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The Amalgamated Society of Engineers 1880 - 1914

A Study of Trade Union Government, Politics, and  
Industrial Policy

By

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## CONTENTS

Introduction

Abbreviations

	<u>Page</u>
Chapter One	The Amalgamated Society of Engineers before 1897 - The control of the craft. 1
Chapter Two	The Reform of the ASE 1891-96 24
Chapter Three	The Movement for the Eight Hour Day , 1887-97 62
Chapter Four	Defeat, 1897-98. Departure from the TUC Federation 81
Chapter Five	Technical Change and its effects. The bitter struggle against the Premium Bonus System. 154
Chapter Six	Industrial policy, 1898-1912. Leadership and "Localism". 217
Chapter Seven	The ASE and Politics, 1899-1912. 273
Chapter Eight	The Constitutional Crises, 1912-13. 310
Chapter Nine	The New Executive Council, June 1913 - August 1914 353
Chapter Ten	Conclusions. 360

CONTINUED.....

## CONTENTS (Continued)

### Appendixes

		<u>Page</u>
Appendix I	Increased destitution in Manchester (during 1897-98 dispute).	I
Appendix II	The 'Clarion' scheme for Federation and the wider Federation Movement	III
Appendix III	The Carlisle Agreement. A.S.E. Documents.	XIV
Appendix IV	Proceedings and Meeting of Engineers with Messrs. Vickers, Sons & Maxim's Staff at which Mr. Barnes was present and several of the Engineers.	XXVII
Appendix V	Engineering Employers' Federation Archives - W17/1. Board of Trade Enquiry for Wage census 1906. Show districts and how designated and methods of payment.	XL
Appendix VI	1912 Delegate Meeting. Delegates political views.	XLIV
Appendix VII	Election for new Executive Council 1913. Number of votes cast for each candidate and summary of election addresses.	XLVIII
Appendix VIII	Comparison of Policies and Attitudes of "Old" Executive Council members and members of newly elected Executive Council 1913.	LIV
Appendix IX	Membership sections changed significantly by 1912. Delegate Meeting.	LVII
Appendix X	Memorandum of Special conference between The Engineering Employers' Federation and The Amalgamated Society of Engineers at The Station Hotel, York on 17th April, 1914.	LXIV
Appendix XI	Memorandum of conference between representatives of The Engineering Employers' Federation and representatives of the unions from whom application had been received for a reduction of hours, July 1913.	LXVI

Summary

Bibliography

## Introduction

I have not attempted to write a fully comprehensive history of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers for the years 1880-1914. J. B. Jefferys in "The Story of the Engineers" (1945) has written a general history and I have tried to avoid covering the same ground. My purpose has been to explore in depth the main themes influencing the A.S.E.'s development.

The ASE was the largest and best known of the "New Model Unions" established during the mid 19th century and it came to epitomise permanent, self confident, respectable trade unionism. It was a society of skilled engineers with a high subscription and impressive friendly society benefits. While the overwhelming majority of ASE members worked for small scale employers (some of whom had worked as craft engineers and had been members of the Society) craftsmen often felt as much sympathy with the employer as with the great mass of unskilled workers. This sympathy, or respect for the employer's view, depended upon the employer recognising the Society's right to lay down the craft rules under which members would work.

William Allan, the Society's first General Secretary, and those who followed him in that office, played a powerful role on the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC. They regarded the Society as the most powerful trade union in the land; a view which was not changed by the development of permanent and effective organisation among workers in cotton, coal, on the railways, and later among general workers.

Reading the Society's archives up to the crisis years of the mid 1890's there emerges an impression of enormous conceit. The Society had, it was believed, a perfect organisation and should be regarded as a model for those seeking to establish or improve their own organisations. Because of its power and tradition the ASE, it was thought should be accorded great influence and respect in the councils of the Labour Movement.

To many within the Society and outside this conceit appeared less and less justified. Changing methods of production and the emergence of a large group of "semi-skilled" men challenged the long term viability of a Society based upon craft.

The traditional organisation of engineering craftsmen into quasi autonomous trade societies with a common system of benefits was undermined by the effective national organisation of engineering employers seeking to take advantage of major technical innovations unimpeded by the customs and practice of craft unionism.

The years 1880-1914 divide into two distinct periods. Before the 1897-98 dispute the ASE sought to regulate the craft through the unilateral formulation of district rules. Reform movements within the Society were concerned to make more effective the traditional policies rather than to change the objectives. After the defeat of 1898 the leadership intermittently and uncertainly tried to develop national collective bargaining to replace lost unilateral regulation while district committees attempted to retain their previous methods of operation. This conflict between leadership and 'localism' was given added force by the constitution which divided authority between the full-time elected Executive Council and two lay bodies namely the Delegate Meeting and the Final Appeal Court. Much of what follows describes how the ASE adapted not merely to defeat, but to the conditions imposed upon them by the Engineering Employers Federation.

The events described, and the developing sympathy among ASE members for a view of trade union democracy which favoured control exercised through district or workshop organisation, casts some light on the industrial conflicts of 1915-20 and the development of the Shop Stewards Movement. It is surely not without significance that many of the men in the engineering industry who took part in industrial movements that were described as revolutionary, or quasi revolutionary, were schooled in the independent traditions of autonomous craft unionism, and the democratic ideas of the



constitution of the ASE.

I am grateful for the privilege of using the many libraries and papers mentioned in the footnotes. My thanks are due to the Engineering Employers' Federation for permission to use their archives. To the AEU must go my special thanks for without the Union's co-operation this thesis could not have been written. I was given the complete freedom to explore the AEU archives many of which were sealed and had not been made available to previous researchers. Among the many employees of the union who showed me great kindness I would like to thank the library staff, Miss Diana Jewkes, (former librarian), Mr. Charles McGilvray and Mrs. Janet Cole.

My thanks are also due to Mr. Edward Thompson and Professor Hugh Clegg who supervised this thesis with great tolerance. I am indebted to Mrs. Hilary Watson who made many helpful suggestions for improving the presentation. Finally I must record my gratitude to those who typed various drafts in particular Mrs. Barbara Frith, Miss Mary Barker and Miss Paula Smyth.

B.C.M. Weekes

September, 1970

## ABBREVIATIONS

A.S.E.	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
A.E.U.	Amalgamated Engineering Union
T.U.C.	Trade Union Congress
S.E.M.	Steam Engine Makers Society
U.M.W.A.	United Machine Workers Association
M.F.G.B.	Miners Federation of Great Britain
G.F.T.U.	General Federation of Trade Unions
E.E.F.	Engineering Employers' Federation
L.C.C.	London County Council
I.L.P.	Independent Labour Party
S.D.F.	Social Democratic Federation
B.S.P.	British Socialist Party
L.R.C.	Labour Representation Committee
O.D.D.	Organising District Delegate
E.C.	Executive Council
P.E.C.	Provisional Executive Council

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Amalgamated Society of Engineers before 1897 -

#### The Control of the Craft

The Amalgamated Society of Engineers' (ASE) constitution remained virtually unchanged from its foundation in 1851 until the Delegate Meeting of 1892. There existed a three tier structure of branch, district committee and local executive council. The branch collected subscriptions, dealt with local problems, considered benefit claims, helped elect delegates and could propose amendments to rule for consideration of the Delegate Meeting.<sup>1</sup> District committees which were elected by the branches, dealt "with rates of wages, hours of labour, terms of overtime, piecework, and general conditions affecting the interests of the trade in their respective districts", could send deputations to employers, had to report to the Executive Council on their activities, and on conditions (employment, rates of wages, amount of overtime worked etc.) in their district. The Local Executive Council generally had thirteen members elected by and from the London branches. (A full-time executive council with eight members was elected from January 1st 1893).

The Webbs described the A.S.E., "As a friendly society ..... the Association consists of a number of self-governing branches acting according to the provisions of a detailed code, and amenable, in respect of its interpretations, to a central executive. As a Trade Union ..... the Association has been from the first a highly centralised body. The great object of the amalgamation was to secure uniformity in trade policy .... With this in view the Central Executive has always retained the absolute power of granting or with-holding strike pay".<sup>2</sup>

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1 Sometimes amendments were considered by intermediate committees, or had to be endorsed by a number of other branches, before reaching the Delegate Meeting.

2 History of Trade Unionism (New Edition) 1911, p. 203.

There are a number of important reasons for disputing the view that in trade matters the A.S.E. was "a highly centralised body". The rules did not, even on the question of strike action, at all times unambiguously accord full power to the Executive Council. There were complex cases where district committees clearly had the right to set in motion a course of events which would probably involve strike action and therefore the sanction of the Executive. In such cases the Executive was often faced with a fait accompli.

A district committee's trade regulations were subject to the approval of the Council but, in the event of a trade dispute, members could cease work with the branch's approval or, where the members of more than one branch were concerned, with the approval of the district committee.<sup>1</sup> The 1892 Delegate Meeting strengthened the power of the district committees by allowing them to call aggregate meetings "upon trade questions" and a strike could be held if a majority of 3 to 2 was obtained.<sup>2</sup>

It is doubtful whether a fine definition of rule was very important in determining the effective power of district committees. The local Executive Council consisted of members meeting after working hours. They had a great deal of benefit work to do and no staff of full-time (or even part-time) organisers. Consideration of all the trade questions arising from the districts was clearly impossible. Full consideration could only

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1 Rule 10, Clause 2, 1885 rule book.

2 "The district committee shall also have the power to call aggregate meetings upon trade questions, and should any such committee be authorised by the members at an aggregate meeting to endeavour to improve the conditions of labour in the district they shall make enquiries as to what distance such action would affect our members .... No general strike shall be entered upon unless carried by a majority of 3 to 2 of the members of the said districts". 1892 rule book, Rule 13, Clause 2. This rule probably sanctioned a widely existing practice.

be given to trade questions that assumed national importance, or were brought especially to the council's attention. Local conditions varied considerably and the council depended for its information on the district committees. As there was no national employers' organisation the Local Executive Council had no equivalent body with which to negotiate. Negotiations were in the hands of district committees with the General Secretary or an executive councilman in attendance on especially important occasions.

The Local Executive Council, elected by and from the London branches, had to be in a very strong position to actively oppose the wishes of a powerful district committee, or a number of district committees. As with the nine hour movement in 1871, the Local Executive was likely to be passive when faced by a trade movement that they regarded as unwise. <sup>1</sup>

The Webbs were mistaken in their belief that the Local Executive Council was the final authority on the interpretation of the rule. This power belonged to the Final Appeal Court (from time to time called by other names e.g. Central Council). The Delegate Meeting also sometimes acted in this capacity. The Court consisted of thirty to forty delegates elected from the branches and heard appeals against the actions of the Council based upon interpretations of the rules. On benefit questions the Court was usually "legalistic". The Court tended to be very concerned that the Executive Council should administer the rules of the Society and not impose policies. <sup>2</sup> An important Executive sanction was to with-hold strike pay but, if a district carried out the procedure according to rule, it might not be clear that the Executive had in fact the right to with-hold benefit

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1 A local trade movement would usually involve members of other unions together with non-unionists. Decisions were made at mass meetings and strike committees elected from unionists and non-unionists. Where such a local movement was being carried forward with enthusiasm it was very difficult for the Local Executive to persuade local A.S.E. members to stand aside. The nine hour movement in 1871 illustrates this point.

See J. Clark, 'Industrial Relations in the N.E., 1850-1914'. Newcastle M.A. Thesis, 1966.

2 The A.S.E. had no policy, only a rule book.

even though they disagreed with the strike policy. In 1895 the Executive withheld strike benefit during the Clyde Belfast dispute but the 1896 Final Appeal Court ordered that benefit be paid - and their ruling was carried out.<sup>1</sup>

An Executive order that strike pay should cease made it extremely difficult for the strike to continue so that even if the decision was reversed by the Final Appeal Court it was too late. But no Executive would welcome a situation of permanent conflict between itself and the Final Appeal Court if only because the Delegate Meeting could be expected to back the Court. This meant that the Executive Council could not end every strike by merely withholding benefit; they had to ensure that their action could at least be construed as conforming to rule.

The centralised benefit system of the A.S.E. was clearly of first importance but it is a serious error to regard a centralised trade policy as also characteristic. There were many trade policies which were common to most sections of the Society: opposition to piecework; the attempt to protect apprenticeship or at least some recognisable standard of skill; the agitation for a recognised district rate; but these were not imposed from the centre, they were rather the common demands of the skilled engineer protecting his craft and seeking to improve his economic position. On trade matters these common assumptions bound together a large number of "self governing" district committees. Trade policy for the district and its implementation was the business of the district committees and they were not usually much affected by the action of the Executive Council.

It is relatively easy to trace the relationship between the district committees and the Executive Council through the A.E.U. archives which record the decisions of the national institutions of the Society. These archives leave little doubt as to the character of the relationship which is also

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of Final Appeal Court, 1896, A.E.U. archives.

reflected in the rule book. Very few district committee records still exist but an examination of the archives of two dissimilar district committees - London and Barrow-in-Furness - where a large number of documents have been preserved provides strong evidence for the analysis presented above.

London from which executive councilmen were drawn (before the new constitution came into effect on January 1st 1893) might have been expected to illustrate one of two hypotheses. The Executive composed of influential London men might have sought to exercise full constitutional and personal influence over the London District Committee and, at least during certain periods, the Executive Council would have dominated the Society's affairs in the capital. Alternatively, the London District Committee could have jealously protected its local autonomy. Both hypotheses are false. There were, in fact, no serious constitutional disputes between the Executive and the London District Committees.

There were serious limitations on the power of the Local Executive Council. Constitutionally, it was responsible for carrying out the rules of the Society which, in practice, meant that the spare-time members of the Executive spent most of their time administering the centralised benefit system. During the early 1890's there were demands that the Executive adopt a more positive stance on trade policy questions such as were covered by rule including the limitation of piecework and control of overtime.

At the same time there was the suggestion that the Executive should play a positive part in the movement for the eight hour day. Historically this was an attractive view since the achievement in 1871 of the nine hour day and its subsequent defence was the only successful national struggle in the history of the A.S.E. A discerning critic might have noticed that the 1871 campaign for the nine hour day was at first conducted by district committees with little support from the Local Executive Council although its defence was more properly regarded as an achievement of the National

Executive and its officers.

The difficulty faced by those who wanted positive national leadership was that they were dealing with a Society that was constitutionally still the A.S.E., founded and administered by William Allan. A spare-time unrepresentative Executive Council with three national officers could administer the Society only because their function was limited. They had neither the time, the constitutional power, nor the machinery to concern themselves with trade policy. The national archives and the archives of the London and Barrow-in-Furness District Committees leave no doubt on this point.

The Executive would from time to time be persuaded to intervene actively in support of a district committee thought to be fighting an extremely important issue. Such an issue (i.e. the extension of piecework) caused the Executive to intervene in the Maxim Nordenfelt dispute in Erith during 1889-90. The result of that intervention showed why this course was so seldom taken. The Executive put their full support behind the Erith strikers but this, in practice, meant little in terms of the Society's resources. The National Society's prestige was at stake without the Executive having the power to influence events.<sup>1</sup>

Those who wanted a more active Executive Council campaigned for the reform of the Society's constitution. Without reform there could be no active national leadership on trade questions.

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1 A major constitutional change centralising the A.S.E's funds and giving the Executive Council the responsibility for sanctioning withdrawal of labour would have enabled the Executive, if it wished, to pursue an active trade policy with the possibility of being able to mobilise the full power of the Society. This kind of reform was never considered. The Executive Council, after reform, never had more power than the unreformed Council. It had the moral advantage of being an elected body when it asked for the members' support. It is doubtful if this made much difference.



London and Barrow-in-Furness

London had a very active District Committee. Each year the Committee reviewed its trade regulations and sent them, with a covering letter to each employer employing A.S.E. members. The following is the letter sent in July 1889:-

To employers.

Dear Sir,

I am directed by the London District Committee to forward the enclosed "Trade regulations Circular" and to state that the members of the above Society are according to the rules now issued strictly bound to obey. The trade as it now stands is quite satisfactory - but owing to keen competition to which our employers are subjected it has caused the committee to reconsider and amend the previous rates of out door allowance etc.

Trusting this will meet with your views and that friendly relations existing here to fore between employers and employees may still continue.

On behalf of the Committee,

I am yours,

W. Nichols (Secretary)

Trade Regulations of the London District

1. That 54 hours constitutes a week's work.
2. That nine hours constitutes a day's work. Overtime to be paid at the rate of not less than time and a quarter for the first two hours, after that time and a half; each day to stand for itself.
3. That the rate of pay for Sunday work be not less than time and a half.
4. That the rate paid for night shifts be not less than time and a half.
5. That men working in wells be paid at not less than time and a half.
6. That chargemen in any shop be paid at least 2/- per week above the ordinary rate of such shops.
7. That sixpence per day out door money be paid, and walking time allowed for any distance over one mile, and not less than one shilling per day over one mile and under three miles from shops.
8. That not less than 1/6d per day out door money be paid and travelling time and expenses allowed for any distance over three miles and under twelve miles from shops.

9. That not less than 2/6d per day, including Sunday out door money be paid, and travelling time and expenses allowed over twelve miles in the U.K.
10. All members working on boats repairing the same, must receive sixpence per day "dirty money". This applies to all waterside premises and docks.
11. District holidays to be: Good Friday, Easter Monday and Tuesday, Whit Monday and Tuesday, August Bank holiday, Christmas, three days.
12. That the rate of pay be not less than double time for Christmas Day, and the Easter Monday, Whit Monday, the first Monday in August, and Boxing Day be not less than time and a quarter. <sup>1</sup>

These regulations were not the result of negotiation. There is no record of any trade negotiations with the London employers. It is surprising that no mention of a district rate appears in the detailed regulations.

The District Committee was concerned to ensure that the regulations were carried out. If an infringement was reported the Committee investigated the matter with great thoroughness. A special meeting was called and witnesses were summoned to attend. Often the foreman of the shop concerned would be an A.S.E. member and he would be called before the Committee. If the Committee decided that the employer had infringed a regulation he would be asked to change his ways. Further infringement could lead to A.S.E. members being withdrawn from the factory - not usually on strike - but to be absorbed elsewhere. This action would be impossible against a large employer. There is no record of any employer between 1889 and 1897 failing to observe the regulations although many had to be reminded of their contents. <sup>2</sup>

Much of the District Committee's time was taken up with alleged breaches of the regulations. They appeared to have very good sources of information concerning events on the shop floor although no official use

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1 Regulations and Letter with Minutes, A.E.U. North London District

2 London District Committee Minutes are incomplete.

was made of "shop delegates" or "shop stewards". Nevertheless, some system of ensuring a steady flow of information from, at least the important shops, must have existed. It is probable that if a shop did not contain an active member who could be relied upon to report infringements of the regulations, a member would be sought to act as a "reporter". The system of unilateral trade regulations depended upon the existence of "shop delegates" of some kind.

There was very little contact between the Executive Council and the London District Committee on trade matters.<sup>1</sup> The establishment and enforcement of trade regulations was the business of the District Committee. It was in this respect a "self governing" association.<sup>2</sup>

The District Committee also sought to defend London's position as an important engineering centre. They were particularly concerned to see that the Admiralty and the L.C.C. placed a good proportion of their engineering work in London. This proved difficult because frequently lower tenders were available from elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

The Eight Hour Day Campaign became increasingly important to the London District Committee.<sup>4</sup>

Barrow-in-Furness was geographically isolated and dominated by one firm - Vickers. War ships and armaments were the chief products. The Barrow District Committee was an extremely important body - it made trade regulations,

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1 There was a good deal of contact on the campaign for the Eight Hour Day which became a national campaign with London leading the way - see Chapter Three.

2 The Local Executive, with local knowledge, and elected from London was in a better position to intervene in London. The fact that it did not strongly suggests that what was true for London was true for elsewhere.

3 For example in September 1894 the L.C.C. tenders for the building of sludge ships were:- Barrow - £23,000, London - £30,000.

4 See Chapter Three.

negotiated with Vickers, and unlike London spent a large proportion of its time seeking to protect the trade from encroachment by plumbers, carpenters and the unskilled. <sup>1</sup>

The District Committee throughout 1896 and 1897 (up to the National Lock out) was in almost permanent dispute with these employers over a whole series of issues including discharges, piecework and overtime.

No record of Barrow's trade regulations appear to survive. <sup>2</sup> But the Committee had established a comprehensive system of shop stewards each of whom received annually a letter "defining the duties of shop stewards". The 1897 letter <sup>3</sup> said:-

"..... defining the duties of shop stewards"

1. To see all men who start are Society men. If not see that they join.
  2. To see that all members have their clearance sent to the branches of the district within one month of starting work.
  3. To keep a careful watch that no other trades encroach on our work.
  4. To demand to see any members pay lines to see that they are paid the district rate, and that they do not exceed the overtime circular.
  5. That shop stewards be empowered, after receiving instructions from Branch secretaries to inspect the pence cards.
  6. These duties are subject to alteration or revision as may be required from time to time.
- N.B. Any member with-holding information or using abusive language to shop stewards in the course of their duties will be dealt with by the local district committee .....

Branch secretaries to supply shop stewards with a list of members who are more than 10/- in arrears".

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- 1 Minutes and other records held by Barrow District Committee of the A.E.U.
  - 2 Probably like the London Committee the details of the regulations were not recorded in the minutes - and the letter to employers in this case has not survived.
  - 3 Dated 3rd February.

The District Committee had a register of shop stewards and tried to ensure that each shop had a steward. Regular meetings of stewards and the District Committee took place (about four per year) through which the Committee was able to keep in close touch with the shop floor situation.

The Barrow Shop Stewards were not regarded as the "representatives" of the man on the shop floor. They were the District Committee's representatives in the shop, responsible to the Committee for the organisation in the shop. The Stewards did not negotiate and were not recognised by the employers. The Steward was not "appointed" by the District Committee but by the men on the shop floor. It required a very slight transition for him to become their representative to the District Committee. After the 1897-98 dispute when the District Committee could no longer discuss "managerial" questions with the employers, the resistance to "managerial prerogative" passed to the shop floor workers and the shop steward naturally tended to become their representative.

Before 1897 the Barrow District Committee - like the London Committee - had very few contacts with the Executive Council on trade matters. The Local Committee ran its own local affairs.

#### The Maxim-Nordenfelt Dispute, 1889-90

The decision of the Local Executive Council in December 1889 to call a strike at Maxim-Nordenfelt's<sup>1</sup> Erith and Crayford works, against the introduction of piecework and the alleged putting of "labourers" on machines, had three important consequences. It revealed the pathetic inability of the Executive Council to sustain even a comparatively small strike. This led to a well publicised demand for the reform of the A.S.E. and in particular for the replacement of the Local Executive Council with an elected Executive

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1 Vickers took over this company in 1897

Council. During the strike the A.S.E. was attacked for not supporting the members of Will Thorne's Gas Workers and General Labour Union who were on strike at the Silvertown India Rubber Gutta Percha works. By contrast the "labourers" at Erith and Crayford were striking in support of the A.S.E.

At Erith the A.S.E. fought its important disputes on wage payment systems. In 1876 there was an extremely bitter strike against piecework<sup>1</sup> and 1907 was to witness an anti-premium bonus strike.

The A.S.E. was hostile to the introduction of piecework and had a rule<sup>2</sup> against it. There were ways around the rule<sup>3</sup> but there was usually a great reluctance to compromise on this issue.

In April 1889 the Assistant Manager of Maxim Nordenfelt' tried to persuade the men to accept piecework. He promised them time and a half and that there would be no reduction in prices. The firm had five years work in hand. None of the men individually accepted this offer but at an aggregate meeting a unanimous decision was made to accept piecework. The Local Executive reacted immediately.

"our members ..... must not accept of (sic) piece (or contract) work and in addition must use all the legitimate means in their power to prevent its introduction....." <sup>4</sup>

John Burns, a member of the Council, was sent to Erith to put the Executive Council's view. He was successful and secured unanimous support.<sup>5</sup>

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1 See Chapter Five

2 Rule 36, 1885 rule book

3 See Chapter Two

4 Local Executive Council minutes, 12 April 1889. Maxims made the Maxim Machine Gun - about twelve per week.

5 Minutes of Local Executive Council, 18 April 1889. Council members:- Frank Rose, (Chairman) H. Rich, C. Day, C. Hisee, J. Brown, J. Watson, John Burns, W. Bray, Albert Bigby, F. Margesan. George Barnes replaced Burns during October

During July the Erith District Committee considered that A.S.E. members were being victimised (A.S.E. men were discharged and non-union men employed) probably over the piecework issue.<sup>1</sup>

In September the Executive heard rumours of piecework being worked at Crayford. They sent an assistant secretary to report and sought an interview with the employers.<sup>2</sup> Another aggregate meeting was addressed by John Burns in an attempt to keep the men to their previous anti-piecework decision.

During October the pressure switched from piecework to labourers on machines. The District Committee reported that at Maxim Nordenfelt a labourer had been placed on a milling machine.<sup>3</sup> A local deputation was sent to the firm and then Robert Austin, General Secretary, himself led a deputation (which included a member of the Steam Engine Makers Executive). During a five hour interview the Manager of Maxim Nordenfelt was told "that on no account would piecework be submitted to" and "that upon no consideration would the members of the two societies make tools and such be put into the hands of unskilled workmen ....".<sup>4</sup> The Manager argued that skill was a question of degree. No report of his remarks on the piecework questions was made.

A few days later Austin and a member of the Council, Watson, were shown over the Erith and Crayford works by Mr. Nordenfelt. They were very impressed by the machinery and shop organisation.<sup>5</sup> The Council expected to reach a settlement with Nordenfelt on both piecework and manning machines.

They were over-optimistic. On November 14 the directors of Maxim-

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1 Minutes Local E.C., July 23 1889.

2 Minutes Local E.C., September 23 1889

3 Minutes Local E.C., October 17 1889

4 Austin's report to the Executive. Minutes, 1 November 1889.

5 E.C. Minutes, 4 November 1889.

Nordenfelt told the A.S.E. that it was "their intention to introduce piecework ..... also place unskilled labourers on machines wherever and whenever they may consider it is in their interests to do so. And further will insist upon overtime being worked at any time when required".

These conditions of employment were completely unacceptable and the Council unanimously instructed A.S.E. members "to give in their notices and leave in a body as soon as they legally may". It was decided that foremen should be withdrawn.<sup>1</sup>

The Council had played an unusually active part in the events leading up to the dispute.<sup>2</sup> They had persuaded the men not to accept what appeared to be a generous piecework offer. The negotiations with the firm had been conducted by the Council and had ended in what amounted to an ultimatum. If the A.S.E.'s credibility as a "trade society" was to be maintained the Council now had to conduct a successful strike. They were faced with only one employer, important in Erith and Crayford, indeed too important simply to allow the members to move to other employers but as a manufacturer of twelve machine guns per week surely not powerful enough to defeat the country's foremost trade union?

The Council took space in local newspapers to advertise the Erith dispute and prevent workers seeking jobs in the dispute area. James Watson was sent to Erith to assist the strike committee. £50 was granted out of general funds to assist the strike and the Woolwich branch was instructed to send a further £50.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Local Executive Council Minutes, 14 November 1889.

2 The fact that Erith was only fifteen miles from London was clearly important.

3 Local Executive Council Minutes, 18 November 1889.



The Council was hardly in the position to call upon the support either of the rest of the trade union movement, or from radical and socialist groups sympathetic to trade unionism. As their attitude to "labourers" on machines showed, the Council (no doubt faithfully reflecting rank and file feelings) still regarded the A.S.E. as an exclusive society protecting the skilled engineer from unskilled encroachment as much as from the employers.

The events of 1888-1889 had no effect upon this. Prominent among the leaders of the "new unions" were A.S.E. members, John Burns and Tom Mann being the most famous. Charlie Duncan a little later was to become ~~g~~General Secretary of the Workers Union. Some of the younger politically conscious A.S.E. members, who were later to become prominent in the Society's affairs, were in 1889 actively lending their experience and energy to the newly organised.

But the A.S.E. itself gave no assistance to the unskilled unions. On August 26, 1889 Watson and Bigby tried to persuade the Local Executive Council to instruct branch secretaries "to call special summoned meetings for the purpose of taking the votes of our members ..... for and against a levy of two pence per member on behalf of the Dock Labourers".<sup>1</sup>  
This was defeated.

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1 Executive Council minutes, 26 August 1889.

The best the Council could manage were their congratulations after the Dockers were victorious. <sup>1</sup>

In October 1889 a strike occurred among the labourers at the Silvertown India Rubber Gutta Percha works, many of whom were members of the "Gas Workers and General Labourers Union". Twenty members of the A.S.E. remained at work. Mr. Stunton of the Victoria Dock branch told the Executive Council that no A.S.E. member was doing labourers' work but this was being done by foremen "some of whom were shareholders". One non-Society man had also been working as a labourer.

The following day a deputation from the Silvertown works met the Council. <sup>2</sup> They said twenty-seven A.S.E. fitters and four A.S.E. foremen remained at work. Will Thorne wrote requesting that A.S.E. men be withdrawn but the Council refused to agree. This decision was bitterly criticised. Fitters could not work without labourers so the A.S.E. was working with blackleg labour. The strike was more likely to succeed if the skilled men came out.

Burns, now no longer a member of the Council, did not mince his words.

"The engineers are traitors if they do not ignore the Council, which I believe has been arrived at through imperfect knowledge on the part of the Amalgamated Society". (sic). <sup>3</sup>

On November 14 "The Star" reported that "hundreds" of men were on strike at Silvertown and the A.S.E. stood in the way of "a successful

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1 Executive Council minutes, 16 September 1889. On August 26 the dockers were desperately in need of financial assistance. At that time "... the collections made in workshops and in the streets, supplemented by contributions from the elder trade unions and from private individuals, had reached a considerable sum, they were totally inadequate to provide even a shilling a day for a tenth of the families who were without means of subsistence". Under these circumstances the strike committee called upon "all the workmen of London to come out on strike on the 2nd September". This call was withdrawn when some of the employers conceded and the first cheque arrived from Australia (£750). "The Great Dock Strike", H.H. Champion (1889) p. 18-21.

2 Local Executive Council Minutes, 3 & 4 October 1889.

3 "The Star", 7 October 1889. On October 5 Austin defended the Society's position in the Star.

termination" of the strike.

"Whilst hundreds of men and women are going with scant food rather than yield to unjust demands the members of the A.S.E. are working daily for the firm which is fighting the cause of labour".

Two days later "The Star" reported the Maxim Nordenfelt strike.

The Erith and Crayford men were striking against the introduction of piecework. The employers wanted to "enforce piecework prices wherever desirable, introduce labourers onto machines when they consider desirable and, to work overtime when they liked". In contrast to the A.S.E. at Silvertown, the labourers at Erith were supporting the A.S.E.<sup>1</sup>

On December 4 a deputation from the London Liberal and Radical Association met the Executive Council to ask if it would withdraw members provided proof was supplied that this would aid the strike. The Council replied that they would consider the matter as they did all other questions, when submitted in writing.<sup>2</sup>

The comparison with Erith continued to be made.<sup>3</sup> On December 10 after twelve weeks, the Silvertown strike collapsed.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Philip Thane, Secretary of Maxim Nordenfelt explained in "The Times" (30 November 1889) his Company's view of the Erith dispute.

"When the factories were started", wrote Thane, "1,000 suitable workmen were required - the company could not choose carefully and we could not avoid a number of unruly spirits and agitators ..... workmen who have not

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1 "The Star" 16 November 1889

2 Executive Council Minutes

3 See "The Star" December 6, 1889

4 See "The Star" December 10, 1889

given us anything like the amount of work which we had a right to expect". The General Council of the A.S.E. were interviewed and allowed to investigate conditions. It laid down three conditions for the continued employment of their members enforcing:-

1. "That no piecework should be done in the factory by any of the skilled men.
2. That no unskilled men ..... shall be allowed to work at such machines as the Council consider should properly be worked only by skilled men.
3. That the question of overtime should be entirely optional with the men, and not under the control of the manager".

"The strike", said Thane, "was not for higher wages but a strike against the principles of piecework and of the right of employers to use on his machines such men as he considers skilled, and to force him to employ only men approved of by an extraneous power wielded by the Central Council of the A.S.E. In other words, the object of the strike is to take away from the employers the right to determine in what manner they shall work their own machinery, and to hand this power over to another authority, whose interests cannot possibly be identical with theirs".

Austin replied on behalf of the Local Executive Council:-<sup>1</sup>

"Mr. Thane says:- 'Three district demands were made'. This is not quite correct; we made no demands, we stated as plainly as possible the conditions under which our members would work - viz. that we should not work piecework, and surely we have a right to say how we shall dispose of that labour we have to sell or dispose of, in the same way that sellers of iron, steel, copper etc. dispose of their commodities.

"In the second place, we stated that we would not work with unskilled men who had not served an apprenticeship or had been engaged five successive

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1 Minutes, December 2, 1889

years working the machines which we had made to displace manual labour, and for which we had to make the cutting tools. This is not a demand, but a right which, as engineers we claim to exercise.

"Third we object to systematic overtime. 54 hours per week is enough for a man to work and we prefer 48. At Maxim Nordenfelt's each man or boy is expected to work at least 'a quarter day overtime each day for four or five nights a week under pain of dismissal by the manager or one of his foremen'. He has to 'obtain a pass to leave off at the close of a day's work .....'. If we tolerate this system how is it possible for the boys and men to obtain that technical education which Mr. Nordenfelt did not forget to remind us that English men were so deficient in?"

Austin pitched the A.S.E.'s claim to unilateral control very high indeed. He claimed the 'right' to say how their labour should be disposed of, and a right, which derived from their making machines and cutting tools, to determine who should work the machines. There could be no doubt after this letter that the Local Executive Council considered the Maxim Nordenfelt dispute to involve principles of first importance.

Every A.S.E. and Steam Engine Makers' member left work and joined the strike.<sup>1</sup> There were a number of violent incidents involving pickets.<sup>2</sup>

The Council sought to stop all work for Maxim Nordenfelt that was being carried out away from Erith and Crayford.<sup>3</sup>

Maxim Nordenfelt managed to remain in production. Watson, the Executive Council's representative at Erith, reported on 23 December that 417

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1 A.S.E. Abstract Report 1890 p.19. Details of the strike are difficult to obtain as the British Museum Newspaper Library does not contain any of the local newspapers for 1889.

2 Local Executive Council Minutes, 3 & 9 December 1889.

3 Local Executive Council Minutes, 11 December 1889.

men were at work of whom 18 were "knobsticks" (17 "knobsticks" had been persuaded to stay away from work). Clearly the Council were disappointed - "..... this board is not prepared to pledge itself or the Society to make any further grants to the Erith dispute at present".<sup>1</sup>

A week later despite pressure from the branches the Council refused to raise a special levy for the strike.<sup>2</sup>

From this point the strike ran down as it became clear that Maxim Nordenfelt could manage without A.S.E. members. Watson resigned as the Council delegate and on 21 March 1890 the Strike Committee was told "to assist the non-society men into work".<sup>3</sup> There was also a dispute about the condition of the Strike Committee books.

The Strike Committee circulated a letter to branches all over the country.

"We have this week to refer more fully to a less pleasant topic than our prospects of a settlement, that is, the very meagre pecuniary support we are getting from our friends all over the country. It looks as if now - when we are well within sight of victory - our commissariat is being destroyed, and our reserves withdrawn, for what purpose we know not except it is that our friends have grown 'weary in well doing' or, that they are anxious to capitulate in the face of a beaten foe.

"And all this is being most strenuously helped on by the action of the Executive Council of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, who, not satisfied with having done its level best to strangle the movement from the commencement, have now withdrawn entirely all monetary support, and the excuse is, 'the fund for the support of our own, and other trades is exhausted'. Well such is the

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1 Local Executive Council Minutes, 23 December 1889

2 Local Executive Council Minutes, 30 December 1889

3 Local Executive Council Minutes, 21 March 1890

astounding wisdom of this wonderful body that it allows the fund to become exhausted, before asking for its renewal, notwithstanding the perpetual claims for help from it and the fact that the levy is always voted cheerfully when asked for. How long, oh, how long, are the affairs of a huge organisation of sixty three thousand men to be dominated by nine metropolitans of such passing wisdom?"<sup>1</sup>

The Executive Council rejected the Strike Committee's view and stated that it was "monstrously unjust to attempt to fasten on to this board the responsibility for their reverses....." £945 and £88.13.2. were voted to the strike; a special delegate was retained for four months, "during which time the movement was supported with a liberality unprecedented in the annals of our society, the interests of our members in various parts of the country were being jeopardised, and in some cases sacrificed, for the good of the cause at Erith".

On May 16, 1890 the Strike Committee brought the dispute to a close. Maxim Nordenfelt was closed to A.S.E. members but in September 1890, after negotiations between Austin and the Management, the factories were opened again to the A.S.E. The Management agreed that A.S.E. men would not be compelled to work piecework and Austin thought this was observed<sup>2</sup> although piecework was commonly worked throughout the factory.

#### Powerful District Committees

District committees of the A.S.E., before the terms of settlement of the 1897-98 dispute, had considerable power and, in regard to trade matters, were largely self-governing. The minutes of the Local Executive Council show that most district committees had very little contact with the senior body and this probably explains in part why the A.S.E. tolerated a spare-time London appointed Executive Council for so long.

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1 Published on front page of Strike Committee balance sheet and published in A.S.E. monthly report, May 1890. A.E.U. Archives.

2 A.S.E. abstract reports 1890. A.E.U. Archives.

The Executive Council dealt with benefit questions and other matters which they regarded as being of national importance. The Council decision to intervene in the dispute between Maxim Nordenfelt and the Erith District Committee could be justified on this ground although Erith's proximity to London was another important factor. It must be emphasised, however, that the Executive Council's intervention in the Maxim Nordenfelt dispute was a rare example of positive action by that body.

The dispute is of considerable interest. By their failure to support the labourers at Silvertown and their lack of support for the dockers the Local Executive Council had alienated any outside sympathy they might have had. They faced from the employer not only a challenge on piecework but an attack on their whole conception of what the function of a craft trade society should be.

Having accepted the challenge, with the resources of sixty-three thousand members, the Executive could provide the Strike Committee with only just over £1,000 and was unable to prevent an ignominious defeat.

The reform of the Society is discussed in a later chapter. One reason for establishing a full-time Executive Council was to enable the Society to act more effectively as a national organisation. It was thought that this would avoid another "Maxim Nordenfelt" situation because greater resources would be made available in the event of such a dispute in the future. The eight hour day movement required some kind of national direction if it were to succeed. It was hoped that the reformed Society would be able to further more effectively these trade policies which were widely accepted by the members.

As we shall see, the reforms were not intended to establish uniformity in trade policy or to centralise power in the hands of the Executive Council. While the full-time Executive was created, the powers of the District Committee were undiminished. It is likely, irrespective of industrial



events that the full-time Executive Council would have sought to play a more active role than the Local Executive Council. Nevertheless any attempt by the Executive to increase their power would have been resisted by the District Committee, and would have been difficult to sustain in the face of the rule book, which in the last resort was interpreted by a lay Final Appeal Court.

The reforms carried out by the Delegate Meeting of 1892 were designed to consolidate the existing system of centralised benefits, powerful District Committees and local trade policies unilaterally determined and enforced.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Reform of the A.S.E. 1891-96.

There were three important stages in the reform of the Society. Firstly, Tom Mann's campaign for the General Secretaryship in 1891-92 raised the whole question of reforming the structure of the Society. Secondly, the Delegate Meeting in 1892 substantially amended the rules, and finally George Barnes, a "new unionist", became General Secretary in 1896.

Robert Austin who had been General Secretary from 1886 died on September 25, 1891.<sup>1</sup> Two serious candidates came forward to contest the election for a successor - Tom Mann and the Assistant Secretary, John Anderson. Mann as a well known Socialist and leader of the London dock strike wanted to make the ASE a more effective and less narrowly based organisation. Anderson stood for things as they were.

This election was to become part of the ASE legend and it, without doubt, was an important factor in spreading new ideas within the Society.

Mann had no need to take an extremist stance - his tactic was to gather the support of all those who wanted change.

The ASE, he told an East London audience, should include "every workman engaged in connection with the engineering trades, and who is called upon to exhibit mechanical skill in the performance of his labour. This would include men on drilling machines, tool makers, die sinkers and electrical engineers". Non members were not likely to be eager to join "therefore it may be the time has arrived when the members should provide, not only for the proper administration of the Society's rules, but also properly equip the general

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1 Austin was a traditionalist and was not interested in changing the character of the Society. He was born in 1826 at Wigan. Settled in Bury where he helped found the Bury Co-operative Society. In 1864 he became Secretary of the Manchester District Committee. He was elected General Secretary in 1886. "Trades Unionist and Trades Council Record" September 26, 1891. Austin had stood as a working man candidate for the Manchester School Board. He was a member of the National Reform Unions Committee. "Reynolds Newspaper", 27 September 1891.

office with the requisite organising staff". He wanted a nationally elected full time Executive Council and the appointment of organising district delegates. Bigby, the Chairman of the Local Executive Council, at the same meeting strongly supported the election of a full time Executive Council.<sup>1</sup> Mann's election address made a wide appeal for support:

"Acting upon the earnest request of a number of highly valued members of the Amalgamated Society, I have decided to stand for the General Secretaryship, and before doing so I have taken into consideration the great importance of the position and how onerous the duties that are likely to fall to such an officer. I have been a member of the Society since February 1881, when I joined the Marylebone branch, and since that time I have done my best to press forward the cause of trade unionism for all classes of workers. The views I hold respecting trade unionism are probably well known, but I may here state that I have long contended, and still hold the belief that the most important of all work for social elevation of all classes of workers is that of organising into trade and labour unions, not only for the purpose of raising wages, resisting reduction etc. but for the all-important work of imparting a sound education on all industrial matters, without which real progress is impossible. The increased activity in trade union circles during the past few years is likely to continue and I am of the opinion that the Amalgamated Society should be in the forefront of the great and ever growing labour movement. I agree with those who think that the basis of our society should be considerably broadened, so as to embrace all those who are engaged in the trade who are called upon to exercise skill in the performance of their duties. I have endeavoured in years past to support all trade movements for the abolition of systematic overtime and the reduction of normal working hours. I am aware that in some districts our members are receiving far too low a wage for the

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<sup>1</sup> Trade Unionist and Trades Council Record, October 10, 1891.

skilled work they are called on to perform and whilst I am fully aware that the conduct of the general secretary must be under the complete control of the executive council, so far as my personal influence could be exerted, consistently with the dignity of the position occupied, I should, if elected, deem it my duty to still energetically work to get the standard of wages raised and the present working hours reduced. The engineering trade has a splendid future before it. All changes from old methods of manufacture to newer methods bring increased work to engineers; the rapid development in the application of electricity also opens up increasing spheres of usefulness for electrical engineers, and all such ought to be catered for by the Amalgamated Society that it may be commensurate with the increasing importance of the trade, not only in the U.K., but also in America and Australasia. Young societies very properly look to the powerful and wealthy Amalgamated Engineers as a pattern society, and if honoured by election, it would be my duty and pleasure to devote my energies in such a way as would contribute to the proper development of our Society, the elevation of our members, and to the welfare of the Labour Movement - Faithfully Yours, Tom Mann."

Mann's Central Committee had seventy members with George Barnes<sup>1</sup> as its Secretary and William Newton as President. The Vice Presidents were James

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1 "Tom Mann became candidate for the General Secretaryship in 1890 (sic). At a mass meeting held in the old Rowland Hill Chapel in the Blackfriars Road.... I was elected as Secretary of a Committee to promote his candidature ... and ... thereby got to know and be known by many outside the local ranks of the ASE." G.N. Barnes "Workshop to War Cabinet", (1923) p.37.

~~James~~ Oswald, Albert Bigby who became one of the first Organising District Delegates and Alfred Sillick who in 1893, became the first Chairman of the re-constituted full-time Executive Council.<sup>1</sup>

Testimonials formed a large part of the election address and they were often from people who were far from sharing Mann's political views.

Sidney Hallard, an employer member of the London and India Deck Joint Committee said:

"Mr. Mann has the power ..... to be able to discuss and negotiate difficult matters of differences between employers and employed good temperedly without stirring up ill feeling or anger".

Thomas Burt of the Northumberland Miners stated:

"I know of no one more heartily and intelligently in sympathy with the Labour Movement than you. From what I have seen of you I feel confident that if elected you will discharge the duties of the high position with the utmost ability, energy and fidelity".

Henry Tait and Edward Tow expressed the same sympathies. Robert Knight, General Secretary of the Beilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders in adding his support said:

"I have knew Mr. Tom Mann for some years, and my experience of him, especially in connection with the prominent part he has taken in organising the labouring classes at the London Decks, enables me to say that I believe him to possess the qualifications necessary to be a leader of a large organisation".

Benjamin Jones of the London Co-operative Society said Mann had "sound but broad views".

Two more deck employers W.E. Hubbard and H. Lafore are reported as saying respectively:

"I have always found you most courteous and reasonable in debate" and

"I have the greatest confidence in his perfect honesty, discretion and

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<sup>1</sup> Mann's campaign was often referred to in later years but details are hard to come by. "The Workingman's Times" has some accounts of meetings and for the North East Coast "North East Gazette" January 9, 1892

judgment. Under most trying circumstances he has brought peace about, when it almost appeared impossible".

From Owen's College, Manchester, J.E.C. Munro wrote that Mann was "Devoted to the cause of labour, he brings exceptional intelligence to bear on the labour problems of the day".

L.T. Hobhouse, fellow of Merton College, Oxford in supporting his cause wrote:

"My great respect for his personal character and abilities ..... Intellectually he impresses me as one of the ablest men I have ever met .... And all his utterances, spoken or written are alive with the lefty social enthusiasm and passionate devotion to the cause of the suffering which quickens all who meet him to fresh life and marks him out for a foremost place in a whole movement".

Finally the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes commented:

"Mr. Tom Mann has greatly impressed me with his remarkable ability, his firm grasp of social problems and his readiness in explaining and advocating the cause of labour".

I have quoted Tom Mann's election address in full because it very clearly indicates the nature of his campaign. He did not fight a Socialist propagandist battle, nor did he raise the question of the craft character of the A.S.E. What he did was to advocate the reform of the A.S.E.'s government with a programme which was to be carried out in most respects by the 1892 Delegate Meeting. There appears to have been very little political character to the campaign. <sup>1</sup>

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1 As we shall see only the "Workingman's Times" was to link the reform of the A.S.E.'s government with Socialism. The "Workingman's Times" was remote from the A.S.E. as a piece about the Secretaryship shows. "The appointment which is stated to be worth £300 per year is virtually a life one, though there is a formal election yearly ....." September 25, 1891. The salary was £200 per year plus a free flat, rent, coal and gas. A Secretary was appointed by the Delegate Meeting, or in a year when no Delegate Meeting was to take place "by vote of members" every three years; A.S.E. rule as revised by the 1885 Delegate Meeting rule XII. The local Executive Council had to decide in September 1891 whether Austin's successor should be immediately elected by the members or to wait until June 1892 for the Delegate Meeting.

As campaign tactics Mann's choice of issues were undoubtedly correct. Socialists and those who wished to end the A.S.E.'s craft basis would vote for him anyway. The bulk of the membership did not share these views and by emphasising his limited aims and respectability Mann hoped to secure a majority. Hence he submitted testimonials from three employers, four lib/lab trade union leaders, including Robert Knight and Thomas Burt, and the Liberal intellectual, L.T. Hobhouse. No Socialist testimonial was published.

One conspicuous absentee from the list of Mann's supporters was John Burns.

Burns, Mann and Tillett led the London Dock strike of 1889. When Mann decided to contest the Secretaryship of the A.S.E. he was still President of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labour Union with Ben Tillett as Secretary. Burns was a trustee and unofficial adviser.

Up until the end of 1891 Mann and Burns were on good terms with Mann writing friendly letters to Burns.<sup>1</sup> Burns had considerable prestige in the A.S.E. - perhaps more than Mann<sup>2</sup> - probably because of his great oratorical skill, and a reputation for greater political stability than Mann. It appears likely that a joint campaign (either Burns or Mann standing with the other actively campaigning) for the General Secretaryship would have been invincible.

From the beginning Mann sought an alliance with Burns. Mann wrote to Burns on October, 11, 1891:

"I hear you have decided to stand for Gen. Sec: A.S.E. is this so? As if it is it's a pity you didn't (?) me a hint and I certainly would not have stood".<sup>3</sup>

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1 See Burns' papers British Museum M.S. 46285

2 During the 1897-98 dispute some districts asked to have a visit from Burns instead of Mann, see Barrow District Committee Minutes, 1897.

3 Burns papers M.S. 46285. Mann added "I was at West London last night there was a good attendance but there were more drunken interruptions during one hour and a half I was there than I have ever observed in any other branch in a similar time".

Two days before Mann in writing to him about his own candidature had said:

"Dr. Jack, re engineers Sec'Ship. May I make use of your name on committee and I think I shall have good support in London but Manchester and Newcastle are doubtful".<sup>1</sup>

Burns waited fifteen days before replying:-

"Dear Tom

I have carefully considered your request for my name on your committee for Engineers and after the most anxious thought and deliberate consideration have decided not to take any part in the election whatever".<sup>2</sup>

This letter not surprisingly caused a marked cooling in the relationship between the two men.<sup>3</sup>

Why did Burns act in this way. Among his papers are some undated pencilled notes:<sup>4</sup>

"Tom Mann. The ablest Labour Organiser in the world. Fluent, plucky, and level headed when persistent".

"Tom Mann and Ben Tillett exploiting the Deckers. Getting a good living out of it. Honorary Presidency means accumulate absence. Means accepting responsibility without doing the work".

"Mann has to do one of two things, either to leave the deckers or stay. If Mann goes elect another President if you so decide".

"Tillett is placed in a false position, so is any secretary or any acting President while Mann is honorary".

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1 Burns Papers M.S. 46285.

2 Burns Papers M.S. 46285

3 Burns Papers, Diary M.S. 46311 ".... called at Council and hence to A.S.E. office. Saw Mann there who was very curt in his manner". 25 November 1891.

4 Burns Papers M.S. 46305.



From this it could be concluded that Burns thought Mann should concentrate on the dockers or just that he should make up his mind. If these were his reasons why he did not tell Mann so in the letter is a mystery but it is difficult to understand what better position there was for "the ablest Labour Organiser" than that of General Secretary of the A.S.E.

There were two other candidates for the General Secretaryship, John Anderson and William Glennie, of whom only Anderson was a serious contender. In 1891 he was 48 years of age <sup>1</sup> and had made his reputation twenty years earlier in the nine hour movement. His appeal was essentially conservative:

"Members generally are taking a deeper interest in all that concerns our welfare along with a determination to adhere to those principles upon which our Society is based, and has carried on its work successfully up to the present in preference to the new, untried, and dangerous ideas which a section of our members have for some time past been advocating, the result of which, if adopted, the wisest among us cannot foresee".

Anderson concentrated upon his record of membership, the danger of experimenting in financial matters and the need for the General Secretary to be experienced in office work.

His testimonials followed the same pattern. Thos. S. Collings, J.P. testified to Anderson's "Long and useful career" with the Manchester District Committee.

An ex-assistant secretary, John Shelton wrote "My knowledge of your capabilities for that office has derived .... from .... experience of eighteen months .... at the General Office".

Robert Barrow described Anderson's "scholarship, clear-headedness, fearlessness, and impartiality".

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<sup>1</sup> Mann was 35 years of age and Glennie 30 years of age.

Thos. Smith, a General Councilman,<sup>1</sup> ex-President and Secretary of Sunderland District Committee; Secretary, 53 hours Movement North East Coast etc.

"His work at the late General Executive Council meeting placed him in the front rank as a man who is capable of directing the affairs of our great institution at General Office: notably his ready application, aptitude, and dispatch of all intricate business entrusted to his care, won him golden opinions among our members and the public men of Sunderland."

The Leeds District Committee was impressed by Anderson's experience.

Glemmie issued no address.<sup>2</sup>

The election campaign crystallized the debate between conservatism and reform. It provided a platform for those who believed that the closed craft society of William Allan could not be sustained as a major force in the trade union movement. Mann's programme was moderate, but if reform even of a limited kind was accepted then it was unlikely that the process of change would be limited. In any case, despite his election address, Mann could not be regarded as a moderate stable influence.

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1 The General Executive Council met on Whit Monday 1888 and was to meet every third year. It consisted of thirty members appointed by electoral districts. "It shall be a court of appeal over the local council.... It shall have power to consider and decide upon any special question submitted to it by the local council"...ASE rules revised by 1885 Delegate Meeting rule XI.

2 Mann and Anderson's election addresses are missing from the AEU archives. Mann's address without Testimonials is in the Burns Collection at the TUC and in the Labour Leader, 24 October 1891. Anderson's address together with Mann's plus testimonials, Webb Collection, Collection E, Section B, XLVIII.

It may well have been a fear that Mann lacked stability which cost him the election. After a bitter campaign of meetings in every major centre with over 50 per cent of the members voting, Mann lost by a narrow margin. The result:

Anderson	18,102
Mann	17,152
Glennie	738

There is little doubt that John Burns with his reputation for honest consistency could have turned defeat into victory of Tom Mann.

The election campaign was an important influence drawing the attention of the members to what was perhaps the most important policy question facing the Society - could the ASE afford to remain a traditional craft Society in an engineering industry with a rapidly growing non-craft labour force. Even an extended view of craft status would in the 1890's have been a step forward. There were organisational problems. Should an elected national Executive Council replace the Local Executive? Could the Society maintain its position without appointing full-time organisers? It was argued that without an effective national machine the ASE would be powerless and Tom Mann's campaign drove home this point.

#### The 1892 Delegate Meeting

While the election campaign for the General Secretaryship was progressing preparations were in hand for a Delegate Meeting. At issue was the whole structure of the Society.

The "Workman's Times" commented:-

"On Whit Monday the ASE will send representatives to Leeds to take part in the Delegate Meeting..... the Delegate Meeting possesses absolute and final authority. ...."

"The revision committees which have been at work some time past have most thoroughly and conscientiously done their duty.<sup>1</sup> ....

"What reforms are needed?"

"First and foremost arises the proposal to broaden the basis of the society by the creation of 'trade protection members' ....."

"Further recommendations are made embracing the appointment of organising secretaries and district paid delegates, the selection of parliamentary representatives, and the establishment of an emergency fund ...."

"Whether the Amalgamated Engineers are to allow themselves to be gradually cut up, disorganised, and demoralised by encroachment of machinery on their craft, or to make good their claim to the regulation of machines and constructive skill alike ..... will be decided. It is as great an issue as has ever been presented to trade unionism. But the evidences are plentiful that the Makers of Machines do not intend to be swallowed up by them."<sup>2</sup>

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1 These were committees covering groups of branches which considered amendments to the rules.

2 24 May 1892.

The press were excluded from A.S.E. Delegate Meetings and no verbatim record appears to have been kept. Reports of amendments and voting records do, however, exist.

Delegate Meetings continued until the agenda was completed and the 1892 meeting lasted for fifty days. It radically changed the structure of the Society but left the craft basis untouched.

"Our primary object is to raise the status of the workmen engaged in the engineering trade, and generally to improve the conditions under which we labour. If constrained to make restrictions against the admission into our trade of those who have not earned a right by a probationary servitude, we do so knowing that such encroachments are productive of evil ..... It is our duty, then, to exercise the same care and watchfulness over that in which we have a vested interest, as the physician does who holds a diploma, or the author who is protected by copyright".<sup>1</sup>

Rule 1 which governed "who may be members" included the usual list<sup>2</sup> of engineering crafts with only electrical engineers, rate turners and machinemen added. Every candidate for admission still had to have served an apprenticeship<sup>3</sup> and this excluded many machinemen. Two new membership sections were created, Trade Members and Trade Protection Members<sup>4</sup> but both of these were only open to skilled men. Trade Members had to be between thirty

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1 Preface to 1892 rule book. This part of the preface was still unchanged in 1914.

2 The usual list was - Smiths, Ship Smiths, Angle Iron Smiths, Fitters, Turners, Pattern Makers, Millwrights, Mechanical Draughtsmen, Planers, Borers, Sletters, Brass Finishers, Coppersmiths, Machine Joiners, Die Sinkers, Press Tool Makers, Stampers or Drop Hammer Forgers.

3 Rule XIX (1892). This rule included "He must be of good ability as a workman, of steady habits and of good moral character".

4 Rules XXII and XXIII.

and forty years of age on entry, paid 6d per week in contributions (as against 1/- for full members), received limited benefits (no superannuation) and had the right to vote but were excluded from holding any Society office. Trade Protection Members entered when between forty and fifty five years of age, paid 4d per week, received death benefit (£5) and dispute pay. Like trade members they were debarred from holding office.

It must be concluded, therefore, that the membership base of the Society was not significantly broadened by the Delegate Meeting.

The true significance of the Meeting lay in the reform of the government of the Society.<sup>1</sup> An Executive Council, elected from eight geographical divisions, was to take office from January 1, 1893. The Local Executive Council elected by the London branches was abolished. Whereas the old Local Executive was made up of members meeting after they had worked full time at the trade, the new Executive Councilmen were to be full-time officials of the Society.

For the first time a regional organisation was established with the appointment of six organising district delegates. These delegates were to be elected by the entire membership but nominated by the districts they intended to represent.

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1 Two other changes are worth noting. A superannuation reserve fund was established at the cost of one shilling per member per quarter. This protected the general fund from the increasing cost of superannuation (Rule XXX). Piecework was still opposed but district committees, "subject to the consent of the Executive" could now decide to let members work on piecework, and lay down appropriate conditions. It is doubtful whether the new rule did more than clarify practice. The previous rule (XXXVI 1885) opposed piecework but said "All district committees and branches are to see that members have a proper rated wage, apart altogether from piecework prices, and they must exert themselves to make it a condition that all these engaged upon piecework shall be paid their fair share of the surplus....." This clearly shows that A.S.E. Members worked by the piece and that district committees did have the power to regularise this before 1892. J.B. Jeffcys in "The Story of the Engineers" (1945) makes too much of 1892 change.

The position of the General Secretary and his two assistants was now formalised. They were to be elected for three year periods by the members.

Political action was for the first time covered by rule.

"If at any time it should appear to the Council desirable to contribute towards the expenses of a member of the Society as a candidate for election as a member of the House of Commons, they shall have power, after submitting the question to a vote of the members, to cause a levy to be made for payment of such contributions, and of an annual allowance to such member if elected, such levy not to exceed threepence per year per member."<sup>1</sup>

The 1892 Delegate Meeting made important changes in the structure and government of the ASE. An elected full-time Executive Council, organising district delegates and a provision for political action improved the Society's organisation and was to enable it to remain the largest trade union in the engineering industry.

The Delegate Meeting, while reformist on government, was conservative on the craft question. This should be taken into account when we consider the influence of Tom Mann's campaign for the General Secretaryship and the character of the Delegate Meeting's decisions.<sup>2</sup>

The decision to hold a Delegate Meeting<sup>3</sup> and the preparations for the meeting were well under way before Robert Austin died.<sup>4</sup> Mann's campaign could have no effect upon these. That the active members who formed the Delegate Meeting were influenced by the campaign is possible, indeed likely.

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1 1892 rule book rule XIV clause 14 carried by 34 to 28 with 1 neutral.

2 "That his candidature (Mann's) had partly achieved its object, and had served to rally and unite the forces in the Society making for change, can be seen from the radical alterations made in the rules and structure of the Society at the Delegate Meeting held in 1892."  
Jefferys p. 113

3 The decision was taken by a vote of members in June 1891.

4 "When it has been decided that a delegate meeting shall take place, each branch shall, at a summoned meeting, appoint a committee for the revision of the rules at least nine months previous to the delegate meeting ....."  
Rule XXXI, 1885 rule book.

But discontent with the government of the Society was widespread long before 1891 as was shown during the Maxim Nordenfelt dispute in 1889.<sup>1</sup> There were a number of forces working towards reform including new unionism, a rising membership putting great strain on the traditional method of government,<sup>2</sup> the reluctance of those in dispute to accede to a locally elected spare-time Executive Council and the great pride, particularly conservative members felt, in the power and prestige of the A.S.E. - power and prestige which was tending to decline due in part to the traditional structure of the Society.

Tom Mann's campaign organised the reformers and made them more effective. His supporters, as we have seen, made much of the campaign's "lasting educational" effect. David Gardner,<sup>3</sup> discussing the Delegate Meeting, claimed:

Nearly all these reforms adopted may be put down to the active advocacy of them by Tom Mann. He hath sown, and now the harvest of reform is being reaped. There is an opening out of the arms of the Society and it must result in the consolidation of trade. Much of the broadening policy is due to Alf Sellicks, Dicks, Campbell, my three companions, Leeds and Halifax delegates and, in fact the progressives come from all parts of the kingdom ....."<sup>4</sup>

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1 See Chapter One

2 Between the 1885 Delegate Meeting and 1892 membership grew from 51,600 to 71,000

3 Secretary Mann's Glasgow Committee Member 1892 Delegate Meeting and Scottish member of first elected Executive Council until he resigned through ill health in 1910.

4 Workingman's Times, July 16, 1892



Bigby speaking somewhat later as a newly elected Organising District Secretary for Number 5 division<sup>1</sup> stated:

"The new forward movement in the general policy of the Society has taken great strides into popular favour during the last year. At the time of the alteration in the rules this was one of the most backward districts of all ..... All this is now changing ..... Old fashioned officers are being removed and replaced by young and advanced men ..... In Birmingham and district a propaganda committee of one member for every branch has been formed and is doing excellent work holding meetings and making new members. The same is true of most other large towns, Grantham, Faighborough (sic) and Leicester having similar committees formed. He attributes much of the progress now being made to the results of Tom Mann's candidature for the General Secretaryship".<sup>2</sup>

John Burns was approached by David A. Rees to address a meeting of the "A.S.E. Manchester District Progressive Party".<sup>3</sup> Rees wrote:

"The idea of such a movement originated from Bro. T. Mann's election committee in the late contest for the General Secretaryship of our Society ... our object purely educational".

Rees said that they had fifty four members some of whom were Anderson's supporters.<sup>4</sup>

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Number 5 Division covered:

- 1 Worcester, Hereford, Warwick, Salop, Stafford, Derby, Leicester, Northampton, Nottingham, Lincoln and Bedford.
- 2 Webb Collection 1893 Report on A.S.E. Cardiff and South of England Collection E, Section A, Volume XVI.
- 3 Progressive parties were also formed in Hull and Belfast - Workingman's Times, December 3, 1892. In December 1893 Recruitment Committees were at work in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Paisley. Monthly Report, December 1893.
- 4 Burns papers MS 46287, Vol. VII.

