

solidarity

north west

vol2 no1 6d

carrington chaos....

On November 9th engineering craftsmen returned to work after a bitter 15 week strike. They had gone out to back up their demand for a 25% pay increase with no strings. They came back to an increase of 10d an hour with the promise of a further 6d provided "meaningful" negotiations on productivity begin.

This is only the latest in a number of phyrrie victories on the massive Shell Chemical site at Carrington.

This site was once renowned as the best organised in the Manchester area, but recent events have shown serious flaws in the state of organisation. For a start the men are split into four completely separate organisations. There are the Shell chemical operators, the Shell maintenance engineers, the mechanical contractors (steel erectors, electricians, etc.) and the civil contractors (buiding workers).

The chemical operators are mainly T.G.W.U. members, and under the guidance of a very reactionary convenor they recently accepted a productivity deal which is so loaded in the employers favour that the convenor may yet end up as a knight for his "services to industry".

The maintenance craftsmen are a much more militant and better organised bunch. Prior to the recent strike they had achieved over a long period a higher than average pay packet coupled with a very high standard of working conditions.

The failure of the recent strike can be mainly attributed to the fact that their fellow workers on the operating side gave them no support and even continued to operate plant which was being serviced by scabs from Shell's offices. In fact these scabs must have cost the firm a fortune. On many occasions during the strike the contractors' men on site got a great deal of pleasure

from watching these clowns (mostly office bound engineers with all kinds of degrees) struggling to perform single jobs. For instance four men took three hours to fix one steel purlin, a ten minute job for two skilled erectors.

Nor was any real support forthcoming from the contractors men, though in fairness the mechanical side had only returned part way through the Shell strike from a ten week dispute of their own.

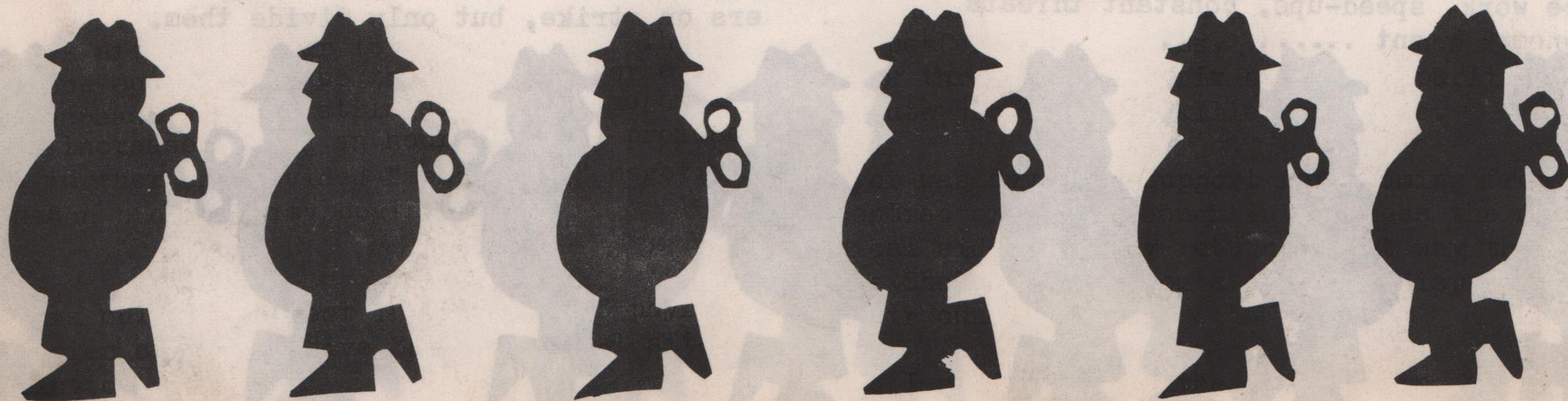
As I said earlier the cpntractors, who are responsible for new construction work and some maintenance, are split in two. The building workers have made several attempts to link up with the mechanical side, but have been rebuffed every time. Many reasons have been given for these knockbacks, but there is no doubt that sheer old fashioned craft snobbery plays a part in it.

So Shell's management sits back a laugh while the men are so hopelessly divided that they have not a cat in hell's chance of making any real gains. If only the four sections came together and worked with each other then there would be a real opportunity to take on the Shell Empire with some chance of making them have it, but until this happens the bosses are in clover.

What Carrington needs is some real Solidarity.

