

BIG FLAME

merseyside's rank and file paper

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GIRLING

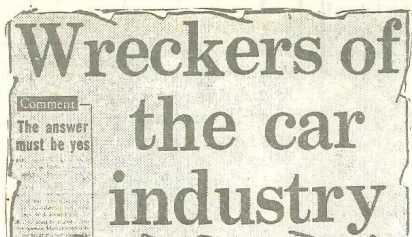
locked out sold out

Girling workers have gone back to work. And wages at the Bromborough disc-brake factory remain the lowest in Merseyside car industry.

The month-long stand was brought to an end by the combined intervention of employers, the Tory press and local engineering union officials. The trouble began when machine operators were locked out for refusing to work on jobs on which no mutually agreed price had been fixed.

to keep a family on Girling wage packets. They should have talked about the real trouble-makers at Girling's - Management. But the Mail and the bosses have this in common - they're both out to smash the unions.

Put Girling workers also had to reckon with union officials. Right from the start these men tried to find a compromise solution instead of



Although the fight was about a long-standing AEF policy the officials did their best to help out management. But where the employers might have failed, the press succeeded. The lock-out finished at the end of a week which saw a press build-up of scare stories. The Daily Post rushed in with a report about the 'maoists' at Bromborough, compared with whom Communists were gentlemen. But the Daily Mail outdid this with a front page leading headline, screaming 'Wreckers of the car industry'. Instead of hysterical lies about red plotters, they should have explained how

sticking to their own union's policy. On two occasions the men were advised to go back on conditions worse than before the lock-out began. But they wouldn't. Things were getting out of hand for the officials. Next step: officials met the bosses without the knowledge of the stewards. The peace deal the stewards heard about later was: 25/- for a return to normality. In other words, working on unrated jobs at prices imposed by the bosses. The officials had paved the way for

cont. p4

BUS SCANDAL

Liverpool bus fares all go up 3d this week. Coming at the same time as news of rent rises on corporation estates, the increase has been greeted by the groans of passengers and busmen.

Vicious circle

We are fed up with the dreary old vicious circle - bus fares go up, people travel by car instead, fewer passengers use the buses, and fares are raised again in a vain attempt to make a profit.

This cannot go on. If you miss a bus now in many areas you can wait up to half an hour for another - no joke in the sort of weather we've had recently.

Fares Up Wages Down Services Cut



Let's face it - few councillors are without a car, Labour or Tory. They don't give a damn about buses - except in the week before the Municipal Elections. Buses are now controlled directly by Merseyside's Passenger Transport Authority. The only difference with the old system, for the people who work on it and use it, is that councillors now find it all the easier to pass the buck.

Bus wages

Most ironic of all is that as fares go up the busmen's wages are going down. Overtime is being drastically cut.

A married driver told me: 'I usually take home £18, and that's for a long week, this will cut my pay to about £15.' Crews complain that their union leaders are keeping them in the dark.

Boycott

When Crosville recently tried to raise fares, a buscrew told me, a boycott was placed on the increase by crews who went on collecting the old fares for weeks. A similar boycott on Merseyside could force the P.T.A. to take notice of the public.

The only sensible policy is this: keep the fares down and make transport free.

HOUSING SHORTAGE

According to statistics there are 12,000 people on the housing register in Liverpool, 33,000 slums to be cleared by 1972, and a further 10,000 unfit houses without basic amenities and yet the rate of building last year went down.

Why?

At the present rate plus the fact that 2,300 houses have to be relet each year, there will—according to the Corporation—be a surplus in 10-15 years time. So fewer and fewer houses are being built.

How do they reach these conclusions? What about the 20,000 substandard council houses built in the 1920's, which in 15 years will be slums unless money is spent now to bring them up to a tolerable standard. At the rate the corpy are farming out people to the outskirts, a surplus may well arise in the city centre as fewer people remain.



It's all very well for the planners to tell us that there will be a housing surplus, but that is no consolation to the thousands still living in places unfit for human beings, - to the families sleeping six to a room, or to those hundreds who have been waiting ten years or more.

How can the planners possibly justify a slowing down in the building programme while thousands are still waiting for a decent place to live?

