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Solidarity

FOR WORKERS' POWER

Construction News

BARROW HEPBURN & GALE

Metal Box

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1964

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INTERNAL COMBUSTION ON KINGSNORTH

Ever since the Resident Engineer Mr. Kenton for International Combustion Limited, announced that the first redundancies would take place around the September/October period, our Stewards have been trying unsuccessfully to negotiate a reasonable redundancy pay agreement.

This is essential in the Construction Industry, and it is generally agreed that due to the casual nature of the industry, with its short term contracts and a host of other contingencies, that special consideration should be given to construction workers on the redundancy payment over and above the statutory payment. That is of course except on the Kingsnorth site.

ALL THE KINGS MEN.

All of the important people including the Shop Steward, Officials, and management have had meeting after meeting on this subject, without result. They've had Federation Meetings, Statutory Conferences and Site Conferences, all have failed to produce even an offer from Mr. Kenton the King of Kingsnorth. Some people think its a good job that they have all of these meetings without any results because if they wasn't doing that they might be working and then the redundancies would start at least a year earlier.

We have also held a few meetings on this subject and it was agreed at one of them on Bro. Hughie Barr's recommendation, to hold a series of One-Day Token Strikes in the hope that the effect on production might help Mr. Kenton to make up his mind, but as the overtime wasn't stopped completely these one day stoppages have had little or no effect except that Mr. Kenton had the audacity to attempt to dissuade us from our actions with the subtle use of propoganda that was so poorly written and produced, that everyone thought that it had come from the Central Office of the communist Party.

Both the meeting and the token strikes continued so you can guess that Mr. Kenton (V.C.) wasn't very happy on the last day before the Whitsun Holiday.

It is traditional in the Construction Industry that on the last day before the holiday there is an early Blow-up, usually around dinner time, some firms give an extra day. No Engineer in his right mind would attempt to interfere with this tradition, but Mr. Kenton has proved time and time again that he is an exception to every rule and is never afraid to tempt fate.

On the day before the Whitsun Holiday the Stewards approached Mr. Kenton to enquire as to what time he was shutting the Site down on that day, he replied 4.15 p.m. as usual and refused to negotiate. This was quite clearly a reprisal against the Token Strikes. As the Stewards left the office they heard Mr. Kenton singing nonchalantly to himself- the song went something like "I don't want to set the world on fire, I just want to start a flame in your heart." This must have given someone an idea?

FIRING THE BOILER

All round the Boilers there are very large stacks of polystyrene lagging. Sometime after the dinner break a fire broke out amongst one of the stacks, it was nothing to do with us so we just watched as it caught hold and extended along the stack.

Soon it was well alight, a C.P. hack Ginger Richards arrived on the scene and started squirting from a small Fire Extinguisher, we don't know what he had in it but the fire seemed to blaze even harder as he squirted it. Eventually the Power Station Fire Brigade turned up and amid cheers and boo's from us attempted to fight it without effect.

While they were engaged in that one another fire broke out in another area of the Boiler, this was too much, and the Kent Fire Brigade had to be called in, they arrived and with every encouragement from us began to set about putting them out. Almost immediately another fire was reported back and then another, altogether 5 different fires had started amongst the stacks of lagging in different areas of the Boiler.

We began to think that Mr. Kenton was trying to fire the Boiler with lagging instead of Oil, or was he trying to roast us all alive.

Just to make the day a complete farce the police arrived and began an exhaustive investigation but without result, most of the Communist Party Revolutionaries were off of the site attending yet another meeting so there was only 600 of us ordinary workers left there, and none of us could have been that creative,

Perhaps the Kingsnorth Foreman knew something about it, we understand they were feeling very vindictive, due to the fact that the Social Mr. Kenton had organised for them to celebrate the handing over of No. 1 Boiler to the C.E.G.B. National Grid had gone wrong.

Apparently the Social was arranged in the Chatham Labour Club. Mr. Kenton made the mistake of organising a Strip Show as a caberat, but the club Steward refused to allow it on moral grounds, anyway the Foreman all turned up in their best Tonic Mohair Boiler Suites only to find the Social had been called off.

One Foreman Ernie Hombden turned up in his best Green Suite, Bow Tie and Umbrella and was so outraged when he found it had been called off he was heard to remark that Mr. Kenton couldn't organise a Piss-Up in a Brewery. He also threatened that he wouldn't work so hard in future but another foreman whispered to him reminding him that he didn't work anyway, Hombden turned round on him, angrily and said well I'll be kinder to the men in future and if I catch them off the Boiler before

time I wont stop them any $\frac{1}{2}$ hrs.

In a Press Statement later Mr. Kenton explained that the workers on Kingsnorth had worked very hard to get No.1 Boiler finished and the Social and Strip Show had been organised as a means of celebration and relaxation.

This is the type of logic that Mr. Kenton and his kind apply to every situation, the workers work hard and its the Foreman who get the Social and need the relaxation.

Anyway your guess is as good as ours as to how or who started the Fires at Kingsnorth, all we can say is that if it wasn't us and it wasn't them it could have been coincidentle that internal combustion occured in five different stacks of lagging at the same-time.

