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CHAPTER VIII

NO GUTS, NO GLORY

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CHARACTERS

MAN

The audience sits, the stage is empty and he starts speaking from the audience.

MAN No guts, no glory. He who dares wins. There's something in that! If you want to change things you need to move your arse, there's nothing else for it. The stage is up front. Do I get up and play my part or remain sitting down? Shall I stay comfortable and just watch, or do I do my bit?

I always say that people have lost their faith! It's awful! Not that you should think I'm religious or anything. That's not what I mean, I'm not religious, but that sort of thing brings people together doesn't it? Faith in a shared vision. Political institutions though? Not really. And then there's the question of how things should be changed. What should I do? I don't know really, but there are things that I don't agree with and so I'll stand up, not let it to happen to me. I get up on stage.

He gets up and goes to the aisle between the audience.

When I was young everyone either fervently followed Labour or the Liberals. In North Wales they were all Liberals and in South Wales they were all Labour weren't they? These days nobody talks about politics anymore! In the valleys only 60 per cent go and vote in elections and then everyone talks about the number of votes Labour has lost and how many Plaid Cymru has won – the other parties don't count for anything here anyway. The crux of the matter is that 40 per cent stay at home on Election Day, they don't even go and vote. Nobody trusts the parties. Me neither.

But do you know something? I always vote. All I know is that on Election Day you vote. That comes from working in so many countries where they fought bitterly for the right to vote. There's no way round it, it's a date not to be missed. I think of those comrades and do my duty. I go and vote, that's my duty, but I don't do more than that. It's elections after all, but then what should I vote? After all the years of New Labour and Tony Blair...How can I trust anyone who sleeps with a Bible on his bedside cabinet?! Well anyway, that's when I use my stickers. Yes, stickers. On the ballot paper. I've been doing it since New Labour. On every ballot paper a sticker. On them it says why I don't vote. Well, why I go to



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vote and at the same time don't vote. I get up go to the polling station and don't vote, at least not in the expected way...But I'm doing my duty still, without voting for any of those money grabbing bastards who aren't interested in anything and don't give a damn about anything. That's the way it is. I vote for local councillors and Welsh Assembly members. Our members of parliament don't mean a thing to me. I don't vote *against* Labour in general elections, but I don't vote *for* them either and that's why I take my stickers. In Great Britain it doesn't count then, it's called a wasted vote. I enjoy wasting my vote. Well in general elections. And hey, at least I've got off my backside and done more than sit in front of the telly watching Coronation Street.

Don't get me wrong, I've been a member of the Labour party since 1975. I just haven't voted for them since New Labour, it didn't work, just couldn't do it. I couldn't do it anymore, although I really tried. I stood in the polling booth and tried to make my cross. It didn't work. Everything's either too conservative or too neoliberal. These days nothing has anything to do with Labour anymore. But I'm still a member, no question about that, even though I'm no longer sure why. I understand why people aren't interested in voting for a particular party. People only get involved in concrete stuff; they're not interested in things as a whole anymore. For example when it was to do with that programme for South Wales, that restructuring of the hospitals, there was a huge involvement! They did an opinion poll and the powers that be were overwhelmed by the reaction they got. They couldn't believe it. The company that does these studies and opinion polls expected a handful of reactions to their questions and then they got 76,000 answers! It was a specific topic for everyone to concentrate on and had nothing to do with the party anymore. Many say that the young aren't interested in politics. That's not true. It's very clear. They're interested in politics, in shaping the community and in protecting the environment and all that. They're into that. Yes. They're not interested in political parties. They don't trust politicians and the political system. Give them a topic that they're interested in and then they do things!

As for me...What can I say? I mean maybe I haven't changed the world in any great way; I've never been up in the front row, never been one of the greats and never put my life on the line, but I've always done small things, even today. I inspect waiting rooms in doctors' surgeries and hospitals. I do it voluntarily for the community health council. It isn't a big thing, but even though it seems trivial, it's necessary and a real help to the patients.

