



Arthur Bagot, Castle Metals chairman

Kirkby firm lose city gas contract

CASTLE METAL Products have lost the contract to maintain gas central heating in 10,000 city council homes.

Liverpool's housing committee ended the £50,000 contract when the Kirkby firm was put into the hands of a receiver last month. The decision was expected to be confirmed by the City Council on January 28.

In December the Free Press reported that elderly people were in danger because the vital maintenance work was not being done properly.

Soon after Castle Metals took over the work from North West Gas in October, old people were being left for over a week without their central heating.

We reported that Castle Metals got the contract although they had fewer men, fewer vehicles, provided an inferior service, and were apparently no cheaper than the gas board.

And, we said, the company was in serious financial difficulty.

The chairman of Castle Metals is Mr Arthur Bagot, a Liverpool magistrate and business associate of

council leader Bill Smyth.

A receiver was appointed by the firm's creditors on January 6. His job is to take over from the company's directors and act in the creditors' best interests. But it will probably be several weeks before workers know whether or not the firm is to close.

Meanwhile, police investigating the affairs of the old Kirkby council are taking an interest in Arthur Bagot's firm.

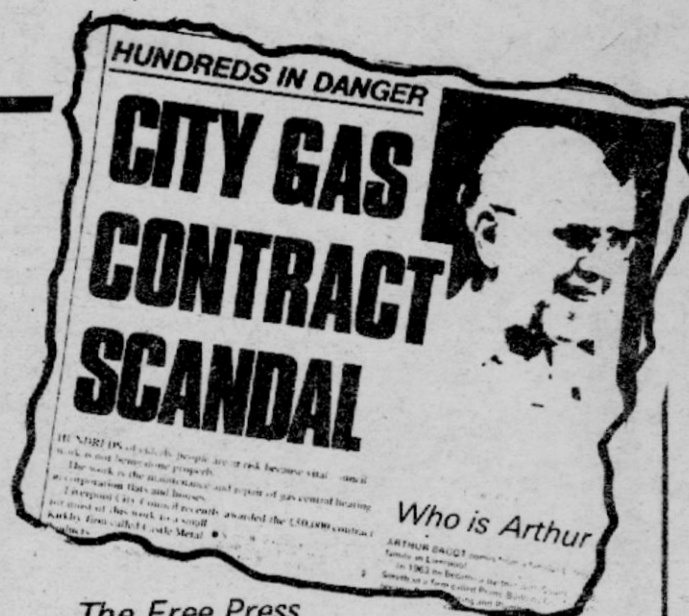
Castle Metals maintained all of Kirkby's centrally-heated homes, although there were no competitive

The Free Press story last December

tenders for the work. Each year that well-known council architect Eric Spencer Stevenson simply obtained quotations and the contract always went to Castle Metals.

The firm were also busy installing central heating on the Tower Hill estate as sub-contractors to the well-known Kirkby builders, George Leatherbarrow.

And it was Leatherbarrow's firm who, in 1971, built a £31,000 extension on to the Castle Metals factory.



BEAR BRAND IN TROUBLE AGAIN

BEAR BRAND, the Liverpool hosiery firm, is in trouble again. Any day now the 300 workers, mostly women, could face the sack.

The government has turned down a new plea from the company for help.

It was only a year ago that the government bailed out this Woolton nylon firm... just 15 minutes before the company was due to announce its final closure.

Bear Brand were given a £375,000 loan on fairly generous terms. No repayments had to start for two years.

Now the workers at the factory are amazed that this money has evaporated so quickly. Only about £30,000 has been spent on new machines.

