

Employment of Disabled Persons

A look at Remploy Ltd



Anarchist Syndicalist Alliance

REMPLOY LIMITED

Remploy: that's the place that employs the disabled.

That is all that many people know of this organisation; indeed, it was all that I knew until one evening when a fellow union member came down to the branch and told us just how bad it is to work there. Some of the things that he told us that evening shocked even some of the hardened members, and this article is the result of over a years investigation into Remploy. It is by no means complete. Doubtless, if one really got down into the gutter with the people responsible, one would get a much clearer picture.

This kind of article proves that it is worthwhile to really dig about in the dirt, even over a firm such as Remploy, which at face value has such a good reputation, as it apparently serves a worthwhile service to a section of the community who otherwise would be without employment and all the advantages that is supposed to bring.

So, on with the facts.

Remploy Ltd., - formerly the Disabled Persons Employment Corporation Ltd., (1945-48), and first registered on 7th April 1945 - was formed as a result of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act, 1944, and exists to provide productive employment for persons too severely disabled to work under ordinary industrial conditions. The company is Government sponsored and there are 87 factories in various parts of England, Scotland and Wales. The products turned out by the company are:-

- (A) clothing, leather & allied products
- (B) furniture
- (C) metal products and engineering
- (D) packaging and bookbinding

WHO FINANCES REMPLOY ?

Remploy receives an annual Government grant to cover the companies operating costs. This grant is currently running at the rate of approximately £5 millions, and should, according

to the Board Chairman, Arthur L. Stuchbery in the 1971 report, "be regarded as the cost of providing an essential social service." In addition, the Government makes an annual grant towards capital expenditure. Again from the Chairman's 1971 report: "The company is unlikely ever to be fully self-supporting. The main reasons are:- the output of its disabled employees is less than that of fit workers, the number and location of the factories are determined by the needs of the disabled rather than by normal economic considerations; the type of work is selected for its suitability for disabled workers rather than for its profitability. Remploy does not sell on sentiment but on quality and price, the latter being based on manufacturing costs in normal industry." Which is more than can be said for the wages, which we'll come to later. Compare this heart-rending slop with a report from the Acton Gazette of 22nd April, 1971. Commenting on a complaint by an employee about the wages and conditions at Remploy in general, and the Acton factory in particular, a company spokesman's short answer was; "Anything is an improvement for these people: they would never get a job elsewhere. There is a limit to what we can pay out." He added that the reason for the lower rate of pay was that a disabled output was 30 - 40% that of a fit person, when Remploy was paying somewhere between 75 and 80% of basic wage rates. Finally; "Many of our workers would be virtually un-employable in any other industries; they are just not up to commercial production standards." When one looks at the rates of pay, one can easily see that they are nowhere near what he says; when one looks at the bonus, merit, and proficiency schemes at Remploy, one can easily see that the output is far higher than 30 - 40%; added to this, 200 workers a year go from Remploy to open industry, probably for an easier time.

HOW MUCH DO REMPLOY MAKE ?

In the year ending March 31st, 1971, sales had increased by 20.5% over the previous year to a record £11,266,000; according to the Chairman, this was reduced by inflation to only 11.75%. Mr S said in his report, "With our main task of employing as many of the severely disabled as possible it is also our policy to improve their standard of living whenever possible. It therefore gives me some satisfaction to report that over the last eight years earnings have risen by 68% whereas the retail price index has risen only by 40%." Some satisfaction. We all know that 68% of nothing equals nothing.

He further added: "Due to wage awards there was an excess of expenditure over income of £5,417,000 compared with £5,060,000

for the previous year." Considering that the wage bill per annum is a little over £5m what happened to the £10.27m sales, the £5m annual Government grant, the unknown amount of the annual capital expenditure grant: what happens to all this money to enable the company to record a loss of £5.5m? I should say it is obvious where this money goes, straight back into the treasury. Remploy Limited being no more than a means for the Government to hand over vast sums of public money to the private sector and a way of supplying this same sector with a cheap labour force thus further increasing their profits. Stuchbery also said that if Remploy did not exist think of the extra burden on the social security benefits, this saving, he said, together with income tax payments national insurance payments, purchase tax etc. etc. contributed by the Remploy workers in his estimation totalled £4.7m per annum: low and behold just about what the wage bill comes to, well how about that? This means that the Government are paying no extra for this labour force, they're doing no one except themselves and private industry any favours by keeping Remploy going: the employees like so many others are going to work 40 hours a week to earn a few coppers. they couldn't get nearly as much by being on the dole.

WHO WORKS AT REMPLOY?