I've been living here in Wales for 27 years, in England before that. I worked in trade union education and travelled a lot for work. That's how I came to have lots of friends in the Rhondda. My wife and I visited from time to time and noticed at some point how many houses were for sale here in the valleys. At the same time my good friend Mrs. Thatcher had passed a law which raised our rent by 120 per cent and here we could buy a house for half of our rent! The entire valleys were for sale, everyone was leaving! Since then everything is greener. The miners lost their fight and coal mining has disappeared. The population too. Work too. Young people too. They're all going. Only the old stay behind. Where else could they go? Everybody leaves and the old get older still. Even though I know that I'm getting older and my physical and mental capacities will probably get worse, old age is still a huge disappointment to me. It takes months to get over a slight fall and even though I've worked throughout my life the pension never stretches far enough. If there's anything you want to do, do it before you're sixty, after that it's hopeless!

I've come across many people who have changed my life. There were people from the unions who I've greatly admired. Ordinary people with great faith. These people have always been with me. And then there are those moments when you realise how fragile



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community is, how quickly, without wanting to, you become just another cog in the wheel. The miners' strike with which I strongly agreed was one of those moments. The Thatcher government was prepared for the strike; they stockpiled coal and provoked it. We fell for their trick and landed in their trap. The union went on strike and could only lose. I was already working in union education when Arthur Scargill was chief of the union. Halfway through it became clear what was going on. The country was in sympathy with the government and the miners were caught in a trap. Then there was the possibility of a settlement. The destruction of the union was Thatcher's only goal, but for Arthur Scargill it was all about death or glory. I wish Scargill hadn't been head of the mining union back then! The unions today still haven't recovered from that blow. Before you go on strike be damned sure what you're letting yourself in for, be damned sure that you're well prepared and make sure that people know damned well where it's all taking you. In other words, if you're going to fight make sure you have a winning chance! And if you haven't got the chance of success, know when to stop! Take the blow, take the humiliation and prepare yourself better next time!

He takes out a card, walks between the rows and shows it to the audience.

Look. I was eighteen in the photo. Quite handsome, eh? It's my British Seaman's card. Things weren't that good at home. I lived with my aunt. My mother was dead and my father was in the RAF. When he came back he was an alcoholic. One night they took him away. The police. They fetched him and took me to my Aunt. There came a time when she had to go and look after her sick daughter who lived somewhere else. And I simply left for Liverpool and went to sea with the merchant navy. I didn't want to go to the Royal navy; obedience was never my strong point. I spent about three years in the merchant navy.

Three years at sea. The union negotiated wages and working conditions with the ships' owners. Every ship, no matter which or where it was at the time, well every union member, had to vote to go on strike. Being at sea and on strike, don't really go together. How could they? If you're at sea and don't obey orders, it becomes mutiny. You can't go on strike at sea. A thing which is a right on land becomes a crime at sea. So the only thing we could do is vote. I voted against the strike. It sounds daft today, but that's how it was. I loved being at sea. I had enough money to get drunk in every fourth harbour and ashore the women were good to me – I couldn't see any reason to go on strike! The majority were all for it, but like I said, we were at sea. We had to reach our home port before we could go on strike. So back to Liverpool it was. We docked there three weeks after the strike had started. We disembarked, got our pay and went straight out on strike. So there I am on land, striking for nine weeks, until the union recommended making a settlement so that we could go back to work. After I'd seen the terms of the settlement I went to a union meeting and said "You know, I was against this strike and now I'm supposed go back to work, but I can't see any improvement on what we already had nine weeks ago. Now I want to continue the strike!" They voted against me and it became clear to me that from then on I'd stay on land. I went to work in the factory, joined another union and slowly became a union activist. I've no idea why I became so engaged in the union after that. People say it's because I'm instinctively against everything!

He gets up on stage.

There's an old saying, it's old and true:
It's the same the whole world over



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It's the poor that gets the blame
It's the rich that gets the pleasure
Isn't it all a bloody shame.