Meanwhile things are certainly warming up at Kingsnorth, but Mr. Kenton has changed his tune a bit now and has been heard to sing "April Showers" so if anyone has got any water hidden up on the Boiler?

REDUNDANCY VICTORY OR

As the final chapters of the Kingsnorth story is being played out we are being systematically brainwashed into accepting an inevitable and major redundancy in September.

The official union line has been that the only thing left worth fighting for on this site is a couple of weeks severance pay on top of the normal redundancy payments. The net result of all the meetings between management and union officials has been that the management have offered us about half what the unions originally asked for.

THE THIN EDGE

Our union officials after a token hesitation have now recommended that we accept the managements offer, while the I.C.L. workers at Fiddlers Ferry Power Station have unanimously rejected ICL's redundancy policy and have voted to continue the struggle. Throughout the struggle at Kingsnorth our union officials have never once challenged or questioned the validity of the redundancy in September.

Looking round at the Kingsnorth Power Station with only one boiler completed and three more in various stages of construction, it is obvious to us all that the present labour force could be absorbed with the work available until well into the new year, but then what is obvious to us on the job is obviously not obvious to our union officials who are inclined to see things from the comfor and security of their own or the employers offices.

This practice of running the labour force down on major contracts unecessarily can be the thin edge of the wedge not only for us, but on all I.C.L. contracts. It can be a most effective method of getting rid of the militants and enforcing a new discipline with lower wages and worse conditions.

REMEMBER

Many of us working on Kingsnorth also worked on Tilbury 'B' Power Station, and can well remember how false a redundancy can be.

Foster Wheeler John Browns made over 200 men redundant at Tilbury with over half the contract unfinished. The excuse they used then was that too many men working on one boiler presented a safety hazard. (Since when have they worried about our safety) Within three months they re-employed another 200 men plus another 150 on top with the result that far more men were working on the boiler than before the redundancy.

Our union officials played their usual role on this occasion by collaborating with management and selling our bodies.

John Baldwin who is now the C.E.U. Assistant General Secretary was called in to negotiate the redundancy in his capacity then as the Essex organiser. At a mass meeting on the site Baldwin and his heir apparent Bro. Bill Donnelly the C.E.U. Steward informed us that the management was not going to abide by the C.E.U. policy of "first in last out", instead they were going to sack who they liked.

John (the con) Baldwin told us that he was not going to accept this and intended to threaten the management with an all out strike, never once did he question the validity of the redundancy or the numbers involved. Half an hour after the meeting he told us that Foster Wheeler John Browns had completely capitulated and were now prepared to accept the union policy of first in last out. Thus it seemed we had won a major victory.

One does not need a great deal of imagination to see that by creating a false conflict of "who is going to be made redundant first and who is not" we are blinded by the real issue of, is the redundancy necessary at this time? and this is the issue that our union officials automatically ignore.

Of course in relation to Tilbury, the Principal Boy, John Baldwin did organise and lead a delegation to Parliament to question the validity of the redundancy, but that was after the 200 men had gone down the road and not before.

Our purpose in reiterating this piece of history is to point out how easy it is for union officials to disguise the real issues at stake by blinding us with militant noises and false conflicts around the redundancy problem.

We recognise that redundancy at some stage is inevitable, we have no quarrel with the first in last out policy but we say that we should first establish whether or not the redundancy is justified at this point in time. We say that the redundancy is definitely a false one.

The lads on Kingsnorth should take note for we may be heading towards another "Tilbury Trap"

I. BURN.

A CASE FOR ACTION

Barrow Hepburn and Gale Ltd. in Bermondsey are luggage Manufacturers. They employ something like 150 people both male and female.

Although this particular factory in Bermondsey is a part of a much larger combine it is typical of thousands in terms of the way management controls its labour force and of working conditions. It is small and divided.

It contains a mixture of the OLD victorian paternalistic management, and the NEW "make the sweat-shops pay" techniques and methods of your new modern management, complete with time and motion studies, "experimental" bonus schemes, and trendy "my dad was a miner" type management personell.

The work force too is a mixture of on the one hand the old boys who have been there for donkeys years and who are either too old or too broken by the system to even think about let alone actually take any action against their benevolent employers, and the essentially younger lads who have been told by every branch of the mass media that the land of milk and honey has arrived, but who have seen through its 'crown topper' and 'maclean white smile' type image and are saying fuck it.

The work to be done in places like this is as difficult as it is anywhere and in many cases more difficult. Because of the very tightly knit structure the reality of victimisation is never far away, and the union is both uninterested and incompetent.

The lads who like us work in E.4 section at Barrow Hepburn and Gale were the first to used as guinea pigs for the companies new bonus scheme. In this article we want to describe the struggle that has taken place between us and the management regarding its operation and interpretation.

BONUS OR BOGUS SCHEME

The new bonus scheme was signed by the bosses and the N.U.L.W.A.T. in August 1969 and came into operation the beginning of this year. We were not consulted and our union official when questioned about it was completely ignorant about its contents and meaning.

