Tracks of Solidarity

Daniel Lee – trade unionist and socialist

In his own words – as told to Mark Metcalf

02-12-1932: 15-06-2025


Daniel Lee

I was born in Leeds on December 2nd 1932.

The Leeds Mercury.

An All-Yorkshire Journal and a Power in the North for More Than Two Hundred Years.

No. 20028.—ESTABLISHED 1718. FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1932. DAILY—ONE PENNY.

BRITAIN TELLS AMERICA THE PLAIN FACTS.

GENERAL'S STRONG CHANCES.

Next German Chancellor.

THE FIRST TEST MATCH AT SYDNEY TO-DAY.

Bradman Pronounced Unfit for the Game.

OUR ACTION IF WE HAVE TO PAY.

Imports from U.S. Will be Restricted.

U.S. HAS HAD £434,000,000
WE ARE MINUS £200,000,000.

Payment in Gold Bars from Bank Reserves.

CARDINAL BOURNE ILL IN ROME.

Sudden Attack on Visit to Pope.

1932 was a year of crisis

My parents were James and Catherine.

She was a seamstress. He was a Taylor's cutter. They met as a result of her brother and then forming a friendship whilst he was serving in the First World War and they married in the early 20s.

I was born with a club foot, forcing me to regularly attend Leeds General Infirmary in Pudsey for 17 years for treatment.

I went to Holy Family Infant School in Leeds at aged two and a half. I spent 12+ years there and it was an unpleasant experience.

I could already read and write before I attended school.

My mother had blamed herself for me having a club foot and as result she spent a hell of a lot of time with me teaching me to read and write.

Which in the event of me going to the school became a handicap because as soon as my mother had left me on the first day I attended then the headmistress Mary Austin had me on her own. She said ‘the first thing is Lee, she never called me Danny or Daniel, is you will unlearn everything that you've been taught. I will teach you from here on.’

She said I would learn the catechism. When I told her I already knew it as my mother, being a devout Catholic, had taught me it, she told me that I would learn what she taught me. ‘You learn what I tell you’, she repeated. When I said could write I was told ‘you will write what I tell you.’

It was horrendous. I wrote to Cardinal Vincent Nichols about this mental and psychological as well as the physical abuse I received but got no reply.

What stuck with me was when I went home and I said to my mother “she's told me that everything you taught me I have to unlearn. She'll teach me how I should be educated.”

And my mother, being a devout Catholic, coming out of the convent and so on, said ‘it might be for the best.’

Those words have stuck with me from that day to this.

As a result of which I couldn't trust my mother anymore. I loved and respected her but I never was able to trust her or anyone else for years and years.

My father was from Leeds and my mother from Walsall.

She was a seamstress and she worked for various clothing firms in Leeds. My father was a Tailors cutter and worked for a firm called Henry Price, known as 50 shillings or 50 bob tailors as that was how much it cost them to make a suit. https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/8050859.a-man-and-his-millions/

He worked there until he retired at the age of 65. My grandmother was born in Wexford and my grandfather was also from Ireland.

I describe myself as an Irish Yorkshireman. My other grandmother on my father's side came from Edinburgh and my grandfather on my mother's side was, as far as I know, born in Poland. Their name was Gaunt. They originated as a result of the pogrom in the Netherlands when the Huguenots were forced out in the 17th and 18th century and they settled in Walsall and he became a buckle polisher or something of that description.

My mum was Catherine. Her brothers were Tom and Frank. Tom was the eldest and as far as I know he never left Walsall. He never served or anything. Frank joined the army and that's where he met my father subsequently

My mother's two sisters were Dorothea, the eldest and Nellie the youngest. They departed to the United States in 1921. Dorothea lived until she was 100 years and nine or six months and Nellie lived until she was 99 and nine months. My mother died aged 61 in 1963 and she's buried in Killingbeck Cemetery in Leeds. I would account for the differences because not only did she work on her own trade as a seamstress but during the war she had to contend with the bombing plus she had to bring up three children in myself, my sister Patricia Janet, born 1936, and also my brother Hugh who was born in 1939.

Dorothea was named after a very famous nurse who was totally respected by the people of Walsall. So much so that there is a statue in Walsall to her.
https://www.blackcountryhistory.org/collections/getrecord/GB148_1204_1_2_269

When war was declared on 2nd September 1939 my dad, who had served in WWI in the Northumberland Fusiliers, was recalled to the colours and he was serving in the Rhine Army when I left school.

It was a Friday when I left school and by the Monday I was working in Hayes Engineering, where I worked for a few months before being transferred into RF windows electrical engineers as an apprentice in Leeds.

At Hayes I was employed like all youngsters and did whatever they wanted you to do. One of my tasks was to carry casings up to the case hardening shop to be hardened. It meant them being dipped in cyanide and there were no health and safety measures. Nothing, no gloves and nothing at all and then I as I said I transferred to RF windows through my father. He got me a position there and I started that in 1947.

Apprenticeships were vital

It was absolutely essential to obtain an apprenticeship, which for me was an apprentice in electrical work or contracting generally.

The saying in working-class families was that if you had a trade then you could earn a living for a lifetime.

I still believe that and I passed it on to my three sons and my daughter. All my sons had a trade and they've never been unemployed, even now. (2022)

After the apprenticeship was completed I left Leeds in 1950.

I was a bit of a rolling stone. I joined a firm in London in Albany Street called William Stewart's and who were a contracting firm.

How we used to pay our union contributions at RF Windows was that every Thursday our branch secretary from the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) Central Branch would come round after we had been paid and collect out subs. It was an organised shop and you had to be in the union to work there. It was obligatory. He would retain our union cards. I had joined the ETU when I began working at RF Windows.

Airport strikers may go back

The 130 electricians on strike at London Airport are expected to return to work on Monday as a result of an agreement reached yesterday between Electrical Trades Union officials and executives of the British Overseas Airways Corporation. By Monday the strike will have lasted a fortnight.

It was believed at the airport last night that while negotiations were carried on the men would work alongside the two non-unionists about whom they went on strike. B.O.A.C. Argonauts, grounded by the stoppage, are expected to be flying within 48 hours of the resumption of work. Up to Thursday the interruption of services was estimated to have cost B.O.A.C. about £250,000.

Yorkshire Post 09-12-1950

The Electrical Trade Union was the first union that Daniel Lee joined in 1947. It was a powerful body.

Yorkshire Evening Post

Friday, December 16, 1949 — No. 18,444

LARGEST CIRCULATION IN THE COUNTY

FINAL EDN.

Shop steward says: Telegram may be received any hour

STRIKE THREATENS LEEDS

POWER MEN PLEDGE: WE WILL COME OUT IF LONDON ASKS

Troops still man three stations

LEEDS power workers will strike if London stations ask for support.

AWAITING RESULTS

Memory girl

PUT ARSENIC IN SUGAR AT PARTY

Bandits raid butcher's shop

Assistant locked in 'frig,' £100 stolen

Detectives search Leeds for two office raiders

LEEDS police are to-day searching for two youths, one of whom entered a St. Paul's Street office, threatened a woman cashier with what is believed to have been a revolver or air pistol, grabbed £22 10s. from a tray of wages tins and escaped.

FOR MEN ONLY

Tram, lorry in collision

'I still want to marry him'

GIRL PLEADS FOR MAN WHO STABBED HER

"He regrets"

As a union member I never experienced any difficulties in Leeds. It was quite a nice period. There no real difficulties in finding employment or any union friction. I think because I was more Yorkshire Irish within my persona that it got a bit dull for me. My itchy feet took me away to London. I did not even tell my family and I caught a train out of Leeds Central and went off to London where I arrived one very sunny morning at Kings X station on July 4th 1950.

I then started looking for employment and finished up with William Steward's in Albany Street. I stayed there till late 1954. I completed my apprenticeship training and I then moved on to firms such as Drayton Group and Rashleigh Phipps.

We were loaned out to Exhibition firms like Beck and Pollitzer as all the main exhibitions took place in London. We were journeymen, we journeyed from job to job.

This was the time I started to become more active as a shop steward on jobs. Where we went they were mainly not organized. Contracting was a very rough game. How it used to be designated was when you went on to a site the sack was a small bag in the corner of the site and as each day went by it got larger and larger. Then towards the finish of the job the foreman for the electricians would say: 'Alright, it's time for you to go,' and then they used to say 'lick them and stick them' because you had holiday stamps in.

You'd take your holiday stamps with you to the next employer.

It was a journey to each job and then you had the sack.

The pay for a journeyman was fixed by the negotiations between the ETU and employers nationally.

Then you could forge local arrangements and adaptations to it which was the job of the shop steward with support from the members on the site

Clause eight meant that if you felt that you were being asked to do anything that was abnormal In the conditions of work or whatever it may have been then you could negotiate extra money.

When I first started at Hayes engineering there was no gloves, there was nothing. But if you went on a site in London and it was wet and muddy you were entitled to Wellington boots.

I can always remember once working at Briggs motor bodies. The lads met together and said well this is ridiculous. We went in to see management and said under clause eight we were entitled to an extra half a crown or two and six a day. I said that's abnormal conditions. I said if everyone has to wear Wellington Boots then it has to be an abnormal situation. Anyway, we won that one. We used the caveats in the national agreement to boost things locally.

What were you building?

Anything.

Housing or factories or power stations. I worked on radar stations in Tiree and an air base. Anywhere the contractor sent us.

How did you become the shop steward?

I was elected. I have never had any position in the union or anywhere else to my knowledge that I have not been elected to.

I do not believe in supporting people who were not elected, whether it's the Pope or whoever doesn't matter. They should be elected. Why? Because then they're subject to recall. You have an immediate hand on their shoulder.

If they don't measure up to what they're supposed to do in the interest of the workers then you have the right to organize to have them remove. At the moment we have got a clown as a Prime Minister. I know what he is, he's a bloody Tory from the top of his head to the tip of his toes. And as a youngster growing up in the North of England in the deprivations of the 30s and the 40s they don't have to tell me anything about what the Tories are and I mean the real Tories, not the ones who just go there to do the job and cop the old moolah

Why did you step forward then to become a steward?

I didn't know at that time but that was built into me from the disgusting treatment I had growing up in that school, the Holy Family, at the hands of three women teachers who operated in a system. I mean some people can be crushed by that can't they?

I mean, I'm not going into all the bloody torture that I went through but she used to make me kneel on a wooden floor outside of her office for an hour and a half at a time and if I sort of slipped back onto me heels to get a bit of rest bite then she'd come out and whack me with a cane. That was a part of the physical stuff and then there was a mental stuff and she beat with my bad legs.

Do you know when you were first elected as a steward?

It would be in the 50s because I wasn't allowed or didn't need to be in Leeds. I would say my first election was 1953. I can't be more precise than that. I could go through my union cards as I have got them all from that time.

How did you gain the skills to be an effective steward? There were courses for shop stewards that I attended on work study methods and associated matters like that.

Knowledge I gained via the courses assisted me in the negotiations that I took forward. As part of the conditions of employment negotiated nationally you got time off with pay to attend the courses, which benefitted the employers just as much as the workers.

I have no regrets but I know I was **blacklisted** as a result.

I always said my profession was a shop steward and my trade was an electrician.

You're in the 1950s. You've become a shop steward. Was it about economics or did you combine this with politics?

