

Honourable Flags

By Ian Saville

Characters:

In the present day:

Kit Palmer
Andy Zeal (Grandson of Joe Zeligman)
Inspector
Stanley Mendel (Son of Sam Mendel)
Police officers
Man in stocking mask

In 1932:

Bob Roberts (Director / Producer of the *Red Platform Workers'* Theatre Group)
Hannah Gold
Joe Zeligman
Sam Mendel
Harry Bornstein
Sally Corcoran

Stanley and Sam can be quite easily and logically played by the same actor. Other doubling is possible, so that the play can be performed by six actors at a pinch.

Scene 1. A disused building in Whitechapel.

Andy: And now it's cracked.

Kit: We're in at last, Hooray!

Andy: I knew we'd do it. Like I always say:
It only takes a little bit of nerve,
Determination and the proper tools
To make things go the way you want them to.
We've got it now.

Kit: A place to organise
A centre.

Andy: Right. I'll call the others quick

Kit: This place is perfect.

Andy: Fuck it. Phone won't work.
The battery's dead. Forgot to charge it up.
One of us has to go and get the rest.
But one of us will have to stay – keep watch.
Will you go, or should I?

Kit: I'd rather stay.

Andy: You sure you'll be all right?

Kit: Of course I will.
Although, it's true, I'm just a girlie girl ...

Andy: All right, all right – that isn't what I meant.
Fact is, I'd be quite nervous if you went.

Kit: Before you go, let's take a look around
So you can tell the others what it's like.
This building's old

Andy: We might not have much time.

Kit: I like this place.

Andy: Yeah, so do I. But there' s a lot to do.
We' ve got to move our stuff in, get set up
And start to organise the week' s events.
An old sweatshop – what better as a base
From which to organise activities
Against child labour in the clothing trade.

Kit: This room' s quite big. We could have parties here.
Live music. Stand-up comedy, a dance.

Andy: Yeah, yeah. But not until we're sure we' ve got
A proper foothold in the place. You know
If we don' t get set up here pretty soon
Security are going to arrive,
Replace the shutters and renew the locks,
And this time they' ll make sure we can' t get in.

Kit: Okay, you go. I'll put the legal warning o n the door.

Andy: I've got it somewhere. Here. Let's hope it keeps
Those bastards out. Stalls them at least, until
We've got things moving.

Kit: Weren't there any men?

Andy: What are you on about?

Kit: In these sweatshops?

Andy: Of course there were. They had the better jobs.

Kit: This was no factory. There's too many rooms.
All different sizes. Something else was here.

Andy: What difference does it make? We're in.
Not what it was but what it will be is the point.
Come on, let's get the light in, take this crap
Off these great windows. Lots of work to do.
Come here. We did it. Found the perfect place.

(Kit moves towards Andy. They kiss.)

I'll get the others while you make a start.
We can set up by dark if we look smart.

(He goes. Kit tapes the legal notice to the window through which they entered. Then she picks up the crowbar and starts to work at removing the metal sheets covering up the other windows. As she starts to move one of the sheets, a pile of papers falls to the floor. Kit picks up the papers, sits down and starts to read. Behind the gauze, Joe and Hannah are lit up. They play the following scene mechanically, formally, slowly.)

Joe: Honey, do you love me?

Hannah: Aw, honeybun, I sure do love you.

Joe: A whole lot?

Hannah: A whole whole lot, honey.

Joe: Oh, that's real swell.

Hannah: It sure is.

Joe: Sure it sure is.

Hannah: That's real real swell.

Joe: Real, real real swell

Hannah: How are you feeling, honey.

Joe: Happy, honey. In fact, I'm so happy I could die of happiness.

Hannah: So could I.

Joe: Aaaaah!

Hannah: Aaaaah!

(They take up a "dead" pose. The lights behind the gauze fade out again. Kit looks around. Another sound from the window. Kit raises the crowbar, but as Andy's face appears, she lowers it with relief)

Andy: Are you all right Kit?

Kit: Yes, it's just I thought

I heard a sound. It must have been the wind

Or some small creatures moving about, around.

Andy: I spoke to Jed. They're coming over now.

And by the way, he told me you were right.

Kit: That's nice to know. I like to be correct.

But what exactly was I right about?

Andy: This place. It never was a factory.

Kit: What was it then? An office? Or a shop?

Andy: You'd never guess.

Kit: A police detention centre.

Andy: No, no. This place was – friendly. Like you said.

Not very different then from what it will

With one or two day's labour be again.

Kit: A social centre?

Andy: Not far off.

Kit: Unreal!

Andy: Come on; let's get to work. Jed and the rest

Are bringing all our stuff up in the van.

And while we work, you'll hear what Jed told me

About this building and its history.

(Exit)

Scene 2. The same building. (The Workers' Circle) 1932

(Lights up on the same set, but with the iron shutters removed, and the old,

tattered poster now new. Bob is waiting. Enter Hannah and Joe)

Hannah: ... The thing was, we'd almost finished the sketch anyway. If they'd just waited five minutes we would have been on our way home. But this is the moment they choose to tell us we causing an obstruction

Joe: Typical coppers. Never there when they're really needed. Hello Bob.

Hannah: Hello Bob.

Bob: Hello. What sort of time you call this?

Joe: Sorry Bob. Hey, where's everyone else?

Bob: Good question. Can' t anybody in this group get anywhere on time? No wonder there' s been no revolution in this country. The revolutionaries always turn up late.

Joe: Well, we' re here now. Here, did you hear what happened to them on Saturday?

Bob: I heard there was some sort of punch up.

Joe: The whole street joined in. Sorry I wasn't there.

Bob: Did you actually manage to do the show?

Hannah: I was just saying to Joe, we were almost done anyway. I mean we literally only had to shout out the slogans at the end. Then these three coppers come up and start taking away the props and posters ...

Joe: I don't believe it. I bet Jim wasn't gonna stand f or that. The time he spent on them posters ...

Hannah: Exactly. He starts shouting about how this wouldn't happen in a proletarian democracy, and how the police are lackeys of the state ...

Joe: His brother-in-law's a copper. Doesn't get on too well with him I understand.

Hannah: So anyway we're pulling the props back. You know that rope we use to show the Labour Party tied to the ruling class? Well, we've got one end, and the coppers have got the other, and we're both pulling backwards and forwards like a pro per tug-of-war.

Joe: A symbolic representation of – something or other.

Hannah: Symbolic representation of wanting our rope back. The crowd thought it was a right laugh. People stopping to find out what's going on – biggest audience

we've ever had. Then some bloke in the audience joins in, and the coppers start trying to arrest people. This bloke hangs on to a lamppost and a couple of coppers try to pull him away. But he's not going, I tell you! We're all shouting the odds, encouraging him. Jim's making a speech about the violence of the state, and urging his brother workers in the police force to recognise their proper class allegiance. I'm shouting "that's right, you tell 'em". Then this sergeant comes up to me and tells me I'm not acting in a very ladylike manner. So I stands up and says "would you call this ladylike?" and slaps his face, and starts running. Then we all start running...

Bob: And what happened to the props?

Hannah: Ah. Well...

Joe: So we're gonna have another evening of poster painting. I hate that.

Bob: Maybe we should have less stuff to carry around anyway. For a quick getaway.

Joe: That's true.

Hannah: Anyway, we all survived.

Bob: Where are they?

Joe: How did the meeting go, Bob?

Bob: What meeting?

Joe: What's his face. Hartmann. Stephan. What did he say about the group? Couldn't really tell what he was thinking while he was here. Quiet bloke.

Bob: I don't think he was very confident speaking English.

Joe: Well he knew more long words than I do, that's for sure. Anyway, what did he say? Is he going to report back to Moscow that we are one of the most skilful and talented groups in the...what d'you call it? ...International Revolutionary Drama Society?

Hannah: I don't think there's much chance of that.

Bob: International Union of Revolutionary Theatres. And he's not reporting back to anyone. He's just doing a survey of what's going on in the different countries, to prepare for this big event.

(Enter Sam)

Sam: What big event we talking about now? This Meerut meeting?

Bob: No, we were discussing ... where have you been?

Sam: I'm sorry Bob. I just couldn't get away from the shop. There's a rush order on, and the boss is determined to finish these bloody coats before the end of the week. Excuse my French. I hate the sight of the bleeding things. Have we started?

Hannah: No. We're still going through the customary half-hour of political struggle.

Sam: I haven't missed anything then.

Bob: Can we get on with it? I don't know what's happened to the others. We'll just have to start without them.

Joe: Did you hear about Whitechapel?

Sam: No.

Bob: Tell him later.

Joe: Big punch up. Coppers.

Sam: No! Anyone hurt.

Hannah: Someone got his face slapped.

Sam: Disgraceful.

Bob: Please! Listen, that is one of the things Hartmann said. We need a bit more discipline if we're going to be an effective weapon.

Sam: Weapon? What are you talking about?

Bob: We are a weapon in the struggle. We are not just a group of nutcases prancing about in the street ...

Joe: Not *just* a group of nutcases.

Sam: You tell my brother that...

Bob: Look, if you don't think it's important, go elsewhere. If you just want to do nice little shows for people who are going to clap politely, then, then ...go to your church hall and join the Gilbert and Sullivan Society.

Joe: Church hall? Us?

Bob: Synagogue then.

Joe: Yeah. The Goldberg and Solomon society.

Hannah: Bob, we do think it's important. It's just ...

Joe: It's just we all have a hard time all day, whether we're working or not, and we like a bit of a joke in the evening.

Bob: You can take a joke too far.

Joe: We still want to be a weapon in the struggle Bob. We want to be effective.

Bob: Do you want to change things? That's what's important. If you're just here to enjoy yourself, you're wasting all our time.

Joe: Course we want to change things. But we can enjoy ourselves while we're doing it, can't we? Anyway, what else did Hartmann say?

Bob: He thought we needed a lot of work. We're a long way behind the other sections.

Joe: Which other sections?

Bob: The Germans for a start, and of course the Russians, then there's the Swiss, the Belgians, the Italians, the Japanese, the Koreans ...

Joe: He's been about a bit, hasn't he?

Bob: Joe!

Joe: All right. So we'll work.

Sam: Was he talking about just our group, or the whole WTM?

Bob: The whole thing. The national organisation and the individual groups. There's groups a lot worse than us. At least we get out a couple of times a week – we're reaching some workers. Some groups are just talking shops. And there's a danger of that happening to us if we don't get a move on. The PAC sketch...

Hannah: Wait a minute. You said something about a big event?

Bob: Oh. Yes. They're organising an international Olympiad of Workers' Theatre in Moscow in six months' time .

Joe: Olympiad? What's that when it's at home?

Bob: Like the Olympics. It'll be a sort of International Olympics for workers' theatre. A socialist competition.

Hannah: Something about that phrase doesn't sound right.

Joe: Olympics? Just your sort of thing, Hannah. I think you should go in for the hundred-yard dash.

Hannah: I'd rather throw a javelin at one of those coppers.

Bob: No sports, just theatre.

Hannah: But competition. Winners and losers.

Bob: Winners and learners. And a chance to see some amazing work. Real agitational theatre like you've never seen before. I saw some of it in Germany a couple of years back.

Sam: The tour.

Bob: That's right. But this is going to be much bigger. Street work and plays from all over the world. New forms of theatre.

Sam: When and where?

Bob: Moscow. Next November. So we have about seven months to prepare.

Joe: How many can go?

Bob: Many as we like. But we have to pay the fares, so it won't be more than ten.

Joe: I wouldn't mind a holiday in Moscow.

Bob: It won't be a holiday. And you won't be able to just choose to go. Groups will have to compete for places on this trip.

Hannah: Compete?

Bob: I'm putting a piece in *Red Stage* all about it. The regional organisations will each hold contests among their member groups and the best people will form the British delegation.

Hannah: And who's going to decide who are the 'best people'?

Bob: The Central Committee of course.

Sam: I think we should all vote for the best group.

Joe: Yes. And for the best actors.

Bob: That is exactly what we don't want. The encouragement of individualistic qualities.

Joe: What's that supposed to mean?

Bob: This is a team effort. Anyway, we have to think about other things. Not just the acting.

Hannah: Oh? What 'other things'?

Bob: All the other things that make an effective group. Number of shows given, new sketches written, copies of Red Stage sold, recruitment, fund-raising...

Hannah: Recruitment? To what?

Joe: Here we go again.

Bob: To what? To the movement.

Hannah: By which you mean the Party. The Communist Party.

Sam: What's wrong with that?

Hannah: Are we an independent organisation, or are we a branch of the Communist Party?

Bob: We're an independent organisation that recognises that the only effective opposition to Capitalism is the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Hannah: There are other revolutionary parties. And there are revolutionaries who don't belong to any party.

Bob: How can anyone call themselves a revolutionary if they are not actively involved...

Joe: Listen, much as I love a good ding-dong about anarcho-syndicalism, I do think we ought to get on.

Hannah: Performing. How good we are at performing. That's what should decide it.

Bob: Commitment has to be taken into account.

Hannah: Commitment? To what? If we're going to...

Sam: Come off it Hannah. Let's have a look at Bob's new sketch.

Hannah: But we really ought to sort out...

Joe: Hannah!

Hannah: All right. But I'm not happy ...

Joe: Happy? Course you're happy!

Sam: Yes. Why wouldn't you be happy?

Joe: How could you be unhappy? Here you are, a member of 'Red Platform', the most advanced workers' theatre group in London.

Sam: England!

Joe: The world! Excluding the Soviet Union, of course.

Bob: Some hopes!

Joe: And not only the most advanced, but also the most handsome revolutionary – what was that word? – *thespians* in the world!

(Joe takes Hannah and dances, while humming a waltz tune)

Bob: That's enough. Joe, will you just ... What did I say about discipline? ...

Joe: Sorry, Bob. Everyone knows I'm a bit *meshugge*. Isn't that right Hannah?

Hannah: You said it.

Sam: Listen, what I don't understand about this Olympiad is...

Bob: Can we leave it for now? Talk about it at the end. If there's time. I mean the way things are going we might not even be in business by November. Where on earth is Jim?