There is some evidence that Tom Mann's campaign did have a considerable impact but by its limited nature it tended to advocate changes that were acceptable to a wide section of the members. Many of the claims were made by those associated with the campaign and by The Workingman's Times which sought to link the A.S.E. reform with Socialism:

"The success of the go-ahead members of the A.S.E. over the rest-and-be-thankful members is one of the most encouraging signs of the progress of Socialist thought and action in trade unionism. The socialising of the great industrial parliament outside the House of Westminster has been a work which Socialists have set themselves to accomplish in England during the last ten years, 'Our unions must expand and federate,<sup>1</sup> or, cut up as we are into ever so many sections, combined capitalism will crush us' has spoken the socialist. It was only the splendid combination of the docks and riverside workers in London, and the federation of these unions, which saved the dockers from oppressive spoliation (sic) by the forces of federated capitalists".<sup>2</sup>

It is extremely difficult to sustain the "encouraging signs of the progress of socialist thought and action" either from Tom Mann's campaign, the decisions of the Delegate Meeting, or, as we shall see, from the character of the new elected Executive Council. That many Socialists were associated with Tom Mann's campaign is clear but the character of the campaign and the decision of the Delegate Meeting, suggest that an overtly socialist appeal

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1 Federation was to become an issue, and then the policy, of the A.S.E. not primarily as a result of Socialist propaganda but due to the industrial defeat after the 1897-98 lock out. See Chapter Four.

2 "The Workingman's Times", August 20, 1892.

would not receive anything like majority support.<sup>1</sup> Two claims can certainly be made for Mann's campaign firstly, it helped to crystallize the opposition to the existing mode of union government and secondly, it provided a national platform and a nucleus of organisation, for the man who was to become the A.S.E.'s first socialist General Secretary, George Barnes.

The New Executive Council<sup>2</sup> took office on January 1, 1893. They were in no sense more radical than the Local Executive Council they superseded.

It is difficult to distinguish a particularly Socialist approach to the problems of the A.S.E. which would enable the Executive Council to be characterized as "Socialist" or "non-Socialist". The fundamental craft question which a Socialist might be expected to have an extreme view about, was settled by the Delegate Meeting and it was not the function of the Executive Council to raise policy issues. They could reasonably take the view that their chief responsibility was to carry out the far-reaching reforms of the Delegate Meeting.

What sort of issues lent themselves to a distinctive Socialist interpretation? A more militant approach to industrial questions but was there anything distinctly Socialist about this? The A.S.E. was taking a more militant stance, the craft issue being foremost. No doubt the "New Unionist" movement together with Socialist influences were in part responsible for militancy; these were complemented by the effects of technical change, new production techniques and the growth of the employers' organisations. The Clyde-Belfast dispute of 1895 and the lock-out

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1 The Workingman's Times did not sustain its view of August 20, 1892, see October 15, 1892 "The New Movement in the A.S.E." which mentioned the new Executive Council nationally elected, that the Society was "open to all (1), and confident in the future". Socialism was not mentioned. That the Socialist element was important in the struggle for reform is confirmed by a Woolwich Socialist, Henry J. May "It must be borne in mind that the changes of 1892 were the result of the growth of a Socialist element in the Society....." "A sketch of the life's work of Alfred Sellicks", p.17 (1903). A.E.U. archives.

2 Members: Sellicks, Gardner, Black, Golightly, Taylor, McDowell, Hooson, Gray.

of 1897-98 were to be the climax of these trends.

Before 1893 district and branch initiatives on industrial questions were taken without more than a formal reference to the Local Executive Council. The new Executive faced a similar situation and they were to find it extremely difficult to influence the powerful district committees.<sup>1</sup>

During the first two years the new Executive was pre-occupied with the question of the eight-hour day and in February 1894 the Government's introduction into dockyards and arsenals of this was a considerable victory for the Executive.<sup>2</sup> But the eight-hour day was never a "Socialist" question within the A.S.E. The legal eight-hour day was; but outside government employment industrial action was regarded by Socialists and non-Socialists as the appropriate method for the engineering industry. There is no evidence that any member of the Executive, or that John Anderson himself, was anything but determined and militant in their support for the eight-hour day.<sup>3</sup>

The issue which Socialist members of the Executive were more concerned about than any other was parliamentary representation and the question was not whether to support and sponsor Socialist candidates but rather a straightforward one of the A.S.E.'s representation in parliament.

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1 Henry J. May wrote that the reforms of 1892 "had their equivocal side. This was now manifest in the power which had been placed in the hands of district committees, enabling them to act more independently of the central Executive than hitherto". Life's Works of Sellicks, p.17. May was writing about 1893-97. The Delegate Meeting altered the powers of district committees in only one respect, they were given the formal right to convene aggregate meetings to discuss trade disputes.

2 See Chapter Three.

3 In 1886 Anderson contested the General Secretaryship vacated by John Burnett. His Bolton Committee wrote, "In 1871 during the nine hours movement, he took a leading part, he was chosen by the men in the district he was then working in as a member of the committee; he was appointed one of the deputation to confer with the employers on the subject, through which he lost a valuable situation". A.E.U. archives.

There was some pressure on the Executive to implement the rule on parliamentary representatives but no great enthusiasm was apparent. In September 1893 a decision was deferred pending the T.U.C.<sup>1</sup> The following month the Council announced that it had "decided to call for a levy of one penny at the present time but if circumstances warrant it in the near future ... the whole question will ... be again brought before you". A sum of £100 was granted to John Burns (no record of a vote on the question of a levy appears to survive). This brought forth fresh protests but the Executive explained that a one penny levy raised £250:

"So, we should be able to assist another one (M.P. in addition to Burns) and perhaps it will be as well to state here that the present arrangement is that the Council decline to select candidates, or pay election expenses, but leave that for the present to constituencies and when a member wins a seat in parliament, his claim for financial assistance will be considered in the same way as was the case of Mr. Burns.

"The reason will be obvious, and this will answer all inquiries viz. in the first place it is rather too delicate a matter for the Council to take upon themselves the selection of candidates, and in the second they cannot afford to pay election expenses and in the third they do not intend to interfere with our members in the due exercise of their political views; and, as the resolutions of the Trade Congress on the provision of funds for Labour representation have not yet been given effect to, the only plans we could adopt was, and for the present is, that members of the Society must prove to the constituencies they seek to represent, their fitness for the positions, at their own expense and with their own ability, and then if they assist us in whatever question effecting Labour we wish to bring before parliament we shall be glad to consider the case as before stated. We may further add that those

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1 Monthly Report. See Chapter Seven for Politics 1899-1912.

who write here asking for DIRECT representation will find us looking at the rule that the word 'direct' which left the Delegate Meeting was struck out by the Registrar, and in our opinion very properly too, as it is rather a large order to assume that we have any more right to representation than any other branch of the labouring community, and it is labour representation that we think is required, not wholly and solely Engineers representation, although at the same time we like our share".<sup>1</sup>

This was a somewhat unconvincing defence of inaction. It was difficult to understand how supporting a number of candidates involved interference "with our members in the due exercise of their political views", or if it did, this would be changed by "trade congress" provisions. The emphasis on "labour representation" appears admirable except that the Executive was to show great reluctance to support A.S.E. members when they stood as I.L.P. candidates. Even the Labour Representation Committee (L.R.C.) was, to begin with, regarded suspiciously (it took the A.S.E. two years to affiliate). The excuse about not having enough money to contest elections came strangely from a body which only bothered to raise a penny levy.

In practice the Executive was not very interested in parliamentary representation and was able to put quite a good face on this until the successful establishment of the L.R.C. overcame many of their objections.<sup>2</sup>

At the Gorton by-election in July 1894 the I.L.P. sought an A.S.E. candidate probably because of the large engineering population in the division. Tom Mann refused to stand because he was committed to Colne Valley. Alfred

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1 Monthly Report, November 1893

2 Trade Union support of parliamentary candidates was advocated partly because working men could not usually afford to run election campaigns and the Liberals were often reluctant to nominate a working man. It is significant that skilled Engineers before 1906 had only one M.P., the increasingly professional Liberal Party politician John Burns. Though reluctant to intervene in politics the Executive Council did welcome the election to parliament of William Allan of Sunderland, an employer who had introduced the eight-hour day into his factories. Allan was opposed by the I.L.P. much to the disgust of A.T. Dipper Secretary of the Tyneside and National Labour union who expressed his feelings strongly in a letter dated 23 February 1893 to John Burns. Burns Papers MS 46287. Executive Council on Allan's election E.C. Minutes, February 25, 1894.

Bigby, organising district delegate, was approached but the Executive Council declined to allow him to stand. G.N. Barnes was then asked, but Hooson and Gardner's motion

"That every facility be given to G.N. Barnes to contest a constituency as an Independent Labour Candidate for a seat in the House of Commons"

was defeated by the Executive Council with only the movers in favour.

The Executive instead carried

"That Mr. Barnes be informed that so long as his candidature or election does not interfere with his official duties as set forth in Rule the Executive Council does not deem it necessary to interfere with the matter".<sup>1</sup>

A part-time candidature was clearly unsatisfactory so Barnes withdrew.<sup>2</sup>

At the 1895 General Election Tom Mann (Colne Valley) and George Barnes<sup>3</sup> (Rochdale) stood unsuccessfully as I.L.P. candidates. They received no assistance from the A.S.E.

Until the A.S.E. affiliated to the L.R.C. in 1902 only Hooson and Gardner, of the eight man Executive Council, gave consistent support to parliamentary representation.

#### The dismissal of Anderson and the election of Barnes

Despite what the employers were to say during the lock out the Executive Council was not extremist or Socialist. Evidence in the employers' eyes, of the Executive's leanings towards Socialism, was the removal of the moderate General Secretary John Anderson and his replacement by the I.L.P. militant George Barnes.<sup>4</sup>

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1 E.C. Minutes, June 7, 1894. Barnes was Assistant General Secretary. He was at this time an enthusiastic I.L.P. socialist.

2 In September 1894 an A.S.E. committee in Newcastle asked for support for Mr. F. Hammill, an A.S.E. member in the pending by-election. The E.C. refused. A.S.E. Quarterly Report, September 1894.

3 Barnes had resigned the Assistant Secretaryship.

4 For the employers' view see Chapter Four.

Another account of Anderson's dismissal places the emphasis upon militant pressure on the Executive. "By August the militants were clamouring for blood and the Executive 'considered it necessary' to dismiss Anderson for 'wilful neglect of duty!'"<sup>1</sup>

The case of John Anderson was a sad one but there is no evidence of any ulterior motive on the part of the Executive. Anderson was, to say the least, accident prone.

On 28 November 1893 the Executive was informed by Southward No.2 branch that Anderson, a member of the branch, was more than ten shillings in arrears and therefore not eligible to hold office in the Society. The Council declined "to take upon themselves the responsibility of revising that election"<sup>2</sup>; but they decided he should refund his salary for the period of the arrears.<sup>3</sup>

Three months later Hooson and Gardner moved, after a discussion of Anderson's drunkenness

"That he be dismissed from the office of General Secretary believing that his repeated unsteady conduct and negligence is calculated to wreck the Society".

All other members of the Council voted against this motion and they went on to support and pass

"That this Council place on record with a view of further action, in case of repetition, its sense of the neglect of duty by the General Secretary and hereby give him notice that the next offence of the same character will

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1 Clegg, Fox & Thompson "A History of British Trade Unions since 1889", (1964) Vol. 1, p.162, a footnote adds "The Executive sacrifice of Anderson was timely. Three of its members had stood for re-election in 1896; all were returned, though with tiny majorities".

2 E.C. Minutes, 23 November 1893.

3 E.C. Minutes, 16 December 1893



be dealt with by his immediate dismissal from office and further that in future he will be required to sit with the Council during office hours, and remain with them unless by permission of the Council through the Chairman".<sup>1</sup>

No account of this decision appeared in any of the Society's publications.

Less than a year later (February 1895) Anderson lost an uncrossed postal order which was eventually cashed containing the forged signature of George Barnes. Anderson not only lost the order but failed to inform the Executive of the loss until it appeared containing Barnes's name. He told the Executive:

"He had lost the order and thought he could find it, as he would have to make it good, he knew he had had the order in his pocket and had lost it the same night".

Gray asked:

"Did Mr. Barnes believe Mr. Anderson knew who forged the order?". Ans. by Mr. Barnes, "Yes, Mr. Anderson knew more than he had told him or the E.C."<sup>2</sup>

Barnes suggested that the Executive Council should take handwriting specimens<sup>3</sup> in an attempt to trace the culprit; this was agreed upon. Anderson hoped the Executive Council "would not lend themselves to any electioneering dodge".

This remark reveals the nub of the matter - the postal order incident came during the election campaign for the General Secretaryship in which Anderson and Barnes were the only serious candidates. Barnes feared that the forgery was a clumsy attempt to discredit him during the campaign while Anderson was worried that his responsibility for the loss would be used against him.

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1 E.C. Minutes, 3 March 1894.

2 E.C. Minutes, 27 February 1895.

3 The police had investigated the matter but were unable to make any progress.

Rumours spread among the members and to stop these the Executive felt compelled to issue a statement.<sup>1</sup> A handwriting expert was engaged but he could "find no evidence to implicate anyone....."<sup>2</sup> Although the matter dragged on for several weeks<sup>3</sup> no further progress could be made towards tracing the person responsible.

The Executive Council was entitled to think that Anderson's carelessness was responsible for the whole time-consuming, irritating business. Forgery and police investigation hardly helped the prestige of the Society.

Barnes had resigned as Assistant Secretary in order to be able to contest the Secretaryship from an independent position.<sup>4</sup> He must have recognised that it would be extremely difficult for him to succeed where Tom Mann had failed.

Unlike Robert Young who as Assistant Secretary was to contest the Secretaryship nineteen years later,<sup>5</sup> Barnes fought upon issues and not the competence of the incumbent although, as we have seen, there were grounds for such a campaign. He stood by the changes made at the 1892 Delegate Meeting including the motion that the Monthly Report should be open to the members for "prompt review and correction" in the event of careless administration:

"And while I should oppose our identification with either political party, I am favourable to working through public bodies, because I believe therein lies immense scope for the application of T.U. principles. Regarding the interests of all who toil as identical I desire to see our Society take

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1 E.C. Minutes, March 5, 1895

2 E.C. Minutes, March 28, 1895

3 See E.C. Minutes for 6 April, 8 April, 23 April and 3 May. Monthly Reports April and May

4 1895 election address, A.E.U. archives

5 See Chapter Eight

an increasing part in pressing forward the claims and demands of the workers to a greater share of the wealth they alone produce".<sup>1</sup>

Barnes's election committee was similar in composition to Tom Mann's.<sup>2</sup> They issued a veiled reference to Barnes's competence and Anderson's conduct. Of Barnes they said:

"His dignified and temperate statement affords in itself sufficient evidence of his fitness to worthily fit the high office ..... We could adduce outside testimony, but prefer to leave the matter to those within our ranks who know the circumstances and the relative merits of the two candidates ....."<sup>3</sup>

Anderson's address followed a familiar and sour pattern:

"I at once take the opportunity of disclaiming any responsibility of plunging the Society into a contested election at a time when there should be peace and harmony in our ranks ..... cost of money and valuable time which could have been devoted to other objectives ..... and I feel sure that, after the long and arduous contest I went through three years ago with one of the most popular labour leaders ..... at a vast expense .... that I will have your sympathy and support in this unwarrantable attempt of those who have decided to oppose me".<sup>4</sup>

John Burns was still at this time immensely popular within the A.S.E. His conduct during the election was extraordinary for he not only failed to support his fellow Socialist (Burns was to claim to be a Socialist for many more years) Barnes, he actually supported Anderson. He wrote:

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- 1 Election Address, A.E.U. archives
  - 2 Harry Rich, Chairman; C. Turnbull, Vice Chairman; F. Hurst, Financial Secretary; W.H. Beckett, Treasurer; Moss Sedgwick, Secretary.
  - 3 Statement issued with Election Address.
  - 4 A.E.U. archives. After Anderson's dismissal he "plunged the Society into contested elections" on every possible occasion until he was elected an Organising District Delegate in 1899.

"Whilst thanking the Branches of our Society that did me the honour of nominating me, it is not my intention of being a candidate for the post of General Secretary, which I see no grounds for changing now".<sup>1</sup>

Burns's intervention did not end there. Tom Mann, now Secretary of the I.L.P., campaigned on Barnes's behalf. At Sunderland Mann told a meeting of A.S.E. members:

"It was a policy of drift that characterised the Society at the present day. The biggest blackleg district in the trade, he continued, was at Battersea.<sup>2</sup> The government today continued to flout and jeer at the Society ..... The best work the government had control of was given to firms that would not pay the recognised rate of wages (Shame) He held that the Executive Council and the general officer ought to be men capable of effectually treating with the government ..... Their organisation required strengthening ..... He did not want the Secretaryship. He would not give his services if he was offered £15 per week. He would not under any conceivable circumstances take any office under the Society. He believed that Mr. George Barnes was the most qualified man that was in the running for the General Secretaryship (applause) ..... he trusted that those present would do their best to return Mr. Barnes (loud applause) .....a show of hands was taken with the result that there was a very large majority in favour of Mr. Barnes".<sup>3</sup>

Alf Sellicks, one time supporter of Mann,<sup>4</sup> wrote to Burns about Mann's speech:<sup>5</sup>

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- 1 Printed with Election Addresses, 1895. A.E.U. archives
  - 2 Burns lived in Battersea and represented Battersea in Parliament and on the L.C.C.
  - 3 Sunderland Daily Echo, March 6, 1895.
  - 4 New Chairman of the Executive Council.
  - 5 Letter dated March 8, 1895, Burns Papers M.S. 46287.

"Tom Mann has been speaking in Sunderland, you will be interested to hear that 'Battersea is the biggest blackleg district in the trade'. Then 'The Gov. flouts and jeers at the Society and refuses to comply with its demands. The (sic) He 'would not give his services to the A.S.E. for £15 per week'.

Barnes is the man to put all this right (?)

Yours

A. Sellick

poor I.L.P".

Thus prompted, Burns replied to Mann:

....."So grossly unfair to our Society, its policy, its great development and work, is Mann's speech, so cowardly are his reflections upon the present officers, and so unjust towards my own district, that I venture to refute the statements he has made.

"Mr. Mann states that the Society has pursued 'a policy of drift'..... its membership has 'drifted' from 53,000 in 1888 to 77,000 in 1891, an increase of 43 per cent in six years. <sup>1</sup>

..... "The Society has enlarged its constituency and included within its ranks trades and callings that were previously excluded ..... Beyond this the officials at the central office are not circumscribed in their work as they used to be".

On Battersea, Burns claimed that there was in Battersea a larger proportion of trade unionists than elsewhere. Battersea was represented in parliament and on the L.C.C. by a trade unionist. Sixty seven (sic) trade unionists were members of the town council and also that Mr. Mann's desire to "extol Mr. Barnes to the detriment of others has made him lose his head. But that is no reason why members of the Society should lose theirs by following his narrow partisan advice".

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1 The membership trend is correct but 71,000 was the published membership for 1891.

On Mann's charge that the A.S.E. had no influence with the government, Burns replied:

"The Government has in two years reduced the working hours to eight per day of 40,000 people in its employ ..... recently contractors have been and are being levelled up to trade union conditions. Who has played the most prominent part in this achievement? Not the I.L.P. rip-and-tear brigade but certainly the officers and prominent members of the A.S.E. whom Mr. Mann now charges with lack of vigour.

"In fact, the object and tenor of Mr. Mann's speech on behalf of Mr Barnes were to disparage all other candidates, cast reflections on active, honest, non-political officers who will not subordinate the interest of our great Society to the shibboleths of the I.L.P. and its intolerant leaders. Mr. Mann's statement that he did not want the secretaryship is gratuitous in view of the fact that he tried to secure it and the members accepted another - a result Mr. Mann can never forgive. If this occurred three years ago, why depart from the rule of continuity of office when officers are qualified and have given no cause for being displaced. Are we to see introduced into trade unionism the 'spoils to the victor' system? Are we to see executives besmirched and long, honest and devoted service cast away? And for what? Simply because Mr. Mann for the fiftieth time has changed his social, political and industrial course, and in the light of the change wishes Mr. Barnes to be the General Secretary of the A.S.E; not because Mr. Barnes is better qualified than others, but because he is, for the moment, a political friend and ally of Mr. Mann.

"The fact is Mr. Mann is trying through Mr. Barnes to capture the A.S.E. for reasons extraneous to trade unionism .....

"I hope the men of the North whose loyalty to trade unionism is never doubted, and whose gratitude for past services is proverbial, will display their disgust at Mr. Mann's unfairness by not voting for Mr. Barnes, the nominee of the I.L.P., and thus help the present officials in their good work,

and save our Society from being disintegrated for political ends and by political ambitions".<sup>1</sup>

Mann's changes of political position were probably damaging:

"At one time we looked to Mann as one of our coming champions but the meteoric rapidity of the changes in his movement leave us no other course open than to cross his name from the list".

The writer<sup>2</sup> claimed that Mann had been a Trafalgar Square Democrat, Scientific lecturer, Member of the London Reform Union, had sought to democratise the Church of England and now wanted to be Secretary of the T.U.C. He ended "Why can't Mr. Barnes be allowed to look after himself?"

W. Calderwood, an A.S.E. member and Secretary of Woolwich Trades Council, attacked Burns for "mere personal spleen ..... together with glaring inaccuracies in reference to Battersea". Burns's letter was another "of his many attempts to do .... what he once boasted at the general office of the A.S.E. .... 'smash up the I.L.P. before the next Trade Union Congress'. Barnes was not the I.L.P. candidate said Calderwood and Burns was playing politics as much as Mann. Both Mann and Burns had the same right to support which candidate they pleased.

Mann's reference to Battersea applied to the engineering trade, "it is as well that Mr. Burns's letter has appeared in a Northern paper, or else he would have brought a hornet's nest about his ears". Calderwood, who lived in Battersea, claimed that from 3,000 engineers who worked or lived in Battersea the A.S.E. had only 270 members.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Sunderland Echo, March 13, 1895

2 "One who had been disappointed". Sunderland Daily Echo, March 15, 1895

3 Calderwood claimed that 2,000 engineers were employed at three railway workshops (The London, Chatham & Dover, The South Western Railway and The London & Brighton). The Railway Companies were notoriously anti-trade union. Calderwood signed Mann's illuminated address in 1892.

On the eight-hour day in government workshops, Burns failed to mention "that a large and representative committee worked unceasingly in Woolwich for upwards of twelve months ....." Burns himself had said that this committee "was in the main responsible for the concession ....."

" Mr. Burns advised Mr. Barnes to contest the secretaryship three years ago at the funeral of the late Mr. Robert Austin. Therefore why now this change of front?"<sup>1</sup>

John Regan, Secretary of Birmingham District Committee and Secretary of Anderson's campaign (although Anderson claimed to have no committee), asked Burns to attend a complimentary dinner for Anderson and added "to present him with an illuminated address".

"We thank you your (sic) powerful letter ..... warning our members against the insidious attempt made by Mr. Tom Mann and his party to capture our Society for political purposes with a view of making it an advanced base of operations on behalf of the I.L.P. and your strong appeal to members 'to save our Society from being disintegrated for political ends by political ambitions'"<sup>2</sup>

Burns thus clearly and emphatically allied himself with Anderson. He had some grounds for complaint against Mann as certainly on Battersea and the government's introduction of the eight-hour day he had a case. But his 'why depart from the rule of continuity of office' was very old unionist in tone and would, one imagines, have been denounced by the John Burns of a few years before.

It was certainly strange that Burns who had always been concerned to introduce politics into the A.S.E. (and trade union affairs) should now protest at the disintegration of the Society "for political ends and by political ambitions".

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1 Sunderland Daily Echo, 21 March 1895

2 Burns papers, Vol. VII, M.S. 46287



This would appear to be a case where Burns's hatred of the I.L.P. and jealousy of Mann (and perhaps Barnes) had the upper hand. By 1895 he had drifted far from his old associates and was allied with the "old unionists"<sup>1</sup> to exclude the trades councils from the T.U.C. and introduce the block vote.

Burns was on intimate terms with Alf Sellicks<sup>2</sup> and would have known about Anderson's incompetence. To attack Tom Mann was one thing but to defend an incompetent General Secretary was a revealing indication of Burns' sense of proportion.

The charge that Barnes would "subordinate the interests of our great Society to the shibboleths of the I.L.P. and its intolerant leaders" took no account of Barnes' character and the actual effect any politically motivated General Secretary could in fact have. That Burns was overstating his case is implied by his contrast between Barnes and "active, honest, non-political officers". This from "the man with the red flag".

As Assistant General Secretary in 1895, Barnes had appeared competent. The Executive Council conducted the affairs of the Society and the General Secretary's influence upon the Executive depended upon his prestige within the Society and more importantly his personal qualities. No General Secretary could, of his own volition, alter the policy or character of the Society.

Burns did not explain what effects could be expected to arise from the election of Barnes. An I.L.P. member might be expected to be more militant than Anderson but, as has been suggested, on the eight-hour question Anderson was firmly committed, while the districts were vigorously militant. I.L.P. or Socialist influence at that level was probably more important than at the level of General Secretary (given the composition of the Executive Council).

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1 With the notable exception of Broadhurst, see Clegg, Fox & Thompson, p. 259.

2 See letter above and Burns Diaries.

The Executive Council were not likely to attach the Society to the I.L.P. but Barnes would assist Gardner and Hooson in achieving a more active policy on parliamentary representation. Given Burns's public attitude on the question he might have been expected to support Barnes. Even if he were unable to stomach Barnes's I.L.P. membership then he could have kept quiet as he did in 1891-92. Instead he supported a man who on political questions took the sort of conservative attitude which John Burns had always denounced.<sup>1</sup>

The result of the election emphasised the importance of Burns's attitude.

John Anderson	12,910
George Barnes	11,603
Barton	759

Despite his election victory Anderson was not to hold office for very long. One year later the Executive Council dismissed Anderson for "gross carelessness, wilful neglect of duty, and drunkenness during the 1896 Delegate Meeting".

On July 25 the Executive discovered that there was "an overcharge of some £60 in Mr. Anderson's accounts".<sup>2</sup> Anderson was asked to explain and he wrote from the Delegate Meeting "that the money was in the safe".<sup>3</sup> Council decided that this was no explanation and instructed him to "return home at once".

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1 Fred Hammill who was denied A.S.E. support in the Newcastle by-election of 1894 was a close friend of Burns. Anderson was firmly against helping Hammill, see below P.45. footnote 2.

2 Executive Council Minutes

3 Executive Council Minutes, 28 July.

Breteton, an Assistant Secretary, opened the safe and discovered £95.8.9. Anderson returned and explained "that owing to the telegrams from the Delegate Meeting he had been hurried over the accounts and in consequence he had only struck a rough balance, leaving it with Mr. Glennie to make any correction".

"Taylor asked whether Anderson had made up the cash book. Anderson said 'No'.

"Mr. Breteton here said that if that was true Mr. Anderson had told him an untruth as he had told him he had entered up his cash book prior to going away.

"Mr. Anderson then corrected his previous statement and said he had entered all transactions up to going away but hadn't struck a balance and that he had forgot about the money in the safe".

Later "Mr. Breteton here said he felt a sort of humiliation since Mr. Anderson became General Secretary in regard to his repeated mistakes, he was sick of it and something had got to be done".<sup>1</sup>

The Executive postponed action for two days until a full Council could be present. Anderson was asked what he had to say about the charge of "gross carelessness, wilful neglect of duty, and drunkenness".

"Mr. Anderson said he could only repeat what he had already said, viz:- That he had been hurried over returning .....

"Mr. Sellicks said if that was all the excuse he had to urge in his defense he had better retire and so end this painful interview.

"Mr. Anderson said that was he to be condemned merely for a slip of the pen."

"Mr. Sellicks replied that was not so, he had got to face the charge of neglect of duty, carelessness, etc. and he hadn't done his duty for a long

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 29 July

time, he had simply frittered his time away on the Quarterly reports.<sup>1</sup>

"Mr. Anderson replied ..... 'Was there no redemption, he couldn't defend himself as he had done wrong, couldn't this be overlooked and he be allowed to resume his duties. He could tell us from a man's honest heart this would never happen again, before god it would never happen again, look at my position pulled between two bodies'.<sup>2</sup>

"Mr. Sellicks denied that Mr. Anderson was pulled between two bodies as the Council had never interfered with him at all .....

"Mr. Anderson ..... 'would he be given one more opportunity and please don't ruin me gentlemen, give me once more chance'.

Council considered the matter and decided:

"..... having in mind the previous warnings given him as to such conduct also having heard his admission of guilt and his plea generally this Council now decide that Mr. Anderson cannot longer be retained as General Secretary of this Society, therefore the office be declared vacant".

This was carried unanimously.

Anderson was allowed to contest the election that followed and he also issued a pamphlet defending himself.<sup>3</sup> Barnes, now very well known, was in a strong position.

"..... recent events afford ample justification for the last contest". He also raised the question of "federating with kindred societies in the engineering and shipbuilding industries in order to counter the new employers' organisation. He was supported by John Burnett, one time Secretary

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1 If Sellicks believed this why did he indirectly assist Anderson's re-election a few months earlier by directing Burns's fire on to Mann and Barnes?

2 i.e. Delegate Meeting and Executive Council.

3 No copy has been found.

of the A.S.E. and a labour officer at the Board of Trade. Sidney Webb wrote:

"It is because you unite the vigorous energy of a man in his prime with great official experience, proved integrity, and the strictest regularity of habits that my wife and I heartily wish you success".<sup>1</sup>

The election caused some bitterness among those who suspected that Anderson had been harshly treated. T. Connolly, declining to be nominated and protested at:

"The amount of lies, wicked and wilful slander, coupled with vile and cowardly inuendo, which have become the fighting weapons of the new order ....."

This was countered by Frank Rose who said:

"I have for a long time been convinced that our general office was inadequately tenanted and that a drastic change in the management was imperative. So fully did I realise this that I took an active part .... in forwarding the candidature of Bro. G.N. Barnes last year .....

Some of the antique specimens of our wisdom who advised the members to 'vote for all the present officers' or who called an attempt to remove an insober, neglectful, servant 'little short of a crime' may find food for serious reflection now".

Barnes became General Secretary with 17,371 votes and 9,012 for Anderson.<sup>2</sup>

Anderson appealed against his dismissal to the Final Appeal Court in 1898 but the Court rejected his appeal by 11 votes to 6.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Election Address 1896. A.E.U. Archives. J.T. Brownlie was a notable supporter of Barnes.

2 There were six other candidates sharing 3,600 votes between them. Barnes had a majority of 2,355 over Anderson and the other candidates combined.

3 Final Appeal Court Report, 1898, A.E.U. Archives. In 1899 Anderson was elected Organising District Delegate for No.2. Division. Eight years later he was dismissed by the Executive Council for "premature senility". The doctor's report and complaints from members made it clear that his "insober habits" were the real cause of the trouble..

It is clear that the Executive Council were not eager or politically motivated in their decision to dismiss Anderson. Had they merely sought an excuse for his dismissal the arrears question would have provided it. The fact that the Executive Council overlooked this, the first case of drunkenness and the postal order incident shows that they were, if anything, tolerant. They also made no attempt to assist Barnes in 1895 by publishing damaging details of Anderson's conduct. As we saw, Sellicks actually assisted Anderson.

The reform of the ASE during the early 1890's was of considerable significance. By establishing a full-time Executive Council, and a staff of organising district delegates the society established a form of organisation that would enable it to remain a powerful force. The decisions limiting the Executives authority, and retaining the craft basis of membership, were clearly of considerable importance.

Although there was much support for a more effective leadership there was no support for autocracy even defined as power for elected representatives. As we shall see the Executive Council, lacking in many respects the power of decision, was to require certain political skills to operate effectively.

There was little support in 1891 and 1892 for opening the Society to men lacking formal skills. We have discussed the effect of Tom Mann's campaign for the General Secretaryship, and suggested that much of his moderate programme probably enjoyed support among his opponents. Further, preparation for the Delegate Meeting, and therefore the formulation of the proposed rule changes was well underway before the Tom Mann campaign started.

To suggest that because Mann's campaign had perhaps less influence than Jefferys implied is not to underestimate the importance of his defeat.

The first elected Executive Council was not more radical on industrial or political questions than had been the preceding part-time local Executive Council. Had Mann been elected he would certainly have favoured the Society playing an active political role. It is also likely that he would have attempted to persuade the Executive Council of the need for them to campaign in favour of the Society taking into membership semi-skilled engineers for whom no union existed. Indeed under Mann's influence the style of ASE leadership might have become more political and dynamic in character. Mann had the drive and charisma which could have pushed the reform of the ASE much faster along the road to both political action and industrial unionism. When it is recognised that some of the customs established by the first ASE elected Executive Council remained effective for many years the character of the chief officer was obviously of considerable importance.

Ironically John Burns by inactivity probably prevented Tom Mann becoming General Secretary. Burns became the most powerful supporter of political conservatism and administrative incompetence. Only Anderson's obvious failings eventually led to his dismissal and the election of George Barnes as General Secretary.

The election of Barnes completed the reform of the ASE; he became a competent Socialist General Secretary. But for all his gifts Barnes had not the capacity to wield the influence which might have been Tom Mann's.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Movement for the Eight-Hour Day 1887-97

The attempt to obtain the eight-hour day by industrial action was to be an important factor in the decision of the engineering employers to establish a permanent national organisation. It can be argued that the 1897-98 dispute, which led to the defeat of the A.S.E., was inevitable in view of the "machine question" and the fundamental conflict between the Society and the employers on the control and use of the tools of the trade. Undoubtedly the crisis in 1897 was produced by the sustained industrial and political pressure from the A.S.E. for the establishment of the forty-eight hour week.

Demands for a reduction in the standard working week have usually been accompanied by the claim that higher productivity during the shorter working week would ensure that production was maintained despite fewer hours worked. This claim appeared particularly viable to those seeking to reduce the working week from fifty four or fifty three hours to forty eight hours because this reduction would eliminate the 6 a.m. pre-breakfast start. It was contended that the early start produced low productivity before breakfast and had the effect of reducing productivity for the rest of the day.

The eight-hour day movement enjoyed wide support and, as we shall see, appeared by the end of 1894 to be succeeding. For the A.S.E. the chief consequence of the campaign was that in encouraging a militant attitude it ultimately persuaded the Society to undertake industrial action which it was not strong enough to sustain. Instead of obtaining the eight-hour day the Society found its whole trade society philosophy under attack.

The A.S.E.'s defeat had profound effects. The chief industrial consequence was a system of centralised collective bargaining that remains to the present day. The aristocratic demeanour of "new modelism" and craft pretension were now utterly at variance with the world in which the A.S.E. had to exist. Particularly at variance with the permanent emergence of a powerful



employers' organisation and the development of managerial techniques which subdivided work at the expense of the traditional craft methods of production.

These changes which had been predicted by some of the reformers were one reason for the changed structure of the union after 1892. But the A.S.E. remained a union of skilled men. Tom Mann wrote, from time to time, in the monthly report about ending the concern for status in favour of the rate for the job but nothing was done.<sup>+1</sup> There is no evidence of any campaign on this question within the union.

If the 1897-98 lock-out destroyed the traditionalist view of the A.S.E. it was equally destructive of the reformers' position. The dispute was initiated by the new leadership and was to be fought on the question of the eight-hour day. This issue was expected to rally impressive outside support, particularly from the T.U.C. which was by now firmly committed to the eight-hour day. In fact the engineers were easily beaten and the Parliamentary Committee's action, or rather lack of effective action, disappointed the A.S.E. The fact could not be disguised that the A.S.E. was an unlikely leader of radical causes and the admirable eight-hour day was only part of the dispute. An exclusive trade union hardly seemed worth taking risks to defend. By successfully grafting their programme on to the traditional craft basis of the A.S.E. the reformers were able to capture the union. But this success made the A.S.E. position somewhat confused. When the crisis came, insufficient enthusiasm for the A.S.E. cause could be generated and overwhelming trade union support was, in consequence, an empty hope.

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+1 The conflict between craft unionism and giving priority to the "rate for the job" is discussed at the beginning of chapter Four.

## The Eight-Hour Day

The nine-hour movement of 1871<sup>1</sup> was the only successful national strike movement in the history of the A.S.E.<sup>2</sup> Its initial impetus came from the Tyne, despite the efforts of Allan and the Local Executive Council. The success of the movement was largely made possible by the lack of an effective employers' organisation. Once nine hours had been achieved its defence throughout the slump years - particularly during the very bad year of 1879 - was a major victory for the Society.

With this record, the Socialist demand for an eight-hour day had considerable impact within the A.S.E. and throughout the succeeding decade demands that the A.S.E. should adopt this more advanced policy were frequently made. The leadership was cautious.

"Several enquiries having been made by members and branches why the council had not issued schedules for the purpose of taking votes and opinions of our members on the question of reducing the hours of labour to eight per day, the council gave the matter its best consideration; and whilst fully convinced that eight hours is quite long enough to work it was of the opinion that the time was not opportune to begin an agitation for a reduction in the hours of labour at the time when we were seeking for an advance or restoration

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1 There is no evidence of engineers playing a prominent part in the hours of work campaigns of the 1830's and 1840's. Union concern with hours of work may, as was the case with the cotton unions, be "a partial compensation for their inability to control entry itself". (Turner, Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy, (1962) p.256-257). The engineers took up the hours of work question from the 1870's onwards and, although this was not directly related to entry as such, it was probably influenced by labour market considerations. The engineers had apprenticeship conditions but entry was not tightly controlled in practice, there was no reason, for up until the mid-nineteenth century, except in periods of trade depression, there was usually a shortage of competent tradesmen (See Hobsbawn 'Essay in Labour History' (1960) edited by Briggs and Saville, confirmed by Clarke, Industrial Relations in the North East, Newcastle M.A. Thesis, 1966). From the 1870's the supply and demand situation became less favourable to the men. This trend was to be accelerated in the 1880's and 1890's by the introduction of self-acting machines and high speed steels which had a diluting effect upon the craft.

2 For this movement see Jefferys, pp. 85-98. Clarke, Industrial Relations in the N.E. 1850-1914. Newcastle, M.A. Thesis, 1966.

of wages in many parts of the U.K., and the council on this ground, and other reasons as well declined to issue voting papers on this matter".<sup>1</sup>

District committees were requested to seek the abolition of overtime. Another reason for not supporting the eight-hour movement:-

"is that we are averse to Government intervention with adult male labour as to the number of hours we shall work each day; and as we obtained the nine-hour day without the aid of the Government, we think we can obtain the eight hours when the proper time arrives"<sup>2</sup>

Robert Austin's remarks in the Annual Report for 1888 led to a sharp exchange in the Local Executive. John Burns and Harry Rich (a Socialist and Secretary of Barnes's London Campaign Committee in 1895 and 1896), moved "that the whole remarks which refers to the eight-hour movement be struck out" but the motion was lost.<sup>3</sup> The question was then adjourned. On Good Friday 1889 the issue was reopened. The yearly Report up to "that portion which refers to the eight hours question" was adopted. Burns and Rich then moved "that the whole of the controversial and non-representative matter in the remarks for the yearly Report as contained in that portion referring to the eight-hours movement be struck out". This received four votes (no details but there were nine councilmen) and was defeated. It was then moved "that the remarks for the yearly Report as now amended which relates to the eight-hours movement be now adopted". This received five votes including the casting vote of the Chairman.<sup>4</sup>

Austin's controversial remarks appeared in the Annual Report for 1888 under the heading of "Eight-hour Movement". He pointed out that the question

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1 Robert Austin - General Secretary, Annual Report 1887

2 Robert Austin - General Secretary, Annual Report 1887

3 Minutes of Local E.C., 18 April 1889

4 Minutes of Local E.C., 19 April 1889

had become prominent. Since it was discussed at the last T.U.C. several trade unions had voted on whether it should be compulsory by law.

"That the eight hours per day is long enough for any one to work will meet with but few dissensions so long as the same amount of money is received for eight as nine hours; therefore this part of it may be dismissed as settled; but rather than lose the day of eight hours, we should be prepared to advise the acceptance of a lesser wage for the time being as the wages would soon return by the demand for a greater number of men.

"But the great and moot point is, shall the eight hours per day be made compulsory by law, or enforced by voluntary organisation as was done in obtaining the nine hours. For ourselves we prefer the latter, as we have a strong objection to Government interference with manhood labour as to the number of hours he or they shall work, and we are inclined to believe that there are many more of the same opinion .....

"Again ..... 700,000 trade unionists represented at the Bradford Congress and from the returns presented .... only fifty societies and nine trade councils .... had expressed an opinion .... and not more than 35,000 had voted on it and these were not unanimous". It was not clear what the real opinion of trade unionists was.

"At the same time we shall do all we can to hasten the good time coming, when every willing worker shall have a fair share and equitable payment for the labour that has to be done. In the meantime, let us consider in all its bearing, taking into consideration the hours worked by our continental and American cousins, before we seek legislative interference in regulating the hour of our labour .

"In the meantime the A.S.E. should end systematic overtime and try to achieve the eight hour day by union and organisation with other trades, if we then fail, we can, as a last resource, seek the aid of parliament".

There then followed the result of a plebiscite on hours of labour, taken

by the T.U.C. in 1888. Table 1 consisted of societies who had voted and sent the numbers. The totals were in part discouraging for the eight-hour movement. To question 1: "In your opinion has the time arrived when a further limitation of the hours of labour should be sought for?", 3,916 answered "yes" and 8,194 answered "no". Question 2: "Are you in favour of an eight hour limit of the day's work - total 48 hours per week?" (or as an alternative to this, Question 3), 22,720 said "yes" and 4,097 "no". Question 3: "Are you in favour of a total cessation of work on Saturday?" 2,168 yes, 4,710 no. There was then a two part question: "Are you in favour of parliament enforcing an eight hour day by law, or enforcing a Saturday holiday by law?" (yes 17,267, no 3,819) or "Are you in favour of obtaining either of these privileges by the free and united efforts of the organised trades of the kingdom?" Yes 7,385, no 3,539.

After the results were the following comments: Question 1, "Members took no interest in question; was considered by a great proportion as utopian". Question 2, "Disapproved of parliamentary interference". Question 3, "These figures represent the total number of members in the branches who took up the question". Question 4, "We consider it somewhat doubtful as to what value should be attached to this vote".

The comments are confusing; though no great enthusiasm is apparent the answer to Question 4 is in favour of parliamentary action and not against as suggested. Yet this is merely thought to have "a doubtful value".

Table Number 2 "Societies who have not given the number voting" including the A.S.E., which gave only one answer and that to Question 1. "In your opinion has the time arrived when a further limitation of the hours of labour should be sought for?" "No"

In 1889 the policy had hardly changed although there was considerable optimism. Austin still regarded the T.U.C.'s voting and discussion on the eight-hour question as unsatisfactory.

"It will no doubt be said that we have the power in our own hands at the ballot box. This is true we have the power at present in our own hands without waiting for a general election viz. by the trades of the country, uniting together, and saying through their governing bodies "that eight hours shall be the standard day's work", instead of nine hours, or any other number at present practised by many trades; and by this process no factory inspectors would be needed, no extra costs would be entailed, and every society would maintain its present form of government, with a few alterations of minor social reform".

Austin's view that a major social reform could be achieved by using the techniques of classical craft unionism is interesting. There was a tendency for radical policies to be married to A.S.E. traditionalism but in this particular case such a marriage was impossible.

Very few trade unions were sufficiently organised to be able unilaterally to lay down the conditions and hours of work. Even the A.S.E. at the height of its power was unable to do this effectively for overtime or piecework. Further, the radical social case for eight hours was related to underemployment, the occupations of chronic unemployment and part employment were usually weakly organised.

Austin again described the T.U.C. view of the question.<sup>1</sup> Another plebiscite had been taken. 178,376 members had voted, 39,656 were in favour of eight hours while 67,390 were against. But 28,511 were in favour of it being obtained by act of parliament while 12,283 were against. The A.S.E. did not vote.

Commented Austin, "from the foregoing returns, may we not reasonably infer that the pinching want of work has not yet been felt strong and painful enough to awaken the working men and women to a sense of their duties to each

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<sup>1</sup> Annual Report, 1889

other, when we see such a few voting for and against these important propositions?

"..... it is only fair to say that these returns were so incomplete, and in the opinion of those present, so unreliable, that the meeting rejected them altogether and proceeded to the next business. But I hope our members will not thus summarily dispose of the eight hours movement, but give the subject most serious consideration, remembering the time, not many years ago, when over thirteen per cent of our members were unemployed, and this may occur again, therefore it is essentially necessary that we should be prepared to act either by combined efforts or by legal enactments. Whichever way it is done; the great majority must decide, and I trust the same may be beneficial for the community at large".

Delegates to the 1889 T.U.C. were instructed to "have free expression of opinion on the eight hours per day question but must not speak in the name or on behalf of the Society, or its members, as their votes for and against have not yet been taken".<sup>1</sup>

When A.S.E. members were asked to vote on the eight hour question the result was farcical. Seventeen branches replied, 204 members supported the eight-hour day and 5 were against. 46 wanted it achieved by legislation and 148 by "voluntary action".<sup>2</sup>

Such a vote did not seem to justify the Council changing its policy when instructing delegates appointed to the 1890 T.U.C. "But close on the meeting of the Congress one of the London branches urged, yes, almost demanded the Council to give the delegates what is fashionably called a mandate on the subject, and in order to utilise any discussion on points that may occur gave the following instructions to each. That it be a recommendation to the

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1 Minutes, Local Executive Council, 27 August 1889.

2 Monthly Report, November 1890.

delegates elected by this board to attend the Trade Union Congress at Liverpool to meet together and agree on a point of procedure, and vote for legislative action in obtaining the eight hours labour day as an adjunct to the voluntary efforts of the working men and women of the United Kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

The return of a Liberal government in 1892 led to sustained agitation for the introduction of the eight-hour day in dockyards and government factories. In 1893 the whole A.S.E. Executive Council lobbied M.P.'s for this.<sup>2</sup>

But could the eight-hour day be justified on economic grounds? Would eight hours work, for the same pay as for nine, reduce profit margins, or could nine hours production be achieved in eight?

The evidence of Mr. Allan, an employer from Sunderland, to the Royal Commission on Labour attempted to answer these questions.<sup>3</sup>

Allan told the Royal Commission "that the stability of society itself was threatened by the deepening animosity" between workmen and employers. "Workmen were distrustful of arbitration ... and often rightly" arbitrations were likely to be biased against the men. "Conciliation Boards were more

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1 Abstract Report of the Council's proceedings July 1 1888 to December 1 1890, p.60. Mandate also published Monthly Report, November 1890.

John Burns campaigned for the eight-hour day and was able to bring the argument before A.S.E. members up and down the country. At Battersea on September 21 1890 he defended the "eight-hour day by act of parliament".

"I am in favour of eight hours by parliamentary enactment because only one and a half out of seven millions of skilled and unskilled workmen are in our unions. The non-unionists have not got money enough to supply themselves with food or clothing or keep a roof over their heads sufficient time to starve their masters into yielding".

Burns collection - notes on eight-hour day, speech published as pamphlet - British Museum.

2 Quarterly Report, A.S.E. December 1893

3 Allan's evidence reported "by order of the Executive Council" in Monthly Report, February 1893. Allan later was returned to Parliament with A.S.E. support.



hopeful" but "what data would an arbitration or conciliation board have to go upon in say a question of wages or hours? The earnings of labour were known whilst the profits of capital were an absolutely unknown quantity .... data of profits ... was obviously imperative, and this depended upon a combination of employers very different from what is ever likely to exist, employers strongly objected to having their profits known to each other or in any way to divulge the results of their operations". Associations of employers lacked "identity of interest and openness among the members".

Allan considered overtime "an economic absurdity" he considered that when overtime was systematically worked talk of an eight or nine hour day was absurd. "Systematic overtime was responsible for the idleness, or only partial employment of numbers of workmen". Those who did not share overtime became discontented. "Men who worked overtime in busy times were the men who were retained during slackness ... thus in any trade the tendency of overtime, like piecework, was to create a superabundance of employment for one section and a scarcity for another". The unemployed in a trade were not always the worse men. "Until all men in a trade were in steady employment overtime was clearly uncalled for in practice as it was wrong in principle". Overtime for emergencies was unavoidable. He felt that systematic overtime was demoralising and economically pernicious. "Universal limitation of the hours of labour to that period during which the human machine could do its work without fatigue or weariness was only a question of time ... no man could work overtime without physical deterioration, physical deterioration produced discontent, discontent produced strikes, so, alike on moral, physical, and economic grounds, the strike pestering evil of overtime ought to be abolished".

From an economic standpoint Allan had no objection to piecework, "it being analogous to the natural and direct method of apportioning the workman's share of the produce". But piecework "operated very injuriously in practice".

"Like overtime, it was unfavourable to that steady employment so essential to the well being of the worker. It was a fruitful source of friction whenever it obtained side by side with the time system". This was caused by the large earnings of pieceworkers. Piecework under existing conditions "meant less men employed over a given quantity of work ... It was plain, therefore, that all trade unions should not allow their members to work on piecework, and should discourage a system fraught with so much injury to themselves". Mr. Allan said he had nearly forty years experience as a marine engineer and employed now from 300 to 400 men and boys. The eight-hour system had been in force in his establishment nearly twelve months and had been an unqualified success. Asked as to the particulars re the introduction of the system, he stated that trade was not exceptionally busy at the time. He agreed with the men that each side should for six months bear half the cost of the reduced output (if any) and, if at the end of that time the experiment proved successful, the wages would go up to the original level. At the end of the six months he found that the cost of production was certainly not increased and accordingly the wages were restored. Before the change the men lost a good deal of time, averaging about two quarters (quarter days) per week, whereas they were now more punctual, and practically lost no time whatever. In regard to overtime, they worked none systematically, and incidentally, very little. He did not think a dozen nights had been worked in the last twelve months.

As to the physical and moral results, he noticed a marked improvement especially among the boys. Whereas there used to be an average of from twelve to fourteen on the sick list, the number was now much less. There was an improved tone among both men and boys and the relations between them and himself, although not bad before, had certainly improved. Financially it had been a success. The cost of production was now less than before and

therefore he had gained.

Allan's evidence shows the clear relationship between unemployment, overtime, piecework and the case for eight hours per day. On all these matters his experience had led to conclusions which were in entire accord with A.S.E. policy.

At about the same time another pamphlet was issued by William Platt M.P. entitled "Report on a Year's Work with a Forty Eight Hour Week in the Salford Iron Works, Manchester"<sup>1</sup> Mather and Platt Ltd. by William Platt M.P.

The firm decided to replace the fifty-three hour week with a forty-eight hour week from 1 March 1893 for a trial year. This experiment took place during what Platt described as "a period of depression". But "though the prices obtained from the output of the concern were lower in the aggregate than ever reached before, the total invoice value of the orders executed during the year amounted to the average value of the six preceding years ..... In order to carry out the trial with scientific precision and care a very competent engineers accountant ... was deputed to take daily and weekly notes of the smallest detail of time and cost throughout the year".

The results of the experiment were satisfactory. Although the value of wages to turnover increased by 4 per cent compared to the six preceding years this was due to selling prices in the trial year being "considerably lower, the actual quantity produced ... was considerably larger than in the six preceding years .... we have found an economy in gas and electric lighting, wear and tear of machinery, engines, gearing etc., fuel and lubricants and miscellaneous stores. On the other hand, we have examined the increased fixed charges due to interest of plant and machinery, rental taxes, permanent staff on fixed salaries being employed five hours less per week. The balance of debit and credit account on these expenses is unmistakably in favour of the

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1 John Burns' collection notes on Eight Hour Day. British Museum. Mather & Platt employed 1,200 men. They were employed on general engineering including "all machinery used in the textile trade".

trial year".

Lost time had been reduced from 2.46 per cent to .46 per cent. The year's results justified making the forty-eight hour week permanent.

Platt ended by paying tribute to the A.S.E. "It is a notable and significant fact that a great trade union has in the midst of the general agitation for shorter hours, calmly and patiently waited for the result of a crucial trial, the working of which it encouraged before giving the slightest sanctions to any appeal being made to employers generally".

In February 1894 Anderson was able to write on the "Eight-Hour question":

"Since the last monthly report was issued rapid strides have been made with regard to this movement which is now assuming such an aspect that it is almost certain with a reviving of trade, it will rapidly spread, and, as the action of the government is now well known to you respecting its establishment in government factories, it need not be further referred to here, but what I desire to call your attention to is the significant manner in which many private firms are voluntarily following the government's example as we have had several intimations recently to this effect, but perhaps the most important is the action of the directors of a large firm in Birmingham (Knocks) .... this is a large and important establishment, the adoption of the principle is one of great and far reaching significance ... since this has been sent forward other firms have made the concession, but so impressed is the Council with the importance of taking advantage of these signs of the time and th~~us~~s to hasten the consummation of such a desirable object, that two important firms who are doing government work, have been written to with the object of having the eight hour working day established".<sup>1</sup>

The issue dominated the A.S.E. A commentator remarked that

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1 Monthly Report, February 1894.

some members think we have not taken enough credit for the eight-hour day "but to use the words of Mr. Burns we may say that it is an eight-hour day we want, and not credit, and we cannot help thinking that it is too soon to crow yet, for there is a number - a large number - of private firms to consult yet before we can see the end.

"The fact is that our employers are beginning to realise that it must come, and also that it is better to arrange the matter with their own men than leave it to outside interference; besides everyone, employer and employed alike, have arrived at the conclusion that it is not such a loss to the country as some of its opponents would try to make us believe, and, what is better, they recognise that eight hours is quite long enough to work in one day, providing that the spare time, again using the words of Mr. Burns - wisely used in education and healthy recreation .

"We have just received the intelligence that another firm (Pontefracts, York Road, Kings Cross) have conceded eight hours, so we may now count London as amongst the number of towns that have made a move in the right direction.

"Sunderland, Manchester, Birmingham, Woolwich, Enfield Lock, Sheffield, Plymouth and Newcastle are on the list, and the movement is spreading.

'Success to it is our earnest wish'<sup>1</sup>.

A classical trade movement pattern with an important exception. Aggressive district committees force the issue and win success. The Executive reported this and encouraged other districts to force the same issue. Local initiative with national encouragement aimed to achieve universal acceptance. The exception in the case of the eight-hour movement was that the government, after trade union political pressure, provided the initial breakthrough.

March saw the movement continue, Anderson reported "satisfactory progress".

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1 Monthly Report, February 1894. Monthly Commentary

"We have had intimation of another firm conceding it viz. Kings Norton Metal Company near Birmingham and to show how it is attracting the attention of employers it will be seen ... that the directors (Willoughbys, Plymouth) entertained about 200 of their workmen on the success of the movement at the firm".<sup>1</sup>

How successful was the eight-hour day and were the men any better off? "The Engineer"<sup>2</sup> took a rather jaundiced view. Reporting that the eight-hour day had begun in Woolwich Arsenal it was claimed that if the men and boys had been doing their best this will mean a considerable reduction of income particularly at Enfield where ten hours had been worked. Nor was this all. A minute's grace when men came to work had ended. "Rigorous punctuality" was now enforced, overtime for the first two hours was now reduced from time and a half to time and a quarter.

Workmen were no longer paid for Bank Holidays "and other days when the factories are closed, as for instance, during stock-taking". Sick pay was reduced for men earning £2 to £2. 10s. per week.

The eight-hour day will not apply to shops running night and day nor to locomotive drivers and stokers.

"Altogether it seems that the maximum gain received by the men amounts to a reduction of one-ninth in the length of the working day, in return for which they lose their holiday money, and a percentage of overtime pay, while the least want of punctuality ensures the loss of half a day, instead of one third as used to be the case. But for the greater number being on piecework they must work harder than they ever did before or take back less to their wives and families".

This view was taken up by the A.S.E. "Some of the leading engineering

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1 Monthly Report, March 1894.

2 March 2 1894.

journals are endeavouring to persuade the government employees that the granting of the eight-hour day is only a mixed blessing, and that the change is likely to reduce their earning power.

"They go as far to say that the losses more than counterbalance the gain, and that the price paid for increased leisure is a heavy one. We do not mind these expressions of opinion because we know better ... no one, we believe, inside the unions, ever thought the eight hour day was wanted. Simply for the sake of an addition hour of recreation, or "beer drinking", or studying political economy, or gardening, or playing football.

"Of course not! Political economy, gardening, and even football - according to some people's notion - are a waste of valuable time to a workman, he should go to work and stay there, and when he can't work any longer, he should go home to bed, and after he has done this until he is 55 years of age, he should go home altogether, and if he has not pinched himself enough to save something on his own account, why, he must starve".<sup>1</sup>

Within the last fortnight, reported Anderson in April 1894,<sup>2</sup> " a report on the working of the forty eight hour week has been issued by M.W. Mather M.P. .... the change has proved a complete success .... I have pleasure in stating that Messrs. Howard and Co (Bedford) and Messrs Barrington and Sainsbury, Soho Iron Works (Manchester), have also introduced the system".

The following month similar reports "We have been informed of another firm at Manchester adopting it, also Messrs. W.R. Bell & Co. (Croydon) and the important firm "The Thames Iron Works Ltd" (London), along with the well known firm of Messrs. Hadfield Steel Foundry Company Limited, Sheffield."<sup>3</sup>

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1 A.S.E. Monthly Report, March 1894

2 A.S.E. Monthly Report, April 1894

3 A.S.E. Monthly Report, May 1894

In June the trade movement pattern continued, "We have learned that the firm of Messrs Lever Brothers, Port Sunlight, in the Liverpool district, has conceded the eight hours per day, and I may here explain, that in deference to the wishes of several branches, the Council has decided to take the opinion of the members on the question of asking to vote whether they are in favour of voluntary trade union effort or legal enactment....."<sup>1</sup>

The result of this poll was 9,711 in favour of a legal eight-hour day with 6,438 favouring an hour's reduction achieved by industrial action.<sup>2</sup>

The Daily News published a series of articles supporting the eight-hour day campaign which were later re-published as a pamphlet entitled "A ton of practice".

Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman discussing arsenal and dockyard factories employing 20,000 workers claimed that the eight-hour day experiment "has been an entire and absolute success". There has been no loss of production "I would say ... that the war office experience, and the experience of several large and typical engineering firms, prove conclusively that for the engineering trade at least a forty eight hour week is perfectly safe from the commercial point of view".

Mr. E. Robinson M.P. was interviewed about the Admiralty eight-hour experiment. Output under eight hours was as great as under nine.

"And would you say that an eight hour day is a safe and sound limit for engineering work?"

"Certainly; the war office and Admiralty experience would show it to be perfectly sound, and quite as good economically from the employers point of view as a nine hour day".

The Thames Iron Works which employed 3,000 introduced the eight-hour

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1 A.S.E. Monthly Report, June 1894

2 Executive Council Minutes (membership 65,000) 21 August 1894.



day in November 1892 almost two years later they told the Daily News "we are very well satisfied" with the forty eight hour week. The same view was expressed by Mr. James Keith, of the Engineering firm of that name, who employed "several hundred men", in London and Arbroath. After more than a year's experience Keith assented "the employers are making a great blunder in refusing to concede the forty eight hour week .... Their statement that the forty eight hour week will cost them  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent increase in wages is simply - well, utter nonsense. I do not believe it will cost them anything extra.. Men who come to work after breakfast are as fresh at four as at nine o'clock. And as fresh on Thursday and Friday as on Monday".

At the end of 1894 the A.S.E. appeared to be within sight of a universal forty-eight hour week. The government had successfully introduced the hour's reduction into its industrial establishments, and a growing number of private firms were discovering that a forty-eight hour week did not necessarily mean accepting a reduction in output. As the Society suspected the pre-breakfast period had an adverse effect upon productivity.

As 1894 came to an end the movement slowed down and during 1895 and 1896 little progress was made. The campaign for the eight-hour day developed during years when trade was slack and unemployment was at a high level. But while unemployment gave intellectual weight<sup>1</sup> to the case for an hour's reduction such economic conditions made it difficult for trade unions to effectively threaten or use industrial action.

Booms which produced almost full employment, together with heavy overtime working, increased trade union bargaining power, but members tended to be more interested in wage increases rather than shorter hours. It is

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1 The unions argued that an hour's reduction without loss of pay would not lead to a reduction in production because productivity would increase, also that an hour's reduction would increase the level of employment. These propositions could only be reconciled if overtime was reduced so that actual hours worked decreased more than was required by increased productivity.

therefore hardly surprising that the height of the 1894 eight-hour movement coincided with a trade depression<sup>1</sup> and A.S.E. concern about the state of the funds.

"That in view of the continued reduction of our funds which can be attributed to no cause than an unprecedented and prolonged depression in trade accompanied by several serious labour disputes consequent upon the actions of the employers to make the most of the difficult position that the trade unions are placed in, this Council have no other option but to raise the contributions....."<sup>2</sup>

If the hours movement was strongest when industrial strength was weakened by depression it meant it was likely to peter out. This happened in 1894 - though in this case there was another important factor - the organisation of the employers. Given this situation two conclusions followed: (1) that even in the organised trades eight hours could only be achieved by legal means, or (2) if industrial action were to be effective it must come at the beginning of a trade improvement, while memories of depression were fresh, and the need for eight hours still enthusiastically recognised. Hence the failure of 1894 led to the new attempt as trade revived in 1897.

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1 Another way of making this point. The eight-hour movement became prominent, not during the boom in the engineering industry 1889-90 but during the depression which followed.

2 Executive Council Minutes, 31 July 1894.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Defeat 1897-98.<sup>1</sup> Departure from the T.U.C. Federation.

#### 1. The Machine Question

The A.S.E. was a craft union, a power in the labour movement, and regarded its organisational form and benefit provisions as the model for other trade unions to follow. As a craft society it sought to protect the interests of skilled workers, by exercising control over "the job." Three alternative policies towards rapid technical change were in theory open to the society:

- 1) A severe test of genuine skill could have been applied and only tasks which fell into this category defended; thus if a high proportion of craftsmen were organised, then considerable craft bargaining power could be deployed and the case for craft reward given intrinsic merit.
- 2) The majority of jobs once skilled could be claimed as craft work.
- 3) Instead of concentrating on maintaining skill standards the society could have sought to protect "the rate for the job". The question to be settled with the employers would have become the establishment of an adequate rate of pay for work which may have been less skilled in craft terms, but would have made a more efficient contribution to production. This policy implied that craft unionism could be transformed into a form of industrial unionism.

Trade unions organise members, not jobs. Although craft unions seek to organise those who undertake certain skilled jobs it is the member not the job that is recruited. Alternative (1) was therefore unrealistic. The ASE could not exclude large numbers of men from membership because their work no longer conformed to certain craft standards. By limiting the membership in this way the ASE would have become a small society of highly skilled engineers and it would have ceased to be one of the two or three most powerful trade unions.

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1 For accounts of dispute see,

(1) "Report on Strikes and Lookouts" Board of Trade

(2) "The Dispute in the British Engineering Industry 1897-98"  
R.A. Clark, Economica 1957.

(3) Jefferys, "Story of the Engineers"

(4) Clegg, Fox & Thompson - A History of British Trade unions since 1889,  
Vol. 1, p.165-168

This would have been unacceptable to both active members and the Executive-Council.

There is no evidence in years before 1914 that the society was prepared to abandon the craft ethos. Consequently the A.S.E. was forced into the position of claiming craft status for a whole variety of work almost irrespective of its contemporary skill requirement. It was this that made the machine question intractable.

