

Women workers who organised and won

WINGROVE AND ROGERS are a family firm, founded in 1919. They make TV and radio components at the Old Swan factory and electrically powered vehicles at a second factory in Kirkby. For 50 years the company successfully resisted the unions, and then two-and-a-half years ago there was a strike at Kirkby.

The strikers didn't gain very much but they inspired the women at the Old Swan factory to organise. They joined the AUEW, although the management didn't take this seriously. And, as senior steward Rita Smith now recalls, "It was just a glorified collector."

Then they started negotiations for a bonus scheme. These dragged on for a year. "They kept coming up with all sorts of ideas, but no money." When the Threshold payments came in, the management refused to pay those as well.

At last the women took action to back up their claim. They worked to rule for a month and held two one-day strikes. It was after that that works manager Graley threatened the selective suspensions.

It was an official strike from the start. And knowing no better, the women left it to the union. "At first we just stood around," said Rita. "We didn't know anything about it, about going round the other factories. We started moving ourselves after about six weeks."

She was a bit disappointed with union support early on. "I'd say it was rather poor. They should have given us the advice we got from other people. You have to go round yourself. They will pick up the phone, but it doesn't go very far."

"The bosses are always on about the power of the unions. I'm beginning to wonder where it is. We've learned you're only as strong as you are yourself."

Some of the strikers tried to get things moving by going to see union boss Hugh Scanlon at the TUC conference in Brighton. "He didn't want to come out, but we said we'd sit till he came. He gave us his autobiography." He also called for a report from the local AUEW District Secretary Mr Brodrick.

But it's action that wins strikes, not words. The women set about organising themselves. Rita called for volunteers to form a strike committee, with members from each of the factory's four work-rooms. Another committee included stewards from other factories, who offered advice.

As always, money was a problem. The £6.25 strike pay was tolerable for married women whose husbands were working, but not much for single girls. They started a strike fund and workers at Ford, Dunlop, Robinson Willey, Metal Box and many others sent donations.

The fund was used to meet expenses and to pay non-union strikers. Hardship cases, like a divorcee with two children to support, were paid from the fund. And those who travelled in to picket from places like Netherley and Wallasey got their bus fares.

After six weeks the AUEW imposed a levy on Merseyside members and this gave an extra £5 a week. Women



CHARLES WINGROVE, J.P., Chairman of Wingrove and Rogers, was proud of his firm's industrial relations. In his report for 1973 he noted: "It has been a difficult and frustrating year for our staff and we are very appreciative of their good work. We have also maintained good relations with our work people in very trying conditions."

A few months later, on June 21 this year, George Graley, works manager, called a meeting at the firm's factory in Domville Road, Old Swan.

"He called everybody together and he stood on this big bench and he had a speech typed out. He was absolutely red in the face. He said if we didn't go back to normal working by Monday he would start laying off selected personnel. That upset the women... to be spoken to like dirt."

The following Monday around 150 women production workers began one of the longest ever strikes by women. Their union, the AUEW, called out a handful of male

used to a take-home pay of only £15.40 could just get by on £11.25. They had to make the strike bite. The owners of a lorry which ignored the pickets were traced through the TGWU, and sent no more. The strikers contacted workers at National Carriers and British Road Services and they stopped coming.

The girls from the packing department knew where the Wingrove products were sent. They went round the cargo firms at Speke Airport, where Cambrian workers agreed to the blacking. The non-union firm, Pandaire were so afraid of trouble they stopped handling Wingrove cargo as well.

When the management switched to Manchester Airport the blacking was extended. Raw materials for the Kirkby factory were also cut off.

The women got shop stewards' names through the Trades Council and went round the factories asking for support.

workers at the factory in support. And two weeks later the whole lot were sacked.

How did this 'one big happy firm' become a battleground? And more important, how did the women overcome their lack of knowledge, and male prejudice, to organise and win a 17-week strike?

What they did is an example to men and women workers everywhere. They fought and they won. But the dodgy financial position of their employers means more struggles could lie ahead.

And we should not forget what victory means. It means an extra £3.50 a week in the pay packet, sure, and valuable experience. But the women who surprised themselves with what they could do, who learned to decide things themselves, who mixed freely and made new friends, who saw the 'neutral' press and police at work, these women are now back inside the factory.

Back at work, where "you get in a rut, it's all repetition." Back being told what to do instead of deciding for themselves.