Like many other bonus schemes it is bogus. It contains phrases like the one saying that the scheme exists to "produce within the individual a pride of performance; to unite management and employees in a common concern for ability and output". We haven't exactly started singing the company anthem before we start work each morning but if this crap is anything to go by it won't be long before we are. You can take it from us that the only 'Common Concern' to management is their ability to extract as much profit as they can get out of us. What really happens after those beautiful phrases have been lost under a pile of wastepaper in some corner, is that we have to fight tooth and nail for everything we want, just like you had to before this wonderful new bonus scheme and just like you will have to after it.

Like most companies they don't give a damn about the worker, all they want is for us all to work like a bunch of zombies five days a week. Our feeling about the bonus scheme is that it should be thrown out of the window as a preliminary along with the management who dreamt it up and the union who signed it.

THE SCHEME ITSELF.

This scheme is worked on getting a performance rate of between 75 and 120 and is called 'measured work'.

The rates of scales on performance are as follows;

Performance	75	80	90	100	110	120
Bonus/Hour	nil	6 $\frac{1}{2}$	1/6 $\frac{1}{2}$	2/8	3/9	4/9 $\frac{1}{2}$

With a performance of 75 you get sod all and in reaching 120 you get 4/9 $\frac{1}{2}$ d per hour which means working your guts out to get a certain number of their cases done per hour. There is also unmeasured work which entails being shifted to another machine that you don't usually work on but getting paid at the same bonus rate as on our own machine. This is what used to happen, but what they are now trying to do is to get us to do everything on measured work, so that when they shift you to another machine, on which you have little or no experience, your performance rate naturally drops and you lose money. When you point this out to foreman Warren (who goes about as if his arse were on fire) he tells you, "It'll be all right and you won't lose money: We will look after you," does fuck all and you DO lose money. Nothing happens until you really kick up about it and even then you get it only if Smiler Warren decides you have been working hard enough.

THE STRIKE

On Wednesday morning, 8th July, a worker was told to do a job on another machine and as he had lost 50% of his bonus the previous two weeks he refused to do the job on measured work, but would do it on unmeasured. When he said this, laughing boy Warren got very narked and said, "Either do this or collect your cards". The worker asked to see Skinhead Powell (Instigator-in-Chief of the time and motion department), was refused the request and was told he was sacked.

As nearly all of us could see ourselves in exactly the same position in the very near future we held a discussion among ourselves as to what could be done. A decision was reached that at 11.30 a.m. we would leave our machines and ask to see the management to put two questions to them:

- A. Would they reinstate the sacked worker
- B. Would they guarantee that any worker put on another machine would be paid at the same rate he normally earned on his own machine.

HIGH NOON

At 11.30 we left our machines and told the foreman to ask Mr. Powell to come and see us to discuss our grievances. At high noon Warren returned to tell us that His Highness would not meet us while we held a loaded gun at His head, but if we went back to work He graciously consented to meet a deputation of three. We then told his message boy that we were all in this together and we all wanted to hear the Oracle together. (Exit Warren with long white coat flapping in the breeze.)

It was then agreed that if we did not see Powell before the dinner break we would not return in the afternoon if His tired Majesty did not have the energy to climb three flights of stairs to even listen to us.

DAY TWO

When we reported for work at our normal time the following morning we were approached by members of the management who said they were prepared to start negotiations with us only if we signed a slip of paper stating that we would resume work on that day. We all did so as it was our intention to resume work and ask again to see Mr. Powell to get the matter thrashed out.

At 9 a.m. the Personnel Officer approached us and we told her we wanted a ten minute discussion to study our position. When this was given we sent for the workers on the other floors in our block, to explain our actions to them as they are not in the bonus scheme as yet, but will be at a later date and we did not want them to fall for the same dodges and fiddles that we have been subjected to.

At 2.30 we went to the canteen for the meeting and were met by Jockey Strap Mullins and Honey-Tongue Taylor, aided and abetted by Warren & Co. But still no Powell, who was the one management member we wanted to see in the first place.

A spokesman was nominated on our behalf, to put forward our complaints, but got nowhere fast - Honey Boy just made our arguments for some safeguard for our earnings look as if Scrooge himself were the worker in question. We were then informed that we would be given no guarantee whatsoever for loss of bonus when transferred to some other operation in which we may or may not have some experience. Our Beloved Benefactors also informed us that while we were given

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training on some other operation (on which we do loose money) they were doing us a favour by doing so that they could move us all over the bloody shop to suit their convenience. This is what they call mobility of labour !

We do not object to training for other jobs that take up to 7 weeks to achieve a half decent performance rate.

During Taylors' " I am the Messiah" speech, he had the fucking nerve to tell us that it was a privelege to learn on his machines which incidentally are more often than not in the throws of disrepair. We were also informed at this time that the worker who was sacked got his cards not for his refusal of the measured job in question, but for threatening to remould Warrens face. (A task I am sure that a plastic surgeon would only give a 50/50 chance of success.)

The meeting broke up shortly after this , with dissatisfaction on behalf of the workers, as all we really wanted some sort of safeguard for money we have earned and all they want us to do is to work our bollocks off to make more and more profit for less and less workers.

This is the first time Solidarity has visited this factory, but we intend to visit here again and again. We are interested in reports and ideas from other workers inside.