Chronic housing conditions do exist in this city and will continue to exist while the council gives priority to new roads, flyovers and prestige buildings, while at every election all parties continue their boasts about record housing figures. We have learned by bitter experience that these targets are never reached, and never will be reached unless action is taken on a national scale to make those in authority understand that people come before profits.

WHERE THE RENTS



The 1969 housing figures showed a slump to 366,793 new homes for the year - the lowest number built since 1963, and 46,922 down on the 1968 figure. At the same time rents are rising with monotonous regularity.

If we are getting fewer houses, then how is it that we are having to pay more for them?

The usual excuse, of course, is that both material costs and wages are rising. Little is said of the money-lenders behind council house building, who reap in the profits. The money to finance local authority building is borrowed and paid back with interest over 60 years. So if £4,000 is borrowed at the current interest rates, the ultimate total cost will be £21,182, of which £17,182 is interest.

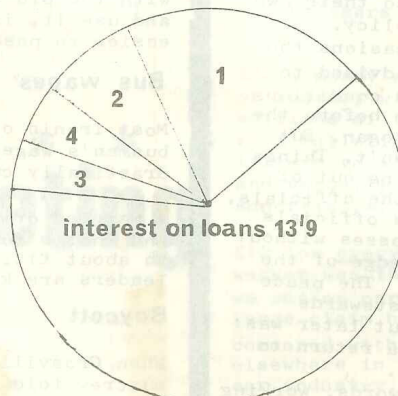
While government subsidies reduce the burden to some extent, the fact remains that over two thirds of your council rent is taken up in repaying interest on loans to the money-lenders.

It is in this way that the 'City Gnomes' can build their palaces on the backs of the workers!



Birkenhead Rents

HOW EVERY £ IS SPENT



- 1 repairs fund 3/2
- 2 loan repayment 1/5
- 3 other expenses 11d
- 4 management 9d

Liverpool

biased but p

The liverpool echo has a vast readership among the working class on merseyside.

It rewards them either by ignoring their daily lives or by kicking them in the guts whenever sides can be taken in a strike.

This has important results for rank and file solidarity in the area. The Echo & Post are in a monopoly position having bought their competitors. Together with a chain of local weeklies they control the distribution of news on Merseyside.

The Echo group - (which owns the Birkenhead News, Rebington News, Southport Visitor, Crosby Herald, Formby Times and Bootle Herald) - effectively controls Radio Merseyside as well. Echo journalists type a carbon copy of all their stories which is passed on to the radio station.



Bessie's Ne

— the midd

The decision of Bessie Praddock, M.P. for Liverpool Exchange, to retire at the next general election marks the end of an era in working class politics. Older readers will remember a time, not so long ago, when working class people up and down the country were active Labour Party members. They were active in the wards and constituency parties, in knocking up voters, in campaigning for the Party because they thought that Labour was their party.

But not any more. The era that has come to an end is the era when ordinary working people were fooled by the Labour Party And Bessie, our Bessie, was one of the all-time greats at fooling us.

Of course the union bosses are happy to pay the party as much as ever. It's not money that the Labour Party is short of. It is members. There are plenty of members in the middle class areas but not in Liverpool Exchange, or Scotland Road, or Toxteth. Not where the workers actually live.

l Echo

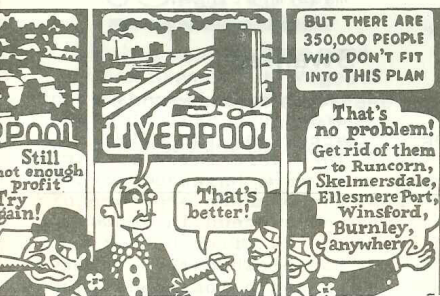
profitable

The Echo management is headed by Sir Alick Jeans, and is involved in every way with the political and commercial rulers of Merseyside.

Echo directors serve on the board of several printing firms - Tinlings, Willmer Bros., Keyspools - on Lloyds Bank, Threlfalls, State Assurance, Liverpool Investment Building Society.

obsessed

There are strong connections with the port industry. J.C. Taylor sits on the boards of Cunard and Mersey Docks & Harbour Board, and H.B. Chrimes, as well as being treasurer of the University, on the boards of Ocean Steamship and Rea Towing Co. No wonder the Echo seems to be obsessed with dock strikes.



ew Labour le class party

There are people who dish it out and people who have to take it.

