



Picture by Dick Langley

Out of the story of the recent ten week strike of seventy boilermakers at Cammell Laird's shipyards, as told by one of the men who walked out, emerge the real villains of the piece - the management, the Boilermakers' Union, the Liverpool Post and Echo monopoly - who all attempted in their own devious ways to force the men back to work without their genuine grievances being investigated or satisfied.

LAIRD WORKERS WALK ALONE

by phil cohen

It is a story of deception and the tearing up of agreed negotiating procedures on the part of Cammell Lairds, deliberate lies and fabrications designed to aid the employers by the Echo, and the inability of the national union to get to grips with a localised situation, blinded as it was by personal feuds and an inflexible organisation.

The men, led by their own rank and file committee, were asking for what amounted to a rise of only 6d per hour, from a company with a trading profit of over £5million in 1968 and with the Chairman, P.B Hunter, taking £11,000 and the top-paid director taking £13,500.

contemptuous

The deputy chairman, Norman Cave (of Radio Merseyside Council fame) contemptuously described the men as common platers and condemned the strike saying: "It is now obvious that we have an element in our midst who are prepared at any cost to prejudice the livelihoods of the company's 7,000 employees, to delay the financial recovery of the company itself and to disrupt the good management-union relationship."

This was another typical 'reds under the beds' scare which was aimed at the three Communists on the rank and file committee, including the leader Tommy Webb, and the district secretary of the union, Barry Williams, also a Communist. Williams had earlier been in dispute with McGarvey, president of the union, who had declared his election as district organiser null and void. A court case followed, won by Williams, with £800 costs which he promptly gave to the local Old Age Pensioners' Association. He was then elected again to prove the point.

McGarvey, obviously angered by these events, spoke to a strike meeting on May 9 and instructed the men to return to work, but that was defeated by 38-20 in a secret

ballot. Then, with behaviour amazing for a trade union leader, he suggested that the 20 should report to work under the full protection of his union and leave their workmates outside the gates. This encouragement to scab was solidly rejected by the men and McGarvey left in disgust. As one of the workers said: "We pay 7s a fortnight to be protected, not sold down the river."

"McGarvey should take a peage and retire to the House of Lords where he belongs."

Symptomatic of the strike also were the continual attempts of the Echo to smear the workers and their leaders, misreporting the declared support of 1,500 other boilermakers at Birkenhead for the strike. Typical of the Echo's distortion was its use of management statement as headlines. The massive headline one day - "GO BACK OR BE SACKED" - sums up the Echo's attitude to the strike.

Now that the seventy men, first dismissed, have been reinstated, what of their demands? The ceiling on piecework rates has been lifted so that they no longer work on a scale drawn up with 1964 wages and prices in mind; but now they have to work much harder because of this and a sort of productivity system has been one of the by-products of winning this point. Fourteen other men who refused to work the press have now also been reinstated.

Their strike follows a long history of provocations and poor conditions attributable to an incompetent and reactionary firms. A year ago, the Government stepped in to avert the financial crisis, forcing eleven directors to resign from the board as the condition of a loan. They included Edward Du Cann, a former chairman of the Tory Party. A new board was appointed. In their published report for 1970, it is disclosed that they gave £43,000 to the sacked directors, as compensation for loss of executive office.

One thing is clear, from now on the seventy men who walked out in anger will have a different perspective on their daily papers, their union and the reactionary management which employs them.



"REMEMBER, PHILIP, YOU SAID WE COULDN'T AFFORD TO SEND YOUNG ANDREW TO A PRIVATE SCHOOL?"



NETHERLEY - the people and the planners

'They are trying to put me in my coffin before it's time'

Pensioners at Netherley are living in 'solitary confinement' due to an amazing planning blunder.

For their flats were designed like tombs. There is only one way out...that's up fourteen narrow concrete steps.

Now the Corporation have been forced to admit that the building of the ugly mid-rise blocks, which cost millions of pounds, was a mistake.

In an advert in the Echo they belatedly agreed that the one-bedroomed flats, which were specially designed for pensioners, were:

'Considered unsuitable for elderly or infirm people living alone.'