At the end of March 1971 there were 7,629 people working - or should we say slaving? - at Remploy, 23% of these being ex-servicemen, 15% are women, and 90% of all productive workers are severely disabled. Since 1946 Remploy has employed over 29,000 people. The kind of people who work are:- amputees sufferers of paralyses, heart and chest diseases, epilepsy, nervous and mental illnesses. Wages and other conditions agreed with unions. Part time medical officers assist Remploy works managers in assessing the work capabilities and functional limitations of potential employees. (All under this heading is taken from the official leaflet)

HOW MUCH ARE THE WORKERS PAID AND HOW?

The total wage bill at the end of March 1971 for the preceding year came to just over £5m. The basic hourly rate for men over 21 is 36.9p and for women over 21 it is 29.1p. It is down lower for those under 21. Management-Union agreements state that: - "The minimum rate of pay after six months service shall not be less than £15.00 for men and £11.92 for women." Simple maths will show that the multiplication of 36.9p by 40hrs does not equal £15.00. By adding 1p to the

rate per hour, the required minimum is nearly reached. However they have no intention of giving away this vast sum of money without a little extra effort, even though the agreement states it must be paid anyway. To fool the workers into thinking that they have to earn this amount the Merit Rate Scheme was introduced. "A merit rate of either $\frac{1}{2}$, 1, or $1\frac{1}{2}$ pence will be added to one's rate of pay after three months' service. In order to assess one's merit rate points are awarded for the following:- timekeeping, attendance, behaviour, co-operativeness, ability to work without supervision, versatility (ability and willingness to do any job) and performance. In order to achieve the full $1\frac{1}{2}$ p per hour one has to comply reasonably with all these and work at or above a 41 minute hour." To add the final amount, i.e. 1p for men and 2p for women (per hour) which is needed to bring the wage to the required minimum, the employee is once again fooled into thinking that this must be earned, this time by means of the 'Proficiency rate'. "A proficiency rate will be paid for average performance over each six-monthly period, and like merit rate, be added to the basic minimum rate to produce a basic rate payable for six months. The proficiency rate ranges from 1p at a 22 minute hour to 3p at an 80 minute hour." I hope you haven't forgotten that the employees are disabled and, according to an official Remploy handbook, "incapable of work under normal industrial conditions." One thing that can be said is that these conditions are not normal industrial ones; more and more workers are telling the boss where to poke his stopwatch, and in a few cases have even given free demonstrations. Is this what the unions and management mean when they say; "suitable for employment only under special conditions" ?* Remploy, equipped with a labour force of this nature, taken from a section of the community less able to defend themselves than most employees, are systematically exploiting this same section with the willing assistance of the unions; and for what reason? - why, profit of course. To force any disabled person to work on productivity schemes and the like, highlights the cruelty, the means that capitalism will use to make a profit, and the contempt in which they hold all those who are forced to show willing to be their slaves.

WHICH TRADE UNIONS NEGOTIATE WITH REMPLOY ?

Eight unions are a party to the Remploy agreement. They are:- General and Municipal Workers Union, Transport and General Workers Union, National Union of Leather Workers, Society of Graphical and Allied Trades, National Union of Hosiery Workers, Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, Electrical Trades Union, and finally, the National Union of Furniture Trade Operatives. When questioned about

* From Official Remploy Handbook.

the low rate of pay and the bonus schemes in force at Remploy, things which they are as much responsible for as the management, some trade union officials defend them while others say "We had no choice in the matter, it's all the fault of the other unions"; while others come up with a mixture of both. Of course someone must be the original 'evil brain', but until society is changed we'll continue to be plagued with representatives only too willing to sell the labour of those they represent for any figure that management pull out of the hat.

One official trade union attitude on the Remploy agreement was aired at an ETU branch meeting last autumn, when the local Area Secretary G. Tilbury was summoned to the branch to explain why the union was a party to such deals. After putting off the meeting twice he at last turned up, he then proceeded to tell those present how good it is to work at Remploy, how pleased the union were to have negotiated such a marvelous deal etc. etc. Unfortunately for him there were quite a few members at the meeting who work at Remploy. Before he had got very far with his story they told him what they thought of him, the union, and the deal they had had foisted off on them. Tilbury then did the usual trade union official acrobatics, and attempted to blame the other unions for all the bad parts, and no amount of arguing could get an admission of guilt out of him. A mere baiting of officialdom in this manner is a joke for those handing out the stick, but nothing is really changed; the Remploy agreement certainly wasn't. More than a change of officials is required before the lot of the severely disabled will be bettered, attitudes and outlooks, let alone society must first make radical changes. Until this happens, this section of the community will still be regarded by half of society with pity and cold indifference, and by the other half as easy prey for exploitation; until they are regarded as people and treated as such their lives will little change.

* * * * *

APPENDIX.

It was decided to add these extra details as an appendix so as not to clutter the main article too much.

REMPLOY WORK UNITS.