The years 1890-1914 witnessed a revolution in many production techniques and particularly in the machine shop. A variety of tools began to produce more efficiently what had long been exclusively worked on centre lathes. Capstan and turret lathes, universal milling machines, the radial drill, and the external and surface grinder all radically changed long established work patterns. Many of the new machines produced high quality work but required less skill from the minder. The employers, quoting American experience, demanded the right to employ semi-skilled men on the new machines.<sup>+1</sup>

Barnes and most of the Executive Council were prepared to move towards a "rate for the job" view. But they were hopelessly defeated by the intransigence of the employers and the conservatism of the A.S.E. membership. Each attitude strengthened the other. The years leading up to the dispute have three important characteristics. A developing eight hour movement, the establishment of an effective employers' organisation and increasing conflict over the machine question.

The new employers' organisation developed out of a standing committee formed in March 1894 by employers in the North East led by Amrstrong-Whitworths of Elswick. In 1896 on the initiative of employers on Clydeside, Belfast, Barrow, and the North East the Employers' Federation of Engineering Associations was founded. The Federation objects included the securing of "Mutal support ... on such questions as ..... hours of labour, overtime, limitation of work,

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<sup>+1</sup> see Chapter Five Technical Change and its Effects.

piecework, demarcation of work, machine work, and the employment of men and boys on Machines."<sup>+</sup>

Colonel Dyer, Managing Director of Armstrong-Whitworth became the Federation's first President.

Even while the new employers Alliance was still at an informal stage the lockout was employed to resist union demands. In September 1895 the engineers presented separate wage claims in Belfast and on the Clyde. Negotiations took place in January with Lord James of Hereford in the chair which ended in a partial victory for the man. The Clyde accepted the settlement; Belfast refused. To enforce a return to work the Executive Council suspended strike benefit. At the 1896 Whitsun Delegate Meeting the Executive was condemned and ordered to pay arrears of benefit.<sup>1</sup> This dispute was in some ways a for~~er~~<sup>er</sup> taste of the future. Employers' militancy, the Executive Council seeking compromise, and then condemned by Delegate Meeting and/or Final Appeal Court.

A general lock out was also threatened in September 1896 over a dispute at Dunsmuir and Jackson, Gowan, when A.S.E. members refused to work with "an exceptionally obnoxious character". The Executive Council "were very much surprised at the action of the Employers' Federation in giving notice of a general lock out against members of our Society after we have given definite instructions to our Branches that these members should return to work and must not be supported from the Society's funds."<sup>2</sup> Eventually the men won when "the firm agreed to have the industrial pariah deported to a more congenial atmosphere."<sup>3</sup>

The Society used shop stewards to keep check on workshop conditions and in particular the machine situation. Cassier's Magazine<sup>4</sup> claimed that shop stewards were:-

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+ "Conditions of Federation" (1896) Employers' Federation of Engineering Associations

1 Clyde Belfast Dispute, E.C. Minutes, September 1895 to January 1896.

Also Jefferies, p.140-141

2 Executive Council Minutes, 3 September 1896

3 Barnes Annual Report 1896

4 November 1897

"Paid spies of the Society (the) machine question reached the dimensions of a combative policy in August 1896 when 500 fitters and turners employed in Earles Shipbuilding and Engineering Company's works at Hull struck" against a semi-skilled Member of the Machine Workers' Association. The Board of Trade intervened and helped resolve the dispute. Future machines were to be operated by a fitter or turner, but the semi-skilled man was to remain.

Barnes's account of the dispute was different. "Our members (at Hull) .... objected to the placing of a low paid and unskilled man upon the machine in question, and after a strike extending over four months and sustained with a splendid determination, the interest of the skilled engineers was established, and the wage paid for operating the machine raised to that current in the trade. The same question will doubtless have to be fought out elsewhere, and it is of the utmost importance that we shall be clearheaded in regard to it. It should never be lost sight of that the proportion of machine to hand work is an increasing one, and that to lose control of the machine is to a large extent to lose control of the trade."<sup>1</sup>

In December 1896 the A.S.E. protested against labourers working hand saws.<sup>2</sup> The Employers' Federation replied:-

"The machines are the property of the employers, and they are solely responsible for the work turned out by them; they therefore will continue to exercise the discretion they have hitherto possessed by appointing the men they consider suitable to work them."

In January 1897 the Sunderland District Committee of the A.S.E. claimed that the new Boring Machines at the Sunderland Forge and Engineering Company should be worked by A.S.E. members.<sup>3</sup> At the Elswick Works of Armstrong & Co. the same demand was made. The Board of Trade's decision in the Hull dispute was used by the A.S.E. to support their action.

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1 A.S.E. Annual Report 1896

2 Cassier's Magazine, November 1897

3 Cassier's Magazine, November 1897. For Executive Council approval of Sunderland D.C. action see Minutes, 6 March 1897 and 9 March 1897.

"Our right to the work done on certain machines was conceded".

There was also a dispute over the lathes at the Vickers, Barrow.

"Cassier's Magazine" claimed that a "systematic attempt all over the country to rate machines" for A.S.E. members was being made.

The Executive Council's View of such disputes was that work on disputed machines should be suspended "and the question of who shall work the machines can only be discussed from the national standpoint."<sup>1</sup> On March 22 the Council wired the following District Committees that lock out notices had been posted by the Federated Employers, viz:- Belfast, Stockton, Newcastle, Greenock, Glasgow, Middlesbro', South Shields, Paisley and Barrow-in Furness.

A conference was arranged, and the lock out notices suspended (March 26, 1897).<sup>2</sup> The A.S.E.'s proposal to the conference was:

"That while we claim the right to work at any machine made by our trade, and while we refuse to believe that any machine can be as economically and successfully worked by unskilled or semi-skilled as by skilled labour, we are willing, for the purpose of exhausting reasonable means to a settlement to agree to the following:-

- (1) District Committees (of) equal trade union and employers (representatives) with independent Chairman (Board of Trade Referee if necessary). Disputes over the rate to be paid for working any machine to be referred to the joint district committees.

The employers rejected this proposal. It involved the workers sharing control of the business. They quoted cases where unskilled men had got more work out of the machines and claimed that to put skilled men on automatic work was a waste. No conclusion was reached by the conference. Work

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1 A.S.E. Executive Council Minutes, 9 March 1897

2 A.S.E. Executive Council Minutes, 24 and 26 March

was resumed where strikes had occurred - the machine question was shelved.<sup>1</sup>

The A.S.E. pressed the Employers' Federation for a counter proposal but the employers refused. In a letter dated 29 April 1897, Dyer, President of the Employers, reiterated their position. The District Committees or Boards were unacceptable because they would be invested "with the power to interfere with the internal management of their works."

On May 8 Barnes replied on behalf of the A.S.E.:-

"The issue is said in yours to be simple and vital, namely, 'the preserving or relinquishing of their (the Employers) right to manage their own business.' But upon the questions of the restriction of overtime and the payments for outwork and trial trips your Federation has recognised the competence of joint meetings of employers and employed to arrange conditions and make them binding upon employers and employed." As machinery became more widespread wage negotiations which excluded machine rates would become less important. The "Society has never sought to interfere with the employers discrimination as between man and man, and in the recent troubles at Sunderland and elsewhere we have not done so, excepting when convinced that the man objected to was working for less than the rate of wage usually paid to others doing similar work. In short, there is no case on record, as far as we know, of objection being raised to a man, whether unionist or not, who was in receipt of the wage current in the district for the class of work upon which he was engaged; and if we have appeared, in argument, to have put forward any claim for exclusive employment upon machines for our members or for skilled engineers, then it has simply been done because we have thought it necessary to guard ourselves. The plea, therefore, put forward in your letter as to the 'necessity laid upon the Employers of considering the large number of men belonging to other trade societies or to no trade society' does not seem to us to have any weight against our proposals, which, subject to wage as agreed upon being paid, would have left the individual employer absolute freedom of choice in the selection of workmen.

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<sup>1</sup> For account of conference see Cassier's Magazine, November 1897.



"Our sole object is to maintain wages at a high standard."

On May 20 Dyer replied, denying that the employers' action on trial trips or overtime "established any new principle.

"The Machine Question, which has been raised by you, and which covers the manning and rating of machines, has been thoroughly discussed at the conference and the employers regret that they cannot agree to accept the new position you have taken up. To do so would be to sacrifice a position which they cannot abandon.

"It is obvious that if the Employers were so short-sighted as to combine with you in the attempt to create an arbitrary standard of wages for work beyond what is warranted by the skill and education required for its efficient performance, that the cost of production of British manufacturers would be unnecessarily increased, and British products could not hope to compete .....

"The Employers recognise the right of your Society to arrange with them terms for your members, but they cannot admit your right to interfere with the freedom of other workmen to dispose of their labour on whatever terms they consider satisfactory, not can the Employers be parties to any such arrangement." Dyer continued by hoping the A.S.E. would see the reasonableness of the Employers position "and you will not further press the new departure you are proposing in regard to manning and rating machines."<sup>1</sup>

Judging from the conference and correspondence the A.S.E.'s position on the machine question appeared extremely reasonable. New machines were being introduced and all the A.S.E was concerned about was a fair rate for the job. But, as the employer and the rest of the trade union movement know, the position was much less clear.

In practice the A.S.E. had no effective policy. Sometimes they supported the rate for the job, sometimes only skilled men on machines, while

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1 Correspondence contained in "Notes on Engineering Trade Lock Out, 1897-98"  
AEU Archives

'on occasions skilled men refused to work automatic machines!'<sup>1</sup>

On April 29 the Executive Council considered a letter from Matthew Arrandale, General Secretary of the Machine Workers Society, claiming that A.S.E. members were trying to displace his members at Hull, Sunderland and the "Thames Ironworks". He also objected to his Society's exclusion from negotiations on the machine question. Further "stating that their members had never taken work on machines at a less rate of wages than what our members had previously been paid."<sup>2</sup>

Barnes was instructed to reply "on general lines and in a conciliatory spirit."

The Executive's policy was to concentrate on the wage rate question but this was not put to the membership. On May 7, Taylor and Crompton wanted the Council to ask "each district committee to express a definite opinion on the question of enforcing a demand to have the machines in question worked by skilled mechanics, or on a settlement on the basis of wages."<sup>3</sup> They were defeated. Later in the month (24 May) Taylor and Crompton moved:

"That with a view to ascertaining the feelings of the members on the method of dealing with the machine question, each district committee be directed to call mass meetings to pass resolutions as to the advisability of dealing with the machine question on the basis of wages; or the rights of skilled engineers to work machines hitherto worked by them, also machines in future

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1 See Barnes A.S.E. Annual Report 1896. This was to be a recurring problem and was to lead to the most extraordinary situations. In late 1907 the A.S.E. sought to prevent the granting by Sheffield Corporation of a tramway contract to Messrs Edgar Allen, an engineering works in the town. The objection to the firm included the employment of labourers on machines. But when two members of the Executive Council, Butts and Gardner, visited the firm they reported "the work was not actually requisite to be done by skilled worker (sic) in fact would be difficult to get our men to continue on this class of work" (sic). Executive Council Minutes, 7 December 1907.

2 A.S.E. Executive Council Minutes, April 29, 1897

3 A.S.E. Executive Council Minutes, May 7, 1897

designed to do work previously done in the lathe, planing and other machines."

The motion was defeated.

It is extremely doubtful whether the membership would have accepted a rate for the job approach. It is likely that if the employers had accepted the Executive Council's proposal for district committees of employers and employed, plus neutral members, the A.S.E. local members would have insisted on skilled men working the machines. If the rate for the job view which was strongly supported by those around Tom Mann and George Barnes, had succeeded, it might have had profound effects upon the craft status of the union and opened the way to a non-craft full status membership. The employers by refusing to discuss the issue, under the banner of managerial prerogative attempted, to remove the machine question from the bargaining process, thus changing the character of the issue for the A.S.E. Instead of, skilled manning or rate for the job, it became the fundamental one of, is the machine manning question to be negotiable or not?

That the Executive Council would have had great difficulty in persuading members to support a rate for the job approach is shown by the proceedings of a conference held in June 1897 in Carlisle. This is of such importance that it is necessary to quote the full Executive Council minute on this question.<sup>1</sup>

"Messrs Sellicks and Barnes reported the proceedings at Carlisle conference, on Saturday and in which they gave a complete resume of the statements and arguments used by delegates present, they stated that so far as their opinion went the conference was not so satisfactory as anticipated. The

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1 A.S.E. Executive Council, 21 June 1897.

resolutions passed being as follows.

"Mr Purvis, Sunderland moved, seconded by Mr Purvis, Stockton (there were two men named Purvis). That we the delegates here assembled on behalf of the men we represent request our Council to withdraw their proposals re the rating of machines.

"Mr Potter, Belfast moved, seconded by Mr Hall, Jarrow, That this conference while believing that the Executive Council have acted with the best intentions are of the opinion that their later policy in reducing the machine question to one exclusively of wages is not to our Society's interest and now suggest that our claim to the working of all classes of machines at present worked by skilled mechanics must be sustained.

"Mr Reid, Glasgow, moved, seconded by Mr Thwaites, Newcastle, That owing to the diversity of opinion, we recommend to the Council that they take a vote of the members in the country for or against the policy adopted by them.

"Mr Thwaites ultimately withdrew from seconding owing to disagreement as to whether or not the vote should be taken of the whole members.

"Mr Walsh, Barrow, moved That we the delegates assembled request our E.C. to adhere to the stand they have taken re the wage rate for machines in dispute as we consider it the only satisfactory way of meeting the question.

"The two latter resolutions having fallen to the ground, those moved by Mr Purvis and Mr Potter were put as separate resolutions, all the delegates voting in favour of each with the exception of Reid, Glasgow, Thwaites, Newcastle and Walsh, Barrow."

## 2. The Eight Hour Day and the Employers' Demands

As has been shown, the campaign for the eight hour day had been developing since 1890. Early in 1897 the London District Committee of the A.S.E. estimated that "3,000 of our members are working the Eight Hour day in London

at the present time". The Committee asked for powers to enforce the eight-hour day throughout the city. "Never has trade been so prosperous since the Nine-Hour day was won a quarter of a century ago. Are we to go forward? If so, vote and give us all the help that lays in your power which must produce the enthusiasm necessary to place the A.S.E. in London where they ought to be, at the front of the Labour movement".

2,692 were in favour of giving the Committee power to act and 372 against.<sup>1</sup>

On 30 April 1897 a circular was issued to the London employers "to request you to concede the Eight-Hour working day without reduction of pay". The circular was issued on behalf of a Joint Committee representing the A.S.E., Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders, Steam Engine Makers, Smiths and Hammermen, and the Copper Smiths. David Brown, Secretary of the A.S.E. London District Committee was also Secretary of the Joint Committee.

A further circular from the Joint Committee to the employers dated May 28, 1897 informed them "that all overtime must cease pending the concession ..... (of) the Eight-Hour working day ..... Our members are instructed to cease working overtime after this week". By now the London United Society of Drillers and the United Machine Workers Association had joined the Committee.

From July 3 the Joint Committee began to withdraw members from employers not working the Eight-Hour Day.<sup>2</sup>

The Boilermakers & Iron Shipbuilders Society had about half the membership of the A.S.E. and were the most important union in the industry apart from the A.S.E. They were particularly strong in shipbuilding centres and without them industrial action by the unions would be far less effective.

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1 Notes on The Engineering Trade Lock Out 1897-98, Appendix 3.  
A.E.U. Archives

2 All circulars, Notes on The Engineering Trade Lock Out 1897-98,  
Appendix 3.

There had been some doubt at the beginning as to whether the Boilermakers would join the Joint Committee but in March the London District Committee of the Boilermakers did become part of this body. In a letter dated 17 April 1897 the Boilermakers Executive Council gave guarded support for this step:

"that if the signing of the circular means pledging our Society to fight this question to the end in London alone, then we cannot allow it, but if it is only an application to the Employers and the future course of action is to be again considered by the respective Executive Councils then there is no objection....."

Barnes commented, "The guarded language of the Boilermakers Executive in this communication was probably regarded by the Joint Committee as merely the diplomatic phraseology sometimes adopted on such occasions for the purpose of safeguarding the position of an Executive Authority over its own members".

This however was not the reason. In a letter to the Employers, dated 17 June 1897, Robert Knight, General Secretary of the Boilermakers Society wrote:

"My Executive Council has had nothing whatever to do with the stoppage of overtime in the London District ..... the question of overtime has always been left to each Branch in London to decide for themselves".

As the dispute in London began the Secretary of the Joint Committee received the following letter from the Secretary of the Boilermakers' London Committee:

"I am instructed by the London District Committee to inform you that we have withdrawn our two Delegates from the Joint Committee on the Eight Hour Day (Mr. F.R. Pain and Mr. J. Butler). We could not do otherwise under the circumstances that have occurred lately".

On the same day one of the delegates in question wrote:

"It is with regret that I beg to inform you that our Executive Council have ordered our withdrawal at once from the Allied Trades Committee".<sup>1</sup>

The Patternmakers Society had refused to support the Joint Committee because "the time was inopportune". Now with the dispute underway the Boilermakers had withdrawn. This meant that, despite apparent support for the eight-hour day, when issue was joined on this question in the engineering industry, the A.S.E. had to fight virtually alone and worse, with smaller Societies who would look to the A.S.E. for financial support.

Barnes claimed that when the dispute began 150 firms in London employing 6,000 to 7,000 A.S.E. members had conceded the eight-hour day.<sup>2</sup> Any chance of a "trade movement" effect was ended on July 1 when the Employers Federation told the A.S.E. that in the event of a strike in London "notices will immediately be given by the members of the Associations affiliated to the Federation that a reduction of hands of 25 per cent will take place of the members of such unions in their employment."<sup>3</sup> The A.S.E. Executive Council decided that in the event of 25 per cent being locked out, the remaining 75 per cent should give notice.

It is clear that the eight-hour question was not used as a pretext by the A.S.E. to have a show down with the employers when other issues were really what concerned them. The machine question and the problem of managerial prerogative were simmering, and the employers made these the issues of dispute as it became clear that the A.S.E. could not win.

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1 The Boilermakers action is dealt with in "Notes on The Engineering Trade Lock out, 1897-98", Appendix 3.

2 Maxim Nordenfelt, Erith, refused to concede the eight-hour day. "Overwhelming majority" of workers decided to withdraw labour. The Times, July 2, 1897.

3 Notes on "The Engineering Trade Lock out 1897-98" Appendix 3.

The A.S.E. like most of the Labour Movement was committed to the eight-hour day and tried to secure it, in favourable economic conditions, by industrial action.

When the issue of trade union rights also became central to the dispute, help on a massive scale was expected from the rest of the trade union movement. For while others talked about the eight-hour day the A.S.E. was actually doing something about it and, in the process, its whole industrial position was threatened.

This view is supported by the attitude of "Engineering Magazine" during the dispute. At the beginning, the eight-hour day was regarded as the chief issue, and about this the Magazine had no very strong feelings.

"It will be observed that May 26 is the date mentioned for the reply of the employers, the request being that the eight-hour day shall begin to take effect in the week following. Whatever difference of opinion may exist with respect to the eight-hour movement, the more general belief is that it is better to obtain it by mutual arrangement than by act of parliament. It appears that in the engineering shops in which it has been conceded, in Sunderland, Manchester and some other places, and also in a few instances London, the system has worked fairly satisfactory".<sup>1</sup>

Even ten weeks later an editorial on the dispute was about the eight-hour day only and was again written in a mild tone.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Engineering Magazine Industrial Notes, May 7, 1897. The same point was made by "The Times", "..... good deal of grumbling (Glasgow) at the way in which <sup>the</sup> machine question, on which they were enthusiastic has been shelved and the question of working hours brought to the front". July 8, 1897. The first mention of an issue other than the eight-hour day came on July 30. "There is no doubt that the issue to be decided is not whether the Amalgamated Engineers are to succeed in their present demand but whether the mens union are to obtain complete control over the businesses of the Masters".

2 Engineering Magazine, July 16, 1897.



Other issues were of course important. In June 1897<sup>1</sup> Tom Mann headed an article on the dispute "The Machine Question" but made much of the eight-hour issue:

"Now that war is declared ..... the A.S.E. are in honour and duty bound to fight for the wage rate and I consider the Executive have acted wisely in not stipulating for union men exclusively".

The trade was too diversified and orders too pressing for the employers to lock out all members.

"I am strongly of the opinion that if it proved necessary to stop work, that the Amalgamated Society and such other unions as may be affected, ought to insist upon the eight hour day without deduction of pay, before being willing to return again to the workshops. The employers have sought the quarrel, let them have it; everything favours the men, the state of trade, the prospect for next year, the unions finances, and the opinions of the members. Therefore, my voice and action goes in favour of the standard wage rate for machine workers, and the 48 hour working week".

By September 1897 it had become clear that the employers were standing together and the eight-hour day was not being extended. The whole tone of the dispute began to change as victory for the employers appeared likely.

"One hopeful feature about present dispute. Magistrates have shown praiseworthy courage in punishing picket violence.

"There would be enough free labour in the country to keep works going were the free labour not in fear of the pickets .... best mechanics are

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1 A.S.E. Monthly Report, June 1897.

enrolled in the A.S.E. and the Executive of that body has enormous power in virtue of its control over benefit funds .... This is a most powerful weapon against the employers and perhaps it is one they are not deserving of much sympathy in having brought against them. If Masters had properly appreciated the responsibilities of their position in the past, they would have inaugurated a benefit society which would have been free from political bias, and the fighting trade unionist would have been shorn of his offensive qualities ..... Capitalists are absolutely justified in trying to smash T.U.'s as they exist". To break up benefit societies<sup>is</sup> inhuman. "But these benevolent objects do not justify other ends of a questionable nature"..... Union officials ..... "want to substitute their authority for that of the employers. As a well-known employer said to a deputation of union workmen, who wished to establish the principle of nominating their own foremen; 'You want to say who is and who is not to look after work; soon you will say who is to stand in my place' to which the deputation made no answer. Mr. Barnes, the Secretary of the A.S.E., has quite lately disclaimed any wish to interfere with management in regard to machines, but we fear his moderate statements hardly square with the general practice of the members of the Society".

The last issue of the Labour Gazette showed "that the majority of disputes were brought on, not for the purpose of obtaining higher wages, but in order that the men's representatives might have command of the internal management of the works. Under such circumstances, it is not by any means a misfortune to the country that these questions should be brought to issue by decisive battle".<sup>1</sup>

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1 All extracts from Engineering Magazine, 24 September 1897

The mood continued to harden.

"Those persons who write in such a benevolent spirit to the daily papers suggesting that the dispute should be referred to arbitration and conciliation can never have considered the point. There can be no question of conciliation about essential principles, either of morality or of economics".<sup>1</sup>

Next an attack on the Labour Gazette; ~~of whom~~

The actual editor was Mr. John Burnett, ex-Secretary of the A.S.E. "Further rumoured that the majority of, if not all, the official correspondents of the Labour Gazette ..... are trade union delegates of the different industrial centres ..... We can hardly wonder that the Labour Department has been described 'as merely a Government branch of trade unionism'.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the Labour Department of the Board of Trade could not be trusted to conciliate.

Already the prospects of victory for the employers, and afterwards, was considered.

The Masters' Federation had done well but it must prepare to keep the peace when victory is won. "It should not be difficult to form out of the great number of non-union men a force which will always be available when sound economic practices are threatened by the Socialistic force which have of late captured the unions, and turned their energies into channels of which their originators never dreamed".<sup>3</sup>

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1      Engineering Magazine, 1 October 1897

2      Engineering Magazine, 8 October 1897

3      Engineering Magazine, 22 October 1897

In November Colonel Dyer analysed the dispute and its causes:

"About two years ago a vacancy occurred in the post of General Secretary to the A.S.E., and three candidates were nominated. Previous to this the Council of the A.S.E. had been carefully packed with the Socialistic element of the Society, and, as a natural sequence one of the candidates for the post of Secretary was Mr. Tom Mann, who may aptly be described as an advanced Socialist. The good sense of the large number of the members at once showed itself, however, so that he had no chance of election, but with the considerable following which he had secured he was able to dictate terms with the New Unionist Mr. Barnes, while the third candidate, a supporter of the "Old Unionism" had no chance whatever. Mann agreed that he would give the whole of his support on the condition that immediately the new Secretary felt himself secure in his place, the demand for the eight hours in a day would be brought forward". He also made a preliminary demand that all machines should be in the charge of the A.S.E. members or else "men employed on them should receive the same high rate of wages" irrespective of their skill.

"But the fact that the demand was made at all (on machine question) showed the working of the dangerous Socialistic element, and disclosed the bombshell that threatened the destruction of the engineering trade of the country".

Then came the demand for the eight-hour day. The Employers' Federation was strengthened for "they knew that these claims only masked the real attack; the Council of the A.S.E. sought either to obtain entire control of the workshops of England, or else carry out the propaganda of the Socialist Party, i.e. to destroy the capitalists".

Individual employers were unable to resist the A.S.E. "In every shop and in every department there have been for years, what are known as 'shop stewards' members of the A.S.E. whose duties are to see that the rules,

written and unwritten of their Society are carried out, and he is a brave employer who dare say "nay" to their demands which, if not granted would be followed by immediately calling out every member of the Society in that shop". The "real truth" is that for two or three years A.S.E. collected funds and members to crush the small employers federations of the North.

To show how determined the A.S.E. was Dyer quoted a letter from George Barnes in the "People's Journal", Dundee, August 7, 1897:-

"We have so far out-generated Colonel Dyer as to having averted the fight upon an unpopular issue, and to have shunted it on to a question upon which we ought to get the support of our fellow workmen ..... Now the spirit of discontent, I am glad to say, is taking hold of the Northern men and the eight hours will have to come now instead of later on. But it will be a big fight. Meanwhile, rally up, workmen! and help us to hit harder every time".

"This (continued Dyer) shows plainly the real object of the attack made upon the employers".

The eight-hour day was impossible while foreigners worked the same machines longer. In Hamburg 24/- was paid for 59½ hours: in London 38/- for 54 hours. Now 48 hours was suggested. The shorter hours demand was really a demand for more overtime.

"It is unnecessary to point out the gross dishonesty of trade union officials who have collected money from the more provident of the workmen to be a provision for old age and sickness, if they spend, as they are spending - this money to secure for themselves and their supporters, in this dispute, comfortable salaries...." A foremen protection society would have to be formed and Parliament would have to make trade unions keep their provident funds separate.

Magistrates were often afraid of trade union power and blacklegs were frequently assaulted.

"The only thing that the Employers Federation seeks, and must have, is industrial peace, and freedom from trade union dictation and interference, to conduct its business as its intelligence and experience directs".<sup>1</sup>

The A.S.E.'s reply to Dyer was issued in December and entitled "Epitome of Col. Dyer's Article in "Cassier's Magazine":

"An article .... was contributed to the November issue of Cassier's Magazine ..... In that article the real origin of the Eight Hours demand was said to have been a "deal" between Tom Mann and George N. Barnes two years ago, the former agreeing to support the latter in the contest then pending in return for a promise to plunk down the Eight Hours demand in the event of being elected. He also argued that, in fulfillment of such promise, the quarrel with the Employers Federation which had been waged on the machine question had been "shunted" on the Eight Hours, quoting from a letter written to the "People's Journal" on August 7 in support of this view ..... He made some extreme statements about trade union officials, charging such with recklessly dislocating the trade of the country, and elsewhere with conspiring to poison non-unionist workmen. Needless to say no proof was given in

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1 Cassier's Magazine, November 1897.

"The Times" from mid-August was attacking the extremism of the A.S.E. The dispute was of "very large dimensions". This result is entirely due to the increasing audacity of the tactics resorted to by the A.S.E., a body once regarded as comparatively conservative in its actions, which has fallen under the domination of an extremely aggressive set of leaders and now workers with merciless regularity the system of coercing a limited number of employers and using the concessions extorted from them as an engine for enforcing similar demands upon others". August 13, 1897.

"The Times" and Dyer become more extreme as the dispute continued. By December Dyer claimed ".... it was Socialism that had caused the whole dispute - the new militant trade unionism which wanted to force upon the employers at large a Socialistic propaganda that could not fail to ruin the country ... the machine question, and other questions which had been raised were merely a thin veil of sophistry under which the Socialistic curse was being forced upon them ..... He honestly believed that the 'Employers' Federation was the kindest friend the British Workman had ever had." "The Times", December 13, 1897.

support of these extraordinary charges ....."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout September, October and November the Board of Trade attempted to convene a conference between the employers and the unions. The employers were not at first interested. Eventually a conference was held at the Westminster Palace Hotel from November 24 to December 3. The terms offered by the employers were very like those finally imposed.

"Any condition of labour which prevails in any one of the workshops shall be adopted in any other federated workshop at the option of the Employers.

"Every workman shall be free to belong to a trade union or not.

"Every employer shall be free to employ any man, whether he belong or not to a trade union.

"Every workman shall undertake to work peaceably and harmoniously with all fellow employees, whether he or they belong to a trade union or not".

"Piecework was to be extended to all members of the Federation where desired by the employer. Prices to be "fixed by mutual arrangement between the employer and workman".

No man would be required to work more than forty hours overtime over four weeks except in an emergency. "All existing restrictions as regards overtime are to be removed".

Every workman was to be rated according to ability. "It must be distinctly understood that .... there is no intention whatever to reduce the rate of wages paid to efficient workmen". The employers wanted freedom because:

"In most works there are old servants, men up in years, or men whose efficiency is impaired by partial disablement or indifferent health, who are not able to earn the same wage as younger and stronger men; there are also men who, although they may have had a mechanical training, are not, from various circumstances, worth as high a rate of wages as other more able men, but still all these classes of workmen may be worth a lesser rate of wages. The

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1 Notes on The Engineering Trade Lockout, Appendix g

employers must have an option of engaging or retaining these or other men at such rates of wages as are mutually satisfactory, rather than refuse them employment on work on which they could be advantageously employed".

There was to be no restriction on the number of apprentices.

"The machine tools are the property of the employers..... They therefore will continue to exercise their discretion to appoint the men they consider suitable to work them".

"Proposals for avoiding further disputes. With a view to avoiding disputes in future deputations of workmen will be received by employers, or their representatives by appointment, for mutual discussion of questions on which both parties are directly concerned, but only Local Associations of Employers will negotiate with trade union officials.

"Failing settlement by the local association and the trade union of any question brought before them, the matter shall be forthwith referred to the Executive Board of the Federation and the central authority of the trade union, and pending the question being dealt with there shall be no stoppage of work....."

The Executive Council put these proposals before the members but did not recommend them.

"It is scarcely necessary to point out than (sic) one idea pervades the whole of them, namely, that of individual bargaining between employers and workmen. It will be noted that every proposal of a general character may be nullified by the retention of a right to make bargains or arrangements with individual workmen in contravention of its terms".<sup>1</sup>

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1 Notes on The Engineering Trade Lockout 1897-98, Appendix g.



The return of votes for and against the employers' proposals was as follows:-

	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>
A.S.E.	547	53,877
Steam Engine Makers Society	55	4,271
Machine Workers Association	37	3,299
The Joint Committee (Affiliated Societies)	38	2,481
Non-Society men	75	5,038
	<u>752</u>	<u>68,966</u>
Totals:		

The severity of the employers' demands was widely criticised. In a letter to "The Daily Chronicle"<sup>1</sup> fifteen Oxford Dons protested against the attack on collective bargaining.

"Our protest, as we have stated, touches only the fundamental issue - the issue, that is, between individual and collective bargaining. It is much to be feared that if the employers were successful in setting aside the mediation of the unions, there would be a return to the lawless methods which were characteristic of trade disputes before the development of trade unionism. But it is reasonable to hope that the employers may be led to modify their terms, and, while securing themselves against petty interference, to leave intact the principle of collective bargaining....."

At this stage in the dispute the General Secretary of the Boilermakers intervened with a statement which the employers posted on hoardings all over the country. Robert Knight wrote about individual and collective bargaining.

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1 14 December 1897.

"I am afraid some of those who have spoken and others who have written have not had much experience of the factory and workshop..... Let us closely examine the points connected with the question. First - collective bargaining is to be recognised by the employers in the future as in the past in general advances and reductions in wages whenever the state of trade warrants either ... The application of the principle of collective bargaining to the fixing of piece prices that shall be paid to all the men working in all the shops or yards in a given district is one of the utmost difficulty, and especially so in the engineering trade ..... In connection with the Society with which I am associated we have both collective and individual bargaining ..... But supposing the difficulties referred to in the engineering shops could be got over, and it was found possible to fix prices for the different shops to which the men could work, and the Engineers Society recognised them as standard rates and ordered their members not to take work for less than those fixed, no Employers Association in the world could prevent them doing this ..... My Society has never asked employers in any district to fix a standard wage for us. The Society has done this itself, in each district, and by doing this we have striven to make the cost of labour the same in all districts alike as far as possible.....

"Employers know our rates, and do not attempt to pay our members less, but if they thought they could get men outside our Society who would do the work cheaper they would have a perfect right to do so. There has been much said about "Union Smashing". I do not believe there is any intention on the part of the employers to attempt it....."<sup>1</sup>

Knight's letter was oddly timed. Such a statement could hardly be expected to assist the unions who were trying to squeeze better terms out of the employers. Further, the lock out would appear to be a remarkably

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1 Notes on The Engineering Trade Lockout 1897-98, Appendix q.

effective weapon against the traditional craft technique of unilateral control. The unions contended that universal collective bargaining could not be effective if the employers insisted on excluding important questions altogether (e.g. the machine question) and further allowed individual exception to those issues where bargaining occurred.

After the defeat of the employers' proposals a further conference between the unions and the employers took place from December 14 to 17, 1897. Fresh proposals which were a slight improvement were negotiated.

The declaration of general principle (freedom of management) was modified thus giving the unions a right of consultation. ("but in the event of any trade union desiring to raise any question arising therefrom, a meeting can be arranged by application to the Secretary of the Employers Association to discuss the matter").

The freedom of employment clauses were improved. ("The Federation do not advise their members to object to union workmen or give preference to non-union workmen".)

Those on piecework remained in the same position. Colonel Dyer and his colleagues gave an assurance that the overtime limit would be lowered. On the rating of workers the right of unions to negotiate on behalf of members was established. (The employers "do not object to the unions .... arranging amongst themselves rates of wages at which they will accept work". The note about lower wages for older workers was omitted). An attempt by the A.S.E. to secure recognition of a minimum rate failed. On the machine question the employers refused to concede anything.

The Executive Council advised members "on the whole the proposals as set out do, to some extent, risk your interests, but your delegates ventured to offer on your behalf a return to work on the basis of a 51 hours week,

which, however, the employers declined.

"We desire, as we are sure all concerned do, a return to work, and some degree of certainty of lasting peace and return of goodwill. We therefore ask you to record your votes as shown in accompanying Ballot Paper....."<sup>1</sup>

The result of the votes on the employers' modified proposals and the compromise fifty-one hour week was as follows:

	<u>Employers proposals</u>		<u>51 hours</u>	
	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>
A.S.E.	694	43,325	6,415	32,760
Steam Engine Makers Society	160	2,598	963	1,589
Machine Workers Association	66	2,853	508	2,276
Joint Committee (Affiliated Societies)	46	1,806	171	1,684
Non Society men	70	4,105	354	3,636
Tool Makers Society	<u>5</u>	<u>246</u>	<u>104</u>	<u>125</u>
Totals	<u>1,041</u>	<u>54,933</u>	<u>8,515</u>	<u>42,080</u>

The result, at this stage of the dispute, was remarkable. Even the compromise 51 hours which the employers refused to concede was rejected.

At this point the Duke of Argyll wrote:-

"When the Duke of Wellington left his noble Peninsular Army he described it as an army that 'could go anywhere and do anything'. 'Yes sir' was the reply of one of his officers 'provided you go with them'. The rank and file may be splendid fellows, but let them know their place. In nature they are second not first".

Barnes replied:

"The Duke of Argyll has been blowing his feeble pibroch in this matter, and had declared that the men's demands were not in accordance with natural law. The Duke was a sort of pseudo-philosopher, great on natural law; but it ought to be sufficient to ask whether it was in accordance with natural law

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1 Notes on The Engineering Trade Lockout, Appendix 58.

that this 'humbug' should impiously claim thousands of acres of the earth's surface while hundreds of thousands of poor creatures knew scarcely where to lay their heads".

Mr. Walter Maudslay, an employer in a letter to 'The Times'<sup>1</sup> answered this:

"Mr. Barnes, at loss for a fair argument, turns to abuse, and the rampant Socialism of the man stands disclosed. No permanent peace can reign between employer and employed while such men are allowed to handle the reins".

Maudsley's views reflected many typical anti-union attitudes.

The main cause of labour trouble was the abuse of the trade union system. Men without the wide experience from which would come "a true grasp of the economic principles of trade" became trade union leaders.

"These leaders are often singled out, not so much for their sound judgment but because they have a command of language and are of a more pushing character than some of their more modest, and, possibly wiser companions. Once having tasted the sweets of a comparatively idle life and high remuneration for their services, they naturally are anxious to justify their existence".

Workmen have grievances. But labour troubles are often "solely the offsprings of the fertile mind of the paid agitator".....

Maudsley had a scheme to deal with this:

"I propose that an organisation conferring somewhat similar benefits to those granted by the trade unions should be created ..... a benefit society with superannuation and an out of work fund attached to it....." ●

The funds would be dealt with "entirely by committees of bona-fide workmen..... The aim of the scheme is that the workman should become his own master. It is most desirable that he would be delivered from the fangs of

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1 11 January 1893. All quoted <sup>statements</sup> from 'Times' letter.

an agitator who draws him into a conflict and then week by week bleeds him of his hard-earned gains, or who uses the money subscribed after years of patient toil for the purpose of strikes". The worker who wanted to strike under the scheme would be able to withdraw his money. But good sense suggests "that nothing will induce him to withdraw golden sovereigns over the counter....."

Barnes replied to Maudslay on the next day in the following words:

"The strike for the nine hour day was begun, continued and nearly ended without official recognition or help from trade union officials, and this applies in part to most strikes in the intervening period since". The present dispute was begun by the men in the workshops. If the eight-hour day was achieved workers would have more leisure to acquire knowledge. Trade unions had more experience than employers of industrial organisation and the disbursement of funds. "Mr. Maudslay may rely upon it that the great body of sober and thoughtful and even 'modest' workmen will be sceptical as to the objects of an organisation such as that suggested when they consider that it emanates from those who have actively resisted every effort made for the improvement of workshop conditions".<sup>1</sup>

Maudslay's scheme had been advocated in the trade journals since September.

The employers should establish "some general organisation for providing sick, superannuation, and other friendly benefits on something like the basis of the National Free Labour Association".<sup>2</sup>

Separate benefit funds by law were also suggested.<sup>3</sup>

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1 All correspondence in Notes on the Engineering Trade Lockout 1897-98, p.

2 "The Engineers" September 17, 1897

3 "The Engineers" September 24, 1897

National Free Labour Associations also received a good deal of attention although the A.S.E. Executive Council never considered this problem important enough to deserve attention. Alfred Yarrow kept blackleg labour accommodated in two boats moored on the Thames, to prevent picket trouble.<sup>1</sup> When Barnes in January 1898 withdrew the eight-hour day demand, "Engineering" (January 2, 1898) reported that the employers required managerial freedom before work could be resumed.

It was felt that employers must prevent the transfer of the fight from outside to inside the shops, "We take it for granted that the workmen who have helped them during the dispute, in the face of considerable danger will be loyally supported .... The best safeguard against shop tyranny is to take care that unionists are in a minority".

Did the employers' demands threaten collective bargaining? Frederick Harrison, J.M. Ludlow, Henry Crompton, E.S. Busby and Sidney and Beatrice Webb were asked by the A.S.E. to define "legitimate action of trade unions".

"The main purpose for which workmen unite in trades unions has always been to obtain from their employers, by means of combination, more advantageous conditions of employment than such men could secure as an individual. With this object, it is a fundamental principle of trade unionism to replace individual bargaining between the wage earner and the employer by collective bargaining between the whole body of organised workmen and their employers, and to supersede the separate determination of conditions as between individuals by collective agreements formulating common rules for workmen in the aggregate".

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<sup>1</sup> See Barnes "The Life and Times of Alfred Yarrow".

The Times described how The National Free Labour Association provided strike breakers who were frequently involved in clashes with pickets. See The Times, July 15, 1897, August 1, 1897, August 19, 1897, August 26, 1897, August 27, 1897. Sheffield was the centre of bitter clashes. The Times, October 2 and October 5, 1897.

Standard piecework lists in the cotton industry, formal joint committees in the Northumberland and Durham coalfields enforcing an exact uniformity of payment and 'Working Rules' agreed between master builders and trade unions were all given as examples of collective agreements. Such agreements covered:

"The Standard wage" conditions of work, "Detailed lists of rates to be paid for work done by the piece, payment for any increase of exertion or strain, the remuneration for working particular machines at particular speeds, hours of labour, overtime ..... Detailed provisions for the interpretation or application of the collective agreement to particular cases by an impartial tribunal. And the prevention of further disputes".<sup>1</sup>

The "eminent authorities" very much supported the A.S.E.'s view of trade union rights and collective bargaining as against that of the employers and Robert Knight. In their view individual piece rates, the machine question, overtime and basic rates should all be subject to negotiation.

As has been intimated on January 12 the A.S.E. decided to withdraw the demand for the forty eight hour week "with a view of strengthening our position in regard to the terms and conditions proposed by the employers" and on January 15 the London Joint Committee also withdrew the demand. The employers replied that subject to the acceptance of the conditions of management:

"the employers are prepared to re-open their works to members of the Allied Unions on Monday morning, the 24th current, at the usual starting hour".

The A.S.E. Executive secured a further meeting with the employers on 21 January and on this occasion a note was added to each clause of the agreement. After the clause on Freedom of Management the note read:

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1 Notes on The Engineering Trade Lockout 1897-98, Appendix 63-66.



"No new conditions of labour is introduced or covered by this clause. It simply provides for equality of treatment between the unions and the Federation by reserving for all members of a trade union, as well as for all the Federated Employers the same liberty which many trade unionists and many employers have always had. Special provision is made in the clause and in the subsequent "Provisions for avoiding future disputes" to ensure to workmen, or their representatives, the right to bring forward for discussion any grievance or supposed grievance".

After the clause on Freedom of Employment:

"Note. The right of a man to join a trade union if he pleases involves the right of a man to abstain from joining a trade union if he pleases. This clause merely protects both rights. The Federation sincerely hopes that a better understanding will prevent any question of preference arising in the future, and advise the members not to object to union workmen".

The section on Piecework now ended:

"Note. These are just the conditions that have been for long in force in various shops. Individual workmen are much benefitted by piecework.

"A mutual arrangement as to piecework rates between employer and workman in no way interferes with the functions of the unions in arranging with their own members the rates and conditions under which they shall work".

The overtime clause ended:

"Note These Overtime Conditions are precisely the conditions now in operation in various places, though in many Federated workshops no limitation whatever exists at the present time. In many cases this will be the first attempt to regulate or prevent excess of overtime".

The Note on 'Rating of Workmen' said:

"Collective bargaining between unions and employers associations is here made the subject of distinct agreement.

"The other clauses simply mean that as regards the wages to be paid there shall be (1) Freedom of the Employer; (2) Freedom to the Union Workman both individually and in their collective capacity - that is to say, collective bargaining in its true sense is fully preserved; and (3) Freedom to Non-Unionists.

"These conditions are precisely those in operation at present on the North East coast, the Clyde and elsewhere, where for years past alterations of wages have been amicably arranged at joint meetings of employers and representatives of trade unions".

On apprentices the note claimed that existing practice was being maintained.

"The clause on Selection, Training and Employment of operatives" which dealt with the machine question had a note:

"There is no desire on the part of the Federation to create a specially favoured class of workmen".

The note on "Provisions for avoiding Disputes" sought to protect the position of the unions:

"A grievance may be brought forward for discussion either by the workman individually, or by him and his fellow-workmen, or by representatives of the union".

The conditions ended:

"In no instance do the Federated Employers propose Conditions which are not at present being worked under a large number of the members of the Allied Trades Unions.

"The Federated Employers do not want to introduce any new or untried conditions of work, and they have no intention of reducing the rates of wages of skilled men.

"These Conditions, with relative Notes, are to be read and construed together.

"The following is also to be read in to the terms, being part of a letter handed to your Delegates at Hotel Metropole, January 21st:-

"These notes appended to the recent explanation issued by the Employers, disclaiming any intention of reducing the rates of wages of skilled men, applies both to time wages and to piecework earnings. In the latter case there is no intention of interfering with the usual practice of making extra payment for extra effort".<sup>1</sup>

The Joint Committee meeting the next day decided:

"That we, as a Joint Committee, recommend our members to accept the employers terms with the explanatory notes as being the standard by which we accept".

A letter to members signed by Matthew Arrandale (Machine Workers), James Swift (Steam Engine Makers) and George Barnes also recommended the acceptance of the terms.

"You will observe that each clause is now followed by a Note, to be construed as part of and to be equally binding with the clause itself.....

"The clauses are in some respects inconsistent with the notes, and the interpretation may occasion some little confusion, but at all events we think that they may be given a fair trial .....

"This is the more necessary as the dispute has now lasted 29 weeks and its continuance involves an increasing drain upon the Societies' funds without much chance of betterment. We have had many good friends who have subscribed handsomely, but the income from outside is decreasing and likely to further decrease, and therefore the struggle could only be carried on by largely increased contributions, and probably reduced benefits. This we feel we are not justified in imposing upon you now in view of the improvement in the terms".

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1 Notes on The Engineering Trade Lockout, 1897-98, Appendix 73.

The vote on the amended proposals was as follows:-

	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>
A.S.E.	20,064	11,406
Steam Engine Makers	2,133	716
Machine Workers Association	1,906	488
Amalgamated Society of Toolmakers	915	123
Marine and General Engineers	29	1
London and Provincial Society of Hammermen	41	17
Society of Coppersmiths	289	0
Society of Instrument Makers	263	32
Society of Smiths and Hammermen	365	291
Society of Drillers	430	0
Non Society Men	2,156	853
	<u>28,588</u>	<u>13,927</u>
Totals		

There was a clear majority for a return to work but on a reduced vote.

Work was resumed on Monday January 31, 1898.

### 3. The attitude of the A.S.E. Executive Council

As we have seen the employers made several accusations about the extremism of the A.S.E. Executive Council.

Attitudes and expectations had much to do with the Council's view of the terms of settlement and their criticisms of the TUC. Any understanding of the A.S.E.'s position after January 1898 must include some consideration of the Executive Council's policy.

The initiative in May 1897 had passed from the Council into the hands of the London District Committee of the Society and the Eight-Hour Day Joint Committee. This meant that the eight-hour question was taken up without any proper consideration of the machine question which was bound to be an issue in the event of any serious dispute with the Employers Federation. An attempt to prevent this happening was made<sup>1</sup> by Crompton and Taylor:

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1 Executive Council, 21 June 1897

"That on consideration of the London District Committee report that no movement including extreme action and likely to involve the Society in a conflict with the Employers Federation will be sanctioned by this Council until a settlement on the machine question has been obtained".

Black was neutral with Golightly, Hooson and Gray against. (By convention the Chairman Sellicks gave a casting vote and the General Secretary never voted).

The employers, in response to the London eight-hour movement's withdrawal of labour, informed the Executive on July 2 that "notices would be served on 25 per cent of the members of the unions affected", the decision to withdraw the other 75 per cent was taken with Golightly and Gray against. The rest of the Council voted for the complete withdrawal of labour.

Where notices were given to 25 per cent all overtime was to cease during the period of notice. By Saturday July 3 the question of the attitude of other unions had become crucial:

"That Mr. Knight (Boilermakers) and Mr. Swift (Steam Engine Makers) be informed that as the eight hours question has been brought to its present stage by a Joint Committee representing the engineering trades and approved by us as each step has been taken and that as a portion of the men in London cease work today we cannot now draw back to alter the method of procedure".

Taylor and Crompton, supported by Gardner, Black, Golightly and Gray, favoured a call to the Engineering Trade Federation "to close up with the movement".

"General Secretary reported that several deputations had called the previous evening regarding the progress of the eight hours movement in their various shops, the Vauxhall Ironworks men were very impatient as the firm were making strenuous efforts to get their work hurried on before the lockout took place".<sup>1</sup>

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 3 July 1897.

This motion was referred to the Joint Committee without recommendation.

Two days later (July 5) the London Joint Committee requested that the Vauxhall men be withdrawn but the Executive Committee refused to comply "as no notices have been given".

A series of mass meetings were organised and John Burns and Tom Mann, among others, engaged to speak.<sup>1</sup> The Barrow District Committee were restrained from withdrawing the men from Vickers.<sup>2</sup> Until the dispute ended the Council tried to restrain those who wanted to extend it and the alternative policy of spreading the eight-hour movement from London all over the country was never considered.

Non-society men and members of other weaker trade unions presented the familiar problem of the provision of financial support. From August 21, when the Council made a loan of £1,000, the Machine Workers Association was completely dependant on the A.S.E.

By September hopes of an early victory had vanished and the need to widen the financial basis of the dispute was recognised.

"The resolution drafted by the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress for submission to the Congress in support of our eight hours struggle was read, during consideration disappointment was expressed by the Council at the mild terms in which the resolution was worded" and

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 12 July 1897.

John Burns gave his full support to the A.S.E. This was to be the last time he campaigned for the Society. He held meetings in Barrow, Birkenhead ("grand meeting"), Hull ("great demonstration"), Sheffield ("good meeting, men excellent"), Manchester ("magnificent demonstration"), Poplar ("great meeting"). Many of these places he visited several times. Burns Papers M.S. 46315, British Museum.

2 Executive Council Minutes, 12 July 1897.

"That an appeal be made to the organised trades of the country for support in our present struggle with the Federated Employers and that copies of same be sent to delegates at Congress".<sup>1</sup>

Congress expressed "entire sympathy with the A.S.E. and others struggling to obtain an eight hour day. And called for aid "both morally and financially". The seconder Mr. A. Gould (Hull) said, "The members of Congress must go back to their trade unions and get machinery put into operation that would secure a continuous levy week by week, so that if the dispute lasts twelve months the engineers would receive adequate support".<sup>2</sup>

On September 15<sup>3</sup> Barnes reported the first approach from Mr. Llewellyn Smith of the Board of Trade Labour Department. Smith wanted to know the position of the Society:

"(The) General Secretary started by saying the London men would require the eight hours and the men in the provinces an indemnity. Smith made light of this .... and suggested that a fair compromise would be something less than eight hours for London and the provincial men going back on the same lines as they came out". Barnes thought Smith "was fishing for third parties".

How soon would T.U.C. financial support be available?

"Mr. Barnes reported that he had went over (sic) to see Mr. Sam Woods (Secretary, Parliament Committee) and as before he found the office closed. When he did get to see the Assistant he was informed that Mr. Woods was in the country, and that the Parliamentary Committee had resolved to issue a circular draft which was read over to him but had to be finally approved by the

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 3 September 1897.

2 Report of the Thirtieth Annual Trade Union Congress.

3 Executive Council Minutes.

Committee, who wouldn't meet again until October 12th.

"This apparent dilatoriness had had the effect of making him speak his mind on the matter and to insist that the Committee should conduct the business in reference to the monies coming in from other trades, in a business-like way".<sup>1</sup>

On September 18 "The Machine Workers Association" again requested the A.S.E. for financial help. They had 4,144 members and of these 2,432 were on benefit. "To keep their members out required £1240 per week to meet which they had an income of £140 per week ..... All the monies they had received from outside sources up to the present was £25 from the Ship and House Painters and £100 from the Carpenters and Joiners, but not one penny from any other source ..... Various references were then made to the sums being voted by other societies but of which we had received very little indeed".

This after ten weeks of dispute.

Gardner, Crompton and Hooson recommended "That owing to the heavy financial strain upon this Society" no help can be given to the Machine Workers - they should seek a loan from "other influential Societies". This was defeated by Golightly, Taylor, Gray and Sellicks the Chairman. The Executive carried a resolution granting a further £800 to the Machine Workers, adding that a loan should be sought.<sup>2</sup>

A money raising campaign now began, with every trade union being asked to hear a statement of the case. Sellicks reported<sup>3</sup> that the Parliamentary Committee had decided on the distribution of monies collected to help the engineers and were to give "equally amongst the Societies affected and which would work out at 9d. per man affected, this would mean some £800 to our Society

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 17 September 1897.

2 Executive Council Minutes, 18 September 1897.

3 Executive Council Minutes, 23 September 1897.



out of the £1,100".

Ritchie the President of the Board of Trade met Barnes to suggest a joint employer employee committee on the eight hours system.

"Mr. Barnes stated that the eight hours for London was practically won, that the men in the country wouldn't go back on the old conditions unless absolutely beaten; put in its bald form Mr. Ritchie's proposition was, all lock out and strike notices should be withdrawn and men should resume work on the old conditions pending decision of committee of employers and men affected...."<sup>1</sup>

The Boilermakers requested a meeting between the Federation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Trades,<sup>2</sup> the Employers and the A.S.E. to discuss the eight-hour day. The Executive Council did not think "any good purpose would be served by a meeting between us and the Federated Trades".

At this stage the A.S.E., although worried about money, was fairly confident as to the outcome. The eight-hour day was still considered by the Boilermakers, the A.S.E. and the Board of Trade to be the only issue involved.

On September 28 members of the United Machine Workers Association were placed "on the same footing as non-Society men" and district committees were instructed to "assist them to tide over the present difficulty provided all voluntary funds received by that Society be sent to this office".<sup>3</sup>

At the same meeting the Executive Council unanimously laid down their views about a meeting with the employers. There could be a conference:-

"With a basis for discussion on the lines of the forty eight hour week for London with an indemnity for the provinces of a reasonable reduction of working hours, or we are prepared to meet them in open conference without prejudice and endeavour to arrange a basis of discussion suitable to both sides with an independent chairman to be mutually agreed on or appointed by the Board

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 23 September 1897.

2 The A.S.E.'s attitude to the general idea of Federation between Engineering union, and its refusal to join the Shipbuilding and Engineering Trades Federation are described above p. 139.

3 Executive Council Minutes, 28 September 1897.

Strike pay 15/- for Society men, 8/- for non-Society men, plus 6d. for each child.

of Trade".

Two developments were reported to the Council on September 30. Firstly, about thirty men had returned to work at Platts, Oldham. "The men were clamouring for either Burns, Barnes or Sellicks to come and address them".<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the issue of Freedom of Management had made its appearance during a meeting between Barnes and The President of the Board of Trade - Ritchie when Ritchie had produced proposals for a conference. It was ascertained that the unions had no intention of interfering with the right of the employers in the conduct of their business and the employers had no intention "to interfere with the rights of trade unions to conduct the affairs of their union or to interfere with arrangements in force between the unions and certain employers to work forty eight hours weekly or with any question arising thereon". Bearing these factors in mind Ritchie suggested a conference should take place with a chairman who it should be mutually agreed would have no vote or powers of decision. Hours of labour and rates of pay for the whole country would be discussed and, on this understanding, the men on strike should return to work. Should an agreement be reached in this way no further strike or lock out was to take place before a similar conference had taken place. The Council agreed to ballot members if the employers accepted the proposals.<sup>2</sup>

Finance continued to be a problem. On October 6, two German members,

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1 Platts was an extremely important firm employing 10,000 men and making looms for sale all over the world.

"In 1851 at the end of an important strike the union was entirely crushed, and since then Messrs Platt have forbidden the formation of any such union among their employees. When the men have any suggestions to make, they send a deputation to their masters who always hear it with attention ... The absolute position of the masters, so exceptional in the labour work, is explained by the unique position of the firm. Although it is not the only English house of the kind, it is far the most important. It has no rival in the neighbourhood of Oldham, and has, in fact, a monopoly of this branch of the industry, which it has raised to its present importance. Workmen who left would find great difficulty in disposing of their special on equally favourable terms. It is their highly-specialised character which makes them so dependant on the great firm which directs and employs them". Paul De Roussiers "The Labour Question in Great Britain", p. 255-256. (Published 1896).

2 Executive Council Minutes, 30 September 1897.

T. Kieipe and W. Konigs<sup>1</sup> were sent to Germany to raise money, and it was decided to raise a loan of £25,000 on the security of an A.S.E. loan to the Charlton Board of Guardians.<sup>2</sup> The American and Canadian Council was asked for an opinion about sending Tom Mann to them for fund-raising activities and they replied "Send Tom Mann immediate".<sup>3</sup> Gardner and Hooson wanted to act on this but the Council decided to let the telegram lie on the table.

The unfortunate machine Workers accused the A.S.E. of trying to break their organisation because of its insistence upon paying their members through A.S.E. committees instead of through the Machine Workers' organisation. The charge was denied.

When the London Ship Repairers Association presented a lock out notice Knight secured its withdrawal to his Boilermaker members on the understanding that the status quo would continue. In the face of this, the Executive Council decided to secure a similar agreement.<sup>4</sup> Despite "a large increase of voluntary subscriptions from all sources" benefits had to be reduced.<sup>5</sup> An appeal to "trade unionists and the general public to render all the financial assistance in their power to the engineers and other trades affected....." was issued on October 14 by the Parliamentary Committee. The appeal was made because:-

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- 1 Konigs was expelled from Kiel before being able to address a meeting, 'The Times', 27 October 1897.
  - 2 Executive Council Minutes, 6 October 1897.
  - 3 Executive Council Minutes, 12 October 1897.
  - 4 Executive Council Minutes, 14 October 1897.
  - 5 Due to absence of sub-committee minutes and circulars the amounts paid are not known. Reductions reported Executive Council Minutes, October 26, 1897.

"(1st) ..... the employers have intimated that their object is to crush the Engineers' Trade Union. (2nd) Because the employers refused to accept the good offices of the Board of Trade ..... (3rd) Because the employers have locked out and thrown out of employment many thousands of workmen who have no grievance of any kind". No reference was made to the eight-hour day.

The dispute took a new turn with the intervention of Mr. Hills the Manager of the Thames Iron Works. He had granted the eight-hour day at his works but was a strange unpredictable man as he was to show when, after the dispute, he withdrew the shorter working day. However he wanted permission to approach the Engineering and Shipbuilding Trade Federation, the Board of Trade, "and even the Church",<sup>1</sup> as he "thought a basis of agreement would be 48 hours for all over the country with 51 hours pay". (54 hours was the usual working week). Hills claimed influence with the employers and required absolute secrecy. His offer of mediation was accepted.<sup>2</sup>

Hills saw Knight, the Boilermakers Secretary, in Newcastle and gained the impression that the Federation of Engineering Trades would co-operate to get a settlement:

"We (A.S.E.) would require to become affiliated to this body; if we did so he would use his influence to have a conference called at Carlisle next Thursday for a full discussion of the matters at issue ..... Mr. Hills finally stated that Mr. Knight had left a very fair impression on his mind".

Gardner and Hooson moved:-

"That we take immediate steps to join the Federated Trades and make application to that body for affiliation subject to the appraisal of the members".

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 1 November 1897.

2 In 1913 the Thames Iron Works went bankrupt. Immediately before this Hills approached the A.S.E. with a sort of "Fairfields" scheme under which they were asked to invest in the company. The Executive Council refused, although the Boilermakers agreed.

The resolution was found to be ultra vires so eventually it was decided that, subject to the necessary majority being obtained, by ballot vote of members, application for affiliation should be made. Gardner, Black, Taylor and Hooson favoured this, with Golightly, Crompton and Gray against.<sup>1</sup>

On November 10 Barnes reported that after telling Mr. Hills of our decision concerning the Federation "he then expressed himself as willing to assist us financially."<sup>2</sup>

The attempt to work with the Federation was a failure:

"Messrs. Barnes and Crompton reported result of delegation to Carlisle, when they arrived at place of meeting they were told the delegates of Trades Federation had some preliminary business to transact, they retired and came back about 2.30 and were received, the delegates asked various questions regarding our reasons for seeking affiliation which being answered they were asked to retire, they learned that Mr. Hills had had an audience with the Federation and strongly urged that body to give us all the moral and material support they could in our struggle with the employers. As a result Messrs Jack, Wilkie and Matkin were delegated to convey the decision of this body which was to the effect that application was postponed until the votes of our members had been taken on the question of us joining the Federation. Both Mr. Barnes and Mr. Crompton stated that they considered the Federation had treated them most unfairly and discourteously and there appeared to be a desire to humiliate us".<sup>3</sup>

The Council decided not to proceed with the vote on affiliation.

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- 1 Executive Council Minutes, 5 November 1897.
- 2 Executive Council Minutes, 10 November 1897. George Cadbury was also helping financially.
- 3 Executive Council Minutes, 17 November 1897.

During mid November, the Executive Council began to move towards a conference with the employers which made the London Joint Committee (who had originally been the eight-hour day committee) restive.

"Mr. Barnes reported that he had went up to the Joint Committee (sic) to inform them what had transpired at preliminary conference and the appointment of representatives to the conference he stated he was received in a very hostile spirit by the delegates present and received no assistance but rather the reverse from those belonging to the A.S.E.<sup>1</sup> the Joint Committee claimed that they were the body who were responsible for the negotiations (sic) up till now and intended to boss the show. What was the A.S.E. that they should claim a preponderance of the delegates etc. etc. Mr. Barnes said he explained this was now a national struggle and they were only a local body and apart from the Steam Engine Makers and the United Machine Workers Association who had direct representation had not 1,500 members effected among them ..... he further said Mr. Brown (Secretary of Joint Committee) had called about U.P.M. .... (to) tell him the Joint Committee had elected 5 delegates ..... on discussion the ... Joint Committee was strongly condemned as arrogant and imprudent".

It was decided to write to all A.S.E. members of the Committee telling them that any other attempts to prevent Executive Council decisions being carried out "will be severely dealt with even to exclusion".<sup>2</sup> But the matter did not end there. Mr. Hills saw the Joint Committee and suggested that Knight of the Boilermakers "should be appointed Chairman of the forthcoming conference" (the Chairman was to be neutral and to have no vote). Barnes

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1 Barnes would have been well-known to the London members. Although he was apprenticed in Dundee, and had worked in Barrow-in-Furness, from Easter 1880 he had lived and worked in London. As a member of the Chelsea branch he had become a member of the Local Executive Council 1889-90. While seeking the General Secretaryship the main basis of his organisation and support was in London.

2 Executive Council Minutes, 19 November 1897.

told the Committee "Mr. Knight could not be appointed chairman .... neither could he represent the A.S.E." Nevertheless the Committee "had ultimately agreed to ask Mr. Knight to represent them at the conference". Mr. Dixon and Mr. Lindsay were to go to Newcastle to make the request. The delegates went to Newcastle but Dixon, a member of the A.S.E., was instructed not to carry out his mission. He agreed and here the issue ended.<sup>1</sup>

Here indeed was a stern reminder of the danger to the A.S.E. Executive Council when a major dispute occurred with control ostensibly in the hands of an ad hoc committee.

We now come to what was the crucial period of the dispute. The employers were united and presented their harsh terms for a settlement.<sup>2</sup> These were decisively rejected by the men and it was now very doubtful whether any concession on hours could be achieved. Was it possible to gather sufficient support to make it worth the employers' while to settle for something like the status quo?

Barnes wrote to the Parliamentary Committee on December 7, 1897.