"We went to various factories in the Speke area," said Joan Furlong. "Evans Medical, Manesty's and Automotive Products. We were really stupid at first, we didn't know who to see. But at each factory the stewards came out, told us a little bit more and where to go next."

"We spoke to the dock shop stewards. We went into this smoky room and they locked the door after us. We were on the platform facing about 100 big men. After speaking we were led out and the door was shut again. But they were really good and told us we should have gone to their earlier."

The strikers wrote leaflets explaining their case. These were delivered to houses near the factory and to other trade unionists.

Despite all this the strike dragged on, mainly because the Domville Road factory was being kept open by 70 scabs. Each day they would gather at the end of the road and march in -

aided and abetted by up to 40 police, playing a familiar role. "We were intimidated," reckons Sylvia Finney, one of the strike committee. "It's disgusting, the amount of police for so few women. Anybody could have been getting murdered and they were up there."

Sylvia made the point that there was all the one arrest on the picket lines in all the 17 weeks. Another striker described the police tactics: They seemed to single out someone and concentrate on them. She said some of the men had been picked on especially, one punched in the stomach and another hauled out by his hair.

But, surprise, surprise, the police were nowhere in sight when Rita, the senior steward, was attacked by an office worker's husband. She was punched and thrown over the bonnet of a parked car.

The women appealed for support on



MORE STRUGGLES MAY LIE AHEAD

THE WOMEN of Wingrove and Rogers have won. But the financial mess the bosses have landed themselves in probably means more struggles lie around the corner.

Rightly, the strikers were not impressed by the threat that they were ruining the firm. "We'd rather he went bust and threw them scabs out of a job," said one. They were in the right and they were going to fight.

But now the women will have to keep up their guard. The financial position of Wingrove and Rogers makes redundancies, or even closure, a real possibility.

On August 30 this year the company mortgaged their Domville Road factory and its contents for £100,000.

The money was borrowed from the Industrial and Commercial Finance Corporation Ltd. It sounds a lot but it would only pay Wingrove's wages for about six weeks. And, on recent results, the firm are not going to find

it easy to pay back. Wingrove and Rogers lost almost £20,000 last year, almost £17,000 in 1972, and £20,685 in 1971. More important, the actual amount of business coming to the firm has hardly increased over the last five years.

The Old Swan factory is in most trouble. It handles most of the business and makes a loss. The Kirkby factory handles less and makes a profit.

Still, the directors haven't been going short. During the last five years they have been paying themselves £4,000 and £5,000 a year. These lucky fellows are: C.G. Wingrove (chairman and joint managing director), F.C. Wingrove (joint managing director), Major C.W. Wingrove, T.W.G. Dutton, C.G. Graley, and since July 3, 1974, G.F. Croft.

And the women won't forget how little they were paid when Wingroves were making big profits in the late sixties: £105,000 in 1968 and £52,000 in 1969.

Strike horror drivell

THE PRESS, like management, see all strikes as bad. They cut production and are against "the national interest."

So we get headlines like these in the Liverpool Daily Post recently: THEY ALL WANT PEACE AT FORD AND WORKERS' SIT-IN MAKES HUNDREDS LATE FOR SCHOOL. Anything to discredit the strikers.

The women from Wingrove and Rogers were no exception. The Liverpool Echo referred to them insultingly as "The Petticoat Pickets" and seized on a claim by scabs that they were sworn to a headline a story PICKET "WOULD MAKE DOCKER BLUSH".

But the work of one reporter, Leslie Clare of the Daily Express, stands out for utter distortion. On September 25, under the headline ACID THREAT SHOCKS WOMEN STRIKE REBELS, the appalling Clare wrote of "terrified" scabs who had to cross "menacing picket lines". An unnamed woman had been threatened in a note that acid would be thrown.

the picket lines, and got it. Workers' from building sites, factories and Left organisations came along. "People from Standards often joined us, although this sometimes made them late for work."

After eight weeks 20 women gave in and went back, at first sneaking into work early. After twelve weeks the management made an offer: They would take back 30 and make everyone else redundant on the day of the return.

But, surprise, surprise, the police were nowhere in sight when Rita, the senior steward, was attacked by an office worker's husband. She was punched and thrown over the bonnet of a parked car.