Those who take the meat from the table
Teach contentment.
Those for whom the taxes are destined
Demand sacrifice.
Those who eat their fill
Speak to the hungry
Of wonderful times to come.
Those who lead the country into the abyss
Call ruling too difficult
For ordinary men.

Bertolt Brecht.



fighting against work !!

- 25/8 The workers go on strike.
- 26/8 Agreement between the employers and the unions - a small increase in wages is agreed.
- 27/8 The Rank and File go on with the strike.
- 28/8 The strike spreads to other factories.
- 30/8 The rank and file committee is created. A new agreement between the employers and unions results in a substantially increased offer.
- 31/8 The rank and file go on with the strike. Even the union stewards disagree with the officials.
- 2/9 Demonstrations against the union leaders.
- 8/9 Left political leaders (Communist Party and others) come and advise the workers to be "realistic".
- 15/9 Finally the last offer is accepted by the workers, only a few now want to go on.

Where did this happen? In St. Helens? Or was it Port Talbot, or Le Mans (France),

Portomarghera (Italy), Kiruna (Sweden), Amsterdam (Netherlands), Geneva (Switzerland) or Detroit (U.S.A.)?

Actually it was in the Netherlands this summer, and involved 150,000 workers in a fight against the four biggest companies in the country, (AKZO, Philips, Unilever and Shell) but it could be anywhere and any time in a modern industrial country.

It is now a fact that during the last three years a new wave of workers' offensives has been felt in every single country round the world. Contrary to the view that the press presents of Britain as the sole strike prone country, this is now a world wide movement. And that is the characteristic which makes the present workers' offensive new in history. It is also new because it comes spontaneously, it erupts from the shop floor, expressing the strong will of the workers to fight. A strike called by a union is becoming increasingly rare. As a result, and this is the third point, the strike appears to be fought at the same time against the employers and against the unions. A fourth point is that recent strikes can be seen as a direct attack against work itself, that is against the conditions imposed on the workers by the industrial rulers; shifts, productivity rates, hierarchies, wage differentials, piece work, speed-ups, constant threats of unemployment

Strikes are decided on because .. the workers feel the workshop is too cold, or too hot, because they want a tea break at 11 o'clock..... the reasons are often apparently trivial. But the real reason is that the workers are pig-sick of their monotonous, repetitious, boring jobs, over which they have no control, and leave them only two days a week for being ALIVE. So it is not really surprising that strikes are now spreading around the industrial world.

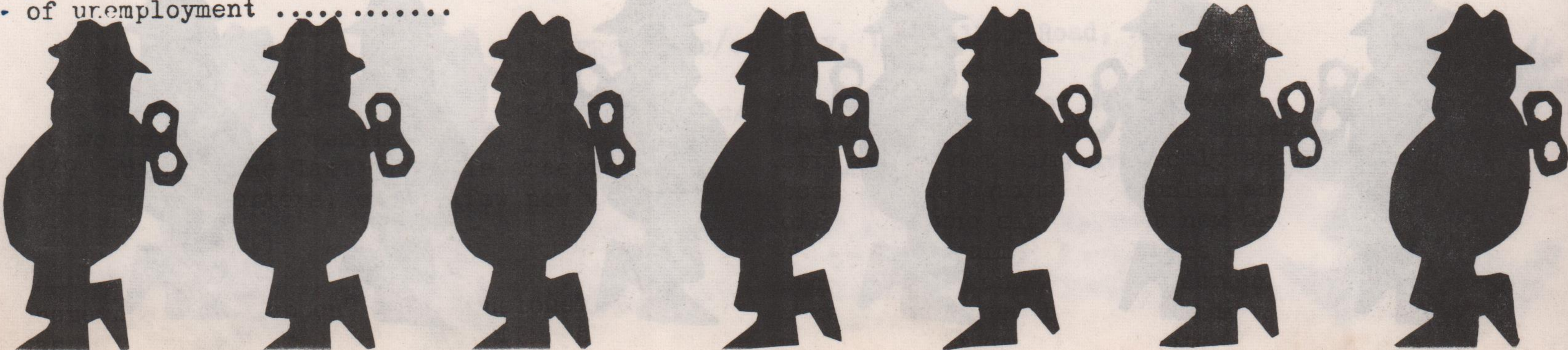
sweden workers v trade unions.