After months of warnings from tenants, welfare workers, and the community council,

the Corporation had acted. They stopped letting the 750 flats to single people over sixty-five.

Tragically, this was too late for one old man, who had been unable to climb the steps to raise the alarm, after a stroke. He had been dead a week when he was found.

Even after this, one housing official said: 'We are still putting people in up to the age of sixty-five, provided they are not infirm.'

Needless to say, doctors and tenants are now pointing out that people in their early sixties soon grow old, and rapidly lose their strength.

Naturally the residents and social workers await next winter with dread. Then the old and infirm will really be alone, cut

off from their neighbours by the steep steps, and facing cold nights possibly with no heating, if they are hard up.

Already several pensioners place a chair at the top of the stairs every Friday. And sit there waiting for all the bill collectors.

They know they would have to climb up and down a frightening hundred-and-sixty-eight steps if they have to answer the door six times.

Whatever the Corporation may say now-while they are desperately trying to get young people in-the flats were designed for pensioners.

One idea behind the design was to encourage a community spirit. The blocks are divided

between two and three bedroomed maisonettes for families and the pensioner's flats. The doors to the one bedroomed flats are on the same landing and right next to a maisonette....

The planners felt this would create a friendly atmosphere of a terraced street. And the families could keep an eye on the pensioners.

But it does not work like that. As the pensioners have to walk DOWN into their cellar-like flats they are completely cut off.

Not surprisingly one old person said: 'They are trying to put me in my coffin before its time.'

THE MILLION POUND BLUNDER

The history of Netherley is a story of a series of frequent and costly mistakes. One mistake alone may have cost £1,000,000. And it is a story without a happy ending. For hundreds of elderly people, who spent years waiting to be re-housed, are now being forced to live in flats which are clearly unsuitable. Their hopes have been crushed.

While some families hope there is another chapter to be written as they wait for shopping centres, a post-office, chemist and regular bus services.

At the start Netherley was seen as a self-contained town of twenty thousand people by the planners. But immediately things went wrong.

The plans for the first phase of the estate - Naylorsfield - were rejected by the Ministry of Housing in March 1964.

Not only were they rejected, but the Ministry was positively rude about them.

The revised plans weren't much better, but the Ministry, City Councillors, and the Corporation sat back and gave a £1,451,950 contract for the building of Naylorsfield to Unit Construction Company.

This contract included the building of two high-rise blocks - just when Corporation officials were realising how much these were hated by tenants.

Now it was time to plan the main part of Netherley - phase 2, which will have 3,630 dwellings when it is finished in August at a cost of £18m.

Again the planners stumbled. Mainly because they were under intense pressure from the planning officer, Mr. Walter Bor and the Housing Committee to build cheaply and at a very high density of 100 persons per acre. Their answer again was high-rise flats.

Thank heavens, these were thrown back as unacceptable.

So they struck upon the idea of building 2000 homes in ultra long mid-rise blocks (between five and eight stories high). And 1,470 terraced type homes.

Success! or so they thought. But they had no reason to celebrate.

In 1970 Mr Harry Mac Naughton, a former city architect came to a startling conclusion. He took a cold look at the plans, after resigning from the Corporation, and decided £1,000,000 had been wasted.

This sum could have been saved if no high-rise or mid-rise blocks had been built, he said.

He realised it cost 50% more to build tall flats than houses. And sometimes, he saw, the Corporation were building high or mid rise blocks at a lower density than other housing schemes.



TOM WOOD WAS LUCKY

Sixty-two-year-old Mr Tom Wood leaves the front door of his pensioner's flat in Netherley open all day long.

He would rather face the cold draught than be locked in a cellar with no way of escape, if he is taken ill again.

For Mr Wood knows that last time he was chronically sick with bronchitis, he was lucky. The a passing neighbour heard his faint cries for help. Next time, it might be different.

Like all elderly people in the specially designed pensioners' flats he lives in fear.

Fourteen concrete steps lead down from the landing of these medium rise blocks to the single bedroomed flats.

