

HUNDREDS IN DANGER

**CITY GAS
CONTRACT
SCANDAL**

HUNDREDS of elderly people are at risk because vital council work is not being done properly.

The work is the maintenance and repair of gas central heating in corporation flats and houses.

Liverpool City Council recently awarded the £50,000 contract for most of this work to a small Kirkby firm called Castle Metal Products.

Castle Metal Products is run by Mr Arthur Bagot, a Liverpool magistrate and a business associate of City Council leader Bill Smyth.

His firm took over the maintenance of almost 10,000 centrally-heated homes in October. Before that, nearly all the work had been done by North West Gas.

Since October, Castle Metals have proved incapable of doing the job properly.

Elderly people have been left for days without their central heating. In the cold winter months ahead this could easily result in tragedy.

The service provided by Castle Metals bears no comparison with that provided by the Gas Board.

Earlier this year North West Gas had an almost unlimited number of men available to do repairs for 14,000 Liverpool homes. (They employ 500 skilled men and apprentices on Merseyside.)

Castle Metals have seven men covering 10,000 homes in Liverpool and a further 5,000 homes in Knowsley (under a separate agreement).

- North West Gas provided a 24-hour call-out service. Castle Metals do not.
- The Gas Board treated repairs for elderly people as emergencies, to be dealt with the same day if possible.

Castle Metals have already left at least one elderly couple over a week without their central heating (see below).

- North West Gas have 54 radio-controlled vans and a full back-up service, which was available to the corporation.

Castle Metals have no radio vans. In fact they are so badly off for vehicles some fitters use their own cars.

- North West Gas employed fully trained men for the annual service.

Castle Metals are using unskilled men to do their annual servicing.

Castle Metals seem to have got the contract because, on the face of it, they are cheaper than North West Gas.

But a direct comparison of actual costs for the year ending March 1975 (when Castle Metals were doing only 700 homes) shows the reverse.

Taking into account the cost of spares and overtime rates, the costs per dwelling were: North West Gas: £1.20
Castle Metals: £1.80
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ARTHUR BAGOT: Now you see him... ..now you don't



Who is Arthur Bagot?

ARTHUR BAGOT comes from a famous Labour family in Liverpool.

In 1963 he became a partner with Councillor Bill Smyth in a firm called Prime Building Co. This later became Prime Heating and Plumbing.

At the time Smyth was a leading Labour councillor. Now he is leader of the City Council after switching to the Liberal Party.

Right up to March 1974 Bagot and Smyth each had 100 shares in Prime Heating. (Smyth's wife owned the other 100). Then they sold their shares.

But according to records at Companies House, Bagot still has a small minority shareholding in Waver-tree Heating, which is owned by Smyth and his wife.

Bagot is a director of two other heating, engineering and plumbing firms... A & B Engineering and Castle Metals.

Naturally the work of Prime, A & B and Castle Metals has sometimes overlapped. All have received work off the Gas Board. And frequently workers from Prime Heating in the past had to go to Castle Metals for equipment, and vice versa.

Bye, bye, Harry — with love from Sayers

DIRECTORS of Sayers, the Liverpool bakery firm, have concocted a nasty recipe to squash pay demands.

Like the CIA they seem to believe the best way of dealing with opponents is to get rid of them. In 1975 they have already sacked five shop stewards.

And at a private meeting earlier this year top directors drew up plans to sack another one.

He was electricians' steward Harry Rimmer. At the time, Mr Rimmer was negotiating a new pay deal for the electricians.

Mr David Rothwell, Sayer's chief engineer, was so elated by their little scheme he wrote on his rough notes: "BYE. BYE HARRY!"

Then, in a more formal record of their discussion he wrote:

"It was agreed that there was one main problem i.e. one of personality ideals. It was also agreed that removal of personality/ideals was the answer."

But Fred Sayer, the chairman, and the other directors, couldn't sack Harry Rimmer just yet. That would be too obvious.

As Mr Rothwell recorded: "It was further agreed that... an immediate solution to this particular problem could cause more difficulties than ever. Therefore any solution must wait until after the

negotiations have been completed."

The fair-minded people who attended this meeting were Mr Sayer, Mr Rothwell, Mr G F Harrison, company secretary and director, and Bill Roper, works director.

Not content with sacking one, they also discussed at another meeting sacking all four electricians they employed.

"We are now of the opinion," wrote the diarist Rothwell, "that it would be more beneficial to the company to do without the luxury of employing our own electricians ... therefore future electrical work will be contracted out."

Still nothing could be done until the negotiations were settled.

So Sayers tried another tactic. They decided to call in the government's Conciliation and Advisory Service. That would be independent.

Well, not too independent, hoped the directors. They wanted an advantage.

