

I AM CRITICAL MASS

Well, I've already made my positions on cycling clear in this publication so when I heard tell of a "Reclaim the Streets Mass Cycle" I felt like it would have been hypocritical of me not to go. The onslaught was scheduled for 6pm Friday 27th May, starting at the Garden of Remembrance. Nicky, Shane and I arranged to go. As I came off O'Connell Street and swung around Parnell Square my mind was filled with thoughts of the anti-war demonstrations that we'd attended a couple of years before, half to protest - half to make sarcastic comments to each other.

The first sight was the Guards who had taken up a position on the island facing the main entrance of the Garden. "You can't stop us pigs. It's our right to demonstrate." Then I came round the corner ready to witness the vast volume of cyclists outraged at the way we're treated on the streets of this city. All ten of them.

This was a little disappointing. It was 6 o'clock. A hundred people were late. Had the Guards threatened them? Was there some other Garden of Remembrance on the other side of the city? Where was everybody? Was there only ten (extremely active) cyclists in the entire city?

I joined Nicky and Shane and surveyed the rest of the group. Old man, strange looking man, grunge girl, long haired fella (I would have hoped for someone with dreadlocks and bongo drums but he was the best we had), Green Party looking guy (brown jacket, no tie, tie's are bad for the environment or something), texting girl, enviro-dad with his son in the back seat and Spanish footballer looking fella. Others came and went, at best we reached 11 at one heady point. The question was who was in charge? At one point Green Party crossed the street and videoed the sorry horde. My money was on him. Shane and Nicky reckoned it was Old Guy.

We could see the Guards were laughing at us. They laid on a motorbike, a 4x4 and several bikes. All for 9 bikes / 10 people. This was going to be embarrassing. Were we supposed to parade in front of the public, stopping the traffic, blowing whistles and shouting at everybody? We were thinking of dropping out ourselves. Who on Earth organised this mess? I started to think that some enterprising young bike thief had come up with a brilliant new way of stealing bikes. "Alright folks, if you'd just like to load your bikes up into the back of me van there, or I will stab yez." And I bet the Guards would have just watched and laughed.

"Right, let's ditch this. Uh, oh, here comes Enviro-Dad." "Right, will we head off?" "Uh, yeah, we were thinking about it." "I was thinking maybe we could head down Parnell Street, then down Capel Street and over the bridge." "Right, we were more thinking of heading down O'Connell Street, through Rathmines, and into our house."

Enviro-Dad guilted us into it. As we left a couple more dropped off with the shame.

But once we got going, it was actually quite pleasant. Just slowly cycling through the city, filling up the road and not worrying about the cars behind us. I don't know if we really made much of an impression on the general public. With our Guards-on-Bikes escort they must have thought we were some kind of extremely slow paced environmentally friendly fugitives or else the strangest foreign dignitaries ever.

At some points cyclists were involuntarily partaking but they soon lost us at the next lights. The best bit was when Long Haired broke the lights at a pedestrian crossing. "Way to get our message across buddy!" So what was our message? The idea is to show people how peaceful and calm the place would be if everyone cycled everywhere. And it worked. Well, I was convinced anyway.