

The Great Turnpike Bust

By STEPHEN WINTER

Four of us were on our way from Washington to New York on Sunday afternoon. It was the end of the April 24 weekend and we were stopped cold on the Jersey Turnpike in the same traffic jam that kept everyone, long-hairs and straights alike, from getting home.

At first we thought there must be an accident ahead; later a radio news broadcast told us that demonstrators had blocked the road in both directions, after being refused food service and gas for their cars at the highway's rest stops.

Three hours later, about an hour after dark, we were directed out Exit 3 (the turnpike was closed and all traffic detoured out Exit 3). We paid our toll and continued as far as we could, about 50 yards beyond the toll gate, and waited in the stalled line of traffic.

We came through the right gate to a standstill in the right lane. The left lane was moving so we signalled and our car began to swing out to pass through.

"Hey, where do you think you're goin'?" A detective with a bullhorn blocked our car and ordered us to stay put. Then he yelled to one of his troopers to collect keys, presumably so we couldn't try to "sneak out" again.

A trooper came over to the driver's window and said, "Gimme the keys."

We'd been on the road almost five hours, miles behind the bonfires which were only embers on the sides of the highway by the time we inched our way by them. Suddenly we found ourselves included among what later was released to the media as "the hundred or so demonstrators who refused to leave." There were four of us in the car and we each wore a beard.

"Gimme the keys."

It was outrageous. "Are we under arrest? What's the charge?"

"Are you gonna give 'em to me or do I get 'em myself?" and he reached his arm in the window and pulled at the ignition key.

"What's the charge? Hey, what are you doin', man? You can't do that. You got a warrant? What's your name?"

"Don't wise off," he said.

S., who was driving, pressed the steering-column button that released the ignition switch. The key was free and we were stuck.

"You're doin' very well," the trooper said, and marched off to the next car.

Later another uniform came back and confiscated S.'s driver's license and vehicle registration. Same procedure: We'd ask the officers their

names, for a warrant, for the charge against us, were we under arrest, by what authority were they acting? And we always got the same answer—no answer. Or, when they were more talkative: "Don't worry, you'll find out."

On order from Detective Black Leather Jacket and Bullhorn (he wouldn't tell us his name), troops with billy clubs in hand herded us back into our cars after we dared to get out and saw to it that we stayed.

At least one trooper used a highway flare as a weapon, holding it inches from the faces of those who still demanded their rights from inside their cars. Later one man showed me the holes in his clothes where the hot drippings had burned through.

After traffic was gone, they didn't press us about staying in the cars. A few wandered among other cars and the troopers. Every one of us had long hair. For most it was too cold or just not worth it. Finally we were taken out, frisked and loaded onto three buses. (They sniffed my pipe tobacco carefully but completely missed my pocket knife.)

When we reached the courthouse, reporters and a couple of lawyers from the American Civil Liberties Union were already there. More of both kept coming in. And more cops and more "demonstrators," none of whom wanted to be there. By the time processing was finished it was after midnight.

Cheerleader during the arraignments in a small, well-lit plastic auditorium

was our judge; he was in a good mood. The charges against all defendants were the same: That the named defendant "did act disorderly on a public highway, to wit: The New Jersey Turnpike, in that he did obstruct, molest or interfere with the state police." Bail was set at \$50 each.

As arraignments were completed, Detective Black Leather Jacket and Bullhorn herded those of us idealists without \$50 cash into an unheated bus in the parking lot outside. There we waited all that cold night, while legal counsel and the press were kept away from us. Most prisoners had not yet been granted legal right to a phone call.

At least one trooper stayed in the bus with us at all times, with others on guard outside.

At 4 A.M. they called my name and took me off the bus. My bail was paid and I could go. S. had posted bond for himself earlier on our pooled money, and now got us out.

We got the car after paying a \$12 fee for a half-mile tow. The troopers had told us about that earlier and laughed. They thought it very funny that we'd have to pay for the towing ourselves.

They hadn't told us, though, that we'd also find waiting a \$30 summons for illegal parking on a turnpike exit.

Stephen Winter is former managing editor of News Front, a management magazine.



United Press International