Hannah: Ah. Well, that's something I have to tell you about, Bob.

Bob: What?

Sam: He's not walked out again, has he?

Hannah: Well...

Sam: He has. I knew it. What is it this time?

Hannah: They're expecting another kid. He's gonna have to work longer hours.

Bob: But this is important. For the kid's sake as well ...

Hannah: Not everyone sees it like that, Bob. He says he's gonna try to stay active.

Bob: This is ridiculous. How can we work like this? And does anyone know what's happened to Miriam?

Sam: Oh, yes. She said she was gonna be late. Kid brother's sick or something.

Hannah: Not again.

Bob: Oh well. Let's get on best we can. Did you read the new sketch?

Joe: Course. *(they all take out copies of the sketch)*

Hannah: Yes.

Sam: Yeah. Very good.

Joe: I really like the song.

Bob: Well, I'm not too sure ...

Sam: Who's gonna be the worker?

Bob: Hang on. We need to talk about it a bit ...

Hannah: Course.

Bob: Because I showed it to Hartmann, and there were some things he wasn't too happy with.

Hannah: Like what?

Bob: Well, the song, for a start.

Joe: What do you mean? Good idea using the Al Jolson number. Very funny. And everybody knows the tune, so...

Bob: Well, Hartmann was saying, and I see his point, that we shouldn't really use tunes from the talkies ...

Hannah: What?

Joe: Why not?

Bob: American bourgeois decadent art. Jazz. You know ...

Joe: That's rubbish!

Sam: I don't know. Maybe he's got a point. I mean, why should we be copying what the film studios are doing? They're not revolutionaries, are they?

Hannah: It's a parody. It's using something they've made against them.

Bob: Well, that's the idea, but there is the point that the music itself embodies capitalist ideology.

Sam: Now you've lost me.

Joe: So what we gonna do? Write our own tunes?

Bob: That's what his group does.

Joe: Yeah, but they've got composers and all sorts over there. They've got all these intellectuals queuing up to work with them. Nearest thing we've got to an intellectual is Sam's brother. I saw him nip into Whitechapel Library last week. Or was he just finding somewhere warm to kip?

Sam: Leave my family out of this.

Bob: Look, I'm just saying what he said. If we can't write our own tunes, we can use some of theirs – you know, stuff from the German groups. Or even some of the tunes from the Soviet Union.

Joe: What is he talking about? Did he understand the politics, Hartmann? Did he know about the PAC, the Public Assistance Committee?

Bob: I explained it to him. He understood.

Joe: Do they have all that in Germany? Do the unemployed in Germany have to go and justify themselves to some committee of busybodies just to get a bit of cash to live on?

Bob: They've got it pretty bad in Germany. Unemployment there is worse.

Sam: Worse?

Bob: Much worse.

Hannah: Hartmann seemed to think the Communists would be taking over by the end of the year.

Joe: If Hitler doesn't take over first.

Hannah: He didn't seem much bothered about Hitler. More worried about the Social Democrats –

Joe: Social Fascists he called them.

Sam: Now, that's what I don't understand, because they're more like our Labour party, rather than Moseley's lot...

Bob: Can we just get on with this sketch?

Joe: Right. The PAC. Means Test Murder. Who's playing the worker? I should do that. I mean, it's gotta be me really, hasn't it?

Sam: Why?

Joe: Because I have got first-hand experience of being unemployed, and those shmendriks on the PAC. Then there's his wife, and lady bountiful, and the vicar, and the Army officer, and the bloke from the Assistance Board. Here, we're running out of actors. We'll have to double up.

Bob: We have to get some more people.

Joe: Listen, Bob, I had this idea ...

Sam: Oh no.

Joe: No, listen. For the worker. You've got the bloke going up in front of the committee, to convince them that he's got nothing in his house that he could sell, right?

Bob: That is the idea, yes.

Joe: Because, of course, heaven forbid that he should live in luxury with a gramophone player, or even a picture on his wall, when he's also receiving a pittance out of the rates. So, I tell you what, you could have him trying to sell ... his false teeth. (*others laugh*) No, really. I could do a good bit with that – you know – a bit of market patter 'I'm not asking fifteen bob, I'm not asking a dollar, I'm not even asking half a crown. Who'll give me just a tanner, twelve ha'pennies, for this magnificent set of false choppers?' And he's drooling away there, and no one's gonna take these teeth. I mean you could have the audience being the punters. And we could have some of our lot in with the audience shouting the odds. Yeah. We could do this down Petticoat Lane as well. On a Sunday. It'd get a great...

Bob: It's not supposed to be a comic role, Joe. He kills himself in the end.

Joe: Yes, I know, but that one bit...

Bob: Joe, I thought you'd be best as one of the PAC members...

Joe: Oh yeah? What, the vicar I suppose? A Jewish vicar. My Rabbi will love that.

Hannah: Your Rabbi? Since when did you have anything to do with any Rabbi?

Sam: He's more familiar with the inside of a bacon sandwich than the inside of a synagogue.

Joe: But I don't eat my bacon sandwiches along Whitechapel Road where the whole of the East End can see me.

Sam: You don't have to play the vicar. You could be the army officer.

Hannah: I'll do the vicar.

Sam: You'll have to play the wife as well. Miriam'll have to be Lady Bountiful.

Bob: If she ever arrives.

Joe: Not necessarily. I could play her.

Sam: Come off it Joe. You really mad?

Joe: No. I could, you know, dress up. False thingies, you know

Sam: It's not a bleeding pantomime, Joe.

Hannah: Are you serious?

Joe: No, really. I think it'd go down marvellous if we did that.

Hannah: You know, Joe, I love you dearly, but sometimes you are a complete nutcase.

Joe: You love me? She loves me.

Sam: She didn't mean it like that.

Joe: Really. It's a great idea. We combine it with the false teeth thing. (*Putting on posh woman's accent*) Young man, you have the temerity to beg off the state for a handout, whilst still retaining a valuable set of eating utensils in your gob. For pity's sake, whip them out at once, and deliver them up to the mercy of the free market. It is your patriotic duty as an Englishman.

Sam: Happy to oblige, your ladyship. Only problem being that as a circumcised Jew, I cannot allow these teeth to be used for the consumption of any food which has not been certified under the auspices of the Kashrut committee of the London Beth Din...

(All except Bob break into uncontrollable laughter. Then all look at Bob and calm down)

All: Sorry. Sorry Bob etc.

Bob: Listen, can we get back to the sketch I actually wrote?

Joe: Just messing about Bob.

Bob: Exactly. I think we'll have Sam as the worker, Miriam, if she gets here, as his wife, Hannah, Lady bountiful, and for the moment Joe will have to play all the other parts. I'm sure you can use all your comic talents there.

Joe: I'll need more than comic talents to play three people at the same time.

Bob: Well, look, we' ll have a readthrough for now. We're doing the Meerut Sketch at the meeting next week. Have you all learnt that?

Joe: Almost. I've got the gist of it.

Bob: We should have just about enough people for that. But what is absolutely clear is that we are going to have to recruit some more people if we are going to do any new work.

Sam: How are we gonna recruit people?

Bob: I don't know. Talk to people. At work. In the street. At meetings.

Joe: There's a kid I know might be intereste d.

Sam: A kid?

Joe: Well, he's not a school kid. Lives with his mum in our flats. I knew his dad. He died a couple of years ago.

Bob: What makes you think he'd be interested?

Joe: His ma loves the stage. Always talking about the Yiddish theatre, you know.

Bob: That's not the same.

Joe: I know that. But I think this'd do him some good.

Hannah: And I'll talk to Sally.

Sam: Who's she?

Hannah: The Irish girl works on the next machine.

Sam: Irish?

Hannah: What's wrong with Irish?

Sam: Nothing, I suppose. Never met an Irish person, that's all.

Joe: Who are you gonna bring then Sam?

Sam: Me? I don't know nobody.

Bob: Well, we've got to expand. Otherwise we have no chance of getting to Moscow for this Olympiad, let alone bringing down the capitalist system before Christmas.

Joe: Bob, you are such a pessimist.

Bob: Let's read the sketch, Joe. Please.

(They sit ready to read the sketch.)

Scene 3. The Inspector addresses the audience

Inspector: Freedom of speech is one thing, abuse of democratic rights is another. The majority of them are harmless. I know that. A bit loopy, maybe. Extremely naïve, certainly. But mostly they are just harmless kids. I grant you that. I have a daughter that age myself, so I know. Grew up on Blue Peter and took all the “save the environment” stuff extremely seriously. Too seriously. So they think they can do everything better than the previous generation. We mucked everything up, of course, as far as they’re concerned. OK. So they try to put together a different world, with sticky-backed plastic. Heath Robinson contraptions. All right. I’ve no objection, so long as they’re not getting in anyone else’s way.

But then there’s this smaller group among them. Not a tiny group. Maybe twenty five percent. Maybe fifteen. But they have a disproportionate influence. They are always pushing for more extreme actions. Bordering on violence. Violence against property in the first instance, but this will rapidly escalate, when we step in, as we must, to violence against persons. Persons being my officers.

We monitor them. Forward Intelligence Team. Some of it covert, of course, but I won’t go into that. Anyway, we glean plenty of intelligence by just talking to them. Straightforward chatting. Uniformed officers are allocated to particular troublemakers, and they talk to them on “actions”. Of course, they’re cagey about talking to us, but on the other hand, they want us to know that they’ve outwitted us. So they give things away. Sometimes in a humorous way. They can be highly amusing. Some of the banter that goes on can be quite witty. But underneath it there’s this ...contempt. From all of them. The

harmless ones as well have this ...contempt for my officers. Treat them like they're stupid. Thick. All right, they're not necessarily the sharpest tools in the box when it comes to academic achievement, but they're not thick. Not by any manner or means.

But this contempt, this hatred for the police pervades the whole – I don't know if you can call it a movement or what. But all of them are infected with it. And it goes along with a disrespect for certain institutions. Disrespect for property. They see a house. OK, it's empty. That doesn't mean they can just take it. Very careful they are with their legal warnings, to keep us off the premises. Using our laws, our institutions to play games with us. But the point is, where does it end? Now I'm not saying that these are working hand in hand with Al Qaeda or whatever, but their attitude is such that they are capable of carrying out actions which it is our duty to prevent. And after September 11th, we have to be careful. Anything that attacks legitimate institutions creates opportunities for the terrorist. It has to be nipped in the bud. That is our job. That's all we do.

So what do we know? They move around setting up these "social centres", which are actually bases from which to create and spread disorder. They draw in gullible people to provide a cover – give the impression it's just Yoga classes and music appreciation. And this latest place, we've been keeping an eye on that place for some time. Because, funny enough, that place has been a haunt of anarchists and antiestablishment types for many a year. Set up by anarchist refugees beginning of the last century. Workers' Circle they called it. Arbeter Ring. Not that you'll find many workers among this lot. There's

something that's changed over the years, eh? I don't think there's much idea of the nobility of work among these layabouts.

So, we know that they are planning something. We don't know the exact details, but we know it's big. It won't happen. You won't know anything about it. That is our objective.

(exit)

Scene 4. On the way to the rehearsal

Harry: ...what do you mean, agitational? I'm not going to any Communist meetings. My ma don't approve of all that lark.

Joe: Your ma? What are you talking about? Your ma don't have to worry. I'm not kidnapping you.

Harry: I thought you were taking me to a theatre rehearsal. That's what you said it was, a theatre group.

Joe: It is a theatre group. But it's a bit political.

Harry: A bit?

Joe: Well, it's sort of ...we do socially significant plays.

Harry: Like George Bernard Shaw?

Joe: Sort of. Well, not exactly George Bernard Shaw. We make the plays up ourselves. And, rather than being about, you know, history, they're about what's going on now.

Harry: I don't know, Joe. I'll be out of my depth. How am I gonna write plays?

Joe: It's all right. You won't have to write anything. When I say we write the plays, I mean the whole group writes them ...

Harry: What, you all sit down together?

Joe: No. Well, look, someone in the group writes, then we discuss, then we change things – sometimes it's a play from some other group in the movement ...

Harry: Movement? What is all this?

Joe: Just come along to this rehearsal. If you don't like it, fine. Nothing lost. It'll do you good.

Harry: I promised my ma I wouldn't be back too late.

Joe: So you won't be back too late.

Harry: Joe, I don't know about this ...

Joe: Listen, you gotta have something else in your life, apart from your Ma and your work. You wanna meet people, don't you?

Harry: Yeah.

Joe: Well, you'll meet some very nice people in this group.

Harry: Yeah, yeah. But all this political stuff ...

Joe: The politics is just common sense. Your dad would have approved. Supporting the workers, against the bosses and their system. Simple. See, capitalism, the economic system the bosses use to keep us in our place, needs to be ... Here, what time is it?

Harry: I dunno. About seven I suppose.

Joe: Bleeding hell. Let's get going.

Scene 5. Rehearsal at the Workers' Circle

(Hannah is waiting with Bob)

Bob: You know, I'm almost tempted to go back to the Labour Party. They may have been class collaborationists, but at least the meetings began on time.

Hannah: They could afford watches. I wonder where Sally is. I hope she hasn't backed out.

Bob: We only want her if she's committed enough to turn up on time.

Hannah: Have you found out any more about this Moscow trip, Bob?

Bob: Can we deal with one thing at a time? Right now we need to get this Meerut sketch working properly. I take it you know your lines?

Hannah *(gets out script)*: Of course. I think so. OK. Let's see.. . "in every state in British India... In every state in British India... A *(looks at script)* police and troops are out, to crush the rising tide of revolt... Rising tide of revolt against a ...against our vile conditions" Maybe I could just read that out.

Bob: Certainly not. You've got to be able to look people in the eye when you say that. You've got to get across the urgency of the situation This is not a politician's speech to win votes. You're telling people about what is really happening. Real people being shot at just for organising a trade union.

Hannah I realise that, Bob. I'm just worried we won't be able to learn it for Friday.

(Joe bursts in with Harry)

Joe: Hello. Bob, I've learnt every word. Listen. "In Bengal mines there are 35,000 women, working UNDERGROUND – forced to take their children with them from their hovels of sun-baked mud – to die by their sides as they work." Here is that true?