Just before Christmas Tom Wood came close to death because of the disastrous design of the flats.

THIS IS HIS STORY:

"I used to live near the Anglican Cathedral. When I received the key for my new flat in Netherley I had not seen it.

"When I opened the door of the flat I nearly fell down the stairs, it was so dark. It was like going into a cellar.

"I didn't know anyone in Netherley then, and the doctor told me I was fighting for my life every day. Then about November 1 seized up, and began rolling round on the floor in agony.

"I shouted but no neighbours were passing, in these flats you are completely isolated, you're in a cellar between two balconies. Few people even knew I lived there.

"Then Mrs Hamilton, a neighbour came along and saw the note I left for the meals on wheels

people.

"This is my only chance to catch someone, I thought. I shouted out 'Wait! Wait!'

"I was lucky. She just heard me. If she hadn't stopped to look at the note I could have starved to death.

had to crawl

"Even then I had to crawl up the steps to open the door.

"After I came out of hospital several people were very kind. Two or three people drop in to see how I am getting on.

"But I still leave the door open from 8.30 to 4.30 I have just got to take the cold. I just can't face climbing those steps every time someone comes. And anyway, I could easily be ill again."



Mrs Ellen Brown

Just a simple request

Tiny Mrs. Ellen Brown made a simple request to the Corporation over a year ago. She asked them to lower the handle on her front door.

For 69 year old Mrs. Brown stands just 4ft. 2 inches high. And she has been ordered by her doctor not to stretch, as she has a weak spine.

But every day for the last twelve months, she has had to stand on tiptoe to leave her flat, which is built several feet below the landing like a dungeon.

Not until last week did the Corporation change the handle, after another request - this time from her doctor.

However, Mrs. Brown still faces a far more serious problem. And this time the Corporation have done nothing.

She has asked to be transferred to a ground floor flat in Netherley as she finds treading up and down the fourteen concrete steps very tiring.

"No-one knows if I'm dead or alive down here," she said. "There isn't anyone to see I am okay."

"I have stopped the newspaper now. It's very exhausting walking up and down to collect it."

"Few neighbours come in to visit me, although everyone is very friendly." "I have asked and asked to be transferred. But there aren't many ground floor flats in Netherley."

On Fridays, when the bill collectors come Mrs. Brown has to climb the steps at least 3 times. That is seventy-four steps. Not to mention the times when she has to answer the door if relatives come or if she goes out shopping....quite a task for an elderly woman nearing her seventieth birthday.

Let them eat chip butties

An alarming number of school-children in Britain are permanently undernourished, according to the Social Nutrition Unit of Queen Elizabeth College, University of London.

The unit took a sample of 4,382 primary and secondary school children and found only 32% were getting a satisfactory diet. (By 'satisfactory' they mean 80% of the allowance the Ministry of Health recommends for a proper diet).

57% had an unsatisfactory diet and 11% a poor one. (i.e. less than half of what the ministry recommends they should be eating).

Said Dr Lynch, in charge of the research: "It is a responsibility of society to see that the children are properly looked after and fed." Meanwhile school meal charges have gone up and the number of Liverpool children having lunch at school has dropped by a third.

Britain on the run

Sales of toilet rolls in Britain have increased by a staggering 56% in the past five years, the manufacturers report. Has there been some sudden change in our eating habits since 1966? Or have we found some new use for all that soft, absorbent paper?

The Free Press is offering one month's supply to the sender of the most ingenious explanation. Answers (on perforated tissue please) to 107 Brookdale Road, Liverpool 15. Closing date: July 20.

Narrow squeak

Several Liverpool MPs have come up for re-adoption by their local parties because of changes in constituency boundaries.

It's customary for the parties to keep re-adoption voting figures secret, but for interested Free Press readers here are the voting figures for James Dunn, Labour MP for Kirkdale and Richard Crawshaw, Labour MP for Toxteth:

Dunn. For: 12. Against: 5. 21 others invited to the selection meeting failed to turn up.

Crawshaw. For: 29. Against: 20. Neither was exactly unanimous.