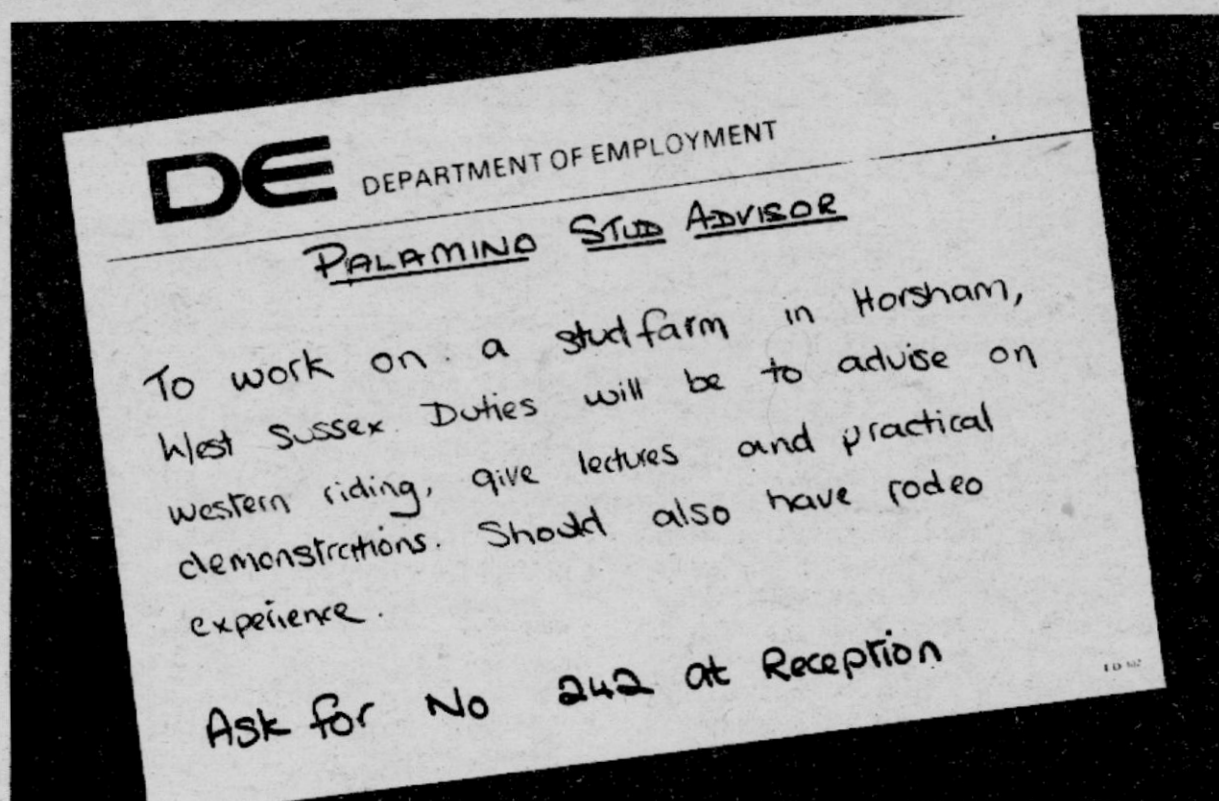
The new directors, Mr Mervin Smith and Mr Murdoch say it has gone mostly in debts. And they asked for another loan of about £½ million from the Department of Trade and Industry.

But there was never any chance they would get this. Eric Varley, the minister in charge, even spoke out against the first loan to Bear Brand.

Yet strangely the output has shot up recently because the management has lowered the prices of the nylons.

The workers are now even working overtime (though for the first six months the company did not even give them the pay rise negotiated by the union).

But this change in policy may have come too late.



Sayers men seek support

SAYERS, the Liverpool bakery firm, are trying the old tactics of divide and rule to try and end the 14-week old dispute.

Twenty men have been picketing the factory since a number of them were sacked for refusing to do overtime and for supporting a dismissed driver (in the TGWU).

Ten are engineers, seven are electricians, and three are sheet-metal workers.

At the end of last month, Sayers agreed to start negotiations, but only with Bert Broderick, an AUEW official.

The company would not allow the electricians, or their union official, at this or any other meeting. Clearly, they wanted to spread disarray amongst the pickets from different unions.