These come under the division of Remploy's Packaging and Bookbinding Group. These units spread over the country in places like Bristol, Barking, Birmingham, Tonyrefail, Newcastle, and Acton are what the heading says, packaging depts.. Work is on

a strictly commercial basis for such jobs as check, clean, sterilise, repack and generally refurbish some 15,000 individual plug in stereo headsets a week for firms like BOAC & PAN-AM. Other types of work undertaken by the works units are:- the assembly of sturmev archer gear triggers for Raleigh Cycles, handling, assembly and packaging of accessories for the midlands motor trade, fuse wire carding for the nationalised electricity boards, and finally, an order placed in May last year by IPC Magazines Ltd for the printing, winding and packing of 160,000 special fuse wire cards for distribution with 'Homemaker' magazine. Now perhaps a word from Mr. J C W Wright, who from his office in Cricklewood -Remploy HQ- manages six such units. " When you take advantage of the Work Unit service," he says, " You have firstly an efficient, reliable labour force combining full-time factory personnel and out-workers -which ensures a good competitive, commercial standard of work- and secondly, by moving work onto the Remploy organization in this way, the customer frees valuable floor space." So much for chairman Stuchbery's crocodile-tears about wanting to employ as many of the severely disabled as possible for their own benefit, we can now see why he wants to do this, to increase the size of his work units to give an even more reliable service to industry. " Our service gives a quick turn round with good quality and that's what brings the majority of our customers back to us time and time again," is how one of Remploy's Work Unit organizers explains the success of this expanding group. This explains the reason for the bonus schemes and all the other methods of job speed-up in use at Remploy, to enable the management to squeeze the utmost out of what they regard to be a second-rate labour force.

REMPLOY OUT WORKERS.

Another interesting aspect of Remploy comes to light in connection with the work units, that is their employment of out workers. Taking work into someones home has been going on for years, but the industrial revolution virtually put paid to this method of production. Remploy in a bid to get a profit anywhere, and by any means are expanding this method of production. Work, such as some just mentioned, is delivered to the doorstep by van and is picked up again when completed. So if you're too sick or disabled to go to the exploitation, they'll bring it to you, complete with stop watch and bonus scheme. Nothing, unfortunately, is known about the rates of pay for out workers or the number of hours per week they work on an average, or in fact how many there are. We were going to include a list of some of the firms who use the latter two systems, but we decided against this as it would take up too much space and would only give them free ads'. Any one who is interested can have a copy of this list by writing to us.

The next article in the appendix, sections out of a management directive in case of strikes in Public Transport- we include without comment, it doesn't need any.

TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENT IN THE EVENT OF STRIKES IN PUBLIC SERVICE TRANSPORT.

2/ In the event of a strike all members of the staff will be expected to reach their normal place of work without additional expense to the company. Able-bodied members of the staff and disabled employees who are able to make the effort, living within a reasonable distance of their place of work, will be expected to walk if necessary. In normal circumstances a reasonable distance for a fit person to walk would be considered to be about four miles.

7/ In order to minimize the effects of the strike the Works Managers and Heads of Departments may vary the working hours of members of the staff by staggering hours to suit individual circumstances and working requirements. In doing so, they should endeavour to achieve an average working day of not less than 7 hours.

8/ Apart from the arrangements mentioned above, no special provision can be made for transporting disabled employees to work at Remploy factories. It must, however, be made known to disabled employees and industrial staff paid by the hour, that the company will be unable to pay their wages should they be unable to get to work as a result of the strike. Works Managers may, however, at their discretion, where they consider the circumstances warrant it, pay for limited periods of time lost by the employees who do get to work but arrive late.

SICK PAY.

If you've worked at Remploy for less than a year you don't get any, if you've worked there for ten years you get four weeks money. You'd almost think they'd realized that the longer you've worked there the more likely you are to be sick! Many of the employees at Remploy are continually on and off the sick, so this miserable allowance doesn't mean much anyway, even if you have been unlucky enough to have been there ten years.

We do hope that this pamphlet has been of some interest to the reader. During the course of our investigation into Remploy many little details came to light to make the completed picture a very gloomy one for those who work there. Unfortunately space and money have stopped us from including everything we would have liked to, and we hope that it has assisted in dispelling some of the illusions about Remploy Limited, thus showing the firm in its true light; a public-owned sweat shop organization.



Published by the Anarchist
Syndicalist Alliance.

Many thanks to the nameless
Remploy workers who supplied
nearly all the facts.

ERRATUM:- Page 3, first para', last line, couldn't should
be could.

This pamphlet and other ASA pamphlets available from:-

Matt Cunningham, OR 107 St Paul's Road,
9 Briar Hill Avé., Jarrow,
Little Hulton, Lancs.. Co Durham.

Latest ASA pamphlet:- The Story Of A Proletarian Life,
by Bartolomeo Vanzetti. 7½p.

"BLACK AND RED OUTLOOK" for Industrial Unionism.

Published by the Anarchist Syndicalist Alliance.

All orders from:- Ann Portus,
116 Gilda Brook Rd.,
Eccles, Lancs..