Bob: Course it's true.

Joe: Terrible. And we think we've got it bad.

Hannah: We have got it bad.

Joe: Yes, but not that bad. Here, Bob, what's happening with the Moscow business?

Harry: What?

Bob: Joe, you're late.

Joe: Yes. I went round to collect Harry here.

Harry: Hello.

Bob: Hello.

Joe: This is Harry Bornstein. Meet Bob Roberts, our producer.

Harry: How do you do?

Joe: Look at that, a proper bourgeois introduction. Harry wants to join.

Bob: Do you?

Harry: (*He looks around*) Er ...yes ...

Bob: Why?

Harry: What?

Bob: Why do you want to join the group?

Harry: Erm...

Joe: What do you mean, why? It was you said we needed people. All right, he's just a kid, doesn't know anything about anything ...

Harry: Hey!

Joe: But he is a worker. He's class conscious, he comes from a family that has always ...

Bob: Joe? Can you let the boy speak for himself? Why do you want to join this group, Harry?

Harry: Well. Actually, I've always liked acting, plays, that sort of stuff...

Joe: And the politics. Harry's fully in sympathy with our political line, aren't you?

Harry: What? Well, yeah, I support the workers ...

Bob: I see.

Harry: And I'm against the bosses, and their system. I mean I'm opposed to the Capitalist, erm, economic, erm. Well, it's a bit difficult to explain. Joe knows what I mean.

Joe: Bob, Harry obviously has a bit of a way to go in his political education ...

Bob: Yes.

Joe: But he's quite sincere about joining us.

Bob: I don't doubt it. What do you think, Hannah? Should we take the lad on, on a trial basis?

Hannah: Of course. Why would we turn anyone away? You working, Harry?

Harry: I just started at Morris and Abrahams.

Bob: What's that, a tailor's shop?

Joe: Course it's a tailor's shop. In this group nobody need ever be short of material. Clothes, I don't know, but t schmutter someone can always get hold of.

Harry: It's just a little place. Four of us work there. Mr Morris took me on as an apprentice as a favour to my mum.

Bob: A favour? Bosses don't generally do favours.

Harry: Well, sort of. My dad died last year ...

Bob: I'm sorry.

Joe: Lovely man, Ben. Harry's dad. And he was a fighter.

Bob: Oh? Party member?

Joe: Well ...

Harry: Party?

Bob: Was he in the CP. The Communist Party.

Harry: No. he was in the Labour Party.

Bob: Really?

Joe: Look, he wasn't a social fascist Bob. How could he be? He was Jewish.

Harry: He wasn't in the Labour Party exactly. The what's-it-called. The ILP.
Independent Labour Party.

Bob: A bit better.

Harry: Mostly he talked about the union.

Joe: He was one of the main organisers. Trying to get all these little tailoring unions together – you know, the ladies' tailors, the men's tailors, pressers, mantle workers ...

Bob: OK, OK.

Hannah: We do need more people, Bob. And if Harry's keen, that makes up for him being young.

Bob: Well, Harry, have a look at what we're doing. You might decide it's not for you anyway.

Harry: Thanks ...

Bob: Though there's not much for you to watch at the moment. Either of you know where Sam is? Or Miriam?

Hannah: No idea.

Bob: What are they playing at?

Joe: Come on Bob. We've all got other things in our lives too you know. Some of us even have to eat.

Bob: We need to use what little time we've got productively. This is not some production of Oscar Wilde where we spend months discussing the cucumber sandwiches. We are, actually, trying to change the world. The real world. Which needs changing.

Joe: All right, keep your hair on.

Bob: You know, this is a real struggle, against real people who are not waiting for us to catch our breath. When I think what we could do, what we could be. Everything gets done at half cock.

Hannah: You still want to join us, Harry?

Harry: I think so.

Bob: OK. So let's get on with what we can until Sam and Miriam arrive. Meerut. You know anything about Meerut, Harry?

Harry: No. What is it?

Bob: Meerut Jail, in India. The British Raj have locked up 30 people, just for doing what your dad did.

Joe: And he don't mean sewing crooked seams.

Bob: You think it was difficult for your dad, organising all those workers in the tailoring trade into a union. In India it's even more difficult because workers who go on strike don't just lose their jobs, they're liable to be shot at.

Harry: It was difficult for my dad Mr. Roberts. My ma thinks it killed him.

Bob: I see. I'm sorry.

Joe: Well, anyway. These people in India are just trying to do what your dad was trying to do, that's the point ...

Harry: Who's shooting at them?

Joe: Who d'you think? The British Army.

Harry: I thought they were just keeping the religious fanatics apart – the Hindus and the whatsits ...Mohammedans .

Bob: That's what they tell you. But the people who are shot at are people on strike. And the thirty rotting in Meerut jail for the last four years are the people who organised the strikes.

Hannah: So, this sketch explains what happened to the Meerut comrades, and tries to get British workers to support them.

(Sam arrives with Sally)

Hannah: Sally!

Sally: So there you are. I didn't know if this was the right place. Lucky this nice man turned up.

Joe: Very lucky.

Sam: Sorry I'm late everybody.

Bob: Where have you been?

Sam: Sorry Bob. I really couldn't get away from the shop. Rush order again. If my boss had his way I'd be there till midnight.

Bob: Isn't there any organisation in your shop? Where's the union?

Sam: Bob, there's only the three of us working t here. We're not exactly gonna bring the capitalist system down if we go on strike. And if I tell him I've got to leave now to go to a rehearsal so we can get rid of him and his class, I'll be out on me tuchus before you can say Harry Pollitt.

Joe: Surely not. Skilled man like you?

Sam: Skilled men like me are ten a penny right now.

Hannah: And skilled women come even cheaper.

Joe: Get me half a dozen.

Sally: What sort of place is this?

Joe: Welcome, my dear, to the Workers' Circle. The Arbeter Ring.

Sally: I thought so. This is a Jewish place. All that Hebrew writing on the walls ...

Hannah: Not Hebrew. Yiddish.

Sally: Well, whatever it is, it isn't Irish. Are my sort welcome here?

Bob: All workers are welcome. Don't worry, I'm not Jewish either.

Sam: But all the rest of us are.

Hannah: It's a club set up by Jewish workers. But it's for workers of all lands.

Sam: Workers of all lands unite!

Bob: We were just talking about the Meerut sketch with Harry here. Do you know anything about Meerut, Sally?

Sally: Is it some sort of vegetable?

Bob: Are you sure this is for you?

Sally: Well, to tell the truth, when Hannah told me about it I thought she was mad. But she persuaded me to give it a try. Sure, Hannah's given me a lot of help at work – our boss is terrible the way he steals our time, and gives us next to nothing in return. And if we're going to do plays that help workers get together to do something about that, I'm all for it.

Bob: Well, we'll see. Anyway Sally, this is a sketch about "workers of all lands" uniting. Read it with us and see what you think. You learnt your lines Sam?

Sam: Mostly.

Bob: In that case you can let Harry have your script. Still no Miriam.

Sam: I don't know how to put this, Bob. (*He pulls out a script*). Here, she said to see if someone else could use this.

Bob: Oh no. What's her excuse?

Sam: Her brother's still ill. She's got to look after him.

Bob: Oh well. Two steps forward, one step back.

Sally: Is that a dance?

Bob: Not exactly.

Hannah: Take no notice.

Bob: OK, let's get on with it. Hannah first voice, Joe second voice ...

Joe: Always second voice ...

Bob: ...Sam third voice. There's a fourth and a fifth voice, so Harry and Sally can try those.

Hannah: Don't worry. There's not much to learn. Only a few lines. If you get stuck, someone else can come in and help you.

Harry: But won't that look strange, saying someone else's lines?

Joe: Not in this show.

Hannah: You see, Harry, these aren't exactly characters – we're not playing anything like real people.

Harry: Who are you supposed to be then?

Joe: Good question.

Sam: They're, sort of, the voices of the masses.

Hannah: Or the voices of the Indian Workers.

Joe: Or even the voice of Joe Stalin.

Hannah: It's like a sort of chorus. Sometimes just one of us speaks, and sometimes we speak together

Joe: *(joins in)* .. speak together.

Bob: All right. I think Harry and Sally can pick up the idea if we just get on with it. Get the sticks. We'll show them the moves as we go through.

(They each pick up a broomstick)

Bob: Take it from the beginning. Murder.

(This sequence is played with all actors taking a full part – no pretence of Harry and Sally having to learn anything)

All: *(start whispering, building to a shouted crescendo)* Murder, Murder, MURDER, MURDER, MURDER!

Hannah: In every state in British India, police and troops are out to crush the rising tide of revolt against our vile conditions – long hours in the mines and mills! Exhausted by our labours! Our British taskmasters stand over us with whips

Joe: In Bengal mines there are 35,000 women working underground – forced to take their children with them ...

(Actors go into mime sequence, acting out the Meerut sketch with movement, using sticks to represent the picks of the miners, the rifles of the soldiers and finally the bars of the prison.)

All: Comrades, Hands across the sea! Comrades, SOLIDARITY!

(They sway from left to right)

COMRADES – COMRADES – COMRADES –

COMRADES –

SMASH THE BARS!

Scene 6. The Whitechapel Social Centre 2002

Kit: And then we took our clothes off.

Andy: Just like that?

Kit: There wasn't enough time for a striptease.

Andy: But let me linger on the thought of you
With Jimmy, Asha and Elizabeth
All standing starkers in this posh new shop
While company directors standing by
Spluttered their dry white wines into the air
Trying to shift their gaze but still see all.
Yes, it's a lovely picture.

Kit: Oh, I see.

The one I'm painting here is not so good?

Andy: Don't tempt me into base comparisons
But say what happened next. How long were you
Displayed in all your glory to the crowd?

Kit: Maybe a minute, then from all about
Came men in uniforms to sort us out.
But all the while we chanted our refrains:
'No sweated labour!' and 'These clothes are bought
Not just with money but with children's lives'.
Other supporters moved among the crowd
And handed out our flyers with the facts
Of all the lives destroyed to make the clothes.
The guards punched, kicked us as they wrapped us up
In coats and sheets, then bundled us outside
Onto the streets where waiting boys in blue
Threw our bruised bodies into that black van
That sped us to the too-familiar cells

Of a police station near Victoria.

Andy: They held you there? How long?

Kit: About five hours.

Andy: And then they let you go without a charge?

Kit: They threatened we'd be done for breach of peace
But in the end they cautioned us instead.

Andy: So did you sign the caution then?

Kit: No way

Like, why should I accept that what I did
Was something I should say I'm sorry for?

Andy: But still they let you go?

Kit: Of course they did,

All that they wanted was to frighten us.
They knew that court would be a waste of time
And get the store more bad publicity.

Andy: So there were no reports of this event
On television, press or radio.

Kit: It's on the internet.

Andy: For those who know.

Kit: As far as I'm concerned we did the deed
And shook the bastards up a little bit.
It doesn't matter whether a report
Gets on some poxy television news.
We did it for itself and nothing else.

Andy: And what you did was excellent, I know,
But still it's only one part of the plan.

For this to mean a thing we need to reach
The vast majority of those out there,
For only with their help can changes come.

Kit: You just don't get it Andy. It's a shame.
I like you, but you can be such a pain.

Andy: What are you on about? Sometimes you speak
In words that just don't mean a thing to me.

Kit: OK, I'll put it this way: What I do
I do for me and for the world I know.
Not for the future – not for some great plan.
I'm not prepared to wait until a boss
Or some committee tells me I can act.
What happens is what I decide to do
Except for when I'm stopped by them or you.

Andy: We can't all work that way.

Kit: And that's the shame.

Andy: My grandpa, he belonged to the CP.
He told me that in every waking hour –
And also, probably, each hour he slept –
He'd ask himself this question: "Am I now
Advancing in some way the interests of
The international proletariat?"
And if his honest answer would be "no"
He'd do something about it, find a way
To modify his action so that he
Was sure that in the struggle of the times

He played a useful part.

Kit: And your point is?

Andy: Just that we should do what the hell we can
To bring about the things we want to be.
That means that we have to be organised,
And always look for ways to make new links.

Kit: If I could meet your grandpa now I'd say
I know that you do what you think is right
But you have built a prison for yourself
That you cannot escape from in this life.

Andy: You would have liked him. Always made me laugh.

Kit: Don't 'build for revolution', do it now.
If everything is part of something else
How can you ever love the things you have?
What is this part of (*she kisses him*)? And what this (*again*)? Or this? (*again*)
You have to learn – appreciate the kiss
For what it is, not as prefigurement
Of something that's to come.

Andy: Does that mean then
That more's to come? And if so when?

(She laughs. They kiss again. And again. As they get more passionate, a tinny electronic rendering of The Internationale is heard. It's Andy's mobile phone, which he fumbles to answer.)

Andy: Hello? (*To Kit*) It's Jed.

Kit: Tell him we're getting on
With anarchistic creativity.

Andy: Yes, I've been working on the website here.
And Kit is planning some great work of art
That shows the history of the textile trade
From the perspective of the underdog.

Kit: Not so pretentious.

Andy: When will you come here?

Kit: Some people need to come and help clean up.

Andy: Surely there's someone there can sort it out?
I thought this place was our priority.
OK. OK. OK, OK, OK. (*Puts phone down*)

Kit: When are they coming over?

Andy: Not today.
And what is more they want me to go there.
All the computers there are on the blink.

Kit: Who cares? What difference do computers make?

Andy: They want to print the flyer, but the thing
Has somehow crashed, taking all work with it.
I'd better go and see what I can do.

Kit: The struggle calls and we each play our part
You with technology and me with art.

Andy: OK. How goes it? 'Parting's such sweet sorrow'

Kit: For fuck's sake go. I'll see you here tomorrow .

Scene 7. Inspector addresses the audience

Inspector: We live in dangerous times. Dangerous times call for bold strategies. Sometimes we have to do things we would otherwise regret. Let me explain.