Then, at the latest meeting, Sayers dropped a bombshell. They said they were not even going to talk about reinstating three of the engineers.

Earlier, the management had offered

a deal to the AUEW — which would have left the electricians out in the cold.

The company made two vicious conditions: First, the electricians were not to be included.

And second, as soon as the engineers were back at work they would have to start talking about some redundancies!

Why? Because the company have found scab labour cheaper. We reported in our last issue how a scab fitter is living in a caravan inside the factory. And Sayers have also been using senior managers to do basic maintenance.

With a management like that, the dispute could go on another 14 weeks. Help with picketing is badly needed because Bakers Union and TGWU members are still crossing the lines (although a group of T&G men bravely refused for a period, recently)

Support to: Sayers Engineers Strike Committee, H Rimmer (EETPU) 118 Allerford Road, Liverpool 12.

Flat agency may have found a loophole

AFTER City Estates, the accommodation agency in Bold Street, Liverpool, were convicted of charging illegal fees to prospective tenants, the Free Press pointed out that they continued to charge these fees.

They're still doing it. They ask for £4 before you get a chance to sit down — but now they reckon it's legal.

Mr S.K. Leung, a student at the Polytechnic was unfortunate enough to go to City Estates on December 29. He paid his £4 and was given only one address.

When he arrived there, he was told there was no vacancy and someone else from the agency had already called.

Not surprisingly, Mr Leung was not satisfied and asked for his money back. City Estates said they would give him £2 back, but would keep £2 to pay for an advert in Accommodation Weekly, whatever that is.

When an official from the Polytechnic union phoned on behalf of the student and threatened prosecution if the money was not returned, a City Estates employee said the 1953 Accommodation Agencies Act allowed fees to be charged if they were for advertising in a newspaper.

It does indeed say that. City Estates may have found a smart loophole to help them continue to rob the public.

The students' union continued to pester the agency and eventually City Estates promised to give all the money back "as a goodwill gesture"

They added, for good measure, "We don't want nothing to do with students. They're a load of rubbish".

Students — and others — may well think that about City Estates.

TASK FORCE

(continued from page one)

— when a scuffle started between a few members of the local division and Task Force men.

The Task Force men had wanted to charge in, the local police wanted to hold them back.

But even if Oxford is successful and does overcome the opposition he's bound to meet, that doesn't mean everything will suddenly be rosy down at the local police station.

The Task Force men will merely go to other police jobs. And unsavoury incidents have been reported even in the back of police mini-cars.

OFFICE MOVE

GINGERBREAD, the organisation for single-parent families, will shortly be opening a new daytime office at 4 Bold Place, Liverpool (behind St Luke's Church). Until then they can be contacted at 85 Upper Parliament Street (Tel 709 1049).

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'LIBERTY HALL'

Cindy's Club, 75 Victoria Street, Liverpool 1

Further details phone 227 2514 25p members, 35p non-members
Subscriptions: £1 for 6 months to T. Devaney, 66 Devonshire Road, Liverpool 8.

Feb 8: Film— Gumshoe.
Feb 15: George Davis discussion.
Feb 22: Pete McGovern.
March 7: Film— Diary of a Mad Housewife.

FIREWEED

FIREWEED is a quarterly magazine which publishes new work by unknown and well-known writers and artists whose work is of particular interest to working people, socialists and others interested in the arts. No.4 (February) includes: New play text by Trevor Griffiths; fiction by the two leading West German worker-writers; songs by Ian Campbell; stories by David Pownall and Nigel Gray; a painting by Renato Guttuso (in full colour) and photo-features, poems and stories. Subscriptions to: FIREWEED, 107 Bowerham Road, Lancaster. £3 for one year. Single issues: 60p plus 15p p&p. Subscribers get a free copy of Arnold Wesker's new play, the Journalists. (Also available from Atticus Books).