Clare quoted Tory parliamentary candidate Anthony Steen: "I saw one girl surrounded by pickets. She broke into tears and collapsed."

Clare reported that the pickets refused to speak to him. The women say they were never asked.

None of the "menacing" pickets were arrested during the seventeen weeks. The woman Steen made so much of has personal problems and had previously been sent home from work in tears. She did not collapse. She threw herself into senior steward Rita Smith's arms.

When the Express story appeared some of the strikers went to see Clare. The following day a second, shorter story appeared in which Clare had to admit he saw "no signs of violence" from the pickets.

Federation, Wingrove and Rogers began serious negotiations. Their eventual offer was unanimously accepted at a mass meeting: A rise in the basic rate to £20.75, £2 for Threshold, and a guaranteed bonus of £1.50. The women had won.

Sylvia Finney had this to say after the meeting: "It's funny. I feel this is a bit of an anti-climax although we have won. I enjoyed every minute of the strike. I've never enjoyed myself so much. I didn't know a quarter of the girls before the strike started. I made far more friends on the outside than on the inside."

On Monday, October 28, the 130 women went back inside.

THE BELLE VALE DISASTER



Who cares this time?

SCARCELY A WHIFFER greeted news that Liverpool would have to spend an extra £2 million on the Belle Vale estate.

Only bare details were given on the radio and the Echo buried the story half-way down an inside page.

And yet there was an outcry in the Press a few years ago, when Liverpool overspent less money on a far larger scheme... the Cantril Farm development.

But there's a difference. Belle Vale was designed by private architects, while the builders were the Liverpool firm Unit Construction.

Cantril Farm was developed solely by the Corporation using the large direct works department - that is, building workers employed by the council.

The Daily Post and Echo carried banner headlines day after day attacking the direct works department. The Tories jumped with glee. And they butchered the direct works department.

Hundreds of building workers were sacked. Then, more profitably, almost all the equipment from the department was sold at knock-down prices to thankful private companies.

SHANKLAND-COX, the consultant architects given the task of redesigning Liverpool, are almost certain to be sued by the City Council for hundreds of thousands of pounds.

The master-planners, who have already crammed off millions of pounds in fees for projects in this city, are being blamed by top corporation officials and councillors for the massive overspending on the appalling Belle Vale housing estate.

This overspending has already passed £1 million and is likely to reach at least £2 million.

The original contract was for £8,571,502. On top of this, not only have families been kept waiting for new homes, but about £500,000 has been lost in rent and rates.

The Free Press has copies of the reports presented by officials to the private meetings of the housing committee, which were held to investigate the overspending.

These confidential reports say architects Shankland-Cox have:

- Produced "inadequate and faulty" designs.
- Failed to provide drawings on time causing long delays and excessive expenditure amounting to thousands and thousands of pounds.
- Allowed the contractor to build to a standard below building regulations.

The Belle Vale estate is dominated by the long, ugly, factory-like blocks of flats and maisonettes. Tenants have complained about these "units" from the day they moved in. In several of the flats and maisonettes, rain has leaked through roofs and balconies; black fungus has appeared on some walls, and some ground-floor rooms receive so little natural light that electric lights have to be kept on all day.

And yet, when the builders have finally packed away their tools, Shankland-Cox will pick up a hefty cheque for £454,396, which includes £127,878 for abortive fees.

Not surprisingly the architects are not eager to accept responsibility for the failings as they would then be liable for heavy damages. And their international reputation would also be sorely damaged.

Indeed none of the parties involved will admit one mistake. The architects blame "late and disruptive decision-taking which... resulted in totally inadequate time being allowed for the preparation of contract particulars", and also faulty materials used by the builder.

Unit Construction, the Liverpool building firm who built the whole estate, are happy to blame everyone but themselves. Certainly the scheme was "dogged with difficulties" from the start, as the report says. It began as a single scheme of 2,000 dwellings in 1966, and a tender was accepted from Unit by Ald. Macdonald Steward, the then leader of the council.

But then Unit upped their price and the scheme was, instead, divided into

CITY LIKELY TO SUE ARCHITECT

a number of phases. After several revisions concerning the strict cost-wardstick, estimates were reformed and re-submitted, and Unit were given the go-ahead to start Phase 1 (768 dwellings).

Phase 1 was started in April 1970, but wasn't completed until August this year... two years late.

