

Lockdown Journeys

by Fergus Downie



At this pace we are probably not going back till after Christmas and on a rare visit to our deserted glass outpost I saw all the antiseptic precautions being laid out for our nervous return. Clipped bureaucratic instructions abound and the most interesting is the 'two at a time' rule for using the gents. How is one to know until one enters these desolate cells? A serious matter. The faux pas that may arise from overhasty reconnaissance are endless particularly when men are usually at their most sensitive at such moments. I dare say I will just answer the call with a stout heart but after this, I will be guided by one way directional arrows around the building designed to save us all from face to face encounters when walking. It's very fitting – we're pretty catty and we talk behind each other's backs all the time but it does encapsulate all the cotton wool fastidiousness of local government life. As a metaphor for the decadent west it's perfect and I'm pleased to see that the work we do serving the

public carries on. If you want anything vulgar like a service you'll have to wait (the Children's Services social workers are the lone unsung heroes at this time – lockdown has turned miserable homes into potentially lethal powderkegs) before we can take a safe toilet break, but we did nevertheless illuminate our building to take a stand against American racist cops. What else would you expect for your council tax. Enough said.

Only the working class endure the terrors of the pandemic with stoicism and such is the way with these less sophisticated types. On my way back my favourite fragment of the lumpen proletariat, the elite ticket inspectors (only a special forces cadre within southeastern trains can collect a penalty notice), had cornered a hapless fare evader. He was unlucky – there are few unionised workers allowed to get close enough to evil these days but this tracksuited loafer had riled the intrepid functionary by talking loudly about a proposed exchange of drugs whilst parking his feet on the seat

After telling his interlocutor how much 'gravy' he was prepared to 'serve up' and cataloguing fractions of ounces, the inspector struck. The ensuing exchange of wits made my journey to the Great Wen worth every desolate minute.

Ticket please

.....I ain't got no ticket bruv

.....So you do have a ticket?

Baffled incomprehension at the effect of a double negative took a good ten minutes to resolve – more than enough time to humiliate the wrong doer and make my journey worth it. He didn't check mine, he knew I was in awe and stalked the empty carriage like the great souled man that he was. Never were there greater men.