Look at what our Pessie has to say about this: "Local Labour Party organisations are rather like the local divisions of unions. Where a branch of industry is trouble free and the workers are well looked after, the unions organisation is likely to wither, for it is extremely difficult to keep the soldiers at their peak of efficiency when there isn't any war.

"In places like Liverpool Exchange the Labour Party hardly exists except at election times, or at times when it is part of the social life of the area.

"However there are stalwarts among our Liverpool rank-and-file. We have a host of women who are in general sympathy with the Party but whose main interest is in some special branch of social work." (from Jack & Bessie Braddock: "The Braddocks" published in 1963)

Although Merseyside is one of the most important industrial centres in the country, neither paper has a full-time industrial correspondent. When a strike blows up, instead of coverage at the factory gate in an attempt to get at the truth behind a dispute the usual coverage seems to be Phoning up the bosses for their side of the story and, sometimes, just to make it seem fair, getting hold of one or two union leaders. In the case of the dockers, even this is dispensed with. The only time the point of view of the rank and file is given is when it agrees with the bosses story. The Echo gave front page treatment in February under the giant heading "BAMBOOZLED" to a Ford worker who spoke out against the shop stewards who were supposed to be manipulating the men into a strike. It was silent about thousands of men at Halewood who were pressing their stewards for a sympathy strike with the Swansea strikers. The same criticisms apply to coverage of politics. Anything to the left of the Labour Party is not mentioned and the Labour Party itself never gets much prominence. Anything which

Big Flame offers facilities for making posters and duplicating leaflets to aid in the struggles of tenants and workers.

We know whose side Labour is on.

Well there you have it. The workers are the troops waiting for orders from the Braddocks', the Harold Wilsons', the Roy Jenkins' of the world. And why aren't the workers politically active? Because they are well looked after.

At least that's what they tell us. Uncle Harold and his boys are looking after us. So there is no need for us to do anything. Just sit back and let our leaders do the work. And if there any difficulties they'll send their social workers, their lady-not-so-bountifuls in to clear up the mess.

Perhaps they even believe it themselves. As someone once said: "I've said it three times so it must be true."

But there is another side to this happy picture (and don't we know it?). Pessie and her social workers will look after us but we must not try to look after ourselves. When the Exchange party dared to disagree with Bessie and tried to get rid of her back in 1953 she said her opponents were: "revolutionary communists, Bevanites, and incidentals, and I look upon them all as incidentals."

Perhaps that's the answer. That's why people aren't active in the Labour Party any more. The incidentals have had enough.

smacks of rebellion or originality is glossed over: people like Arthur Dooley, a sculptor and Communist Party member, are only mentioned if they cannot be ignored. Controversial council decisions are reported but any probing behind the reality of many issues is a rarity, although God knows there a plenty a good paper could expose. The Establishment knows it has the press in its pocket.

£2+million

And why should the Echo care. Profit is the motive for its production, and at making money the group is expert. In 1968 the trading profit was £2½ million - more than the Daily Mail for example. It has just purchased the Catholic Universe for a tidy sum, has a big share in a News of The World subsidiary, has registered several commercial radio companies so that if the Tories win the next General Election and legislate for commercial radio the Group is ready to go on the air in a big way.

So that's freedom of the press on Merseyside. The only way to get fair coverage is to force it on the Echo. Maybe if dissatisfied workers marched on the Echo HQ in Victoria St at the time of a major dispute and persuaded their printing colleagues inside to black biased articles the Echo would take the hint.

This is the first in a series Who Owns Merseyside

We want to hear your views- about Big Flame, about Merseyside, about what's happening at work, about politics. Don't hesitate to write to us. The paper depends on your ideas and your concern.

Don't forget the meeting at the Swan Hotel on March 15th. That night your vote will influence Big Flame's future.

order form

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BIG FLAME

A wholehearted bigoted bias in favour of the vast majority of the population of this country who sell their labour - Big Flame is proud to be accused of this.