The Case Men

STOP PRESS:

Since this article was written five men have been sacked. All five were involved in the strike action described above, yet all five men were dismissed for reasons apparently unconnected with this action, lateness and not clocking in properly were the reasons given. Communication between the various departments within the factory has been difficult. The management know that it is difficult and this is why they think they can get away with sacking five men. The five men were all under the guinea pig bonus scheme, that is what the struggle was about and soon no doubt it is going to be the probem of other men in other departments. No doubt the management will want to refine this new method of exploitation before they give every one a chance to benefit from it !! When you do remember what the lads in E4 have being trying to prove, you will get more money O.K. but you will have to work your bollocks of for it and it will never be secure.

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BLUES

When I was a lad I remember seeing Charlie Chaplin in a film called 'Hard Times'. How I laughed and laughed as choking with mirth I watched the antics of that great clown. I shall never forget those happy moments.

In those far-off days I thought that the kind of factory life portrayed in Hard Times was sheer fantasy. It just seemed too inhuman to be true. Like monsters and witches I was certain that Charlie's mad mad factory belonged to the bizarre world of Grimms Fairy tales. But I was wrong. For Charlie's factory does actually exist. I know because I work there. It is the Metal Box in Stroud. And what a horrible place it is!

Like a huge brick-coloured bungalow the Metal Box works stands at one end of a long row of factories straddling the northern bank of the River Medway just before it flows under Rochester Bridge. There is little on the outside of this particular lunatic asylum to betray the madhouse it is on the inside. The first thing one notices on approaching the place from the direction of Knight's Road is a huge sign saying Metal Box and Company Limited. I hardly notice this sign anymore. After all these years I just know it is somewhere up there as I pass by the blue and white factory gates every morning. I also know I hate it because it is the name of the tin can hell I work in five days a week.

Altogether about 800 men and women slave at the Metal Box - making tin cans and more tin cans and still more tin cans day in day out. Some 400 of us or so are on the day shift which starts at six in the morning. I like being on the day shift because we finish at two in the afternoon. I also like it because we get a free daily puppet show in which the actors are the people making up the management, which includes the union stewards and the Gestapo guards at the main gate.

They don't all come on the stage at once. If they did it would be uproarious. As it is they usually appear in ones or twos. The chief actor is called Brophy, who could be described as a cross between Billy Bunter and Cliff Michelmore. He plays the part of a manager-king who rules over a Satanic mill. The other members making up his royal court are Mister Carmichael his chief lady in waiting and Gorgeous Fitzgeorge, head of quality control. Carmichael's chief comic role is

to create panic as often as possible for no reason at all; while Fitz-george plays a magnificent supporting role as Carmichael's piglet. Yet another character is the Fire Chief, who as a complacent pompous prat spends much of his time strutting about desperately trying to bolster his sense of self-importance.

When these particular actors are not on stage the comedy continues with a great show of clowning by our very popular shop stewards convenor. He plays an excellent part as court jester. The management love him. He is about the best union entertainer they've ever hired. But then he has to be good or the management would soon get shot of him. For in this particular factory the workers can only elect shop stewards who will do the firm's bidding. The management will not allow anyone else to take the job. Consequently, only toadies and idiots tend to become shop stewards.

When good men do get elected now and again they seldom last for long. I've seen quite a few of them get their cards. So determined is the firm to keep its control over the choice of shop stewards that sometimes the management will actually engineer the dismissal of a man who refuses to arse-lick if there seems to be a possibility of him being elected shop steward.

The consequences of this particularly tyrannical management policy are now becoming very obvious. A few months ago, for instance, a new slave work scheme was imposed on us when the management and union officials agreed on a new 'productivity' deal completely over our heads. If we were slaves before this new deal was made, then we became slaves with roller skates on after it came into effect.

It is now all systems go from start to finish of each shift. Men dash here, women dash there (and not just to the toilets). The warehouse where the finished cans end up is perhaps the craziest place of all. Do this! Leave that! Go there! the supervisor yells as the boxed cans roll in after they are packed by the buzzies.

Everywhere the noise and confusion is terrific. No one can stand around for a moment. Even if someone is waiting for material or the repair of a machine he or she still has to look busy. Big Brother Brophy's hired henchmen are always watching - waiting to pounce. They love to shove their weight around. But then they're not so heavy, since they are about as hollow as the newly-made cans that are forever clattering their noisy way along the factory runways. Between noise and management and fear of the sack this place is sheer hell.

Apart from the soul destroying repetition of the production process, the noise of the tin cans as they pass down the runways makes it impossible for the workers to communicate with each other.

Many of the workers who have been here a long time suffer from very bad hearing; the noise reaches over 145 Decibels when all of the lines are working.

This is not surprising since, according to Dr. Rosen, Professor of Otology at New York, 85 Decibels is the intensity known to damage a human ear steadily exposed to it. He also states that loud noise can increase body tensions which can affect blood pressure, the functions of the heart and the nervous system.

Dr. Rosen states that the noise level from traffic in New York is currently 92 Decibels and increasing at the rate of 1 Decibel per year. According to his estimates by the year 2000 all New Yorkers will be deaf unless something is done now.