To listen to some of these people -- protesters, lawyers, the general Guardian-reading classes, you would think that we were just out to collect power, to consolidate control, for its own sake. Piffle. What good does power do me? No good at all. Just makes me anxious that I'm going to lose it. People don't seem to realise that for us, control is not an end in itself. It is a tool for doing our job.

Ends and means. Means and ends. That's what you have to consider.

They talk about this question all the time. Communists, anarchists, the left. Seems to be one of the main questions exercising their brains, to judge from their literature. Which I have read extensively and with great interest. Even, at times, with admiration. Some of their ideas are... attractive.

So they say, "look, we've got this idea for a wonderful way of organising society." Only trouble is, the dominant classes and their mass media prevent us from achieving it. Their ideas have hegemony in the public sphere, because of their control as a class. Gramsci, I believe it was, who said that. And I'm not disputing it – though why they have to use a God-awful word like "hegemony" I do not understand. Surely, "leadership" or "dominance" would do. They've translated from Italian anyway, so why not go that extra mile and translate it into proper English?

So anyway, getting back to means and ends. If you' ve got this wonderful world to bring about, it surely doesn' t matter if you are slightly naughty in how you go about things. Or worse than slightly naughty. "You can' t make an omelette without breaking eggs". Lenin. An easier read than Gramsci. Now, they go backwards and forwards on this. Some of them are opposed, in principle, to breaking eggs. Some of them say it depends on how many eggs, and some think it' s a question of what sort of eggs we are talking about.

But put it a slightly different way, and most of them agree. I mean, if it' s a question of stopping something they consider out of order, then they have no worries about breaking some of our rules. Example. Hawker Jet, about to be sold to Indonesia. They go in and smash it up, because they believe it is going to be used for somewhat nefarious purposes. They admit they did it, but they are acting for "the greater good" they say. And, blow me, they manage to convince 12 good men and true that this is indeed the case. Or at least that they believed that this was the case and therefore a lack of intention to do wrong, mens rea, blah, blah, blah. Acquitted.

So what I ask you is, let' s put the boot on the other foot. Perhaps I have some ideas about what is best for society. Don' t rule out that possibility. Just because I wear a uniform doesn' t mean I can' t think. Maybe I would like to make an omelette. A nice fluffy omelette. I' ll get an eggbeater.

And when it comes to "greater good", I think I am in a position to know what is a greater good than what these people are planning. Look, when I went into this job

it was only, only, because I knew that I would be on the side of good. By definition.

But any small misdemeanour on the part of my officers, in pursuance of society' s greater good, is not going to be overlooked by a jury, if it should be put before them. Because, as it happens, there is an asymmetry here. We cannot use that defence of our actions. We have to be squeaky clean. Caesar' s wife.

Now, I happen to think that this is unfair. But it is the world we live in. So, let me put it this way, when we break an egg, we have to clear up after ourselves.

Scene 8. A Café in Whitechapel

(Joe and Sam. Sam trying to look at tabloid newspaper, while Joe talks)

Joe: Good crowd this morning. How many do you reckon were watching?

Sam: I dunno. Hundred and fifty. Two hundred.

Joe: See that bloke? Scottish bloke. Came up to me at the end, he said ‘that’s it – that’s my life you just showed up there.’”Looked like he was gonna burst into tears.

Sam: I hope he’s not just gonna cry. I hope he’s gonna do something about it. I don’t think he joined the Party.

Joe: That’s not the only thing you can do. Here, she’s doin g well, Sally. Considering she only just started. She’s a nice girl.

Sam: Yeah.

Joe: She can give as good as she gets, too. Did you hear what she said to that bloke?

Sam: What bloke?

Joe: The bloke who kept shouting ‘begorrah’ every time she opened her mouth. She put him right in his place.

Sam: Yeah.

Joe: Did you hear her? She said, she said ...

Sam: I heard. Joe, I wanted to ask you something ...

Joe: Look, there they are ...Oi – we’re over here! What do you want to ask?

Sam: Later.

(Hannah and Sally come over to table)

Hannah: So what do you think of our new star?

Joe: I was just saying to Sam, she is a great asset. eh Sam?

Sam: Something like that. I hope you’re gonna stick with us.

Sally: Well ...

Joe: Course she is. Here, where’s Harry?

Hannah: He’s coming. He was just talking to Bob.

Sam: *(reading his newspaper)* Blimey. Look at this. ‘Reds Plotting for Civil War in Britain. Direct orders from Moscow’.

Joe: What are you reading?

Sam: Sunday Pictorial.

Joe: Why did you buy that rubbish?

Sam: It was the only paper they had left.

Joe: Let's have a look. Oh dear. Apparently we are 'making mischief in ships and dockyards'.

Sally: What does that mean?

Joe: Well, now that you've joined the group, Sal, I can tell you our guilty secret. You see, every day, or at least, every day Sam can get off work, me and Sam go down the docks, and while Sam distracts the dockers ...

Sam: ...with a bit of balalaika playing ...

Joe: Have you heard his balalaika playing? I tell you, it would distract anyone. So while these dockers are listening to the superb balalaika music of Sam Mendel ...

Sam: I usually give them a medley of Tchaikovsky, Marie Lloyd and Johnny Weissmuller numbers ...

Joe: All right, all right. What I do is, I change over the labels on all the crates.

Sam: He's very quick ...

Joe: I have to be. So if, for instance, there's a load of fish on its way to billingsgate, I might swap labels with a consignment of starched collars bound for Eton.

Sam: So all these Eton toffs end up with smoked mackerel round their throats.

Joe: I report back to Moscow on a good day's mischief.

Sam: And we both receive a big bag of Moscow gold.

Hannah: Do you think anyone believes all this? Oh my godfathers, it's got all about us!

Joe: Where?

Hannah: See where it says 'a red stage'?

Joe: Let's have a look. Yeah. 'Plan to poison the countryside by soviet plays.' Oh, this is good. 'All modern methods of propaganda are employed. There is, for example, the Workers' Theatre Movement, a branch of the Communist Party'

Hannah: Cheek. Most of us aren't even in the Party.

Sam: How do you make that out?

Hannah: Sally and me aren't members. Neither is Joe ...

Sam: He is now.

Hannah: What?

Sam: He's joined up.

Hannah: Have you?

Joe: Yeah.

Hannah: Why?

Joe: Why do you think?

Sam: Anyway, what else does it say about the WTM?

Hannah: You don't have to join the party to be able to change things.

Joe: Do we need to go into it now, Hannah?

Hannah: What about Harry?

Sam: He's joined, too.

Joe: Look, here we are – 'bands of 'Red Players' who go about the countryside ...'

Sam: Countryside! I did go down Hackney Marshes once.

Joe: "...about the countryside performing plays specially written in the Russian style, holding up those responsible for the government of the country to ridicule, instilling class hatred and preaching industrial strife".

Hannah: It's the bosses that want strife. We just want the factories.

Sam: Shame they didn't know about the Olympiad. They could have got another couple of paragraphs in about that.

Joe: So. We are now famous international agitators.

Sally: Only to the readers of the Sunday Pictorial.

Sam: There's a lot of them.

(Enter Harry)

Joe: *(Russian accent)* Comrade Harry. Do you have the roubles?

Harry: What?

Joe: The roubles from our Russian masters, our payment for following their direct orders down Whitechapel market.

Sally: Sam has found an article in the paper explaining how we're going to murder everyone in their beds in return for Russian gold.

Harry: Does that include my ma?

Joe: What you talking about? She's a nice lady, your ma.

Harry: I don't think she'd say the same about you. Not if she knew your politics.

Joe: Why? She's not a Tory, is she?

Sam: Joe! Don't say such things. Even as a joke.

Harry: Course she's not a Tory. But she don't approve of the CP either. Reckons it's causing too much aggravation in the tailoring trade.

Joe: Your dad wouldn't have said such a thing.

Harry: Maybe. But he's not around.

Sam: Has your ma been having a go at you?

Harry: Yeah. She found my party card.

Sam: You shouldn't leave things like that lying about.

Harry: It wasn't lying about. It was in my trouser pocket.

Joe: Even worse to leave your trousers lying about.

Harry: You know, she gets ...worried about me. Thinks if I get involved in politics I'll go the same way me dad went. Work meself to death.

Sam: So what you gonna do?

Harry: I don't know. She said I should forget about all this politics and concentrate on that nice drama group I've joined.

Joe: So she still don't know what sort of group we are?

Harry: No. She keeps asking when we're going to put on a play she can come and see. I told her we've been working very hard and it takes a long time and we don't know exactly when we're gonna perform ...

Joe: Does she believe you?

Harry: I don't know. She probably don't now. Probably thinks the whole drama group story is just a cover for being a Party member.

Sam: Ah well. Don't mess her about. Just tell her the truth. She'll get used to it.

Harry: I don't think I could do that. She's in a really bad way these days.

Joe: You want me to have a word with her?

Sam: What are you gonna say Joe?

Joe: I dunno. Just reassure her that we are all reasonable people who are not leading him astray.

Harry: Maybe I'll have to leave the group.

Sam: Oh no! Not another one.

Joe: Come on. Can't be that bad.

Harry: Yeah, well, she's been through a lot of hard times, you know. Had to take charity from the Jewish Welfare board and all that. I don't want to give her any more tsouros.

Joe: Look, I'm sure I can talk your ma round. Here, you want a cup of tea? Sam'll buy you a cup of tea.

Harry: No, I ought to get back to her. She'll be worrying about me.

Sally: I hope you don't have to leave, Harry.

Harry: So do I. Bye everyone. See you Wednesday, anyway.

(Harry goes)

Sam: Well.

Joe: He's not gonna leave.

Hannah: How do you know?

Joe: Were you watching him this morning? He loves getting up there and performing. He only really comes to life when he's doing this work.

Sally: Yes. Funny, isn't it? He's such a quiet boy.

Sam: But if his Ma is so dead set against it –he's not gonna upset her.

Joe: We'll find a way to help him out.

Hannah: What way?

Joe: I don't know. But we'll find a way.

Scene 9. In Whitechapel library

Sam: *(incredulous)* Shakespeare? You want us to put on a Shakespeare play?

Joe: Keep your voice down. We don't have to put it on. We just have to set up a rehearsal. Get in early, before Bob arrives. Invite Mrs Bornstein along. Talk intelligently about the play for half an hour, then she goes away happy and we carry on rehearsing the new sketch for Moscow.

Sam: You're joking. I can't do all that 'Romeo, Romeo' stuff. Not with a straight face. Anyway, why would Mrs Bornstein believe that a bunch of working class people like us would be spending their spare time on Shakespeare? It's all about kings and queens.

Joe: It's not all about Kings and Queens. Look, I've had plenty of time to sit here and find something suitable.

Hannah: I suppose it might be interesting anyway.

Sally: I've never seen a Shakespeare play, but we had to read some of his poems at school. Sure I couldn't make head nor tail of them, but I liked them anyway.

Joe: I found the perfect play for us. It's all about workers. Well, it's got some scenes with workers, and those are the ones we'll rehearse.

Sam: What play's that, then?

Joe: A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Hannah: Isn't that about fairies?

Joe: Yeah, well there are fairies in it.

Sam: I'm not playing any bleeding fairies.

Joe: We won't do the scenes with fairies. I told you. We'll do the stuff with the workers in. There's even a tailor. It'll be perfect.

Scene 10. At the Workers' Circle. Early evening

(Joe, Harry, Sally. Joe has a dogged eared copy of *Midsummer Nights Dream*, and papers with parts, which he is distributing to others)

Harry: What is all this? I don't understand ...

Joe: You'll get it as we go through. Where's Sam?

Hannah: He said he was coming.

Joe: He'd better.

(Enter Sam)

Joe: At last.

Sam: What's the matter? I'm early. Bloke downstairs said he'd never known us turn up so early.

Joe: Well we've got a lot to fit in. Here (*hands him paper*)

Sam: What's this?

Joe: Just follow it as we go through. We just need to read the scene now, so we've got some idea what it's about.

Sam: I don't get this.

Joe: You will. I'll start then. Is all our company here? Harry –

Harry: Oh. Right. I see. *You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the scrip.* Shouldn't that be 'script'?

Joe: No. That's what it says in the book. Scrip.

Sam: It's a spelling mistake. Bleedin' Shakespeare. Supposed to be such a genius and he can't even spell script.

Joe: It's just old English, isn't it?

Sally: What's supposed to be happening in this scene, anyway? I can't make sense of it. I haven't got that bit you just said.

Joe: No, well, I wasn't gonna sit in that library and copy the whole play, was I? So I copied out your parts and your cues.

Sam: But I can't tell when my cue is coming up.

Joe: You'll just have to listen carefully then, won't you?

Harry: I don't think my ma is gonna believe all this.

Joe: Why shouldn't she? Look, I deliberately chose this scene because these are workers who are also actors. Just like us. And in this scene they are rehearsing a play.

Harry: What play?

Joe: What?

Harry: What play are they rehearsing?

Joe: It's called – hang on, it's here – it's called *The Most Lamentable Comedy And Cruel Death Of Pyramus And Thisbe*.

Harry: Don't sound like a comedy.

Joe: No, well, I suppose comedy meant something different then.

Sam: Why are they rehearsing?

Joe: What do you mean? Why shouldn't they rehearse?

Sam: It's a reasonable question. I mean, where are they gonna perform this play? On the street, like us? Or in the village hall?

Joe: Neither. They're doing it for some big event. Wedding reception of the King, or the Duke or something.

Sam: Oh. Who's doing the catering?

Joe: Ha ha.

Sally: Is this the King of England?

Joe: No. Somewhere abroad. Greece, I think. Athens.

Harry: We supposed to do Greek accents then?

Joe: No. I don't think so.

Hannah: So they're doing this play for the Monarchy?

Joe: Yes.

Hannah: So they support the monarchy?

Joe: I suppose so. Look, can we get on with this? We've got to get ready for Mrs Bornstein, then we've got to get through a bit of a rehearsal of this, and all before Bob arrives. And he's usually on time.

Sam: How can you compare this lot to us? We're not monarchists.

Joe: I didn't say they had the same ideas as us. Just that they are workers and actors.