"I am instructed to ask you the position in regard to the convening of a meeting of Trade Unionists for the purpose of conferring on the present crisis in the engineering dispute. Of course, you will see that the Employers have formulated impossible proposals, and the men will doubtless reject them, but it is useless to disguise the fact that we cannot go on much longer without concerted action by the general body of trade unionists, who are menaced. We have noted certain paragraphs in the newspapers and would be glad to know from you whether or not there is any truth in the statements that the Parliamentary Committee are about to convene such a meeting as I have suggested.

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 22 November 1897.

2 See above

If nothing of the sort is contemplated we should probably do it ourselves. Trusting for a favourable and early reply".

Sam Woods replied:

"In reply to your query .... at the last meeting of the Parliamentary Committee .... I read a number of letters ..... from Trade Councils, asking the Parliamentary Committee to convene a general conference of the trade unions of the country to consider the unfortunate difficulties in which the engineers are placed". The Committee were in sympathy with those engaged in the dispute, "Yet they did not think it wise for them to call such a conference, chiefly on the following grounds. First, because it would be setting a precedent for which they had no authority, second, because no trade union connected with the Congress had asked for such a conference, and third, because they considered that the cost of holding such a conference would be great, and that if the money were sent on to the trades affected it would be much better spent". He had consulted Mr. Wilkie, (Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee and (the ubiquitous) Mr. Knight and "they agreed with me that it would be more regular, and ..... more satisfactory if it were called by the trade affected in the dispute. With every good wish for your success and a speedy and satisfactory settlement".<sup>1</sup>

Could even at this late stage and despite previous difficulties, the "Federated Trades" be brought in? A conference was called at the Westminster Palace hotel on December 24 1897. The Federated Societies were all (with the exception of the Steam Engine Makers) present and, in addition, the Iron Founders were represented. Again the A.S.E. failed. The delegates were asked to consider attempting to enforce a 51 hour week but this was refused on the grounds that they had no authority to decide and the matter must go before the

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1 Correspondence in Notes on the Engineering Trade Lockout 1897-98, p. 137-138.



respective Executive Councils.

"Another resolution was submitted by Mr. Masterton of the Iron Founders against the 'terms and conditions' but owing to hostility of the Federation this was withdrawn".<sup>1</sup>

On the last Saturday of the year 'The London Trades Council' convened a National Conference to consider the engineers' difficulties. Barnes, Sellicks and Hooson put the A.S.E. case:

"On the whole the meeting was a good one, and they expected the results would be an increase in the financial support".<sup>2</sup>

This proved to be an illusion, however, as no extra money became available.<sup>3</sup>

Blatchford reported the same conference in Clarion.<sup>4</sup> Clarion had been giving enthusiastic support to the engineers and had collected £2,100 for the A.S.E. ('The Labour Leader' managed only £100). In Blatchford's view the dispute proved the need for an effective Trade Union Federation but his attendance at the London Trades Council conference led his mind to other matters.

No leading member of the Parliamentary Committee was present. "The Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. is a failure .....

"The plain truth about the thing is, that a well paid trade union official, after a few years service, almost invariably, becomes useless, to those who pay his wages. He puts on size, he apes the parliamentary air, he gets corrupted by the deference and high wages paid him. He likes to be a personage, and he grows comfortably used to the pleasant security and easily

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 23 December 1897.

2 Executive Council Minutes, 31 December 1897.

3 See Blatchford 'Clarion' 29 January 1898.

4 See Blatchford 'Clarion' 8 January 1898.

gained importance of his situation. The result is a strong temptation to advertise himself, to secure his own position, and to oppose overtly or openly any change in the tactics or methods of the workers which might endanger his pre-eminence, importance, power or pay".

The failure of the T.U.C., the Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades and the London Trades Council to produce extra financial support meant that the A.S.E. Executive Council either had to be prepared to bankrupt the organisation (without probably any substantial chance of success) or rapidly come to terms. They chose the latter.

On the 4 January consideration was given to reducing benefits. Two days later subscriptions from members working full-time was raised to one day's pay per week.

At the Executive Council's meeting on January 12, with Black and Hooson dissenting, the forty eight hour week demand was withdrawn. Several intermediaries including Mr. Clem Edwards and Mr. Cook, editor of the Daily News, were trying to bring the parties together again.<sup>1</sup>

On 21 January the Executive Council virtually decided to settle on the employers' terms. Barnes and Sellicks reported on a meeting with the employers.

"..... the employers representatives agreed that all the explanations and notes should be read into the terms, that is construed together, and further that the existing practices in regard to piecework should be maintained....."

"That the latest terms along with the notes and explanations of the employers added be placed before our members side by side with the alternative courses open and in view of our financial position we recommend their acceptance".

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 20 January 1898.

Gardner, Black, Golightly, Taylor and Hooson were in favour, while Crompton and Gray wished simply to place the terms before the members without any recommendations.<sup>1</sup>

Work was resumed on January 31, 1898. The organisation was intact but defeated. That wonderful feeling of industrial power and of superiority above the other Societies, could never exist again with quite the same confidence.

There is no evidence from the conduct of the dispute that the Executive Council acted in an extremist way, or lived up to the employers' Socialist bogey. Once the eight-hour Joint Committee in London was permitted to take "extreme" action the possibility of a major conflict had to be faced. In view of the A.S.E.'s commitment to the eight-hour day, heavy unemployment during many years and the 'legend' of the nine-hour movement, industrial action during favourable economic circumstances was always likely to force the issue. 1897 was favourable, at one time it appeared that a victory would be achieved in London; further, as has been shown, the trade journals were not unduly disturbed by the prospects of the forty eight hour week and, indeed, thought it to be inevitable.

The case against action on the eight-hour day was that the Employers Federation was well organised, united, and determined to prevent the A.S.E. gaining the strength and prestige that would follow the achievement of a shorter working day. That the employers at a time of relative economic prosperity withstood a twenty hour week dispute was remarkable. The explanation of their strength and unity must be that the Federated firms, in light of technical change, were determined to weaken the craft power

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 21 January 1898.

of the A.S.E. It would have been much harder for the employers to win a struggle on the machine question if they had conceded the Society's hours of work demands.

As we have seen Dyer quoted Barnes saying that the A.S.E. had "shunted" the dispute from an "unpopular issue" to one where they expect "the support of our fellow workmen". In 1923 Barnes published an autobiography<sup>1</sup> in which he discussed the events of 1897-98.

"The problem presented to me was really how best to use the machine question as a lever wherewith to bargain for shorter hours of labour.

"But although nominally fought on the eight-hour question it was really the question of machines and workshop management which brought out and bound the employers together and which ultimately led to our failure to get a shorter working day".

Barnes' view can be taken to mean that the engineers were not interested in the eight-hour day but simply used this issue as a pretext for a dispute which was in fact directed at the employers' attitude to the staffing and rating of automatic machines. This depends, if the above quotation is used, upon whether "nominally" describes how the dispute developed or the attitude of the A.S.E.

It is difficult to see how the A.S.E. was only nominally committed to the eight-hour day in 1897. As I have shown, from 1888 this was an important question with the means of achievement as the central issue. The Executive Council considered that it played an important part in persuading the government to extend the shorter working day to government factories and dockyards in 1894. Further, Barnes himself,<sup>2</sup> campaigned vociferously on

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1 "Workshop to War Cabinet"

2 See Chapter Two and Three

this issue, both as the Secretary of Tom Mann's election committee for the General Secretaryship in 1891-92 and during his own campaigns for that office in 1895 and 1896.

There is no doubt that the A.S.E. were determined to secure the eight-hour day by industrial means at the first opportunity. It is likely that if the Executive Council had held back in July 1897 unofficial action, in the tradition of 1871, would have followed. That from late October 1897 the dispute was only nominally about the eight-hour day is clear enough. By then the employers were growing stronger while the A.S.E. was getting less financial support than had been expected. It was then a question of getting the best terms possible which meant negotiating about machine rates and staffing, piecework, managerial freedom and the procedure for avoiding disputes.

The Executive Council's conduct over the dispute was conservative. They restricted its scale as far as they were able and never extended the eight-hour demand outside London. When the dispute began the Society had a balance of £361,140, which was reduced to £154,000 at the end exclusive of loans and arrears. No attempt was made to fight to the end or to scrape in every possible pound. The decision to put up the subscription of those members working full-time to a day's pay per week came only in the last days. Clearly the Council had limited objectives and were determined not to seriously damage the traditional character of the Society (the benefit scales continued).

#### 4. Conclusions and Perspective

In 1897 the A.S.E. had 91,944 members. At no time in that year were more than 47,500 engineers, belonging to all societies and including non-union men, locked out. Less than one third of A.S.E. members were affected.<sup>1</sup>

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1 R.O. Clark, *The Dispute in the British Engineering Industry 1897-98*, *Economica* 1957.

During the thirty weeks of dispute the A.S.E. collected £115,879 of which £69,457 came from "Trade and Labour Councils, Trade Societies and Parliamentary Committees", £28,399 from abroad and the rest from collections, miscellaneous subscriptions, district collections, concerts, football matches etc. The Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress contributed £17,325. One half of the £28,399 from abroad came from Germany.

"A special tribute is .... due to the late Eleanor Marx Aveling, who did a splendid service in putting us in touch with Continental sympathisers".<sup>1</sup>

The Parliamentary Committee's attitude, and the size of the T.U.C.'s financial contribution, was acutely disappointing to the A.S.E. For eight years Congress had been committed to the eight-hour day yet when the engineers took up the issue the movement proved incapable of sustaining them. It might reasonably be argued that the T.U.C. was expected to act in a way contrary to its very nature. As a very loose organisation of trade unions performing a political pressure group role it had achieved permanence in a way that more ambitious organisations had not. Its refusal to become deeply committed during strikes and lockouts insulated it from many dangers including the possibility of mass secession by the disaffected. What the A.S.E. wanted was a different sort of organisation, one which could provide, at the very least, a substantial strike insurance.

In addition to the disappointment caused by the Parliamentary Committee behaviour of the Boilermakers and, in particular, the attitude of their General Secretary, Robert Knight was a further setback. In the A.S.E.'s eyes the Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades had been exposed as the tool of the "sectional societies" against them. As a fighting body this organisation was useless as it only covered the area of any likely dispute since a federation to be effective needed to cover all the major industries. Those not involved could then, on a massive scale, support those who were.

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1 Notes on the Engineering Trade Lockout 1897-98, p.14 onwards, subscriptions quote, p.10.

A new system of collective bargaining, a permanent employers' organisation and a new industry-wide procedure for dealing with disputes, emerged from the dispute. In future the Executive Council would be held responsible by the employers for upholding the terms of settlement. This tended to place them between the employers on one side and a membership, schooled in craft traditions and therefore very autonomously minded, on the other. By and large the Executive Council did not regret their accession to such responsibility.

"The terms of settlement, however, upon which work was resumed by the men, recognised and adopted the principle of collective bargaining on most and discussion on any condition of employment, and therefore laid the foundations for a better organisation of the trade."<sup>1</sup>

But because the settlement was imposed upon a defeated Society the Executive Council were placed in a very difficult position. Upholding the agreements was often in many eyes concomitant with surrender to a hated foe. And the Executive Council's somewhat over enthusiastic acceptance of the new system gave added strength to this view. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the employers' insistence upon a total victory, and in particular their refusal to concede the 51 hour week in exchange for the final settlement, was an error. A compromise of this kind, though still very much to the employers' advantage, would have been easier to sustain. A compromise would have enabled the Executive Council to argue that at least the Society had obtained some benefit from the terms of settlement. That, with added strength, the Society could use the new system of bargaining to achieve its objectives. Instead they appeared to defend a system from which the Society had obtained nothing. The new bargaining system was associated with the loss of local power, the attack upon "the craft", and an Executive Council which sought more power. The Engineering Employers Federation never considered any alternative to the policy they adopted and given their views about managerial prerogative and craft unionism they were bound to seek total victory.

There was to be considerable criticism of the Executive Council's conduct of the dispute and this was often linked with a desire to maintain local autonomy; a desire which was incompatible with the procedure for avoiding

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1 Barnes, 'Workshop to War Cabinet', p. 49.



disputes. Two of the organising District Delegates, James Radcliffe and Frank Rose, were suspended in November 1898. Radcliffe was suspended over his action during a wage dispute in Leeds in September.

"We had some difficulty in restraining the men however, and the more so as Mr. Radcliffe at this time was engaged in arguing with us and putting to them that their right of local action was being unjustly interfered with."

Rose objected to the Council's conduct of the dispute but was also concerned about the 'right to local action' and both these issues were used by 'opposition' candidates in Society elections.<sup>1</sup>

5. "The Labour war to come"

The 1890's were a period of conflict, change, uncertainty and heightened expectation hardly matched by fulfilment. New unionism and the first effective emergence of Socialist ideas at the TUC marked the beginning of the decade. The employers, before the opening of the depression years, waged an effective attack upon the new unions; the defence of property, managerial rights, the restrictive, unpatriotic character of trade unions became a familiar theme. New unionism hung on to survive for better days.

Employers became organised; companies were becoming bigger and the trust and oligopoly were increasingly familiar. Labour disputes were on a larger scale and more often involved employers' organisations. The mining lockout of 1893 involved 300,000 men and was the biggest dispute the country had then known. It lasted sixteen weeks and ended in what could reasonably be presented as a victory for the Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB). A new system of collective bargaining for the federation area was established; the MFGB by effectively stopping the pits established its power. A little

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1 Quote from Executive Council Circular on Suspension of Organising Delegates, 12 November 1898. The suspensions are described in Chapter six.

earlier (November 1892-January 1893) a dispute in cotton involving 50,000 workers had occurred which ended again in a new system of collective bargaining - the Brooklands agreement. Both the Miners and Cotton Workers striking against wage reductions had to fight strong employers' organisations in conditions of economic weakness because of the depressed state of trade, but emerged from the disputes in a stronger position.

This was also the period of the rapid growth of trade unionism on the railways. Railway competition had by this time practically ended, the more powerful railway companies insisting that for safety reasons a military type of discipline was necessary and that therefore no recognition could be given to the trade unions. Badly paid, and suffering a particularly severe accident rate, the railway unions were gradually struggling to a position where they could challenge their employers. In 1897, with 90,000 members, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants very nearly forced a showdown. It was only a matter of time before a national railway strike occurred. The engineers alone took the offensive on the eight-hour day. While others sought recognition, bargaining rights and survival, the engineers campaigned for what had become the foremost demand of the trade union movement. By 1897 with improved trade they were ready to strike for this demand in London. The Executive Council and the London Joint Committee, had every expectation of success. As we have seen this expectation was not realised. American ideas of technology were not the only ideas which had crossed the Atlantic. Dyer was most impressed with Carnegie's methods and results.<sup>1</sup> "Free labour" was used (tho' probably without much success) and anti-union benefit schemes canvassed. For a time the A.S.E. took the threat to its existence seriously.

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1 Letter to 'The Times', 6 September 1897. Article 23 September

It is important to remember that the engineers were still widely regarded as the most powerful force in the trade union movement and their defeat, called by Robert Blatchford "The Trade Union Sedan" led to a great deal of concern about the state of the Movement. The engineers were defeated because they were faced by a more powerful force, claimed Blatchford. An effective federation might have been more powerful than the employers.

"The voluntary levy suggested by the London Conference has apparently not been adopted." But the fact must be faced that "the other unions are to blame .... for not coming to the rescue .... But British trade unions are either selfish or foolish, or impotent, and have never yet displayed the smallest capacity for bold or generous united action ..... The simple fact is that the trade unions are badly drilled, badly organised and badly led."

We need a strong federation worked "upon democratic lines by means of the initiative and the referendum. The delegate system is a failure ..... Meanwhile the engineers are beaten and the other unions are utterly unprepared for war. But war is coming all the sooner because their ranks are disunited and their leaders demoralised and incompetent."<sup>1</sup>

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1 Clarion 29 January 1898.

The labour struggles took place against an increasing awareness of the 'social problem' and in particular the scale and depth of poverty in the country.<sup>1</sup> Unemployment was a fear that even the most skilled workers knew. By the side of this poverty existed an increasingly lavish ostentatious wealthy class whose activities were increasingly publicised.

In the middle of the dispute, while the employers were proclaiming the disaster that would follow the granting of a forty eight hour week, Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee took place. This display of splendour and richness must have appeared, to the engineers, as oddly at variance with the 'laws of political economy' they were being compelled to accept.

#### 6. The departure from the T.U.C.

By the end of the dispute the A.S.E. was disillusioned with the T.U.C. A trade union federation was widely canvassed, and in June 1898 a tiny vote of members agreed by 4,065 to 580 to support a scheme of this kind.

Legal limitation of hours was now a firm policy as was shown by the instructions given to the Congress delegates for 1898. Support was given to the following resolution:

"That the time has arrived when the hours of labour should be limited to eight per day in all trades and occupations in the U.K., and that the Parliamentary Committee be instructed to draft a bill on the lines of the resolution, with a view to getting it passed through parliament and made a law of the country".<sup>2</sup>

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1 See Appendix I. 'Increased destitution in Manchester'

2 Monthly Report, September 1898.

The A.S.E. delegation reported that Congress was unsatisfactory.

"The resolutions which had been sent in condemnatory of the Parliamentary Committee for inaction during the eight hours dispute were discussed, and, as we expected, voted out. That the Parliamentary Committee as a body was, during the dispute, passive and indifferent, that one or two of its members were hostile to the men, was obvious at the time to any observer of even less than average intelligence. The Committee gave effect to the Birmingham Congress only in a half-hearted formal manner in a statement issued to and reaching the trade unions about a month after the Birmingham Congress was over, and contributed no financial help till after some of the Societies engaged in the dispute were hopelessly bankrupt; and moreover, it was notorious at the time that the influence of one of its members was used in preventing the members of his society taking part in the dispute which loyalty to co-workers and the common good alike dictated".<sup>1</sup>

In March 1898 a striker named Pentrey, at Messrs. Mail McFarlanes Tyne Dock, was put to work as a smith, he was 20 years of age and his wages were reduced from 24/- to 12/- per week. On Saturday April 5 the smiths who were members of the 'Cooperative Smiths Society', left work "as a protest against the above infringement of the smiths' trade".<sup>2</sup> Three smiths who were members of the A.S.E. took their places on the following Monday.

The Smiths' Society protested to the Parliamentary Committee and eventually in December 1898 three members of the Committee, C.W. Bow<sup>er</sup>man, W. Mullin and D. Holmes were appointed "to act as arbitrators between the Societies".<sup>3</sup> This was accepted by the A.S.E.

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1 Monthly Report, October 1898

2 T.U.C. report 1899, p.36.

3 T.U.C. report 1899, p.36.

In defence the A.S.E. claimed:-

Had they had intimation of a dispute "and we had been asked to keep our men away, probably we should not have inquired very closely as to the reason why, but simply have asked our men to keep clear and allow the parties to settle their differences. We had no such intimation. Probably the Cooperative Smiths were averse at that time to raising the question of cooperation with us seeing that they had been for the few months before busily at work cooperating with the employers with whom we had been in conflict on the question of the eight hours".<sup>1</sup> When the Executive Council came to look at the dispute they discovered that the man in question, Pentrey, was a dumb mute who in their opinion had been badly treated by the Cooperative Smiths. Also that the lower wage rate was given because he was learning the job.

The arbitrators found in favour of the Smiths, "That we recommend the A.S.E. to at once withdraw their members from Messrs. Mail, McFarlane and Co." <sup>2</sup>  
The A.S.E. Executive Council refused:

"That Mr. Woods be informed that before we can advise our members to implement the recommendation of Messrs. Holmes, Bowman<sup>er</sup> and Mullin we shall require an undertaking from the Cooperative Smiths to withdraw the embargo now in force against the employment of our members in all shops where they unjustly claim exclusive possession, and a further undertaking to remove the barrier placed in the way of the lad Pentrey of acquiring by a legitimate apprenticeship his legal right to work at the trade".<sup>3</sup>

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1 Monthly Report, August 1899

2 T.U.C. report 1899, p.37.

3 Executive Council Minutes, 18 May 1899.

Broadberry, Golightly, Crompton and Gray were in favour with Taylor neutral. Gardner and Hooson wanted to accept the arbitrators' decision under protest. After further correspondence:-

"We have no option but to at once sever our connection with the Trade Union Congress".<sup>1</sup>

Only Gardner opposed the motion.

It is impossible to believe that but for the dispute and ill-feeling between the A.S.E. and the Parliamentary Committee, and also between the A.S.E. and small societies like the Smiths who remained at work instead of supporting the eight-hour movement, that a trivial dispute of this kind would have led to the exclusion of the A.S.E. from the T.U.C.

"The leaders in other trade unions feel rather sore about the action of the A.S.E. They are reminded of the action of the engineers in throwing overboard the Engineering Trades Federation; established some years ago at Newcastle, after being parties to the compact .....

"There was also a good deal of friction between some of the engineering trade unions and of unions of allied trades in respect of the engineering dispute which led to the lockout and the feeling has not altogether subsided".<sup>2</sup>

Despite the Executive Council's opposition a vote of members in 1905 by 10,928 to 9,227 favoured a re-affiliation.<sup>3</sup> Council's attitude was unchanged by the 1905 Congress.

"The delegates say, in recording their general impressions of the Congress that on the whole the gathering was disappointing. There is a growing feeling amongst trade unionists with whom we are in contact that the Congress as a factor in the labour movement, has outlived its usefulness.

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 20 July 1899.

2 Engineering Magazine Industrial Notes, September 1 1899.

3 Monthly Report, May 1905.

"The mere reproduction of resolutions demanding legislative remedies for most of our industrial evils, without any real effort being made to back such resolutions has led to decline in real interest and active sympathy with Congress work.

"On the whole, then, we do not consider that the return of our Society to Congress has been a step forward, and certainly it is not an unmixed blessing. As however, we are committed to attendance at Congress for three years we have only to make the best of the situation".<sup>1</sup>

At the Delegate Meeting held in 1907 it was again decided to withdraw after the Congress of that year. Up to 1914 the A.S.E. was to remain outside the T.U.C.

## 7. The Federation Movement

After the defeat two courses were open to the A.S.E. The Society could seek to re-build its industrial strength by recruitment and by developing new industrial policies and there was also political action to be considered. Certainly the A.S.E. became committed to the Labour Representation Committee after 1902 although there is little evidence to suggest that experience of the dispute contributed significantly to this.<sup>2</sup> Most of the leadership from the mid 1890's were supporters of political action but their problem was to relate this to the requirements of the A.S.E. The A.S.E. had suffered an industrial defeat followed by challenges to the Society's organisation on the shop floor and there was no clear way in which political action could affect this. Further, unlike the miners, and to a small extent

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1 Monthly Report, October 1905

2 See Chapter Seven



the cotton workers, engineers (and particularly skilled engineers) were never sufficiently concentrated to provide the bulk of the electorate in any particular constituency. Thus independent political action was dependant upon the development of the wider political movement. This depended upon many factors over which the A.S.E. had little control.

An industrial movement to enhance the Society's strength was more relevant to the immediate situation and could be influenced more directly. Further, by the mid 1890's such a movement was being widely discussed. The T.U.C. was incapable in many eyes of deploying the full resources of labour with maximum effect. It was a passive political pressure group organisation dominated by a conservative leadership and its behaviour during the engineering lockout strongly confirmed this view.

Movements to effectively concentrate the diffused strength of the entire trade union movement were frequently considered and sometimes attempted during the history of British trade unionism. There were serious practical difficulties about policy control and union autonomy, the dangers of precipitous action, and the likelihood that employers would attack any new organisation before it could become established.

During the 1890's it was a federation of trade unions which was under consideration. In 1898 to some engineers this appeared to offer the prospect of redressing the industrial power balance in their favour. The A.S.E.'s attitude towards the Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades was always to be lukewarm. They took part in some of the preliminary negotiations but when the Federation was established in 1890:

"The Council decided, after a careful consideration of the proposed scheme of federation, that until the rules of our Society are altered by a delegate meeting, the federation could not be made binding on our members ..... it would not be wise to proceed further in the matter".<sup>1</sup>

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1 Monthly Report, November 1890.

There were two difficulties about an engineering federation from the A.S.E.'s point of view. The A.S.E. was an 'Amalgamation' and opposed to sectional societies; a federation could strengthen the smaller societies, partly because the A.S.E.'s strength would be available in some form to assist the smaller trade unions.

"That the London District Committee report ..... be approved except the appointment of two delegates to attend the conference of the proposed Federation of Metal Trades which is disapproved on the grounds that the E.C. think some steps should be taken to bring about the amalgamation of the societies named instead of federating with them".<sup>1</sup>

The other objection was of a practical nature. It concerned the problem of voting; in almost any grouping of engineering unions the A.S.E. would have more members than all the rest put together. Either, with one member one vote, the A.S.E. would dominate the organisation or the A.S.E. would not have full voting strength and would be at the mercy of smaller unions.

The failure of the Engineering Federation to support the Allied Societies in the dispute, and the argument that little support during a strike could be relied upon from other unions in engineering and shipbuilding who might themselves be involved, confirmed the A.S.E.'s views of the Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades.

Events leading up to the dispute, and in particular the establishment of an Employers' Federation, convinced the more radical A.S.E. members of the need for 'a fighting' organisation of trade unions. Tom Mann wrote:-

"The A.S.E. has not yet learnt the necessity for forming part of a real federation of all trades connected with this particular profession, so that the A.S.E. men themselves are suffering seriously from the effects of

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 19 August 1895.

sectional isolation ..... A fighting force is wanted ..... a genuine federation of the societies connected with the trades". Meantime the Society should organise a membership drive, take up the eight-hour day, and end systematic overtime."<sup>1</sup>

This was written before the dispute. Barnes in February 1897 was more general:

"Not until workers realise the irresistible power of their united pennies and votes will any permanent beneficial change take place in the lot of the worker".<sup>2</sup>

An editorial in the March 1897 Monthly Report called for a federation of trade unions because of the "concentration of capital". Members were asked to give their opinions on the Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades.

Immediately before the dispute the A.S.E. Executive Council was considering joining the established Federation and only after defeat did they support the idea of a wider more ambitious federation of trade unions.

The defeat of the A.S.E. gave impetus to ideas of a wide federation of trade unions able to sustain each other during long strikes or lock outs. 'Clarion' had been campaigning for a federation of trade unions since the beginning of 1896. Dissatisfied with the T.U.C. federation plan, 'Clarion' produced a scheme under which the unions would, in the event of a strike or lock out, guarantee those in dispute a sum not to exceed the weekly income of the receiving society, based upon a subscription of 3d. or 6d. per head. The scheme appeared attractive to small societies who would receive much more than their weekly income during a dispute. Large societies, like the A.S.E. could be guaranteed much less money per head during a national dispute. There were other problems - how would the committee decide whether to support a strike?

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1 A.S.E. Monthly Report, January 1897.

2 A.S.E. Monthly Report, February 1897.

What would happen if several strikes conducted together greatly increased the subscription of those receiving low wages?

These questions were never tested. In July 'Clarion' set up the 'Federal Labour Parliament' representing individuals not trade unions. It soon became clear that this venture could not succeed and it was not long before it collapsed amid recriminations.<sup>1</sup>

The T.U.C. started the process that was to lead to the General Federation of Trade Unions (G.F.T.U.) in 1893 when five motions calling for a federation of trades appeared on the agenda. Two resolutions were eventually discussed, one moved by Pete Curran called upon the Parliamentary Committee to draw up a scheme for bringing labour organisations "into close relationship on the lines of the American Federation, so as united action may be taken when an industrial crisis arrives". The resolution was carried without a division.

Crompton of the A.S.E. moved that the Parliamentary Committee seek to arrange conferences of "kindred trades" to facilitate the establishment of single industrial unions. This was piously carried by 99 votes to 4 and disappeared into history without a trace of effect.<sup>2</sup>

The 1894 report of the Parliamentary Committee pointed out that four years before a "code of rules" was placed before congress without effect. These rules were reproduced. They were similar to the eventually established G.F.T.U.

The purpose of the Federation was to be the creation of a fund. Societies had to have twelve months membership before being eligible for benefit. Membership fees were to be 6d. per member and the annual contribution to be fixed by conference. Strike pay was to be 5/- per week and was only to be paid if more than 7½ per cent of a Society's membership was in dispute.

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1 Appendix II

2 Report of 1893 T.U.C.

Congress elected a committee of fifteen "to draw up a basis of common agreement for the purpose of federating all trades and labour organisations".

The Parliamentary Committee was not enthusiastic; in 1895 they reported:-

"This Committee (on Federation) during the year, has held several sittings, and have drawn up a scheme containing their views ..... It is regretted .... that .... specific and clear instructions were not given as to payment etc. of the expenses of the Committee ..... (A) misunderstanding arose between the Parliamentary Committee and the Federation Committee ..... the ..... present congress (is expected to) lay down specific instructions to guide the Parliamentary Committee ....."

The committee's scheme was rather vague. It suggested sectional federations of "kindred societies and industries" and a central "Federation of Federations".<sup>1</sup>

On the fifth day of Congress, Wilkie (Secretary, Associated Shipwrights Society), moved and the Secretary of the Federation Committee Fred Hammill (a member of the A.S.E. and London Trades Council) seconded, that the Federation Committee "convene meetings of representatives from each society to form the executive" of the group. "After a number of groups had been formed the Committee to convene a general council ....."<sup>2</sup>

Hammill claimed that the scheme though not perfect, was the best that could not be framed. They had realised more and more, day by day that the strike and lock out policy was a policy of the past, and they had therefore endeavoured to substitute conciliation arbitration, and mediation".

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1 End of T.U.C. report for 1895, "Suggested Rules for a British Trades Federation".

2 T.U.C. Report for 1895.

Hardly the call for a fighting federation. The vote on a show of hands was 108 for and 68 against. A card vote was called twice (there was "a good wrangling and squabbling") - the first vote was 346,000 for, 405,000 against, the second 330,000 for and 463,000 against. The 1895 Congress was where the Parliamentary Committee imposed the new standing orders bringing in the card vote, and laying down that delegates must either be trade union officials or working at the trade. This meant that it was an unusually bitter Congress and the new card votes caused confusion.

Federation was next raised at the 1897 Congress. A. Clark of the Railway General Workers Union moved;-

"That trade unionists ..... form a federation to render mutual assistance in disputes ..... the representation be proportional ..... that a committee of thirteen be elected (to) report before January 1 1898".

It was seconded by A.T. Dipper, National Amalgamated Union of Labour. Isaac Mitchell, A.S.E., declared:-

"Had a scheme of federation, embracing a majority of the trades in the country been in existence twelve months ago, the engineers would not at the present moment have been out on strike for an eight-hour day". (cheers)

Johnson of the Carpenters and Joiners said that in federation lay the workers' salvation.

The resolution was passed with one dissentient but the miners "took no part in the vote".<sup>1</sup> A committee was elected with the following members:- R. Knight (Boilermakers), Parnell (Cabinet Makers), I. Mitchell (A.S.E.) A. Wilkie (Shipwrights), W.H. Wilkinson (Weavers) A.T. Dipper (National Amalgamated Union of Labour), A. Clark (General Railway Workers Union) J. Inglis (Blacksmiths), T.A. Flyn (Tailors), W.H. Hornidge (Boot & Shoe Operatives), J. Cronin (Steelworkers), John Robertson (Scottish Typographers) and H. Johnson (Carpenters).

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1 T.U.C. Report for 1897.

The Committee presented a scheme which was discussed at a special Congress in Manchester on 24-27 January 1899. No very ambitious proposals were made. The Federation was to have a general council consisting of two delegates from each society. A card vote could be taken. District committees were also to be established.

Two scales of contributions at 6d. per member and 3d. per member per quarter were instituted and benefits at 5/- or 2/6 per member. Disputes were to be considered after eight weeks. There was to be arbitration for disputes between members. This was a scheme for a small strike insurance fund and little else.

The A.S.E. supported the setting up of the Federation Committee but had reservations about the report.

Any federation, to be effective, must provide for extra payments when "the trade union movement is pitted against an immense force of capital". The facilities for negotiating with the employers were welcomed. Yet "the preponderance of force on either side will always be the determining factor in such negotiations. Hence the need for federation not only of kindred trades directly interdependent, and, therefore, liable to be involved in a common dispute, but one of dissimilar trades whereby the risk of dispute covering any considerable number of them at any one time is reduced to a minimum ..... (We) think that the contributions proposed are not sufficiently high to meet the requirements ..... Again the plan reproduces certain anomalies in representation ..... the unit of government is the Society irrespective of size, so that the small sectional union would have a power and influence altogether disproportionate to its influence outside. Thus the five sectional societies in the engineering trade, with a membership of about one fifth of, would have a voting strength equal to five times that of the A.S.E.

"True, provision is made, votes being taken on the representative principle on demand being made, but the anomaly in regard to the initiation of policy is not effected thereby. We hope, therefore, that the plan may be amended .... These small societies, as we know to our cost, exist at all only by trading on the cupidity of their few members who are not called upon to pay sufficiently high a contribution to build up a fighting fund....." .....

Rivalries which arise out of the "overlapping function consequent upon the existence of many executives" make it undesirable "to encourage the continual existence of small sectional unions as is done by the Shipbuilding and Engineering Trades Federation and reproduced by the special committee's plans".

'Clarion' attacked the conservative nature of the T.U.C. scheme. There were a number of attacks upon trade unionists who though nominally supporters of the 'Clarion's' view were associated with the G.F.T.U. plan.<sup>1</sup>

Tom Mann warned against the extreme optimism of some federation enthusiasts:-

If workers federate what is to stop the employers doing so?

"In what way would federation have benefitted the engineers for instance? Funds for an indefinite fight .... But it should not be forgotten that the engineers fought for seven months, and they were not financially exhausted at the close but continuation of the fight did not augur well for success; and if by federation other trades had financially assisted the engineers what would have prevented the employers from federating equally effectively and conducting the fight more extensively? I believe thoroughly in the necessity for federation nationally and internationally, but what I am guarding against is a tendency observable in some quarters of resting our

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson of the Carpenters who served on the T.U.C. Committee and Clark of the General Railway Workers Union for example. See 'Clarion', 30 April 1898.



case for successful action in the future purely upon federation of trade unions ... is it not the vast mass of unorganised that we ought to be giving attention to?"<sup>1</sup>

The A.S.E. Executive Council decided to take a ballot vote on the T.U.C. federation scheme.<sup>2</sup> Affiliation was approved by 14,531 to 1,807 and the payment of 6d. per quarter instead of 3d. (per member) by 7,118 to 5,584. The Council affiliated on 90 per cent of the membership - 72,000<sup>3</sup>

The General Federation of Trade Unions (G.F.T.U.) came into existence with 350,00 members.

"The number represented is not so large, compared with the numbers represented at Manchester is the cause of some anomalies of representation in giving effect to the scheme formulated in January. There were represented at Manchester nearly a million trade unionists. Hence representation on the management committee, if most of these had joined, would have been on the basis of each of the fifteen of such management committee representing about 70,000. As it is, with the smaller number each management committee man represents about 20,000. But, while the basis of representation is thus reduced from 70,000 to 20,000, yet no society, however large, can have more than one representative on the committee. Thus while our numbers are a fourth of the whole, and we pay a fourth of the income of the Federation, we are entitled only to a chance of a fifteenth part of the representation on its management committee. However, in this connection it may be remembered that there can be no money spent for a year, and by that time there will be an opportunity at the next General Council

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1 Tom Mann "The Workers Union", 'Clarion' 7 May 1898

2 Executive Council Minutes, 28 February 1898

3 General Office Report, May 1899

meeting of revising the rule in the light of the circumstances then obtaining".<sup>1</sup>

Isaac Mitchell was elected General Secretary of the G.F.T.U. and this was probably thought to increase the A.S.E.'s influence.

Six months later district committees of the G.F.T.U. were established<sup>2</sup> but the small number of affiliated societies made them ineffective bodies.

The G.F.T.U. retained its original constitution almost unchanged. In 1907 it still had only 340,000 members.<sup>3</sup> The affiliated societies took part in the trade union membership growth from 1910-1914 and so raised the affiliated membership to 849,200.<sup>4</sup> But the G.F.T.U. remained a pale shadow of what some of its founders had hoped for.

The attempt to establish an effective fighting federation of trade unions was probably doomed from the start for the reasons advanced by a miners' leader, William Straker<sup>5</sup>:- (1) federation appealed to weaker organisations and would not be necessary if the movement became effectively organised, (2) there was the difficulty about autonomy and, (3) if the federation were firmly established, concern about preserving the funds and organisation of the federation would probably make its industrial policy cautious. It might be that a "fighting organisation" had to have nothing to lose.

'Clarion', and the Clarion Federation is an interesting study which cannot be fully undertaken here. But a number of points can be made. It was the most widely read Socialist paper and was consequently influential yet its understanding of the trade union movement was very incomplete. What is perhaps most interesting about 'Clarion' politics which led Blatchford to federation is

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1 Monthly Report, August 1899

2 Executive Council Minutes, 26 March 1900

3 G.F.T.U. Annual Report, 1908

4 G.F.T.U. Annual Report, 1914

5 See Appendix II, . . .

how similar in some respects they are to the militant ideas of 1910-20. No trust in leaders or political parties. Belief that if working class industrial power could be concentrated its effect would be overwhelming, sympathetic action, and if necessary a general strike. It is likely that part of the antecedence of the 1910-20 unofficial movements are to be found here.

The A.S.E.'s attitude to federation was unrealistic. There was no reason to expect the Parliamentary Committee to produce a strong federation scheme. Why should they help establish a potential threat to their own power?

When the G.F.T.U. scheme was produced despite criticism, the Executive Council did not produce an alternative scheme. Although the Monthly Report carried a good deal about the 'Clarion' scheme the Council never discussed it. No proper attempt was made to discover how many of the larger societies would join the G.F.T.U.

From the "redressing of industrial power" view the G.F.T.U. was worthless to the A.S.E. In fact smaller societies were leaning on the A.S.E.'s power. Its use was that, together with the Labour Party, it enabled the Society to remain outside the T.U.C. without isolation from the Labour Movement.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Technical Change and its Effects. The Bitter Struggle Against the Premium Bonus System

The unprecedented advance in machine technology which occurred from the mid 1880's threatened craft unionism by undermining existing skill and job demarcations. These developments produced a standardised, capitally intensive industry employing fewer old-style craftsmen but with comparatively higher earnings.

The full effects of technical change on the structure of the engineering industry were not apparent until after the War - although already before 1914, the growth of the manufacture of sewing machines, cars and cycles<sup>1</sup> where new, highly mechanised, methods of production were widely used, was impressive.

These new branches of the industry were most dramatically to highlight the potentialities of improved machine technology allied to the more efficient utilisation of labour. But even the more traditional parts of engineering - shipbuilding, marine engineering, machine tools, machine making and all forms of general engineering were experiencing technical innovations which tended to change working methods.

The A.S.E. was a craft society and felt perpetually worried by technical change. Craft responsibility was central to the A.S.E.'s attitude to work. The Society had craft rules which were unilaterally enforced before 1898. A craftsman accepted responsibility for his work and determined how his work was carried out. He owned some of his own tools and those too expensive to own he controlled. It was not considered to be the function of managerial supervision to interfere in the method and performance of work. The management could legitimately dismiss the slipshod and incompetent since the A.S.E. sought only to enrol competent, careful workers of good personal

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<sup>1</sup> 54,000 were employed in the manufacture of cars and cycles in 1907. By 1912 the number was 78,000. This represented 40 per cent of the shipbuilding labour force.

character.

The new machine technology tended to change, and in some cases eliminate, craft work, but more seriously it brought the labour manager ("feed and speed man", "supervisor") to the point of production. Tradition and craft were tending to be replaced by flow production, the subdivision of work and simplified processes controlled by the stop watch.

Between 1888 and 1914 technical change was rapid but its spread was uneven. There was seldom a sharp break by which skills were devalued. Craft issues arose but in an unco-ordinated fashion. A.S.E. rules were somewhat widened and enrolment continued as, in the past, without any clear realisation that a fitter or turner in 1910 was probably less skilled and adaptable than twenty years before. By these means the A.S.E. "followed its membership" into process production and therefore accepted a subdivision of the craft.

It was extremely difficult for the Executive Council at any one time to take stock of the craft situation. The worker who was seeking to retain craft status in the face of extreme difficulties was likely to be increasingly committed to craft unionism. There is some evidence to suggest that the ideology of craft was more tenaciously upheld as craft divisions became more difficult to sustain.

The employers by ostensibly refusing, under the terms of settlement, to negotiate about work practices, both limited the Executive Council's ability to control the memberships collective actions at the point of production, and apparently made superfluous any attempt by the Society to resolve the craft status - multi skill problem.

It must be admitted however that even had the employers been prepared to recognise the A.S.E.'s legitimate concern with changes at the point of production, there is little doubt that the A.S.E. would have continued to be mainly concerned about "the craft" and the preservation of craft distinctions.

The conditions of craft unionism were concerned with an ideology of work which was entirely in conflict with either crude economic man,<sup>1</sup> or the technological evolution of work which developed when the "machine revolution" was pushed to its logical conclusion.

Machines replaced manual dexterity and made possible the repetitious production of exactly equal parts. Like the machine the worker was expected to repeat exactly similar operations. Work became a drudgery and if there were compensations, they existed in earning enough to live prosperously outside the factory. At the end of the Nineteenth Century for very many workers their job was monotonous and physically exhausting but for engineering craftsmen this was not generally so. The old style craftsmen who fashioned a product from the raw metal by 1890 might have almost ceased to exist but many engineering workers would still have had skills which they used and in so doing achieved a sense of pride and usefulness.

At any particular time it is very difficult, if not impossible, to measure the degree to which any group of workers derive satisfaction from their work. But in the years leading up to 1914 members of the A.S.E. could remember a time when they exercised more control over "the job" and "the tools" and this genuine comparison was often exaggerated into a belief in the passing of a sort of "golden age". This mythical golden age of craft however, appears to have exercised as much influence over the minds of skilled workers as the equally mythical economic man exercised over the minds of employers.

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1 Reading the pages of "Engineering" or "Engineering Magazine" from the late 1890's one is struck by the implicit assumption that work is a purely economic function. There is no understanding of what craft unionism stood for or of the actual conditions under which people worked.

It is impossible to understand the importance of the craft issues and the extent to which "the point of production" dominated the interests of engineering workers, without appreciating the nature of the technical change with which they were faced.

### Technical Change

The change can be summed up as the development of new materials and techniques which enabled machines to work faster and with greater precision. Tasks which formerly demanded individual skill and experience were mechanised. Cutting tools were greatly improved and during the 1890's machines capable of using, not only high speed steel, but the more effective steel alloys, were introduced:<sup>1</sup>

"..... tools had been developed that could cut 150 feet of mild steel a minute without lubricants. Finally in 1900 F.W. Taylor and Maunsel White demonstrated their high speed chromium-tungsten steel at the Paris exposition. The metal ran red hot, yet did not soften or dull. Again it was the machine that lagged, and heavier models had to be built, four to six times as powerful as those using carbon steel, before the possibilities of the new metal could be exploited. By the first world war, speeds of 300 and 400 feet per minute had been achieved on light cuts, and it was common for a single tool to remove twenty pounds of waste a minute. Little remembered now, this innovation was one of the wonders of its day. One senses, reading contemporary accounts, the near incredibility of observers at seeing steel pierced and cut like

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1 Tungsten, Vanadium and Manganese alloy were developed in the 1850's and 1860's. They were "self-cooling, outlasted regular tool steel five or six times and could cut 60 feet a minute". "Machine development took 30 years to catch up". The Cambridge Economic History of Europe, Vol. VI. Technological change and Industrial Development in Western Europe 1750-1914. David S. Landes, p.524.

butter".<sup>1</sup>

The cutting tools were matched not only by stronger machines but by machines capable of a vastly greater productivity. During the 1890's the turret lathe<sup>2</sup> became capable of four or five times its former productivity by use of multiple spindles.

"..... which made it possible to work on several pieces simultaneously. Eventually banks of these machines were set up, using cross slides as well as turrets to work away side by side ..... The only labour required was for occasional tool setting and replenishing the supply of raw material".<sup>3</sup>

Increasing mechanisation and the consequent "speed up" meant that turners became, increasingly, just turners. The old style turner had to "exhibit all round ability" and had done a variety of jobs including plain boring, boring, reaming, screw cutting and drilling. Ancillary functions (e.g. marking out work, speeds and feeds, preparing the cutting tools) were lost to specialists. By 1914 in many establishments only in the tool room did the turner remain a multi-functional worker.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1890's machines, outside the area which came to be known

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1 Landers, p.524-525.

A whole series of developments at this time made possible the advance of machine technology. Two of these which are easily overlooked are - the introduction of forced lubrication "which made possible quiet running at high speeds with little wear and without risk of seizing (Landers, p.526); and the ball bearing ..... (which) by distributing the pressure over lines rather than points of contact .... made possible savings of as much as 90 per cent of power losses in shaft transmission." Landers, p.527.

2 "The machine was equipped with a rotating turret that carried as many as eight cutting tools, each of which could be brought to bear on the work in turn". Landers, p.526.

3 Landers, p.536, see also "Industrial Change and its Effects upon Labour 1900-1914" by A.L. Levine. London thesis, July 1954, p.130-131.

4 Levine, p.156-157.



as the machine room, benefitted from harder metals and new materials. Milling<sup>1</sup> and grinding<sup>2</sup> machines became more effective taking "fine" work from the turner and "finishing" from the fitter. The development in the United States in 1893 of synthesised carborundum which replaced emery (carborundum is harder and finer) allowed grinding to become:-

"A process of the highest precision, and the way was open for thrusting upon the grinding machine functions vastly more important than that of sharpening tools". Precision grinding now became possible and led to a "discernible tendency to relegate the lathe principally to roughing out work".<sup>3</sup> The use of lathe and grinding machines allowed cylindrical parts to be ground to the exact gauge.

"This reduces fitting to a minimum and the result is a higher grade of work than can possibly be produced by the most skilful 'turner' or lathe hand. By this system it is possible for the lathe attendant to be a comparatively unskilled lathe operator, and to attend two or three machines taking heavy cuts and using fast feeds". This was the American system "As contrasted with these methods, the old way of turning nearly to size, and then filing to fit, is still followed with rare exceptions in European shops". This was written in 1899, and the author<sup>4</sup> went on to point to the future, again using American industry as his example:

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1 The milling machine was not widely used in Britain until the 1890's, largely because the machine lacked, until then, a sufficiently tough material for efficient use. This machine was an American development dating from 1861. "Its distinguishing characteristic is the use of a revolving multiple cutter, which resembles a small cylinder or truncated cone with saw-toothed sides" several advantages over single point tools "relatively wide cutting edges, continuous motion and the possibility of profiling the teeth to permit the production of any geometrical shape desired". Landers, p.536.

2 The grinding machine was also American (1864). It is a wheel of abrasive material.

3 Levine, p. 291.

4 H.F.L. Orcutt "Machine Shop Management in Europe and America" Engineering Magazine, February 1899.

"The general tendency is for American manufacturers to reduce the great number of workers to low wage attendants, to elevate a small number of skilled workers to a high position with a big wage, and to rely mainly on labour-saving machinery, not on a large number of average workers".<sup>1</sup>

Rapid interchange of parts between machines with the minimum of human intervention was probably the most important factor of the new machine technology. The jig exemplified this principle.<sup>2</sup> This tool came into use between 1900 and 1914.<sup>3</sup> It:-

"increased the tempo of manufacture and furthered the displacement of skill. In the machine shop the jig not only brought a new rapidity to machine operations but was also a de-skilling device ..... it facilitated highly accurate reproduction of individual components", its influence "spread beyond the machine shop into the fitting shop .... old style fitting was reduced and erecting times cut down".<sup>4</sup>

The effects of the advance in machine technique on fitting and turning, and upon the skill structure of the industry were widely appreciated:

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- 1 I have concentrated on the "machine revolution" because it was this that was transforming the conditions of fitters and turners who made up the bulk of A.S.E. members. Other forms of technical change were also important, e.g. Electricity was rapidly replacing other sources of power and adding flexibility to the workshop. Better transmission of power was achieved by the use of chains instead of belts. By 1904 in the shipyards portable pneumatic tools for riveting the hulls of ships were widely used. See Levine, p. 295. The Shipbuilding Industry (1905) by D. Pollock, p. 101-102.
  - 2 The jig or fixture is an essential part of any interchange. "Without resort to a jig or fixture the placing into correct position of a piece to be machined - for example a casting, or a forging - necessitates extremely careful setting by means of a chuck, clamps and so forth. Now, where it is desired to produce in quantity, if a jig or fixture is used this setting up operation, and "locating" may be considerably simplified, and the time necessary for this setting and locating greatly reduced. Moreover, not only is the locating of the piece done with dispatch but it is done with accuracy". Levine, p.299-300.
  - 3 Levine, p.305-306. The 1914-18 war greatly accelerated its use.
  - 4 Levine, p.299-302.

"Probably in no department of mechanical work are the contrasts between old and new methods more striking than in erecting and assembling. In the new method, machining is done accurately to dimensions; in the old, machinery and tools are mainly used for removing metal and reliance is placed on the fitter for proper working fits".<sup>1</sup>

Fitters, however, were not eliminated and machine tools appear to have been less efficient than many writers supposed. Jobs with components of great size continued to require the fitters' rectifying skill. The new methods did eliminate some old skills but they required new ones. They created more work for, what came to be known as, semi-skilled workers.<sup>2</sup> On the overall level of skill their effect was complex as the new techniques of production required greater accuracy. Micrometers became a familiar tool while the ability to work from drawings, rather than a sketch, was necessary. Higher speeds were achieved and mistakes could be costly.

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1 H.F.L. Orcutt, "Modern Machine Methods", "The Engineer", January 31, 1902.

2 The terms skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled raise problems of definition. "... the 'skilled' machine shop worker could be thought of as he who is 'capable of undertaking any job (in his particular branch of the trade)' able to work to drawings, to prepare his tools, to set up his machine, and to turn out a satisfactory job from start to finish".

Sir Alfred Herbert, Report on Women in Industry 1919 Vol. II, p.54.

Quoted by Levine, p.405.

"Semi-skilled is a term applied to an operator, who, though he has not served his time and worked through the shops as an apprentice yet has had sufficient experience to enable him to do any class of work falling within the range of a particular machine without much supervision or to undertake certain limited work at fitting or other engineering processes. He is a specialist without the general training of the craftsman.

History of Munitions, Vol. IV, p.77.

The unskilled process worker "was the type of person who when it came to operating such comparatively simple straightforward repetitious work, a person who had received little or no training and as long as he (or she) was kept to the simplest operations could be considered as belonging to the very lowest of "lesser skilled" labour". Levine p.406-407.

Many of the productive tasks became repetitive and required greater concentration than the traditional skills. Those who were regarded as non-skilled were expected to undertake responsible though routine work. The old craft conception of work was under attack; skill was still important, but this was more the skill of experience allied to technical knowledge rather than that of the hand worker.

The period 1888-1914 is one of acute concern about the competitiveness of British industry. Germany and America were rapidly undermining Britain's industrial pre-eminence<sup>1</sup> and British industry appeared to be less efficient and slower to accept change. Furthermore as compared to the United States, British productivity and investment were growing too slowly for comfort.<sup>2</sup>

International competition in part explains the employers' offensive against craft unionism. "Restrictive practices" were frequently blamed by the employers, press and the trade publications for the relative decline of the engineering industry.<sup>3</sup> Considering, however, that as from January 1898

1 For a discussion of this subject see A.L. Levine "Industrial Retardation in Britain 1880-1914" And H.J. Habakkuk "American and British Technology in the 19th Century" p.189-220.

2 Average annual percentage increases in Labour Productivity in British and American Manufacturing Industry 1870-1937.

Annual Percentage Increase in Physical Output per Worker

<u>Period</u>	<u>U.K.</u>	<u>U.S.</u>
	%	%
1870 - 1907	0.6	1.4
1870 - 1890	1.0	0.9
1890 - 1907	0.1	2.0
1907 - 1937	1.4	1.8
1907 - 1924	0.5	1.8
1924 - 1937	2.4	1.8

M.K. Frankel "British & American Manufacturing Productivity, p.103.  
Quoted by Levine, p.15.

3 See "Engineering" and "Engineering Magazine" 1898-1914. Also among many examples see Shadwell "Industrial Efficiency", E.A. Pratt "Trade Unionism and British Industry". (A reprint of articles that appeared in "The Times"). For trade union views including G.N. Barnes "Mosely Industrial Commission to the United States". (1903). D. Pollock "The Shipbuilding Industry", p.190-191.

the employers had "freedom to manage", it is hard to see what official liability the trade unions had for labour practices that were said to restrict production.

Where the unions might have been considered restrictive was in clinging to the craft structure. This was, in part, due to the extent to which any change in the skill structure became involved in questions about managerial prerogative and therefore broke down at an ideological level. The employers made no attempt to get around this problem by attempting to construct an acceptable definition of skill. We have seen how, in many respects, the new machine technology demanded a higher level of technological education and skill and it is possible that a solution to the demarcation chaos and craft pretention might well have involved the establishment of a better general level of technical education, together with the growth of a technological elite.

"Though every great modern business bristles with problems of high intellectual as well as practical movement, physical, financial and administrative, how many responsible heads of business in this country possess any expert training in mechanics, finance, economics or psychology? The very notion of the need for such training appears to almost all of them a ridiculous pandering to intellectualism which unfits men for a real business life. Though a few of them are intelligent enough to recognise that Germany has got ahead of us in some profitable trades by employing scientific experts and that the higher business training of young Americans is consistent with a rapid lucrative career, very little has been done to secure for our industries the fruits of expert thinking and training".<sup>1</sup>

Even towards their own trainee boys the engineering employers showed no great concern for their technical education.

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1 J.A. Hobson "Incentives in the New Industrial Order" (1902)

"Our enquiries show that in the engineering trade the old system of indentured apprentices has almost died out ..... A few employers recognise that the majority of boys are incapable of working, or unwilling to work at classes after their day's work is over, have allowed a certain number of hours a week for school attendance at the firm's expense. It cannot be expected that the majority who struggle against competition, will do so voluntarily".<sup>1</sup>

This gives some indication of the extent to which the implications of the new skill structure was understood by the employers.

The immediately outstanding effect of the new machine techniques was to speed up production. Accuracy and precision was made possible and with this the growth of production methods based upon the use of interchangeable parts. Standardisation was to become increasingly important. The economies of scale became more obvious as the sub-division of production and specialisation developed. The efficient use of labour, supervised production, and accurate costing became a necessary managerial concern.

Had the years 1880 - 1914 been merely characterised by technical change the whole impact on craft unionism might have been basically in terms of skill requirements. The technical changes in fact, confirmed a complete revolution in the employers' view of the part labour should play in the production process. In practice what had once been independent skilled labour was increasingly regarded as an appendage to a mechanical process.

Once a skilled, independent, class of respectable craftsmen had been necessary to the employers:

".... in the period before gauges and automatic machine tools, only a deft hand could make components that were reasonably accurate or fit them together. These men were .... masters of their techniques, able to maintain their tools as well as use them, they looked upon their equipment as their own even when it belonged to the firm". They organised "the work to their own

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1 Board of Trade Report, "Engineering after the War" (1918)

taste and convenience. The best of them 'made' the firms they worked for .... the skilled worker set his own pace instead of accomodating to that of the machine".<sup>1</sup>

The A.S.E. opposed any attempt to reduce the craftsman's control over the point of production. Piece work was opposed because it was thought to lead to a reduction of quality thus damaging "pride in the craft".<sup>2</sup>

"The freedom of management to manage" was a denial of plurality in the engineering industry. Any legitimacy the trade society, as a trade society, might have had, was withdrawn.

As new machine technology made it very difficult for the A.S.E. to defend the shop floor worker in the face of managerial demands, it is important to have some conception of its effect upon skilled workers.

#### "Labour saving" Management

The A.S.E. membership was by trade union standards extremely literate; the possible effects of technical change tended to produce concern about status. There was a wide awareness of technical developments and the managerial implications. It is necessary therefore to describe the general drift of ideas about management even where these ideas were regarded as "idealistic" or were carried into practice in a distorted form.

"Labour saving" was taken increasingly seriously in the years leading up to 1914. Severe competition, the supposed lessons of German and American experience, and technical changes which raised the whole question of how the labour force could best be used, explain this. National production was coming to be associated with

"(1)..... the fragmentation of the job into simple operations

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1 Landeg, p.534.

2 For Robert Austin's General Secretary 1885-91 view of piecework see Chapter One.

susceptible of being performed by single purpose machines run by unskilled or semi skilled hands and (2) the development of methods of manufacture so precise that assembly became routine, in other words, the production of interchangeable parts".<sup>1</sup>

The need to introduce labour saving methods, together with new methods of production associated with technological advance, called for new management skills. Management became much more concerned with the day to day operation of the production process.<sup>2</sup>

But, this change was not merely a redefinition of management's role, it could also involve a change, in what was in effect, management's view of the firm. The old view that skilled men exercised some control over the way in which work was performed easily accorded with the recognition that groups (i.e. trade unions) within the factory had rights and separate interests. New ideas of management tended to see the work process as an organic whole and this view of the productive process was also applied to industrial relations. The legitimacy of separate interests within the firm was questioned. Those who advocated "scientific management" were the most radical advocates of a new management philosophy: but even those who were not as extreme often accepted many similar organic assumptions.

"Scientific Management"<sup>3</sup> came, like many of the contemporary technical and political ideas, from the United States and is particularly associated with F.W. Taylor. It was based upon the fundamental assumption that the

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1 Lander, p.534.

2 This was to considerably affect the position of Foremen. Foremen up to 1897-98 had been in many cases respected members of the A.S.E. recognising that skilled men were responsible for how a particular job was undertaken. As management sought to decide methods of work the position of the Foremen became difficult and the engineering employers set out to divide Foremen from the men. Hence the establishment of the Foremen's Mutual Benefit Society.

3 The section on Scientific Management is based upon Urwick and Breck "The Making of Scientific Management", Vols. I and II and "The Principles of Scientific Management" by F.W. Taylor



unprecedented advance in machine and metal technology had made possible a form of management that was truly scientific. Work method problems could be solved by the application of demonstrably sound objective principles. The working population would be more efficient and receive far higher rewards. Managers would cease to be creatures of intuition and prejudice. Society at large would become very much wealthier because of efficient production.

The attractions of a doctrine of "objective" management were many. It removed the managerial decision about efficient production from the arena of conflict. The pluralist accepting the legitimacy of group conflict could concentrate on the problem of achieving an acceptable compromise about the distribution of the "fruits of labour". Arguments about the ownership of social capital appeared much less important once it was recognised that in a given social climate production would objectively follow. Scientific management took no account of the ownership of production, distribution and exchange.

Equally, for some collectivists "scientific management" provided a solution to a serious political problem. Once "production for use" was established then "objective management" would satisfy society's productive needs. The abolition of private capital would end conflict at the point of production as the purposes of production were now accepted by the working population. Lenin was an enthusiastic supporter of "Taylorism".<sup>1</sup>

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1 "The more class-conscious vanguard of the Russian proletariat has already set itself the task of raising labour discipline ..... The work must be supported and pushed ahead with all speed. We must raise the question of piecework ..... We must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system.... The task that the Soviet government must set the people in all its scope is - learn to work. The Taylor system, the last word of capitalism in this respect, like all capitalist progress, is a combination of the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements in the field of analysing mechanical motions during work, the elimination of superfluous and awkward motions, the elaboration of correct methods of work, the introduction of the best system of accounting and control etc..... We must organise in Russia the study and teaching of the Taylor system....." "The Immediate tasks of the Soviet Government", Collected Works, Vol. 27, p.258-259.

Scientific management "in its initial phases" has been defined as:-

"(a) A careful analysis of the production process, its break up into simple segments and the establishment of labour norms for each;

(b) A system of costing which enabled the firms to discover the labour cost of each operation;

(c) The elaboration of systems of incentives or supervision capable of making workers labour at maximum intensity. For practical purposes this then meant payment by results".<sup>1</sup>

The "payment by results" usually adopted was not a simple piecework system, it was a premium bonus scheme which could be applied to any job, routine or not, and, because there was a limit on the workers' earnings, the problem of accurate timing was not acute. Even a generous time would not involve unacceptably high labour costs for the employer.<sup>2</sup>

For the "scientific" manager work was a purely economic activity and production was the only consideration. Men work to produce goods as efficiently as possible and the work group had a purely economic existence without any social rights.

Craft workers followed custom and practice. The job sequence was not usually considered objectively and the advantages of the subdivision of tasks or, the fundamental reconsideration of method was ignored. Therefore, if "scientific management" was to be introduced the recommended first step was for an "expert" to watch the best workman, then to divide each job into as many separate parts as possible planning how each part could best be performed. The expert should then himself do the whole sequence of operations, timing each stage. At this point F.W. Taylor recommended that the best worker should be

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1 Essays in Labour History, Eric Hobsbawn, p.133.

2 The premium bonus is explained and analysed below.

selected and shown how to work according to the new method. He should then be offered a third more pay if he followed the new system of work, taking less time to perform tasks than hitherto. When the best worker had mastered the new techniques and was earning more money the remaining labour force could gradually be trained, dismissing those who lacked aptitude.

Productivity would now become a highly organised operation. The original "research" by the expert would apply only to current work and most engineering shops, not producing a mass of interchangeable parts would have a multiplicity of frequently changing work situations. Even where elementary flow production of common parts existed the continuing search for better methods of production, allied to technical change, involved frequently changing production methods. Each new situation would involve a work study department working out the detailed implication for each task. If at any stage a worker was unable to follow an operation in the time permitted, then the expert who devised and planned the operation must show him it can be performed, or alter the methods and/or the time allowed. The shop foreman would lose his control over productivity to the "expert", the work becoming a highly controlled supervised process. For the old style craftsman a complete change in methods and attitude was required.

We have discussed above the character of craft unionism. Its three most important characteristics may be summarised as unilateral control over the rules of "the craft",<sup>1</sup> the right of the skilled workman to decide how he should do a job, and pride at creating an article by individual skill. "Scientific management" was entirely hostile to all these ideas. Control over the point of production was removed from the craftsman and the machine revolution, as compounded by "scientific management," threatened to transform the skilled worker into an automat.

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1 The founders of the A.S.E. intended "to regulate the entire body of our trade". A.S.E. Monthly Report Editorial, December 1899.

"Scientific' management" threatened, not only "the craft" but what craftsmen meant by trade unionism. If men were to be selected one at a time for "processing", with the best, or "blue eyed boys" first, and the rest having to work as fast, or be dismissed, what happened to the collective principle? Individual bargaining always favoured the employers and what guarantee would exist that dismissal was always because of inefficiency? (Even the "efficiency" test was likely to operate against the older worker). Would not the militant be singled out for removal?

The short term effect of reorganisation would mean the employment of fewer men, working harder and producing more but this implied a large number of unemployed engineers which in turn was likely to reduce the Society's bargaining strength.