If this is the case the workers at Metal Box must be suffering torment. We should start to kick up a fuss - by complaining to our Doctors, the Factory Inspector, the T.U.C. Medical Research Dept. and our M.P.'s. Remember the only way to kill one noise is to make a louder one. We have no faith in the bureaucracy of the trades unions or Parliament, but if enough noise is made in the right places it may strike the nerves of some of the do-gooders who elect to control our lives.

I carry on working here because jobs are hard to find. But I also know that the grass is no greener anywhere else. I've worked in a number of different factories here in the Medway towns since I was a lad. But I've found they're all the same. You've got the same management gang - giving orders and sacking you if they don't like your face - standing over you in every factory. They take the credit when the profits go up and they make scapegoats of their workers when things go wrong.

If I was younger I would probably have asked for my cards long ago. But I'm wiser now, and know you're only putting things off by changing your job. One has got to stand and fight sometime. I believe that we should start fighting at the Metal Box right now - before our feet or hands fall off or before we all have a mass nervous breakdown. Why shouldn't our voice be heard? Why shouldn't we have some say in what goes on here? Why should Brophy treat us worse than he did the blacks when he was manager of a plantation in Africa? After all, he isn't a god, though he likes to act like one. If they could chase him out of Africa, then surely we can show him that he can't dictate to 800 men and women here either. We could start by electing people who would really represent our interests, and not those of the management.

I believe it is about time we began acting for ourselves at the Metal Box. For too long we've depended upon union officials big and small. It's easy now to see that they have sold us down the line - as they have always been doing. They are worse than the management because they pretend to be our friends. We should tell them it's time to stop taking us for a ride. We should show the management and the unions that we are not the fools they think we are. We should show them in no uncertain manner that 800 people have also got a voice and a will of their own.

TIN CAN CHARLIE

UNION GETS ITS DUES

The two major unions responsible for negotiating what they and the management were pleased to describe as the 'agreement' in the article on the Metal Box Company (see article "METAL BOX BLUES") were the T&G.W.U. and the G.M.W.U.

Solidarity unlike other Left - Wing Political organisations does not involve itself in analysing the leftist leanings of this or that Trade Union. We believe that from the bureaucracy level they are all basically the same. Their only differences are their differing stages of development.

North London Solidarity has recently published a very good pamphlet on the G.M.W.U.. It traces some of the history and development of this Union and makes a first class analysis of its role.

Not only the workers at Pilkingtons have discovered the role of the G.M.W.U. is in question, but the workers at Fords' Halewood factory, and wherever G.M.W.U. members have been involved in struggle.

For all union members who have asked themselves the question "What's Wrong With Our Union" this is essential reading and at 6d Metal Box workers can't afford to miss it.

G.M.W.U. SCAB UNION

Obtainable from:
SOLIDARITY (SOUTH LONDON)

OTHER GROUPS

London (North)	c/o H. Russel 153A Westmoreland Rd. Bromley Kent.
London (West)	c/o 15, Taylors Green, London W.3.
Aberdeen.	c/o N.Roy, 138, Walker Road, Aberdeen.
Clydeside.	c/o Dan Kane, 43 Valeview Terrace, Dumbarton.
Dundee.	c/o F.Browne, 444, Perth Rd. Dundee.

THE ABOVE LIST IS A LIST OF SOME OF THE SOLIDARITY GROUPINGS, APART FROM THIS SOLIDARITY HAS MANY FRIENDS AND CONTACTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY IF YOU WISH TO BE PUT IN TOUCH DROP A LINE TO THE GROUP WHICH IS NEAREST .

ALLENS - A TALE

WHICH TELLS ITSELF

This report has been sent in by members who have been working on the Allens Engineering Ltd. contract at Kingsnorth Power Station. The report deals with a completely ruthless employer, and with the combined treachery of the C.E.G.B. and C.E.U. in dealing with the militancy of a small number of men.

The contract was scheduled to take approximately 12 months but has taken $3\frac{1}{2}$ years to date. The employers could not have fought so long and so successfully without the aid of the CENTRAL ELECTRICITY GENERATING BOARD and the officials of the CONSTRUCTIONAL ENGINEERING UNION.

There were 20 men employed on the Kingsnorth contract to erect the Ash and Dust Plant Hopper. Being a small job it did not attract the traditional militants and most of us had no experience in either negotiating or organising that is until an executive council member of the C.E.U. discovered that some of the men on the Allens contract were out of compliance with their union dues. This turned out to be our first ironic contact with the union.

From the very beginning we were in trouble. The management insisting that we work on a PRICE WORK SYSTEM and us not being able to make reasonable wages from his prices for a whole number of reasons.

There were no tools or equipment supplied. The site foreman would just say "look around the site, see what you can pick up or borrow". The tools we have been using for the last three and a half years have mostly been stolen from other contractors on this site and others. We've got a hydraulic bending machine for instance which came from Foster Wheeler John Brown Consortium Tilbury 'B' power station. Our engineer was once employed as a timekeeper there so I suppose that explains it, but it doesn't explain how he managed to qualify as our engineer.

We have one set of burning gear between us and this is all rotten, and replacements can only be made by our ability to pick up what we need on the site.