I think they're inseparable as political decisions impact economically.

At the moment they're worsening.

Then you have no alternative than to organize opposition to political decisions because they're detracting from a national agreement or whatever. If they cut workers short of what they're entitled to and if it's a political decision then you have no alternative except to take up the political aspects of it. Then you do it through the Labour Party of which I was a member until Tony Blair and the war in the Middle East at the start of this century.

What might you as a steward take up on behalf the members?

Anything they wanted. Let's say a domestic problem. I mean as a shop steward you were more like a parish priest sometimes. The first thing you did was to talk with him because they were upset and it was affecting them

No matter what it was then I would say that if they needed time off then they needed time off. Like if it was a death, if it was a baby that was ill or if it was a marital problem They know that I would sort it out. They wanted time off, but because of the pressure of work they were told by management they could not afford to let them go home.

That's when I would take that out and discuss it with the rest of the lads on the job or in a shop where everybody was working. And if they agreed with me, because that's why I said elections are paramount to anything and everything, then I could approach management and speak authoritatively and negotiate with them.

Sometimes they'd say no. I would say 'that's down to you.' I mean I've been involved in many strikes. Some over issues such as I've just recounted.

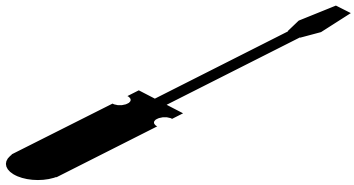
Other strikes I recall. You know this Hire and Fire thing. That's all the thing now but my first encounter with this was in 1956 on the South Bank. It was a new Daily Mirror building. I was working at Dagenham at that time. But, of course, there was no such thing as illegal secondary picketing. If a site called out for pickets you used to go and picket it with the lads on strike. It was a McAlpine's site.

Jim Matthews, big Jim Matthews as they called him was GMB General Secretary and he came to an agreement with McAlpine's that they were going to rephase, not rehire, not sack but rephase the site in order to take care of some issues that they conjured up In order to justify the phrase.

They said they were going temporarily dismiss everyone on the Saturday and then under the new conditions rehire them on the Monday

Well, this was to get rid of the site committee in Brian Behan, Cassidy, the chairman and McGuire the secretary.

By this time, we were well practiced in the art of the moves that they made.



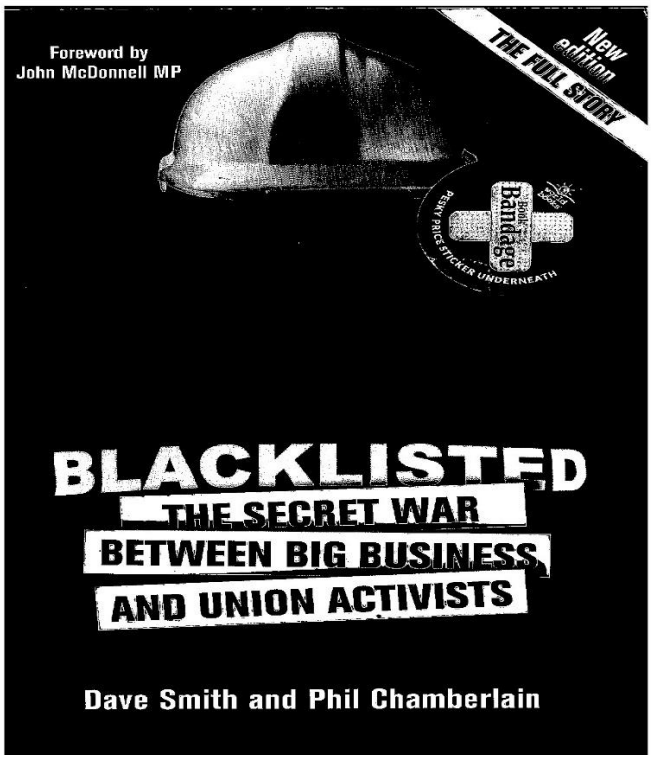
And even members from other sites all agreed that on the Monday that the first three that would go through the door were McGuire, Cassidy and Behan. And those are the three that went in and were immediately rejected as being unsuitable. That began then a six-week strike. I finished up on a picket line where there were more coppers than the pickets.

It was a really nasty strike that one and all sorts of the politics, even more naked than I'd ever seen before. There were all the extreme left-wing groups. I never knew some of them.

There were all these splinter groups.

In late 57 I became the convener steward for the contracting electricians in London. It was all the shop stewards of all the sites in London.

My activities in that respect ended up me blacklisted which it was said did not exist then but is now acknowledged as having existed later on. But there was a blacklist as I was on the bloody thing because I couldn't get a job anywhere. **I used to go to the Labour Exchange and they'd say how there's a job there.**



It was to be many years after Daniel Lee was blacklisted on London's building sites during the 1950s that the practice by the employers was finally confirmed

I had the skills and they gave you a ticket to go to this job but when I went there and put it on the table I was deemed not suitable.

It became impossible. We're talking here late 57 up to May 59. I had two sons, Steven and David, to look after and it was horrendous.

We were living in a room down the steps in Edward Square that backed onto the Union Canal in in Caledonian Road.

It was squalor.

Finally in May 59 the labour exchange manager said 'look there's a job calling for electricians in Swindon on a new build of diesel electric hydraulic trains.'

I said oh, 'okay. I'll go along.' I went to an interview in Marylebone. The interviewer of the electricians was a fellow called Spackman. He was the senior electrician foreman in Swindon and he had with him a fellow called Aubrey Prowler.

I thought I was going to get the same treatment as everywhere else. I didn't know as I'd never worked on the railway. And I didn't know anything about the railways and so I swatted up for a couple of days and the only thing I could get was that on the underground at that time it was operated on what was called a metadyne system.

So, I swatted up on it and by good fortune he didn't know anything about it. So that wasn't a problem. Anyway, we finished the interview. It took about 20 minutes to half-hour

I mean negotiating and talking and explaining came as first nature to me, because I'd had years of it. As I was coming out Aubrey Prowler noticed I was limping. I said 'I've got club foot'. He said 'oh you did very well …. yes, you've got the job. '

But I knew that I had to act decisively and I was there Monday morning in Swindon. I caught the train and I went to the main gate and spoke to the watchman and said I'd be interviewed last Thursday and Mr. Prowler told me I had the job.

He said 'well I'll better ring' and so he rung up to the number 10 offices it was.

They were shocked. They'd been waiting to send me out a letter. I said well, 'Mr Prowler told me I had been successful and I'd got the job. I said I took that to be right away'.

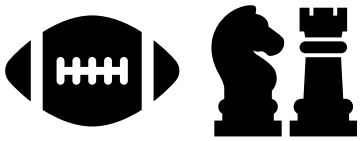
They were surprised but responded by saying, 'well now you are here you might as well stay.'

You had to work a month before you came established. Once you were was established then they had a job to get rid of you know. And I worked them out having dealt with contracting employers & the brutality of them and their total disregard for anything other than what you could do.

How the nationalised industries operated and the conditions and so on came as a very pleasant surprise.

I took my toolbox and they introduced me to the foreman and the chargehand and was told I did not need them as they supplied all the tools. That I had better take them home

That's one thing of many that was better for workers. There were clubs to join as there was a staff association. You could compete in national chess championships or play rugby. It was incredible.



It was a properly organised situation for workers to have some enjoyment out of being employed by British Rail. And I stayed there until I fell out over quarter of a century later.

I was employed at a British Rail Engineering (limited) (BREL) workshops that was part of British Rail. There were workshops from Glasgow down to Lancing, Sussex. The major ones were Crewe, Derby, which had two workshops, Swindon and York.

Daily Mirror

TUES. JAN. 25 1955

FORWARD WITH THE PEOPLE

No. 15,922

100 M.P.H. TRAINS FOR BRITAIN

The steam engine gets the sack . . .

BY LEN JACKSON
Daily Mirror Industrial Reporter

A £1,200,000,000 plan to give Britain faster, cleaner and more frequent passenger trains was announced by the Transport Commission yesterday.

The steam engine will disappear. In its place will come more electric and diesel locomotives.

The plan, which will take fifteen years to complete, is expected to be approved soon by the Government.

FROM THIS

This is Stephenson's Rocket.

TO THIS

A Britannia Class locomotive.

AND NOW THIS

And here is one of the new diesel engines.

By the time Daniel began working for British Rail in 1959, steam was being phased out in favour of electrical and diesel locomotives

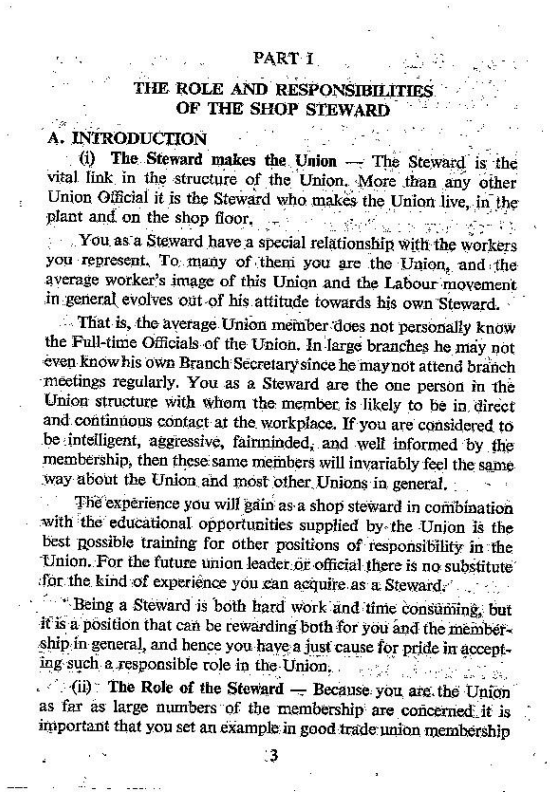
They were by and large the largest ones. And then there were smaller ones which included running and maintenance depots and things like that. They controlled all the work that had to be done for British Rail, like keeping the rolling stock going. It all came through the workshops. Even the rebuild. That didn't finish although the last steam locomotive to be built by Swindon was in the early 60s. That was called the Evening Star. The first one they built was called the North Star.

We were building diesel hydraulics. They were made by Germany and there was German technicians over to assist in the initial build-up of them in Britain. They had an engine up front and at the back.

This was one of the things I used in my interview, because as I was chatting away with him. I said, "Why didn't we use Pyrotechnics?"

He said, "No, no, because of the vibration of.....that's why we use conduit and VIR cables."

"Well, that makes sense." So, you can see how my interview with this fellow went. Because I'd done hundreds of them and it was easy.



PART I

THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SHOP STEWARD

A. INTRODUCTION

(i) **The Steward makes the Union** — The Steward is the vital link in the structure of the Union. More than any other Union Official it is the Steward who makes the Union live, in the plant and on the shop floor.

You as a Steward have a special relationship with the workers you represent. To many of them you are the Union, and the average worker's image of this Union and the Labour movement in general evolves out of his attitude towards his own Steward.

That is, the average Union member does not personally know the Full-time Officials of the Union. In large branches he may not even know his own Branch Secretary since he may not attend branch meetings regularly. You as a Steward are the one person in the Union structure with whom the member is likely to be in direct and continuous contact at the workplace. If you are considered to be intelligent, aggressive, fairminded, and well informed by the membership, then these same members will invariably feel the same way about the Union and most other Unions in general.