"Scientific management" was more influential in the United States than in Great Britain. There are very few examples of "pure" "scientific management" before 1914. But the theory was widely known and understood.<sup>1</sup> There is little evidence that British managers were interested or able to introduce such a rigorously complex system. The importance of "scientific management" is that it indicated the direction in which managerial practice appeared to be moving. Management was more productivity and cost conscious. The craft workers were under constant attack. But managerial techniques were much cruder than those advocated by F.W. Taylor. This situation resulted from many factors including the lack of technical expertise among British management and the attempt to use the new situation, created by the improved

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1 See F.G. Burton "Commercial Management of Engineering Works" (1905). "The Engineer" 19 May 1911, 12 April 1912, 25 April 1913, 14 November 1913. J.A. Hobson "Sociological Review 1913. "Trade unions and Speeding Up" by George Shann M.A., a series of articles that first appeared in the "Workers Union Record".

machine technology, to "discipline" labour and reduce trade union power.<sup>1</sup>

Following the 1897-98 dispute the technical journals reveal an increasing interest in managerial problems. This, together with comparative articles on American (and less often) German practice, sought to impress upon British management the importance of change. Many of the changes, in particular the introduction of the premium bonus, had a distinct "scientific management" flavour.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Much of the writing on labour problems concerned the creation of an almost military discipline in the workshop. Failing this the movement and control of work people should be as tight as possible. "The value of early training in habits of discipline, cleanliness and obedience is incalculable in after life, and the present position of Germany as a manufacturing country is due partly to the lasting effects of military discipline and training . . . . Such scenes as were witnessed in Liverpool and in South Wales during the recent labour troubles would have been impossible if the working classes of the U.K. had received any early training in the habits of discipline, obedience to authority and self-restraint; and it may be hoped that one result of the recent strike disturbances may be to increase the number of adherents and supporters of the National Service League and the Boy-Scout Movement". John B.C. Kershaw, Labour Unrest in the U.K., Engineering Magazine, May 1912.

"When a workman seeks employment an application should be made to his former employers for his character". A printed form should be used. The "questions should ask the period for which he was employed, and in what capacity, his ability as a workman, and his conduct as regards honesty, industry and sobriety. Until a satisfactory reply has been received he should only be temporarily employed as from day to day.

"Timekeeping" It is essential that the office and managerial staff should keep good time . . . . . Probably the most convenient and effective plan is the attendance book . . . . . The book may be kept at the gate . . . . . (but) there should be no imperative rule requiring signature in the presence of the gate keeper . . . . The class of men from whom gatekeepers are usually selected is not one to be entrusted with any semblance of authority over technical officers or competent clerks . . . . they have to be trusted . . . . to perform their work . . . . in a most conscientious way . . . . the general regulations of the firm should be such as to promote the feeling of noblesse oblige.

"Admission of Workpeople" No such delicacy must however, be exhibited with the workpeople who, . . . . are usually devoid of any strong devotion to their masters".

"Commercial Management of Engineering Works" F.G. Burton, Chapter on "Dealings with Workpeople".

2. For a discussion of the British response to Scientific Management see A.L. Levine "Industrial Retardation in Britain 1880-1914" Chapter 4.

From the start of its European edition in 1897 "Engineering Magazine" was particularly concerned with managerial/cost problems as against the purely technical subject. The issue for October 1899 is typical in this respect containing three articles out of eight on managerial problems. ("Standardising in Engineering Practice", "The Revolution in Machine Shop Practice" and "Works Management for Maximum"). Slater Lewis,<sup>1</sup> writing in this issue, explained the growing interest in managerial problems. Until recently, wrote Lewis, "..... the internal routine and administration of shops, save perhaps in matters of purely engineering practice, has been left in the hands of practical men, with whom rule of thumb is supreme".

The Editorial emphasised the importance of specialisation if quickness of production, improved quality of products and cheapness were to be achieved. Cost detection and methods of payment were discussed in many issues of the magazine.

The control of costs and improved productivity were thought to be greatly improved where payment by results could be introduced. Engineering work had usually been considered too individual or specialised to be measured for the purposes of payment. Slater Lewis believed that this type of work was diminishing.<sup>2</sup>

"The ordinary operations of the manufacturing engineer do, as a matter of practice, tend towards repetitive work". Piecework was an advance for worker and employer but setting a fair rate raised a serious problem. If the worker earned too much his rate was likely to be cut. But unless he could earn considerably more than on day work there would be little incentive to work harder and, in consequence, the net result was likely to be "a somewhat greater intensity of production and (the worker) receives a somewhat greater constant remuneration than when he was on hourly rates". The premium bonus

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1 Author of a well known text book called "The Commercial Organisation of Factories".

2 Engineering Magazine, November 1899.

answered this problem.<sup>1</sup>

Payment systems and their purposes were a continuing theme:

"In introducing a system of pay the management should have many aims in view. The most important of these are as follows. The possibilities of shop economies and cheap production, the forcing of the shop to a maximum production quickly; the attraction of expert workmen, and their encouragement to use their skills and wits to the utmost; the singling out of the slovenly, slow workmen for either development or discharge, the cultivation of a feeling on the part of the men that the company is firm in its determination to be just and fair, and that its insistence on a high rate of production is justified by the rate of wages paid. To this feeling must be added the knowledge that the company will insist upon a full day's work".<sup>2</sup>

Labour-saving was considered sufficiently important for "Engineering Magazine" to produce special labour-saving issues in March and July 1904.

"Engineering", a weekly journal was the best known of the technical publications. It was mostly interested in purely technical issues but its readers were familiar with wider questions of inter-industrial comparisons<sup>3</sup> and the whole question of "scientific management"<sup>4</sup> which was linked to change in the engineering industry:

"Nothing in the recent history of engineering is more illustrative of the changes which are taking place than the removal of practically the whole of the design of the product to be manufactured from the shop, that is, from the men who are doing the actual physical work on the material - to the special designing and drawing department whose duty it is to determine the

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1 The Premium Bonus is discussed below.

2 "Engineering Magazine", August 1902.

3 During 1903 The Mosely Industrial Commission to the United States reported.

4 F.W. Taylor's views were described 1 February 1907.

form of the finished product in every detail, so that all questions of design or determination of dimensions are removed from among the duties carried out in the shops" under a system of scientific management each workman could have five different foremen and three different clerks each dealing with a different aspect of his work. "Engineering" considered that the theory of "scientific management" was far too optimistic about human capabilities. "The whole movement which has gathered around the name of "scientific management" appears to us to stand in great part for a formless enthusiasm which, in its operation towards a better order of achievement than the world now shows, is likely to fail to realise that the story of the best human labour makes but a pitiful and halting tale".<sup>1</sup>

"Engineering Magazine", "Engineering", and "Cassier's Magazine" broadly reflected managements' attitude which showed a growing interest in labour-saving techniques but a suspicion of sophisticated theories.

Because any kind of industrial dissension was considered illegitimate the whole basis of the conflicts caused by technical change and new management techniques were not discussed. Managerial control was a simple chain of command which apparently considered itself capable of producing concise instruction to meet every situation. The gap between command and implementation was not appreciated. Even if the problem of implementation could be overcome, the level and intensity of supervision required if all important decisions were to remain of a managerial character, was formidable.

In the engineering industry there existed side by side two formal systems of regulation. The A.S.E. continued to issue trade regulations although after 1898 most employers refused to recognise their existence. A really determined effort by management could probably have established some measure of control over the work situation but once any system of control became

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1 "Engineering", 1 February 1907.



a matter of routine, control could weaken. The inert acceptance of custom would always be a threat to managerial prerogative. Craft unions were organised to take advantage of such inertia. "Scientific management" was the great enemy of craft unionism because it sought to replace the inevitable drift to managerial inertia with a continuing system of managerial control. The A.S.E. mode of craft unionism sought control over work at the point of production by the establishment of customs. Creeping encroachment of managerial power by which autocratic control was replaced by collective decision making was the traditional tactic.

The technical journals tended to have a very sanguine view of absolute managerial prerogative. Efficiency would be increased while working men would be dealt with fairly.<sup>1</sup>

Managerial attitudes were influenced by technical change and by the general industrial situation. The employers' victory in 1898 was seen as an opportunity to eliminate trade union influence from the point of production.

Employers "should have the full and unhampered services of their employees and the only way to accomplish this is to weaken the power of the professional agitator".<sup>2</sup> The 1898 victory achieved this. "..... the master became master in his own house ..... The free selection of the most suitable labour for machine tools thus secured has given the employers the full use and productive powers of their machines".<sup>3</sup>

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1 This was the overwhelming view but there were some exceptions. "I have known men who were managers' favourites charge their employer, day after day, for overtime that was not worked ..... There are many managers and foremen in Britain who draw more money from shop keepers in the shape of commission than they draw in salaries....." T. Good, "Unacknowledged Workshop Conditions", Engineering Magazine, August 1902. See also H.M. Norris, 'Actual experience with the Premium Plan', Engineering Magazine, January 1900.

2 Hiram Stevens Maxim "Engineering Magazine" December 1897.

3 Louis Cassier "Cassier's Magazine", April 1900.

The theory of the agitator causing disputes tended to be unquestionably accepted by the technical journals as were the beneficial effects of the employers' victory. No account of the actual effects on the shop floor ever appeared.

All the trade journals were hostile to trade unionism. They supported "The Free Labour Association" and were opposed to the 1906 Trade Disputes Act. There existed two views of industrial relations - one represented by the employers and the technical journals and the other by the A.S.E. with neither side understanding the others views.

The Chasm between the two sides can best be illustrated by comparing the managerial attitudes described above with a craftsman's view of the same changes:

"So much freer, so much fuller, so much higher and wider is the life of our time, that, looking back, we cannot help feeling something like pity, if not contempt for past generations. We travel in an hour what to our father was a hard day's walk. We send a message in a minute, that would have taken weeks. We know as common things what to them were fast-locked secrets. In the years of our lives we see more, do more, learn more. Compare the school books of our children to the school books of our fathers. Look at our daily papers, read even by the poorest giving them a birds-eye of cities, glimpses of the doings of all classes of society, and news from all parts of the world. But have not all these inventions and improvements a tendency to make a few enormously wealthy and the many hopelessly poor? The tendency of the machine is not merely to place it out of the power of the workmen to become his own employer, but to reduce him to a machine minder, which needs little skill and brains. Under the old system the workman may have worked hard and long but he had companionship, variety, and the pleasure of seeing things grow under his hands to the finished form. Consider the blacksmith of the past, his work was by roadside or street. You could see through doors all that was passing and step to tell or hear the news. You could see him shoe a horse, now mend a tender, now forge and temper a tool, or beat out a

cone for the chimney place and when there was nothing else to do make nails. Go now into one of the big shops, covering acres of ground, where workmen are massed together and by the aid of machinery iron is converted to it uses at a fraction of the old cost. You cannot enter without permission from the office, and if you are permitted you must not talk to the men. Here you find men doing over and over again the same thing, passing all day long bars of iron through rollers, turning bits of iron just the same all day long, week in, week out. In the whole establishment there will perhaps not be a man who can do more than some minute part of what goes to make a saleable article. The lad learns to attend one machine, then his progress stops ..... He has no more control over the conditions under which he works than a passenger in a railroad car over the motion of the train....."<sup>1</sup>

### The Premium Bonus

The most bitter struggle over management techniques centred around attempts to introduce the premium bonus into the workshop. This was also an issue chosen by the Executive Council of the A.S.E. for demonstrating the advantages of national collective bargaining.

The premium bonus appealed to many employers who rejected "scientific management" because of the supervision problems involved. An effective system of payment by results could be said to reduce the necessity for close supervision.

Day work, or time work, is payment for time spent at work and not directly for the amount produced. There is little incentive to produce more than the accepted norm which was also dependent, in part, on the degree of supervision. This was the traditional method of payment in engineering since

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1 W. Corkey of Erith, A.S.E. Monthly Journal and Record, January 1904.

the relative absence of standard jobs and the need for high quality production were thought to make other systems impractical. The usual alternative was to pay by the piece, higher productivity leading to a larger pay packet. The great problem was how to fix a fair piece rate. In textiles where the unions favoured this form of payment, standardised machine work simplified this problem. Where piece work was established in engineering there was no guarantee of higher productivity; often the earning of "time and a half", for example, could lead to a reduction in times and consequently workers were careful not to earn more than the permitted maximum. The employers therefore were unable to tell by earnings (time taken) whether piece prices were generous or not.

Premium bonus schemes were an attempt to break away from this difficulty by sharing the time "saved" between the employer and the worker. If the worker received a generous time his gain was limited. Job times could be guaranteed so the worker had no reason to limit his production.

Many different methods of calculating the premium bonus were devised. Two of the most popular systems prior to 1914 were the Rowan and the Halsey.

The Rowan system, devised by J. Rowan of Glasgow was first introduced by him in 1898. It was said to be particularly suited to "less standard methods" of production.<sup>1</sup> Estimates were made of the times jobs normally took. If an engineer completed a task in his "normal" time he received his usual day work rate but if he took less than the "allowed" time, he received a bonus calculated in the following way:  $\frac{\text{Time Saved}}{\text{Time Allowed}} \times \text{Time Worked}$ . For example if he was allowed ten hours, but completed the job in seven, his bonus time was  $\frac{3}{10} \times 7 = 2.1$  hours. He received seven hour's pay for working at the job plus 2.1 hours bonus, 9.1 hours total. No matter what the "allowed" time, it was never possible to earn double time. So that the employer

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1 For an account of the Rowan and Halsey systems see Yates "Wages and Conditions in British Engineering". p.85-88

was protected against a serious error in the original estimate.

The Halsey system (named after A.F. Halsey - a Canadian) was introduced into Britain about 1890. It also recognised the payment of the day work rate for a job completed in normal time. If the job took less time, time rate plus a percentage of the time saved was paid. A job estimated at ten hours, but completed in seven would be paid seven hours at time rate plus one third of the time saved as a bonus. (Seven hours plus one (three hours saved) - eight hours in total). F.W. Taylor considered one third of the saving to be a fair bonus on the grounds that a larger bonus might persuade some workers to work fewer hours rather than earn more. Also, a one third bonus appeared to satisfy a rough notion of justice. One third for the worker, one third for the employer and one third for the consumer.<sup>1</sup>

The premium bonus presented the A.S.E. with an acute problem of industrial policy. Under the terms of settlement the employers were entitled to introduce any system of payment they desired. Premium bonus systems were popular and being introduced from the late 1890's onwards although fears about the extent of their introduction were exaggerated. The A.S.E. Executive Council had two possible courses of action open to them. They could seek to regulate payment systems by national agreement or they could allow the members to carry on an unofficial war on the shop floor.

By signing the Carlisle agreement in August 1902 the Executive Council sought to regulate by national agreement the introduction of premium

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1 There were many variations on the Halsey and Rowan systems. G.J. Weir, an engineering firm at Cathcart, Glasgow introduced a scheme in 1897 dividing the "time saved" equally between worker and employer.

bonus systems. This was the first clear indication<sup>1</sup> that the Society accepted the 1898 settlement and was prepared to develop collective bargaining arrangements between themselves and the Engineering Employers' Federation. If the premium bonus could be effectively controlled then the members might be prepared to accept the further growth of national collective bargaining.

But the Carlisle agreement illustrated the difficulties in the way of such acceptance. The employers could choose whether to accept limitations on managerial freedom and would presumably only do so, where they faced shop floor opposition. Once an agreement had been made there was the problem of enforcement. How could the A.S.E. compel an employer to uphold its terms? Who was to determine the interpretation of an agreement? The signing of an agreement was but the first step.

Problems of implementation and interpretation played no part in the actual negotiations. The Executive of the Engineering Employers' Federation and the A.S.E. met in central conference at Carlisle on 19 and 20 August 1902. They were to discuss the "working of the bonus system" at "Armstrong, Whitworth", Newcastle-on-Tyne, "The Central Marine Engine Works" West Hartlepool, "Richardsons Westgarth & Co.Ltd", Hartlepool and "Browett, Lindley & Co.Ltd" Patricroft, Manchester. The A.S.E. proposed that instead of dealing with each case separately a general agreement should be made.

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1 George Barnes made it clear that he accepted the terms of settlement in an article in "Engineering Magazine" for January 1901. In this article he accepted the case for piecework. "The real solid gain following the dispute has been the freedom from stoppage, consequent upon the facilities afforded for the discussion of differences .... these facilities (should be) maintained.... The engineering unions should frankly accept specialisation .... and grade their membership."

Barnes had moved a long way in four years.

"And so we find the workers tied by the cords of class politicians to the stake of their own timidity, jealousy, and prejudice, ever and anon making ineffective efforts to reach the produce of their own labour, ever being flaunted before their eyes. Success lies only in freedom. That is to say, that in political and industrial matters we must recognise the class struggle going on and wage our political, as we have always done our industrial battles off our own bat. Until then we can only nibble, and in nibbling get all we deserve to get." A.S.E. Journal, May 1897.

This proposal came as a complete surprise to the employers.<sup>1</sup> The employers' representatives had no power to reach a final agreement, however they "advised" all employers to accept the agreed conditions. These conditions ultimately became the Carlisle agreement, which had four clauses:-

1. The time rate for wages (for each job) should in all cases be paid.
2. Overtime and nightshift to be paid on the same conditions as already prevail in each workshop.
3. A time limit, after it has been established, should only be changed if the method or means of manufacture are changed.
4. No firm should establish the Bonus System without intending to adhere to it."<sup>2</sup>

From the first the Executive Council of the A.S.E. refused to place the Carlisle agreement before the members, arguing that the agreement did not concern a "new condition of labour" but that the premium bonus "is now in operation in many workshops, and has been in operation in some of them for many years."<sup>3</sup> The Executive made a considerable effort to convince the members that the agreement was desirable and that the premium bonus should be accepted. Sidney Webb<sup>4</sup> wrote a defence of the Executive's action being keenly impressed by it:

"With the evils of competitive piecework in the engineering trade ....

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1 Engineering Employers' Federation Archives, P.2.1/5.

2 Copy of agreement together with circular to A.S.E. Branches. Articles by Sidney Webb and George Barnes as circulated by Engineering Employers' Federation, see Appendix I.

3 Appendix III

4 A.S.E. Monthly Report, October 1902, Appendix I.

(this) is diametrically opposed to the standard rate - the principle of equal pay for equal effort .... On the other hand, the crude and primitive device of payment by the hour has many drawbacks. It is, when you care to think of it essentially the method of the slaveowner. Collective bargaining should concern effort as well as payment." He believed that piecework was difficult to work in engineering "Under these circumstances the premium bonus is provisionally agreed to, seems to me an admirable expedient (sic). The A.S.E. may in my humble opinion, safely agree to it. The standard of time work rates is fully protected. The danger of a future cutting of rates is well guarded against. As it is the first class firms who are desirous of adopting the system, not the producers of 'cheap and nasty' work, the necessity of attracting and maintaining first class workmen (who will certainly not continue under the system unless they make top wages) enables us, in my judgement, to dismiss the fear. And, what to my mind is a great advantage to trade unionism in the engineering trade, the system makes a distinct advance in rendering more accurate and scientific the working of the standard rate itself - the securing of equal pay for equal effort .... My conclusion is that the A.S.E. would be well advised to ratify the provisional agreement which their Executive Council very ably secured."

Barnes defended the Executive on the ground that the employers were entitled to introduce the premium bonus:- "What we had to do was to safeguard such introductions by conditions making the working of the system to harmonise with trade union principles, with our rules, and with the interests of our members."<sup>1</sup>

By 1902 the Executive Council was well aware of the difficulties of enforcing piece work agreements. There were always considerable difficulties about what constituted a "new" task and a "fair" time. Management acted

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1 G. N. Barnes, circular to Home Branches, October 14, 1902, Appendix III



and faced only the threat of a conference where it was probably impossible to order a return to the status quo. Where men had been dismissed witnesses were available only for the management's case.

A piece work dispute which resulted in a conference, just before the signing of Carlisle agreement, should have alerted the Executive Council to the dangers of any agreement which could not be equally policed from the workers' as from the employers' side.

After the 1897-98 dispute the Barrow District Committee of the A.S.E. and Vickers were constantly in dispute about piece work conditions.<sup>1</sup> The dispute referred to was sufficiently important for George Barnes to represent the A.S.E. at the conference.

In view of what was to happen to the Executive Council's policy on the premium bonus it is useful to describe this conference which well illustrated the difficulties in the way of piece work agreements.

The conference<sup>2</sup> was concerned with several piece work disputes, two of which (the cases of men called Howard and Radcliffe) the Barrow District Committee were particularly worried about. Howard was asked to do a job in 41 hours but claimed that 52 hours were required. Radcliffe complained that he had been underpaid by 5/10. Both men were dismissed, Howard for refusing to do the job in the time allowed and Radcliffe for "insolence".

Vickers explained their case and Barnes accepted it. He considered that the District Committee had allowed themselves to be misled. The District Committee called Howard and Radcliffe before them to consider Vickers account of their cases. (Both men had to travel to Barrow as dismissal by Vickers

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1 Barrow District Committee Minutes, Barrow A.E.U.

2 Proceedings of interview with Mr Mc Kechnie and staff of Messrs Vickers Sons and Maxim Ltd. and deputation from Engineers at which Mr Barnes was present, Appendix IV

made it impossible for them to find work in the town). They both re-affirmed their previous statements which the District Committee unanimously accepted.<sup>1</sup>

The District Committee decided however, that they could not face a conflict with both the Executive Council and Vickers on this issue despite their conviction that Howard and Radcliffe had been wrongly discharged. This case and many others dealt with by The District Committee showed that piecework disputes tended to turn on conflicting evidence in which the only evidence given was from the employers' side but where their contentions were not proved.

It was possible to itemise the necessary conditions for redressing the balance so making piecework agreements enforceable. The status quo should remain 'pending' negotiations, witnesses should be drawn from both sides and impartial evidence as to the practicability of times and standards should be called.

But this was to request the impossible. Employers who insisted upon "freedom to manage" were unlikely to accept such restrictions on their prerogative. In effect the only insurance that agreements would be kept was strong shop floor organisation. Without this, agreements like the Carlisle agreement, could only be an effective protection for the shop floor worker if the employer showed goodwill. Without this the Carlisle agreement was worthless.

The Barrow District Committee fought Vicker's attempt to introduce the premium bonus system. An aggregate meeting on 15 December 1903 demanded:-

"Our Executive Council issue instructions to our members generally throughout the Society that on and after the first Monday in February 1904 no member is to work the premium bonus system."

Until June 1904 the District Committee, despite the Carlisle agreement, sought to prevent Vickers introducing the bonus system. From then on the pretext of an assurance from the Executive Council that the bonus system would

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of Barrow District Committee, July 15, 1902.

be dealt with "as a whole" (i.e. nationally), an attempt was made to work the Carlisle agreement.

Barrow District Committee recognised that their only chance of making the agreement effective was to organise their members on the shop floor. Without any encouragement from the Executive Council they consolidated their system of shop stewards who met regularly to report on shop floor conditions throughout the workshops. They established their shop floor organisation well enough but ~~with~~ out national support they were never strong enough to strike against Vickers. What happened at Erith in 1907 confirmed their caution.

During the years 1902-1907, the Barrow District Committee was continually in dispute with Vickers about piecework. Their experience can be summarised as a series of apparently arbitrary dismissals, useless local conferences, where there always existed an unresolved conflict of evidence and time cutting in apparent contravention of clause 3 of the Carlisle agreement. Here the problem was what constituted a change "in the method or means of manufacture." A small change in design could lead to a severe cut in the time allowed. Barrow's experience would appear to have been not untypical if correspondence to the Monthly Report is any guide.<sup>1</sup>

The major conflict over the introduction of the premium bonus which was to receive most publicity, and to greatly affect A.S.E. attitudes, occurred at Vickers, Sons and Maxims, Erith during 1907.

Vickers Erith manufactured various types of smaller artillery<sup>2</sup>".... two classes of gun work executed at Erith. First the quick firing gun for field, naval and garrison artillery with a breech mechanism so made that a large

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1 See in particular "The Premium Bonus System" by C. Coleman, Battersea Branch, November 1904.

2 Big guns were made at Vickers Sheffield while Barrow made "large naval and garrison mountings". Account of Vickers Erith, "The Erith Times, Belvedere and Abbey Wood Chronicle", May 11, 1907.

number of rounds may be fired in the quickest possible time. Secondly the automatic gun<sup>5</sup>, the best known of which are the Pom Pom and Maxim, in which the mechanism is operated by the recoil..... The great machine shops in which the quick firing guns are constructed are a notable sight, with their electric cranes, their timing, milling and rifling machines, boring lathes and tools, so arranged that the gun in process of manufacture passes through the shops consecutively from one end to another."

At the height of the Boer War Vickers Erith had employed 4,500 men. By January 1907 3,000 were employed,<sup>1</sup> in April the local press was speculating on the dismissal of a further 1,500.<sup>2</sup>

The possibility of a dispute arose during December 1906 when Conradi the manager sought to introduce 6 or 7 "inspectors" to "price jobs". This was taken as a first step towards the introduction of the premium bonus. Fears were to some extent reduced by Mr Albert Vickers who promised:-

"Well, we will never introduce a system which the men will not accept. If they will not accept it they will be free to refuse."<sup>3</sup>

On December 22 the Erith District Committee threatened to withdraw labour unless the inspectors were withdrawn. Steer, an Executive Council member and Black, organising district delegate, persuaded an aggregate meeting of the Erith men to withdraw strike notices pending negotiations with the firm.<sup>4</sup> These negotiations proceeded to a central conference on 22 March 1907 where it became clear that Vickers had been attempting to introduce a

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1 Engineering Employers' P2/11

2 "Erith Times" etc. April 26 1907. This part of North Kent was particularly dependent on armaments production. During 1907 Woolwich Arsenal was also short of work and dismissing men.

3 Engineering Employers', P2/11

4 Minutes of Executive Council, 21 December 1906.

premium bonus system without actually saying so. The Engineering Employers' Federation took the view that Vickers were entitled to introduce a bonus scheme but had "disavowed their right to introduce it."<sup>1</sup>

Despite Mr Albert Vickers's assurance Conradi pressed ahead with introduction of the premium bonus.<sup>2</sup>

The A.S.E. Executive Council tried desperately to prevent the Erith District Committee from withdrawing labour and at one point the whole District Committee resigned.<sup>3</sup> After several aggregate meetings the patience of the Erith men was exhausted and during the second week in June they finally decided to strike unless their conditions were met. An aggregate meeting at which 700<sup>4</sup> men were present decided to withdraw labour unless the firm:-

"1. Abolish the Premium Bonus

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1 Engineering Employers', P2/11

2 "Erith Times" May 10 reported that the men had been given a choice of piecework, daywork or the premium bonus. All men refused the bonus. Two men were discharged for it was alleged refusing the bonus. There was "a hostile demonstration against the management. They (the men) carried the discharged men out of the works shoulder high and for a time things looked decidedly ugly in the precincts of the offices."

Conradi's part in causing the dispute was confirmed by Barnes.

Mr Barnes. "The manager is a very over-bearing and tactless man. We have had experience of him elsewhere."

Sir Andrew Noble. "Where had you experience of him?"

Mr Barnes. "At Thorneycrefts at Chiswick. Not long ago he was a workman and a very offensive man - a fellow who seems to imagine that he is better than other people."

Conference between Engineering Employers' Federation and A.S.E., 26-27 June 1907, Engineering Employers' Archives, P2/11.

In Erith the 1907 strike was known as the Conradi strike.

3 E.C. Minutes, 6 June 1907.

4 The A.S.E. in Erith had 1,000 members 80% of whom worked at Vickers. "Erith Times" 14 June 1907.

2. Withdraw "speed and feed men"<sup>1</sup>
3. Withdraw all time limits on work cards."

By linking the end of the premium bonus with the withdrawal of "speed and feed" men the Erith engineers directed their attack not at a new system of payment by results as such but against a system which had a de-skilling "regimenting" effect.

Thornycrofts of Chiswick had two years previously been reorganised in the way Vickers were attempting at Erith.<sup>2</sup>

"Charts indicating the feeds and speeds to be employed were fixed to every machine and "feed and speed" bosses armed with feedometres endeavoured to keep men and machines working to their fullest capacity. Emery wheels were taken from the shop, all tools being ground to theoretic angles by unskilled men. A man was given six standard tools on starting, which were changed for new ones when worn."<sup>3</sup>

1 "Speed and feed" men were an important aspect of work changes.

"The Movement of Machines and Machine tools was being speeded up by a host of mechanical improvements not least by the introduction of Taylor-White "high speed" steel .... and the movement of human beings by a more successful harmonising of their capabilities and potentialities to those of the machines they operated. This then is the line of evolution in which feed and speed systems and premium bonus stood."

A.L. Levine "Industrial Change and its Effects upon Labour 1900-1914" p.361-362.

"The practice of feed and speed systems simply involved the employment of special overseers or supervisors to determine (and enforce) first if all the optimum rates of speed for cutting tools or "rate at which the surface to be dressed is brought into contact with the (cutting) tool". H. B. Drury "Scientific Management" (1918) p.76.

"In many instances .... the angles to which cutting tools were to be ground were decided upon by the "feed and speed" man on similar functioning, and cutting angles were thus worked out for the different types of cutting steel and machine tools used in an establishment so that the individual operator no longer had to puzzle out these particular variables for himself.. (this was a de-skilling effect)" Levine, p.362-363.

2 According to George Barnes, Conradi had worked for Thornycrofts before moving to Erith, see p.186 footnote.

3 W.F. Watson "The Worker and Wage Incentive", p.11

Levine's comment on the situation is apt:

"Here, then, is a degree of regimentation imposed upon work methods which, because it left little room for the ploy of individual foibles and idiosyncrasies as far as deciding upon appropriate cutting angles, feeds and speeds concerned, must have made the performance of the various machine operations in the shop in question that much more standardised or uniform."<sup>1</sup>

The premium bonus was disliked, partly because it was seen as a new and more pernicious form of piecework but also because its introduction usually involved a further sub-division of the work process, alterations in skill boundaries, and the craftsman exercising less control over his work. The Erith strike, like the whole opposition to the premium bonus, was against "regimentation" and in defence of the engineering craftsmen's traditional control at the point of production.

On June 12 1907 at 5 p.m. the A.S.E., the Tool Makes, the Steam Engine Makers and the United Machine Workers came out on strike. The Pattern Makes, the Boiler-makers, the Tin Smiths and the Carpenters joined the strike a few days later. Grudgingly the A.S.E. Executive Council supported the strike<sup>2</sup> and authorised the payment of 15/- per week strike benefit.

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1 P.363-364.

2 "The present position is a striking illustration of the altered condition of things now prevailing as compared with a few years ago. At one time local autonomy was a principle which was largely given effect to throughout the Society". The Executive Council should as the representative of all the members decide policy....." (This) principle is now totally inapplicable ..... We .... have every sympathy with the Erith men, who apparently like many more, have not realised the changed conditions we must at the same time, as representing the whole Society, deal with the bonus question as with all other difficulties in accordance with the interests of the Society as a whole. Collective bargaining is getting a wider interpretation." Monthly Report, July 1907.

From the beginning the strike was an extremely bitter one<sup>1</sup> with frequent clashes with the police and crowds surrounding Conradi's house.<sup>2</sup> By June 21 the strike was solid:

"The whole works were practically deserted for the strike was one of the most unanimous and determined on record. When would the blacklegs ..... begin to arrive?"

Many extra police had been drafted into the town, some of whom surrounded the railway station preventing the strikers from picketing the trains. The strikers watched for trains through field glasses and attempted to run along the bank to meet any strike breakers. Vickers had built a bridge across the railway straight into the works. But:-

"The batches of men brought in - meagre in number and poor in quality have been given as hot a reception as it is possible under the circumstances. Up to the time of going to press few workmen have been put on and the great shops are still and weird ..... Inside the works provision has been made for boarding and sleeping the strike breakers."

The foremen not unnaturally were opposed to "feed and speed" men who tended to reduce their authority. They promised the strikers that they would refuse to allow unskilled men on the machines. A deputation of foremen saw Conradi requesting the withdrawal of the premium bonus scheme and the "feed and speed" men.<sup>3</sup>

The outcome of the dispute very much depended on the firm's success in recruiting strike breakers. Their strategy was to transport blacklegs by

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1 Eye witnesses have described to me how blacklegs were put down manholes by the strikers.

2 All information unless otherwise stated from the "Erith Times, Belvedere and Abbey Wood Chronicle".

3 Quote from Erith Times, June 21.



rail and so into the firm without having to cross the picket lines; once inside they could eat and sleep on the premises.

Vickers had to contend with the attitude of Erith Urban District Council. The Labour group was the only organised group on the Council and was just one short of a majority, so that at the annual meeting of the Council they were able to "pack" the Committees. The Labour Councillors tried to stop Vickers from using the scaffold bridge from the railway into the works. While seeking a bye-law to prevent the use of the bridge, Labour members turned their attention to the legality of Vickers buildings being used as sleeping accommodation. Conradi wrote a letter to the Public Health Committee saying he required to use certain buildings to provide sleeping accommodation. The Committee visited the factory and decided that the buildings did not comply with council bye-laws in respect of windows, washing sanitation and drainage. Conradi was told to discontinue using the buildings for this purpose within seven days or face legal proceedings. This crucial decision was taken by a Public Health Committee comprising of Clayton (Chairman) and three labour members - Cage, A.Button and Scarlett with the other Labour Members, Ling, Stallwood, Aranson and F.S. Button present, not able to speak, but lending moral support.<sup>1</sup>

Even without the intervention of the Council, Conradi's strike breaking was not very successful. The strike committee sought out blacklegs and offered them their fares home. A group of Glasgow men "refused to work.... they were not told when engaged that a strike was in progress ..... (they) left the premises amid the triumphant cheers of the strikers."

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1 Erith Times, June 28.

"Many" of the blacklegs "proved worthless". Even Conradi made no attempt to disguise the truth telling the press:-

"These men come here to get as much as they can without doing any work."

"The Erith Chronicle, Belvedere and District Times" commented:-

"From day to day however, the strike breakers are arriving in small detachments and leaving almost as quickly. The men imported from Chatham left the works on Friday".

An American trade unionist named Cawley had himself taken on as a strike breaker in order to spy "out how matters stand in the works..... He stopped four days in the works, and was able to give much information to the strike committee. Mr Cawley considers the men hold the winning hand, as they have induced the 'charge' men to strike and therefore no progress is being made in the works, there being no skilful direction."<sup>1</sup>

Conradi was clearly failing to break the strike. "Never before has a strike been so unanimous among unionists and non-unionists."<sup>2</sup> The strike breakers were few and inefficient. On July 9 the Erith Urban Council had an acrimonious meeting with Labour members pressing for legal proceedings to be started by the Public Health Committee against Vickers. Clayton the Committee Chairman told the meeting:-

"..... in the case of any private individual or of some working men they would take proceedings and the Committee was not flinching or

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1 Other quotes "Erith Chronicle Belvedere & District Times", June 25.

2 Erith Observer, 21 June 1907.

neglecting their duty in regard to Messrs Vickers Sons & maxim." By ten votes to four the Labour members forced through a resolution to institute legal action immediately.<sup>1</sup>

Vickers faced an effective strike, a hostile population, a press that was remarkably sympathetic to the strike and legal action by the Erith Council. But the men's position was weaker than it appeared. The A.S.E. Executive Council was not in favour of the strike because it undermined, in their view, collective bargaining and rising unemployment, together with the falling demand for armaments, put the strikers in a weak bargaining position. On July 1 Sir James Whitehead offered to arbitrate. The A.S.E. accepted but Vickers refused.<sup>2</sup>

After negotiations with the Employers' Federation on July 9 the unions put the following proposals to the strikers:

"Are you in favour of a resumption of work in accordance with the recommendations as follows? Withdrawal of the premium bonus system with time limit; operation inspectors restricted to duties not aggravating to the men, no difference to be made in men's rate when starting; (sic) start to be made on day work system, no new system shall be introduced unless men consulted in collective capacity and agreed to by them; men to be started 242 a day for 5 days, the rest to be absorbed as soon as possible. No victimisation."

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1 "Erith Times", July 19 1907.

2 Engineering Employers' P2/11.

Sir James was Mayor of London during the 1889 dock strike and played a part in the settlement of that dispute. He was the chief financial provider of the Dartford Liberal Association (Erith was part of the Dartford Constituency) and financed the successful campaign by James Rowland in the 1906 general election.

733 men voted in favour with 177 against.<sup>1</sup>

When Conradi learnt of the basis of the men's decision he refused to open the firm.<sup>2</sup> James Dunn a director of Vickers wrote to Barnes:-

"If this is a statement of what the men have been asked to ballot on, it is one that cannot be accepted by my Company without reference to the Employers' Federation ..... the return of the men must be postponed ....."

Barnes disavowed responsibility for the proposals on which the strikers voted saying the matter had been handled locally,<sup>3</sup> and on July 15 Dunn sent Barnes a new basis for a settlement:

"Men on strike at Vickers Sons & Maxim's Erith factory will resume work, being taken on at about 242 per day for five days. The will re-start on day pay rates and points in dispute will then be discussed by directors and employees with the usual powers of referring any possible differences to the respective committees of the A.S.E. and the Masters Federation."<sup>4</sup>

This proposal was put to the men at an aggregate meeting and accepted by 507 votes to 308.<sup>5</sup>

It was doubtful whether, despite the success of the strike, the men had achieved any worthwhile concession. Vickers had only agreed to discuss "points in dispute" and although pending discussion, the premium bonus was suspended.

A striker who returned to work described what happened:-

"Men are asked to sign a form of application for work or agreement.

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1 Engineering Employers' P.2/11

2 "Erith Times", July 12 1907.

3 Engineering Employers' P.2/11

4 Engineering Employers' P.2/11

5 "Erith Times", July 19 1907

Questions are asked; whether trade unionist or not - if so, what society. Finally signature as to agreement with the rules of the factory. A copy of the rules is not handed to each man (who, by the way, has furnished already all the essentials of the above information when starting originally); and against as (sic) premium bonus is admittedly worked in the factory, we are not, and cannot be in agreement with the rules."<sup>1</sup>

The settlement was taken by some people as being a defeat for Vickers. David Gardner, Chairman of the A.S.E. Executive Council described "the firm agreeing not to work the system to A.S.E. men (although others worked it) the men on their hand agreeing to the day work system."<sup>2</sup>

In order to follow the Erith dispute through to its conclusion it is necessary to anticipate a further development in the general campaign against the premium bonus. In 1909 the T.U.C.<sup>3</sup> established a committee under the chairmanship of the formidable D.J. Shackleton M.P. with William Mosses of the Patternmakers as secretary.<sup>4</sup> This committee was ultimately to set about the task of co-ordinating trade union opposition to the premium bonus. The

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1 Erith Times, July 19 1907.

2 Letter in Archives of Engineering Employers' Federation P.2/3 dated 15 February 1909.

3 The 1909 T.U.C. passed the following resolution.

"This congress strongly condemns .... the premium bonus (which is) bitterly opposed to the principles of trade unionism .... (the premium bonus) creates a form of sweated labour .... increases the number of unemployed .... Societies should use every effort to stop the further development of the system, also to take steps to abolish it wherever it has been introduced. That the Parliamentary Committee deputised the Admiralty and the war office to protest against the introduction or extension of the premium bonus system..... (the) Parliamentary Committee to call a conference of Societies affected to consider what steps can be taken to abolish the system."

4 Committee members: M. Arrandall, representing the Parliamentary Committee, J.J. Stephenson A.S.E., J.C. Garder Sheet Metal Workers, J.G. Clark Scientific Instrument Makers, A. Richards Boilermakers, W.Martin General Union Carpenters & Joiners.

A.S.E. though not affiliated to the T.U.C. was represented on the committee.

Shackleton's committee went to Erith and asked two A.S.E. members and a Patternmaker about the situation at Vickers.

The first A.S.E. witness claimed that the 1907 strike ended when Vickers withdrew their demands and agreed not to change their methods of paying wages without first consulting the men or their representatives. In March of 1909 ".... the system was re-introduced under the name of extra pay, and it had gradually extended until it covered every department in the works."

At first the workmen took no notice of times and when extra pay was earned returned it to the cashier for payment to local charities. But some men accepted the extra payments and their number gradually increased "..... recently a notice had been passed round the works, through the foreman, to the effect that any workman returning the bonus would be discharged."

The other A.S.E. witness described another aspect of Vickers policy:

"A decided preference was given to non-society men, and as a result of this preference, as well as an account of the ineptitude of the Society in regard to this matter, a large number of their members had run out. At one time all applicants for work were required to state if they were Society men .... Favouritism was so rife that whilst some men found it difficult to make time rates, others had no difficulty in making 1/- per hour."

The patternmaker told the committee that:-

"Since the strike .... an apathy seemed to have settled down on all classes of workmen which made them willing to submit to anything the employers cared to impose on them."<sup>1</sup>

Vickers account of the situation was different. On May 18 1909 Conradi reported to the London Engineering Employers' Federation:-

"..... three or four weeks ago the Society came to the decision that they could no longer effectively oppose the introduction of the "Bonus System"

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1 Report of T.U.C. Committee on the Premium Bonus System, copy in Bishopsgate Institute.

at these works and left it to the men to do as they like."

John Black A.S.E. Organising District Delegate also wrote to the London employers:-

"I am desired to enter a protest against the action of the manager at Messrs Vickers Sons & Maxim Ltd. Erith Works in persisting in their efforts and methods of introducing the 'Bonus System' into the works, contrary to the previously expressed intention of the firm as conveyed through Mr Dunn, in July 1907. The most objectionable feature of this matter is the stipulation of time limits for the various jobs, and in the placing of extra money in men's boxes or bags, and any demur on the part of the men in accepting or retaining same is said to be met with threats of discharge, thereby endeavouring to prevent that liberty of action in the matter which the men claim they were given at the settlement of the dispute in July 1907."

Conradi disputed this:

"We certainly fix a time limit on various jobs, and this has been done for the past two years. It is not true to say that we place extra pay in men's boxes. All extra payments made have been applied for through the foremen or wage clerk. Neither has any man been threatened with discharge if he refuses to accept same, in fact, for some considerable time all extra payments have been promptly applied for and willingly accepted.

"The local branch of the A.S.E. have found it impossible to any longer intimidate their members and are now again trying the London District Engineers Employers (sic)."<sup>1</sup>

Confirmation of the Erith A.S.E.'s views about the premium bonus at Vickers comes from an unexpected quarter. John Barr the Manager of Vickers, Barrow-in-Furness used a spy, whom he described as a member of the "Moulders" Executive, to secure confidential information about the anti-premium bonus

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<sup>1</sup> This letter dated 28 May 1909. Letters in archives of Engineering Employers' Federation P2/11.

campaign. In June 1910 Barr wanted this man sent to London by his Executive to attend a meeting of the joint committee on the premium bonus, and to contact trade unionists in Erith to discover how the bonus system was working. The spy did not receive his Executive's nomination to the Joint Committee meeting; but wrote to a colleague in Erith about the bonus system and passed on the reply to Barr adding "If you have any further suggestions or instructions I should be pleased to receive them."

The letter from Erith was dated June 29, 1910:

"You asked ..... working of the ..... premium bonus system at Erith .... you state that you have heard that men are satisfied with the Barrow system, that is absolutely false, as the tyranny and indignation about it is as great as ever. When they started the system here they simply gave the bonus away; either by putting on time after the work was completed or by giving such big limits that it was simply impossible to do anything but to earn premium ..... Since then they have been putting on limits so short that in many instances it has been impossible to do the work in them. Some of the trade unionists here have been discharged as the result and have been barred elsewhere as being slow. In some cases they have been compelled to walk the streets for months without any hope of getting employment. They have now what may be called "super feed men". That is when the local feed and speed men (or as they like to be called "Rate Fixers" or "Operation Inspectors") have given a time for a piece of work to be done in, then come along the super feed man from Barrow and disputes the time, says it is too long and then tells the yarn that they do this job in half the time at Barrow and generally insults the workers right and left. It is a part of the system .... to set one shop or works against the other..... Again, they put as chief of the speed men a man who was a turner at a shipyard and of course gives ridiculous times which have to be abided by, though he knows nothing about most of the work. The foremen have no power at all .... it is a common occurrence for men to be suspended indefinitely. Quite recently a man had a week off and not allowed (sic)



to start anywhere else. Also suspended one day, come in the next, work perhaps one hour, sent out again. Same next day, whole day out the next, but have to come every morning, sometimes miles by train to see if there is any work for them..... I have said sufficient for you to do your best to get rid of this Greatest Tyranny that has ever been thrust upon the workers since slaving was abolished."

The spy commented:-

"Don't know what to make of it ..... It seems so one-sided ..... System at its inception was spoiled .... If there are any particular class of workers you would like a report from ....."<sup>1</sup>

The A.S.E. sustained a major defeat at Erith. Despite an impressively successful strike at Vickers the Society was unable to prevent a steady deterioration in working conditions and shop floor protection.

Declining armament production during 1907 and heavy unemployment during 1908 and 1909<sup>2</sup> made successful bargaining difficult. Vickers clearly withdrew from a difficult conflict in 1907 in order to achieve their ends by less direct methods; ~~so that~~ by 1910 the premium bonus had been forced on a militant factory.

The A.S.E. Executive Council never favoured strike action to prevent the introduction on the premium bonus - possibly because of the economic situation - but also because they felt obliged to honour the Carlisle agreement. They argued that this agreement "set up such machinery as would likely prevent the spreading of the system and restrain the less scrupulous employer from taking advantage of the men's position."<sup>3</sup>

The Erith dispute showed that the Carlisle agreement was ineffective

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- 1 Barr sent correspondence to Engineering Employers Federation. Archives, P2 1-5.
- 2 During 1908 the A.S.E. had an average 10.2 per cent of members on unemployment benefit. The 1909 figure was 9.2%. The highest subsequent non major dispute year figure (i.e. ignoring 1922-32 %) was 1931 - 12.4%.
- 3 A.S.E. Monthly Report, November 1906 in answer to Erith criticisms.

even where there existed a well organised militant work force backed by an equally determined District Committee. Clause three of the agreement:- "A time limit, after it has been established, should only be changed if the method or means of manufacture are changed"<sup>1</sup> proved unenforceable even in Vickers where repetitive work was common. It was never difficult to devise "a change in the method or means of manufacture" to justify a reduction in time. The conditions, which the exponents of "scientific management", together with premium bonus systems, propounded (and which the technical press assumed to exist), as for example the idea that the feed and speed man should always be able to do a job in the time he allowed, were seldom evident. Vickers used the premium bonus system simply as a method of increasing the intensity of labour and reducing costs to the minimum. This was the usual charge levelled against the bonus system.

The A.S.E. was the only engineering union to sign the Carlisle agreement. "Council wish to briefly say that if the Carlisle agreement .... is abolished, that will not abolish the premium bonus system but will leave the field open for the more unscrupulous employers to introduce whatever conditions they may think fit ....."<sup>2</sup> Such statements depended upon the assumption that the Carlisle agreement was effective. If, as the Erith case tended to show, it was not, then the A.S.E. would have been wise like the other engineering unions, not to have tied their members hands by making an agreement.

The Erith District Committee grasped this point. In October 1909 they convened an aggregate meeting of members which called for the ending of the Carlisle agreement. In November the District Committee issued a circular to A.S.E. district committees describing events at Erith, attacking "the unfair

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1 A.S.E. Monthly Report, November 1906

2 A.S.E. Monthly Report, November 1906.

interpretations put on the terms of agreement<sup>1</sup> by the Executive Council" and calling for the abolition of the Carlisle agreement. A special delegate meeting was requested. The Executive Council suspended the Erith District Committee and other members associated with the circular.<sup>2</sup> Those who refused to withdraw their names from it were expelled.

Upon appeal to the 1909 Final Appeal Court the Executive Council's action was over-ruled by 12 votes to 6. "That this Appeal Court being of the opinion that Rule gives no power to the Executive Council to suspend District Committee for such trivial reasons....."

This decision was a serious reversal for the Executive Council. In 1904 the Final Appeal Court, had ruled in a case where a strike occurred according to rule, but again in the terms of settlement, that the Executive Council was wrong to withdraw strike benefit to secure a return to work.<sup>3</sup>

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1 In 1907 the "terms of settlement" became the "terms of agreement", the former name was still widely used however.

2 District Committee members. A. Button, Thomas S.J. Moore, A.C. Cope, Hy Savage, A.H. Holland, Tom Rees, District Secretary, W.H. Cornelius, W.A. Reddy.

Hy Savage, A. Holland and R. Geers were suspended for issuing a circular "containing untrue statements".

F.S. Button and Thomas S.J. Moore were excluded for refusing to withdraw their names from the circular.

F.S. Button helped to convene "A Voluntary Committee" to secure requisitions from other branches calling upon the Executive Council to take a vote of members on the terms of settlement and the Carlisle agreement.

The 1909 Final Appeal Court considered three appeals on the Erith question (Appeals 18, 24, unnumbered page 323) all three were upheld. For further details see Monthly Reports, February and March 1909 and December 1908.

For Executive Council's consideration of the case see Minutes, 3 December 1908, 10 December, 22 January 1909, 10 February 1909, 18 February 1909, 21 September 1909.

Tom Rees the District Secretary was a bitter opponent of the Executive Council from 1909 onwards. He became a member of the 1912 Delegate Meeting and in 1913 was elected the first full-time Secretary of the London District Committee.

F. S. Button was elected to the Executive Council in 1913 after the Delegate Meeting had dismissed the Executive Council.

3 See Chapter Six

The Delegate Meeting of the same year imposed further limitation on the power of the Executive to intervene in a dispute by forbidding them to take a dispute to central conference without the approval of the district concerned. No agreement could be concluded "concerning wages, piecework prices, or system of working unless the terms of agreement are first submitted to the district or districts effected."<sup>1</sup> It is likely that if the Executive Council had had the power it would have prevented a strike at Erith by refusing to authorise the payment of strike benefit. The 1909 Final Appeal Court strengthened the position of district committees by giving them the right to circularise information or motions to other district committees and campaign against the decisions of the Executive Council.

To an Executive Council trying to consolidate a system of centralised collective bargaining, this further concession to district autonomy was a severe blow. Their position was also weakened by the fact that the terms of settlement had only been voted upon by the membership once, a settlement to a strike which had lasted thirty weeks, and the Carlisle agreement had never been so approved. The Executive Council was further embarrassed by the Joint Committee on the premium bonus which was established to give force to the T.U.C.'s opposition at the same time as they were acting against the Erith District Committee. They appeared to be out of step not only with their own members but with the rest of the trade union movement.

The T.U.C. Joint Committee on the premium bonus system, to which reference has been made in connection with the Erith dispute, found considerable hostility to the system. A worker employed at Vickers Barrow told the committee that the premium bonus had:-

"..... broken down that comradeship which should exist between men of our trade, and put them in competition with one another ..... the

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1 1904 rule book rule XIV clause 15

introduction of high speed cutting steel had wrought a great change in constructive engineering. This factor has justified a revision of the time allowances, which had been subject to considerable cutting down but the firm had the same process with much less justification. Cases were common which the mere alteration of the drawing number and the issue of a new drawing had been considered a sufficient reason for altering the base time allowance to an invariably lower standard."

The A.S.E., Steam Engine Makers, and United Machine Workers had formed a joint committee:

"They found .... that the interpretation of the terms which governed this system was entirely in the hands of the employers, and the workman had absolutely no redress if he considered himself unfairly treated." Older men could not keep up the pace required.

An A.S.E. witness from the Armstrong works at Elswick told the Committee that the Carlisle agreement on fixity of times was ignored.

The Committee reported that the premium bonus existed chiefly where there was repetition work in ordinance, motors, locomotives and electrical sections. It was also spreading to marine engineering and general engineering.

They opposed the bonus system for seven reasons:

1. That it destroyed the principle of collective bargaining "..... and although certain regulations and restrictions were imposed by the Carlisle agreement these safeguards are being continually and persistently evaded by employers on various pretexts." The workman rarely had any voice in fixing his time allowance and had no remedy through his union for complaints.
2. That it was destructive of trade unionism and encouraged disorganisation. The premium bonus "to a large extent abolished craftsmanship by training vast numbers of specialists who are not eligible for membership of the various engineering trade unions." Workshop trade union discipline was undermined.

3. That it was one of the causes of unemployment.

4. The premium bonus lead to the scamping of work:

"When a man was responsible for carrying through and the completing of a job he took a very natural pride in his handiwork. The system under review is largely responsible for the present day specialisation of work in which the individuality and the personal responsibility of the workman is lost ..... Work is now turned out with a view to satisfy certain inspection tests rather than to be an example of the best work the skill and industry of designers and workmen can produce."

5. That it prevented the proper training of apprentices. Before the premium bonus "employers undertook to give them an all round training". This was no longer the case so that when the boys reached manhood they had only a limited knowledge of the trade.

6. The premium bonus systems promoted selfishness in the workshop.

On this point the witnesses were unanimous. Efficient men "work to their full capacity altogether regardless of the inevitable result to their less capable fellow workmen, who, unable to keep pace with their leaders, were subjected to a continual process of selection and elimination which is making it almost impossible for a man in years, or who is not in almost perfect physical condition, obtaining or retaining his employment, and numerous instances were given where men were working in squads under this system of the less efficient being worked out by their fellows, owing to the fears that the general earnings would be reduced....."

7. It promoted workshop favouritism.

Many chargemen and foremen received a premium based upon the net bonus. "This is a direct inducement for them to train and encourage hustlers, and to victimise those who either by choice or necessity refuse to be exploited under the system."

"The Committee concur in the whole of these conclusions. They are of opinion that the premium bonus system, by encouraging individual selfishness, is demoralising to the workmen. That by destroying craftsmanship and encouraging specialisation, it is harmful to the industry, which, moreover, is burdened by a horde of supervising officials,..... and that, further, this system is a menace to the community at large, owing to the abnormal and continuous increase in unemployment." The Committee called for united action by those societies affected.

Stephenson, the A.S.E. member of the Committee, condemned the action of certain societies who deplored the system while allowing their members to work it. He wanted a conference to consider how the system might be ended. In conclusion:- "It is a matter of regret that the great industrial struggles of 1897 in the engineering industry trades had not called forth more united action. We know more fully now what 'Freedom of Management' means."<sup>1</sup>

The Joint Committee's campaign against the premium bonus does not appear to have made much headway until 1913 when the new A.S.E. Executive<sup>2</sup> secured the end of the Carlisle agreement. To be effective an anti-premium bonus campaign needed enthusiastic A.S.E. support.

There were some minor successes before 1913. Aberdeen and Woolwich Councils prohibited premium bonus or piecework on municipal contracts.<sup>3</sup> The

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1 Report of T.U.C. Joint Committee on the Premium Bonus System. Copy in Bishopsgate Institute.

W.R. Thompson (Manager, David Rown & Son, Glasgow) commented on the report to the Engineering Employers' Federation. His only substantial point was that firms were not in fact working proper premium bonus systems. Archives Engineering Employers' Federation, P.2 13/16.

2 See Chapter Nine.

3 April 1910

employers sent out a national questionnaire in response to this but were unable to find any other councils following the same policy.<sup>1</sup> In 1912 the Admiralty abolished the premium bonus in dockyards.<sup>2</sup>

John Barr, using information supplied by his spy was able to keep the Engineering Employers' Federation informed about the Joint Committee's campaign. "Confidential" T.U.C. meetings were reported, the employers knowing they had little to fear as long as the A.S.E. Executive (before 1913) were prevaricating.

By February 1911 the joint committee's campaign had not started. A vote on joint action had been taken which produced an unsatisfactory result. The A.S.E. vote was 14,564 for 5,399 against.<sup>3</sup>

Stephenson declared that the movement had dwindled but "If a united expression from trade unions said the system should not exist they would at once take their place in the front rank of a movement to produce its abolition ....."

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1 Engineering Employers P2 13/16

2 Engineering Employers P2 13/16.

3 There is no evidence of the A.S.E. Executive seeking a high vote. Several voting methods were used by the A.S.E. All voting took place at the branch. The biggest vote was likely if a special ballot occurred at a special branch meeting. A special meeting without a ballot was likely to produce a higher rate than a poll at an ordinary branch meeting. The latter method was used in this case. The Executive by choosing the method of voting could argley determine the size of the poll.

Other Society's voting figures - National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades 1,014 to 212. United Machine Workers 1,254 - 431. Patternmakers 1,644 - 124. Combine Smiths 165 - 0. Smiths & Strikers 857 - 82. Ironfounders 6,307 - 336. Amalgamated Society Carpenters & Joiners 11,965 - 2,064. U.K. Coachmakers 1,165 - 551. Smiths & Hammermen 265 - 93. Sheet Metal Workers 2,837 - 261. United Coppersmiths 320 - 0. Brassfinishers 388 - 50. Total Vote 42,834 to 9,603 in favour of joint action against the premium bonus.

Report of Meeting in archives of Engineering Employers' Federation P2 13/16.



There never appears to have been any doubt about the attitude of the A.S.E. members towards the premium bonus and the Carlisle agreement.

As we have seen when the Carlisle agreement was signed in August 1902 an attempt was made by Sidney Webb and George Barnes to convince A.S.E. members, not merely that the Carlisle agreement should be accepted, but also that the premium bonus system had certain advantages. This was the last occasion that this particular justifications was used. Henceforth the Executive Council argued that, although the premium bonus system was undesirable, the employers under the terms of settlement had the right to introduce it, and the Carlisle agreement helped to mitigate some of the worst features. But, the Executive always refused to allow the members to vote upon the agreement.

We have seen how Erith District Committee became firmly opposed to the agreement and Barrow likewise were against it.<sup>1</sup> Also on 22 September 1913 the Coatbridge branch which had no experience of the bonus system, voted 89 to 2 for ending the Carlisle agreement.<sup>2</sup>

These may be regarded as straws in wind. Much more substantial is that of 381<sup>3</sup> candidates, who stood for office in A.S.E. elections between August 1902 and August 1914, and who were entitled to issue an election address, not one supported either the premium bonus system or the Carlisle agreement. 85 candidates called for the abolition of the premium bonus which, apart from

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1 Aggregate Meeting, 15 December 1903 unanimous. Minutes Barrow District Committee (A.E.U. Barrow)

2 Coatbridge Branch Minutes held by Coatbridge Public Library.

3 See election addresses, A.E.U. archives. This figure does not include election of full time district secretaries, 1913. No candidate in this election supported premium bonus either. The figure of 381 counts each candidature as one.

political questions, was the most popular issue raised in election addresses.<sup>1</sup>

If elections for the Executive Council, the body determining policy on this question, are considered, the premium bonus question was a very important issue.

In 1903 (the first election year after the Carlisle agreement) elections took place to fill four divisions (out of eight). Two successful candidates promised to secure the abolition of the bonus, while a third wanted the Executive Council to be "more democratic".

By 1904 the bonus was more of an issue. Two of the four successful candidates were anti, while three of the "runners up" also favoured abolition. 1906 saw three known anti-bonus candidates returned unopposed, while for the first time a sitting member was elected an abolitionist. Two divisions returned members in 1907. One returned candidate promised action soon, while in the other seat both "front runners" were "anti". In 1909 all four successful candidates were against the bonus. In 1910 five divisions returned members. Four of the five successful candidates promised action against the bonus while three of the "runners up" took the same view.

The last election before the constitutional crisis of 1912 followed the same pattern. Three elections - resulting in three anti-bonus sitting members being returned - two of whom having condemned the bonus in their addresses.

The extent of anti-premium bonus sentiment varied. Commitments extended from ending the Carlisle agreement to the demand that no agreement should be made without the consent of the members. Both amount to the same thing.

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1 85 may appear a small number. A number of factors have to be taken into account. Many candidates did not issue an election address. Where candidates stood for a non policy making post (the majority) they frequently used their address merely to describe their activities in the Labour Movement. Some candidates stood in areas unaffected by the premium bonus. Others would have felt their views were well-known or it was not an issue because all were anti.

In 1905, before the Erith strike, but when the full implications of the Carlisle agreement were understood, the Executive Council judged by members' election addresses, was hostile to the continuation of the bonus system, and in favour of the membership voting on the Carlisle agreement. The members' commitments were as follows:<sup>1</sup>

Div. 1 D. Gardner. Member since 1893. No commitment on the premium system.

Div. 2 W. Hutchinson. New member 1903. Against agreements without consent of members.<sup>2</sup>

Div. 3 W.T. Kelly. Member since 1903. Wanted premium bonus agreement put to membership.<sup>3</sup>

Div. 4 Albert Taylor. Member since 1903. Carlisle agreement has not been carried out.<sup>4</sup>

Div. 5 J.J. Stephenson.<sup>5</sup> Member since 1903. Opposed to Executive Council policy. Against premium bonus.<sup>6</sup>

Div. 6 J. Butts. Member since 1903. No issue in 1903 election address. Against bonus 1906.<sup>7</sup>

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1 Members were nominated by division but elected by the entire membership.

2 Election address, E.C. election 1904 (All election addresses, A.E.U. Archives).

3 Election address, E.C. election 1903

4 Election address, E.C. election 1904

5 Before his election to the E.C. Stephenson was a militant anti-premium bonus member of Barrow District Committee - Minutes, Barrow District Committee, A.E.U. Barrow.

6 Election address, E.C. election 1903.

7 Election address, E.C. election 1906.

Div. 7 J. Steer. Member since 1904. Executive Council should be more democratic in its methods.<sup>1</sup>

Div. 8 T.H. Wilkin. Member since 1901. Districts should be asked about premium bonus and if not advantageous to workmen, should be abolished.<sup>2</sup>

The 1905 Executive Council had one member uncommitted and one member who considered that the Carlisle Agreement had not been carried out. Three members wanted either agreements or the "premium bonus" agreement put to the members. (In Wilkin's case the "Districts"). This would have had the same effect as ending the Carlisle Agreement. Steer wanted the Executive to become more "democratic" which could be presumed to mean putting the agreement to the vote of the members. Stephenson was against the bonus system and Butt although uncommitted in 1905, took up Stephenson's stand the following year, a view he probably already held in 1905.

By any reasonable test there existed on the Executive Council in 1905 a clear majority for some action against the bonus system. Seven years later the position was even more clear cut. The Executive Council members and commitments were as follows.

Div. 1 J. Husband. Member since 1910. Against premium bonus.<sup>3</sup>

Div. 2 W. Hutchinson. Member since 1904. Against agreements without consent of members.<sup>4</sup>

Div. 3 W.T. Kelly. Member since 1903. Premium bonus issue should be put before members.<sup>5</sup>

Div. 4 Albert Taylor. Member since 1893. Pledge to help T.U.C. fight premium bonus.<sup>6</sup>

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1 Election address, E.C. election 1903.

2 Election address, E.C. election 1904.

3 Election address, E.C. election 1910.

4 Election addresses, E.C. elections 1904 and 1910.

5 Election address, E.C. election 1903.

6 Election address, E.C. election 1910.

Div. 5 J.J. Stephenson. Member since 1903. Anti premium bonus.<sup>1</sup>

Div. 6 J. Butts. Member since 1903. Anti bonus system.<sup>2</sup>

Div. 7 J. A. Turnbull. Member since 1910. Anti bonus system.<sup>3</sup>

Div. 8 T.H.Wilkins. Member since 1901. Anti bonus system.<sup>4</sup>

Every member of this committee was in some way pledged to action against the bonus system. Yet, during these years the Council took no action against the Carlisle Agreement or the premium bonus system. The charge that election pledges were worthless had some validity. Five of the eight Executive Councilmen were originally elected on programmes that included action on the premium bonus.