The other major problem with Allens' PRICE WORK is that being a small contractor, the other contractors always have priority of access to the job, so when we were held up, the waiting time was paid at the discretion of our very indiscreet management. The result was that the average earnings and conditions on the Allens contract were well below the earnings of other contractors employees carrying out similar work on the Kingsnorth site.

APATHY ?

Flexibility Fred Copeman, the C.E.U. district official paid us a visit for the first time in May 1969, to sort out the PRICE WORK SYSTEM he said, and to start with he insisted that we elected a shop steward. It was quite obvious that nobody really wanted the job but in the end a young erector improver agreed to take it. Fred Copeman returned the following week only to claim that he would not negotiate in the office with a third year improver.

Finally after a long meeting a man named Frank Cafrey, an older member of the union agreed to take over. At this stage our earnings on PRICE WORK was £23 per week inclusive of fares and expenses.

MANAGEMENT ORGANISE

On 17 June 1969 the improver and ex shop steward was sent out on a job on his own. The steward Frank Cafrey advised him to refuse to work on his own and he did. The steward said he would get in touch with Fred Copeman.

Soon after the steward was called into the office by a Mr. Welks and told that due to the uneconomical way the job was proceeding, he would have to make four men redundant including the steward. He said they would be given a week in lieu of notice and could leave that day, and supplied a note to that effect. The steward claimed that it was a false redundancy and Mr. Welks replied "you work for Allens and we don't want you anymore" The steward threw the note back at him and left the office.

On thursday 19 June our cards and F.45s and monies arrived together with a week in lieu, we then learnt that the improver had been sacked for refusing to work on his own.

WE CALL FOR UNION SUPPORT

On Monday 23 June the redundant shop steward returned to the Kingsnorth site and approached Bro. Hughie Barr the I.C.L. shop steward and President and executive Council member of the C.E.U., and asked for some advice and support. Over 600 members of the union were working on the I.C.L. contract at that time and it was Bro. Hughie Barr who had made the original complaint that some of us were out of compliance with our union dues.

Bro. Barr asked us what the rest of the members were doing who were left on the site. We told him that on our advice they were continuing to work on day work. Bro. Barr said that if they were not going to support you, how do you expect me to help. It was quite clear that Bro. Barr was not interested and so it was a waste of time arguing.

The steward Frank Cafrey reported this back to a meeting later that day with the recommendation that we continue to work on day work and we all agreed.

This continued for the next three days but we were warned that if we continued to refuse to work PRICE WORK we would not get paid for the work already done.

On wednesday the steward advised us that as there were no signs that the four men who were made redundant were going to be reemployed, and the fact that we might be all working for nothing, it would be better to go out on strike and close the contract down altogether. We all agreed. We also moved a vote of confidence in our shop steward Frank Cafrey.

THE C.E.U. ACTS BEHIND THE SCENE

On the next thursday we contacted Flexibility Fred Copeman and were surprised to hear Fred instruct us all to return to work including the four men who were redundant and the sacked improver. We asked what conditions we were returning under in relation to PRICE WORK.

Copeman advised us that there was a Federated meeting pending at which there would be four items discussed. 1. The sacked man. 2. The redundancy 3. The wages for the three days when we had worked day work and Allens refusal to pay us. 4. The PRICE WORK SYSTEM. On the basis of that we returned to work.

On 22 July the Federated meeting took place with Fred Copeman representing us. The redundancy and sacked man and wages issue were conveniently brushed aside. The whole meeting from 11a.m. till 4p.m. consisted of Copeman insisting that Price Work in this area was established as 25/- to 30/- per hour. The meeting finished in deadlock and Flexibility Fred Copeman suggested another meeting in 3 weeks time after his holidays ! As he left some of the men asked what they were supposed to do between now and the next three weeks if they refused to work Price Work and were either sacked or the management refused to pay them. Copeman replied that if he was us we should all jack the job or go on our holidays, on his advice one fitter left and three erectors took their holidays.

Three weeks passed during which time our earnings were not increased at all. The next Federated meeting was due to take place on the 11th August but we were unable to contact Fred Copeman and enquiries to Allens Engineer Fred Higgins told us that no Federated meeting had been arranged.

We held a meeting and decided to come out on strike again on that thursday. The next day the steward wrote to Fred Copeman asking for the strike to be made official. Fred Copeman agreed to recommend to Eddie Marsden the C.E.U. General Secretary that our strike be made official, but asked the shop steward to write to Eddie Marsden himself setting out the full details of the members complaints.

LETTER TO THE GENERAL SECRETARY

This consisted of a ten page report setting out the history of the job and the attitude of the employer and why we were out on strike. We pointed out that it was impossible to work a PRICE WORK SYSTEM under the prevailing conditions and to continue to attempt to do so was a contradiction of the C.E.U. rule book.

If Allens insisted on continuing with their PRICE WORK then we wanted the prices changed in order that we could earn ^{now} 25/- to 30/- per hour but a wage comparable with the rest of our members on the Kingsnorth site. (The average earnings with bonus would be 17/- per hour) If we could not earn this on price work, then we would insist that in future we worked strictly to the boiler structure code, which was the agreement we had signed on to.