The experience you will gain as a shop steward in combination with the educational opportunities supplied by the Union is the best possible training for other positions of responsibility in the Union. For the future union leader or official there is no substitute for the kind of experience you can acquire as a Steward.

Being a Steward is both hard work and time consuming, but it is a position that can be rewarding both for you and the membership in general, and hence you have a just cause for pride in accepting such a responsible role in the Union.

(ii) **The Role of the Steward** — Because you are the Union as far as large numbers of the membership are concerned it is important that you set an example in good trade union membership

3

The roles of the shop steward

Striking to retain the closed shop

The question of Swindon. When I went there, I led the first strike over the closed shop. Eighteen months into my employment, I'd organised by that time. That meant that all the electricians were either members of the ETU or the AEU. Previously, they'd been in all different unions.

What I did was organise the shops first, the electrical departments. They were fully organised and whatever was going, pay and conditions wise, we were getting it. It wasn't simple as they still dealt with things like a war wage allowance and that. It was made up of, God knows, all bits and pieces. The basic rate was 39 shillings. (£1.95)

And on that, you earned your bonus. You'd never reach 100% of your bonus. But we were showing 125 and 130.

I was now beginning to organise the Works Committee, which then covered all of the workplace.

We moved out in the town to the Trades Council and the GMC of the Labour Party.

And there was a lot of employment in Swindon then. Vickers Armstrong, Plessey and Square D. Loads of factories. They're all gone now.

What they did was to get hold of a born-again Christian called Albert Delaney. He refused to pay his subscriptions to the ETU, saying, 'On principle, I've seen the light and all that.(...) I said, "Well, look, you can't work in a shop if you're not a member of the union. And you've got to be under five weeks with your contributions. Otherwise, it's goodbye." This is what I meant about elections.

So, he said, 'Well, no, I'm not paying it'.

And the management kept him. They paid him, but he wasn't allowed in the shop.

The closed shop principle was an absolute copper-bottom necessity.

I said, ‘Well, OK’.

I had a meeting with the lads, and said, ‘I'll go and tell them that he goes. Or, you know, we're not going to work with him’.

They said, ‘Well, he's staying, and he's got to go in there’.

I went in and negotiated with this manager who’d been there years. And he said, ‘Well, you won't get paid’. Because what they used to do in Swindon Works was if they had a dispute they sat at the bench.

Then the manager, after whatever, two days, would say, ‘Oh, yeah, we'll only stop you so much money’. And it was archaic, you know, the thing. It was like a family thing, you know. You've been a naughty boy, so we're going to stop you five shillings off.

I said, ‘I know we won’t get paid; we're going on strike. I just want to tell you where the strike headquarters will be. It's the Carpenter's Arms in Gorse Hill’.

He said, ‘But you're leaving the works’.

I said, ‘Of course we are. We're going on strike. I mean, this is not a game. This is serious’.

We were out and I've got all the signatures of the strike book in there.

We were out from the 30th of September to the 4th of October. We finally went back and Delaney? I don't know where Albert is now, but he never came anywhere near that. He was gone.

There were two works – carriage and locomotives - when I first went in. The locomotive works, the fitters, were so craft-conscious that it used to make me weep. There were blokes working as their mates who knew twice as much as they did about their job and were taking probably just about three-quarters of the same money. That used to drive me up the bloody wall.

Anyway, when it came to the amalgamation of the locomotive and the carriage works those in the loco works made clear they wanted nothing to do with the less skilled, those in the National Union of Railwaymen, (NUR) regarded as the lowest of the low as whilst technically those in the carriage works could make it from being a floor sweeper up to category four, the skill section, it took decades to do so.

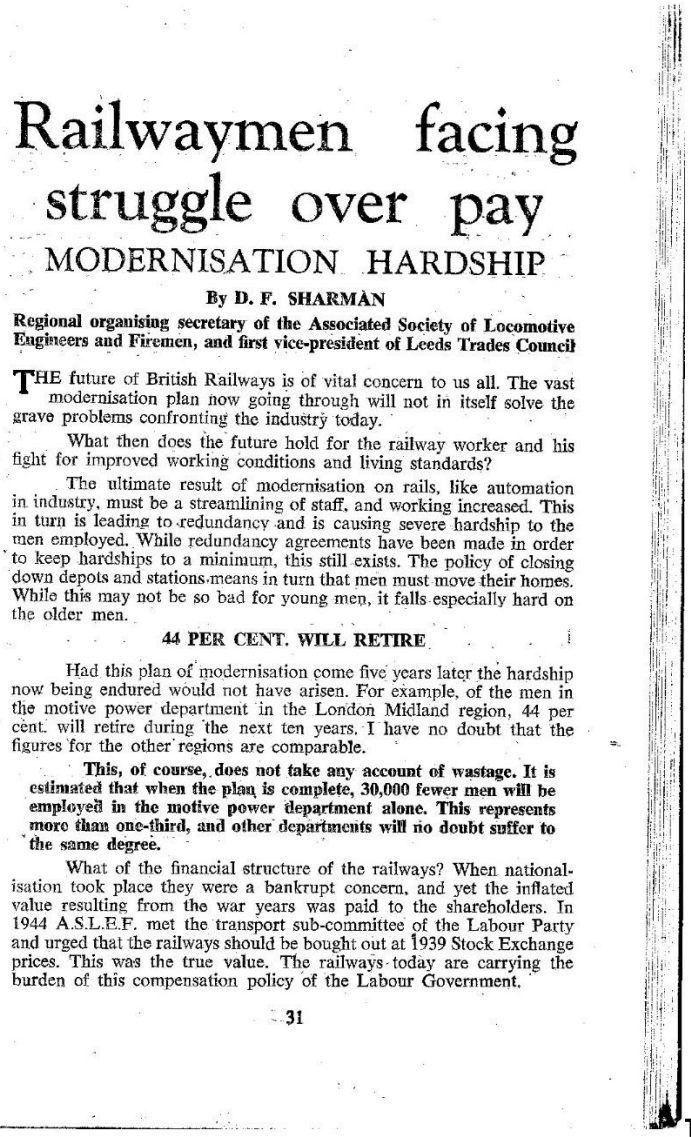
Nevertheless, I’d point out that we were all railwaymen and no way was I going to argue for them to get poorer terms and conditions when transferred.

I said, ‘They'll take their service and everything that they have under the conditions that they're employed with over when they amalgamate with us’.

The skilled worker would say, ‘No, I'm not agreeing’.

I said, ‘Well, you will. Because I'm not leading anything. I'm not negotiating anything that does them down in any way. And what they're entitled to’. Anyway, that's a battle I won as well in the early 60s. We had a hell of a battle.

With them (British Rail) getting rid of the locomotives there was a contraction in the industry.



Railwaymen facing struggle over pay

MODERNISATION HARDSHIP

By D. F. SHARMAN

Regional organising secretary of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, and first vice-president of Leeds Trades Council

THE future of British Railways is of vital concern to us all. The vast modernisation plan now going through will not in itself solve the grave problems confronting the industry today.

What then does the future hold for the railway worker and his fight for improved working conditions and living standards?

The ultimate result of modernisation on rails, like automation in industry, must be a streamlining of staff, and working increased. This in turn is leading to redundancy and is causing severe hardship to the men employed. While redundancy agreements have been made in order to keep hardships to a minimum, this still exists. The policy of closing down depots and stations means in turn that men must move their homes. While this may not be so bad for young men, it falls especially hard on the older men.

44 PER CENT. WILL RETIRE

Had this plan of modernisation come five years later the hardship now being endured would not have arisen. For example, of the men in the motive power department in the London Midland region, 44 per cent. will retire during the next ten years. I have no doubt that the figures for the other regions are comparable.

This, of course, does not take any account of wastage. It is estimated that when the plan is complete, 30,000 fewer men will be employed in the motive power department alone. This represents more than one-third, and other departments will no doubt suffer to the same degree.

What of the financial structure of the railways? When nationalisation took place they were a bankrupt concern, and yet the inflated value resulting from the war years was paid to the shareholders. In 1944 A.S.L.E.F. met the transport sub-committee of the Labour Party and urged that the railways should be bought out at 1939 Stock Exchange prices. This was the true value. The railways today are carrying the burden of this compensation policy of the Labour Government.

31

Taken from Leeds Trades Council Annual Report in 1959

There were 24 members on the works committee at that time, and subsequently it was reduced. When all these battles were over, it was reduced to 12 and of which I then became a chairman. When this post was taken by the NUR rep I'd revert to the secretary. Either way I was permanently off the tools for 25 years till I quit.

Our basic wages were paid by the management.

We'd gone from steam to electric, from a historical to a modern situation and took all the baggage and bad workplace practices with it. Basically, from the First to the Second World War.

And that battle was won. We then had the works committee.

That sort of personifies what I did over those years. I'd go into negotiations and come out with some preposterous things because they sent that many managers down to deal with it then it's not true.

They were good at their job, but they were useless at negotiating and understanding workers.

They used to bring in bloody retired generals and give them a job just, you know, in the nationalised industry. Milking it, like they're still doing. Like they did when they de-nationalised it all.

I mean, the de-nationalisation and the theory of it, like...we want a private enterprise country. All that old shit that doesn't work, you know, and the proof of it is here now. This was even taking place in the 60s. They were talking about de-nationalising the railways, weren't they? **Well, they brought Beeching in and he slashed 11,000 miles just to balance the books.**

Row over the 'whoppers' by Beeching

By JACK HARRIS

"WHOPPING errors and inaccuracies" have been used in the Beeching Report to justify closing branch lines, said Lord Stonham, chairman of the National Council on Inland Transport, yesterday.

He claimed that not all the doomed lines lose money. And some that do lose money could easily be made to pay by obvious economies.

Lord Stonham was giving details in London of the rail-closures fight being made by the council, an independent body supported largely by local councils and industry.

The Railway Board, said Lord Stonham, were determined to close down lines "by hook or by crook." Earnings were being deliberately reduced, people discouraged from using railways and costs "inexplicably increased."

Blunders

He said the Government's haste to avoid a full probe amounted to "a conspiracy to defraud the public of essential transport."

Lord Stonham gave three illustrations of what he claimed were Beeching Report blunders:

BRIGHTON DOCK at Shoreham does a big rail traffic in iron ore. But during Dr. Beeching's last week, no ship was unloading so this traffic was left out of the report.

SHEPPERTON, Middx., deals with about 200,000 tons of coal a year. But the report shows its figure as 2,000 tons a year.

HASTINGS - TONBRIDGE line handles 400,000 tons of gypsum a year, besides other freight. Dr. Beeching claims traffic is down to 10,000 tons.

Ignored

Mr. Jack Barnett, prospective Liberal candidate for Gravesend, Kent, spoke last night of allegations of drivers inefficiency on the Allhallows - Gravesend line which is to be closed.

He said: "I have been told by a railway worker that when he drew attention to the desire to relieve fares on the line, his warnings were ignored.

"The railwayman also alleges that the safeguards, despite his warnings, was deliberately altered to get this an unserviceable and dangerous state."

THE WAGGS

"How many times have I told you not to buy bubble gum?"