In Gothenberg floor and tile fixers went on strike on 14th September against a wage cut of between 20% and 50%, following a new piece work agreement between the employers and the trade unions. The strike was not aimed directly against the bosses, but against the union and the officials who signed that new agreement. at the same time the workers of Svenska Incopal went on strike to dencunce the agreement signed by their union, which means higher production rates. They want an hourly wage of 18SKr (about 30/-) with no relation whatsoever to individual productivity. (..... and for those who still believe in the Swedish paradise it should be remembered that the production rythms in the Volvo car factories are the most intense in the world.

holland the biggest strike since the war

About 150,000 workers were involved in the struggles last August and September, the most important of which (the Rotterdam dockers) lasted for 19 days. This one was unofficial, except for the first two days, the others being more or less supported, or tolerated, by the unions. As a top union leader said ; "Many employers criticise us, but perhaps by our wage claim of 400 Guilders (more than £40) we have prevented complete chaos in the country." By chaos he means of course a general workers' movement like the one in May 1968 in France or in Autumn 1969 in Italy.)

The result of the strike was a rise of 25 guilders a week (over £2/10) and a strong feeling of solidarity amongst the rank and file, who are now aware of the disciplinary role of trade unions, and of the fact that political outsiders don't really help workers on strike, but only divide them.



switzerland

immigrants against trade unions.

200 Spanish building workers went on strike in Geneva. Their demands are, among others, better lodging conditions (not barracks with two showers for 80 men, where lights are cut off at 10.30 p.m.) and travelling time to and from work to be included in work-time. The unions try everything they can to keep the "good" reputation the country enjoys in industrial relations. As they cannot control the Spanish workers, they blame "their lack of democratic education". This struggle was very important, since workers' autonomy has been blocked in Switzerland for a long time, because of the power of the trade-unions. The class solidarity shown by the Swiss workers is the first sign of a general workers' offensive against the traditional "social peace" in the country.

italy

more money and less work at once.

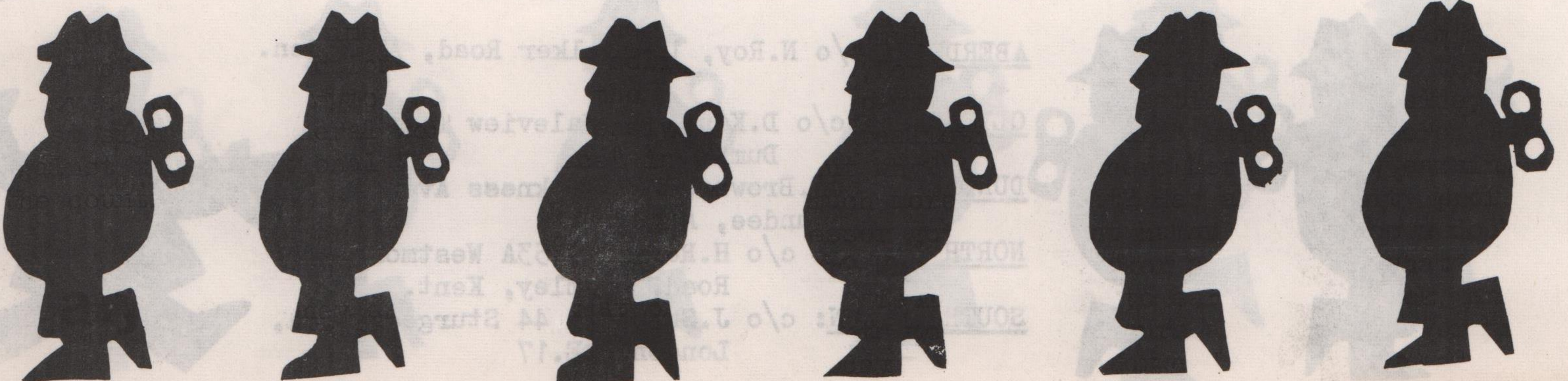
From September 1969 to April 1970 Italy has been the hottest point of the European workers' struggle against work. The workers started by demanding large increases in the basic wage, not in incentives. They demanded this for everyone, and at once. This would be the first step towards the breaking down of gradings and categories as one of the bosses instruments of division and blackmail. They no longer wanted to listen to the union's talk about new categories, or partial moves from one category to another. They decided on a reduction of the working week to 40 hours (36 for shift workers), a reduction that was not to be spread out over a period of time. They rejected any further discussion of overtime regulations, or the shop steward as a controller of the production pace fixed by the employers. During the struggles they also demanded total equality with white collar workers, right the way through from social insurance to vacations. NOW they are starting to ask for payment by the month, and an end to hourly pay tied to productivity according to the bosses interests. It is with these aims that the Fiat workers are preparing to fight not for new contracts, but against the contracts of the employers and the unions, against the 3 year paralysis of the struggle that the employers and the unions attempt to impose.