While this was being built, the council issued a new planning brief for the rest of the project. This resulted in Phase 1 being extended and followed by Phase 1A, which included the last of the oppressive spine blocks.

After this there were three more phases, but the longest delays and the most serious mistakes were made on Phases 1 and 1A.

If the council go ahead (as they almost certainly will) and sue Shankland-Cox, the result will hinge on the crucial question... Who was responsible for the delay?

The officials have no doubt - Shankland-Cox. In the private meetings, they have made scathing statements about the failings of the architects, complaining they cannot even get replies to their letters.

And Mr K.M.Egan, the city solicitor says in the report: "valid claims would seem to be over-expenditure caused by the architect's delay in producing working drawings or by defective designs... or for loss of revenue through non-availability of the dwellings."

The report highlights: BAD DESIGNS. There are serious problems of condensation and dampness in the spine blocks.

The officers say "if more consideration had been given to this matter in the design stage, many of the problems could have been overcome."

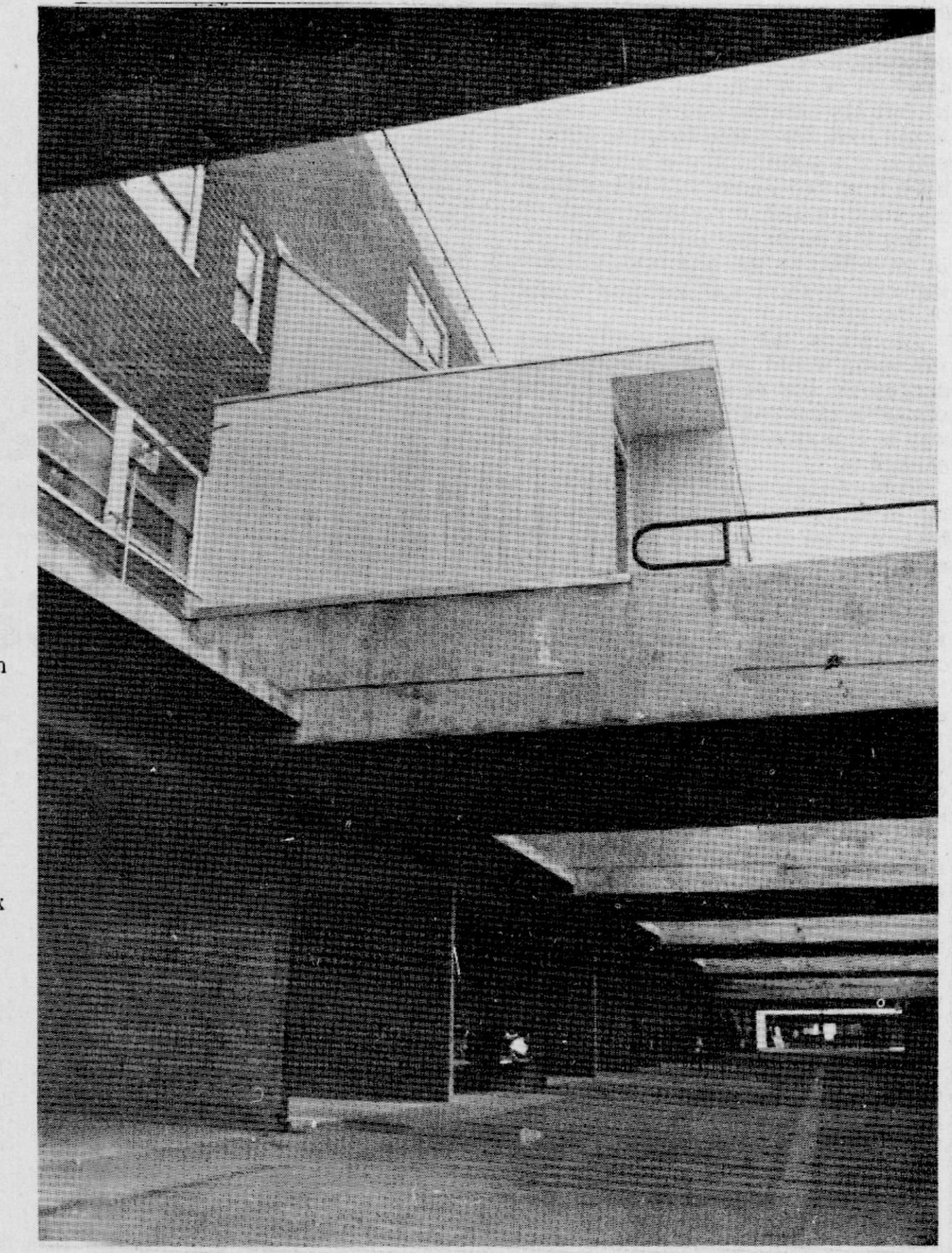
FAILURE TO DESIGN TO BUILDING REGULATIONS. £31,000 was spent on Phase 1 alone, correcting work which did not meet these standards.