Unofficially, they contacted Mr D Ryder, a conciliation officer from this independent service.

They invited him to a private meeting on April 22. This wasn't held in the factory and naturally the electricians weren't asked to meet this special guest.

No, this surreptitious meeting took place at the comfortable Woolton home of director Bill

Roper.

And at one stage — according to the prolific diarist Rothwell — Ryder even said: "The company should try and resist the premium on premium payments." (This referred to the payment of overtime based on shift rates... something the company was keen to stop.)

This helpful get-together over, Bill Roper wrote an official letter to Mr Ryder asking him to intervene. The letter was dated April 23, the day after the Woolton meeting. Of course, this wasn't mentioned.

Still, everything worked out dandy for the electricians. They had been to the library (which is what they called Mr Rothwell's notebook) and knew about the secret meeting.

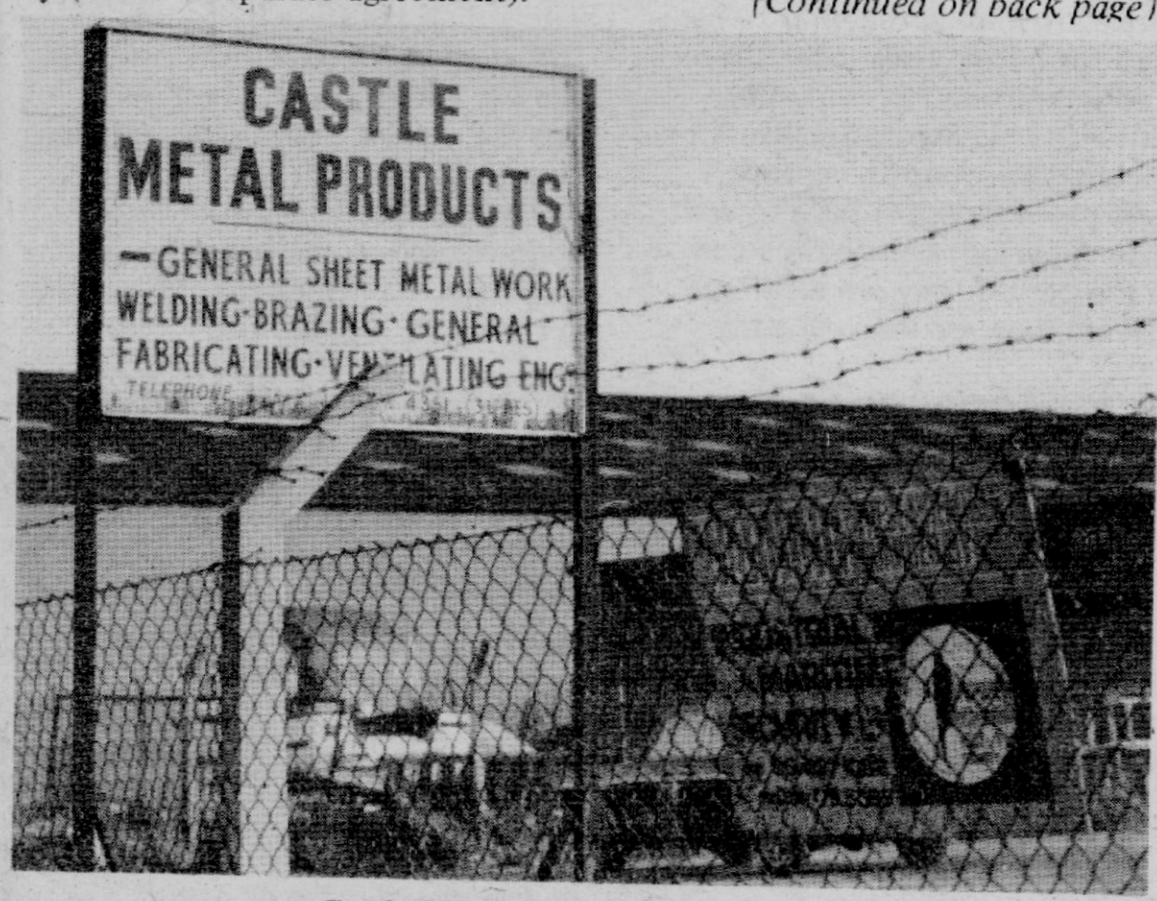
Poor Mr Ryder was rather shocked to be told this just before he began the hearing into the dispute.

Anyway, the electricians must have had a good case. They got almost everything they were asking for.

But with all these dubious events, it was not surprising that few Sayers workers had much trust in the directors.

Then an astonishing event took place. Frank Smith, a driver and active steward, was driving a Sayers

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Castle Metals' base in Kirkby.