Some of the usual objections to "mandate" democracy can be advanced. Candidates returned for the first time might have insufficient understanding of the situation; a pledge might prove inappropriate, or would make the situation worse. The fact that some candidates reiterated their promises made such justifications difficult to sustain. But there is some truth in the view that many A.S.E. members over-simplified the whole issue.

If the Executive Council had been able to anticipate the future it seems likely that they would not have concluded the Carlisle Agreement. But having made the agreement nothing would be gained by simply ending it. On the contrary some employers might take its' ending as a signal to enforce the bonus more rigorously although, if Vickers was any guide, this was hardly possible.

The trouble with the Carlisle Agreement, from the Executive's point of view, was that it appeared to make them in some way responsible for the spread

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1 Election address, E.C. election 1903.

2 Election addresses, E.C. elections 1906 and 1909.

3 Election addresses, E.C. elections 1910 and 1912.

4 Election address, E.C. election 1906.

of the bonus system. By concluding an agreement the seal of approval could be implied.

Though genuinely opposed to the bonus system the Council could see no way of abolishing it. The terms of settlement gave the employers the right to introduce it. Even joint action was unlikely to succeed;<sup>1</sup> joint action with the A.S.E. leading was discouraged by memories of 1897.

The Council individually or collectively failed to argue this, or any other case. On the premium bonus issue they failed to provide any form of leadership - giving pledges that were not honoured.

For a craft membership, whose whole work situation was threatened, and adversely affected by technical change and managerial authority, the premium bonus with all its implications represented the most degrading culmination of the whole miserable evolution.

The premium bonus issue may be treated as a gauge of the engineers' concern about the effects of technical change and new managerial techniques on the craft. For most A.S.E. members the premium bonus was a purely academic issue as they were unlikely to be affected by it. Had they been "economic men" - purely concerned about earnings, far from the premium bonus (or piecework) being opposed, it would have been welcomed.

The years 1886 - 1926 saw the continuous growth of the piecework system.

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1 Gardner commented on the T.U.C.'s premium bonus policy at the beginning of 1909. "I really don't know what the P.C. (Parliamentary Committee) are playing at over the Premium Bonus System as we have not been consulted up to now not being affiliated to the Congress, but you may take it for granted they can no more now stem the system than they can the piecework system and if they had a knowledge of what has gone before they would be well advised to cease running their heads against a brick wall."

Letter dated 15 February 1909 probably to John Barr's spy. Engineering Employers' Federation archives, P2/3.

Percentage of Piecework

	<u>1886</u>	<u>1913</u>	<u>1920-26</u>
Turners	6	39	63.4
Machine men	11	47	55.4
General Labourers	2	9	15.4 <sub>1</sub>

The Employers' Federation on the basis of 980 returns covering 250,000 men calculated that, in 1914, 46 per cent of turners and 37 per cent of fitters were on piecework. "Taking all classes of workers together, nearly 31 per cent of those in federated firms were at the outbreak of war working under a system of payment by results and the majority of those are on piecework" (not premium systems).

The extent of the premium bonus can only be accurately measured for 1907. According to the Board of Trade enquiry into earnings and hours of labour for that year, three quarters of male operatives, a half of the women, and three quarters of the girls in the engineering industry were working time work. Only four to five per cent of male operatives and one ninth of the women were operating premium bonus systems.<sup>2</sup>

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1 J.W.P. Rowe "Wages in Practice and Theory" (1928). Appendix to Machine changes - technical details.

2 This appears to be rather a low figure. Both the Engineering Employers Federation and the A.S.E. listed districts where the Premium Bonus was worked. In an enquiry conducted for the 1906 Board of Trade Wage census the employers discovered that 29 out of 83 districts had a firm or firms working the bonus system. These districts were Dundee, Glasgow, Greenock, Johnstone, Dunbarton, Kilmarnock, Belfast, Barrow, Carlisle, Annan, ~~Whitehaven~~, Tees, Tyne, Wear, Manchester, Oldham, Bury, Wigan, Preston, Leeds, Bradford, Shipley, Leicester, Ipswich, London, Erith, Dartford, Southampton, Dartmouth. See Appendix V for full enquiry details.

Answering a question from the T.U.C. Joint Committee on the Premium Bonus 1909, the A.S.E. said the bonus was worked in the following districts - Accrington, Arbroath, Ashton, Bolton, Bury, Chesterfield, Coventry, Colchester, Derby, Devonport, Durham, Dunbarton, Edinburgh, Fraserburgh, Hartlepool, Huddersfield, Ipswich, Kilmarnock, Leicester, Middlesbro, Newcastle, Nottingham, Norwich, Portsmouth, Peterboro, Rochdale, Rushton, Stockton, Sheerness, Workington, Wigan, York, Rugby, Wolverhampton, Glasgow, Annan, Manchester, Greenock.

There is no way of telling how many A.S.E. members were working under premium bonus systems. It was however sufficiently widespread for a large proportion of the members to be aware of the system and probably the conditions under which it was worked.

The only statistics available up to 1914 compare piecework with time work. Premium bonus workers were included with pieceworkers.

The Board of Trade wage census for 1906 calculates turners and machine men as receiving  $18\frac{1}{2}$  per cent more than time workers in the same occupations. Fitters received 16 per cent more.

"The position was substantially the same in 1913 with turners and machinists earning on piecework about 19 per cent more than their weekly time rates and fitters a slightly less percentage."<sup>1</sup>

The A.S.E.'s opposition to the premium bonus and piecework is striking when consideration is given to the movement of prices and wages in the years up to 1914. "..... the workers position was best about 1896. After a long period during which wages had shown an upward trend and prices had moved, if not steadily, in a general downward direction, a point was then reached where the time wages stood above the level of prices. After two or three years, food prices started on an upward movement which was not accompanied by a corresponding increase in time wage rates. In the first few years of the century the time wage level remained practically unchanged, and the slow but steady upward movement of prices widened the gap between them. During the decade before the war, food prices continued to rise at a faster rate than the rise in wage rates, so that by 1914 the true position of the skilled time worker in engineering was probably more unsatisfactory than when the century opened. The increasing amount of piecework....., and the earnings obtained in this way, enabled a number of engineering workers to offset the upward

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1 These statistics assume that piece workers on time rates would receive the same time rates either as those already on time rates, or, as their own time rate "underpinning" piecework earnings. Neither of these assumptions are necessarily correct.

See Yates - Wages and Labour Conditions in British Engineering, p.99.



movement in prices that was in progress."<sup>1</sup>

Premium bonus schemes were engineering managements' most systematic response to the "labour saving" opportunities presented by the major technical innovations of the years 1880-1914. The changing character of the industry and technical changes rendered old style craft attitudes incompatible with the most efficient use of labour. A.S.E. nostalgia about craftsmen who fashioned the raw metal into a finished product without supervision, and T.U.C. fears about inspection standards replacing true craft pride, were untenable and took no account of the immense potential of new production techniques. What these attitudes failed to recognise was that work was becoming increasingly collectivised (which is a way of describing the sub-division of work into many related parts) and that the methods by which individual craftsmen controlled their work at the point of production had been rendered technically obsolete.

In view of the employers' attitude it is doubtful whether the unions had any alternative but to defend obsolete attitudes. The employers sought to link the appropriate consequences of technical change with an intensification of work and the replacement of craft discipline by strict authoritarian managerial authority. If the A.S.E. membership had accepted the premium bonus, which symbolised this managerial doctrine, then trade union solidarity on the shop floor could have suffered a serious blow.

The employers' total victory in 1898 was damaging both to industrial relations and the reform of the skill structure of the industry. Under the terms of settlement the employers took the right to change work practices by imposition, without consultation or negotiation. They could ignore any

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1 Yates, P.106-107

proposals made by either shop floor workers or their unions, that affected "management" unless the workers were strong enough to resist changes that were hostile to their collective interests. The terms of settlement did not prevent conflicts about managerial matters and in practice it proved impossible for the employers to reform the mill structure of the industry or achieve anything like the optimum efficiency from new methods of production.

The terms of settlement placed the Executive Council of the A.S.E. in a very awkward predicament. They represented a society that had always given a high priority to the craftsman's control over the point of production. The Executive took the decision to seek collective control under the terms of settlement. There were grave difficulties about this; the terms of settlement were about unilateral control by the employers, and they were resented by the members as conditions imposed on them by defeat. The old, though now impossible doctrine, of unilateral society craft rules and local autonomy were much preferred.

In this very difficult situation the Executive Council correctly concluded that unilateral managerial authority would prove ineffective. But they prematurely tried to take the initiative and conclude collective agreements with the Engineering Employers' Federation. If the Executive Council were not to be mere supplicants, the initiative for agreements had to come from the employers or be jointly required. The Executive needed to develop throughout the Society a shop floor organisation that could ensure that agreements were maintained. By conducting the Carlisle Agreement in the way they did the Executive Council gratuitously accorded still more authority to the employers.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Industrial Policy 1898 - 1912

#### Leadership and "localism"

The terms of settlement were accepted by the Executive Council of the A.S.E. but constitutionally it was extremely doubtful whether the Executive had the authority to secure compliance from the district committees of the Society. As we have seen the Executive Council administered the rules of the Society but district committees were empowered to draw up local rules and trade regulations. A shop dispute could take place if authorised by the district committee and larger disputes were, in theory, controlled by the Executive Council but it was often extremely difficult to control a course of events already legitimately brought to collision point by a district committee.<sup>+1</sup>

The Executive Council could have sought a delegate meeting immediately after the termination of the 1897-98 dispute to amend the rules so that they conformed to the new industrial situation. This the Executive never considered. They had no power to call a meeting but could certainly have induced sufficient branches to insist on a special delegate meeting being held had they requested one. However, once a meeting was convened the Executive had no control over the outcome to the extent that the delegate meeting might even refuse to allow consideration of the Executive's arguments.

The crux of the matter was that the Executive would require the delegate meeting to limit local autonomy so that the unpopular "terms of settlement" could be carried out. This no delegate meeting was ever likely to uphold and one convened specifically to consider the terms of settlement might possibly provoke the employers into a renewed lockout.

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<sup>+1</sup> For a more detailed account of the Executive Council's power and constitutional position see chapter Eight.

Immediately the dispute ended the Executive Council's authority to carry out the terms of settlement was challenged. The Organising District Delegates (O.D.D.) were responsible to the Executive Council although they worked with district committees who might oppose Executive Council policy. Before January 1898 this raised few problems because an O.D.D. had in practice little control over the actions of district committees but afterwards the Executive's authority in the districts depended upon the O.D.D's loyally carrying out their policy and resisting the pressures of local autonomy.

In November 1898 Radcliffe and Rose, O.D.D's for Number 3 and 2<sup>+1</sup> Divisions respectively, were suspended for "spending their time and energies in undermining the authority of this Council, and inciting the members to refuse to be bound by its decisions". Radcliffe refused to attend an Executive Conference at the Hotel Metropole and Rose, although attending, was accused of "repeated scandalous charges and insinuations against this Council".

Radcliffe's case arose out of a wage dispute at Leeds where the men were reluctant to follow the new procedure for avoiding disputes. "The men were disposed to withhold their labour as a means of securing the advance". The Executive Council "had some difficulty in restraining the men, however, and the more so as Mr. Radcliffe at this time was engaged in arguing with us and putting to them that their right of local action was unjustly interfered with". At a mass meeting on September 30, 1898 Radcliffe "made a violent attack upon the Council, and by specious arguments in favour of local autonomy, created much ill-will and friction".

Radcliffe was called to an Executive meeting but refused to attend stating: ".... I must demur to be a party to an unauthorised arrangement

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+1 Number 3 Division covered much of Lancashire centred on Manchester. While Number 2 Division covered most of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.

altering rule and practice in these matters by attendance in the 'capacity' you mention."

This resulted in Radcliffe's suspension but he protested that the Executive's action was "an unwarranted stretch of power". He wished to know what was his offence? He declared that he had not refused to attend the Executive's meeting. "All I did was to 'demur' to hesitate from uncertainty until you further advised".

The Executive Council asked Radcliffe "in future to conform to instructions sent from this office" and for "an expression of regret for ..... (inciting) the members nearly to the point of taking local action in contradistinction to Council's advice ...."

Radcliffe gave an assurance to conform to the Council's policy and admitted that "Words may have been used, and things said, which perhaps, on reflection, would have been better left out or unsaid." His suspension was lifted.

Rose's suspension was due to "his repeated scandalous charges and insinuations against the Executive Council". There was more ill-feeling between Rose and members of the Executive Council than there was in Radcliffe's case. The relationship came to breaking point because Rose did not regard himself as the mere servant of the Executive.

The O.D.D.'s were in a difficult and frequently frustrating position. They handled local grievances and negotiated on behalf of the men. But, at the same time, they were obliged to carry out Executive policy, although they had had no hand in its making. When an issue they had handled locally passed to the Executive Council, and then probably to central conference, they ceased to exercise any influence. The district committees worked on a day to day basis with an O.D.D. and he would be expected to act on their behalf, but the Executive Council expected him to represent their views which could be very unpopular. Had the O.D.D's been able to "follow through" their cases to national level, and participate in Executive Council discussions on them, they

might have been less discontented with their role. Unfortunately the Council had decided that "Executive conferences should be taken part in only by those removed from local influences and in a position to discuss matters with a knowledge of the Society's affairs as a whole ....." When O.D.D's had taken part in conferences "they could not - or, at all events, did not then - divest themselves of the character of local officials; but, on the contrary, were constantly talking of "their division" and "their constituents" thus making it perfectly clear that at an Executive conference the good of the Society as a whole was of little moment to them compared with the goodwill - and votes - of that section of it upon which they were directly dependent."

Rose wielded what the Executive called a "facile and bitter pen"<sup>1</sup> and his reports do suggest that he was a bitter, rather intolerant man and his language was unnecessarily provocative. He gave no sign of understanding the Executive Council's problems or of the effects on his office of the Society's defeat. He had one major grievance which concerned policy. During the lockout "the Oldham grinders" struck in support of the A.S.E. in defiance of their own Executive. Despite this, the Executive Council treated their case for assistance on the same basis as the other

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1 An example of Rose's "facile and bitter pen". Describing the General Secretary of the Steam Engine Makers Society:-

"I regret that Mr Swift appears to regard me with some suspicion. I hope you have not been marking the cards again and representing me as a dangerous and irresponsible person. His trickery on this occasion has not hurt me but has simply robbed the Chester men of a shilling a week. You will observe that Mr Swift is a person who takes himself and his office quite seriously and is not entirely devoid of all sense of responsibility, but he finds - like other people I know - that seriousness and a sense of responsibility are not altogether incompatible with the playing of shady tricks. I recommend him to you. He never whistles at his work, but walks the earth in thoughtful melancholy. It is true that he does more harm than good, but you need not let that deter you from imitating him: it is a mere detail. Only the frivolous judge a man by his work. Men of the world will estimate you by the seriousness of your demeanour and the celerity with which you can go back on your professions."

Letter to Executive Council, October 24<sup>th</sup> 1898. A.E.U. Archives.

small societies. Victimization after the end of the dispute heightened Rose's sense of outrage;

"The position of our lockout and district committee here is pitiable, at least so far as those are concerned who worked at Platts only one having got a start and the others having little or no prospect of getting back as long as they hold office."<sup>1</sup>

The situation of the Oldham grinders greatly incensed Rose and may have been the chief reason for his hostility towards the Executive Council. From the Executive's point of view the grinders' dispute would pass; much more serious was Rose's refusal to accept the terms of settlement<sup>2</sup> and his resentment, not only when lay officials interfered with what he regarded as his sphere of influence, (he asked the Executive to "straighten out those busybodies and keep them in their right places")<sup>3</sup> but with the Executive's Council interference. Rose failed to appreciate that the terms of settlement involved the Executive in every dispute with a federated employer.

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- 1 Letter dated February 28, 1898, A.E.U. archives. When the Executive reduced benefit to the Oldham men Rose wrote :-  
"The mean brutality of cutting down the allowance of our men who are victims of Platt's and Bradbury's is past all serious comment, and the men who voted for such a step are bloody curs - who should have a twelve months semi-starvation to teach them common humanity".  
Letter dated 15 May 1898 - A.E.U. archives.  
Rose's concern about Platts was understandable. Platts of Oldham manufactured textile machinery which they sold all over the world. The work was "extremely delicate and technical". An apprenticeship system flourished but there was no apprenticeship contract. Platts were violently anti union and the A.S.E.'s ability to "strike" the firm was a considerable achievement. See footnote page 119.
  - 2 Executive Council Minutes, 29 July 1898. At Oldham Rose tried to assist the grinders ignoring the new procedure.
  - 3 Letter dated 28 June 1897, A.E.U. Archives

The Executive were extremely fortunate that the struggle against local autonomy was fought against Radcliffe who quickly climbed down, and Rose who had also antagonised district committee officials. In view of the Society's rule book, had an O.D.D. been prepared to fight the Council supported by many of his district committees, the Executive Council would have been in a very difficult situation.<sup>1</sup>

Rose's suspension was placed before the membership and upheld by 10,394 votes to 6,497<sup>2</sup>. He was permitted to stand for re-election after he had apologised for "previous indiscretions" and was easily re-elected.<sup>3</sup>

The problem of independent local action was to be a continuing one but O.D.D.'s were careful not to risk suspension in the future. District committees were restive under the new regime but until 1903 there was no major conflict. 1898-1903 were years of strain and extra responsibility for the Executive Council but also there appeared to be a chance of turning the terms of settlement to the Society's advantage.

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- 1 Rose, had he been on good terms with his local officials, would have been especially qualified for such a stand. He was a capable propagandist with wide contacts. Unlike other O.D.D.'s he had little to fear from the Executive Council as he was shortly to resign his position to take up full time journalism (February 1900).
  - 2 Executive Council Minutes, 12 December 1898.
  - 3 For details of Rose and Radcliffe's suspension see official statement by Executive Council and Minutes, 1 March, 3 June, 4 June, 9 June, 1 July, 29 July, 5 August, 17 August, 25 August, 25 October, 31 October, 3 November, 7 December, 12 December, 1898, 3 February, 8 February 1899. A.E.U. Archives



The events of 1903 were to show the intense resentment that existed against centralisation.

The whole character of industrial action in federated firms was changed after the 1897-98 dispute ended. Whereas before, a wage claim had been a relatively simple business involving a no more complex organisation than a joint action committee with the Executive Council kept informed and, perhaps, a request for financial assistance, after the dispute, the new procedure for avoiding disputes involved the Employers' Federation and the Executive Council. The A.S.E. always had to consider the risk of a local dispute leading to another national lockout.

We have described in Chapter One the typical "trade movement" of the pre-dispute period locally inspired and locally controlled. To emphasize the increasing complexity of industrial relations from 1898 onwards it will be useful to describe the Mid-Lancashire wage movement which pre-occupied the A.S.E. from April to December 1899. In this case the Executive Council's tactics were successful, and the whole proceedings are a contrast, not only with the days of local autonomy, but also with the other bitter fratricidal conflicts described below.

The Mid-Lancashire wage movement for an all-round increase of 2/- per week came before the central conference in April 1899 after the local employers had felt unable to make any advance on existing rates.<sup>1</sup>

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1 The Mid-Lancashire area consisted of Rochdale, Bury, Preston, Blackburn, and Bolton, at the first conference Halifax, where a similar claim had been made, was included. Delegates from these districts together with Barnes and Sellicks attended the Conference on behalf of the A.S.E.

Under pressure from the Engineering Employers Federation, the employers agreed to an advance of 1/- per week "to take effect as from the first pay day in July if in the judgment of the Executive the state of trade is as good then as now."

At the end of June the Executive Council called together delegates from Mid-Lancashire and Frank Rose, who had been re-elected O.D.D., to consider how to further prosecute the claim. The local men reported that the state of trade had remained unchanged since April. Answering the question whether the men were prepared to strike if necessary, Rose thought the steam had gone out of the issue "after the question had hung fire for nearly a year, but that in his opinion the stoppage of overtime would at once force the employers to grant the advance." Bury had voted 90 to 3 for strike action while Rochdale favoured "all peaceable means" only<sup>1</sup>.

At the re-convened central conference the employers refused any concession whatever on the grounds that, although a slight increase in the total number employed had taken place, there existed "a lesser volume of trade and less men on overtime."<sup>2</sup> In view of conflicting evidence on the state of trade the employers offered arbitration.<sup>3</sup> The districts were asked by the Council to vote on this offer and propose future action. At a series of aggregate meetings the arbitration proposal was defeated by 1,577 to 309. (This included the Steam Engine Makers vote which was 248 to 159).<sup>4</sup>

After much discussion and some dissention the Executive Council decided to instruct the district committees to demand ~~by~~ two weeks notice an advance of 1/- per week, and to vote on strike action. This brought a protest from James Swift, Secretary of the Steam Engine Makers (S.E.M.)

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1 E.C. Minutes, 28 June 1899

2 Barnes' report to E.C. 29 June 1899

3 The local employers appear to have offered arbitration after pressure from their Federation

4 E.C. Minutes, 7 July 1899

that before taking this step his Society should have been consulted. Barnes was sent to Manchester to meet the S.E.M. Executive where he was told that they "absolutely refuse to proceed ..... pleading indifference of men and our failure to consult". The S.E.M. proposed a conference or interview with the employers<sup>1</sup> and this suggestion was accepted by the A.S.E. Executive Council. Rose reported that a strike was now impossible and reiterated his opinion that an overtime ban should be imposed.<sup>2</sup>

Faced with the A.S.E. threat of unspecified action if their wage claim was not met the Mid-Lancashire employers consulted the Engineering Employers Federation. This resulted in the Federation warning the A.S.E. Council that "if your members in Mid-Lancashire seek to enforce their demands they (the Federation) find that there is likely to be a serious extension of the area of conflict ....."<sup>3</sup> The employers had now issued a warning that militant action by the A.S.E. could lead to a lockout.

It is possible at this stage to appreciate the impact of the terms of settlement on even a comparatively straight forward wage movement. By July 1899 the agitation for a wage increase had continued for more than twelve months. The men had rejected arbitration and were now being asked to decide what action they wished to take. Two external factors, however, had complicated the situation, the Steam Engine Makers would not support a strike nor would the Employers Federation tolerate one (or perhaps any other action) against one group of employers and like it or not, the Executive Council had to determine policy. This could not, as in the past, be determined locally.

It was not surprising that the men concerned were growing somewhat restive and Rose warned the Council that "if no satisfactory conclusion was arrived at we would lose hundreds of members in Mid-Lancashire". He again

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1 Barnes report, E.C. Minutes, 22 July 1899.

2 E.C. Minutes, 27 July 1899.

3 E.C. Minutes, 29 July 1899.

suggested a stoppage of overtime despite the possibility that this might result in a lockout "but that would place the responsibility upon the employers"<sup>1</sup>

At the conference with the employers the A.S.E. representatives<sup>2</sup> decided to over-rule the decision of the Mid-Lancashire men and accept arbitration by Lord James of Hereford. Most of the district committees accepted this decision and turned their attention to persuading non-federated firms to grant an increase. In Blackburn a leaflet was circulated "without heading or signature and threatening to stop overtime in event of the advance not being permanent".<sup>3</sup>

Lord James's award accepted the trade union argument "that the trade in Mid-Lancashire at the end of June was as good as at the beginning of April".<sup>4</sup> The district committees applied for and were granted 1/- per week advance in wages.

The Executive Council's decision to over-rule local feeling on the question of arbitration was vindicated but an unfavourable award could have led to local difficulties. As it was these difficulties appeared on the employers' side. Some of the Mid-Lancashire employers tried to avoid paying the higher rate to piece workers while others delayed payment and the Bolton Secretary of the Employers Federation showed "want of courtesy" to A.S.E. officials. The Employers Federation admitted these charges and said that their Bolton Secretary did not answer correspondence and was guilty of "general neglect".<sup>5</sup>

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1 E.C. Minutes, 3 August 1899.

2 Breadberry and Barnes

3 E.C. Minutes, 12 August 1899.

4 22 September 1899, Letter to A.S.E.

5 Report on meeting with Mr. Biggard, Secretary of Engineering Employers Federation by Barnes. E.C. Minutes, 13 December 1899.

## The Clyde Wage Dispute 1903

This dispute was probably the most important between 1898 and 1914. It lasted only a few days but its effects severely weakened the power of the Executive Council.

The employers on the North East and North West (Glasgow) coasts demanded a reduction of 1/- per week for day workers and 5% for piece workers due to the bad state of trade. This was opposed by the A.S.E. on the grounds that the employers had enjoyed several profitable years and could well afford to maintain existing rates. But, after taking the employers through the procedure, the A.S.E. was unable to modify their determination to impose the reduction from May 1, 1903. The men on the Clyde and North East Coast emphatically refused to accept the reduction.<sup>1</sup>

The Executive Council decided that possibly the members had not fully appreciated the implication of their vote. A fresh ballot was organised. "The ballot paper to be so worded that the members would understand that the object of vote is to decide whether a strike shall or shall not take place in the event of the employers enforcing the reduction".

This ballot which was not declared until the eve of the reduction (29 April), was almost as decisively in favour of refusing the reduction and taking strike action<sup>2</sup> as the first. The Council decided against immediate strike action<sup>3</sup> in favour of asking the employers for another conference and a deferment of the reduction but this was refused. Biggart, the Secretary of the Engineering Employers Federation expressed the hope that:-

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1 N.E. Coast 1158 to 3498, Clydeside 185 to 2,065.

2 North East Coast "in favour of strike" 3,139, Against 1,721  
North West Coast "in favour of strike" 3,329, Against 519

3 Two members of the Executive Council favoured an immediate strike.

"Your Council may be able to control any precipitate action on the part of your members which would seriously interfere with the friendly relations existing between our Federation and your Society".<sup>1</sup>

After further representations the Executive Council persuaded the employers to attend another conference but the wage reduction was to take place from May 1 as arranged.

These moves achieved the maximum of confusion among the men. They had twice voted to resist the wage reduction by strike action. Ferguson, O.D.D. reported "great dissatisfaction"<sup>1</sup> in Glasgow. He asked "are men to work on reduction?" On the same day J. Husband, Secretary of the Glasgow District Committee, wired "Men not returning till reduction notices are cancelled....."

While the Glasgow men remained out the employers refused to meet the A.S.E. in conference. Barnes appealed to the Glasgow men's loyalty. Husband replied "Men's position unchanged refuse alliance to official illegality remain indifferent as to result of hopeless conference sought for".<sup>2</sup> The Greenock men decided to join the strike in view of the employers' withdrawal from the conference.

In the face of this defiant local action the Executive Council decided to send Barnes to Clydeside "to enquire fully into reasons and origin of the disloyalty of the members in Glasgow ....." If the members refused to return to work he was to inform the committee and branch secretaries when they were officially meeting that all benefits and other expenses were suspended.

The failure to hold a conference was causing unrest on the North East coast. At Stockton and Newcastle the men were only working pending a

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1 E.C. Minutes, May 1, 1903.

2 Telegram, 5 May. E.C. Minutes. By illegality Husband meant that the E.C. were refusing to support a strike called according to rule.

conference,<sup>1</sup> but now no conference was arranged to take place. The Executive could only plead for loyalty while they sought a return to work on the Clyde. While Barnes was travelling to Glasgow the Johnstone men joined the strike. With the strike spreading on Clydeside and the North East men restive<sup>2</sup> the Executive Council's authority was in danger of being completely undermined:

"If the Executive of a trade union appointed by the union itself from among its own members, is to be defied and flouted there is an end of order and government..... It would be a disastrous thing for the industrial movement if it became tainted with indiscipline, and subject to moves of rebellion in the ranks".<sup>3</sup>

"Engineering Magazine" picked up the same issue. After pointing out that the men voted to strike against the advice of their Executive Council they quoted Barnes who said simply "It is rebellion . It is the first serious revolt against the terms of agreement made at the close of the strike of 1897-98".<sup>4</sup>

What was not commented on was that it appeared pointless conducting two ballots on the strike issue if the power of decision still rested with the Executive Council.

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- 1 Leadbetter, Secretary of Newcastle District Committee wried, "Regret no conference great unrest amongst men, afraid not able to keep them....."  
Parker, Secretary of Stockton District Committee, "At an aggregate meeting last night men agreed to work pending conference, seeing that same does not take place wire back what course to take". E.C. Minutes, May 5 1903. The following day South Shields were to take up the same cry.
  - 2 The Stockton District at an aggregate meeting decided to cease work on May 12 unless a conference was held before then. E.C. Minutes, 7 May 1903.
  - 3 Daily News, May 5 1903.
  - 4 May 6 1903.

Barnes arrived in Glasgow in a hostile atmosphere. When he went to the Vacant Book Office, where the District Committee were working, his presence was ignored. A meeting of shop stewards took place in the same building but again Barnes was unable to influence the men. At Johnstone he had to contend with a deputation from Glasgow who, without difficulty, persuaded the men to remain on strike. Barnes at this point threatened to stop strike pay. Ferguson, O.D.D., publicly disassociated himself from this threat arguing that the Executive Council had no power to withdraw benefit. At a mass meeting at the Welling Palace Hall Barnes was howled down and abused not merely from the body of the hall but by the District Committee gathered on the platform. When he proceeded to Greenock he had to contend with Husband and other representatives of the Glasgow District Committee. By a 20 to 1 vote the Greenock men decided to join the strike.

This kind of treatment was a great shock to Barnes. No A.S.E. General Secretary had been abused and humiliated in this way before. For Barnes the experience must have been particularly unpleasant since only seven years before he himself had been the opposition candidate fighting the then A.S.E. establishment, enjoying widespread support in Glasgow. He had just been selected as L.R.C. candidate for a Glasgow seat. So that in that city he might have been expected to have sufficient personal standing to at least command a hearing from members of the Society. Instead he was hated because he was seen to be supporting the employers. At this point Barnes took a strong stand. Ferguson was told that as a "general officer of the Society" he must support the Executive Council. The District Committee was told to refrain from intimidation and it is probable that Barnes threatened them with suspension. At another mass meeting, Ferguson was compelled to speak in favour of the Executive Policy; Barnes suspended all benefits and returned to London.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barnes report to E.C., Minutes May 8, 1903.



It was becoming urgent to have a conference on the situation in the North-East. Leadbetter reported a "tremendous meeting" in Newcastle and a determination to cease work on May 12.

The Clyde men met and after a "wild meeting"<sup>1</sup> decided to postpone any decision for forty-eight hours. In the face of the strike threat the employers on the North-East coast agreed to a conference irrespective of whether the Clyde men returned. Barnes used the possibility of a joint conference as an argument for persuading the Clyde men to return.

The withdrawal of strike pay was a shock to the Clyde men:

"Such a sharp withdrawal of the sinews of war came as a thunderbolt to the men" but the Executive Council's action was widely supported. "In business and industrial circles today the greatest satisfaction is expressed with the action of the Council. They have shown that they realise to the full the gravity of the situation and are determined to maintain discipline at all costs".<sup>2</sup>

The Glasgow District Committee decided to continue strike pay of 10/- per week out of local funds.<sup>3</sup>

A week after strike pay had been officially ended Barnes, and two members of the Executive, (Crompton and Gardner) had to be despatched to Glasgow to make another attempt to end the dispute. They met the Glasgow District Committee "but were received very cavalierly". In effect the Committee refused to have any dealings with them and at a mass meeting they "were received with howls, shouts and whistling". Crompton got a "fair hearing" while Barnes and Gardner spoke to "continual interruption". All appeals to the men to resume work were received with derisive shouts.

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1 Fergusen's phrase, E.C. Minutes, May 2 1903.

2 Daily News, May 9 1903.

3 Daily News, May 11 1903. Barnes told "Local officials they would be held responsible personally for any further monies illegally paid". "Workshop to War Cabinet", p.61.

Husband and Brodie moved a resolution "condemning the Council for deserting them but advising the men to resume work". This was carried by the 3,000 to 4,000 men present.

Immediately the strike was over the Executive Council representatives travelled to York for a conference with the employers. It adjourned until the first week in August by which time the state of trade could be reviewed.

On the Friday before work was resumed Barnes returned to Glasgow (straight from the abortive York conference) to address a meeting of electors. He found that his:

"..... brother members .... had turned up in force in a very unfraternal mood .... I tried to make myself heard ..... There were half a dozen meetings being held simultaneously, women began to struggle to the doors and there was dear old Mick Johnson<sup>1</sup>, a sort of generalissimo running up and down the passage of the crowded hall ... shouting himself and exhorting others to shout so as to keep the pot boiling ..... He had been denied a fight with the employers but was making good fighting me". Eventually Will Crooks restored the meeting to good humour.<sup>2</sup>

With the strike over the Executive Council might have been expected to try and calm the situation down. There were weighty reasons for this policy. Three members of the Council were fighting for re-election and a sustained campaign by disaffected elements could endanger their seats. The Executive Council's decision to suspend benefit was of very dubious constitutional propriety. ... Instead of "a masterful strategy of

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1 Johnson was an anti-Socialist supporter of trade union representation in parliament, and an industrial militant. He regarded the Executive Council as "only an administrative body". Against "pernicious terms of settlement". Johnson was a bitter long standing enemy of all that George Barnes stood for. See various election addresses 1898, 1901 and 1904, A.E.U. Archives.

2 Barnes "Workshop to War Cabinet", p.62.

inactivity" the Executive Council exacerbated the whole situation by informing branch secretaries on Clydeside that as the men "left work in direct contravention of the instructions of this Council .... all benefits paid to members ..... must be refunded ....."<sup>1</sup>

The effect of this decision was to turn every member who had received benefit against the Executive Council. Even if the branches had been disposed to obey, it would have been very difficult to collect money from men who had been on strike for eighteen days and were probably in a somewhat demoralised condition after their defeat. The attempt to collect the money paid in benefit would have certainly led to a serious loss of membership. In the circumstances it is hardly surprising that the branches, supported by the Glasgow District Committee, refused to comply with the Council's instructions. The Glasgow District Committee was suspended. Organising District Delegates Jenkins, Jones and Black had to be sent to Clydeside to virtually suspend branch officers and bully the trustees into refunding the benefit monies. How the trustees in the face of such hostility were actually to collect the money does not appear to have been considered.<sup>2</sup>

Eventually the whole attempt had to be abandoned if the A.S.E. was to be reconstituted on Clydeside. The District Committee was re-elected unopposed with only one new member and the situation of May 1903 was re-established.<sup>3</sup> But the Executive Council's prestige was severely damaged.

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 29 May 1903. The Council also decided to suspend donation benefit. This meant that when the employers refused to take back the strike leaders they were not entitled to any Society benefit. See Report of 1904 Final Appeal Court, A.E.U. Archives.

2 For the attempt to secure repayment of benefit see Executive Council Minutes 29 May, 15 June, 17 June, 18 June, 19 June, 22 June, 28 August, 1 September, 3 September.

3 Executive Council Minutes, 28 September 1903

The wage dispute finally petered out at the re-constituted conference in August when the employers declined to reconsider the reduction. They refused arbitration.<sup>1</sup> Had the Executive at the conference secured some concession, local feeling against them would probably have abated.

The severe action by the Council against the Glasgow District Committee was probably intended as a warning to other restive district committees. As we shall see it is difficult to believe that it was based upon any realistic appraisal of their constitutional authority.

During 1903 wage reductions were widespread in the shipbuilding areas. Barrow-in-Furness was by 1903 an A.S.E. stronghold.<sup>2</sup> The terms of settlement received no support among the Barrow men. At one of their regular aggregate meetings on October 28 1902 by 260 votes to nil they called upon the Executive Council to bring them to an end.

In April 1903 it became clear that Vickers were likely to demand a wage reduction.<sup>3</sup> An aggregate meeting of the A.S.E., Steam Engine Makers, and Machine Workers Association was called to discuss this prospect and a joint negotiating committee was established.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 1 September 1903

2 A.S.E. membership January 1898 - 854. April 1900, 1,571. The district on the basis of membership growth requested that a local organiser be appointed.

3 The number employed by Vickers Shipyard had declined from 3,067 in 1901 to 2,085. Report of delegation to Vickers, District Committee Minutes, Barrow, 4 May 1903.

4 The following resolution was passed by the meeting:-

- (1) "That the meeting is of the opinion that trade does not warrant a reduction after the remarks of the Chairman of Vickers, Sons & Maxim at their last annual meeting.
- (2) That conditions of living in Barrow were from 5 to 10 per cent higher than other towns of the same rate of wages.
- (3) That the firm of Vickers, Sons & Maxim were now working 8d. under the rate of other towns is working 54 hours instead of 53 hours. In the face of these disadvantages this meeting is unanimously opposed to the reduction".

Carried unanimously. Recorded in Minute book. A.S.E. District Committee, Barrow, 4 May 1903.

On May 4 1903 Vickers announced a 10 per cent wage reduction which was reduced to 5 per cent by central conference. Andersen the O.D.D. and the District Secretary accepted this but they were repudiated by the District Committee under the influence of J.J. Stephenson. At the aggregate meeting called to discuss what action to take Barnes urged that the reduction be accepted but his advice was rejected by 280 to 160.<sup>1</sup> He warned the District Committee that they must pay no benefit in the event of a strike, the Clyde situation re-enforcing this warning. On the pretext that a two thirds majority was necessary for strike action the District Committee decided that the Executive Council's policy must stand.<sup>2</sup> In December another aggregate meeting called upon the Council to abrogate the terms of settlement,<sup>3</sup>

The Executive Council's action against the men on the Clyde, which had impressed the Barrow District Committee, was based upon an extremely dubious interpretation of their powers within the constitution and rules of the A.S.E. Under rule district committees required Executive Council approval when they sought to regulate rates of wages. However, as we have seen, district committees had the power to call aggregate meetings "upon trade questions". In the case of a shop dispute members could strike with the approval of a district committee. "No general strike shall be entered upon in any district affecting the whole of the members unless carried by a majority of three votes to two of the members of the said district".<sup>4</sup> The Executive Council's decision to ballot members on the North-East and North-West coasts in March and April 1903 would appear to have been under the provisions of this clause which implied that the power of decision rested with the district membership.

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1 This meeting is discussed in the footnote to p.

2 District Committee Minutes, 13 August 1903

3 District Committee Minutes, 15 December 1903

4 Rule XIII, Clause I.

The rules were ambiguous and took no account of the terms of settlement. Nevertheless, the Executive Council must have been aware that the body charged with interpreting the rules, in this case the Final Appeal Court, was more likely to favour local autonomy than executive power.

As I have suggested above, the Executive Council might well have sought either a change of rule or a favourable interpretation of rule, to enable them to carry out the terms of settlement. Having failed to seek a delegate meeting for this purpose it is extraordinary that they raised the whole question of their power in the highly charged aftermath of an unsuccessful strike against a wage reduction. The decision to seek the repayment of benefit was bound to be challenged before the Final Appeal Court and the Court's ruling would in practice concern the effective power the Executive Council could exercise over recalcitrant district committees.

The decision to demand repayment of benefit was unanimous, no Councilman recognising the danger either to those seeking re-election or from the Final Appeal Court.

#### The Elections of 1903 and the judgements of the Final Appeal Court

The elections for three seats on the Executive Council took place between 16 March (the day on which nominations were received) and 10 August (when the results were announced).

By decision of the 1901 Delegate Meeting candidates were nominated on a divisional basis but elected by a vote of the entire membership. The three sitting Councilmen, Crompton, Heesen and Golightly<sup>1</sup> had easily secured election and re-election when elections were decided on a divisional basis.

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1 Alfred Golightly was elected to the first full time E.C. which started work from January 1893. Crompton was first elected in 1897 at a by-election due to the death of McDowell; Heesen was like Golightly, an original member of the full time E.C.

The 1903 elections gave the A.S.E. membership the chance to pronounce judgement on the Council's policy towards the wage reductions coinciding as they did with the strike on Clydeside and the subsequent dispute about the payment of benefit.

Despite the Council's rather desperate attempts to discover voting irregularities the three sitting members were defeated by three relatively unknown young men. The decisive factor was the almost "block" anti-Executive Council vote on the North-East and North-West coasts. There had been nothing about the early stages of the election to suggest that a sensational result was likely. The leading challengers did not receive an exceptional number of nominations<sup>1</sup> and appeared to have little to offer in the way of qualifications. Only one of them, W.T. Kelly, had previously sought election to a national post and he had been easily defeated by the incumbent.<sup>2</sup> Kelly and Stephenson had militant reputations<sup>3</sup> and their election

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1 Number of nominations: Kelly 17, Golightly 34, Crompton 51, Stephenson 12, Hooson 39, Butts name omitted from list. E.C. Minutes, 16 March 1903.

2 Opposed Sykes as O.D.D. 1901, defeated 323 to 664.

3 Particularly Stephenson. He had been an extremely militant Secretary of Barrow District Committee 1898-1902 (did not stand for re-election) and a bitter opponent of Vickers when they introduced the premium bonus. Before Stephenson took his seat on the Council, but after the announcement of the election result, Barnes visited Barrow in connection with a wage reduction on the same basis as that which had taken place on the North-East and North-West coasts. At a central conference the Barrow District Secretary (not Stephenson) and Anderson O.D.D. had accepted the reduction but this action was repudiated by the District Committee. At an aggregate meeting attended by 600 men Barnes argued for acceptance of the reductions, "his remarks were well received". But "some members began to stir up some ill-feeling and a very fiery speech by Stephenson brought matters to a climax and set the whole meeting in a turmoil....." The reduction was rejected by 280 to 160 with "at least 200 not voting". Executive Council Minutes, August 15, 1903. Barrow District Committee Minutes, August 13, 1903.

addresses reflected the conventional opposition stand being against the premium bonus and wanting the Executive to show more fight. Stephenson promised that "he would not smother operations" while Kelly argued that the lockout should not have been ended. Both were strong supporters of political action. Butts was the odd man out. He was also in favour of political action but had no record of industrial militancy. They were all in their late twenties or early thirties (Kelly 29, Stephenson 31, Butts 32).

When the Executive Council received the results which showed the narrow defeat of three of their number they asked Black and Jenkins Jones to investigate the voting of certain branches. These branches with one exception showed a majority against the sitting members. The investigation did manage to improve the position of the sitting members (Golightly by 235 votes, Crompton by 247 and Hooson by 60) but not by enough to affect the result.<sup>1</sup>

Division 3

Kelly	12,178
Golightly	<u>11,968</u>
Majority	210

Division 5

Stephenson	11,794
Crompton	<u>11,508</u>
Majority	286

Division 6

Butts	11,288
Hooson	<u>11,266</u>
Majority	22

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1 The branches were Openshaw 2nd, Redruth, Stockton, Gavan East, Gavan 3rd, Gavan 2nd, Gavan, Gavanhill, Renfrew, Glasgow West, Glasgow South East, Dennistown, Glasgow 4th, Ulverston, Darlington, Newcastle 6th, Chicago, Hull 2nd. The total votes of the investigated branches: Golightly 138, Kelly, 1,807, Crompton 140, Stephenson 1,113, Butts 1,663, Hooson 241, (before investigation)  
A.S.E. Monthly Report October 1903.



After the declaration of these results the Council discovered that Bradford Trades and Labour Council had issued a letter which was circulated to other trades and labour councils "endorsing the candidature of Mr. Butts". Council disqualified Butts and ordered the election to be held again.<sup>1</sup> The new election, however, left the position unchanged:-

Butts	13,604
Hooson	<u>11,677</u>
Majority	<u>1,927</u>

The table on page 238 provides an area analysis of these elections. (Because no detailed figures are available for the second Butts - Hooson contest the table records the first).

Ten areas have been chosen to give an indication of the effect of local pressures upon the results. Barrow-in-Furness was a shipbuilding area, also affected by a wage reduction, and the home town of Stephenson. Much higher than average polls were recorded (36 to 44 per cent against a national average of 23 to 25 per cent). All opposition candidates secured large majorities with Stephenson doing particularly well.

Birkhead was Crompton's home area where he had taken some trouble to maintain his contacts. Here, on an average poll, the sitting members secured a majority with Crompton gaining from his local connections.

Bolton was unaffected by wage disputes and on a high poll produced big majorities for the sitting members.

Bradford was Butts's home town. Stephenson and Kelly secured good majorities on average polls, while Butts secured a large majority on a bigger poll. In Bradford (and in Barrow) the "outside" opposition candidates secured similar votes while the local man did much better.

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Council Minutes, 22 September 1903

AREA ANALYSIS

Executive Council Elections 1903. Results declared October 1903

Area	Percentage of members voting				Percentage of members voting				
	Golightly	Kelly	Majority	Crompton	Stephenson	Majority	Hooson	Butts	Majority
Barrow-in-Furness	169	356	187	39	585	546	161	346	185
Birkenhead	109	67	42	22	125	53	72	25	97
Bolton	661	128	553	43.4	498	83	415	32	489
Bradford	61	153	82	23.3	58	143	85	21	36
Crewe	542	29	513	47.5	398	30	368	35	338
Glasgow Clyde-side	117	2388	2271	48.8	139	2337	2198	48.5	188
Hull	54	272	218	30.0	104	224	120	30.0	102
London	828	691	137	21.5	638	730	92	19.3	708
Manchester	643	786	143	25	597	595	2	20.5	659
Lyneside	664	1632	968	35	705	1467	762	33.0	685
Whole Country	11968	12,178	210	25	11508	11794	288	24.5	11266

These areas are for the purposes of calculation only.

Membership of A.S.E. end of 1903 95,403  
 " " " beginning of 1903 93,252  
 Taken as 95,000 for October.

Crewe, where most A.S.E. members worked in the railway workshops, produced the most emphatic support for the sitting member of anywhere in the country.

Glasgow/Clydeside, in a very large poll, was a landslide against the Executive Council. In some of the branches affected by the dispute the sitting members failed to secure a single vote.

Hull, a seaport town unaffected by the dispute, nevertheless produced a considerable majority for the anti-Executive candidates.

London which had the highest membership in the country<sup>1</sup> on a just below average poll produced an uneven result. Golightly and Hooson had smallish majorities but Stephenson also achieved a small majority over Crompton.

In Manchester, Kelly as a local candidate won a small victory, Crompton and Stephenson obtained almost the same votes while Hooson had a reasonable majority over Butt.

Tyneside had considerable majorities for the opposition candidates though not on Clydeside's scale.

The opposition candidates won one third of their votes from the Clyde and Tyneside (these areas contained 12 per cent of A.S.E. members). The Executive Council's decision to seek repayment of benefit probably played a considerable part in creating the large opposition vote on the Clyde.

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1. In Order of size. London 7,088, Tyneside 6,572, Manchester 5,751, Glasgow Clydeside 5,108, Bolton 1,820, Barrow 1,400, Crewe 1,200, Hull 1,087, Bradford 921, Birkenhead 708. London, Tyneside, Manchester and Glasgow were the largest concentrates of A.S.E. members in the country.

The result of the 1903 election<sup>1</sup> was a severe warning to the Executive Council. National elections made it impossible for Councilmen to rely on their popularity in home districts. Two disaffected regions, in the face of tepid enthusiasm elsewhere, were able to dislodge three Councilmen.

During 1904 the Final Appeal Court met and considered the Council's decisions on benefit payment. The Clyde men decided to challenge the refusal to pay donation benefit<sup>2</sup> to the victimized, an issue most likely to arouse the Court's sympathy. Barnes strongly defended the Council's whole policy towards the Clyde dispute:

"The men had public opinion solidly ranged against them; they had other trades which had accepted reduction indifferent if not hostile; and they were surrounded by a number of non-unionists who would have surrendered in a very short time. They had really embarked upon a rash and hopeless enterprise, for which it would have been a criminal act on the part of the Council to have drawn upon the Society's funds.

"Having taken up this position and notified the men concerned, and having regard to the fact that the North-East men faithfully accepted the position, it would obviously have been very weak and improper for the Council to have receded from it simply because of the clamour of a section of excited and passionate men at Glasgow..... The men have been saved from themselves, and useless squandering of the Society's moneys has been prevented.

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1 J.B. Jeffery's in "The Story of the Engineers" says that four Executive Councilmen were defeated in 1903. He appears to have been confused by the election of a new councillor - James Steer - for No. 7 Division. Steer did not defeat a sitting member - he replaced Alfred Sellicks who had died.

2 Donation benefit (10/- per week for 14 weeks, 7/- for 30 weeks, 6/- indefinitely) was unemployment benefit. Contingent benefit (5/- per week) was strike or lockout benefit. "The Daily News" report quoted above (p.226) suggested that the Clyde men were receiving donation benefit.

"Moreover, a much-needed lesson has been given in maintenance of trade union discipline, and it has been made manifest to all concerned that, at all hazards, the Executive of the A.S.E. has the courage of its opinions, and is determined not to allow the Society to be led on the rocks by irresponsible and inexperienced advisers".

The Final Appeal Court ruled:-

"That, in the interests of good government, and the stability of the Society, the Executive Council were justified in exhausting every resource to prevent a rupture, and in bringing it summarily to a close when it had broken out, but believing the men to have acted in good faith, we uphold their claim for Donation benefit".

The Court dismissed the Glasgow members' appeal for contingent benefit.<sup>1</sup>

The decisions on benefit payment were rather confused and contradictory but what tended to be remembered was that the Council's right to suspend benefit had been called into question. The decision on donation benefit, together with the defeat of the three councilmen, considerably weakened the power and prestige of the Executive Council.

The 1904 Delegate Meeting with the Clyde dispute fresh in mind decided to spell out the limitations on the Executive's power when dealing with a local dispute "on no account shall they take any case from the district in which the dispute occurred to Central Conference, unless requested to do so by the local District Committee". No agreement was to be made without it first being submitted to the district or districts concerned. The result of a district ballot vote had to be accepted by the Executive. These rule changes considerably restricted the Council's power to influence a dispute.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Report of Final Appeal Court 1904

2 See Chapter Five for the effect of these restrictions upon the Executive's power during the 1907 Erith premium bonus dispute.

Looking back with a knowledge of how events unfolded it is easy to be wisely critical. Nevertheless it appears reasonable to conclude from the events of 1903 that the Executive Council's actions were too crudely direct and took too little account of possible consequences. With more skill they could almost certainly have ended the Clyde dispute without damage to themselves or the prestige of their office.

Before the 1897-98 dispute the A.S.E. comprised a series of autonomous trade societies. In the major areas like Tyneside, or on the Clyde, trade policy and wage questions were usually decided locally without the Executive Council playing much part. It would have been very strange indeed if, only five years after the lockout, this tradition of local independence had disappeared. The Executive Council needed to contain local feeling while avoiding, as far as possible, a total confrontation. It is clear that a strike against wage reductions in 1903 had very little chance of success and the Executive Council was quite right to avoid a dispute. In this situation it would have been wise to have avoided what the Executive Council themselves considered to be a strike ballot. Holding the ballot twice merely re-inforced the conclusion that the power of decision rested with the local men.

Having effectively ended the strike by suspending benefits it would have been far better, as I have suggested above, if the Council had from then on left things alone. By trying to secure the repayment of benefits and denying donation benefit to the victimized the Council exacerbated local feeling, thus seriously contributing to the defeat of the three councilmen, and themselves suffering a damaging rebuff at the hands of the Final Appeal Court.

Before the Appeal Court judgement Barnes commented upon the Clyde dispute and the rejection of the three councilmen:-

"These happenings denote an amount of unrest and dissatisfaction unprecedented in the Society's history and is fraught, I believe, with more than lies on the surface. In the main they denote the violent clashing of two antagonistic principles; centralised authority and local autonomy. The first imposed upon us by modern conditions, and the second has been to many, one the prized features of the Society since its inauguration 53 years ago.

"How far it may be possible to harmonise these two ideas time alone can tell ..... in questions of trade policy there must be that unity of purpose and control which is only possible to obtain from a common centre. Let that centre be as close as may be to the membership, let it be brought into contact with the actualities of the workshop as well as with the large actualities, let its proceedings even be brought under periodical and critical review; but safety to the Society lies .... only in yielding due respect to its recommendations and acquiescence in its decisions.

"Localism in this respect is indeed in our internal affairs but a form of that sectionalism which with one voice we decry when presented externally in the garb of small ineffective organisations".<sup>1</sup>

Barnes saw the events of 1903 in terms of the struggle between centralisation and localism; others might see them as the vindication of the A.S.E. constitution which was designed to prevent an all powerful central executive usurping the rights of members and districts.

The election system had enabled the members to express their dissatisfaction with the Executive Council by removing three councilmen. A Final Appeal Court, made up of lay members, had an effect imposed a

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1 A.S.E. Annual Report for 1903. General Secretary's remarks. A.E.U. Archives.

limitation on the Council's right to withhold benefit. It had been shown that the constitution of the A.S.E. severely limited the power of the Council. Changes of policy and the implementation of central control could effectively proceed only by consent or more accurately, without the creation of an intensive opposition sufficiently concentrated to be able to mobilise constitutionally and effectively against the Executive Council.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Terms of Settlement and the One Break System

The issue that united the Executive Council's critics was opposition to the terms of settlement and their centralising implications. At no time were they able to sustain an effective campaign against this nor were Executive Councilmen who had been elected on an anti-terms of settlement programme, able to affect policy. Most of the critics envisaged a return to the pre-dispute situation but this ignored the reality of a powerful employers' organisation. There were two ways of rescinding the terms of settlement, either by negotiation or by unilateral termination. A negotiated termination involved the agreement of the employers which was unlikely so that the slogan "End the Terms of Settlement" implied unilateral action. Since it could not be expected that the employers would accept such action this made retaliation inevitable. It seemed possible that this would take the form of a general lockout or merely a refusal to negotiate (which could amount to a complete or partial withdrawal of recognition).

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1 The 1904 election for General Secretary added an additional footnote to the situation on Clydeside. George Barnes easily won the election (Barnes 17,709, Seay 2,119, Wilson 5,191, Wright 3,881) but the second man Alf Wilson won a majority of the Clyde votes with 1,169 votes to Barnes's 313. Wilson described himself as "a Conservervative". He continued, "Some ask, what has a working man got to conserve? and my answer is: work for himself and his children, his wages, the respect that is due to his union, the funds that he has put by for a rainy day, and a legal position on equal terms with his employers or any combination of capital that may be formed against him". Wilson was a strange sort of Conservervative but the fact remains that Clydeside preferred his Conservatism to George Barnes Socialism. Election Address, A.E.U. Archives.



If the A.S.E. had been in a more powerful industrial position and, given favourable economic conditions, such a policy might have been worth the risk but, at no time up to 1914, could the Executive Council feel the Society was strong enough to enter into a major national dispute with the employers. Anti-terms of settlement men who were elected to the Council very soon came to accept this situation.

It is very doubtful whether the majority of the A.S.E. membership were prepared to take industrial action to end the terms of settlement. The procedure to deal with disputes was thought to be slow and cumbersome but some such procedure, albeit improved, was probably preferable to endless disputes. That part of the settlement giving employers the power to settle trade questions aroused most resentment and this, plus the stigma of defeat and the temptation to blame the terms of settlement for every grievance and frustration, made them the usual target for the disaffected.

The trade policy question was also a serious one but the employers were hardly likely to relinquish their formal rights in this area and this was not an issue where much effective power was conferred. In this respect there were two important factors to be considered. Engineering factories were dependent on skilled workers and if these men resisted the dilution of their craft then the employer, formal rights or not, would have to take account of this. Again, the degree of intensive managerial supervision necessary to effect and maintain major changes in work practices was considerable and over a long period of time likely to break down. The routine of production tended towards the establishment of a stable craft work demarcation situation. A management concerned about asserting its "trade rights" would be likely to attack the craft tradition but not continuously. More likely short periods of conflict would be interspersed by long periods of stability.

There was, in effect, scope for the A.S.E.'s traditional trade policy despite the terms of settlement. A policy of enforcing trade rules was possible and, during managerial "offensives", holding on until the inevitable period of stability returned, was adopted in traditional craft style. Clearly the Executive Council could not enunciate such a policy without alerting the employers and being accused of bad faith.

The terms of settlement were an important issue within the Society and central to the whole question of industrial policy but the Executive Council spent very little time considering their abolition or amendment. This was partly because of the reasons outlined above but also because the Executive (in a Society without any policy-making machinery) was absorbed in day-to-day business and never discussed policy questions in a strategic way. On this basis the question about the terms of settlement was whether they could be improved by amendment not abolition. In 1901 this was attempted but the members felt unable to accept the slightly amended terms.<sup>1</sup> A number of small amendments were made to the procedure for avoiding disputes in 1907. Local conferences were to be held "within twelve working days from the receipt of the application" (no time had been previously stipulated) and central conferences were formally written into the procedure. In an attempt to remove the stigma of defeat the terms of settlement became the terms of agreement remaining unchanged until the new Executive Committee gave six months notice of their termination in 1913.

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1 The altered terms of settlement were rejected by 7,379 to 14,879. They were refused "because of the absence of provision for the payment of day work rates of wage to those asked to work piece work, and because of irritating references to non society men". Monthly Report, February 1902.

No change of name could alter the unpopularity of the agreement.

The Executive Council's difficulty in negotiating on the basis of an unpopular settlement can be illustrated by their reluctance to make agreements that required ratification, and by what happened when they did.

As we have seen the Executive Council continually refused to allow the members to vote on the Carlisle agreement of 1902 concerning the premium bonus. When the new Executive Council in 1913 did put this agreement to the vote it was decisively defeated which was not unexpected because of the unpopularity of the premium bonus.

The Executive's failure to secure a majority for an agreement on the "one break system" was more surprising. In 1907 the Council made an agreement with the Employers Federation that no opposition would be offered to employers who reduced hours of work to 51, while starting work at 7 a.m. instead of 6 a.m., and working through the day with one break instead of two (thus ending the breakfast break). This agreement was unpopular for two main reasons. Firstly, it was seen as proof of the Society's 1897 contention that the two hour pre-breakfast hours were uneconomic. Members argued that 51 hours per week necessitated two five hour shifts per day which were too long. If 51 hours were required then three shifts must remain. Two shifts were possible only if a 48 hour week was worked. Two shifts and 51 hours per week to some extent betrayed the case for the eight hour day.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, following from this, if the A.S.E. accepted 51 hours and two shifts, then great pressure would be put upon the Admiralty to end the eight-hour day in dockyards (other employers working a 48-hour week might come to the same decision). It might have been expected that a later start in the morning,

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 14 January 1908.

and two or three fewer hours work each week for the same pay, would have overcome these objections but, in fact, the members rejected the one break agreement by 19,226 to 9,780.<sup>1</sup>

### The North-East Coast Strike and the Resignation of George Barnes

Opposition to the terms of settlement and later the terms of agreement remained the most popular platform of those seeking to defeat Executive Councilmen. Almost any district committee could secure a substantial majority at an aggregate meeting for their 'ending'. After 1903 Executive Councilmen ceased to argue the issue, instead they tended to ignore the question or talk in a vague way about militant policies to improve the Society's industrial strength.

George Barnes continued to present the case for accepting the system of centralised bargaining and the procedure for avoiding disputes. Gradually he came to support the new system as an advance rather than as an unpleasant necessity.

In the annual report for 1907, which was published as the North-East Coast men were deciding upon strike action, Barnes reviewed the changes in industrial relations that had taken place since he became General Secretary eleven years before:

"At that time the Society had 86,000 members ..... It had just come through a big dispute covering the shipbuilding areas of the Clyde and Belfast, many other small disputes were then on hand, and there was a general feeling of irritation which worsened during the next few months immediately following, and culminated in the big stoppage of 1897. This may be regarded as the end of parochialism in trade unionism. It was bound to come....."

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 30 January 1908.

A habit of mind had been allowed which, while paying empty homage to the principles of amalgamation, had really re-imposed upon trade unionism the old evils and weakness of sectionalism, from which Newton and Allan had rescued it fifty years before. The absence of national organisations of employers had rather favoured this; but the advent of employers' federations made its continuance impossible. From that time forward, a larger loyalty and a more extended outlook in trade unionism as well as in other matters became necessary .....

"The ..... terms of agreement have been, on the whole, productive of some good, as now amended have secured to the members solid material advantages and they embody full recognition by each side of the rights of the other ..... I do not say they are perfect, but they are, at all events, moderately fair, and they are capable of still further modification or variation according to facts and reason ..... the shortest possible time limit for conferences and provision of full information ..... are the two practical things the Society should keep steadily in mind.

"I believe that initiatory discretion of the employers in regard to minor matters is a necessary condition of any terms of agreement. Pending settlement, somebody must say what, under certain circumstances, must be done, and it seems to me that somebody must necessarily be the employers .... It should be here said in parenthesis that this does not apply to wages or hours, and that, in regard to these, both sides are tied alike and both have been tied to their advantage".

This is a statement of Barnes' position on the eve of the dispute which was to cause his resignation. It expressed the extent to which his views had changed since his election; in 1896 Barnes had been the candidate for those with "a general feeling of irritation". Naturally the dispute of 1897-98 had so radically changed the industrial environment that previous attitudes could be regarded as out of date but in spite of this the out<sup>look</sup>look of Barnes's original supporters had not significantly changed. Furthermore,

to those actually dealing with the difficult industrial situation, Barnes's attitude must have appeared somewhat complacent. He accepted the terms of agreement and required changes only in regard to the conditions under which the procedure of avoiding disputes operated. "Initiatory discretion" was conceded to the employers on all but wage and hour questions. What this meant was that in this crucial area of trade policy and working conditions, the employer was free to impose his authority before negotiation. Often the operation of new conditions fatally weakened any chance of securing their removal.

On the traditional trade policy basis of the A.S.E. Barnes had virtually conceded authority to the employers. As for any Socialist view of workers' rights or power this was entirely missing. There is very little evidence of much concern about ideological distinctions in the A.S.E. but certainly Barnes in his younger days had adopted a markedly ideological attitude.

At this juncture, however, there can be no denying that Barnes's view was in a narrow sense realistic. The employers were powerful, the terms of agreement had certain advantages (which could possibly be improved) for the Society and localism or sectionalism was being kept in check. It was an extremely prosaic view of trade unionism.

There were, I think, two serious weaknesses in Barnes's attitude. Most of the active members of the A.S.E. (and probably many of the inactive ones) were not prepared to accept the employers' control of craft matters. It was also a very static view which did not apparently envisage any fundamental change in the balance of industrial power. A consideration of the long term question of this would have raised the whole craft issue as well as matters of political importance. As we shall see, in political activity Barnes retained the rhetoric of socialism (in a somewhat cloudy Ramsay McDonald fashion) but was quite unable to link this to the problems of the A.S.E. He might have persuaded many active A.S.E. members to accept the

realism of his attitude to the terms of agreement had he been able to offer any strategy which, in the long term, offered some hope of a stronger Society capable of matching the employers' strength. In practice he offered only the continuation of an unpalatable situation. It is against this background that the nagging frustration of the North-East coast men must be judged.

From the middle of 1907 the employers in the shipbuilding areas were demanding a wage reduction of 2/- for time-workers and 5 per cent for those working by the piece. The Executive Council was narrowly able to avoid a strike in mid 1907.<sup>1</sup> By the beginning of 1908 the reductions were imminent and the question was whether they could be resisted by strike action. In the Executive Council's view there was a powerful case against the reductions. Wage rates in the affected area were in 1908 the same as ten years before, despite a general national increase of approximately 2/- "corresponding somewhat with increased cost of living".<sup>2</sup> During the ten years in question shipbuilding had been generally prosperous while wages had been reduced.<sup>3</sup> The shipowners were accused of withholding orders until a reduction had taken place.