In fact this offensive against the economic plan of Capital took the traditional form of strikes ... in a most traditional manner; on the question of wages. Nevertheless by their very nature current strikes are strikes AGAINST wages, strikes against work as just something else to be bought and sold, strikes against a situation where a human being is judged only insofar as he (or she) possesses a physical or mental work ability which they can sell.

It is a complete rejection of wage labour, indeed, when workers demand wages according to their specific needs and not following the agreements so "realistically" bargained by employers and unions. Like the claim for £60 for a 20 hour-week put forward by the shop-stewards organisation in Merseyside; "unrealistic", "absurd" said the papers, but why? Aren't others here and now earning much more than that? Has a University professor got different human needs from a dock-er? Why can't a worker ask exactly what he feels he needs to earn (£60 a week) and wants to work (20 hours a week)? The workers today are putting forward their own needs, and not the needs the unions have assumed "on their behalf", or the political needs some political groups also assume always "on behalf of the workers."

The workers today, all over the industrial world, demand more money and less work, for everyone - independently of qualification and productivity. When the Italian workers asked for equal wages for everyone, they were rejecting the role of work as wage-differentials, rejecting the divisions between skilled and unskilled workers, between different industries, between different regions, even between different countries, and equally between "more efficient" and "less efficient" workers. They were fighting to be recognised as something more than just human machines, assessed according to their "output"; Workers are fighting to show that they're human beings who should be assessed according to their human needs, which are roughly the same for everyone, namely a happy life, with more free time and less drudgery at work.

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barberism - - - - -

According to the SUNDAY TIMES (1st Nov)
the extra costs provoked by the new
Budget are estimated at £42 a year
for a family with two children of
school age. Thanks to the cuts in
income tax the net effect of the
new Budget is;
for a family with around £3,000 a
year -- NO CHANGE.
for a family at the £10,000 a year
mark, --- a clear gain of £150.
for a family on £832 (£16 a week)
-- a net LOSS of £36.3s.

Barber's 6% cut in income tax gave
a 28% increase in wages to six of
Britain's top paid managers:
their net increase in a year will
be;

John Davies... Rank Org.....£1,200
Lord Stokes...Brit.Leyland..£1,000
Peter Allen....I.C.I.....£1,400
John Clark.....Plessey.....£1,600
David Barran...Shell.....£1,700
Eric Drake.....B.P.....£1,200

Hope they'll be left with enough to
pay the dentist, the school meals
and the milk!

- - - - -and priorities

The Concorde supersonic airliner is
being produced at an estimated cost
of £700 million, to be shared between
France and Britain. The main benefit
from this plane is that it will make
the Atlantic crossing some two hours
quicker.

Can you afford to travel in it?
Had the British share (£350 million)
been invested sensibly in this country
it would have been enough to :-

- COMPLETELY REHOUSE THE CITY OF
GLASGOW.
- REPLACE EVERY SLUM SCHOOL IN LONDON
WITH THE BEST POSSIBLE SCHOOL BUILD-
INGS.
- WHOLLY REFURBISH THE HEALTH SERVICE
WITH AN ARRAY OF NEW HOSPITALS WITH
THE MOST MODERN EQUIPMENT.



Lord Aldington is chairman of the
General Electric and English Elec-
tric Companies. His pay has risen
from £10,000 a year in 1968 to
19,000 in 1969, rising again in
1970 to £40,000 a year.
The average pay of the 206,000
G.E.&EE Co. employees in the U.K.
in 1970 was £1,135. At this rate
they will have to work for another
35 years to earn what Lord Aldington
did last year. To catch him up they
will need to have their pay quadrupled
every two years!

The Union wanted 15% (The men certainly more).
The employers offered 7%. An arbitrator sugges-
ted 12%, which the union officials accepted but
the employers refused. Unofficial strikes promp-
tly broke out; even unorganised women workers
came out. Union members then voted 92% in favour
of an official strike - and last week, a few
days after the strike vote, the employers gave
12.2% with some fringe benefits. This week
union members vote on the offer, and it's by no
means certain they will accept.

Such has been the course of events in the
engineering industry of the German province of
Baden-Wurtenburg in the past few weeks.

During the first nine months of 1970
more than 7 million days were taken
by 1½ million workers in strikes.
This amounts to, on average, an extra
weeks holiday for British workers, who
have the shortest holidays in Europe.

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