

death on the site

Brian Higgins writes here of the one issue which unites all building workers in real anger and about which the majority would do something if given a big enough and proper lead. This is the total lack of safety on site and the deaths and injuries this causes. He says, "We are now seriously attempting to provide a lead against this."



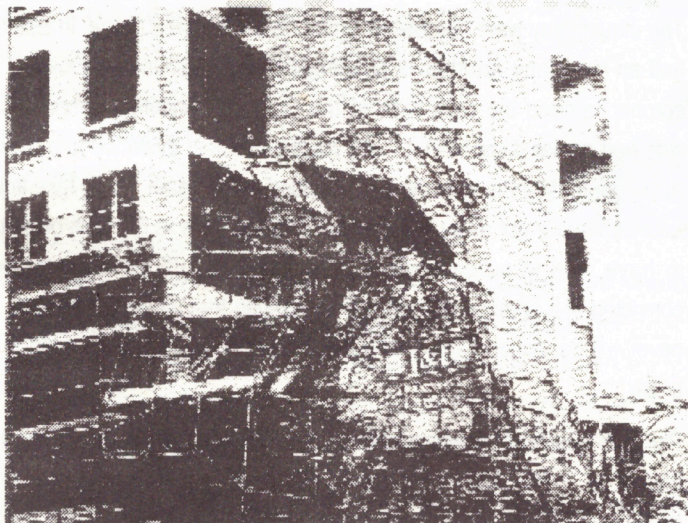
"The slaughter continues – as does the callous disregard for building workers' lives and safety continually displayed by construction employers and the inability and reluctance of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and construction unions such as UCATT, Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and AEEU to do anything about this.

Brian Higgins is the secretary of the Building Worker Group, the oldest and most successful Rank and File group in Britain. He is the author of "Rank and File or Broad Left: Democracy versus Bureaucracy" a short history of the Building Worker Group, available from CRC/Resistance (£1.50).

In August 1995 four building workers **were** crushed to death on a site in Ashford, when a building they were renovating collapsed within seconds. The Surrey Coroner Michael Burgess recently ruled the men had been unlawfully killed.

We do not mince our words in this manner. They were in fact murdered by the construction firm John Lay before the renovation work commenced. This was premeditated murder! Yet no one was arrested, no one has been charged for any crime. The police have been asked politely to reopen the case. Oh yeah? Can you imagine what would happen if a group of building workers had been responsible for the deaths of four building employers!

We make no apologies for the language we use because building employers are, in fact murdering building workers week in, week out and getting away with it. **Nothing** is being done.



Edinburgh – May 1996 a 70 foot high scaffold, which the company Morrison Construction knew was inadequate for the job they were using it for, collapsed killing one building worker and seriously injured four others.

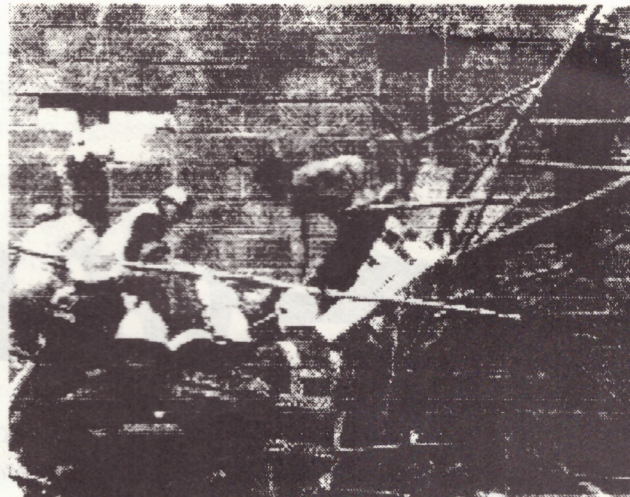
The building employers, the HSE, the construction unions, the police once more repeated the all too familiar ritual of breast beating and expressions of deep regret, while doing fuck all about it. If it is left to this lot, the popular front in construction if you like, the deaths and serious injuries will continue unabated.

Question – how do we stop the killing?

Answer – by stopping production when it happens.

Here we deliver a completely unequivocal and unadulterated revolutionary Rank and File message. Everything else has been tried and failed miserably. We may not succeed because of the odds facing us but unless we try no one else will in this manner.

The only people with the real power and desire to put a stop to the killings and serious injuries on construction sites are building workers. It is only when these workers get unionised and most importantly democratically and strongly organised on site and exercise total control over this and are prepared to stop production when a killing or serious injury happens that it will stop. Stopping or seriously effecting production is the **only** language building employers understand, fear and will take seriously.



Coupled with this, it is also crucially important to realise full-time trade union officials will **not** support industrial action to put a stop to death and injury in construction. In fact they will do everything in their power to counter and stop militant industrial action over safety and every other issue for that matter! This is because their cosy relationships with the employers and quiet lives are threatened by militancy and they are also shit scared of the law and even the threat of its use.

Building Worker Safety Campaign (BWSC) No doubt the reader will be thinking so far all this sounds good but what is the BWG prepared to do to put this theory into practice? We've been putting Rank & File politics into practice for the twenty one years of our existence. But in relation to safety specifically, the Building Worker Group is launching the BWSC, of which, the main policy platform is – "We hold the right to and will put a picket on any site where a death or serious injury has occurred."

This attempt to persuade site workers not to cross a picket line and to stop production in protest against deaths and serious injuries in construction has the eventual objective of a London wide and then UK wide strike for safety in the construction industry. It will take this to make the construction industry a truly safe and decent one in which to work.

We also have quite a few other policies around which we'll organise the BWSC, such as defiance of the anti union laws and total opposition to state interference in the democratic running of trade unions. Copies of full policy statements are available from the address below. Finally please support the Building Worker Safety Campaign. Please support our pickets when we call for them."

This is the first of a proposed regular series of articles from the Building Worker Group. However, we also want to hear from other workers, especially from any attempting to establish Rank and File groups. Send us your stories and news items.

Resistance has a strategy for workplace organisation built around 5 basic points:

- 1) the need for rank and file organisations to be based on complete independence from the trade union and Labour Party bureaucracies**
- 2) the need to defy and campaign for the repeal of all anti-trade union laws**
- 3) total opposition to the blacklist, victimisation and unemployment**
- 4) the need to reclaim and revolutionise workplace organisations**
- 5) the necessity of building direct international links between workers.**