Contrary to the capitalist controlled press, we believe men and

Because the main issue is parity with Rootes, Poscombe Road. This affects everyone and is to all workers' advantage.

The Company's attitude to this demand will be made known on March 23 when the unions report back to their members.

Men, like those in the

at Vauxhall, one step forward—two steps back

women have the right to strive for all the benefits that society can provide, whether this struggle takes place in factory or classroom.

So we find ourselves in the invidious position of warning any division at Vauxhall Motors to beware of the 'phantom tanner' - the extra service increment awarded to a handful in the Ellesmere Port plant.

back axle section who struck on Friday 6th for their own claim, have grounds for annoyance.

But sectional fights only confuse the main issue. Nothing would please the boardroom ghoul more than to see our energies exhausted on a mere £1 a week rise. The 'phantom tanner' is only the first bait.

Girling (cont)

the destruction of piece-work. And it still isn't clear who gets the 25/-.

Stage two of the sell-out followed swiftly. Telegrams were sent out to the workers calling them to a meeting to vote on the deal.

But many claim they never received one.

On Saturday 28th Girling workers met to vote on the deal. AEF's divisional organiser, Mr N McDonald, allowed only one motion to be discussed - his own.

Great play was made with the 25/- rise and the measured day work system (MDW) was heavily pushed.

No mention of the reasons for the fight waged against MDW by workers throughout the industry. It removes control of job prices from workers hands

The results are clear at Ford and Vauxhall where the system is the cause of some of the lowest rates in the car industry.

The system has advantages for everyone except the workers.

Bosses find they can squeeze the last ounce of energy out of their men.

* * * * * meeting

Come to the meeting on Sunday, March 15 at the Swan Hotel, London Road, Liverpool at 7.30pm to decide how Big Flame is to be run in future and to determine its policies.

Facts about



17/5d without service qualifications. Both working a measured day work system, moreover.

Undoubtedly, the strength of the Parity campaign and the strike threat to close down Fords compelled the firm to offer at first £3 and when that was immediately rejected, to up it quickly to £4.

The press did not tell

Ford Parity Campaign

which has brought £4 a week into the flat week wage packet of all Ford workers, was a well organised campaign designed to inform and involve all workers and shop stewards on a national combine basis.

The first step was to prepare the ground by changing the National Joint Negotiating Committee. From a bureaucratic, one union-one seat committee, it became one with more proportionate representation, and included rank and file stewards giving plant and union representation, geographically.

The decisions taken throughout the campaign were taken by combine stewards meetings and by mass meetings of all workers. At Halewood, as many as ten mass meetings were held, either of all workers on each shift, or of all workers on the site. The National Negotiating Committee democratically backed the shop floor decisions to the hilt.

Parity

The membership were informed through a paper, Fords Workers' Voice, leaflets, posters car stickers and Parity badges.

The Company countered, of course, with special editions of the firm's Ford Bulletin, with letters to all workers, and verbally through the supervisors.

£10 for every Ford worker was the price we put on parity. A large claim but modest compared with rates elsewhere in the car industry. A production operator at Fords was on 10/6½ an hour after four years' service. At Rootes, Ryton, his counterpart was on

This was not considered to be enough by the shop stewards and by many thousands of workers. But the majority of workers succumbed to the mass propaganda churned out by press and Company. They were fatally tempted by the biggest wage offer ever so that in spite of the possibility of getting more, voted against strike action at their mass meetings.

Swansea

Only Fords Swansea plant stood out against accepting the offer. They were later supported by some Halewood workers. The Swansea stoppage did not succeed in improving the £4 offer but it established that Parity wasn't a lost cause and that Fords could only buy peace by giving a reluctant promise to talk Parity at a later stage.

Many of us aren't satisfied with the final settlement, but we wouldn't underestimate the success in winning £4 a week from a company like Ford without strings.

BIG FLAME

The first Big Flame was warmly received and we have printed double the number for this edition.

We know there are still many shortcomings but we believe that the potential is there for increasing numbers of people to become involved in the paper, to improve it and use it.

What will ensure that the paper gets better is your active participation in its development.