In this situation the Council might have been prepared to lead an official strike despite the risk of a general lockout. But the rising level of unemployment and the general state of depression in the industry gravely reduced the chances of its success.

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1 Executive Council Minutes, June 21 and June 24, 1907

2 General Office Report, Monthly Report, February 1908

3 This appears to contradict the point that wages were the same as ten years before. However, we must assume that in this case real wages (taking account of living costs) were meant.

As we have seen the 1904 delegate meeting had amended rules so that the result of any district ballot had to be accepted by the Executive Council. The decision of whether to strike was therefore in the hands of the local men.

A ballot took place in early February. Despite their misgivings the Council did not advise against strike action. Hutchison a Council member told an aggregate meeting in Newcastle that:-

"he desired to give them no lead other than to assure them that if by their vote the men desired to resist the reduction the Executive Council will give them the fullest support but he advised careful consideration to the aftermath of a strike when some one was always sacrificed".<sup>1</sup>

The men voted to reject the wage reduction by a large majority.<sup>2</sup> Strike action was planned by the A.S.E., the S.E.M. and the U.M.W.A. As was usual in such circumstances, the policy towards non-unionists posed difficulties. If they continued at work the effectiveness of the strike would be damaged but they could not be expected to cease work without monetary support. It was decided that no official funds should be used to support non-unionists although district committees were empowered to raise voluntary funds out of which non-members could be supported.<sup>3</sup>

On February 19, while the men were working out their strike notice, the President of the Board of Trade, Lloyd George intervened to try and prevent the strike. He called both sides together and suggested that the

1 Executive Council Minutes, 12 February 1908

2	A.S.E. for accepting reduction	922	Against	5,162
	S.E.M. " " "	249	"	448
	U.M.W.A." " "	<u>136</u>	"	<u>530</u>
		1,307		6,140

E.C. Minutes, 17 February 1908.

3 Executive Council Minutes, 18 February 1908 - conference of three Societies.



reduction be postponed for three months pending arbitration. The Employers Association rejected the three months postponement but accepted arbitration during which the old rates of pay should continue. Eventually under pressure from the Societies and Lloyd George the Employers accepted a two month standstill.

A further ballot was arranged with three central proposals:-

- "(1) That the work be resumed forthwith in the event of acceptance.
- (2) That the rate of wages hitherto paid should be continued up to Easter, and that reduction, if any, shall take effect only as from Easter.
- (3) That the question of a reduction, or employer's proposal to reduce by 1s. per week shall be submitted to a referee, to whom each side shall be free to state its case in the light of facts respecting trade and wages on the coast and elsewhere".

As soon as these proposals became known on the North-East Coast it became clear that there was very little chance of their acceptance. Lloyd George asked for the ballot to be stopped to allow him to see representatives of the men. This the Executive felt unable to do. The proposals were rejected by 5,482 to 2,699.

As the result was announced representatives from the affected districts were arriving in London to meet Lloyd George. The representatives told the President of the Board of Trade that the men were worried about the selection of an arbiter. After four and half hours the meeting was assured "that the referee will be chosen from a list of impartial persons, not employers of labour, drawn up by Mr. Lloyd George, the name to be selected with the concurrence of Mr. Barnes acting on behalf of the three trade unions affected, and of Sir Andrew Noble acting on behalf of the employers". Further "Mr. Ratcliffe and all the district representatives of

the three unions present will report favourably to the acceptance of the terms....." The Executives of the unions agreed to recommend the terms<sup>1</sup> in a new ballot.

George Barnes was sent to address a series of aggregate meetings called to discuss the proposals. He addressed meetings at Hartlepool, Stockton, Sunderland, Mid-Tyne, Newcastle and Darlington. "With the exception of Sunderland the reception given to him was generally of a resentful character especially so at Newcastle and Mid-Tyne....." The delegates who had agreed to support the proposals after meeting Lloyd George failed to do so. "Mr. Ratcliffe was also distinctly unfair in his reports stating the reason of his recommendation was based on the changed conditions principally the E.C. not now being behind the men".<sup>2</sup>

Barnes had attempted to persuade the men to support the settlement proposals by threatening that benefit might be suspended if the strike continued. For this he was firmly rebuked by the Council.<sup>3</sup>

The S.E.M. and the U.M.W.A. accepted the arbitration proposals, but by 4,356 to 3,693 the A.S.E. members rejected them.<sup>4</sup>

This was an extraordinary decision by the A.S.E. men. There was, as Frank Rose wrote in "Clarion",<sup>5</sup> something wrong when a major strike occurs for 2d. per day. This was the issue and the possibility of a

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1 Terms of ballot paper. See also A.S.E. Monthly Report, April 1908

2 Barnes report to E.C. Minutes, 19 March 1908

3 E.C. Minutes, March 13, 1908

4 A.S.E. Monthly Report, April 1908

5 "Clarion", February 28, 1908. For details of Lloyd George's intervention see Executive Council Minutes February 20, February 21, February 22, February 24, March 2, March 3, March 4, March 6, March 10, March 11, March 12, March 13, March 18.

successful strike was remote. By March it was already clear that a sharp trade depression was affecting the engineering and shipbuilding industry. During May unemployment in the North-East was to reach an unprecedented level.<sup>1</sup> The weather during the early months of 1908 was particularly severe. While the second strike ballot was proceeding "The Northern Weekly Leader" reported:-<sup>2</sup>

"Shipbuilding and engineering constitutes practically the only industry in the district ..... the suffering of the people are necessarily very great". "In Jarrow Hebburn and Wallsend thousands of workers are in great poverty. 1,000 necessitous children are being fed daily .... and ... the condition of many adults is such that some steps will have to be taken to provide food for them".

John H. Watson, secretary of the Newcastle Children's Rescue Agency appealed for support:-

"This morning we have had eight hundred hungry children to breakfast through the kindness of the workmen of Elswick shipyard..... Although the weather was so severe this morning, the snow lying thick on the ground, many children were barefooted some mothers carrying little ones on their backs and in some of the homes ..... the children were absolutely naked with no

1 Unemployment in Shipbuilding at the end of May 1908. (May 1907 in parenthesis):

Tyne and at Blyton	40.2%	(7.4%)
Wear	50.5%	(2.6%)
Tees & Hartlepool	43.1%	(11.1%)
Clyde	32.0%	(4.6%)

Clyde unaffected by the dispute. "Newcastle Daily Journal", June 18, 1908.

2 March 7, 1908.

fire and no food ..... The present sources of relief are totally inadequate. Thousands of needy children, being under age, receive no benefit from school meals, and the school boot fund is quite insufficient to meet legitimate claims upon it".<sup>1</sup>

There can seldom have been a less propitious time for a strike, least of all one over a mere 1/- per week. Yet the strike continued. The general frustration and discontent which characterised the A.S.E. had in this case come to the surface. Both sides settled down for a long struggle, the North-East coast men intensifying their efforts to strengthen the strike.<sup>2</sup> At the same time they attacked the A.S.E. Executive Council:

"..... action should be taken by our members on the North-East coast to counteract the influence of the Executive Council over members outside the division, and suggest a manifesto be drawn up stating the case of the North-East Coast men and showing the treatment we have been subjected to for the last ten years".<sup>3</sup>

This was the view of the Wallsend branch. The same branch sought to crystalize the struggle around the demand for a 36/- a week minimum.<sup>4</sup>

The Executive Council explained away the intransigence of the strikers in terms of "localism":

"..... considerable irritation was displayed because arrangements had been entered into by the central authorities instead of the local authorities; in fact, so tenaciously is this gospel held that the question was put to Mr. Lloyd George, could the matter not be done through him locally with local employers? and he sternly refused to countenance any such idea.

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1 "Newcastle Daily Journal", March 3, 1908

2 On Wednesday "several thousand" outside the Elswick works "including a large number of women and boys ..... Non unionists leaving the shops met with a hostile reception, several of them becomingly hopelessly entangled in the crowd. It is alleged that missiles were thrown". "The Northern Weekly Leader", March 7, 1908.

3 "Newcastle Daily Journal", March 31, 1908

4 A.S.E. Monthly Report, April 1908.

Still, to be told "you are the masters of your own destiny, the weavers of your own web" sounds well and evokes cheers, but it is not trade unionism as represented by a great amalgamation. If they are the masters of their own destiny it is surprising they have not seen the only deduction, that they should have a local society....."<sup>1</sup>

This was a dangerous argument which would have placed the Executive in an awkward situation if the strikers had then or later considered breaking away. In any case the North-East Coast men had acted within the constitution. In the first place they had received no lead from the Executive and secondly the Lloyd George proposals were not likely to prevent a wage reduction so the ballot decision, given the men's premise, was consistent. Where the men were wrong was in contemplating strike action during a trade depression.

On March 25 George Barnes resigned as General Secretary. He was asked by the Council to continue in office until a new Secretary could be elected. Barnes considered that the Executive Council, by failing to oppose the North-East Coast strike, were undermining the Society and the whole development of collective bargaining:

"..... I venture to express the opinion that the North-East Coast men did not vote on the merits of the terms submitted to them so much as on side issues which had been imported into the consideration. They had become possessed of a notion that they had to 'work out their own destiny' to use a foolish phrase much mouthed to them; their minds had been warped by statements that I, for some reason not clearly defined, had been induced to take the employers' side of the case, and they therefore voted in the main, on a feeling of resentment which had been fostered among them". Now  
".... I decline to be a party to a setting up of a part of the Society as above the Society as a whole.

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1 A.S.E. Monthly Report, April 1908

"..... If trade union officials are to be flouted without due rhyme or reason - and this will apply to local as well as to central officialdom - then the effectiveness of trade unionism as an agent for Labour will be weakened, and collective bargaining undermined ..... once elected ..... officials should have fair play, otherwise employers .... may well decline to treat with them or regard them as representative".<sup>1</sup>

The Executive Council and many branches, some districts and ad hoc committees of members asked Barnes to re-consider his decision. Eventually he submitted to the Council his terms for remaining:

- "(1) More power to Society's representatives
  - (2) More help for office work - a common understanding about other matters; the members to be asked to invest the Council of the Society with sufficient authority to withhold money supports in prolongation of a strike.
- 2nd. Suggest that one of the packers just started remain ..... at the end of the year another man would be wanted.
- 3rd. Too much travelling away from the office on an insufficient allowance....."<sup>2</sup>

The latter conditions were merely a protest at the parsimony of the Executive. It was the first point concerning more power to the "Society's representatives" that went to the heart of the matter. In July<sup>3</sup> Barnes elaborated his case. In a letter to Joe Binns (himself a candidate for the General Secretaryship) he wrote that the Executive should have called a

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1 A.S.E. Monthly Report, April 1908. See also E.C. Minutes, 25 March, 1 April. Also "Workshop to War Cabinet" by George Barnes, p.56-57.

2 Executive Council Minutes, May 4, 1908

3 See A.S.E. Journal

special delegate meeting<sup>1</sup> to alter the rule "which enables a district to defy the Society". He wanted the rule book to clearly empower the Executive Council to overrule "localism" where necessary.

The Council refused to accept the General Secretary's suggestions. They claimed that the resolutions calling for a delegate meeting had "come from a common source" and that they could hardly bring the North-East Coast dispute to an end on terms which the men had twice rejected; furthermore that the rule allowing a special delegate meeting applied only when a dispute existed between the Executive and a district committee. No such dispute existed.

The Council's reply was somewhat disingenuous. Organised campaigns by groups of members were perfectly legitimate within the A.S.E. - every Executive member had frequently been part of such groups - so resolutions, even if they originated from "a common source", were perfectly valid. There was also nothing in rule to suggest that a special delegate meeting could only take place where a district was in conflict with the Executive Council. Precedent was also against the Council since in 1904 a special delegate meeting was convened to amend an unworkable overtime rule when there was no dispute between the Executive and any district.

Barnes did not propose a delegate meeting to deal with the North-East Coast dispute:

"Those who had temporarily led the men had become masters of the situation. Nor have I ever said that the North-East Coast men have not acted within their rights. What I did suggest was that the rule as

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1 A Special Delegate Meeting could be called on a requisition from 30 branches followed by a majority vote of the Society in which at least 15 per cent of the members vote. "For the purpose of promptly constituting such a Delegate Meeting" the members of the previous Delegate Meeting shall serve for it. Barnes claimed that at least 50 resolutions calling for a Delegate Meeting had been received by the Council. 1908 rule book rule XVIII, clause 6.

interpreted by the Council, having brought about an intolerable position, there should be an alteration of rule made to prevent a recurrence".

The Executive Council's real reason for rejecting the call for a special delegate meeting (unconstitutionally) was probably rather more significant. It was extremely doubtful whether any delegate meeting would substantially increase the Executive Council's power. A delegate meeting might, on the contrary, consolidate the division of power between the districts and the centre. It would also have been very difficult, in 1908, for a delegate meeting not to have been extremely concerned about the strike. The question of more Executive power would have appeared indistinguishable from decisions about the justice of the strikers' case.

It could be argued that the highly emotional atmosphere of a strike was the worst possible time to expect a calm re-appraisal of the A.S.E.'s decision-making structure. It may be that, given these difficulties, the Council decided that the best method of increasing its own authority was not by delegate meeting decision but by the gradual acquisition of authority through the working of a centralised bargaining system, thus making it ipso facto the only centre of decision.

Barnes received a good deal of support over his attitude.

"Engineering" magazine sympathised:-

"..... if behaviour such as we have recently witnessed among the men is allowed, it means the end of negotiation between employers and men's representatives".<sup>1</sup>

The Labour Leader had a high opinion of Barnes:-

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1 April 10, 1908



"..... Mr. Barnes is universally honoured and treated alike in the Socialist and trade union ranks. He has for twenty years proudly borne the Socialist flag in the trade union movement. His straight-forwardness and his courage are big assets to the party".<sup>1</sup>

And on his resignation:-

It "..... has been received with something akin to consternation among the ranks of the Engineers Society. No trade union secretary of our times has commanded more universal confidence than Mr. Barnes.

"His manifest sincerity, practical wisdom and fine sincere comradeship has marked him out as one of the most beloved and trusted working class leaders of our time".<sup>2</sup>

Frank Rose in "Clarion" defended Barnes and reviewed the whole position of the A.S.E. in an "open letter" to the Society.

The strike was costing £6,000 to £7,000 per week. 3,000 men were spending money that belonged to the entire membership. A.S.E. members were bitter because they had "lost control of the tools". They were now "mere cogs". "Strikes achieve nothing". Socialism appeared to be the only answer.

The A.S.E. had not won one strike since the 9 hour strike of 1871 that involved any real advantage. It was:-

"unjust that Barnes should have to offer himself as a sacrifice to their unmanly selfishness. If your Executive were men with the courage of their convictions they would be with him now ..... (the) treatment the General Secretary received on Tyneside three weeks ago was ungenerous and brutal".

The A.S.E. should run at least a dozen parliamentary candidates instead of "pouring many thousands down the gutter of waste and futility..."<sup>3</sup>

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1 January 3, 1908

2 April 10, 1908

3 April 10, 1908

Barnes was an extremely competent General Secretary and the Executive Council felt able to trust his honesty and judgement. His resignation was also a serious matter for the A.S.E. particularly as his successor, Jenkins Jones, was a man of far less stature and ability.

Barnes was in fact not allowed to resign from office. While he was continuing in office, pending the election of a successor, the Executive Council decided to "relieve him from office" for "irregularities in the election of General Secretary". It appeared that two candidates, Golightly and Binns, were permitted to change their election addresses after the Council had submitted them to the printers. Golightly had added a postscript to the address explaining that if elected he would withdraw from the parliamentary panel. Binns was accused of re-writing his address. Barnes was responsible for sending the changed addresses to the printers. and there is no doubt that he acted contrary to rule. He accepted this but argued that the changes made merely clarified the candidates' positions. Golightly's case seems very trivial but Binns was an ally of Barnes and his address might have contained an attack on the Council.

Whether Barnes resigned or was dismissed made little difference he was ceasing to be General Secretary. It is rather surprising that the Council did not simply reprimand him and let his resignation take effect. By dismissing him they ran the unnecessary risk of antagonizing a man who still had considerable industrial and political influence.<sup>1</sup>

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1 For Barnes' resignation see Executive Council Minutes 1 April, 4 May, 9 May, 18 August, 20 August, 21 August, 22 August, 26 August, 27 August, 31 August. Monthly Report, April, May, June and September. A.S.E. Journal May - September.

Throughout the wrangle about the General Secretaryship the strike on the North-East Coast continued. In August, with the strikers no nearer their objective, a ballot empowered the three Executives "to obtain best terms possible, subject to a vote of North-East Coast members".

At the same time the Engineering Employers' Federation informed the A.S.E. that the "Federation will deal with the question as a Federation question and will give active support to the North-East Coast Association".

By September 3 the Federation was ready to intervene:-

"I am desired to advise you that the position has received further and very serious consideration, and, as the Federation can no longer refrain from giving active support to the Association it has resolved that on and after Saturday 26 inst., the services of the members of the three societies concerned employed by the Federated Employers shall be dispensed with".<sup>1</sup>

A conference of members of the Executive Council and representatives from the district committees of all three societies met on September 9. The delegates unanimously advised the men to accept the following terms:-

- "(1) To return to work at the reduction, no further alteration of wages to take place for six months from the date of resumption of work.
- (2) That after the resumption of work the men's representatives shall attend a conference with the representatives of the employers for the purpose of considering in what respects the present procedure for dealing with the wages question shall be amended in order to avoid stoppage of work. The first meeting to take place within one month after the resumption of work".<sup>2</sup>

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1 Letters quoted from Allan M. Smith, Secretary, Engineering Employers Federation, August 18 and September 3. A.E.U. archives.

2 Memorandum agreed by delegates. A.E.U. archives

The strikers were asked to accept defeat "in view of the continued depression". The delegates advice was accepted by 4,609 to 3,739.<sup>1</sup> So ended a long and disastrous strike.<sup>2</sup>

A central conference was held to discuss improved procedures for dealing with wage questions, the employers suggesting a wages board but no progress was made.<sup>3</sup>

It was nevertheless becoming clear that the industry's whole bargaining procedure was threatened by the possibility of a series of bitter local strikes concerning comparatively small wage reductions which were likely to be restored during the next period of prosperity.

During 1909, to stabilize the situation, the Executive Council and the Employers Federation concluded a series of agreements under which wage rates would remain unchanged for a specified period of years. Five year agreements were concluded for Hull, Barrow, Sheffield, Barnsley and London. Three year agreements were made for Manchester and Newton. These agreements were to become extremely unpopular with the Executive's critics. "No more long term agreements" was to become a frequent slogan of the 1912-14 years. There can be no doubt that the Executive Council were extremely unfortunate in stabilizing wages during years of growing prosperity and rising prices. Instead of avoiding wage reductions the agreement prevented the prosecution of militant wage movements.

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1 This was the total vote. Made up of:- A.S.E. for 3,618, against 3,278. S.E.M.'s for 506, against 209. U.M.W.A. for 483, against 252.

2 For the latter stages of the dispute Executive Council Minutes 17 June, 7 July, 9 July, 30 July, 18 August, 21 August, 22 August, 24 August, 25 August, 2 September, 3 September, 4 September, 7 September, 21 September, 23 September.

3 A.S.E. Monthly Report, November and December 1908.

## Leadership impossible?

It is possible to take the view that, given the conditions and structure of the A.S.E., effective leadership in the years from the lockout until 1914 was impossible and beyond saying this any further discussion is valueless academic theorising. If we are to make any appraisal of the Executive Council's policy, however, it is necessary to consider the various alternatives open to the Society. The A.S.E. was a Society within which constitutional and policy questions were continually discussed. Major reforms were successfully advocated by organised groups during the 1890's and before 1912. In 1920 the foundation of the A.E.U. was to be another victory for reforming groups within the Society.

It is therefore not unreasonable to suggest that it was open to the Executive Council to take a more positive stand on the whole question of constitutional reform and policy. The Council could have argued the case, not just for more Executive power, but for a decision-making process that on national issues produced a coherent policy for the whole Society.

While the Executive Council was able to use the Monthly Report and the A.S.E. Journal to propose reform, they were open to the charge of being simply concerned in increasing their own power. Also, by the conduct of day-to-day business the Council inevitably made enemies. An Executive Council, seeking to persuade the members to adopt far reaching changes, needed by its technique of leadership to avoid gratuitous antagonism, and to recognise the scope of its influence.

Techniques of leadership were particularly important in a Society where there existed a number of centres of power. The Executive needed to define policy objectives and then seek their achievement with the minimum of conflict. This was difficult in the A.S.E. because no policy as such existed and Executives were always inclined to apply rules in a somewhat automatic fashion. This appeared to be one explanation for the Executive's

action in 1903 when, upon successfully ending the Clyde strike, by a foolish and unnecessary benefit decision (which had nothing to do with the main policy objective) they created a wave of hostility which was eventually to lead to an important limitation on the Council's power and authority.

In a much weaker constitutional position the Executive gravely mishandled the North-East Cost dispute. It failed in the first place to advise against a strike which had no chance of success. Then in response to outside pressure the Executive sought to end the strike on "new conditions". As in 1903 the "new conditions" (in 1903 a further conference was held and in 1908 arbitration) upon which the Council tried to persuade the men to return to work, were worthless because they would in the end sanction the reduction.<sup>1</sup> This was understood by the men but, in both cases, the real question of whether a successful strike was possible was obscured. Such was the confusion in April 1908 that it was impossible for the strikers to know whether the Executive Council supported the strike or not.

It was difficult for leadership to be effective in the absence of well defined policies. The leadership needed to recognise the areas within which their influence could best be deployed. Probably the hardest decision the Executive Council of the A.S.E. had to make was about the areas over which they did not possess, and could not possess, authority.

The Executive Council, barring major constitutional reform, could exercise very little control over district committees on trade matters.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 In 1903 the employers at a further conference refused to alter their policy. Given the state of trade in 1908 an arbitrator was bound to support the employers' demand for a wage reduction.
  - 2 Although the Executive Council had little control over local matters they recognised the importance of effective shop floor organisation. Consequently from 1909 the Executive encouraged district committees to appoint shop stewards.

This meant that if "localism" was to be contained the employers would have to do it. The North-East Coast dispute was a case of this kind. Because the men had acted within the constitution of the A.S.E. the Executive could only seek to persuade them that local action would be ineffective and their slight attempts at this failed. The men would only learn this lesson by defeat at the hands of the employers.

Political action was advocated by the Executive Council as a painless method of improving the Society's strength. It is necessary to say something here about political action as a method of augmenting the Society's power because this became a live issue during the North-East Coast dispute.

As we have seen above, Frank Rose attacked the strike partly on the grounds that the money spent could be better used financing parliamentary candidates.<sup>1</sup> Barnes made the same point.

The members "should not be led away on side issues. Year by year the Society spent an average of £100,000 on unemployment benefit". The other unions spent a similar amount of money. "What would even a tenth of it do - in the matter of parliamentary representation spent on a capable propagandist who would get at the consciences and heart of the people .... Let them get out of strikes and lockouts". Trade unions should concentrate on politics.<sup>2</sup>

While this doctrine was being preached to the North-East Coast strikers the Liberal member for Newcastle died. J.J. Stephenson, member of the A.S.E. Executive Council being the prospective Labour candidate, this appeared to be a first class opportunity to demonstrate the value of political as against industrial action.

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1 See page 254

2 "Labour Leader", 11 September 1908

The situation was complicated by the fact that Newcastle was a double member seat, where in 1906 Walter Hudson a Labour member had been elected, running in harness with the Liberals. If Stephenson contested the by-election it was feared that Hudson would face a Liberal opponent at the general election. Consequently the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party decided not to contest the seat and Stephenson withdrew his candidature.<sup>1</sup> So, the political alternative, when the opportunity to use it arose, did not appear to amount to much.

Even ignoring the Newcastle by-election farce, political action could best be defended as a means of achieving long term social reform and more immediate objectives like changes in trade union law and safety legislation, etc. What it could not reasonably be presented as, was as a solution to the A.S.E.'s industrial problems. Those who told the North-East Coast strikers to take political action had to show how such action could prevent wage reductions and achieve the 36/- minimum wage. This they could not do, anymore than the A.S.E. Executive could show how political action could augment the Society's industrial strength. One possible reason for the declining interest in political action after 1906 is that it became increasingly difficult for trade unionists to see how parliamentary action could affect their immediate industrial demands.

The Executive Council had very little room for manoeuvre within a constitution which severely limited their power. At district and factory level the important struggle over managerial rights proceeded without the

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1 See "Labour Leader", "Clarion", "Newcastle Daily Journal", "The Northern Democrat", July-September 1908.

Election result:	Renwick	(Conservative)	13,863
	Shonlt	(Liberal)	11,720
	Hartley	(S.D.P.)	2,971



Council being able to exercise very much influence. The national agreement they sought to operate was too unpopular with the members for them to be able to extend its scope - even if the Engineering Employers Federation had agreed. During the years 1897-1914 the A.S.E. increased its membership but failed to increase significantly their industrial strength.<sup>1</sup>

However the Executive Council had acted, the leadership of the A.S.E. in the years after 1898 would have been extremely difficult.

The disputes on the Clyde and North-East Coast showed this. In both cases a simmering discontent burst to the surface. There was no question of local agitators taking the law into their own hands; on the contrary, both strikes were enthusiastically sustained by the rank and file membership, as the numerous aggregate meetings and ballots proved.

On the North-East Coast the demand for the 36/- minimum wage was taken up by a "large shop meeting".<sup>2</sup> All decisions of the leaders were submitted to aggregate meetings and discussed. The only time the local leadership wavered was when withdrawn from their local environment they met Lloyd George. When they returned home they either reneged or were repudiated.

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1 Where the Executive Council had the rules to support their actions they often found it difficult to persuade district committees to obey them. Rule changes widening the membership of the Society had very little effect partly because non-craft members were accorded an inferior status and the branches refused to recruit them in other than derisory members.

Despite the terms of settlement some of the branches refused to recruit non-craft members and tried to exclude "the handyman" from the machines. The Executive, often at the behest of the employers had frequently to intervene and compel branches to accept managements right to staff machines with "unskilled" machinists. In 1906 the Manchester District Committee was suspended on this issue.

2 A number of members were excluded by the Executive Council for "issuing printed matter bearing the name of the Society without previous sanction of the Council, and acting contrary to the Society's interest". Typical of the printed matter issued was the following from the Wallsend branch.

"That we, members here assembled, exhort the members of the North East Coast to adhere to the minimum of 36s. weekly in pursuance of the policy advocated by our Executive".

"Fight for Freedom"

The expelled members appealed to the Final Appeal Court claiming that "a large shop meeting" drew up and paid for the printed matter. The Court unanimously upheld their appeal. Proceedings of Final Appeal Court 1909.

With the A.S.E.'s tradition of control at the point of production went a highly developed sense of participant democracy. Representative institutions were suspect, the only true democracy being direct control by the membership. What the Executive Council called "localism" was not loyalty to any particular locality but the control by the men on the spot of their own affairs. Once the decision ceased to be a local one this became impossible to put into operation.

This highly developed sense of direct democracy could be mistaken for syndicalism but there is no evidence of any ideological influence in the A.S.E., unless extreme democracy is taken to be an ideology.

This belief in direct control by the engineer over his union and working environment was encouraged by and in turn encouraged the growth of workshop representatives or shop stewards.

The wartime shop stewards' movement has frequently been explained in terms of the economic conditions of wartime from which it drew its industrial strength but that movement's ideas, on rank and file democracy, clearly existed in the pre-war engineering industry.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The A.S.E. and Politics, 1899-1912

The A.S.E. was a trade society which sought to deal with its members' problems on an industrial basis. Until the delegate meeting of 1892 there was no provision in the rules for any sort of political action by the Society.<sup>1</sup>

Trade unions were unable to ignore political questions, if only because their effective existence depended (and depends) upon a legal framework which protected their funds and allowed them to take effective industrial action. The A.S.E. had many members who worked in admiralty dockyards, on admiralty contracts in the shipyards and in Government factories. In particular, employment in Woolwich Arsenal was often an issue between the Society and the Government of the day. Political influence could assist these members and help persuade the Government to act as a model employer.

However, concern about the character of trade union law and the policy of the Government towards engineers in their employment, did not necessarily imply any particular form of political action. Until the time of the Taff Vale decision, the 1875 Conspiracy and Protection to Property Act was regarded as satisfactory. After a short campaign by the trade unions concerned<sup>2</sup> the 1892-95 Liberal Government introduced the eight-hour day into Government factories and dockyards.

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1 The 1892 Delegate Meeting passed the following rule:- "If at any time it should appear to the Council desirable to contribute towards the expenses of a member of the Society as a candidate for election as a member of the House of Commons, they shall have power, after submitting the question to a vote of members, to cause a levy to be made for payment of such contributions, and of an annual allowance to such member if elected; such levy not to exceed threepence per year per member". 1892 Delegate Meeting, Rule XIV Clause 14.

2 See Chapter Three

A.S.E. members were on the whole among the better paid members of the working class. The Society provided friendly society benefits which to some extent made up for the absence of state unemployment, sickness and retirement benefits.

Before 1892 most members of the Local Executive Council were sympathetic to the Liberal party with a minority of committed Socialists.<sup>1</sup> The chief complaint against the Liberals was their failure to nominate working men for <sup>S&F</sup> ~~winable~~ parliamentary seats. Politics were not generally considered to be the concern of the Society but individual members were encouraged to be active. John Burnett in his forward to the annual report for 1884 expressed a common attitude:-

"In the past, labour has had to fight for all it has gained, and will yet have to fight in the future. It is the recognition of this fact which has called our union into existence. Their main purpose is one of assertion or resistance. They have to make the best of things as they are, and to this mission their rules confine them, but every member has his individual rights and, within the limits of our rules and as a private citizen, he may devote his energies to such of the social reform agencies as he may think most likely to secure better treatment for labour than it has yet enjoyed".<sup>2</sup>

The example and propaganda of John Burns was an important influence in persuading many active members that the A.S.E. should, as an organisation, sponsor parliamentary candidates.<sup>3</sup>

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1 John Burns, George Barnes and Harry Rich were all at one time members of the Local Executive Council.

2 A.E.U. archives

3 The Burns papers show that up until 1900 he used his membership of the House of Commons to give full support to the Society. Alf Sellicks the first chairman of the reformed Executive Council in 1893 was an active supporter of Burns in Battersea. See 'A Sketch of the Life's Work of Alfred Sellicks' by Henry J. May (1903).

At the 1892 delegate meeting the rule permitting the Executive Council to raise a 3d. levy, after a ballot, so that "the Society should be directly represented in Parliament" was passed by 34 votes to 28, with the four overseas delegates voting with the majority. This was a very narrow victory for political action and it is possible to make too much of the narrow majority. There is in fact no evidence to suggest that the minority was comprised entirely of those who opposed the A.S.E. supporting members who stood for election to the House of Commons. The proposed rule could be criticised on many other grounds. It could be argued that the levy was too small, that the decision to raise a levy should not be left to the Executive Council and that it made no sense to want members in the House of Commons unless they were required to support certain policies and principles. A.S.E. delegate meetings lasted several weeks and the 1892 meeting, one of the largest, had only 68 members. Delegates on an important question like political action would have a good idea of how the vote would go beforehand so that this sometimes allowed those who, though in a small minority, wanted a more far-reaching proposal, to vote against without affecting the decision.

The first Executive Council had a not over-enthusiastic majority for the Society seeking parliamentary representation. This to the Executive meant electing members to the House of Commons and no more. The election in 1896 of George Barnes to the General Secretaryship was a most important step in helping to give direction to the Council's political policy.<sup>1</sup> He was a member of the I.L.P. and stood as their candidate for Rochdale in the 1895 general election. He accepted the case for a trade union Socialist

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1 For the election of George Barnes to the General Secretaryship and the attitude of the Executive Council to politics see Chapter Two.

alliance and was to use all his growing influence to establish, maintain and develop the Society's relationship with the Labour Party. As we shall see, the Council's ill-defined political policy was to enable Barnes to speak on behalf of the A.S.E. advocating I.L.P. policies.

It is possible to form the impression that after their 1895 general election set back, the I.L.P. made a concentrated effort to persuade the unions to support independent Labour policies.<sup>1</sup> There appears to be little doubt, at least in the case of the miners, that such an effort was made. Also individual members of the I.L.P. would have supported, within their unions, political action. The conversion of the A.S.E. to political action was also important to Socialists. Some of the "new model union" prestige remained but probably above all it was respectable, permanent and wealthy. If the engineers joined the Socialist Labour alliance then it was bound to seem a more serious proposition.

The Society's constitutional changes resulting from the 1892 delegate meeting, particularly the system of elected national officers, with elections conducted openly by candidates able to organise and issue propaganda, should have facilitated the work of political groups like the I.L.P. But, there is no evidence either from candidates' propaganda or from the "Labour Leader", of any campaign by the I.L.P. to win the A.S.E. to its political position. The same applies to the other Socialist organisations.

It can be argued that until 1895 the I.L.P. failed to appreciate the need for the unions to undertake political action as part of a Labour/Socialist alliance. From 1895 until after the Boer War the party was too weak to do much more than hold together. Even during the years 1902-1909 which marked considerable political growth for the Radical/Socialist left,

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1 Labour & Politics, Bealey & Pelling

(when "The Clarion" achieved a circulation of over 80,000<sup>1</sup>) there is no evidence of activity by any Socialist organisations within the Society.<sup>2</sup>

It is extremely difficult to trace the reasons for the A.S.E.'s step by step movement first towards political action and then towards association with the Labour Party. Between 1892 and 1914 the Society's attitude on political questions changed significantly but although this was very much reflected in the views of elected officials and active members,<sup>3</sup> it was not evident in the extent to which the broad membership became in any sense politically conscious. Throughout the whole period voting on political questions reflected even more apathy than that on trade questions.

The defeat of the A.S.E. on the eight hours question and the terms of settlement turned the attention of some of the active members towards political action. If the Society could not achieve its objectives industrially then clearly political activity ought to be considered but how could the Society become more effective politically than industrially?

A Socialist view might have been that the A.S.E. should support those who wished to destroy capitalism. This could have meant supporting either the S.D.F. or I.L.P., favouring the unity of Socialist organisations and campaigning for Socialist policies within the T.U.C. Although some A.S.E.

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1 See "Clarion" February 23, 1906, circulation 72,000 and "Clarion", February 19, 1909, 82,500. By January 1913 the circulation had declined to 60,000. I don't know of any circulation figure for the "Labour Leader" which was a far less quoted, interesting and well written paper.

2 The Communist Party was much smaller and, in the face of hostility from most of the leadership, was to be far more active and effective in the A.E.U., than were the I.L.P. or Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.) in the A.S.E.

3 If the views of the active members are considered to be those reflected by branch meetings then the record of the Coatbridge branch is not untypical. Comparing 1914 with 1890 the branch was supporting a militant industrial policy, had appointed shop stewards, was committed to the Labour Party, and was an active force within the Trades Council. All of these matters had become branch policy by a gradual process of change over the years. See minutes of Coatbridge Branch, Coatbridge Public Library.

officials were active members of Socialist organisations none advocated such a course. If an attempt had been made to make the Society politically active on purely ideological grounds the effect would have been to unite those who opposed political action with those who wanted political action but were not Socialists. Unless the Society had contained a large proportion of active Socialists the "ideological" approach to political action was obviously out of the question. The surprising thing was not that the A.S.E. did not contain a large number of Socialists but that this aristocratic craft Society should be prepared to take political action.

British trade unions have never seen themselves as primarily political organisations. The idea of adopting a purely long term political strategy was therefore not a serious proposition. If the A.S.E. were to become a political force it had to be because it saw a realisable political objective.

The way in which the Society was governed implied the need for a pragmatic approach. At delegate meetings the rules were discussed. This meant that political proposals were discussed as immediate issues, not as long term political strategies. When the Executive Council came to carry out a rule, or where it was permitted to decide whether to implement it, the discussion was in terms of immediate objectives. Thus for the delegate meeting the decision to take political action was realized in a decision whether to raise a political levy and to adopt parliamentary candidates. For the Council it was when to raise the levy and how to ensure that parliamentary candidates had some chance of success.

The decision to adopt A.S.E. members as parliamentary candidates, for whom the Society would seek constituencies, was seen by all those who wanted the Society to become active in politics as the means of achieving political influence. At first no kind of commitment to any political programme was required. A.S.E. M.P.'s were wanted to defend 'the members' interests,



particularly those members who worked in Woolwich Arsenal and Government dockyards. Their M.P.'s would be concerned with 'labour' questions and the extension of working class political influence which was usually thought of in terms of the franchise. Socialists thought that there was a good chance that A.S.E. M.P.'s would either be Socialists or would become influenced by Socialist ideas as they came to formulate working class demands within the existing political system. What no one appears to have thought very much about was how A.S.E. M.P.'s could assist the Society in increasing its power but the A.S.E. was chiefly concerned in increasing its industrial strength and it was very difficult to see how political action could help in this respect.

Once the Society had decided to try and secure the election of some of its members to parliament the problem was how to find them constituencies and the kind of political allies that would enable some of them to secure election. Unlike the miners, the A.S.E. had no constituencies where there were sufficient members with enough group loyalty to secure a member's election merely because he belonged to the Society. Most the Society's leaders had much in common with Liberalism. They were free traders, they wanted to extend the franchise and saw the Liberal party as sympathetic to this reform. As the Balfour administration began to lose its cohesion, their allegiance to the Liberal movement increased.

In effect in most of the constituencies fought in 1906 A.S.E. candidates were supported by local Liberals and adopted policies that were barely distinguishable from Liberal Party policy. The Executive Council did its best to secure Liberal Party support for A.S.E. candidates although an open alliance with it was out of the question. Local Liberal Associations were often reluctant to adopt working class candidates so that such an alliance would antagonise not only the Socialists but all of those who

wanted independent working class representation in the House of Commons. It was the demand for working class representation in the House that became the strongest argument of those who wanted the A.S.E. to take political action.

On the eve of the 1900 general election this view was expressed very strongly. Tories and Liberals will appeal to the country; "But a third party will also appeal to the country. The champions of Labour will again plead for a place, and will put such a case for reform as cannot be ignored by any who will give it attention. They will point out that monopolies are bleeding the community at every pore, that the people are housed under conditions which render decent life impossible, that taxation is imposed on the industrious, and that age and want still border the lives of the workers. It remains to be seen whether or not workmen have learnt anything from the lesson of experience. If they have they will not again put their trust in old time politicians. If they are awake to a sense of their duties and responsibilities they will send to parliament men of their own class, or those who have laboured on their behalf. Only then will the lever of political power begin to be used in such a way as to move the world in the direction of a fairer distribution of the amenities of life".<sup>1</sup>

Eventually in 1899, after a good deal of pressure, the Executive Council decided to implement the 1892 delegate meeting decision that a ballot of members could be taken on the question of a parliament levy of 3d. per member per year. But out of a membership of 84,000 only 3,530 voted for the levy, with 842 against. After starting the process of selecting candidates the Executive decided that too few members had voted to justify continuing. The A.S.E. was represented at the first meeting of the L.R.C. in February 1900 but, due to the Executive's decision on the levy, was

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1 A.S.E. Monthly Report.

unable to affiliate immediately. When a ballot was taken whether to affiliate to the L.R.C. an even fewer number of members voted (2,897 for, 702 against). Again the Council postponed a decision:

"It is felt .... that it is desirable to have a better and more general expression of opinion before proceeding further in the matter ..... Meanwhile it is hoped that members will interest themselves in the matter, and vote next time in large numbers".<sup>1</sup>

The 1901 Delegate Meeting called upon the Executive to take a further vote of the members on whether the "Society should join with others for parliamentary action" and also, on whether officials of the Society should be allowed to become parliamentary candidates. On this occasion the members voted for affiliation to the L.R.C. by 5,626 to 1,070<sup>2</sup> the relatively small number voting was explained by the fact that the vote had been by a show of hands and not by the issuing of ballot papers. The Executive Council now felt able to affiliate to the L.R.C. Another small ballot also decided that the Society's paid officials should be eligible for nomination to the parliamentary panel of candidates. This decision allowed George Barnes to become a candidate.

The small votes on parliamentary representation show that there was neither significant membership support nor considerable opposition to the A.S.E. becoming active within the L.R.C. It is surprising that considering the great efforts of Barnes, other members of the Executive (particularly Gardner and Hooson) and the advocacy of the "Journal" so few members could be persuaded to vote for affiliation. It is of course true that A.S.E.

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1 April 1900 Monthly Report. The question of whether to raise a parliamentary levy was discussed by the Executive Council and reported in the Society's publication from the beginning of 1899 until 1902

2 Monthly Report, February 1902.

votes always tended to be low (22,000 voted on the new terms of settlement in 1902) depending as they did on attendance at the branch. But to secure only 5,600 votes for political action, after three years of propaganda, shows that there was very little enthusiasm for parliamentary representation.

The foundation of the L.R.C. was of considerable importance to those members who supported political action. In order to secure the election of A.S.E. candidates the Society had to be part of an alliance and the L.R.C. could become such an alliance. Further, the L.R.C.'s policy of independent representation accorded with the views of political activists in the Society and the Executive Council's unanimous view that A.S.E. candidates should stand<sup>1</sup> "on independent lines and independent of all political parties".

The L.R.C. was not generally seen as another political party but as a way of securing the election of labour men who would be independent of the other two parties. It was thought necessary for an L.R.C. parliamentary group to have a whip to guarantee their independence rather than to secure support for a party programme.

Although the A.S.E. had ceased to affiliate to the T.U.C. the Executive Council regarded the Society as an active part of the labour movement. Their membership of the G.F.T.U. was regarded as fulfilling their industrial responsibilities to the movement, while membership of the L.R.C. allowed the Society to be politically active without T.U.C. membership.

Independent political action was the basis of the A.S.E.'s decision to run parliamentary candidates and this view pre-dated the Taff Vale decision. Trade union affiliation to the L.R.C. grew over the years 1900 to 1902 as the implication of the Taff Vale decision became clear but there is no evidence

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Council Minutes, 9 February 1900

that this was an important reason for the A.S.E.'s affiliation.<sup>1</sup> The Taff Vale decision failed to influence the policy of the A.S.E. because the Executive Council had already grasped the political lesson that the legal judgement had taught some other trade union leaders, namely the need to exercise an independent political influence.

George Barnes, George Ferguson, Isaac Mitchell, Frank Rose and Frederick Entwistle were elected to be members of the A.S.E. parliamentary panel.<sup>2</sup> Barnes was gradually acquiring the reputation of an extremely able trade union official which he combined with membership of the I.L.P. and with the respect of the Socialist groups within the labour movement. Ferguson came from Glasgow, was sixty years of age, and O.D.D. for No. 1 division. He had been a prominent Liberal<sup>3</sup> but, as his conduct during the Clyde dispute in 1903 showed, he was extremely militant on industrial questions. Mitchell, General Secretary of G.F.T.U. was gradually becoming less militant on political questions. He was also a native of Glasgow and in the early 1890's had been an extremely militant Socialist involved at times in a bitter struggle with the more traditional members of the Society. His stand on political questions was uncompromising believing in public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Frank Rose was in the process

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1 Membership of the L.R.C. rose from 232,000 in July 1900 to 383,773 in June 1901. By May 1902 it had increased to 626,613 and in February 1903 it was 847,315. See "Labour & Politics 1900-1906" Bealey & Pelling, Chapter IV. Although Taff Vale does not appear to have influenced the A.S.E.'s decision to affiliate to the L.R.C. the implications of this judgement were well understood by Barnes and the Executive Council. Bealey & Pelling's comment on Barnes' "sharp reaction" to the decision. "His analysis of the probable effects of Taff Vale showed much more understanding than that of many other trade union officials. The force and clarity of Barnes's exposition quickly converted A.M. Thompson, then acting editor of the "Clarion", from his first acceptance of Bell's diagnoses". Bealey & Pelling, p.75.

2 Monthly Report, November 1902

3 Executive Council Minutes, 25 October 1905

of a stormy political career. We have described <sup>above</sup> below<sup>1</sup> his struggle with the Executive Council over his right to local autonomy as an O.D.D. At the beginning of 1901 he had resigned his union position to become a journalist. He adopted a fairly consistent parliamentary Socialist attitude but he was difficult in that he could never work for long with any group or organisation. He was in turn to fall out with "Clarion", the I.L.P. and the Executive Council of the Society. Frederick Entwistle J.P. was a venerable member of the Manchester A.S.E. He had for many years advocated that the Society adopt an independent political stand and was Chairman of Manchester and Salford Trades & Labour Council. Entwistle was a moderate Socialist, his chief political interest being in the need for independent working class representation in the House of Commons.

In November 1903 Charles Duncan and Tom Proctor were added to the parliamentary panel.<sup>2</sup> Duncan, besides his membership of the A.S.E. was also General Secretary of the Workers Union. He was a strong supporter of independent working class M.P.'s and took an extremely serious view of the Taff Vale decision. Proctor was a militant Socialist, he had organised John Burns's Nottingham election campaign in 1884 on behalf of the S.D.F. and was an industrial militant. He was also President of Devonport Trades Council.

A.S.E. parliamentary candidates for the 1906 election were, with two possible exceptions, all Socialists varying from moderate to militant. All the candidates had as almost a first article of faith the election of independent working class M.P.'s and this was also the policy of the Executive Council.

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1 See Chapter Six

2 In place of Ferguson resigned and Entwistle deceased. Executive Council Minutes, 20 August 1903

When the decision to adopt parliamentary candidates had been made the Executive had two tasks, firstly to lay down the conditions under which the candidates accepted A.S.E. sponsorship and secondly to seek constituencies where there was a chance of election.

They agreed to meet 90 per cent of election expenses "stipulating only that there shall be local representation of the A.S.E. on the election committee in the constituency where such expenses may be incurred. Candidates must be brought out under the auspices of bona fide labour representative bodies, but no objection will be raised to candidates obtaining the goodwill and support of other political parties". Council was prepared to make up the salary of an elected member to £380 per annum. Members elected "will be expected to co-operate on labour questions with labour members of the House of Commons....."<sup>1</sup>

It could hardly be said that the Council laid down stringent political conditions. Eventually these conditions were somewhat strengthened but as we shall see, this was done more to conform to the policy of the L.R.C. than because of the views of the Executive Council.

The question of finding suitable constituencies was a considerable problem. An independent group of labour M.P.'s at Westminster did not preclude a series of arrangements with other political parties. The Irish party's support for Labour candidates implied no loss of independence because sympathy for home rule was in most cases taken for granted. It was the question of relations with the Liberal Party that posed the most serious problem in this respect. If A.S.E. candidates could persuade local Liberal Associations not to contest, leaving them a straight fight with the Conservatives, then they had a far better chance of election. As we shall see the candidates' views ranged from a more or less complete identity with

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<sup>1</sup> Circular contained in Executive Council Minutes, 23 January 1903

Liberal Party policy to a broad acceptance of liberal movement assumptions.<sup>1</sup> While Liberal Party support would make election easier, or even possible, it could seriously jeopardise the independence of Labour members. The decision of the L.R.C. to establish a separate parliamentary group was some defence of this independence but during the period when A.S.E. members were seeking seats, its importance does not appear to have been appreciated.

George Barnes was the first A.S.E. candidate to be adopted by a constituency. After considering an offer from Dundee, Barnes and the Council decided to accept an invitation to contest the Blackfriars and Hutchesontown division of Glasgow, a seat held by Andrew Bonar Law. The invitation came from a local committee and the Executive approved the candidature once it had proved to have widespread support and been able to call together a large meeting to adopt Barnes.<sup>2</sup>

The Clyde dispute of the following year when Barnes and the Executive failed to support the local men in a bitter dispute almost put an end to the candidature. After much thought and taking the advice of "prominent men in the town" Barnes decided to stay in the field.<sup>3</sup>

After an abortive attempt to secure a Newcastle candidature, Isaac Mitchell was adopted as Labour candidate for Darlington at a meeting attended by more than 1,000 people.<sup>4</sup> Mitchell immediately began persuading

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1 In my view the practical politics (as against the visionary inclinations) of even Socialist members of the pre-1914 parliamentary Labour Party can be said to have been in accord with certain liberal assumptions. There existed a broad stream of opinion sharing common principles within the Liberal Party but much wider in character. This 'liberal movement' stood in defence of free trade and balanced budgets. It was pacifist, believed in international conciliation and arbitration. It was for the 'people' and against the traditional ruling class. Above all it believed in 'progress' and saw history as the triumph of forces of civilisation. A whole series of issues after 1900 drew this movement together against the common enemy. Free trade, education and religion, the Boer War, Chinese labour, 'Peers or People', Ireland.

2 E.C. Minutes, 30 September 1902

3 Executive Council Minutes, 14 September 1903. See also Chapter Six

4 Executive Council Minutes, 9 April 1903



the Liberals not to contest but his chances of succeeding were damaged by the neighbouring Stockton-on-Tees Labour Party seeking the nomination of Frank Rose. In Stockton the Liberals wanted a clear run and threatened to contest Darlington if Rose was nominated.<sup>1</sup> As the Executive Council hesitated over Rose's candidature he accused them of "dealing with his candidature in a spirit of reluctance if not actual ill will". Stockton Labour Party adopted Rose who proclaimed his support for the "Newcastle resolution",<sup>2</sup> thus by implication attacking Mitchell for seeking to win Liberal Party support. The Executive Council told Rose that they were only acting with "due regard" for the Society's funds. They told him that his charges were "untruthful and gratuitously insulting and he must understand once for all that we intend to have no further trouble here with such useless correspondence". Stockton's Labour Party secretary was informed that before the Executive Council would sanction Rose's candidature "satisfactory information must be supplied .... on the probability of success and as to what part of the expenses will be found by the constituency".

Despite a deputation from Mitchell and Arthur Henderson (who had been adopted for Barnard Castle) who "both stated that both their candidatures were being jeopardised by the candidature for Stockton, the Liberals threatening that if Mr. Rose's candidature is persisted in they will run candidates....."<sup>3</sup> The Executive agreed to adopt Rose for Stockton. When later in the year a by-election occurred at Barnard Castle, Henderson, despite

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 23 April 1903

2 The "Newcastle Resolution" referred to a resolution passed at the 1903 annual conference of the L.R.C. held in Newcastle. This resolution stated that M.P.'s and candidates should not identify themselves with or promote the interests of "any section of the Liberal or Conservative parties". See Bealey & Pelling, p.141-142.

3 See Executive Council Minutes, 24-30 April 1903

the advice given to local Liberals by their London headquarters, was faced with a three-cornered fight. Henderson was persuaded to fight the seat nevertheless and was fortunate to face a Liberal who favoured protection. By emerging as the upholder of traditional Liberalism Henderson won the seat.<sup>1</sup>

The Executive Council's decision on Stockton showed that they took independent political action seriously. They were prepared to go to some lengths to persuade the Liberals to withdraw in favour of A.S.E. candidates, but where a candidate had sufficient local support and wished to contest they were not prepared to vote for purely tactical reasons. The Stockton decision was not only important for Mitchell's chances in Darlington but could have affected Barnes in Glasgow. In March, Liberal headquarters had written "to the local executive in Hutchesontown division of Glasgow, deprecating any opposition to George Barnes".<sup>2</sup> Henderson's victory in a three-cornered fight considerably strengthened MacDonald in his negotiations with Herbert Gladstone for some kind of informal secret arrangement between the Liberal Party and the L.R.C.<sup>3</sup> but the A.S.E.'s Stockton decision could not possibly help Barnes's chances at Hutchesontown.

Tom Precter was adopted for Grimsby without any difficulty or complication. Charles Duncan became the L.R.C. candidate for Barrow only after the Executive Council had some assurance that he would not have a three-cornered fight. Duncan appears to have gone to great trouble to make himself acceptable to the local Liberal Association.<sup>4</sup> The Barrow District

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1 Bealey and Pelling, p.152-153

2 Bealey and Pelling, p.145-146

3 Mitchell continued to complain about the Executive's Stockton decision. His complaints were ignored. See for example Executive Council Minutes, 5 May 1903

4 Executive Council Minutes, 3 September 1903, 18 September 1903

Committee, involved in a continual battle with Vickers particularly over the Premium Bonus and extremely critical of the Executive Council's handling of the Clyde dispute,<sup>1</sup> took no interest in Duncan's candidature. No attempt appears to have been made to persuade them that their problems could in some way be dealt with by political action.

With five candidates adopted the Executive Council decided to call a meeting of the candidates and a sub-committee of the Council.<sup>2</sup> After a discussion of expenses and financial problems Rose "expressed entire concurrence with the Newcastle resolution he thought every candidate should keep absolutely clear of either Liberals or Conservatives, had he only approached the Liberal Party at Steckton in the smallest possible way they would be ready at once to fall on his neck and weep. Mr. Precter said he thought if we went on the Liberal platform the Conservative members of our Society would certainly object and vice versa. Mr. Mitchell said he thought it was impossible to carry out the Newcastle resolution and mentioned Leicester as having an arrangement with both parties as regards forthcoming elections. Mr. Rose said he believed this to be an unreliable statement. Mr. Barnes said if he was asked to address the Liberal Party at Hutesontown he should do so and object(s) to be tied hand and foot. Mr. Mitchell agreed. Mr. Precter thought if he addressed the Liberal Party he would lose the Conservative working man's vote. Mr. Duncan said he was prepared to address any party and thought he should have the right to do so, he thought the resolution conveyed a suspicion of mistrust and was damaging to any candidate".

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1 See Chapter Five. Minutes of Barrow District Committee.

2 Sub-committee members - Taylor, Heesen, Crompton, Wilkins and Wheelhouse. Minutes of meeting, 24 September 1903

The Newcastle resolution was ambiguous. It was not clear what "candidates should not identify themselves with or promote the interests of any section of the Liberal or Conservative parties", actually meant in practice. Clearly candidates should not call themselves Liberals or run joint campaigns with the Liberal party but at the same time, there did not appear to be anything in the resolution to stop a candidate from addressing a Liberal or Conservative Party meeting, to present his case and obtain publicity, providing he did not speak in favour of a candidate standing in the Liberal or Conservative interest. The trouble with the resolution, or perhaps its virtue, was that it could be taken to mean what Rose said - that no candidate should have any association or contact with the Liberal or Conservative Parties. An alternative interpretation was that providing a candidate ran as an L.R.C. candidate and, if elected, took the L.R.C. whip, then he was perfectly free to secure whatever support he could providing it did not jeopardise his independent status when he appeared before the voters.

MacDonald and Hardie, by their secret negotiations with the chief Liberal Whip, Herbert Gladstone,<sup>1</sup> made it possible for candidates to secure some of the advantages of an alliance without compromising their constituency independence. The whole argument about independence centred around the view taken about what was possible and the kind of independence an independent group of Labour M.P.'s should actually exercise.

Rose's kind of independence (complete isolation) was in practice excluded by the kind of political alliance the L.R.C. represented. If the L.R.C. had an ideological commitment to Socialism it would have been possible to advocate complete independence with some degree of realism. (In view of the British electoral system it would have been difficult for a group, without the sympathy of one or other of major parties, to achieve parliamentary

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1 See Bealey and Pelling

representation. Even if this obstacle had been overcome, the history of continental ideological Socialist Parties suggests that in practice "complete" independence would have been difficult to maintain). But the L.R.C. had no system of ideas which separated it from the Liberal Party. Many Labour M.P.s were to have great sympathy with the Liberal Party's aims and policy. It was therefore unrealistic to expect the L.R.C. to adopt Rose's interpretation of the Newcastle resolution.

As has been suggested above the desire for more effective working class representation was the aim of all those who supported the L.R.C. This necessitated an independent group of Labour M.P.s forming an independent party. If Labour M.P.s were to exercise a distinctive influence it was essential that they had a genuine organisational independence. Such independence would have been difficult if all Labour M.P.s were dependent upon Liberal votes and Liberal organisation. It was inevitable that many Labour M.P.s would be elected by Liberal votes (this was the purpose of the Gladstone-MacDonald pact) but it was important that this should not jeopardise their independence. The way in which candidates approached Liberal Associations was therefore important. As we shall see, A.S.E. candidates varied, from those who claimed to be Liberals before all else to those who offered a programme which Liberals were asked to support.

The trade unions entry into politics as part of the L.R.C. enabled the Labour Party to achieve a genuine organisational independence. Labour M.P.s were paid either by their unions (the A.S.E. paid a parliamentary salary of £360) or by the L.R.C. from funds provided by trade union affiliation fees. Although few formal local Labour Parties were established, independent organisation was made possible by the union monies provided, particularly where the unions directly sponsored candidates.

The A.S.E. paid 90 per cent of a candidate's election expenses. From mid-1903 the Executive Council provided money for local committees to establish "Registration Agents" for the purpose of registering voters. Before 1918 it was extremely important for Labour candidates to ensure that working class voters were actually on the register and Trade unions had the kind of geographical organisation which could be used to organise this. Where A.S.E. candidates were adopted each ward was requested by the Executive Council to appoint a "Registration Agent".<sup>1</sup> The Council's organisational advice, which was accepted by all candidates, meant that, even where there was no Liberal candidate, the A.S.E. helped establish an independent election committee which was in no sense dependent upon the Liberal Party. When eventually the decision was made to establish local Labour Parties there existed some experience of organisation. Ad hoc election committees were able to take on a permanent form.

The question of relations with local Liberal Associations continued to be important. Against the advice of the Council, Mitchell addressed the Darlington Liberal Association.<sup>2</sup> Barnes did his best to persuade the Hutesontown Liberals to withdraw, using George Ferguson as an intermediary, "he previously being a prominent liberal"<sup>3</sup> but without success. When the Liberals finally decided to contest, he accused them of "a breach of faith".<sup>4</sup>

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 3 July 1903

2 Executive Council Minutes, 9 October 1903. Mitchell, despite his former declarations of Socialist commitment, once he became a candidate became the advocate of traditional Liberal policies.

3 Executive Council Minutes, 25 October 1905

4 Executive Council Minutes, 25 October 1905

The Executive Council fully accepted the implication of the Society's affiliation to the L.R.C. They congratulated John Burns upon becoming a cabinet minister but refused to support his election campaign, withdrawing the £100 per year which the Society had contributed to his wage fund.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Fortescue Flannery was a Conservative M.P. for a Cardiff seat and an A.S.E. member. He had, from time to time, assisted the Executive when they wished to make representations to the government. As with Burns, Flannery was not supported by the Executive during the 1906 election "in view of the Society being affiliated to the L.R.C. it was believed to be hardly possible to include him owing to conflicting interests, but E.C. wishes to place on record their high appreciation of his many valuable services rendered....."<sup>2</sup>

It is extremely difficult to discover any distinctive element in the campaign speeches of A.S.E. candidates who stood at the 1906 general election. They campaigned on familiar Liberal issues.

We have a verbatim record of Barnes's speech accepting nomination at Blackfriars and Hutesontown.<sup>3</sup> He told the meeting that the A.S.E. had decided to nominate him because they believed labour "is entitled to a fairer share and a larger voice in the councils of this nation (Applause)". He went on to discuss the local Liberal Association's policy towards his candidature: "Well then, you have no Liberal candidate up till now and, judging from the utterances of Liberal politicians and leaders, one would say that there is not likely to be a Liberal candidate. Of course, we must not make too much of that, because, as the chairman has observed, there has been a good deal of talk in times gone by the Liberal leaders as to

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1 Executive Council Minutes, 11 December 1905 and 2 January 1906

2 Executive Council, 30 December 1905

3 Speech, 22 September 1902. A.E.U. archives

their anxiety to see labour more fully represented, but very little has come of it. But I would be inclined to believe that, as adversity sometimes conduces to a spirit of sweet reasonableness, it may be that on this occasion there will be no Liberal candidate ..... and under these circumstances, it will be our duty, I take it, to voice the traditional claims of Liberalism so far as they harmonise with the claims of labour - (hear hear) - but it will be our duty, first and foremost, to voice those claims of labour which have come into the area of practical politics as the result of a truer and more humane economic teaching and a more sensitive and enlightened public opinion. (Applause)."

Barnes then justified his stand for political independence on the grounds that the Liberals had not carried out their promises. Programmes had been "relegated to the limbo of forgotten things". He stood for the working class, "the working class is the only class that is not a class; it is the nation". The nation was ruled by class interests, "We have some two hundred landlords, two hundred lawyers and two or three hundred other men - commercial, manufacturing and railways - and every other interest under the sun represented in abundance, and only some twelve men who could, by the utmost stretch of imagination, be said to represent the working people of this country ..... It is in the interests of the Labour Party to work for the uplifting of the common people; it is the interest of the Labour Party, as I understand it, to open up social opportunities and secure equality of opportunity for all men....."

Having set out the claims of independent representation Barnes went on to discuss a programme that was not dissimilar to that of the Liberal Party. He stated his opposition to the Boer War since he felt the war's cost could have paid for many reforms held up for want of means. Labour representatives in the House of Commons had with one exception, opposed the war. With more Labour members "the risk of war will be lessened". Home rule



he described as "a very great question". Not only home rule for Ireland but all round "the giving of greater powers to the municipal bodies (Applause). I believe that Ireland stands first and has a right to stand first because ..... Ireland has shown a passionate desire for home rule and in the second place, because owing to the dissimilarity of her industries and her dependence upon agriculture perhaps she stands more in need of fostering attention than other parts of the country do (cries of 'Rats'). That is my opinion friends; I am not going to change it for any number of votes". Barnes went on to argue the case for decentralisation of government, "I believe that the people of this country can govern themselves a good deal better than those highly-priced gentlemen at the head of affairs at Westminster....." The record of the L.C.C. was quoted in support of this view.

Barnes described how more powerful local government could improve conditions, including tramways, housing, lighting and baths, schools, libraries, and many other things, "the municipal supply of which would have the result of spreading the amenities of life over the largest possible number of people. In regard to this, as you know, the cost at present stands in the way. Money is the lien in the path of the municipal statesman..... I believe ..... that there is a source of revenue at present untapped - a source of revenue which by moral right belongs to the whole community because the community created it, a source of revenue which grows with every item of public expenditure, and with the presence and industry of the people as a whole. Needless to say I refer to land values (Applause). There is a class of people in this country which gets rich in their sleep, who make money and grew immensely wealthy as the result of the enterprise and effort of the community, who are allowed impiously to say that the land is theirs - the land which was intended for the use and the benefit of all men".

Barnes came down firmly for old age pensions "for all who need and apply for them". He compared the cost of war with the smaller cost of old age pensions. On tariff policy he opposed what he called "the bread tax". He quoted Steadman saying "The only thing workmen had to sell was their labour; everything else they had to buy. The only class that would benefit by the corn tax was the landlord class, and the workers would have to pay". He attacked Bonar Law's views on this question.

Barnes then outlined his views on Taff Vale. He did not want the unions returned to what had been thought to be the position before the judgement: "I would like to see the trade unions of this country recognised by the law as collective agents on behalf of labour, in a position to sue, and be sued for that matter; but before that is done, I want to see a very much larger number of labour representatives in parliament, so as to see that those laws that bring trade unions and the law into closer connection shall be made to harmonise with the best interests of trade unionism".