DAMAGES FOR TV CHIEF

MR. LEW GRADE, managing director of Associated Television Ltd., was awarded agreed damages yesterday against a newspaper which accused him of "misleading" TV shares before the Pilkington TV Report.

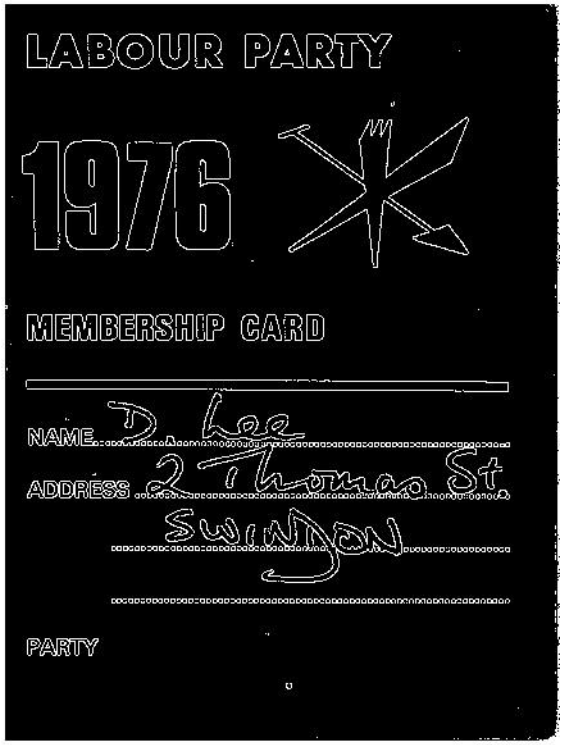
Mr. Justice Clyde-Jones was told in the High Court that Mr. Grade would donate the damages to charity, but would receive costs.

Mr. Grade brought a libel action over a comment by John Gordon in the Sunday Express a year ago on the substantial falls in commercial TV shares after the Pilkington Report was published.

The article claimed that Mr. Grade was one of the people who had accompanied the report and had made heavy sales of their shareholdings.

The court heard that the last time Mr Grade sold any shares was some months before the Pilkington Committee were appointed and the suggestion that

That was a political decision so we tried to take it up through the Labour Party.



I was at Parliament. I could recount all the useless marches, all the different things that took place. But if I had my time again, I'd deal with it a different way.

I said to our members, ‘every time we go to the Union, they use our money to browbeat us.

We are going to build up our own funds and we'll invite them to us. We'll pick the tab up. And they'll listen to us then.” Which they did.

So, you knew if you went on strike, you had monies yourselves to run that strike?

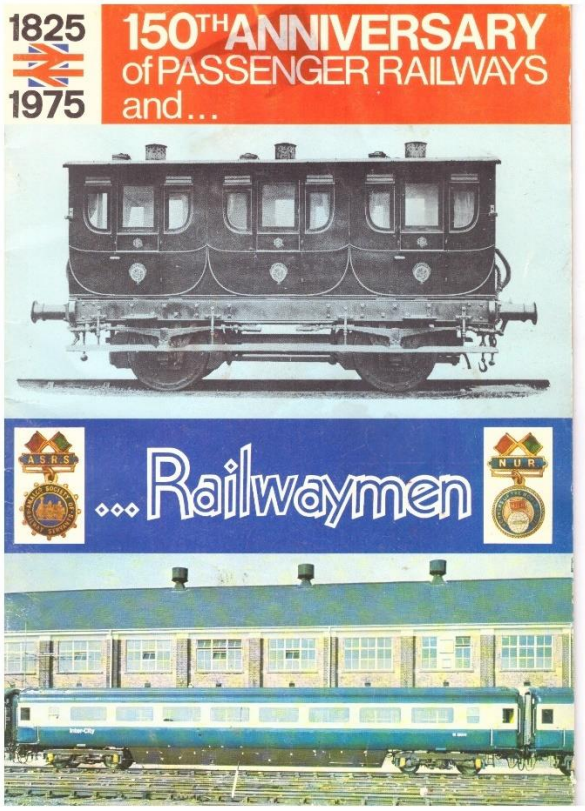
Oh, yeah, but there was never a local strike. The union called national pay strikes and we observed them. But we never had a strike. After that first one that I told you about, we never resorted to strike action.

The fitting department in the A shop might have a bit of a moan. They’d sit at the bench.

I said, ‘Now, look, you’ve exactly the same as everybody else. If you've got a problem, and it's got to be taken up, then bring it here, we'll take it up. Don't you worry about that. But if you want to act on your own then the consequences will be yours. You can't take decisions on behalf of the bloody rest of the members in here. That's not on’.

And that's how I used to deal with that.

The 12 on the Works Committee at Swindon consisted of seven CONFEDS and five NUR.



The Railway Joint Negotiating Committee was where we met the convenors and secretaries of the other works. We used to meet up regular and discuss the problems in Crewe or Derby or Glasgow and the union sometimes.

We were fighting the tide that was coming in and never going out. It was coming in all the time. That was modernisation. And politics and the drive to privatise. It was all part of the same tide. It was never ending.

We had to adapt as otherwise you went under.

When you say adapt, what does that mean?

You had to negotiate. I used to have mass meetings, and there was, what, three, four or, at the most, about 5,000 present and I would say ‘there are three things in front of us. This, I know we can get. This is negotiable. This one, we have no chance. And I'm not going to waste your time, our time, going out to argue something I know is a lost cause. What we'll do, we'll put all the effort into this one’. Because that is a negotiating factor.

We had to mitigate as much as you could, the effects of it. Early retirement, non-compulsory redundancy, volunteers. All that sort of stuff. All the workers understood it. I mean, the leaders, that was our responsibility, as a leadership. But, I mean, I knew what we were doing. And they knew what we were doing. But the alternative was to jeopardise the earnings and the conditions for all the families. Because it was only them that we were fighting for, there was all their kids and their wives and so on and so forth. There was all that involved in how we used to approach it.

There was no alternative, no. We could have decided to go out and strike and for which the national executives would have given a mouthful of support to. But when they supported it, then I knew, because of my dealings with Frank Chapple, Les Cannon and all them, that it meant nothing.

Was there ever a situation you feel where you should have, however, agitated for strike action?

No, never. Well, because I knew what the membership were like. We had hotheads in there, you know. The nutters are going to be all, ‘Yeah, no, no, no, no, this, that and that’. And it's amazing how they can sway this, that and the other. I said, ‘So we don't take that chance’. Because I know that if we took them out on strike, three-quarters of them would be reluctant to go there, even though they voted for it.

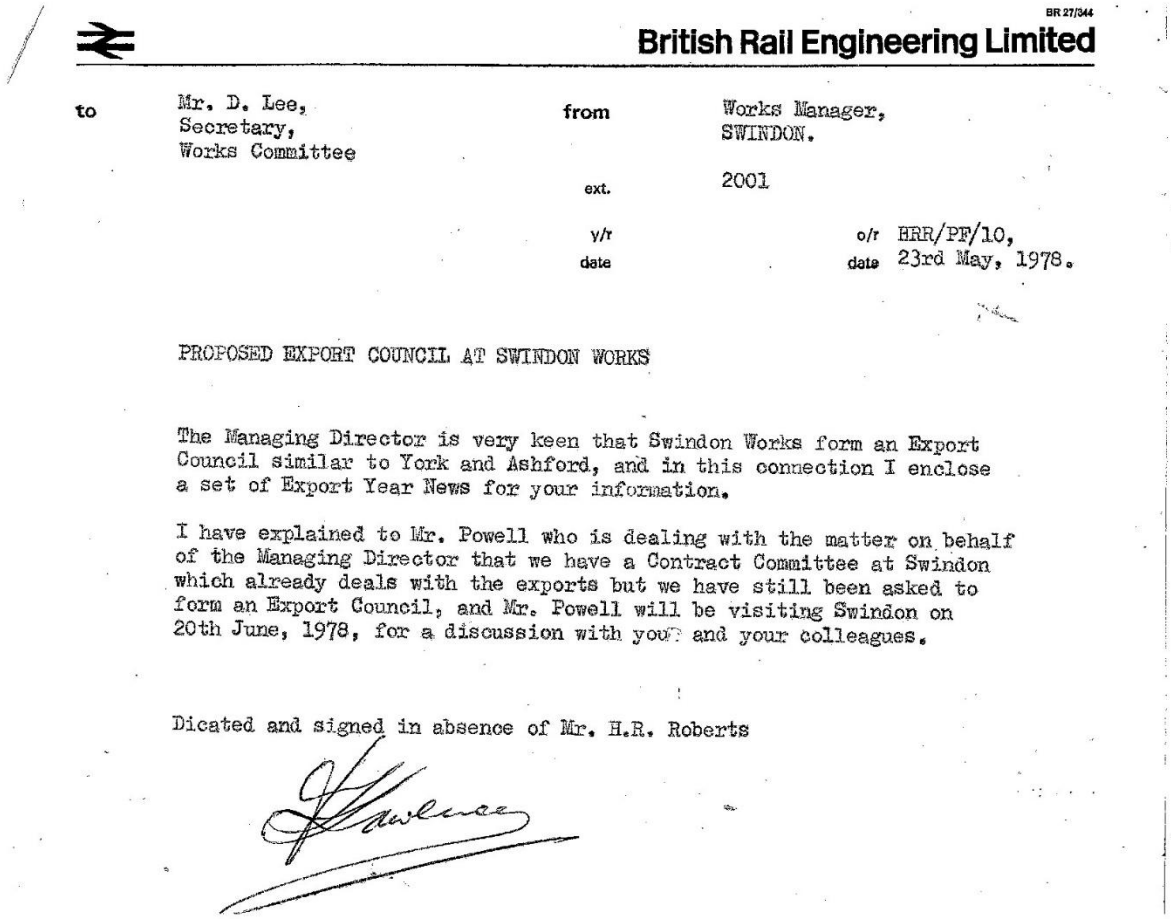
Now, I'm not going out on the gates. ‘You can't win!’

During this period of time there were attempts by management to get me out. They used to send managers down. They sent a bully of a manager down. And when we went in to meet him, the whole committee went in there, and I'd be taking the lead.

He'd say, ‘Right, Mr Lee, what's your... Oh, incidentally, before we start, I've got to tell you that we'll be chopping your bonus down to 100% from the 135 we're paying you at the moment’. I said, ‘OK’. And he said, ‘Well, what are you going to do about it?’ I said, ‘Nothing. I am not a manager. If that's your decision as management, we can't do anything about it. We're not managers.(...) I mean, if we were managers, we wouldn't do it. Stupid’."

‘What do you mean it's stupid?’

I said, ‘They won't work for that. They've got an agreement with you. If you want to break an agreement, say so. And then that's what we'll be arguing about. You breaking an agreement. We can't accept a cut in our wages without coming to an agreement, would you? Right. It makes bloody sense’.



BR 27/344

British Rail Engineering Limited

to Mr. D. Lee,
Secretary,
Works Committee

from Works Manager,
SWINDON.

ext. 2001

y/r
date

o/r HRR/PF/10,
date 23rd May, 1978.

PROPOSED EXPORT COUNCIL AT SWINDON WORKS

The Managing Director is very keen that Swindon Works form an Export Council similar to York and Ashford, and in this connection I enclose a set of Export Year News for your information.