Under this agreement we would insist on an hourly bonus system comparable with the rest of the site and with the same condition monies, with a properly manned job and with all the safety regulations observed as per the union rule book.

THE DOUBLE ACT AND CROSS

On Friday 22 August we held a meeting on the site, Bro. H. Barr came over and addressed us on behalf of the union as poor old Fred had gone down with flu, (in the middle of August !) Bro. Barr reported that Bro. Eddie Marsden had agreed to make the strike official but we were to return to work on the 25th August pending a statutory conference.

Bro. Barr also reported to us for the first time that this conference would incorporate negotiations on a dispute on another Allens contract at Fiddlers Ferry Power station.

On the 25th. August we returned to work as per the recommendation, the management still insisting that we work to their rotten price work system. The statutory conference took place on the 9th. September and the following day we received a message from Flexibility Fred Copeman by phone, Fred said "keep the flag flying, the statutory conference has ended in deadlock again but Bro. Eddie Marsden has agreed to meet Allens in an informal meeting in Manchester to discuss the disputes on both the Kingsnorth and Fiddlers Ferry sites."

The steward reported back to the members and we decided to withdraw our labour. We were still on strike when we heard that Eddie Marsden was meeting the management in Manchester on Friday 12 September. In the days that followed we received no report back from the union or communication, but we began to hear rumours that Eddie Marsden had been able to negotiate a 12/- an hour fall back rate but we heard nothing officially.

The strike continued until Thursday 2 October, when we met Copeman on the site and he and the steward went to a meeting with an Allens representative named McCulloch. When McCulloch was asked about the 12/- fall back rate he said he'd heard nothing about it, and it certainly didn't apply to the men on the Kingsnorth site because we were on strike when the negotiations had taken place, therefore our case was not discussed. Fred Copeman argued with McCulloch and finished up telephoning Bro. Eddie Marsden and the Federation chairman Jamieson who informed Mr. McCulloch that the 12/- fall back rate did apply to us. At this meeting McCulloch also agreed that the whole PRICE WORK SYSTEM would change and in future the steward Frank Cafrey would get full negotiating rights on all prices. On the basis of this we returned to work on 6 October.

WHAT PRICE NEGOTIATIONS

The following week we met McCulloch again. He apologised for the fact that he had not been able to revise the prices on a Wednesday but asked if we could give him until Monday to get things sorted out. But on the Monday 13th we heard that we would now have to wait for a Mr. Hudson to come down from head office as he was the rate fixer.

Mr. Hudson arrived on Wednesday 15 October and offered us exactly the same prices as we had been offered for the last 3 years. We explained this to him pointing out the conditions that existed on the site and the lack of tools and equipment also the fact that we could not even get oxo-acetylene gas or oxygen because Allens didn't pay their bills, but it was no use, he didn't seem to hear.

We are not sure what happened to the fall back rate that Bro. Eddie Marsden negotiated because our wages the following week worked out at 10/6 per hour and we went back on day work.

THE C.E.G.B. AND MARSDEN

The manager of the C.E.G.B. a Mr. Thornhill approached the steward Frank Cafrey and asked when he was likely to get his Ash Hopper erected on No.2 Boiler. Frank told him he would get his bloody boiler when Allens decided to pay us a reasonable wage.

Mr. Thornhill seemed interested in our complaints and said he would use his influence in seeing that another meeting was arranged and he'd see that we got a wage comparable with the rest of the site, so we agreed again to try and work to Allens Price Work System.

Some of us also decided to contact Bro. Eddie Marsden personally and hand him another eight page letter giving the full details of our grievances and the results of the negotiations that had taken place in Manchester. We heard that the Greenwich branch of the C.E.U. were having a social on 17 October and Eddie Marsden would be attending, so we went along and handed him the letter and he agreed to read it, but we don't know whether he did as his attention was drawn to one of the members wives who was doing some sort of cabaret in a Full Horse Riding Habit.

On 21 October the steward recieved a short letter from Eddie Marsden stating that he understood an amicable agreement had been reached on site. We were baffled. The only thing that we could think of to explain Eddie Marsdens misunderstanding was that somehow he had heard of the C.E.G.B. managers (Thornhill) promise to arrange another site meeting, but this seemed unlikely as it was only three days before when we handed him our letter. It seemed we were back to square one again.

FLEXIBILITY AND FRED

On the 4th of November a tractor driver who also drove the crane and normally did about three mens work anyway was informed by the management that unless he mucked in with the erectors he'd be stopped pay all the time his tractor was not working. We informed the management that as far as we were concerned under the Boiler Structure Code this man was in his rights to refuse to do erectors work. The management replied by informing us that he was off pay as from 10.30am. We said if he was off pay so were we. Attempts were made to contact Fred Copeman but he wasn't in and so we went home on a token one day strike.

We returned the next day and managed to contact Fred Copeman by telephone. When the steward explained the position to Fred, Fred said "of course the tractor driver does not have to do two jobs, he only does one let me speak to the foreman." Fred confirmed this with him and the steward left to report to a meeting with the members. It seemed at last we'd gained a victory, we were right for once. Twenty minutes later while the steward was still reporting back the foreman came in and told him Flexibility Fred Copeman would like to speak to him on the phone again.