Sally: I dare say you had to support the monarchy then or you'd be in real trouble.

Sam: But they didn't have to entertain them, did they? What did the other workers think about this?

Harry: Maybe they've been forced to put on this play.

Joe: They're just having a bit of fun. They put on a play about a couple of lovers, in which the woman gets eaten by a lion, and the man kills himself.

Sally: Charming play for a wedding.

Hannah: Maybe that's their way of getting back at the monarchy. A play in which they all get killed.

Harry: Lions? In Greece?

Joe: I don't know. There must have been lions in Greece then. Anyway, it's not a realistic play.

Harry: What, the play they're doing, or the whole play, I mean *Midsummer Night's Dream*?

Joe: Neither of them. I mean one of the actors goes off to fairyland in the middle of it all.

Sam: Couldn't we have done something with a bit more social significance?

Joe: Like what?

Sam: I dunno. *The Merchant of Venice*. I know a bit of a speech from that already.

Joe: I'd forgotten that you was a professor of literature. Otherwise I would have consulted you more closely.

Sam: *Hath not a Jew ... Hath not a Jew ...* What is it?

Joe: I don't know. Hath not a Jew a headache if he tries to get a few other Jews to rehearse a scene for half an hour?

Sally: A few Jews and an Irish girl.

Hannah: *I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions, fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?*

Harry: That's amazing. I wanna learn that.

Hannah: My dad taught it to me. Sounds better in Yiddish.

Harry: Yeah, why didn't we do that play? Sounds really good.

Hannah: I don't know if the rest of the play is so good. The Jew is the villain.

Harry: How can he be if he gets to say all that?

Joe: Please ...

Harry: Why don't you do that speech anyway? My ma would like that.

Joe: We can't just shove in speeches from other plays. Anyway, the whole idea was to do a play that is not political. And that's what we're doing.

Sam: This *Midsummer Night's Dream* seems quite political to me. Pro monarchy. Showing the workers doing exactly what the bosses want them to do ...

Joe: Please. Harry's ma will be here soon. We need to get ourselves sorted out so that it looks like we're serious about this play. I've given Harry the biggest part so his mum will be impressed.

Sam: Who's producing it?

Joe: What do you mean? Nobody's producing it. We're not really doing it.

Hannah: No, Sam's right. If we were really performing this play we'd have a producer standing outside telling us where to stand, when to move, how loud to speak. Like Bob.

Joe: Yeah, well, somehow I didn't think Bob was going to go along with this. We'll just have to pretend that the producer, who we might as well call Bob, is not available tonight. So we're practising on our own. Because we're keen. Look, can we just read through this once? From the beginning again? Right. I start. *Is all our company here?*

Harry: *You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the scrip.*

Joe: *Here is the scroll of every man's name which is thought fit, through all Athens, to play in our interlude before the Duke and the Duchess on his wedding-day at night.*

Hannah: So have they had some sort of competition to decide who can take part in this play then?

Joe: Do you have to bring all that up again? Harry –

Harry: *First, good Peter Quince* – is that you?

Joe: Yes.

Harry: *First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on; then read the names of the actors; and so grow to a point.*

Joe: *Marry, our play is ' The most Lamentable Comedy and most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisby.*

Sam: When do the rest of us ever get a word in?

Joe: Your turn is coming. Don't worry.

Harry: *A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry. A merry what?*

Sally: A merry Christmas?

Joe: Never mind. Just read it.

Harry: *OK ... a merry. Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your actors by the scroll. Masters, spread yourselves. Wait a minute. Who's the producer here?*

Joe: There isn't a producer. We just decided that.

Harry: No, I don't mean here at the Workers' Circle. I mean in this scene that they're doing. Who's supposed to be in charge? I can't work it out. I mean, you seem to be in charge of the scripts and all that, but then I keep telling everyone what they ought to be doing.

Joe: Yeah, that's part of it. You keep taking over, see. Then at the next rehearsal the fairies give you an ass's head.

Sally: How are we gonna do that?

Joe: We're not.

Sam: Thank goodness.

Joe: She'll be here in a minute. Can we get on with it? *Answer, as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver.*

Harry: *Ready. Name what part I am for, and proceed.*

Joe: *You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.*

Harry: *What is Pyramus? A lover, or a tyrant?*

Joe: *A lover, that kills himself most gallant for love.*

Sam: How much longer before we start to speak?

Joe: For crying out loud. A bit of patience please. Harry.

Harry: *That will ask some tears in the true performing of it. If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes; I will move storms; what's he talking about?*

Hannah: He's saying that if he plays a lover, he'll get everyone in the audience crying.

Sally: He's a bit full of himself if you ask me.

Harry: Why did you have to give me that part?

Joe: You could do with being a bit more full of yourself.

Sam: So when he gets all these Dukes and Duchesses crying, is that a way of getting revenge on them then?

Harry: No, no. I see what he means now. He's just boasting about what a good actor he is. Then he says he could also play a tyrant really well. See, *look, my chief humour is for a tyrant. I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split.* Then there's a bit of a poem. Shall I do that as well?

Joe: Leave it out for now.

Harry: Right. *This was lofty. Now name the rest of the players. This is Ercles' vein, a tyrant' s vein: a lover is more condoling*

Joe: *Francis Flute, the bellows-mender?*

Sally: *Here, Peter Quince.*

Sam: *Hooray. Someone else gets to speak.*

Joe: *Flute, you must take Thisby on you.*

Sally: *What is Thisby? A wand' ring knight?*

Joe: *It is the lady that Pyramus must love.*

Sally: *Nay, faith, let not me play a woman; I have a beard coming. You'd have been better off giving that part to Sam.*

Joe: No, because Flute has to play a woman, so I assume they've chosen the one that's most like a woman.

Hannah: I'm a woman.

Joe: I couldn't have given the part to both of you.

Sally: But he says he's got a beard.

Joe: He's got a beard coming. Which means he's hardly got a beard at all. He's a kid boasting about it isn't he – 'look, I can grow a beard' – that's what he's saying. Anyway, like Quince says, he's gonna be wearing a mask. ...*you shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will.*

Harry: *An I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too. I' ll speak in a monstrous little voice:
' Thisne, Thisne!' 'Ah Pyramus, my lover dear! Thy Thisby dear, and lady deàr!*

Joe: *No, no, you must play Pyramus; and, Flute, you Thisby.*

Hannah: I'm getting mixed up now. Are you saying Sally has to play Flute? Or Thisby?

Joe: Both.

Sam: Why's she got two parts? Hannah and me haven't spoken yet.

Joe: It's not two parts. It's one character playing another character.

Harry: Couldn't we have done something a bit more straightforward?

Joe: Harry, just read the next line.

Harry: OK. *Well, proceed.*

(Pause)

Joe: What?

Harry: *Well, proceed.*

Joe: Is that a cue. Whose cue is that? Oh, it's me. *Robin Starveling the tailor?*

Sam: *Here, Peter Quince.*

Joe: *Robin Starveling, you must play Thisby's mother .*

Sam: Thisby's mother? What does she do?

Joe: She tries to revive Thisby with chicken soup. I don't know. It doesn't matter.

Where are we? *Tom Snout, the tinker?*

Hannah: *Here Peter Quince.*

Joe: *You, Pyramus' father; myself, Thisby' s father; Snug, the joiner, you, the lion' s part.*

Sam: Is that me as well?

Joe: Yeah. We can say the person who normally does it has got a cold.

Sam: Why don't we say the person who plays the tailor has got a cold. That's only one line. Then this can be my main part.

Joe: I thought you'd prefer it if your main part was as the tailor.

Sam: I think Shakespeare must have had something against tailors. First of all he calls him 'Starveling'...

Joe: Well, you're always complaining you can't afford a crust .

Sam: Then he only gives him one line.

Joe: He's got other lines in the rest of the play. Anyway, what difference does it make? Is she gonna care which is your main part? Let's just get on.

Sam: Give me the cue then.

Joe: Right. *And, I hope, here is a play fitted*

Sam: *Have you the lion' s part written? Pray you, ift be, give it me, for I am slow of study. Here!*

Joe: *You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring.*

Harry: *Let me play the lion too. I will roar that I will do any man' s heart good to hear me;
I will roar that I will make the Duke say ' Let him roar again, let him roar again.'*
Bit of a crawler, isn't he?

Joe: *An you should do it too terribly, you would fright the Duchess and the ladies, that
they would shriek; and that were enough to hang us all.*

All: *That would hang us, every mother' s son*

Sam: Blimey, do you really think ...

(Knock at door and female voice, East European accent – ‘Hello?’)

Joe: *(Goes to door)* Mrs Bornstein. We were just expecting you.

(As Joe opens door, he collapses. Panic as the others gather round. Blackout)

Scene 11. The Social Centre

(Kit is painting. Andy working on the computer)

Andy: Sometimes I think you're falling deep in love
With those bright images of times gone by.

Kit: Perhaps I am. These figures come to me
When I'm asleep.

Andy: And do they talk to you?

Kit: No, they just look at me. But this one here –
The one you say looks like your grandfather –
Dances about, and then he waves his arms
As if there's something that he wants to say.

Andy: Perhaps it is my Grandpa, telling tales
Of his adventures on the Stepney streets.
When I was young he always used to tell
Of how he and a group of Party friends
Would act out plays upon the street about
The way the rich exploit the working class
And how one day this system had to change.

Kit: You didn't tell me you had acting genes.

Andy: To tell the truth, I'm pretty sure it's here
In this same building that they used to meet.

Kit: Sometimes I feel vibrations in this room
I think come from those distant hopeful times.
Maybe your grandpa's spirit is still here.

Andy: Sometimes, Kit, I think you are off your head.

Kit: And other times?

Andy: I think that you are mad.

Kit: It's only being mad that keeps me sane.

Andy: A bit too deep for me. But anyway
I must get going, hear what Jed has planned.
The more he speaks the less I understand.

Kit: Off you go then.

Andy: No kiss before I go?

Kit: Not for a man who mocks at my tableau.

Andy: Okay then be like that. But don't blame me
That only shadows keep you company.

(Andy leaves. Kit returns to the painting, absorbing herself in completing a detail. The lights dim, and Joe moves into the space.)

Joe: Where am I now? We were rehearsing. But not the usual stuff. Then what? I must have blacked out. And here I am ...where?

Hang on, I've heard of this. Amnesia. Loss of memory. Bleeding hell, this must be – I must have lost months.

(to Kit) Erm ...Tovarisch! I ...look for ...friends ...of me?

Kit: *(To Audience)* First mystery is – how did he get in here?

A bigger mystery – why am I not afraid?

(To Joe) What do you want?

Joe: You speak English?

Kit: Yes.

Joe: Here, have we met before?

Kit: I don't know.

Joe: Only, I'm looking for my Comrades.

Kit: Your comrades?

Joe: Yeah. *(He looks at Kit's painting)* Look at that! My comrades! In your picture. What are we – bleeding heroes of the revolution or what?

Kit: *(Looks at painting and at Joe)* It's him – the dancing man.

Joe: I'm Joe. Joe Zeligman.

Kit: I'm Kit.

Joe: Kit. Well ...Kit. I never thought Moscow would be like this.

Kit: Moscow?

Joe: It's not so different from the room we rehearse in back in England. Bigger, of course. And we don't have none of this machinery – is that a typewriter?

Kit: If only this were really happening.

Joe: Could just direct me to where the festival is taking place?

Kit: Which festival?

Joe: The theatre thing. You see, I'm in one of the troupes – Red Platform. From Whitechapel. England. Of course, you know – you've been painting us. Tailors and dressmakers we are. Like in the picture. (*examines her clothing*) Looks like you could do with a few more dressmakers round here.

Kit: How could a figment ever seem so real?

Joe: Sorry, I'm not following. Although I've got to say, the accent's perfect. Even sounds a bit posh. But the actual words – pardon my saying this, but they don't make much sense.

Kit: Joe Zeligman. It's a familiar name.

Joe: What?

Kit: I'm very glad you came.

Joe: Yeah, well. Like I say, I'm very grateful – we're all very grateful to be invited. But I'd like to find the others. We've got work to do. Or have we? Here, have we already done our bit?

Kit: Done your bit?

Joe: How did it go? What did the audience think?

Kit: I'm sorry, I wasn't there.

Joe: Oh, well that's a shame. Are you in a troupe as well? Or are you just an artist – or rather not just an artist, I can see that. That's brilliant, that is. Quite an honour, to think that'll be here for future generations to look at.

Kit: Thank you. I am an artist – but I also belong to a ...troupe.

Joe: And when's your bit coming up?

Kit: Oh, in a few weeks.

Joe: I don't suppose we'll be staying that long.

Kit: No.

Joe: Good luck with it, anyway.

Kit: Yes. Thanks.

Joe: *(He examines the painting again, then looks at her)* Here, can I just ask – did we sort of model for this?

Kit: You came to me earlier, yes.

Joe: Oh yeah. Of course. A lot seems to have slipped my memory. I was wondering – there's a young lad. Harry. Now this will seem strange –

Kit: *(To audience)* What's strange to him might be less strange to me.

Joe: Only, I can't remember if he came with us or not.

Kit: Well, he's not here, as far as I can see.

Joe: No. No. The thing is, though, you've painted the rest of us, but not Harry. At least, I can't see him in your painting. And he's one of our best actors. It'd be a shame if he didn't come here, just because of, well, just because of circumstances.

Kit: I'm sorry, I can't tell you. These are the people that I know of. Maybe he'll visit me later to have his painting done.

Joe: I see. Well, thanks for all your help. I'll look out for the others now.

Kit: Wait. There are things I want to ask you.

Joe: Really, I need to go now. Maybe I'll see you later.

Kit: I hope so Joe. I really hope I do. *(He leaves. Lights change again. Kit takes out her mobile phone and dials)*

Andy? No, nothing. Just felt like a chat.

Tell me some more about your grandfather.

Scene 12. The Social Centre

(Kit is sleeping on floor by her painting. There is hammering at door. She gets up to answer it)

Kit: Who's there?

Andy: It's me.

Kit: *(opens door)* What are you doing here?

Andy: There's been a raid up at the other place.

