

Port out – starboard home.

Die Scab Die.

I'll remember that blood red graffiti sprayed on my brother's primrose yellow front door till the day I pass. If you think the miner's strike caused rifts in communities, then have a thought for us poor sailors.

We've been through it too. Dad used to work the Irish ferries from Liverpool. A shop steward who was heavily involved in the strike of 66; the one that wasn't Geoff Hurst's. Four-hundred ships laid up in dock for forty-seven days. Peeved ship owners sought draconian punitive disciplinary measures. Able-seamen eked strike pay that barely bought a loaf, a raft of penitential Hail Mary's the extra price of a miserly pontifical handout.

Dad almost went to prison and the thanks he got was blame from his fellow brothers for stuff that was so far out of his control. Stiffed-up by government, owners and the union hierarchy. Now scousers hold grudges and dad, always handy with his fists, lived life with a kill or be killed brashness. It took all of Mum's persuasive guiles to get him to start anew down south.

Dover became a good home. Working La Manche. Freight, tourists, booze cruisers. A fair day's work for a fair reasonable days' pay. Hard but good times. Four generations of my family sold their souls to Port Out Starboard Home Seaways. I spit out the name. I've lived, loved, worked and given blood for that company and how do they treat us? I'll tell you how.

If you think Sixty-six was bad then eighty-six was titanic. Just after the Herald of free Enterprise went down and my best friend died that night; the company decided to impose wage cuts to increase profit margins. Under Maggie's tutelage the fat cats got richer and safety was disregarded. Laws were passed and a state of emergency declared, unions bashed to within an inch of their lives.

I raised funds, organised rotas, stood on the picket line myself and almost got arrested for my troubles. The company turned families against each other. I know my brother had a mortgage and two young kids to support, but I guess his view and my view of what was right and wrong never matched. I even went to his house with hot soapy water and a brillo. All I got was a barrage of expletives from my sister-in-law that would make a docker blush. A chasm as wide as the Channel.

I wish we had made-up. Now the company are up to their old tricks. His and my children and grandkids informed of their sacking by video call. The cowards. My pension might be at risk too.

I need a walk. Fresh air. So here I am up by the castle looking over the port, France a blur on the horizon. All the boats moored up, surrounded by thug security. Along the esplanade, lorry-drivers honk support.

God help us. POSH be damned. From my point of view, the whole world is about to disappear up its own arse.