I have explained to Mr. Powell who is dealing with the matter on behalf of the Managing Director that we have a Contract Committee at Swindon which already deals with the exports but we have still been asked to form an Export Council, and Mr. Powell will be visiting Swindon on 20th June, 1978, for a discussion with you and your colleagues.

Dicated and signed in absence of Mr. H.R. Roberts

And that's just one. Another was Romanian trains. **Two of us went on the Export Committee.** They started all these things up during this period. And we became part of that. I mean, another talking shop and that, you know, because the people who were running it, were doing it from Westminster or somewhere else, you know. They made a big song and dance about.

'Oh, it's possible we'll be building trains for Romania'.

So, we put our plate up, saying, 'Well, you can do them here. We've got skilled people, we've got this, we've got that, we've got the other, and so on'. And they sent a retired lieutenant colonel or whatever he was.(...) 50-pound oak voice, you know.

'Oh, yes. Mr Lee, what seems to be the problem?'

'Well, we just want a slice of these Romanian trains to build, construct'.

'Oh,' he said, 'Yes, we've looked at that and I'm afraid you'll be far too high on your overheads'.

He didn't know, he didn't have a clue what he was talking about, he just learned what they told him.

I said, 'I'll tell you what, then we'll build them for nothing." He didn't know where to go. Honestly, Mark, he did not know where to go.

Of course he was looking at those behind him, managers and people who dealt with us day in, day out, and they knew, you know. And he was looking at them for support and he couldn't get any. It was incredible.

So, he said, 'You can't do it'.

I said, ‘I'll tell you what, then we'll use the same methods that you use to fiddle the overheads elsewhere. You take the best and dilute them with the worst ones. Instead of being honest about it and putting the money up on them because they're entitled to it. They're being done on the cheap. But that's how you do it now. If you let us do the same, we can build them. For a fraction of what you'll say, it cost us’.

In the finish we weren't going to get them anyway.

Preventing closure

I met with the chief personnel manager, Alan Dunkley. He was hard-knocked.

I could get away with certain things, but he was smart.

He instructed the works manager, Harry Roberts, to close the place down.

Harry Roberts had said this, that and the other. A nice enough bloke, but he was so conceited. I'm pretty sure he was at Arnhem. I think he was a captain anyway.

But he worked as a manager in York and then they brought him to Swindon. And he built this aurora around himself, which is easy. In 1976, I would say there was approximately 3,000 remaining. A lot had gone from the carriage and wagon works when they closed it.

Harry said, ‘It's going to close’, and this, that and the other.

And this issue came up of shunters to be built for Kenya, much the same as the Romanian thing, only this time to be built in conjunction with the Hunslet Engine Company in Leeds. Harry said, ‘Meet Mr Dunkley’.

Alan Dunkley. Oh, Jesus, he was tough. So, we met him.

He said, ‘I said that bastard to suck you up’.

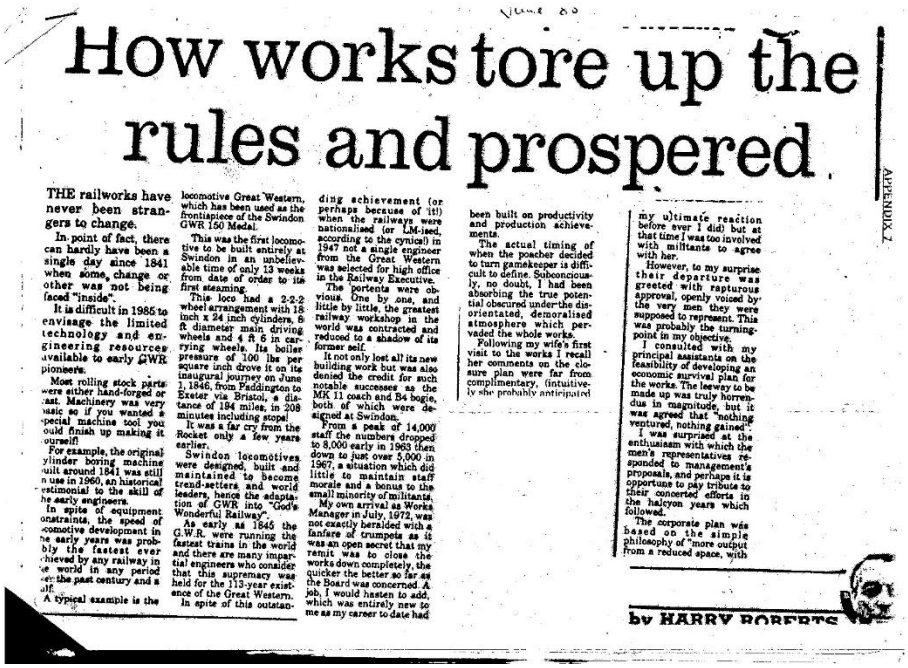
That was his word he used. He said, he hadn't done it. He said, "So I'm going to sack him’.

I said, ‘Well, that'd be stupid, Mr Dunkley. Because he's a very popular man. You know? I mean, whatever it is you want to do, you've got to have him there to do it, otherwise you’ve created a rod for your own back before you even start’.

And I explained to him why he'd be a fool, because of his persona in the town as well as in the works that he thinks he'd built up.

He was the man. He was the man. He went for a beer; people bought him a beer. ‘How are you doing, Harry?’ That sort of stuff with the heart.

But it had been done as a result of negotiating with us, because if you read the articles he put in the paper, ‘My workers are the best in the land. They've demarcated. We got away with demarcation’.



How works tore up the rules and prospered

THE railworks have never been strangers to change.

In point of fact, there can hardly have been a single day since 1841 when some change or other was not being faced "inside".

It is difficult in 1985 to envisage the limited technology and engineering resources available to early GWR pioneers.

Most rolling stock parts were either hand-forged or cast. Machinery was very basic so if you wanted a special machine tool you could finish up making it yourself!

For example, the original cylinder boring machine built around 1841 was still in use in 1960, an historical testimonial to the skill of the early engineers.

In spite of equipment constraints, the speed of locomotive development in the early years was probably the fastest ever achieved by any railway in the world in any period over the past century and a half.

A typical example is the locomotive Great Western, which has been used as the frontispiece of the Swindon GWR 150 Medal.

This was the first locomotive to be built entirely at Swindon in an unbelievable time of only 13 weeks from date of order to its first steaming.

This loco had a 2-2-2 wheel arrangement with 18 inch x 24 inch cylinders, 8 ft diameter main driving wheels and 4 ft 6 in carrying wheels. Its boiler pressure of 100 lbs per square inch drove it on its inaugural journey on June 1, 1846, from Paddington to Exeter via Bristol, a distance of 194 miles, in 208 minutes including stops!

It was a far cry from the Rocket only a few years earlier.

Swindon locomotives were designed, built and maintained to become trend-setters and world leaders, hence the adaptation of GWR into "God's Wonderful Railway".

As early as 1845 the G.W.R. were running the fastest trains in the world and there are many impartial engineers who consider that this supremacy was held for the 113-year existence of the Great Western.

In spite of this outstanding achievement (or perhaps because of it!) when the railways were nationalised (or LM-ised, according to the cynical) in 1947 not a single engineer from the Great Western was selected for high office in the Railway Executive.

The portents were obvious. One by one, and little by little, the greatest railway workshop in the world was contracted and reduced to a shadow of its former self.

It not only lost all its new building work but was also denied the credit for such notable successes as the MK 11 coach and Bo bogie, both of which were designed at Swindon.

From a peak of 14,000 staff the numbers dropped to 8,000 early in 1963 then down to just over 5,000 in 1967, a situation which did little to maintain staff morale and a bonus to the small minority of militants.

My own arrival as Works Manager in July, 1972, was not exactly heralded with a fanfare of trumpets as it was an open secret that my remit was to close the works down completely, the quicker the better so far as the Board was concerned. A job, I would hasten to add, which was entirely new to me as my career to date had been built on productivity and production achievements.

The actual timing of when the poacher decided to turn gamekeeper is difficult to define. Subconciously, no doubt, I had been absorbing the true potential obscured under the disorientated, demoralised atmosphere which pervaded the whole works.

Following my wife's first visit to the works I recall her comments on the closure plan were far from complimentary, (intuitively she probably anticipated my ultimate reaction before ever I did) but at that time I was too involved with militants to agree with her.

However, to my surprise their departure was greeted with rapturous approval, openly voiced by the very men they were supposed to represent. This was probably the turning-point in my objective.

I consulted with my principal assistants on the feasibility of developing an economic survival plan for the works. The leeway to be made up was truly horrendus in magnitude, but it was agreed that "nothing ventured, nothing gained".

I was surprised at the enthusiasm with which the men's representatives responded to management's proposals, and perhaps it is opportune to pay tribute to their concerted efforts in the halcyon years which followed.

The corporate plan was based on the simple philosophy of "more output from a reduced space, with

by HARRY ROBERTS

APPENDIX 7

See, he claimed all that to himself. But he couldn't have done it if we hadn't have agreed with him.

I made my problem, Alan Dunkley's problem on that point.

So, I said, 'Well, look, why can't we build him?' The Kenyan trains. 'Well, look, you read what we've done up to now, retraining all the things we've organized plus demarcation that we've got rid of. You don't want to chuck that away. Because you can't close this place overnight'.

'Well, what can you do?'

And I struck a deal with him, you know?

We got the answer to the job. Harry said he'd got it, and I said, 'I know how we got it'.

And Dunkley, I'll give him credit.

I travelled with Mr. Roberts to Kenya. We concluded the agreement and we built the shunters and to my knowledge they're still working today in Kenya.

The work kept Swindon open for much longer.

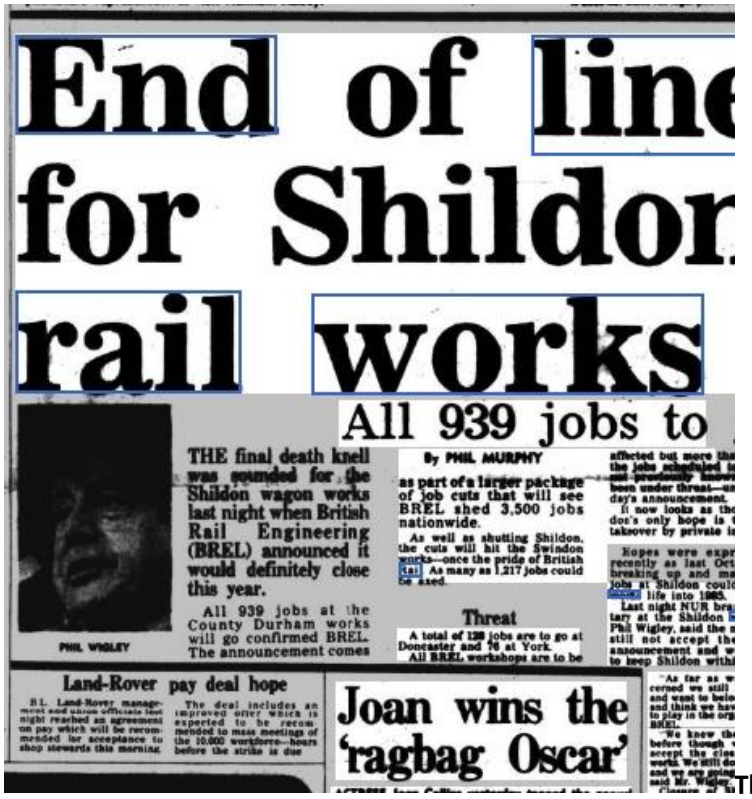
Because that's the art of negotiation. It's the development of an experience and learning the subtleties, in a way, of the people that you're negotiating with.