All hell has broken loose, I had to run.

Kit: Calm down and slowly tell me what's gone on .

Andy: At six o'clock this morning they arrived

Twenty or thirty of the London filth

Knocked on the door then kicked it off the frame

Before I had a chance to open up.

Kit: What was the reason for this wild assault?

Andy: The reason that they gave is just absurd.

The electricity that we use there

Has not been paid for, even though we had

Made many efforts to arrange to pay.

Our faxes went unanswered so we thought

That we would save our money till the cost

Was put to us as a final demand.

So what he cops are saying is that this

Is tantamount to stealing, giving them

The right to bust us, and to confiscate

Whatever they can use as evidence.

Kit: So have they cut the power?

Andy: Not just that.

They've taken our computers and all disks,
Seized papers that they think will go to prove
That we are organising violence
And orchestrating chaos on the streets.

Kit: But nothing there will prove any such thing

Andy: I wouldn't be too sure once they are done.

Kit: That's true. Computer files are easily changed.

Andy: Or just as easily misinterpreted.

Kit: What are you going to do?

Andy: I haven't thought.

Kit: We can't just let them beat us, we must show
That we can carry on in spite of them.

Andy: A generator will have to be found
To get the place to function as before.
And till that's done we'll try to rearrange
The social centre program so we run
Those classes that we can in daylight hours.

Kit: Tonight we can get candles and some lamps,
And have some music, an acoustic set
To show that there's some life in that place yet.

Scene 13. Workers' Circle

(The group is rehearsing a new sketch. Bob is directing. They are in mid-scene.)

Harry: Honey, do you love me?

Sally: Aw, honeybun, I sure do love you.

Harry: A whole lot?

Sally: A whole whole lot, honey.

Harry: Oh, that's real swell.

Sally: It sure is.

Harry: Sure it sure is.

Sally: That's real real swell.

Harry: Real, real real swell

Sally: How are you feeling, honey.

Harry: Happy, honey. In fact, I'm so happy I could die o f happiness.

Sally: So could I.

Harry: Aaaaah!

Sally: Aaaaah!

(Joe bursts in)

Sam: Here he is. What happened to you Wednesday night then?

Harry: You gave my ma a proper fright. She thought you'd had a heart attack or something.

Joe: I was just tired.

Hannah: It looked like more than that.

Sam: Had you been drinking?

Joe: Where have I got money to drink? Where have I got money to eat, for that matter?

Hannah: You ought to see a doctor.

Joe: Another idea that costs money. I'm all right now.

Sam: Walked him home leaning on my shoulder. And he was going delirious. Mumbling, mumbling all the time. Not even English. Were you speaking Yiddish? Or Russian?

Joe: I don't know any Russian. I was just tired. I'd been up a long time. Forget about it. Long as we convinced Harry's ma.

Sam: Shmendrik – we told her!

Joe: Told her what?

Hannah: The truth of course. What this group is really all about.

Sally: And we told her about rehearsing Shakespeare to impress her.

Joe: Why did you do that? Was she angry?

Sam: Angry? You're joking.

Harry: She just thought it was funny.

Sam: Did she laugh!

Joe: Well, that's what I thought would happen. Something like that. Eventually.

Sam: Yeah?

Joe: Yeah. I just thought it would happen later.

Hannah: Really?

Joe: I know his ma. She's on our side.

Bob: I'm glad to hear it. So now can we get back to the rehearsal. I was beginning to think we'd have to write you out.

Joe: Me? Just you wait. I'll be there in Moscow, posing to have my portrait painted.

Sam: Oy! Now he's gonna join the aristocracy.

Bob: OK, OK. Can we just take it from when Joe, Sam and Hannah come in? After Harry and Sally have died of an overdose of romantic love.

Joe: Right. I know all that off by heart.

..and so the Hero and Heroine of another Hollywood tale expire from happiness ...

Sam: Without noticing ...

Hannah: Unemployment.

Joe: Hunger Marches

Sam: Means Tests

Joe: Speed-up

Hannah, Sam & Joe: And the wholesale murder of the workers that the bosses call war.

(Harry and Sally get up and join the others)

Harry: Because if we noticed these things

Sally: Then you might notice them also.

Sam: And if you notice, you might act.

Joe: Act to end the degrading means test.

Sam: Act to take over the farms and factories

Harry: Act to change this rotten system

Sally: Act to take control over your own lives

All: Just like the workers in the Soviet Union, who have thrown out the bosses, and are running their country themselves.

Joe: Comrades, you have been watching a performance by the Red Platform group of the Workers' Theatre Movement.

Harry: in a few months time, the Workers' Theatre Movement will send ten worker-players to Moscow, to take part in:

All: The International Olympiad of Workers' Theatres.

Harry: British worker-players will join up with comrades from

Joe: France and Germany

Hannah: America and China

Sam: Japan and Denmark

Harry: Workers from all over the world will gather in

All: Moscow, the capital city of World Socialism.

Hannah: Comrades, the British Workers' Theatre Movement will send 10 of its most advanced worker-players to this great event in Moscow, the capital of the world's first working class country. There they will learn from our overseas comrades,

share our experience of how the bosses push us down, and meet others who are working in this struggle. They will return with new ideas and methods for carrying on our important work.

Joe: But comrades, we need your help. We need money to pay for this trip. Money that only you

All: The British Working Class

Joe: will provide.

Sam: Show your support for our work. Help us to show other workers how the bosses steal their labour from them, and what they can do to change things.

All: Contribute to the advance of workers' art, workers' theatre –

SUPPORT THE OLYMPIAD!

We are Red Platform

Workers Red Platform

We show you how you're robbed and bled

The old world's crashing

Let's help to smash it

And build a workers' world instead

All: *(raising fists in air)* Build the workers' theatre movement. Support the Olympiad!

(They hold tableau. Pause. Joe breaks away from tableau and adds casually:)

Joe: And fight the means test, oppose the National Government, defend the minority movement, support the Soviet Union, and anything else we can think of. Well, what do you think?

Bob: I think it'll go down very well at the London Show.

Sam: You think it'll get us a place on the Moscow trip?

Hannah: That's not why we're doing it.

Sam: Of course not. But ...you know ...

Hannah: Anyway, it doesn't matter how it goes down at the show. That's just people in the movement

Sam: Who's doing the judging at this contest then? Joe Stalin?

Bob: Don't worry. It'll all be worked out fairly.

Hannah: Will it?

Joe: Come on, let's not get into all that.

Hannah: Talking of Stalin, there's a bit of this sketch that I'm still not too sure about.

Bob: What's the problem now?

Hannah: Well, at the All-London Show there will be a lot of people who will love the sketch ...

Bob: That's not what I call a problem.

Hannah: I know. They'll laugh in all the right places, understand exactly what we are getting at and applaud us till the ceiling falls down.

Joe: How did you know my brother-in-law built that hall?

Hannah: The problem is, how's it going to go down on the street?

Bob: Exactly the same way. Don't underestimate the people on the street. They know that what's happening in the Soviet Union is important to them and their class.

Hannah: I'm not underestimating anyone. I'm sure the street audience will love the parodies of Hollywood and the West End. But all the stuff about the Soviet Union ...

Bob: Not this again!

Hannah: No, look, I'm not making any points about the Soviet state ...

Harry: My ma's always on about her family having to run away from Russia when she was little.

Joe: Yeah, well that was under the Tsar, wasn't it?

Sally: It's a terrible thing to have to run away from your home. You never get over it.

Hannah: Look, I do object to some of the things that Stalin's doing ...

Bob: Yeah, and we don't particularly want to hear them. Tell it to Emma Goldman. If she's not too busy at Foyles Literary lunches with lady whatsername. We have got to support the Soviet Union.

Hannah: Look, Bob, actually I have no objection on ideological grounds to praising the Soviet Union ...

Bob: Thank you. I'm sure the Communist International will be very grateful ...

Hannah: But ...

Joe: But ...here it comes ...

Hannah: I just wonder whether ordinary people will respond. Let's face it. A lot of our audience on the streets are just going to think "why should I give money to their Olympiad. What's it got to do with me?"

Bob: It's got a lot to do with them. It's about organising internationally. Cutting across the bourgeois nations that Capitalism adores. The ordinary man in the street can follow that very well.

Sally: Though I dare say my brothers would shout some stupid things at us.

Bob: Well, there are some people we're never going to get to.

Joe: Quite a lot of people. I mean, look at that crowd in Hackney the other day ...

Sam: Yeah. Try to avoid markets in future. I got smacked in the eye by a tomato.

Joe: Lucky it wasn't still in the tin.

Sam: Very funny. You ought to be on the stage.

Joe: You know, Bob, Hannah has got a point. I know this stuff will get cheers from the party members, and I'm not saying there's no class-consciousness in the east end ... But I do think that we shouldn't let Hannah's individualistic deviationism ...

Hannah: Excuse me ...

Joe: All right. We shouldn't let the fact that Hannah has some funny ideas blind us to the possibility that she may actually be right.

Sam: Look. Why don't we just try it out like it is for the all-London show, and see how we feel about it after that. I mean if it's just a matter of dropping the slogans ...

Hannah: OK with me.

Bob: But Hannah's not just saying we should drop the slogans. She's talking about not even mentioning the Soviet Union, let alone collecting money for the trip.

Hannah: If you want to collect money go ahead.

Sam: I don't think you'll get very far, though.

Joe: I don't know. We might raise the fare to East India ... Dock Road. Don't get me wrong, Bob. It's a lovely sketch. The film stuff is great.

Hannah: Yeah. Very funny.

Bob: OK. So we look at it again after the All-London Show.

Hannah: All right. Look, Bob, I think it's a good sketch. It's just ...

Joe: We don't want to get too far ahead of our audience.

Bob: OK.

Sally: Well, I'm glad that's decided.

Bob: Everyone happy?

Harry: Yeah. There's just one thing though ...

Joe: Oh my god. Don't tell me you've become a critic now!

Harry: No. It's just an idea I had ...

Joe: Bleeding hell. Everyone having ideas. We'll never get anything done.

Hannah: Let him speak Joe. He says little enough already.

Harry: Well, I just thought it doesn't look so good the way we're doing the gangster film sequence. It's a bit ...I don't know ...unrealistic. I was thinking maybe Sam should have a toy gun or something.

Bob: A toy gun?

Harry: Yeah. I just think it would look better.

Joe: Oy vey. A prop already.

Harry: Just a toy gun. Some of them can look very realistic.

Joe: Careful, Harry. I don't think you know what you're saying here.

Hannah: What's wrong with what he's saying?

Bob: You know very well, Hannah.

Sam: A propertyless class must have a propertyless theatre.

Harry: What? What does that mean?

Sam: It's one of the rules.

Bob: It's not a rule. It's a principle of our work. One of the things that distinguishes us from the bourgeois theatre. We don't use props. We are a theatre of ideas.

Hannah: I don't see the problem with a little thing like a gun.

Harry: Sorry. I just thought ...I didn't realise there was this ...principle.

Sally: I'm not sure I understand it either.

Hannah: All he's asking for is a little gun. I'm not saying we should do it, but we can at least talk about it. He's not saying we should build a model of Buckingham Palace.

Sally: You know it might look good if Sam pulls out a gun. We could all jump back, you know ...

Bob: Look, a toy gun is a small thing. But it's what it leads to that's the problem. We use the gun, then someone says, 'this scene could do with a table and chairs'.

Sam: Come on, nobody's gonna lug tables and chairs ...

Bob: Exactly. So we say, well, we'd better do it indoors then. The vicar might even lend us a candelabra. And before you know where you are we're an amateur Drama group doing three-act plays with French windows to a little group of friends. Not a political group using drama to change things on the streets.

Harry: I'm sorry. I didn't think of all that.

Hannah: What about those sticks we use in Meerut? They haven't turned us into class traitors.

Bob: They're not props. They're ...tools. Symbols.

Joe: What about that top hat in the unemployment sketch?

Bob: That's costume.

Joe: Props don't always mean three-act plays. I tell you, I saw this magician down the Hackney Empire the other night – he had props: ropes, scarves, billiard balls, cards – god knows what else – and he wasn't about to leap through any French window.

Bob: You're not comparing what we are doing to some third rate conjurer are you?

Joe: He wasn't third-rate. He was very good.

Sam: Here, what were you doing at the Hackney Empire?

Joe: Someone bought me a ticket ...

Sam: They should have bought you a plate of lokshen soup instead.

Bob: Here we are doing a sketch that shows how the bourgeois theatre and film companies trivialise the world and divert us from our proper task, and then you casually mention that you make a habit of going and watching this junk.

Joe: Look, a lot of working class people like the Music Hall, so it can't be all bad. Anyway, I thought we were discussing this scene. Not how I spend my evenings.

Bob: It's all tied in together, Joe.

Joe: I know, I know. Everything is tied in with everything else. I hear it all the time. If I go for a walk in the country I have to think about the oppressive property rights of landlords. If I have a cup of tea I have to think about imperialism in India. Music – whose interest is it serving? So what's wrong, every now and again, with just enjoying something because I enjoy it? Come on. There must be some things that are just a matter of pleasing yourself.

Harry: Look, I'm sorry I suggested it. I'm sure it's gonna be OK without the gun.

Bob: The whole point of this sketch is that our sort of theatre is totally different from theirs. If we use props we become just the same as them. We're not just trying to get people worked up here. We are trying to get them to think.

Hannah: And what is it about a toy gun that is going to stop them thinking?

Bob: Look, it is a policy. It's how we have decided that our plays will be made. No props. A symbol of our class position. After the revolution we can have all the props you want.

Joe: Bleeding hell, we'll have forgotten what to do with them by then.

Harry: If I'd known all this was gonna happen I wouldn't have said a word ...

Hannah: No. It's good that we have this discussion ...

Sam: It'd be better if we could get on with the rehearsal. We won't get anywhere at this rate.

Harry: Yeah, forget the gun ...

Joe: It's not whether we use props that makes us different from them, it's who we are and what we're saying.

Bob: And how we're saying it.

Joe: Who cares how we say it? Long as it gets across the basic idea.

Bob: Which is what exactly?