In early 1974 the architects tried to get away with this by saying the city building surveyor interpreted these regulations wrongly. But they never mentioned this at the time, and they did correct the work.

CHANGES IN DESIGN. Shankland-Cox frequently altered their plans at the last minute and gave new orders to Unit. Their variation orders cost £38,000 just on Phase 1, and they made 144 similar orders on Phases 1 and 2 and 3.

LATE DRAWINGS. The architects attributed £229,000 to delays... but not their delays. However, £20,000 was lost because of delayed work to the pilings.

The structural engineer wrote: "levels could not be finalised until



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UNTIL NOVEMBER 23 FROM DECEMBER 4

The Freedom of the City a play by Brian Friel (by permission of the English Stage Co.) Derry City, 1970: Three shot by the army. Who fired first? DON'T FORGET our special first night offer: Three first nights for total price 75p

The Sea Anchor by E. A. Whitehead. From the author of "The Foursome" an explosive look at sexual relationships, Liverpool-style.

WHO'S SEDUCING WHO?

THE FORCES look like getting not one, but two bites at the Liverpool recruiting cherry in 1975.

In July, they will again invade the Liverpool Show, which is already being organised despite the lack of a financial report on this year's event (see September's Free Press for our report).

But what's new is a report being prepared by the City Council's Director of Recreation and Open Spaces, "to investigate the possibility of a military tattoo being held on Waverley playground in September 1975".

A proposal calling for a full report to be submitted to an early meeting of the council, just scraped through a city council meeting on Sept 4 - on the chairman's casting vote.

The real purpose of tattoos was there for all to see in an Army advert in the Forby Times of Sept 18. It read: "ENJOY THE ARMY SHOW? NOW YOU'VE SEEN US. FIND OUT MORE

By FRANK KEELEY, one of the fourteen accused of conspiring to seduce troops from Her Majesty.

"We hope you enjoyed the Army show at Bootle Sports Stadium. We had a lot of fun taking part. "As soldiers we train hard, work hard, play hard. And enjoy good pay, good prospects, and a good life into the bargain. "You could have all this too, if you joined us for 3 years. And if you chose a 6 or 9 year stay, your money would be even higher..."

The "free entry" Bootle tattoo cost a surprised Sefton Council about £600.

The forces were excluded from this year's Skelmersdale Show; one of the reasons was that on the two previous occasions they were accepted only on the basis that they would not use the show for recruitment - they failed to keep their word on both occasions.

In the light of the current furor about "subversives" going about "maliciously seducing" poor innocent soldiers, this and other examples of Army duplicity may just raise a doubt or two about exactly who is seducing who.

In the trial of Pat Arrowsmith, the pacifist, earlier this year, Judge Abdella and the prosecution seemed to accept that the leaflet she was distributing would not affect older, hardened soldiers - it was the effect such propaganda might have on the younger, more impressionable recruits that worried them and the Army.

Can one, perhaps, detect the merest hint of double standards here?

In the council debate on the proposed Liverpool tattoo, Councillor Geoff Walsh (Lab) demanded that this be killed "stone dead" and that a report should not even be called for.

He moved an amendment saying that the council should advise all concerned that it is not the policy of the council to hold military tattoos in any city parks or recreation grounds."

This produced little gems from Doreen Jones (Lib), declaring her profound pride in the forces and her belief that it would be a good thing for some young men to go into the Army, and Tony Limont (Lib) asserting that it was healthy for the Army to be seen by the general public, who could feel confident in them.

He then added, perhaps unwisely, that maybe some people thought the council should cancel all visits of naval ships to the city.

Despite all this the amendment only just failed - the vote was 38 each way, and the chairman's casting vote supported the original motion. So now a report is being prepared on the requirements for a tattoo in September 1975.

Wonder how much that will cost us.