The necessity of developing a relationship with the man. You have to. Even if it's an uneasy one, you've still got to make the best of that. Because, I mean, sometimes you're sitting across a table from a bloke that you detest for what he stands for.

Under capitalism, workers are always on the back foot? It can't be any other way.

It's very rewarding in some ways that you're able to do something to mitigate some of the effects that you know do happen, because I've been through it.

I was blacklisted. I know what it's like. Nobody has to tell me what they can do under capitalism and what they can't do. You know, no matter how low you want to trickle it, it's still capital versus labour.


End of line for Shildon rail works

All 939 jobs to

THE final death knell was sounded for the Shildon wagon works last night when British Rail Engineering (BREL) announced it would definitely close this year.

All 939 jobs at the County Durham works will go confirmed BREL. The announcement comes

By PHIL MURPHY

as part of a larger package of job cuts that will see BREL shed 3,500 jobs nationwide.

As well as shutting Shildon, the cuts will hit the Swindon works—once the pride of British Rail. As many as 1,217 jobs could be axed.

Threat

A total of 128 jobs are to go at Doncaster and 76 at York. All BREL workshops are to be

PHIL WIGLEY

Land-Rover pay deal hope

Joan wins the 'ragbag Oscar'

The closure of Swindon BREL was part of a nationwide cull of Br wagon works – January 1983

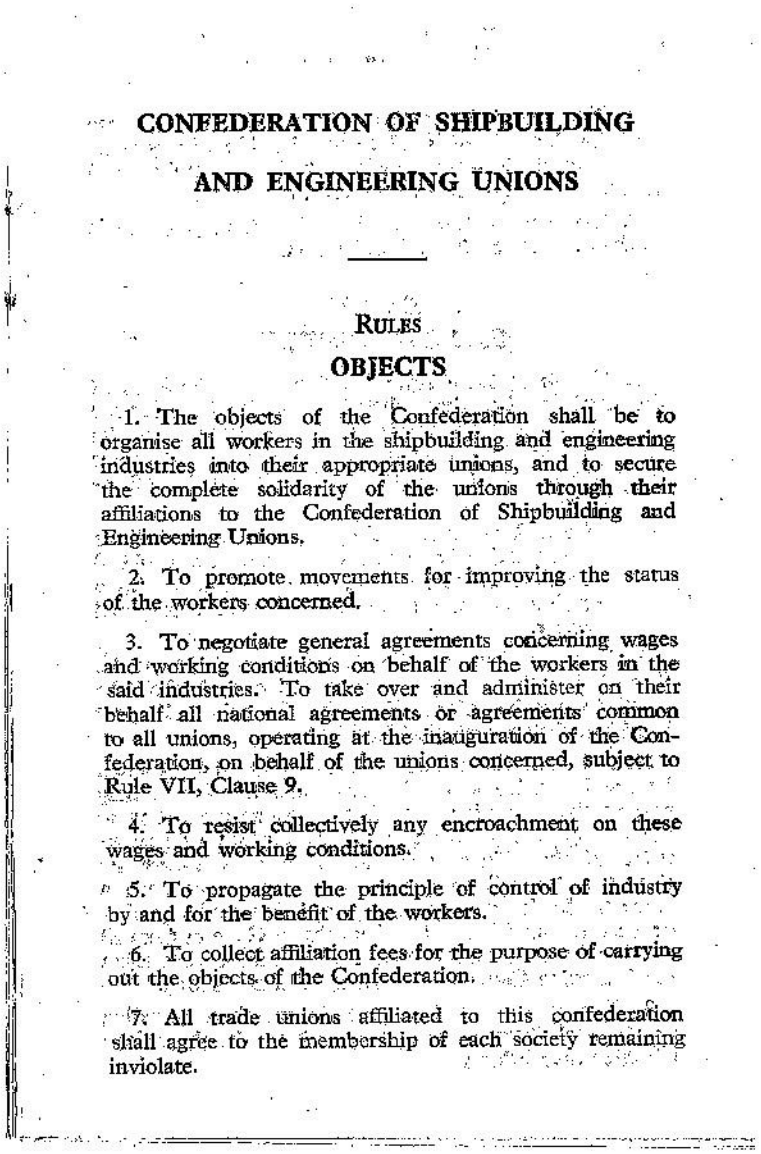
Capitalist versus worker. Even when representing all of these workers you still know who's the real power. Well, I mean, otherwise, we'd own it. I mean, we did in 1945. We owned all the public utilities, every one of them. Post office, the whole lot. And it was given away by weak social democrats, footsies under the table. And they're doing it again. Because they'll leave it in such a state, then they'll get the working class, like they did in 1945, to pick up the country by its bootstraps.

You take the deputy Prime Minister.

He righted on Theresa May, one of his own. She gave him the job to negotiate Brexit or not Brexit. He was there up all night, stabbed her in the back, came back and joined up with your man on the extreme right and all of them. Yeah. And that man does not think that workers should be allowed in to talk to bosses or negotiate with bosses. He didn't believe it.

Just imagine how many prime ministers I've seen. From Neville Chamberlain, I can remember my family, you know, my uncle and my dad and the family talking about Peace in Our Time. I didn't understand any of it, but I can vividly remember the discussions because they used to get heated. The Irish question, that's where it came. In my family, it was always on the agenda.

The national contracts, terms of work and conditions, were nationally negotiated for all the workshops by seven unions, four from the CONFED.



CONFEDERATION OF SHIPBUILDING

AND ENGINEERING UNIONS

RULES

OBJECTS

1. The objects of the Confederation shall be to organise all workers in the shipbuilding and engineering industries into their appropriate unions, and to secure the complete solidarity of the unions through their affiliations to the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions.

2. To promote movements for improving the status of the workers concerned.

3. To negotiate general agreements concerning wages and working conditions on behalf of the workers in the said industries. To take over and administer on their behalf all national agreements or agreements common to all unions, operating at the inauguration of the Confederation, on behalf of the unions concerned, subject to Rule VII, Clause 9.

4. To resist collectively any encroachment on these wages and working conditions.

5. To propagate the principle of control of industry by and for the benefit of the workers.

6. To collect affiliation fees for the purpose of carrying out the objects of the Confederation.

7. All trade unions affiliated to this confederation shall agree to the membership of each society remaining inviolate.

Well, there was 110,000 members at one time in the Confederation, the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU). Then there was the NUR and then the other one was the Staff Union. There was the T and G and there were the pattern makers.

From 1977 onwards we recruited 1,000 workers.

Dunkley knew, rather than have a battle, say, with the running shed in Shepton Mallet or somewhere, he could say, 'Well, look, we've got this problem here. They won't do it down there'. I said, 'Well, that's if they don't want it'. I'd check and if they did not want it we'd take the work.

We agreed to working on the removal of asbestos. We built an asbestos house such that the blokes that we sent in there looked like bloody spacemen. And they had showers, they had everything. So, we were worse off outside of the asbestos removal than they were, because it was still in the air outside, but it wasn't in there.

But that kept on 200 men for months and months. One of my sons worked in there as an electrician. They were removing the asbestos from the carriages. Blue asbestos.

Did you know many people who died as a result of mesothelioma?

Oh, yeah. I mean, I've got a load of plaques now, you know. I don't get paid. If I'd got them in Northern Ireland, I'd have got paid. If I had them in Scotland, I'd get paid. But not in England. You work that out.

Well, I've got the plaques, that's the start of it. Well, I've always understood it's a forerunner.

It can take up to 30, 40 years before these little buggers...

Would you be happy with another 40, wouldn't you?.....

... Whatever's coming, whatever's coming. I have no control over that Mark.

Any work that had asbestos on it would only be done on nights and only with the personnel who had the full protection in order to do that work. That's what we negotiated.

We had a safety committee, a subcommittee of the works committee, that met with management on the safety committee. We had all those covered. We covered a lot.

And asbestos became a big issue.

Before the 60s, they were still saying, 'Ah, you know. You're smoking'. But then eventually you get the truth out of the bastards.

In Leeds, in Armley actually, when I grew up, there was a factory and it was blowing up and down, the kids were making snowballs from it.

Did you witness many people, many friends of yours who died from it? Of course I did. Horrendous. Nothing you can do about it. Once you've got it, you're finished.

I mean, in the early days, it was raw.

You'd see them go skin and bone. Poor buggers were trying to be, you know, happy and trying to participate. And you were going along with them even though you were near tears. You know what I mean? The human thing used to come out on a one-to-one and you'd be talking to them as if like I'm talking to you. But looking at a dying man.

Frank Chapple closed the Swindon branch twice.

The second time he got me was when the treasurer of the branch was using two ledgers. Well, I didn't know as nobody in the branch knew. I mean, the one he used to bring was the one that everybody's money went in. But the one that he dealt with, that he sent off to Head Office, if he ever sent it, was the one, you know, that had the duplication or whatever they called it. He was taking some cash.

Him and I were railed up on the basis of Chapple's recommendation to the executive. We were charged.

John Hook was the treasurer. He was a big crook,. He got the wrong name. I tell you.

Anyway, he didn't challenge it, but I said, 'No way, I'm not accepting that'. And I appealed. What they'd done, they stopped all branch elections and such, taking all the power away. We didn't have a control of any money in the branch anymore. They took all that away.

You had to go with a begging bowl if you wanted some.

I appealed to the TUC Appeals Committee.

I got suspended and then it dropped but they left me with a five-year ban. (1977-1982)

And this is where the relationship with Dunkley turned out well as Chapple wrote urging him to sack me.

And Dunkley wrote back to him saying he did not want to interfere in the affairs of the union in that way and said that in 1976 the Swindon Wagon Works was due to close but that due to efforts of myself and my colleagues that had been averted.

I was the president of the 9A District Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions and Chapple got me moved from that.

He wrote to Alex Ferry at the head office of the Confed, and said, 'Mr Lee has been barred from office and he can't hold any positions'.

The Confed, 98 District Committee, to which I was a delegate represented Plessey's, Square D, everywhere. Everywhere across the district.

The district of the Confed, number nine, was Oxford.

Swindon, because it was too big to include, became 9A.

And I was the President and sometimes the Secretary of that one. And that's the one that Chapple had me moved from.

And he tried unsuccessfully to do the same with my position as chairman of the works committee.

There was work that was being reduced in many other areas such as the running sheds at this period.

Harry Roberts himself was given a post into Egypt.

I had known Chapple for a long time. He was a hit man for the Communist Party in all the time I was in the ETU Camden Town Branch. He was the one who was sent round when there was any opposition to the communist nominated members for any position. Frank went round and bullied branches that were being difficult. Contact them physically? Oh, no, no, no, no, no, not to my knowledge. No, but I wouldn't put it past him. He used to come along and do it as an executive counsellor and say,' you can't do that'.