I just can't stand injustice. During my time at sea...We docked in Cape Town and the boilers needed cleaning, but they were boiling hot, so we the crew, refused. It would have taken four days for the boilers to cool down enough - four days and a financial loss for the management. So instead they hired native workers for a meagre wage. With a few pieces of sacking as protection for their hands and feet, they were sent down into the burning boilers. They burnt themselves and got blisters. We watched in disbelief...There are times when you should do something, but you don't, and then you have to carry on living with it. We didn't do anything. We were just glad that it wasn't us burning ourselves down there in the boilers.

Because of that I became part of something, something bigger. I joined the union. My belief that I should play a part in change became stronger and stronger. Yes, that was the feeling. That's why I joined the union, for the greater chance to be able to change things. What I had seen stayed with me, it wouldn't let me go. If things are wrong, you have to do something.

It isn't easy. I worked in South Africa with the black trade unions for a while. In that time I was permanently scared of being arrested and interrogated. The way interrogation was in South Africa back then I was positive I'd name names. Well anyway, I was arrested and interrogated and I stayed strong. I surprised myself; I was a better person than I thought. These days there's a lot of stuff I don't give a shit about, I'm not bothered about what could happen if I stand for something.

You could be proud of getting your job right as an active shop steward in the seventies. Of course the management disliked you when you got up and fought for individual cases and of course when there were promotions to be had they ignored me. Every holiday application was pondered over critically and so forth. Financially it wasn't good and of course I dragged my family into too, because of my pride they had to do without quite a bit. But I didn't want to give in and refused job offers. I knew I was doing the right thing and I could live with myself. Every time I think of the workers I let down in Cape Town...In the long term the union got me a scholarship so that I could study and when I was then able to work in union education things got better.

The older I get the better I can relate to death. One by one you lose all your family and friends and you don't have any other choice than to come to terms with death. You let go of fear. I don't care anymore whether I'm arrested if I'm involved in political resistance. Let them come and get me.

The valleys are dying. They were a part of Great Britain where the people had vision. Vision is nowhere to be seen anymore. All over the valleys miners had built institutes and hospitals in the hope of a better future. The strike destroyed that hope, the faith and the pride. And what is there now? When I was younger I always used to hear the elderly say: "I think I've lived too long, I'm ready to go." I never understood it, I thought it was absurd. In the meantime I do understand it. I still enjoy life, but I'm not ready to go yet. And I can transfer those thoughts to the valleys; I don't see any future here. The valleys will gradually empty themselves and maybe that's just as well. The young have to go, there's no work



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here. Those who stay get into drugs and alcohol. Yes, it will get emptier. Yes, it's time to go.

Be true to yourself! Deep in your heart you know when you're doing the wrong thing. Even when the whole world is doing it, if it feels wrong don't do it! It's easy to say and hard to live by, but you've got to be clear and be able to live with yourself. Nobody wants to reach my age and remember 1963, when I turned my back on the lads going into the burning boilers with sacking wrapped round their feet. I'm still talking about it today and it's 2015. If I had remained true to myself, those thoughts wouldn't be there still, it wouldn't still be haunting me.

I'm not religious, really I'm not. But if there is anything up there...Yes, I think I've lived too long. I don't like a lot of what I see. I hate that Thatcher woman. She's dead, I know, but that doesn't stop me hating her. Look what she did!

Let's imagine that there was a political system where the people lived happier, freer and more contently than in our present so called democracy; one in which the people supposedly have all the power. Taking that there such a system existed, I'd like to see politicians take money and rather than putting it in their pockets, give it to a team of established academics with an order to search for that system all over the world. It seems that there are people who are much more satisfied with their political systems than here. The people could choose which political system they want. I know it'll never happen; nobody would ever take that in hand for us. But I'm allowed to dream and believe in a better system. And talk about it. So that we don't get dull.

And now enough of my monologue! We want a dialogue, let's talk!

He invites the audience to a meal, or a drink for example.