Fred Copeman reported that there was yet another Federated meeting pending he then said "look the chairman Jamieson is not a bad fellow lets try and appease him by carrying on working normally. The steward told Fred that personally he wasn't as flexible as that and if Copeman wanted someone to do his dirty work he'd better come down on the site and do it himself.

ALLENS GET DEMORALISED WITH FEDERATED MEETINGS.

The Federation meeting took place on 11 November and consisted of another day of Fred Copeman insisting on 25/- to 30/- per hour and the management saying no and refusing to make any offers so the meeting ended in deadlock.

The steward was reporting back to the members on Wednesday 12 Nov. when the Engineer came into the hut and said he would never attend another Federated meeting again as they were a complete waste of time. He then offered to pay us 2/- an hour over anything we earned on Allens Price Work System.

The steward told him to stick it, pointing out that we did not want charity, all we wanted was a proper price work system where we could earn money and know what we were earning, The Engineer stormed out of the hut vowing that this was his last offer. It is surprising really that this offer could be made at all by the Engineer on Kingsnorth, when Allens could not make a single offer at the Federated meeting the day before.

We carried on the same for another week. On Tuesday 18 November a Mr. Martin appeared on the site and seemed to be busy running backwards and forwards between the C.E.G.B. officers and Allens. We didn't find out what he was doing but we learnt that he was the owner of Allens.

FRED REALLY IS FLEXIBLE.

Fred Copeman appeared on the site the day after completely unsolicited by us. The steward Frank Cafrey was called into the office and Fred Copeman proceeded to condemn the actions of the men for refusing to work to Allens promisory PRICE WORK SYSTEM, and threatened that if we didn't work to it, there was plenty of C.E.U. men out of work who would be only too willing to have the jobs. This was in front of Allens Engineer and Mr. Martin.

We discussed this at a meeting later and we decided that as we had been getting no support at all from the union, and now Flexibility Fred Copeman was coming out openly on the side of the management we would have to make some compromises at least until after Christmas. For the next three days we worked to their Prices and it was during this time we completed the Ash Hopper that Mr. Thornhill had promised a decent wage for, and sure enough we were paid 16/- per hour for those three days.

NEW PRICES OLD TACTICS

On the following Monday we started the new prices; out of that week one gang did 16 hours price work out of 40. The rest of the time was spent waiting for scaffolding and other management holdups. Another gang was held up for a whole week from non-access. We were all paid for the time worked on basic rates, the 12/- fall back rate we learnt no longer existed.

Having exhausted the whole procedure of the management agreement, and the procedure of the C.E.U. without any results we decided to take our organiser, Flexibility Fred Copeman to take through the Gravesend branch. At a meeting in December the branch discussed the Allens dispute in full and denounced the Allens PRICE WORK SYSTEM as being detrimental to the best interests of the union, and it was decided to discuss the matter at the next A.G.M. when Bro. Copeman would be there.

ANYONE FOR TENNIS

The A.G.M. came around and all members of the branch supported the idea of discussing the Allens dispute in detail, but Flexibility Fred Copeman proved how flexible he is again, he refused to comment on his non-support of the past year and all he could say was that there would be a shut down on Allens immediately after the Christmas holidays and then the ball would be ⁱⁿ our court as he put it, we could hold the firm to ransom. He repeated this several times that the ball "is now in your court". (Perhaps this is what was wrong, we had been fighting for a living for the past 3½ years while Fred Copeman in a well paid organisers job saw it all as a game of tennis.)

SACKED STOPS PAY AND PLAY

We returned to work on 5 January 1970 and the ball was in our court until 18 February and then out of the blue we were called into the office and each handed a letter which no one has yet been able to read or understand, including the Ministry of Labour. We asked the Engineer what it meant, was we sacked, redundant, or was the job shut down, he just kept repeating, read the letter.

Three days later on a Friday we heard two men had been recalled. From the grapevine we heard the job was opening up again pending another Federated meeting.

We all returned to work. The meeting took place on 18 March 1970 and once again it reached deadlock due to the federated men being affected by the flu?

Most of the men have become completely demoralised and the stewards have since left the job altogether. For most of us this was our first introduction to organised trade union struggle and we've learnt a lot.

It is not just a question of paying union dues as we were led to believe, in fact perhaps we would be better off not paying them because they only go to pay the officials such as Fred Copeman and Eddie Marsden who have done nothing practical to help us at all, in fact all that Fred Copeman ^{did} when he appeared to be on our side was to confuse the whole issue, when he wasn't doing that, he was openly supporting the management.

We also learnt that Bro. Hughie Barrs seeming concern over our welfare was pretty empty, for he was the steward of International Combustion Ltd. with over 600 men, and had he been really concerned their support would have been invaluable and could have achieved what the six federated meetings failed to.

Our biggest mistake was to place faith in the people who claim to represent us, its too late now on this site, but in future when faced with this situation again we should as members of the working class employed by a small contractor go direct to the workers of the main contractor and demand support, by-pass the officials and Hughie Barr if necessary.

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DARTS FOREMAN

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AND PAMPHLETS