Joe: Which is ...that we live in the middle of a pile of dreck, and that the people who run everything want us to stay there. That the only way to change anything is for us to get together and stop fighting one another. That if we do that, then maybe we'll be strong enough to turn things upside down so that everybody gets a bit of what they deserve.

Harry: Like they've done in Russia.

Joe: Yes. Yes. That's what I want to say. That's what I want to get across on the streets. Because we're speaking to our people there. They know who we are. And they couldn't care less what we use to get these things across. Toy guns, sticks, salt-beef sandwiches, top hats – with rabbits in if you like ...

Bob: It's actually a bit more complicated than all that.

Joe: I don't think so. I don't.

Sally: Should we go through the scene again?

Joe: All right. All right. Look, I've calmed down.

Sam: Good. And after we're done I'll buy you some food.

Scene 14. The Café

Sam: How's the soup?

Joe: Fine. Fine. Here, Sam ...

Sam: Yeah.

Joe: You couldn't lend us a few bob?

Sam: Lend?

Joe: Yeah, lend.

Sam: No luck with jobs.

Joe: No. I'm a troublemaker.

Sam: The tailoring trade's full of troublemakers.

Joe: I think I made a bit too much trouble. They got my name down on a list.

Sam: So what you gonna do?

Joe: I dunno. I can't stand all this. I hate the dole. Bleeding PAC and all that.

Sam: I know. Listen, I know you like to think of me as the bloated plutocrat ...

Joe: Just a joke ...

Sam: Yeah, I know. But it makes me feel ...I don' t know ...as if the fact that I've held on to me job makes me a sort of class traitor ...

Joe: No one's saying that ...

Sam: No. It's getting bad, Joe.

Joe: What.

Sam: The way things are going. What's gonna happen?

Joe: What do you mean, what's gonna happen? We'll keep rehearsing, win the contest, go to Moscow. Here, I had a dream about that ...

Sam: I don't mean that. I mean what's gonna happen with jobs and all that?

Joe: Why are you asking me? You've been in the party longer than I have. You should know what's gonna happen. Capitalism is just 'bumping along the bottom'. Can't be long before it breaks down completely. Then we'll start up something better.

Sam: Very sure about that, aren't you?

Joe: Well, come on. You know as well as I do that things are gonna change. People won't take it much longer.

Sam: But in the mean time ...?

Joe: We just gotta survive. Here, I'll tell you what I'm gonna do ...

Sam: What?

Joe: Taxi driving. Work me own hours ...

Sam: Your own hours? You mean all day and night, dontcha?

Joe: Well, at least you don't have some boss sitting watching you from morning to night. No clocking on. No routine. No staring at the same bleeding pressing machine day after day...

Sam: No mates to talk to.

Joe: You talk to the punters in the cab.

Sam: Oh yeah? They're gonna love listening to you telling them what's wrong with the world.

Joe: Yeah, well, I can always tone it down for the customers.

Sam: So you're gonna do the knowledge?

Joe: Yeah.

Sam: It'll take a while.

Joe: Yeah. And it'll take a bit of money.

Sam: I see.

Joe: Yeah.

Sam: You know what? You'd make a good salesman.

Joe: What are you talking about?

Sam: You wanna sell some stuff for me?

Joe: What stuff? Stuff that's been knocked off?

Sam: No, no, no. Nothing like that. It's just this job I'm doing at the moment – there's a lot of cabbage ...

Joe: You working in a greengrocers all of a sudden?

Sam: You know what I mean. Cabbage. Stuff that's left over when the cutter has worked out the pattern ...

Joe: I know what cabbage is.

Sam: Course. So this order that's on now, I've worked out a cutting pattern that'll give a nice bit of material over.

Joe: And you could get hold of it?

Sam: Yeah. Good quality stuff. It'd make up into some nice kid's skirts, you know. We could flog it in the market.

Joe: What's your boss gonna say when half his schmutter has disappeared out the back door?

Sam: He won't know. Out of a big order it's nothing. Anyway, he's been paid for made-up garments. If he gets a little bit of material over, that's a nice little bonus for him. And that's what he'll get. A little bit of material.

Joe: And you get the rest.

Sam: Why not? I worked out the pattern.

Joe: All sounds a bit funny to me.

Sam: To you, everything's funny.

Joe: How you gonna make up these skirts?

Sam: Leave that to me.

Joe: So what happened to class against class? If you are gonna employ people to work on your knocked off schmutter, then you are no longer a worker, but a capitalist.

Sam: What are you talking? Who's stopped being a worker? Am I offering you a swim in my swimming pool? Am I asking you to chauffeur my Rolls Royce? Mow the workers down with my gatling gun? It's just selling a bit of schmutter.

Joe: But whoever is making this stuff up is being exploited ...

Sam: I'll pay good wages. Above the union rate. And you can have two bob for every skirt you sell.

Joe: Piece work! Oy!

Sam: I'm trying to do you a favour. So you can save up for this taxi. Get your licence, whatever it is you have to do.

Joe: Yeah, yeah.

Sam: So. You interested?

Joe: Yeah, I'm interested. When do I start?

Scene 15. The Social Centre

Andy: So, Jed is coming here?

Kit: No, you go there.

He says there have been new developments.

He wants to make sure we agree the plan.

Andy: So why are you not coming?

Kit: He's told me

As much about it as I want to know.

I've told him how I feel and what I'll do.

But now I need to stay and work on this.

Andy: What did he tell you?

Kit: Better that he says.

Andy: Why must that man be so mysterious?

Scene 16. A back room at the Social Centre

Stanley: Bastards. Fucking bastards. Where are you? Where are you, you cunts? Cowardly cunts.

What do you think you are achieving? Who do you think you are helping? The Third World? People in India don't need your help. They don't want your help. And they don't want you to destroy the one thing that can give them a bit of hope.

You think by tying me up, you're somehow going to help some child labourer on the other side of the world. A blow against fucking Capitalism. Don't you understand? The kid needs the work, not your gestures. And I'm the one giving it to him.

What do you think I am, a child-killer? The work I give saves their lives, keeps their families. I don't even run those factories. I don't make the regulations.

CUNTS! Are you listening to me?

Anticapitalism. I know all about anticapitalism. I was brought up on the stuff. The Daily Worker kiddies' column. You won't know about that. My fucking soft, stupid dad was the biggest anticapitalist you could meet. But he knew that people had to make a living. He didn't go around kidnapping people. He didn't hate bosses. He didn't hate anyone.

So what you going to do with me? Kill me? You think that's going to win a lot of converts to your cause? You think that's going to stop people looking around for the cheapest pair of trousers? And who cares who makes them?

I pay above the minimum. Get rid of me and you'll have real sharks to deal with.

You think you're making a political point? You're mad. Meshuggenas.

CAN YOU HEAR ME?

(A figure with a stocking mask appears behind Stanley and places a gag over his mouth, silencing him. Blackout)

Scene 17. The Social Centre

Andy: This never was a part of any plan

Kit: It was an opportunity for us.

Andy: An opportunity that we'd have best ignored

Kit: You wanted us to raise our profile high

And reach the common person on the street.

So this is just a new and better stunt

By which we will make sure our voice is heard.

Andy: This bullying voice does not belong to us.

And those who hear it will not hear our cause.

Kit: You speak as though it's really our intent
To do wild violence to the evil man.
But all we want to do is keep him there
Secluded from the world for just one day.
That way we will ensure that all can see
The exploitation upon which is built
His brand, his company and his way of life.
Jed will send out the press release –
Our one demand is that they broadcast this
And tell the truth of how his business works,
Paying starvation wages for designer clothes.

Andy: Kit, you have seized him and imprisoned him
And yet you want me to believe that you
March behind freedom's honourable flag?
I cannot be a part of such a scheme.

Kit: Oh, Andy, you are making a mistake.
To weigh this one man's temporary constraint
In equal balance with those children's lives .

Andy: No child alive will benefit from this.

Kit: Then maybe children who are yet to come
Will thank us for this blow on their behalf.

Andy: How was all this decided? Why was I
Not asked for my opinion of this plan?

Kit: It happened very quickly. Jed found out
That Mendel often visited this street.
He'd walk alone here very late at night –

A curious habit, but good luck for us.

It was an easy matter, without risk,
To get him in the van, then drive him round,
And bring him back to be kept safely here.

Andy: Why did you not discuss this plot with me?
The idea was to make this place we found
A headquarters of creativity
Open to all to join our project here
And help us spread the word of our campaign.
Instead you've turned the place into a jail.

Kit: Jed wanted your agreement, but events
Moved quicker than we realised they would.
Jed missed you – yes, it was unfortunate.
But we are free. We do what we think best.

Andy: And how long do you think that you'll stay free?
This escapade has played into the hands
Of our opponents, giving them the means
To kill our project and destroy our work.

Kit: The spot I stand on will always be free
However thick the walls around me are.
Andy, you cannot tell me what to do.

Andy: No more can you impose your will on me.
I'm letting Mendel go. *(He goes to try the door)*

Kit: Jed has the key.

(Andy tries to open the door with the crowbar. It won't give. He kicks hard and it opens. The chair can be seen inside, but Stanley has gone.)

Andy: Where is he?

Kit: Somewhere safe.

Andy: What's the address?

Kit: Andy, just wait. Jed's contacting the press.

(He looks at her, then goes. Kit turns again to the painting. Lights dim again, and Joe walks in.)

Joe: Hello again ...Kit .

Kit: Oh, Hello, Joe.

Joe: Here, I've got a bone to pick with you.

Kit: What do you mean?

Joe: You've been having me on.

Kit: How?

Joe: Letting me think that I was in Moscow, when all along I was ...well, I'm not exactly sure where I was. Probably tucked up in my bed at home. Like I suppose I am now.

Kit: No, Joe. This isn't Moscow, but I never said it was. But this is the real world. Too real.

Joe: Too real. What does that mean?

Kit: Just that there are too many terrible things happening, and nobody has a solution.

Joe: The terrible things are happening because of the Capitalist system. Give us a few years and we'll solve that. They're doing it in Russia.

Kit: No they're not. No they didn't. Stalin's Russia was a tyranny.

Joe: Blimey. I'd better not tell anyone in the party about this. I never realised you could have counter-revolutionary dreams.

Kit laughs.

Kit: I'm not the dream – you're the dream.

Joe: I don't feel like I'm a dream.

Kit: No, well, let's accept that you're a dream to me, and I'm a dream to you.

Joe: Fair enough.

Kit: Tell me about your world, Joe. The good and bad of it.

Joe: Bleeding strange dream this is. Discussing philosophy now. What's the point of all this then?

Kit: I just want to know.

Joe: All right. I suppose it can't do any harm. Let's think. The good – my friends. That there are friends all around me, stretching out their hands. They make up a sort of net. No – it's more like threads, woven together, making up this cloth. A nice, bright piece of cloth. Good quality. Fine weave. And I'm a part of all of that. That strong, that patterned cloth. That's the best thing I can think of in my world.

And what's bad? Well, there are those people trying to cut and tear the cloth. Split us apart. That's bad. And how do they do it? Speed-ups. Unemployment. Hungry kids. Dole queues – I've had my fill of them.

And then there's something else that's bad. Now, normally I wouldn't mention this. But I can tell you, 'cause you're only a dream. You're not gonna go and tell anyone else, are you?

It's all the rules. All the bleeding rules we have to stick to. I know you need rules. But sometimes they just get in the way. I mean, Bob, for example. I like Bob, but why won't he let us ...I don't know. Sometimes I just can't abide all these rules. Do you know what I mean?

Kit: I think so.

Joe: What about you, then? What's good and bad about this place?

Kit: The good – I'm free. Freer than you are Joe, at least. I've managed, somehow, to ignore those rules.

The bad – They’ve managed to cut up the cloth here.

This world has all the hunger and the misery that you’ve seen Joe, and more,
though maybe it’s not been quite so close to where I stand.

The worst is, people have almost given up the fight.

What use to stand together when they see,

The mighty always get the victory.

Comradeship and solidarity – those threads have been unravelled Joe. We’ve been
trying ...we’ve been trying to weave them back together.

Joe: Skilled job, that. Weaving.

Kit: You know how to do it?

Joe: Me? I don’t know nothing. But I can learn.

Kit: In times of change we need the learners, not the knowers.

Joe: Wish I knew my lines. There’s an important show coming up.

(He goes. Lights change. Kit returns to her painting.)

Scene 18. Backstage – a Hall near London Bridge

(A large poster on the wall reads “London Workers’ Theatre Movement – All London Show 21st June 1932” and other details. Sam and Joe are in a room backstage going through their lines)

Sam: *(In imitation of James Cagney)* You dirty rat. Take that!

Joe: I’m going. I’m going. Ma, Ma, where are you? Say goodbye to my girl. Do that for
me, Sam. Tell my kid brother not to follow in my footsteps. Aaagh. Aaagh. I’m
dying. I’m almost gone. Feed my pet Rabbit, won’t you ...

Sam: Joe!

Joe: ...but don’t give him any lettuce. He prefers beigels. With a little bit of smoked
salmon and some cream cheese. Put some lettuce on the side if you like, just to
make it look nice. He won’t eat the lettuce, so you can take it back afterwards ...

Sam: Get on with it Joe. We haven't got all night. We have to be on soon.

Joe: Just adding a bit more colour.

Sam: That's not what it looks like to me. Can't you stick to the script for a change? We'll get marked down if we go over time.

Joe: We can't do much more anyway. Where is everyone? Where are the girls? Where's Harry?

Sam: Where's Bob?

Joe: Oh. He said he was gonna be late. Committee meeting. Very important.

Sam: Oh.

(Enter Harry)

Harry: Hello.

Sam: Harry. How's your ma?

Harry: She's all right.

Sam: She been giving you any tips on how to play Hamlet?

Harry: Yeah. She thinks it's all very funny.

Joe: You told her you might go to Moscow then?

Harry: No.

Sam: No? Well tell her, for Gawd's sake. Otherwise Joe'll have us all pretending we're going on a trip to Stratford-upon-Avon.

Harry: I don't want to talk about it. I'm a bit nervous.