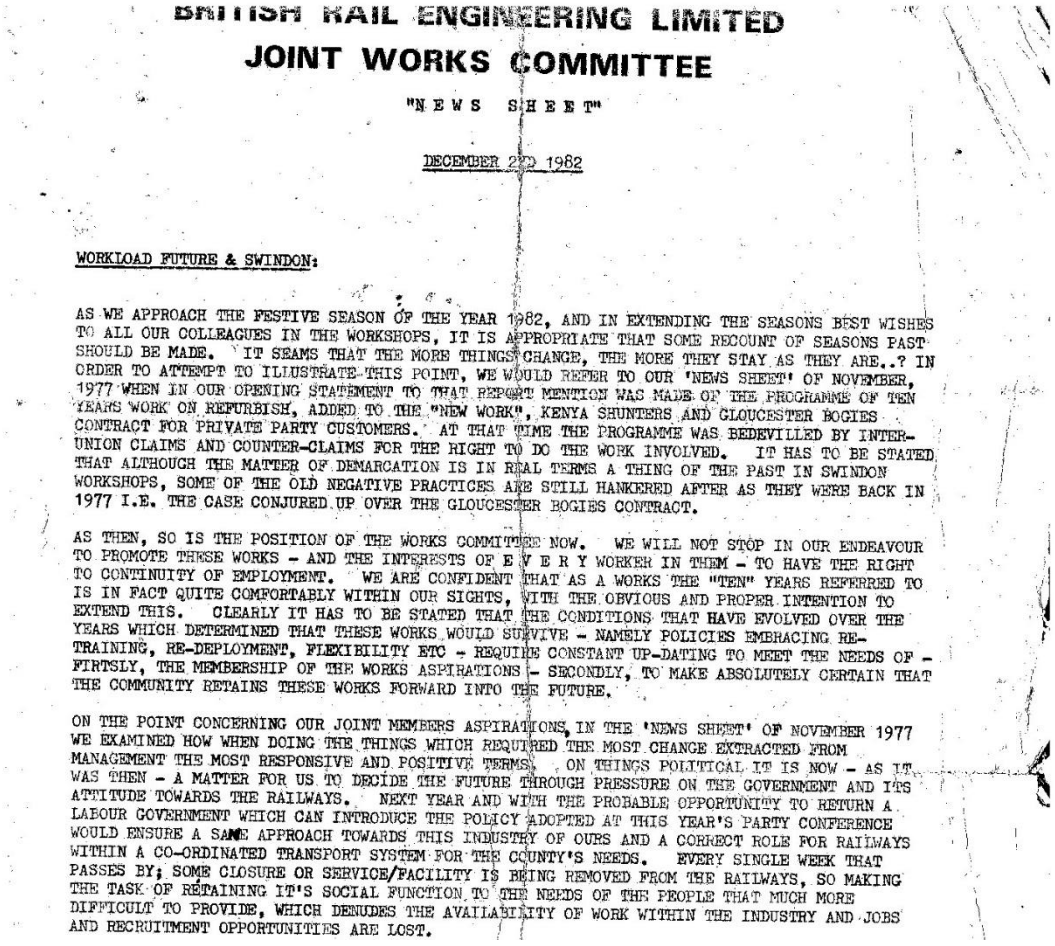
And try to frighten the shit out of them. He didn't do it to Camden Town Branch. I was nominated to stand for the Executive Council against the sitting counsellor, H.H. Gittins, who was an absolute pussycat. And the Brits brothers came, accosting me in a pub one night and put the strong arm on me, you know.

But I'd already made my mind up. I wasn't standing. I was involved too much locally and there was no way I was leaving Swindon. So, I said, 'all right. Yeah. But what you come down for?' They said, 'well, we've been told just to have a few words'. I said, 'well, look, I don't know who's informed you. I said, but it isn't true'. I was never on the Executive Committee. I told you I would never accept such posts.

Chapple offered me a job at the Labour Party conference, an appointed job. For the E.T.U. Oh, yeah. And that's when it really heightened again. I told them, stick it where the sun doesn't shine. I won't

take anything unless I'm elected to it. If I stand up in front of the bloody parish council, I'll tell them what I'm about. And they either elect me or they don't.

But once I've been elected, I know if you can't do what's been agreed, then I'm within my right to say, well, bugger it. You carry on.



BRITISH RAIL ENGINEERING LIMITED

JOINT WORKS COMMITTEE

"N E W S S H E E T"

DECEMBER 2ND 1982

WORKLOAD FUTURE & SWINDON:

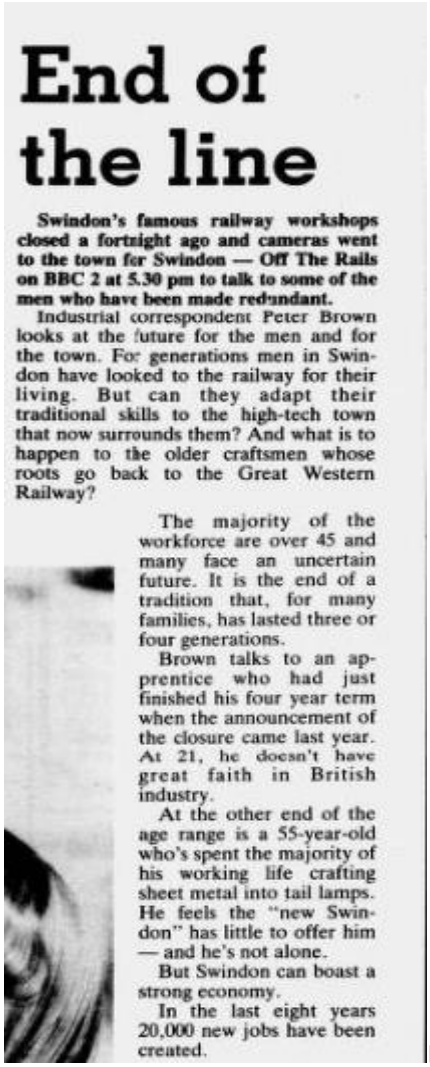
AS WE APPROACH THE FESTIVE SEASON OF THE YEAR 1982, AND IN EXTENDING THE SEASONS BEST WISHES TO ALL OUR COLLEAGUES IN THE WORKSHOPS, IT IS APPROPRIATE THAT SOME RECOUNT OF SEASONS PAST SHOULD BE MADE. IT SEAMS THAT THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY AS THEY ARE..? IN ORDER TO ATTEMPT TO ILLUSTRATE THIS POINT, WE WOULD REFER TO OUR 'NEWS SHEET' OF NOVEMBER, 1977 WHEN IN OUR OPENING STATEMENT TO THAT REPORT MENTION WAS MADE OF THE PROGRAMME OF TEN YEARS WORK ON REFURBISH, ADDED TO THE "NEW WORK", KENYA SHUNTERS AND GLOUCESTER BOGIES CONTRACT FOR PRIVATE PARTY CUSTOMERS. AT THAT TIME THE PROGRAMME WAS BEDEVILLED BY INTER-UNION CLAIMS AND COUNTER-CLAIMS FOR THE RIGHT TO DO THE WORK INVOLVED. IT HAS TO BE STATED THAT ALTHOUGH THE MATTER OF DEMARCATION IS IN REAL TERMS A THING OF THE PAST IN SWINDON WORKSHOPS, SOME OF THE OLD NEGATIVE PRACTICES ARE STILL HANKERED AFTER AS THEY WERE BACK IN 1977 I.E. THE CASE CONJURED UP OVER THE GLOUCESTER BOGIES CONTRACT.

AS THEN, SO IS THE POSITION OF THE WORKS COMMITTEE NOW. WE WILL NOT STOP IN OUR ENDEAVOUR TO PROMOTE THESE WORKS - AND THE INTERESTS OF E V E R Y WORKER IN THEM - TO HAVE THE RIGHT TO CONTINUITY OF EMPLOYMENT. WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT AS A WORKS THE "TEN" YEARS REFERRED TO IS IN FACT QUITE COMFORTABLY WITHIN OUR SIGHTS, WITH THE OBVIOUS AND PROPER INTENTION TO EXTEND THIS. CLEARLY IT HAS TO BE STATED THAT THE CONDITIONS THAT HAVE EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS WHICH DETERMINED THAT THESE WORKS WOULD SURVIVE - NAMELY POLICIES EMBRACING RE-TRAINING, RE-DEPLOYMENT, FLEXIBILITY ETC - REQUIRE CONSTANT UP-DATING TO MEET THE NEEDS OF - FIRTSLY, THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE WORKS ASPIRATIONS - SECONDLY, TO MAKE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN THAT THE COMMUNITY RETAINS THESE WORKS FORWARD INTO THE FUTURE.

ON THE POINT CONCERNING OUR JOINT MEMBERS ASPIRATIONS, IN THE 'NEWS SHEET' OF NOVEMBER 1977 WE EXAMINED HOW WHEN DOING THE THINGS WHICH REQUIRED THE MOST CHANGE EXTRACTED FROM MANAGEMENT THE MOST RESPONSIVE AND POSITIVE TERMS. ON THINGS POLITICAL IT IS NOW - AS IT WAS THEN - A MATTER FOR US TO DECIDE THE FUTURE THROUGH PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE RAILWAYS. NEXT YEAR AND WITH THE PROBABLE OPPORTUNITY TO RETURN A LABOUR GOVERNMENT WHICH CAN INTRODUCE THE POLICY ADOPTED AT THIS YEAR'S PARTY CONFERENCE WOULD ENSURE A SANE APPROACH TOWARDS THIS INDUSTRY OF OURS AND A CORRECT ROLE FOR RAILWAYS WITHIN A CO-ORDINATED TRANSPORT SYSTEM FOR THE COUNTY'S NEEDS. EVERY SINGLE WEEK THAT PASSES BY; SOME CLOSURE OR SERVICE/FACILITY IS BEING REMOVED FROM THE RAILWAYS, SO MAKING THE TASK OF RETAINING IT'S SOCIAL FUNCTION TO THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE THAT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO PROVIDE, WHICH DENUDES THE AVAILABILITY OF WORK WITHIN THE INDUSTRY AND JOBS AND RECRUITMENT OPPORTUNITIES ARE LOST.

1982

The works were closed then. **How did the works come about to be closed, which must have been a devastating blow.**



End of the line

Swindon's famous railway workshops closed a fortnight ago and cameras went to the town for Swindon — Off The Rails on BBC 2 at 5.30 pm to talk to some of the men who have been made redundant.

Industrial correspondent Peter Brown looks at the future for the men and for the town. For generations men in Swindon have looked to the railway for their living. But can they adapt their traditional skills to the high-tech town that now surrounds them? And what is to happen to the older craftsmen whose roots go back to the Great Western Railway?

The majority of the workforce are over 45 and many face an uncertain future. It is the end of a tradition that, for many families, has lasted three or four generations.

Brown talks to an apprentice who had just finished his four year term when the announcement of the closure came last year. At 21, he doesn't have great faith in British industry.

At the other end of the age range is a 55-year-old who's spent the majority of his working life crafting sheet metal into tail lamps. He feels the "new Swindon" has little to offer him — and he's not alone.

But Swindon can boast a strong economy.

In the last eight years 20,000 new jobs have been created.

Burton Daily Mail 10-04-1986

Well, because the left, the ultra-left got hold of it and they wanted demonstrations through the town. They wanted to take management on.