Joe: What have you got to be nervous about?

Harry: I've never been in a competition before.

Sam: There's nothing to worry about.

Joe: If we win, we win. If we don't, it don't matter. Anyway, I heard they might take people from a few different groups.

Sam: What's the use of that? Just means they'll have to rehearse a whole new lot of stuff on the boat over. And the groups left behind will all be short of actors. Here, look at him! He has got the jitters.

Harry: I can't help it. I just keep thinking, you know, I might actually get to see Russia. The Soviet Union.

Sam: Moscow. The workers' capital.

Harry: Yeah.

Joe: Blimey, you've come a long way. A few months ago, anyone mentioned Russia and you'd look like you expected them to whip out a big black bomb.

Harry: All right. I'm a bit more educated. That's good, isn't it?

Joe: I'm not criticising.

Harry: I was always on the side of the workers.

Sam: I should hope so.

Harry: Anyway, you think we've got a chance?

Joe: Should have. What with Bob being National Secretary.

Sam: Now I don't think that'll have anything to do with it. Bob would not pull strings.

Joe: I'm not saying he would. Just that our producer is one of the most experienced people in the movement.

Sam: Maybe. But this new piece. It's not like the others. All these different styles. Personally I think it's too confusing.

Harry: Well, we might get extra points for originality.

Sam: Lot of the other groups are just going for the tried and tested. Meerut, Three Pictures, simple stuff like that. Maybe we should have done Meerut.

Harry: Here, what happens when two groups do the same sketch?

Joe: The audience gets to see it twice.

Harry: But the second lot, they're gonna be at a disadvantage.

Sam: Not necessarily

Joe: The judges will just have to put the first performance out of their minds while they're watching the second one. Anyway, they already know most of the sketches off by heart.

Harry: But not ours.

Joe: No. There's a few groups doing new stuff. One group's doing that sketch 'Strike'. It's supposed to be very punchy.

Harry: Never heard of it.

Joe: American. They found it in some Yankee magazine. The Masses.

Sam: New Masses.

Joe: New Masses. Yeah.

(Hannah enters)

Hannah: Where's Sally? Isn't she here?

Joe: Not yet.

Harry: She'd better get a move on.

Hannah: This is terrible.

Sam: What's wrong?

Hannah: She got the sack.

Joe: How? What happened?

Hannah: Well, you know Berman's been picking on her for months ...

Harry: Yeah. She said she was having problems.

Hannah: So last week he started on again about how she wasn't sewing her seams straight, which is true, because she goes fast like a maniac, how she was always late in to work, which is not true – or maybe true once or twice in six months, how she's got a bad attitude ... On and on. And then he says ...I couldn't believe it myself, you know ...he says he should never have taken on an Irish shikse, that he should have given the job to a Jewish girl ...

Sam: Oi! Not something to say to Sally.

Joe: The shmendrick! A miza mashinner on him!

Sam: (*looking over at Hannah*) Joe!

Hannah: Don't mind me, Joe. I said the same thing.

Harry: You said that to the boss?

Hannah: No. I couldn't say it to his face, I couldn't bring myself to. Anyway, so when Berman starts on about the Irish all being drunks, and the women being ...no good ...and god knows what else, then Sally explodes.

Joe: I'm not surprised.

Hannah: And she curses him! How she curses! In English, Irish and Yiddish. So many curses. Even the Yiddish curses she knew more than I do. She must have been taking lessons.

Joe: Don't look at me!

Hannah: So that was it. "Get your cards". "Don't worry, I wouldn't stay if you gave me a hundred pounds". And she's gone.

Harry: So what you going to do? Call a strike?

Hannah: I said to her that's what we'd do. But she says no. She's had enough. And to tell you the truth I don't know if I could get them all out to support her. They're all so frightened for themselves.

Harry: They have to support her. I mean, that's solidarity, isn't it? They have to.

Sam: In theory they have to. But not everyone understands the theory.

Joe: All this happened on Monday?

Hannah: I wanted to go and see her, but she would never tell me her address. All I know she lives with her family somewhere near Cable Street.

Sam: Not an area I know very well.

Harry: My mum's always telling me not to go down there.

Joe: Anyway, looks like she's given up on us too. Probably decided to have nothing more to do with Jews after what Berman said.

Hannah: No. She's not like that. She knows we're not all like Berman. She hates all the stuff against Jews as much as we do. I should think she's just so low she can't be bothered with our little sketches.

Sam: But we can't do anything without her.

Harry: What we gonna do?

Joe: What about this for an idea ...

Sam: Please, Joe, please. Do not suggest you play her part. It won't work.

Joe: I wasn't gonna say anything like that. I was just gonna suggest that maybe we could do something else. Meerut.

Hannah: We'd need Sally for that too.

Harry: So what are we going to do?

Sam: We'll just have to pull out.

Harry: So there goes Moscow. Why did she have to do that?

Hannah: What do you mean? Never mind Moscow. I want to know what's happened to Sally.

Joe: Look, don't panic. She's not all that late. She might still be coming.

Harry: (*hesitant*) maybe we could get someone in another group to read Sally's part.

Hannah: Harry!

Harry: There's nothing we can do to help Sally, is there? I mean, if your union isn't gonna do anything ... We're not going to get her job back, are we?

Sam: He's got a point, Hannah. We should concentrate on the job in hand.

Joe: How about if we go up Cable street, knock on doors, see if anyone knows her family?

Sam: I don't fancy our chances.

Harry: There's no time for all that, anyway ...

(*Enter Bob*)

Bob: How's it going? Here, you won't believe who's here ... What's the matter?

Joe: Bob, there's a bit of a problem.

Bob: Oh?

Harry: Sally's not turned up.

Bob: So you haven't been through the lines?

Hannah: Not just that. She may not be coming at all.

Bob: Why?

Joe: She got the sack. She's probably got other things on her mind.

Bob: You'd think that'd give her more reason to get here. Oh well. Can we use someone else?

Harry: That's what I was thinking.

(Enter Sally)

Bob: So here you are! We were just about to put plan b into action.

Joe: Except we didn't actually have a plan b

Harry: False alarm! Thank goodness for that.

Joe: Sorry to hear about ...

Sally: Yes. Listen, I'm sorry everyone ...

Hannah: Are you all right?

Bob: Look, she's here now, so let's just get on with it. You know, there's even some big-shot west end producer out there ...

Sally: No. Sorry Bob. Everyone. I can't stay.

Bob: What?

Sally: I just came to tell you all. I'm sorry. I won't be able to do my part. I brought my script in. Maybe someone else can do it. I've got to get back home. Home! Well, I've got to get back anyway.

Hannah: What's happened?

Joe: Someone ill?

Sally: All our stuff is out on the street.

Hannah: What?

Joe: You been evicted?

Sally: The bailiffs are there.

Hannah: When I see that Momzer Berman ...

Sally: Ah, we already owed two month's rent. It was going to happen sooner or later.

Harry: So what are we going to do?

Joe: Homes for heroes.

Sam: What are you talking about now?

Joe: We could do 'Homes for Heroes' – remember, the sketch about housing.

Bob: I know the sketch. I wrote it. But I don't see how it is relevant ...

Harry: Yeah, I don't know any of it ... It's from before my time.

Hannah: Never mind all that. We should be thinking about how we support Sally. Not which sketch we're doing for the competition. Her family's on the street.

Joe: Exactly. That's what I'm saying. We go out and do the show on the street.

Harry: What?

Joe: Yeah. We go back with Sally, do Homes for Heroes on the street outside her place.

Harry: What's the point of that?

Joe: We get a big crowd watching, then we get them to take all the stuff back in – throw out the bailiffs.

Harry: I don't know about this ...

Joe: Harry can play Tom's old part.

Harry: But I don't know the lines ...

Joe: Improvise! We'll talk it through on the way.

Harry: What about the competition?

Joe: Bugger the competition.

Bob: Just a minute ...

Sally: Look, there's no need. We'll find somewhere. We've had to move before.

Hannah: But what are you going to live on? Is anyone in your family working?

Sally: My brothers get the odd day here and there ... me da's not really well enough ...

Joe: Look, it's all very well chatting away, but if we're gonna go we should go now, before it gets dark. That's a point – are there any street lamps outside your place?

Sally: There's one on the corner ...

Hannah: It won't get dark for ages, anyway. It's the longest day of the year.

Bob: Hang on. You're gon na give up all that work, all that rehearsal, for this, this escapade ...

Sam: We don't know if it's gonna help Sally anyway.

Harry: Why don't we go later? Bob, can you ask them to put us on first? Sally would only need to stay another 20 minutes. And all the groups could come down to Cable street after they've performed – add to the crowd. They could all do their sketches ...

Hannah: Sally?

Sally: I'm sorry, I really can't wait.

Hannah: Right. I'm going with Sally. If anyone else wants to come, they're welcome . The more the merrier. All the groups could come and do their bit – make a festival of it.

Bob: Hannah – you gone mad?

Hannah: Why not – they've all got sketches to do on the street. I can't think of a better bit of street than outside Sally's house.

Bob: I'm not gonna ask everyone, including judges, committee members, guests, and all sorts of very important people to go on a two mile hike because we've discovered that someone is experiencing oppression. That's not anything new, you know. Workers all over the world are being oppressed. We are here to look at how to fight it. Of course there's a time for solidarity action, but not now. It's a distraction.

Sam: He's got a point, Hannah. People are always being evicted. Doesn't mean we can't ever meet about something else.

Hannah: Sally is our friend. We've got to support her.

Sally: Look, I've got to be going.

Hannah: Joe?

Joe: You go ahead. Cable Street?

Sally: Denmark Street, just off ...

Joe: I know it. I'll see if I can find some others.

Hannah: OK

Sally: I'm really sorry Bob.

(Hannah and Sally leave)

Bob: Joe, this whole thing is planned ...

Joe: I know. I'm sorry Bob. Sam?

Sam: Listen, Bob – I think they're right.

Bob: That is the trouble with you lot. No discipline whatsoever.

Joe: Harry? We need you too, you know.

Harry: Yeah. I'll be along later.

Joe: Right.

(Joe and Sam leave)

Bob: You might as well go with them. Our sketch is down the pan now.

Harry: I just wanted to see the start of the contest.

Bob: Right. Well, I've got some people I need to talk to. Things are gonna need rearranging.

Harry: Yeah.

Bob: That lot. They're a good lot. But they have no discipline.

Harry: I ought to go with them really.

Bob: (*He starts to leave, then turns*) You know, the Southwark group are short of a body
– someone was sick. They're doing Meerut. (*exit*)

Harry: Maybe I'll go and talk to them. (*exit*)

Scene 19. The Social Centre

(Kit is working on the painting again. Suddenly there is hammering on the door. It bursts open and many [as many as casting will allow] police officers burst in. Inspector follows them. Police start to search premises. Kit looks around in fear.)

Inspector: (*to officers*) Right, get all this stuff packed up. Miss Katherine Palmer, I am arresting you under the Terrorism Act 2000, and on suspicion of having participated in the kidnapping of Mr. Stanley Mendel. You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Now, can you tell me the whereabouts of Mr. Andrew Zeal?

Kit: Fuck off.

Inspector: Naughty, naughty. Take her away.

Kit: It doesn't matter now . Our demands will soon be broadcast.

Inspector: Oh really? Who's arranging that? Our friend "Jed"? (*He laughs*) Very amusing.

(Exit. Blackout.)

Scene 20. The Inspector steps forward.

Inspector: We always had the situation under complete control. Our man inside made sure of that. You don't embark on an operation of this sort unless you are absolutely certain that nothing will go wrong.

Some people would criticise our tactics. But these are old, time-honoured methods, without which very little undercover police work would be possible. Ok, our man may have stirred things up a bit, but it's clear that they were very receptive to his suggestions. If we hadn't taken the initiative, who knows how much further this lot might have gone on their own?

Unfortunately, Mr. Zeal was not on the premises when we gained entry, but we managed to get hold of him later. There's enough to link him with the kidnapping. We're beginning to enter an era where all these formalities about legal procedure will be less important. The public are grateful that we've done our job. Caught the wrongdoer. Enabled them to sleep safe and separate in their beds. They're not going to worry about a few undotted 'i's or uncrossed 't's.

Mr Zeal should be out of action for a very long time. That makes me feel much happier too, because he had the potential to do a lot of damage, that young man.

And then, of course, that woman. The artist. Quite a talent, really. You know, my information is that she abandoned a very promising career in advertising to go and live like that. Such a shame. Now she reminds me in some ways of my daughter. Makes me shudder to think of it. Well, at least she wasn't the ringleader. Just a very minor player. An artist. The court will take that into account.

As for the others, there's nothing we can pin on them just yet. We let them all go after a few hours. But we'll keep them under observation.

Mr Mendel was particularly grateful to us. Maybe he'll make a donation to police funds. Long as he doesn't try to palm us off with payment in kind. Those bloody awful jeans he sells.

A good day's work. I tell you what I'd like to do now, just get home and put my feet up and watch telly. Not *The Bill* of course.

But my wife has other ideas. She's got us tickets for the National Theatre. Sir Harold Borne in *King Lear*. What a treat.

Harry Borne. I believe he started out as a left-winger. Radical theatre, that sort of thing. Funny how people change.

Scene 21. Denmark Street 1932

(Joe lit by Street lamp. Standing on table)

Joe: Friends. Workers. Comrades. You have seen the story of a worker, thrown out on the street by the forces of reaction. A story acted out by members of the Red Platform group of the Workers' Theatre Movement. And today, for the first time, we are showing you a story that is real. Not just based in reality. Not just an acting out of something that happens to workers day in and day out with this rotten system. No, this is not a stage set, and these are not stage props. As workers, we have little property. So the things we have used to tell our story are the real belongings of a real family, the Corcoran family. Help us to finish this play by acting out your part in it. Take action now, to stop this eviction. Take action now, to take over your own lives, just like our comrades in Moscow.

(Cheer from the crowd)

Scene 22.

(As Joe finishes his speech, Kit arrives on the other side of the stage. She looks worn and tired.

Older. She starts to paint. A new painting of herself and Andy)

The End