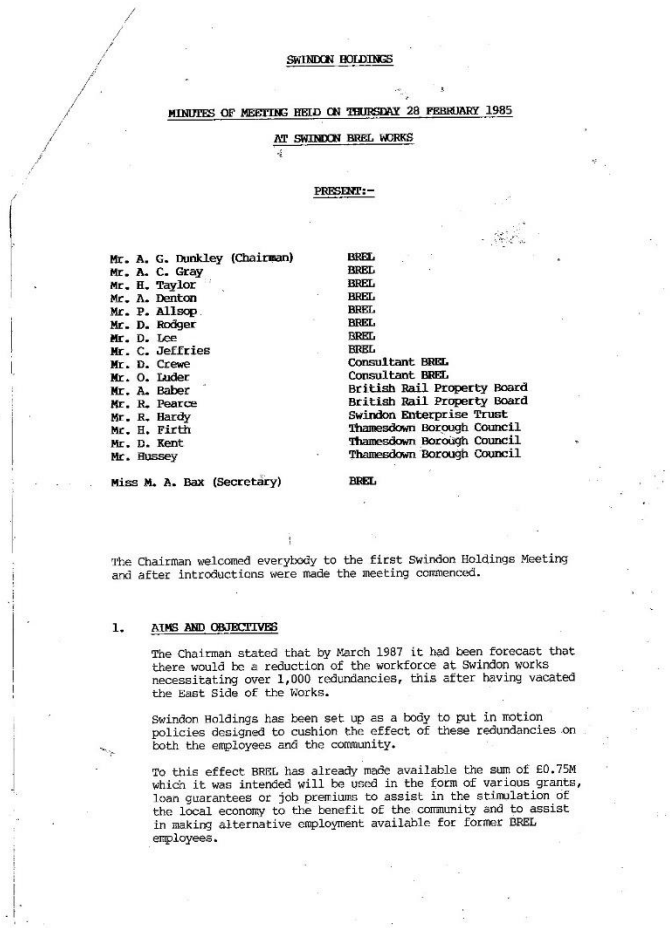
The situation in the works was that we had operated from 76 to 84, like I've explained here, boxing clever. And we negotiated this, that and the other. Mitigate as much as possible. No compulsory redundancies, volunteers, early retirements, all these sorts of issues to remove the threat of closure.

We retrained workers to keep up the numbers that we needed. But jobs were gradually being lost.

They, the works committee, the N.U.R. particularly started to believe, because they thought their executive council were gods, that they, wrongly, could stop this.

And I'd already explained to them, 'we've built we built our own executive and our own funds.'

Swindon, in order to absorb any redundant people, set up a private company called Swindon Holdings and put £500,000 in there or whatever it was in order to facilitate the employment of workers that didn't fall into what we were doing. They would be given early retirement or whatever it was and be transferred over to the Swindon Holdings committee and be given jobs, whatever were available in the district.



SWINDON HOLDINGS

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 28 FEBRUARY 1985

AT SWINDON BREL WORKS

PRESENT:-

Mr. A. G. Dunkley (Chairman)	BREL
Mr. A. C. Gray	BREL
Mr. H. Taylor	BREL
Mr. A. Denton	BREL
Mr. P. Allsop	BREL
Mr. D. Rodger	BREL
Mr. D. Lee	BREL
Mr. C. Jeffries	BREL
Mr. D. Crewe	Consultant BREL
Mr. O. Luder	Consultant BREL
Mr. A. Baber	British Rail Property Board
Mr. R. Pearce	British Rail Property Board
Mr. R. Hardy	Swindon Enterprise Trust
Mr. H. Firth	Thamesdown Borough Council
Mr. D. Kent	Thamesdown Borough Council
Mr. Hussey	Thamesdown Borough Council
Miss M. A. Bax (Secretary)	BREL

The Chairman welcomed everybody to the first Swindon Holdings Meeting and after introductions were made the meeting commenced.

1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Chairman stated that by March 1987 it had been forecast that there would be a reduction of the workforce at Swindon works necessitating over 1,000 redundancies, this after having vacated the East Side of the Works.

Swindon Holdings has been set up as a body to put in motion policies designed to cushion the effect of these redundancies on both the employees and the community.

To this effect BREL has already made available the sum of £0.75M which it was intended will be used in the form of various grants, loan guarantees or job premiums to assist in the stimulation of the local economy to the benefit of the community and to assist in making alternative employment available for former BREL employees.

First meeting of Swindon Holdings

But then when we knew they were going to close the works the N.U.R. came off our works committee saying they were not backing Swindon Holdings, which as members of the committee they had helped negotiate for and backed when it was set up. I had been elected alongside Terry Larkham of the NUR to sit on the committee at Swindon Holdings. We'd taken a decision with the support of the workers to sit on it.

I reminded them that unless there are circumstances that come about that require policy change then in order to leave Swindon Holdings then they would have to discuss it out with the rest of the workers, which they declined to do. And on the basis of that, I said, ‘well, you can get yourself another chairman, secretary’, whatever I was at the time.

I could not see any point in taking men down the road that the union executives wanted to lead them to which is marching around the town and a delegation to the gas house, Westminster.

I said, “there's no future in it. If that's where you want to go, fine. But I'm out. Because I told you right at the beginning what we've agreed to is policy. If they change it without, you know, a proper explanation - and the explanation was Sid Weighell, the NUR general secretary at the time, had taken the decision – then I can't sit on this committee’. Weighell had instructed them to override the view of their members at work.

Therefore, I quit. Frank Chapple had previously said I could not sit on something and I had told him to stuff himself.

If I had stayed on I'd have been a prisoner of something that had not been agreed by the beginning of 1985.

I retained the position of a representative from the factory that owned Swindon Holdings until I packed that in as well about 1988. It wasn't long.

You're saying that walking and demonstrations and the rest wasn't productive. In what way? Well, because I've been on thousands of them. The biggest demonstration I ever went on was the Suez one in 1956.

You couldn't move in London without demonstrations when it brought down the Prime Minister, Churchill's son in law, Antony Eden. Mind you, that man had the guts to resign when he knew the game was up. Not like this bugger, he's been sacked and he's still swollen headed about.

You felt that the period of walking around the town by left group selling newspapers and the rest of the things wasn't that productive? No, I didn't say that. I didn't say that they weren't entitled to make their political points and this, that and the other. But it wouldn't be productive, because it didn't lead us anywhere. We didn't need to walk around the town. The only reason they walked around the town was because Sid Weighell said so and also said 'We'll organise a national strike'.

Well, that's what they told them. They believed it. I couldn't. I mean, I knew what they were. I sat opposite Sid Weighell and Frank Chapple and the only one who had any guts at all was when he reopened the branch a second time. He became the president of the ETU. They made him the head of the Esher College. He was the main tutor there. He was a Lancashire man.

His brother was assistant general secretary at the NUR. I knew him well.

At this time as well the running argument with Chapple was continuing.

He was now using the ex-treasurer of the Swindon branch, John Crook. He had admitted he'd been involved in fraud in the past and he repaid the money. The fact that he wasn't prosecuted meant they were guilty of supporting a criminal act, an act of fraud.

He then wrote snivelling letters to Chapple, to everybody.

Please, please, please, please let me have my card back. Danny Lees persecuted me, you know, all this'. And by this time the executive decisions had permeated into the works committee and they were going all over the place and he came into his own.

I retained a position on the Swindon Holdings until that was dispensed with by the same methods that they destroyed the works committee set up. And in the process of destroying the works committee, they also, as I predicted, destroyed the actual ethos that they'd constructed over years, which then made it easy for the management to declare the closure.

You needed to be in a position of strength and negotiate and to find the alternative work. That's what I thoroughly believe and still do. I'm not saying we would have kept the works open. I doubt very much whether we would. But if it had gone then it would have closed in a much more humane and more positive fashion than it did where they were all just cast aside. And there was nothing, nothing, not even a Swindon Holdings committee.

I left the works in 1989. I've got my labour unemployment certificates to prove it.

1989 to 2022 is a long time. 16 years of that was taken by living in France. I retained my membership of the International Branch of the Labour Party, and I retained my membership with the ETU.

I attempted to get employment in France, but couldn't get it because the retirement age is 60 and I was 60 years of age. They weren't going to take on a bloke who was retired. There was some severance pay to come and I got that through the ETU.

Ken Jackson was the man who finally gave me leave to use the legal side of the union. And they took it to an industrial tribunal and that was settled in my favour. Then so once again, as I've always said to people when I've asked them to join the union and they say, 'Oh no, it's this, it's that, it's the other' you to join it for protection. You don't know when you need it. You might need it for a legal job, anything. You don't have to take notice of the nutters or anything else, but you must be organised. There is no substitute for organisation, no matter what you think of it or not think of it.

So, in France I had a couple of meetings with the unions. They are called syndicalists in France and I had a couple of meetings with members of the CGT and so on. The language was a barrier.

I had great friends, French compatriots, but I never could manage the language. I don't even know English. I have difficulty knowing a verb from a verb, you know, when it comes to English. I came back, the circumstances were that Philomena was the last of the Johnston's and because her brother was a priest, a Vincentian priest. Yes, family home. Oliver, who was the eldest brother, died and it was a question of whether we stayed in France or we came to Ireland where the family landed. So, the coin came down on the side of Ireland. She was the last of the family. She had to come over and we left France.

We sold up and came back and Philomena inherited the family home in Armagh and land with it. That's another story. I then rejoined the United Retired Members branches. I became a delegate to the national conferences. I became treasurer of the Unite branch I was in.

During the period of time when you were away in France, were you still a union member?

Yeah, but not Unite, EEPTU. It became Amicus. I've had a membership since 1947 to 2020? 75 years.

I've got the 70-year union badge.

I was active in the Belfast branch for Unite Retired Members. (URM)

I then transferred to Armagh and South Down Branch. Then I attended national conference for the URM in Eastbourne. I went to all the regional committee meetings and participated in demonstrations for the saving of Daisy Hill Hospital and numerous struggles to save the small injuries unit at Tower Hill in Armagh City.

I attended all the shop stewards' meetings that were called at which Len McCluskey came over. That was the Bombardier disputes and things like that. I went along with and listed what support we could give from the URM, just to make sure that they knew that we were discussing it and where we could support we would. That carried on. I was very active.

I never missed a meeting until Covid. Well, by that time I'm reaching my 90th year.

Why did you move to Peterborough?

Well, because my daughter lives here and in order to assist Philomena and me particularly with her dementia.

Why am I a trade unionist?

I can best answer that because of what I've read.

The socialist authors, not necessarily the Lenin’s or the Trotsky's or the Karl Marx's, although I have browsed through those voluminous documents.

It's people like Jack London, the author.

Men who needn't have been supporters and put their jobs on the line in the end to trade unionists and trade unionism. Organize, organize, organize. In the mode of the song, Jack Hill, you know.

Last night I dreamt I saw Joe Hill alive as you and me. And I said, Joe, you're 10 years dead. I never died said he.

That's the reason.

Because it is necessary to defend what our forefathers have gained through not only blood and sweat but an organization. Built through losing their lives in the interests of trade unionism, the labour movement, and more and most of all, the socialist movement, which is yet to come and which I did have an inkling of when I was a youth labour member in the 1945 – 1951 Atlee government. Where it was the first time that we could really lay claim to have owned some of the public utilities and so on and so forth. We had recourse to remonstrate in a way that was positive, which we don't have anymore.