The argument about education and religion found Barnes in principle favouring secular education but in practice, because many schools were denominational, he stood for a compromise involving denominational schools giving secular teaching "together if need be, with religious teaching, so long as the religious teaching shall not be dogma, but something upon which all can agree; and above that, and of primary importance I say this, that if public money is to be given to the denominational schools of the country, then there ought to be full representation of the public upon these school managements....."

Barnes said that the temperance advocates by restricting the number of public houses created a monopoly. He was against drunkenness and it was against this evil that teetotalers should direct their attack. He wanted the public houses taken over and controlled in the public interests.

At the very end of his speech Barnes raised the question of Socialism, "I am in favour of the conscious application of Socialist principles to the social, industrial and political troubles of our time. I look round about me today and I see - and you may all see - a great disparity of fortune that we all deplore, and I believe it behoves us all as citizens, and as workmen, to endeavour to make a better use than we have yet made of that political power that has been won for us. I am one of yourselves, have been brought up to earn my living from my earliest days. I am but a plain man speaking things with which I am acquainted and to which I can testify, and, if I were to go to parliament either for Hutesontown or anywhere else, I should endeavour, with Hardie and Burns and others that are there already, to use the position that I found myself in, in helping to make straight the path that leads to freedom for the common people of this country". (Applause).

An Electer:- "I am a delegate of a Socialist organisation which has its headquarters in the division of the city. I am here tonight to put three questions to the candidate, and I propose to put them singly. The first question is, Is Mr. Barnes a member of any Socialist organisation? He says he is a Socialist, and I would like to know if he is a member of any organisation".

The Chairman:- "You may put all your questions at once".

The Electer:- "In the event of Mr. Barnes being adopted as a candidate for this division, would he stand as an avowed Socialist and declare (interruption) himself in favour of the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and conduct his candidature on the lines of the class war (interruption). The third question is - Would Mr. Barnes if returned to parliament, consider himself the representative of his trade union or the constituents who elected him; and is he prepared to send a letter of resignation, as is advocated by the Social Democrats, which

would be given effect to in the event of Mr. Barnes betraying class interests.

Mr. Barnes:- "..... I am a member of a Socialist body - the Independent Labour Party (applause). In regard to the second question, I can only say, friends, that it is largely a question of your own interpretation. I am not out for scalps. I have come to fight an election, and I have come to fight it upon practical issues in which you are all more or less interested. My friend has swallowed a formula, and it is for you to say whether I have swallowed a formula or not ..... The third question was - would I consider myself a delegate of the A.S.E. or as a representative of this constituency; and further would I place my resignation in the hands of somebody (not very clearly defined), so that it would take effect in the event of somebody thinking that I have been false to my pledges? In regard to the first part of the question, I have to say that if elected to Hutesontown or anywhere else I should consider myself the representative of the constituency - (applause) - and not of the A.S.E., I believe that the A.S.E. take a sufficiently broad view of the situation to see that this is the true answer to the question. (Applause). In answer to the latter portion of the question, I have to give an answer an emphatic "No".

An Electer:- "Is it the case that the A.S.E. have made it a condition of your entering parliament that you will vote for all measures introduced by the Liberal Party? If a Liberal Party of the Rosebury and Grey type are returned to power in what position would you stand as regards granting the Irish people the right of self government".

Mr. Barnes:- "..... it is not true to say that the A.S.E. Executive ever did as our friend suggests ..... I am in favour of home rule, not only for Ireland, but all round. That is my answer. And whether home rule is brought in by a Liberal or a Tory government does not concern me one little bit. If I go to parliament I go as a Labour

advocate, and, as a representative of labour, it would be my duty to support any measure that I thought conduced to the settlement of a long standing political question....."

It will be seen from this speech that despite Barnes' emphasis on labour representation and his proclaimed membership of the I.L.P. he was determined to fight the election upon what he called "practical issues". These were very similar to the programme of the anti-imperialist Liberals. Anti-war, home rule, taxation of land values, old age pensions, free trade and a mild statement of the Liberal position on education and temperance. It should be said that he was a Socialist of long standing and was widely respected in the I.L.P. and even in the S.D.F. To stand on an extreme Socialist plâtfom would no doubt have doomed him to defeat but a programme much more critical of the existing social order and hostile to the Liberal Party, might have been viable in electoral terms. It may be suggested that he was trying to persuade the Liberals to give him a straight fight with the Tory but when a Liberal candidate was nominated Barnes continued to fight on the adoption speech programme.<sup>1</sup>

The Liberal Party adopted an anti-home rule Liberal imperialist called A.D. Provard, who had been defeated by Bonar Law in 1900. Immediately the Liberals demanded that Barnes withdraw as he had "but a shadowy chance of re-election (sic)..... The labourists are in too many cases defeating their own ends and hampering the whole of progress on true lines".<sup>2</sup>

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1 It was not the speech of a socialist demanding revolutionary changes. It was not a propagandist speech. Barnes advocated policies which a Liberal Government might be expected to follow. He wanted a change of government - not the overthrow of the system of government.

2 "Glasgow Peoples Journal", January 13, 1906

Barnes welcomed the formation of the Liberal Government but described the Blackfriars and Hutchesontown contest as between "Bonar Law and himself, plutocracy and Labour".<sup>1</sup> Provard was described as:-

"an anti-home rule Liberal imperialist, who along with his scanty following clings to the antique and exploded idea that he has to persist in describing Mr. Barnes as the 'Socialist' candidate and all will be well".<sup>2</sup>

Barnes continued to advocate working class representation:-

"They had cringed too long to political parties, and he asked them to vote for him because he was one of their class and he knew their wants from practical experience".<sup>3</sup>

Provard took an anti-Socialist stand and a somewhat traditional Liberal position when he said:-

"Most of our social troubles arose from extravagance in drink".

Barnes won the election with Provard at the bottom of the poll.<sup>4</sup>

After the poll was declared Barnes suddenly discovered his Socialist rhetoric. The result was a "glorious victory for Labour and Socialism..... He was now one of a party which was going to fight for the social and industrial reconstruction of the country against the forces of capitalism whether they called themselves Labour Liberal or Liberal Labour" (cheers).<sup>5</sup>

Barnes had a Liberal candidate to contend with and this might have provided him with more scope to demonstrate his independence but because Provard was a right wing member of his party, Barnes appears to have decided to campaign as the genuine upholder of Liberal principles.

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1 "Glasgow Herald", December 21, 1905

2 "Glasgow Herald", December 29, 1905

3 "Glasgow Herald", January 4, 1906

4 Barnes	3,284	-	39.32%
Bonar Law	2,974	-	35.6%
Provard	2,056	-	26.64%

The Liberal vote was 17.94 below the lowest Liberal percentage in the previous four general elections.

5 "Glasgow Herald", January 15. John Husband who was leader of the Clyde strikers in 1903 took the chair at a number of Barnes's meetings.

Charles Duncan in Barrow-in-Furness had a straight fight with the Conservative candidate. From the beginning he presented his case very much in the way an orthodox member of the Liberal Party would have done. The "North Western Daily Mail" produced a large photograph of Duncan calling him 'The Free Trade Candidate'.<sup>1</sup> His Labour Party candidature was not mentioned. The Free Churches supported Duncan<sup>2</sup> and a crowded meeting of Irish nationalists passed a resolution:-

"That we express our thanks to the Irish parliamentary party, and pledge ourselves to follow their instructions by using our best endeavours to return Mr. Duncan".<sup>3</sup>

When asked on which side of the House he would sit, Duncan replied "on the Liberal of course".<sup>4</sup> Attempts were made to emphasise Duncan's Labour Party candidature and it was suggested that he was a Socialist:-

"Mr. Keir Hardie when he was in Barrow said you were a Socialist, is that true?".

Mr. Duncan - "I am here as the Labour candidate". (cheers).

Duncan won the seat<sup>5</sup> amid "scenes that will for ever live in the memories of those who witnessed them".<sup>6</sup>

It is extremely difficult to pass any judgement on Tom Procter's Grimsby campaign because the two local newspapers were hostile. The "Grimsby Evening Telegraph" (a Tory paper) hardly reported his campaign and

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1 January 6, 1906

2 "North Western Daily Mail", January 6, 1906

3 "North Western Daily Mail", January 8, 1906

4 "North Western Daily Mail", January 3, 1906

5 Duncan 5,167  
Cayzer 3,395

6 "North Western Daily Mail", January 17, 1906

the "Liberal News" did not report anything about Proctor. The "Telegraph " did report Proctor calling for more wages and less unemployment but their only significant reference to him was when they printed what they called his record. Proctor was bottom of the school board election at Devonport in 1898 and in 1903 he had been defeated in a council election.

"If a man is not thought good enough to represent a ward in the town in which he has lived and worked for many years why should he be considered good enough to represent the working men of Grimsby in parliament".<sup>1</sup>

Proctor came bottom of the poll in a three-cornered contest.<sup>2</sup>

Mitchell at Darlington was as we have seen an enthusiastic supporter of a pact with the Liberal Party. Although he did not manage to receive formal assistance his activity did not go unrewarded:

"Mr. I.H. Mitchell nominee of the Labour Party ..... Although purely a Labour candidate of the L.R.C. stamp without any Liberal prefix or affix, Mr. Mitchell has received the blessing of the Darlington Liberal Association and the Women's Liberal Association".<sup>3</sup>

Mitchell gave general support to the new Liberal Government and received letters of support from John Burns and Sir Edward Grey.<sup>4</sup> To give Mitchell an even greater sense of identification with the Liberal Party, Lloyd George spoke for him.<sup>5</sup> He became, in effect, the Liberal

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1 "Grimsby Evening Telegraph", 11 January 1906.

2 Deughty (Unionist) 6,349  
Hutchinstein (Liberal) 4,040  
Precter (Labour) 2,248

3 "Stockton & Thornaby Herald", December 9, 1905

4 "Stockton & Thornaby Herald", January 6, 1906

5 "Stockton & Thornaby Herald", January 13, 1906



candidate and only narrowly lost to his unionist opponent.<sup>1</sup>

Rose, like Proctor at Grimsby, faced an extremely hostile press at Stockton.<sup>2</sup> From the limited reports of his speeches, he appears to have avoided any Socialist commitment the traditional Liberal issues such as Chinese labour, licensing acts, education and home rule, being the main theme of his campaign.<sup>3</sup> Rose came bottom of the poll but probably denied the seat to the Liberals.<sup>4</sup>

The A.S.E. commitment to political action was not based upon any clear political objective beyond the need for more working class M.P.s, and the securing of a trade union law that would effectively remove the consequences of the Taff Vale judgement. With the establishment of a thirty strong parliamentary Labour Party and the passing of the 1906 trade union act, these limited objectives were achieved. It is difficult to see any value the A.S.E. obtained from parliamentary representation once the 1906 trade union act had been passed.<sup>5</sup> Barnes and Duncan were extremely sympathetic to the Liberal Government and this was not just because their hopes for re-election depended upon the support of Liberal voters. The politics of Barnes and Duncan may have contained a remote kind of visionary Socialism but their practical politics were that of the radical section of the Liberal Party (plus an extreme concern to protect trade union

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1 H. Pike Pease 4,375  
I.H. Mitchell 4,087

2 "Every vote given to Mr. Rose is a vote given to Sir Robert Ropner"  
"Stockton & Thernaby Herald", January 6, 1906.

3 "Stockton & Thernaby Herald", January 6, 1906

4 Sir R. Ropner (Unionist) 5,330  
S.F. Mendle (Liberal) 3,675  
F.H. Rose 2,710

5 This assumes that the social reform of the Liberal Government would have taken place without the existence of the Labour Party. I know of no evidence to suggest for example that pension or national insurance legislation resulted from Labour Party pressure or through Liberal concern at the Labour Party's existence.

interests). The two general elections of 1910 merely confirmed this situation. Barnes was given a straight fight with the unionist. "The People's Journal", Glasgow campaigned for "Seven again for Liberalism" and among the seven was George Barnes:

"The sitting member is a man of moderate expression of opinion, who has created a favourable impression as an .M.P., and he is securing the support of the more active Liberals".<sup>1</sup>

Barnes expressed his view of the situation:-

"On this occasion there was to be a straight fight between all that might come under the banner of progress - social, industrial and political, on the one side and the naked, unabashed forces of monopoly, landlordism, liquorism and capitalism on the other".<sup>2</sup>

In Barrow Duncan received the formal support of the Liberal Association:

"That having regard to the serious issues involved in the forthcoming election, this Association considers it imperative that all party political feelings should be sunk in a strenuous desire to defeat the forces of reaction and therefore requests all Liberal electors on this occasion to vote for the Labour candidate Mr. Charles Duncan".<sup>3</sup>

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1 "People's Journal", Glasgow, January 8, 1910

2 "Glasgow Herald", January 6, 1910

3 "The Barrow News" January 15, 1910

The "North Western Daily Mail" supported Duncan in 1906 and January 1910. But at the December 1910 election they opposed House of Lords reform and therefore supported the unionist candidate. Duncan was transformed within ten months from moderate to revolutionary. "Electors of Barrow, the time has come when you must give a vote for one of two things - for Empire or for Revolution". "N.W. Daily Mail", 6 December 1910

Barnes and Duncan were re-elected at both of the general elections held in 1910. The only other A.S.E. candidate was James Brownlie who fought Govan in January 1910 against Liberal and Conservative opponents. Brownlie's campaign was very little reported and he came bottom of the poll with the Liberals gaining the seat.

Like other trade unions the A.S.E. had great difficulty in fighting the 1910 elections due to the Osborne judgement. (An A.S.E. member named Wilson secured a judgement preventing the A.S.E. from spending its funds for political purposes).<sup>1</sup> Barnes and Duncan were active in the campaign that eventually led to the 1913 trade union act.

The A.S.E. was a firm supporter of the trade union - Socialist alliance which was the distinctive feature of the L.R.C. After 1906 the Society became an advocate of the Labour Party adopting a Socialist programme.

The pre-1906 policy owed much to the influence of Barnes. He was a Socialist of many years' standing who was also the general secretary of a major trade union. Widely respected for his great ability, he achieved a reputation for moderation and realism, without losing the respect of the Socialists.<sup>2</sup> Even after 1906 when he became increasingly identified with Liberal politics, he was for many years regarded as a Socialist at heart. Something of this dual respect which he commanded can be seen from an article written in 'Justice' as late as January 1913:

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1 A.S.E. Monthly Report, July 1911.

2 The Labour Leader was a supporter of Barnes. "Scotland has given us many champions who have done great things on behalf of the common people but none truer or braver than George N. Barnes ..... he still retains his modest simple spirit. Born January 1859 at Leckie Fife-shire" defeated for General Secretary in 1895, "by tactics as discreditable as ever disgraced a society, returned to the bench, only to be summoned to the head of affairs in November 1896". 22 January 1898.

"Of the whole Ali Baba band of labourites in the House of Commons .... none have proved a greater disappointment than G.N. Barnes.

We had all come to look upon Barnes as a 'straight man'. He was a workman ..... As General Secretary of the A.S.E. - the Guards Brigade of trade unionism .... he had come straight from bench to high office". Although he was not a member of the S.D.F. he was regarded as a good Socialist. There was rejoicing when he came an M.P.

"What a fall off there has been ..... during his parliamentary career he has displayed none of the strength and sturdy independence on which we counted when he was first elected. Perhaps he was overpowered at the outset, not only by his success but by a sense of his own greatness and importance.....

"George has wanted to be a hero, and to figure in history as a heroic figure engaged in some heroic act. And so he has waited for the heroic, the psychological moment, to the neglect of the humbler but necessary and useful work which he might have done".

In 1905 while still retaining great prestige among Socialists, Barnes, as General Secretary of the A.S.E., played a leading part at the annual conference of the L.R.C. in defeating an attempt to make it a purely trade union committee. This proposal was defended on the grounds that such a committee would secure greater support and in any case I.L.P. members were also trade union members. Barnes rejected this view:

"If the work today was ripening in such industrial centres as Darlington, Glasgow, London and elsewhere, they had to remember that years of preparation had been spent on them by their friends of the I.L.P., who were today giving over to trade union movement .... the political fruit of their years of work and effort ..... If they chucked the Socialists out they might find themselves opposed at Darlington, Glasgow and elsewhere".

Isaac Mitchell who explained that he did not speak for the A.S.E. and stood alone in the fourteen strong delegation, opposed Barnes:-

"He had been a member of the I.L.P. for twelve years ..... he was a member of the Fabian Society in Newcastle so far back as 1890. He had always stood for labour representation. If they turned to the "Labour Leader" they found the Socialists plainly stating that they did not want trade union secretaries alone in the House of Commons. No, they wanted Socialist millionaires, doctors and ministers ..... As a trade unionist, however, he preferred to exert all his efforts to get men of his own class in the House of Commons".<sup>1</sup>

At the 1908 conference of the Labour Party the A.S.E. moved a resolution which was carried by 514,000 to 469,000 calling for the party to support:-

"the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange, to be controlled by a democratic state in the interest of the entire community; and the complete emancipation of labour from the domination of capitalism and landlordism with the establishment of social and economic equality between the sexes".

J.J. Stephenson moved in a militant speech:-

"Consider the scenes that were presented in our large cities; Piccadilly in London at midnight, the East End at midday, the unemployed at Tower Hill and on the embankment ..... To what were these spectacles due but to the private ownership of the means of life....." The effect of this speech was somewhat reduced when Stephenson concluded by calling

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1 L.R.C. report 1905. A.S.E. delegates: Barnes, Bulls, C. Donkin, C. Duncan, W.J. Fleckten, J. Husband, I.H. Mitchell, T. Procter, F.H. Rose, J.M. Meredith, J.J. Stephenson, R.S. Straughen, A. Taylor, Ralph Taylor.

his resolution an "ideal". "..... they must have an ideal in their politics; that ideal being in this case the absolute removal from their midst of all that makes crime and vice rampant".

W.T. Kelly seconded:-

"..... the only way out of the difficulty that confronted them was by attaining Socialism and then controlling the means of life".

This kind of talk was entirely remote from the kind of practical politics the A.S.E. and its representatives pursued.

The case for A.S.E. affiliation to the L.R.C. was usually argued in terms of the need for working class M.P.s and trade union law reform. While the precise way in which working class M.P.s were expected to change things was unclear, these limited objectives had some direct relationship to the policy adopted. After 1900 many full-time officials and active members began to regard themselves as Socialists of one kind or another. This led to the resolution and speeches which have been described at the 1908 labour party conference. Socialism became an idealistic vision not related to practical politics. In view of the Labour Party's subordinate position, and its failure to increase its electoral support, this idealistic Socialism can probably be regarded as harmless.

As we have seen when it came to practical politics even those candidates who strongly professed Socialist conviction fought campaigns very much on an advanced Liberal platform. Some were pleased to receive formal support from local Liberal Associations.

After the Society's defeat in the 1897-98 dispute there was some talk of achieving objectives by political rather than industrial means. At various times those who supported political action made similar pleas but it was never clear, and the link was never made, how the Society's industrial situation could be improved by political means.<sup>1</sup> The Society required industrial strength and there was no clear way in which political influence

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1 See the Newcastle by-election, Chapter Six

could affect the industrial balance of power. Because the Society's problems were industrial in character and could not be changed by political action, political activity tended to be conducted in a rarified atmosphere. As we have seen, very few members took part in political ballots. But if those who actively supported political action were few, those who opposed it were even fewer.<sup>1</sup> There was considerable apathy suggesting that the members of the Society appreciated it was all irrelevant to the real issues.

The A.S.E.'s decision to become involved in politics was nevertheless important in at least two respects. Of minor importance, it altered the career development of some officials who saw their future in politics rather than in trade unionism. But although politics may not have been of great significance to the industrial objectives of the A.S.E., nevertheless the A.S.E. did make a significant contribution to the establishment and consolidation of the Labour Party. This was to mean in the long term that the A.S.E. was able to see some of its objectives as realisable in political terms. However, up to 1914 politics were merely a distraction from the fundamental problems facing the Society.

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1 "Engineering Magazine" had a report of a great anti-socialist campaign but nothing ever came of it. "Engineering Magazine", November 25, 1910

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Constitutional Crisis, 1912-13

#### The Government of the Society

Previous chapters have discussed the constitution of the A.S.E. in respect of various industrial, political and constitutional questions. The 1912-13 crisis turned upon the character of the constitution and the interpretation of rules. It is therefore necessary to re-state some of the constitutional issues and discuss how the Society was governed.

In 1912 the A.S.E. was still in many important respects a traditional craft society. The rule book of a craft society was both the "constitution" of the society and the rules of the craft. As rule making was a unilateral process in practice the rules of the craft, and what the employers would accept, were sometimes in conflict. The same unilateral process of rule making could likewise lay down "constitutional" methods of dealing with industrial disputes which were in conflict with agreements between the society of the employers. This situation owed its existence in part to the division of responsibility between those who were conducting the day to day business of the Society and those who made its rules.

The rule book of the A.S.E. in 1912 took very little account of the terms of settlement of the 1897-98 dispute. According to the terms of settlement the A.S.E. accepted, the "right of management to manage", and a recognised procedure for avoiding disputes was laid down. The terms implied a system of centralised collective bargaining in which the A.S.E. Executive Council was empowered to act on behalf of the Society. As we have seen, when the Engineering Employers Federation considered there had been a breach of the agreement by the workers (usually a local strike before the procedure for avoiding disputes had been exhausted), they expected the Executive Council to order a resumption of work. Often the Executive Council had, under rule, no power to issue such an order.



The rule book of the A.S.E. contained some rules that were ambiguous. Many policy decisions were open to endless hair-splitting arguments about which rule or rules applied. Rules were made and amended by Delegate Meetings.<sup>1</sup> A Delegate Meeting was called according to the provisions laid down by the last Meeting. The 1892 Delegate Meeting stipulated that another meeting should be held in 1896<sup>2</sup> while the Delegate Meeting of 1907 instructed the Executive Council to take a vote of members in 1910 "as to the advisability of holding a Delegate Meeting in the following year", if the vote was adverse then such a vote to be taken in each succeeding year.<sup>3</sup> Provision was also made for the calling of a Delegate Meeting "to consider any specified question or questions affecting the earnings or conditions of employment of members". Such a meeting had to be requested by 30 branches, a vote of members would then be taken, and the meeting to be held if a majority voted in favour with 15 per cent of the members in the United Kingdom taking part.<sup>4</sup>

The Delegate Meeting's sole function was to revise the rules - it could not discuss policy questions. There was no provision in the A.S.E. rules for the discussion of policy as such.<sup>5</sup> All issues were to be decided by rule.

Any branch could initiate a change of rule but, in order to have it placed upon the agenda of the Delegate Meeting, it had to secure the support of two other branches. "The Council may also at the same time, having a right equal to three branches, put forward suggestions for the consideration of the members and, later on, the delegates".

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1 These were sometimes called by other names, e.g. 1904 "Representative Meeting". For convenience they are called the Delegate Meeting throughout the thesis.

2 A.S.E. rules 1893. A.E.U. archives

3 A.S.E. rules, 1908. A.E.U. archives

4 A.S.E. rules, 1908. A.E.U. archives

5 This also applied to the Executive Council

The basis of representation varied from Meeting to Meeting but a Delegate Meeting always had between 30 and 47 members. In 1912 there were 34 delegates from the United Kingdom and 3 from overseas - one delegate for every 3,000 members in the U.K. Executive Councilmen and organisers were not eligible for membership and the Executive Council had no formal means of contact with the Delegate Meeting. The Chairman of the Delegate Meeting would "if practicable, be chosen from members of the district where the meeting takes place".<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the meeting were taken, and other secretarial duties performed by the General Secretary and Assistant Secretaries. Neither the General Secretary, nor any member of the Executive Council were able, as of right, to address or formally advise the Delegate Meeting. They might, however, be summoned to speak on particular issues by the meeting. Delegate Meetings lasted until their agenda was completed which usually took between thirty and fifty days.<sup>2</sup> By change of rule they could fundamentally alter the character of the Society<sup>3</sup> while the Executive Council sat impotently in London, reduced solely to correspondence.

The Delegate Meeting's decisions were effective even where the Executive Council had no wish to uphold them. Two important constitutional provisions ensured this. The Final Appeal Court which had the last word on

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1 A.S.E. Rule Book 1908

2 The 1892 meeting lasted from June 6 until August 11. 1896 from May 25 until July 30. 1901 for 36 days. 1907 for 33 days. 1912 for 52 days. See Delegate Meeting reports, A.E.U. archives

3 The powers of the Meeting were subject to limitation only in respect of benefits. "Whatever is agreed upon at the Delegate Meeting shall be binding on all members, but no Delegate Meeting shall have the power to abrogate any of the principles of the Society, viz. Donation, Sick, Accident, Superannuation or Funeral benefits except thereafter 40 per cent of the Membership vote in favour of the change". Rule XVIII, Clause 5, 1908 rule book.

the interpretation of rules and the General Trustees who signed all cheques issued by the Executive Council.<sup>1</sup>

A Final Appeal Court usually met every two years.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the Delegate Meeting also acted in this capacity but usually an Appeal Court had half as many members.<sup>3</sup> The duties of the Court were "to decide all appeals against rulings of the Executive Council and the decisions then given shall be final....."<sup>4</sup> If the Executive Council sought to ignore the Final Appeal Court, the General Trustees could be instructed to withhold monies.

As the A.S.E. had no policy-making process all Executive Council decisions were "rulings" and as such were subject to appeal. There was always a close correspondence between the membership of Delegate Meetings and Final Appeal Courts.

Delegate Meetings were very jealous of their power and tended to resent any Executive Council interference. Members of Delegate Meetings were naturally concerned with policy which they sought to influence by amendments to rule, but the fiction of 'no policy only rule' was frequently taken to imply that the Executive Council's function was to administer the rules in a neutral way.

In view of this attitude it is necessary to define the powers of the Executive Council.<sup>5</sup> The Council consisted of eight full-time members who were elected for three year periods of office, elections being held at

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1 There was also a "Referee to the General Office". He was elected annually by the London branches and was empowered to investigate "any apparent neglect by the General Office officials, and he shall lay any such complaints personally before the Executive Council and demand any necessary explanation". He reported to the Delegate Meetings. 1908 rule book, rule XIV, clause 6.

2 This varied a little from rule book to rule book.

3 1908 rule book XVIII clauses 7 to 13.

4 1908 rule book rule XVIII clause 12.

5 A.S.E. rules 1908, rule XIV.

eighteen month intervals. Where 'vacant book' offices<sup>1</sup> existed it could acquire possession of the property in which the offices were situated. The Executive Council decided cases of appeal against district committee decisions but members if dissatisfied could take the matter to the Final Appeal Court. Where the rules were silent the Executive Council could "give a decision". If levies or benevolent, parliamentary or legal funds were required the Council was empowered to "consult the members" (i.e. take a vote) although up to £20 could be given to "any other Society" without a vote of members being taken. Much of the Council's time was spent "dispensing the benevolent fund". Council could conduct "propagandist work", open new branches, and admit members of sectional societies ("if such members apply in numbers of not less than five" and they are under 35 years of age).

The Council could order a special audit of branch books and institute legal proceedings if necessary. Councilmen were responsible for correspondence to the Council. On parliamentary representation (as decided by the members)<sup>2</sup> the Council could support candidates. If the Council considered it necessary they could conduct a vote on whether the Society should join trade federations etc. The Executive Council's power to deal with the Employers' Federation was severely limited. Until the 1904 Delegate Meeting, no rule defined the Council's powers of negotiation.<sup>3</sup> Their

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- 1 Every branch had a vacant book, it contained a list of recognised offices. Members out of employment had to sign the vacant book. Before 1907 central vacant book offices existed with a full-time bookkeeper in Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester. After the 1907 Delegate Meeting also in Newcastle-on-Tyne, Belfast, Cardiff, Bolton, Birmingham and Oldham.
  - 2 Under Rule - generally rule allowed political matters to be settled by a vote of members. In this way affiliation to the L.R.C. was accepted and parliamentary candidates adopted.
  - 3 We have seen that the 1904 rule imposed severe limitations on the Executive power in respect of negotiations with the Employers. See Chapter Six Page 241.

authority was derived from a number of sources. The Council had signed an agreement with the Employers, after a vote of members in 1898, to bring the dispute to an end. It could be argued that the members through the Executive Council had a responsibility to uphold the terms of the agreement. Under rule the Executive could give a decision where the rules were silent and on relations with the employers this sometimes appeared to be the case. Further, the Council could persuade branches and district committees to limit their power under rule to initiate disputes.

As we have seen the Executive's influence in this latter respect was reduced by the decision of the 1904 Final Appeal Court. By these decisions the Council's right to withdraw dispute payments was limited and it was ruled that once a local ballot had decided upon a course of action, the Executive Council could act only with the approval of the districts concerned.

The situation in 1912 was then that of an Executive Council without the power to bargain effectively with a powerful centralised employers' association and unable to control local disputes which the employers could turn into a national lockout as they had in 1897. Delegate Meetings were traditionally jealous of their power and wanted the Executive Council to be an administrative body, only.

### The Background

The main charge levelled against the Executive Council during election campaigns was that of dictatorial behaviour (with the Carlisle agreement cited as the most important piece of evidence). Yet, despite this, in 1910 and 1912, all sitting members were returned in the election. Hutchingsen and Taylor<sup>1</sup> were easily returned in 1910 in the first ballot

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1 See Appendix VIII for membership of Executive Council and attitude to issues.

and Wilkins just defeated the formidable Tom Procter<sup>1</sup> in the second ballot. Husband was also returned in 1910 but as a new member. In 1912 Kelly was returned unopposed and Stephenson and Butts were easily returned on the first ballot. Turnbull, who had been first elected in 1910 when James Steer joined the Board of Trade to help administer the new labour exchanges, was, in 1912, faced with five opponents in London but won the second ballot by 17,730 votes to 12,225. This shows that although the Executive Council was heavily criticised it was not sufficiently unpopular in 1910 and 1912 for any Executive Councilman to be defeated. Most were returned easily.

As regards the general background rising trade union membership, serious unrest on the railways, in the mines, among seamen, dock workers and labourers generally did not go unnoticed by the A.S.E. membership. One of the reasons frequently given for the unrest was a high level of employment accompanied by the cost of living rising faster than wage levels which certainly applied to the A.S.E. The longest and most difficult disputes tended to take place against wage reductions during periods of trade depression and heavy unemployment.<sup>2</sup> We have seen that in an attempt to

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1 Tom Procter (b.1856) was one of the best known members of the A.S.E. In 1884 he helped organise the Nottingham S.D.F. and in the following year he took charge of John Burn's election campaign. He took a very strong Socialist line within the A.S.E.; was a supporter of the Labour Party, and a frequent member of the A.S.E. delegation to party conferences. In 1899 he was President of the Plymouth, Stonehaven and Devonport Trades and Labour Council and was President elect of the T.U.C. due to be held in the district, when the A.S.E. was disaffiliated - thus forfeiting the position. This incident indicated Procter's experience up to 1914, for he sought election as an A.S.E. full-time officer on at least eight occasions, was often near to election, but never once succeeded. Procter was a bitter opponent of the Executive Council - he wanted a more vigorous political policy - the end of the Carlisle agreement, the "terms of settlement", and all long term agreements. In 1906 Procter was Labour candidate for Grimsby. See Chapter Seven.

2 Unemployment in shipbuilding was on a 1930's scale during 1907-8 See footnote p.255. Chapter Six.

stabilise wages some long term agreements were concluded. By 1912 most shipbuilding areas were covered by these. It was therefore very difficult for the men to exploit their improved economic position. Full employment existed without the power to force up wage levels.

The increasing militancy of others highlighted the apparent ineffectiveness of the A.S.E. Despite years of activity the Society was probably no stronger in relation to the Employers Federation than in 1898. Membership had increased<sup>1</sup> and by 1914 it reached 174,253, double that of 1900. In this respect the A.S.E. was keeping pace with the rest of the movement<sup>2</sup> but the high hopes of the re-organisation undertaken in 1892 remained unfulfilled.

Within the labour movement the A.S.E.'s power and influence had considerably declined. Once considered to be the "model union" with William Allan at the centre of trade union affairs, by 1912 the situation had so changed that it was not even a member of the T.U.C. and was generally regarded as an old-fashioned traditionalist society. With the resignation of George Barnes in 1908 the Society lost a respected and well known spokesman, his successor Jenkin Jones being a fair less effective public figure.

The response to this situation by some of the members was the traditional one - the formation of Reform Committees within the Society - although on this occasion they were called Reform and Amalgamation Committees.<sup>3</sup> There are a number of references in A.S.E. journals to such committees but I am not able to assess their importance outside London since only the London committee was powerful enough to contest Society elections.<sup>4</sup>

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1 1898 - 83,564. 1902 - 93,252. 1906 - 104,871. 1909 - 107,140.  
1912 - 143,998. 1914 - 174,253.

2 Trade Union membership 1900 - 2,022,000. 1914 - 4,145,000.

3 See James German's election address for Assistant Secretary 1910, and Watson, Webb collection, Volume VI.

4 A search of the A.E.U. archives and local records produced little information about the detailed working of Reform and Amalgamation Committees.

## The 1912 Delegate Meeting

The 1912 Delegate Meeting was more extensively discussed in the months leading up to June 1912 than had been any previous meeting. There were three reasons for this: (1) A widespread desire for reforms to make the Society more effective; (2) The semi-independent existence of the A.S.E. "Journal"<sup>1</sup> edited by<sup>2</sup> Robert Young<sup>3</sup>; and (3) The attempt by members of the Executive Council and other well known figures to defeat two widely advocated reforms. They opposed the innovation of annual policy making meetings similar to what was to be the A.E.U. National Committee; and a proposition that Executive Councilmen should return to the workshop after one or two periods of office (three or six years).

A.S.E. Delegate Meetings were held in private with the press excluded. If verbatim records were taken I have been unable to find them. Reports of the meetings are in the A.E.U. archives which record proposals, amendments and votes. This raises problems of interpretation. Unless the opponents of a proposition put up an amendment (with only rules revision the difficulty of "a direct negative" does not arise) it is usually impossible to be certain of the basis of opposition. There is also the problem of those who oppose for different reasons. An example of these difficulties would be an amendment to change the size of the political levy - in this case opponents can be supporters of the status quo, those against politics, and advocates of a higher levy than the one under consideration.

Delegate Meetings were highly political bodies. Many of the delegates

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- 1 The A.S.E. had two monthly publications - the "Monthly Report" which was exclusively for members and contained official information and reports - and the "Journal" which was on general sale and aimed at being an engineers "Railway Review". The editorial policy of the Journal did not necessarily reflect the view of the Executive Council.
  - 2 In effect - although Jenkins Jones was responsible for the Executive Council for the "Journal"
  - 3 Young became General Secretary in 1914 (see below) and an M.P. in 1918. He was later knighted.



would have known one another before they arrived. Once the meeting had been in session for a few days delegates would have a good idea of where each stood on contentious issues. How a delegate voted was recorded and as most delegates would be office holders, or potential office holders in the Society, they would be very concerned about the published record.

The 1912 Delegate Meeting had 34 home and 3 overseas delegates. I have analysed the political positions of the delegates in an attempt to discover whether there was a significant syndicalist or industrial unionist element. Both syndicalism and industrial unionism tend to have a variety of definitions. Syndicalism has been taken to mean a belief in the revolutionary general strike by the workers organised either in one big union or in as near an organisational form to this as possible. Industrial unionism has been taken to be the proposal to create industrial unions, to improve the workers' industrial strength and ultimately to act as a basis for workers' control of industry. Both syndicalism and industrial unionism were hostile to non-revolutionary political parties and to the political process as such. Rank and file organisation against employers and trade union leaders was strongly favoured. The ideological clarity of these positions can be criticised. We can instead consider something like Tom Mann's position and that of the "Industrial Syndicalist Education League" which can be summed up as, direct action, solidarity and a profound scepticism about political action. Many delegates, if pushed, would probably have favoured amalgamation, direct action and militancy. But no delegate combined this with opposition to political action and in particular the Labour Party.

Tom Rees was a Plebs Leaguer, a member of the London Reform and Amalgamation Committee, a militant and naturally a supporter of rank and file organisation but he had no record of supporting workers' control and was a member of the Labour Party. James German supported the Manchester Amalgamation League but was to support the Executive Council against the

London Reform and Amalgamation Committee in 1914.<sup>1</sup> George Colwill was another supporter of the London Committee who was also committed to the Labour Party. These were the only delegates associated with rank and file organisation and in A.S.E. terms, they took an extremely militant position. Yet by no possible definition could they be regarded as syndicalists or industrial unionists; they were Socialists and militant trade unionists.

For the purpose of defining political positions I have used the following categories. A delegate has been placed in a category if he held one or more of the views taken as indicating commitment.

### Socialist

A member of the I.L.P., B.S.P., or supporter of "Clarion".

A man who called himself a Socialist, collectivist, supporter of the class war and who demanded the "full fruits of labour" for the working class. A man who supported a strong Socialist appeal by and on behalf of a candidate in an A.S.E. election.

### Labour

A member of an L.R.C. or the Labour Party but without known Socialist commitment. Enthusiastic supporter of A.S.E. members who were Labour councillors.

### Preable Labour

Supporter of A.S.E. members who strongly favoured political action but for whom no personal statement is available.

### Conservative Engineer

No known political views but very concerned to defend the status of the craft.

### Anti-Socialist

Committed to anti-I.L.P. or general anti-Socialist position.

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1 His election address for General Secretaryship 1914. A.E.U. archives

## Liberal

Strong supporter of Liberal Party and 1906-14 Liberal government.

Where possible I have defined a man's political position from personal statements usually in the form of election addresses. Every national A.S.E. office was subject to election and each candidate had the right to issue an address. As the 34 members of the Delegate Meeting were prominent in the affairs of the Society most had at some time issued a personal address. Further, as the supporters of rank and file movements, syndicalism or industrial unionism, were seeking every occasion to propagate their views there appears to be no danger that a man would stand for office committed to these views without saying so. The election address was an important means of spreading new ideas among the active lay membership.

The problem of defining a political position does not arise where a man accords to politics a high priority. Such a man would, when standing for any office, raise political questions. The difficulty occurs when a man is not primarily political and is more concerned with industrial questions. In such a case writings and addresses may not mention politics. Further, there is the case of the well known local figure who does not bother to issue an address. This again probably means there is no primary interest in politics but such people when elected to a Delegate Meeting voted on political questions and in any case frequently gave general if unenthusiastic support to the Labour Party. It is the man burning to change trade union politics who tended to raise them very clearly in articles and election addresses.

A.S.E. election addresses frequently contained the names of prominent members (and sometimes the names of outsiders, Sidney Webb or Herbert Morrison for example) who supported the candidature. It seems a fair assumption that where a man signs an address of a candidate who prominently supports the Labour Party, or is a Labour councillor, that he is not hostile to that political

position. Where this type of evidence is available, in most cases, "prebale labour" appears a fair description. But, where a candidate fought an election almost exclusively on political issues, then when more direct evidence is not available I have used support for such a campaign to define political allegiance. W.F. Watson, the Secretary of the London Reform and Amalgamation Committee was widely known as an "amalgamationist" propagandist; it is unlikely that he would have received active support from anyone not sharing his views on amalgamation.<sup>1</sup> More germane to the problem of determining the politics of delegates in 1912, was the case of A.B. Swales. Swales was the most widely supported Socialist in the A.S.E. and always fought on an almost exclusively political platform. In 1907 he fought the Assistant Secretaryship, as a co-operator and as one who was trying to free labour "from the old political parties ..... and create a new party which will help the oppressed". During 1910 as candidate for the Executive Council he opposed "production for profit" and advocated the transfer of wealth from the few to the people.<sup>2</sup> In 1912 he became Organising District Delegate for Number 7 Division.<sup>3</sup> Where a man supported Swales I have concluded that he was sufficiently close to Swales's political position to be regarded as a Socialist.

The political composition of the Delegate Meeting as defined was:

17	Socialist
3	Labour
4	Prebale Labour
9	Unknown politics
1	Industrial interest only.
<u>34</u>	Home Delegates
3	Overseas
<u>37</u>	Total <sup>4</sup>

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- 1 Watson's election addresses for Executive Council 1912 and for Assistant Secretaryship 1913. A.E.U. archives
  - 2 Swales's election addresses, A.E.U. archives
  - 3 Division 7 was mainly London, it went west to Oxford and south east to Dover. Swales's election prevented him playing an active part in the constitutional crisis after the Delegate Meeting
  - 4 For details of delegates' political views see Appendix VI

If all the 'Unknowns', 'Industrial interest only' and 'Probable Labour' are added together and regarded as anti-politics, or anti-Labour Party and Socialist, they amount to 14 delegates out of 37 or, if the Overseas delegates are also included, 17 out of 37. In fact this puts the anti-Labour Party and Socialist element at its highest because most of this group probably simply did not give politics a very high priority.

It is very difficult to know where to draw the line between Socialist and Labour supporters only and there are, in any case, many varieties of Socialist. Clearly if we take all these difficulties into account we have a Labour Party/Socialist majority with the minority tending to the right (or dis-interest) rather than the syndicalist industrial-unionist left.

The absence of an open Liberal Party element is interesting. Some of the 'Unknowns' and, perhaps 'Probable Labour' may have been supporters of the Liberal Party but if they were, they were discreet about it.

The political composition of the 1912 meeting was similar to the previous meeting in 1907.<sup>1</sup>

The Delegate Meeting met for 52 days. It changed the Society's membership and government in a number of respects. The Executive Council was reduced from 8 members to 7 elected and nominated by division. Executive Councilmen previously elected by the entire membership (although nominated on a divisional basis) thus ceased to be nationally elected officers. This was important because an Independent Chairman was to be elected by the entire

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1 1907 meeting had 45 home delegates made up of 25 Socialists, 4 Labour, 3 Probable Labour, 1 Liberal, 12 Unknown. From 1896 the trend is towards a firmer commitment to Labour Party and Socialist politics.

1896 37 home delegates made up of 10 Socialists, 4 Radical (i.e. Progressive but no known commitment to an independent Parliamentary Labour group). 2 Conservative, 1 anti-I.L.P., 1 anti-politics in A.S.E., 2 supporters of F.H. Rose (Socialist), 17 Unknown.

1901 41 home delegates, made up of 13 Socialists, 5 Labour, 5 Probable Labour, 1 anti-Socialist, 13 Unknown, 4 odd positions.

1904 Representative Meeting 16 delegates (all home). Made up of 3 Socialists, 2 Labour, 3 Probable Labour, 1 anti-Socialist, 7 politics unknown.

membership. Previous Delegate Meetings had attempted to secure an Independent Chairman elected in this way. The 1901 meeting wanted the Chairman elected by the whole Society but the rule stated:-

"The Chairman shall be nominated by and from the Council and shall be elected by the vote of the whole Society".<sup>1</sup> In practice the Council only nominated one of its members. Another attempt was made by the 1904 meeting and the rule was changed to:-

"The Chairman shall be nominated by the members from the Council"<sup>2</sup>...."

This change also had no effect because only one Councilman was ever available to be nominated by the members.

The 1912 meeting finally established the position of the Independent Chairman by reducing the number of Executive Councilmen by one, and ruling that "a Chairman should be added to the Council and nominated by and from the branches".<sup>3</sup> Further, the duties of Chairman were clearly laid down and included presiding over meetings, seeing all letters, and signing minutes. More important, he would be responsible for the monthly report of the Council's proceedings and for presenting the Society's case at meetings with the employers. He thus became the senior officer of the Society.

The Delegate Meeting increased the number of organising district delegates from 7 to 12 and provided for the election of full-time District Secretaries in London, Manchester, Newcastle and Glasgow.

A very controversial decision involved a change in the categories of membership. Before the meeting the A.S.E. had four classes of membership comprising full members, machinists, trade protection members and trade

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- 1 1901 Delegate Meeting report. Rule 14, 1901 rule book, A.E.U. archives
  - 2 1904 Delegate Meeting report. Rule 14, 1904 rule book, A.E.U. archives
  - 3 Rule book drawn up by 1912 Delegate Meeting.

members. A machinist had the same membership rights as a full member but a trade member could not become a branch secretary or hold any full-time position, while a trade protection member was "not eligible for any office in the Society, except assistant (branch) secretary, vice president and door keeper".

Some of the delegates were concerned whether the machinist section subscription justified the scale of benefits. Because this section had been established for only eight years, there had been no superannuation payments, so it was impossible to calculate precisely the net contribution made by the machinists to the immediate demands on the benefit funds. The Delegate Meeting decided that trade protection members and trade members received too few benefits. A general review of benefits and subscriptions was considered necessary to allow members covered by the new National Insurance Act to reduce their A.S.E. benefits if they wished. After much detailed discussion it was decided to merge the trade protection members and machinists into a new section and to abolish the trade member section. The new section represented an improvement in the position of the trade protection members but the machinist ceased to be a full member and lost superannuation benefit. An entirely new membership section was set up for "Helpers and Assistants". The opening of the A.S.E. to unskilled workers was clearly of first importance yet, in the general dispute over the fate of machinists and the other issues that arose out of the Delegate Meeting, this important reform was largely unnoticed.<sup>1</sup>

An attempt was made to introduce an annual meeting into the constitution with representatives from the British Isles "to consider the policy of the A.S.E." and Labour representation, the terms of settlement, premium bonus, amalgamation and any other "matter affecting the interests of the Society" and with "power to instruct the Executive Council but no power to alter rules or abrogate the principles of the Society".

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix IX for details of reformed membership sections before and after Delegate Meeting.

Some of the objections which had been raised in the "Engineers' Journal"<sup>1</sup> by Brownlie were met by this proposal since the "rules were not thrown into the melting pot every twelve months" and benefits were not new threatened but the meeting still had no time limit "and with officials present the work of the Society would be disrupted".<sup>2</sup> The annual meeting was rejected by 17 votes to 9 with 8 neutral. So the A.S.E. remained without a policy-making body.

The other much attacked suggestion for the retirement of officials after three or six years appears never to have been discussed.<sup>3</sup> A proposal to terminate the Society's connection with Ruskin College, Oxford produced only ten votes in favour with two neutral. In view of the Ruskin College strike and the establishment of the Marxist Central Labour College, the industrial militants might have been expected to support this together with the Conservative element.

It was decided that the new rules should "come into force from the 1st January 1913 and that the new Chairman together with a new Executive Council should then take office. This meant that all members of the existing Executive would have to seek re-election (if they so wished) irrespective of how long their existing term had to run under the old rules. The top four Councilmen, with the highest proportional votes would remain in office for four and a half years, the bottom three for three years. Thereafter all to

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1 "Engineers' Journal", June 1912

2 "Engineers' Journal", June 1912

3 See "Journals", January, February and June. Brownlie called this proposal "stupid and unstatesmanlike".



be re-elected after three years. A sub-committee was appointed to deal with any objections the Insurance Commissioners might have to the new rules.<sup>1</sup> They were empowered to revise the rules if necessary.<sup>2</sup>

### The reaction of the Executive Council

The National Health Insurance joint committee<sup>3</sup> refused to sanction the election of Executive Councilmen for periods of four and a half years despite the fact that only the initial period of office would exceed three years.<sup>4</sup> The committee appointed by the Delegate Meeting decided, in view of the decision that the new rules should operate from January 1, 1913, and the fact that an Independent Chairman had to be elected, together with a reduction in the number of councilmen (who would represent new divisions), elections would have to be completed before the end of 1912. If future elections were to be staggered to occur at eighteen month intervals then it was decided that the top four councilmen (those who received the highest proportion of votes cast) elected from January 1, 1913 should remain in office for three years but that the minority of three remaining councilmen should, in the first instance, seek re-election after eighteen months. The proposal that some councilmen should be elected for eighteen months had been rejected by the Delegate Meeting in favour of the four and a half year period.

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1 Colwill, Talyer, His e.

2 The Delegate Meeting also instructed the Executive Council to hold a ballot vote on whether the premium bonus system should be abolished and the terms of agreement terminated. This is discussed in Chapter Nine.

3 The committee established to ensure that trade union rules met the terms of the Act under which they could become approved societies within the new national insurance scheme.

4 E.C. Minutes, August 10, 1912. Monthly Report, September 1912. For letter see Monthly Report for September 1912.

From 1 January 1913 the Monthly Report and Journal were combined, in future this publication will be referred to simply as the Monthly Report.

When the Executive Council considered the committee's report<sup>1</sup> they rejected it on the grounds that the committee was changing the rules of the Society without any constitutional authority and also, that the eighteen months period had actually been rejected by the Delegate Meeting. The subcommittee retorted that the Delegate Meeting had given them the power to bring the rules into conformity with the requirements of the Insurance Commissioner and that their proposals would permit the new rules to operate from January 1, 1913.

While this issue remained unresolved the Council turned its attention to the new membership scales and conditions. A special meeting was held with the Scales Committee of the Delegate Meeting on August 17, 1912.<sup>2</sup> (After the Delegate Meeting had ended). The Council claimed that many protests had been received about the new scales and that they required more information in order to prepare a circular.

Joseph Binns on behalf of the Scales Committee explained their view of the situation. Class A had been established for those full members who wished to pay full contribution plus state benefit. Those seeking a reduction because of state benefit were put in Class B. When they looked at the machinist section it was found that it had certain advantages over A and B. They were also appalled at the cost of superannuation. Binns pointed out that machinists could enter the new full membership Class A. "It must be remembered many machinists were paid higher rates than the full members....."

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1 Minutes, August 10, 1912

2 Executive Council Minutes. The Scales Committee were Messrs. Binns, Bamford, Taylor, Colwell, Hisee and Diventic.

Bamford thought the new Class E (trade protection and machine workers) would meet the requirements of those who at present found contributions too high"..... hence our failure to enrol them in large numbers".

The Executive Council doubted whether the machinist section was in fact financially unsound:

"It was pointed out that this Delegate Meeting had created new sections, and yet crippled the last new section formed, which was not good propaganda, apart from the illegal and cruel wrong done on this machinist section".<sup>1</sup>

The meeting ended in deadlock with the "Scales Committee saying that the rules must be carried out as framed by them".

As the Executive Council was at loggerheads with two of the Delegate Meeting's Committees, the General Secretary, Jenkin Jones was placed in a very difficult position as he was the servant of both. It became clear that he was not prepared to obey the Executive Council rather than the Delegate Meeting. This made his day-to-day work with the Executive strained; whether for this reason, or out of genuine concern, the Council began to question his competence. In particular they charged him with the responsibility for printing three or four times too many of the new model rules. (It is not clear which, or whose, model rules these were, this may have in part accounted for the confusion). There was also the question as to whether the General Secretary should send out circulars on behalf of the two Delegate Meeting Committees.<sup>2</sup>

The Executive Council decided to issue a ballot paper to members on the question of electing the Council and the machinist section. The ballot paper read:-

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1 Executive Council Minutes, August 27, 1912, other quotes also.

2 For these issues see Executive Council Minutes, in particular those for October 9, 1912.

"Three delegates appointed from the Delegate Meeting have made an alteration to rule, stipulating that the minority of the Executive Councilmen shall only be elected for eighteen months which is contrary to precedent and the findings of the Delegate Meeting....."

These delegates were appointed "to make only such amendments in addition as might be required by the Insurance Commissioner". A proposal which the Commissioners had explained would meet their requirements was submitted to the three delegates but they refused to accept it. "This proposal is the only one which can adequately meet the present difficulty. It maintains the principle of Executive Councilmen being elected for not less than three years with the majority and minority returning alternatively every 18 months, and it meets the Commissioners' requirements. The alternative mode is therefore in the Council's opinion, unconstitutional, and they ask you ..... to vote for or against the alteration being declared unconstitutional, and allowing the present terms of office of Executive Council representatives to remain as formerly".

The vote of members was: For 13,385, Against 10,448.

(Membership 143,998).

"In favour of retaining the former machine section, and of the former machine section being substituted for those under Class C<sup>1</sup> (new rules)".

For 16,462

Against 7,076

This ballot paper only put one side of the question to the members. The Delegate Meeting's decision to reduce the size of the Executive

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1 Class C, like A and B was a section for full members. It had a lower rate of contribution and benefit than A and B.

Council from 8 to 7 had been lost - together with the Independent Chairman. Such was the consequence of not starting 1913 with a new Executive Council.

There is no doubt that the old machinist section had a raw deal. They had paid for benefits which they would not receive and even if they were able to transfer to full membership, they could not carry over benefit rights. Machinist members over 45 years of age lost everything.<sup>1</sup> Whether the Council really cared about the machinist section, or merely tied this justifiable criticism of the Delegate Meeting on to their own much more shaky case about electing the Executive Council, we cannot know. Redress for the machinists was much less likely once the issue became part of the dispute between the Executive Council and the Delegate Meeting.

The Committee of the Delegate Meeting, which had been appointed to amend the rules if the Insurance Commission required, replied to the Executive Council's case by leaflet. Albert Taylor, Chairman of the Executive Council, castigated the leaflet as "an amazing exhibition of childish jealousy and maliciousness".<sup>2</sup>

Having obtained their favourable vote the Council was in some difficulty. The rules made no provision for a referendum and the vote was a small one with many branches refusing to participate. If two decisions of the Delegate Meeting required a vote of members, why not the rest? The Executive accepted the implications of their action and the five other decisions of the Delegate Meeting were placed before the members of the Society as follows:-

(1) "In favour of reconsideration of branch officers salaries".

For	21,139
Against	4,210

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1 "We are compelling these brothers to transfer downwards to a section where benefits are trifling, and for all the years they have paid they get nothing in return". J.T. Stephenson, Executive Council Member, Journal, October 1912.

2 Monthly Report, September 1912. No copy of the leaflet has been discovered.

(2) In favour of limiting the admission of labourers into the Society only to those who came over as societies amalgamated with the A.S.E. within the United Kingdom. Against the limitation which meant enrolling individual labourers as per Class F:

For	15,785
Against	8,578

(3) In favour of a 3d. reduction for full members who did not require sick benefits:

For	17,076
Against	7,244

(4) In favour of existing trade members contributions being reduced by 3d. per week and allowing their benefits to remain as formerly:

For	16,181
Against	8,221

(5) Finally, apprentices were to be allowed to join under the old or new rules:<sup>1</sup>

For	21,717
Against	2,658

The Executive carefully formulated the questions to produce the required answers, they were now able to claim a mandate from the members. There were difficulties since many members refused to accept the Executive's view and if they were to take the matter to the Final Appeal Court the Executive's action would probably be declared unconstitutional. The only way to establish the authority of the Council was to re-call the Delegate Meeting and present the delegates with a list of amendments to bring the rules into conformity with the members' wishes as expressed in the ballots. This the Council decided to do and the Delegate Meeting was reconvened from

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<sup>1</sup> Under the old rules an apprentice paid 3d. per week. Under the new rules only 1½d, but lost some benefits.

December 11 to December 14.<sup>1</sup>

The critics of the Council mobilized. Both Delegate Meeting Committees (mentioned earlier in this chapter) circulated leaflets to the branches. The "Journal" edited in theory by Jenkin Jones (though in practice up until August 1912 by Robert Young) opened its pages to supporters and opponents of the Executive Council.

Brownlie urged that the Committee from the Delegate Meeting was acting constitutionally in proposing the change of rule:

"Whether a section of your body is compelled to seek re-election at the end of three years or 18 months is a matter of trifling importance in comparison with the graver issues involved ..... By issuing your unconstitutional circular you have placed yourselves above the law, flouted constitutional authority, given encouragement to rebellion, and lowered the prestige of the Council ..... Nothing could be more subversive of order and good government than an Executive Council defying the decrees of responsible authority ..... How can you expect that your decrees will be respectfully and loyally obeyed by recalcitrant branches when you yourselves are lacking in respect for constituted authority? (Your) captious critics will declare that personal considerations and love of office outweigh your regard for just administration".<sup>2</sup>

To meet such criticism the Council issued a statement ostensibly for the re-called Delegate Meeting but also as a call for support from the

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1 But only after pressure did the Council agree to recall the Delegate Meeting. In October they said it was "useless to re-call the Delegate Meeting". They claimed that it had acted unconstitutionally by carrying amendments to rule not actually proposed by a branch. In most cases a branch or branches wanted a number of amendments but what actually resulted from the meeting did not conform to any particular branch amendment, (e.g. on the composition of the new Executive Council). Only when the Executive Council realised that the Final Appeal Court probably would not accept this view did they re-call the Delegate Meeting. Monthly Report, October 1912.

2 "Journal", November 1912. For Brownlie's moderate views on trade union questions see "The Link" for 1912. Brownlie wrote the "Trade Union Notes".

members. The Council claimed to be the upholders of their democratic rights and to those who regarded the Delegate Meeting as the Council's superior they retorted:-

"We do not think that the question of the superiority of one set of individuals over another should be considered but it is only right on our part to claim that the record of the work of the members of the Executive Council is equal to, and in most instances, superior to, that of their contemporary hostile critics". The rules said nothing as to the superiority of the Delegate Meeting. Delegate Meetings could change rules "but there can be no abrogation of any of the Society's benefits unless 40 per cent of the membership vote in favour of the change". (This was reference to the decision on the machinist section). The powers of the Council were not just administrative "but largely legislative since all matters not specifically mentioned in rule have to be determined by them".

Brownlie described this statement as "amazing"; he could not be classed as a "disappointed aspirant for office" (a phrase used by the Council to describe their critics) as he had never contested an Executive Council seat or sought to become General or Assistant Secretary. Brownlie continued:-

"The Executive Council have abrogated to themselves powers above the law, which if not checked will destroy democratic control. It was against the dominant arrogance of administrative authority that Walt Whitman rebelled and urged democracy to wage eternal war against the never-ending audacity of elected persons".<sup>1</sup>

Alfred Hack, a member of the Manor Park branch, listed what he called the "apparent" powers of the Council:-

"1. Delete a new rule entirely without submitting same to a constitutional vote of members (see Independent Chairman new rule 28th day's minutes).

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1 "January Monthly Report". Article dated December 14. From January 1913 Monthly Report and "Journal" combined, hereafter called "Monthly Report".



2. Abrogate a new rule (Class C) by taking a vote for retention of an existing rule (machinist section).
3. Establish a new departure in administration of sick benefit by making this optional, and substituting this for a new rule Class B.
4. Retaining existing rule (XXIII) which has been deleted by Delegate Meeting and reducing contributions of same by 25 per cent (trade members)  
..... the Council have apparently power to do any and all of these things, and obviously many others, if by issue of a specially prepared ballot paper of abnormal proportions they are able to secure a majority of votes cast in favour of their proposals".

Hack further pointed out that the Executive Council rejected the Delegate Meeting decision on the machinist section because it had not secured a 40 per cent majority of the membership (as per rule XVIII clause 5) but neither had their changes of benefit scales.

The Delegate Meeting re-assembled on December 11, 1912 and unanimously<sup>1</sup> decided to reject the decision of the Executive Council and to uphold all their amendments to rule. At once the Council wired the Chairman "Delegates having been re-assembled by the Executive Council on the authority of the members for the purpose of incorporating in rule the mandates of the members and the delegates having decided to ignore this mandate of the members the meeting must be immediately closed". Jenkin Jones was wired to return home<sup>2</sup> and replied to both wires with a request that the Executive Council make available to the Delegate Meeting the correspondence with the Insurance Commissioners. Council reiterated their previous instructions. The delegates' branches were instructed to withhold all payments to delegates.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Minutes of Executive Council, December 13, 1912.

2 Minutes of Executive Council, December 13, 1912.

3 Executive Council Minutes, December 13, 1912.

All this was ignored by the Delegate Meeting. The trustees were instructed to withhold all monies from the Executive Council.<sup>1</sup> A provisional Executive Council, consisting of the five trustees and four other members of London branches selected by them, was established to take over the administration of the Society from 1 January 1913. The Provisional Executive Council was instructed to register the new rules and organise the election of a new Executive Council.

Jenkin Jones now had to choose between serving the Delegate Meeting or the Council. He told the Council that he intended "to act on the resolutions adopted by the Delegate Meeting". The Council suspended him from office "forthwith".<sup>2</sup> Two days later the Council removed the five General Office trustees from office "for declining to sign a cheque for a Co-operative Printing Society account, thereby failing to carry out the duties of their office".<sup>3</sup> Jones refused to return the keys and documents<sup>4</sup> and the bank manager would not clear cheques without the signature of the trustees.<sup>5</sup>

On December 28, W.F. Watson, Secretary of the Metal, Engineering and Shipbuilding Amalgamation Committee (which had grown out of the London A.S.E. Reform and Amalgamation Committee) issued an appeal calling for the Delegate Meeting to be supported.<sup>6</sup> Brownlie issued a moderate statement.<sup>7</sup> The Delegate Meeting had "vindicated the right of democratic control" but ..... "After very careful consideration it seems to me the most practical solution

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1 Each year the London branches elected five trustees who signed all cheques drawn on the Society's account. Trustees 1912, Kidd, Howell, Cummings, Beechey and Welch.

2 Minutes of Executive Council, 18 December 1912 and Monthly Report, January 1913.

3 Minutes of Executive Council, 19 December 1912

4 Minutes of Executive Council, 27 December 1912

5 Monthly Report, January 1913

6 "Daily Herald", December 28, 1912.

7 "Daily Herald", December 28, 1912.

is for the present Executive Council to be allowed to remain in office, then an undertaking to invite nominations immediately for the election of a new Executive Council under the new rules..... (They should) remove the suspicion from the General Secretary and the General Office trustees and thus avoid irreparable injury to the Society".<sup>1</sup>

A common view was expressed by "Engineer" in the "Daily Herald":-<sup>2</sup>  
"Ever since the retirement of our strongest General Secretary, Mr. G.N. Barnes M.P., the present Executive Council have become more and more autocratic".

On December 31, 1912 the Executive Council had carpenters erect barricades at the Society's head office (110 Peckham Road, Peckham) and stocked provisions as if for a siege.<sup>3</sup> What happened the next day (January 1) was described in the "Daily Herald".<sup>4</sup>

"The Eviction of the Officials"

"New A.S.E. men in offices busily at work.

"Police will not interfere.

"Notice to clear out was given on Monday night, but it was not until this morning that actual force was used to complete the eviction. Early in the day the new committee arrived escorted by the police, who were beforehand informed of the intended ejection. Also accompanying the officials were two stalwart carpenters. On reaching the offices they found the doors and windows boarded and barred against them.

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1 This view drew a response from "An old Mal" from Peckham. "Mr. James Brownlie sits on the fence. But then Mr. Brownlie would sit on barbed wire as if it were a fence". "Daily Herald", January 2, 1913.

2 December 31, 1912.

3 Monthly Report, March 1913.

4 The whole crisis passed with very little publicity. Only the "Daily Herald" reported the events of January 1 in any detail. The Delegate Meeting 11-14 December was like all such meetings in private. The then Executive refused to print the minutes - the Provisional Executive Council had too much on its hands to bother, so no minutes are in the A.E.U. archives. The "Labour Leader", "Justice" and "Clarion" were so remote from the A.S.E. (and the T.U. movement generally) they never bothered to discuss the political implications of the crisis.

"The officials within were called upon to quit. They refused, and continued boarding and barring in the house as if for a siege. The doors were literally banged barred and bolted. "We have come to take your place" said the new officials. "And you shan't get them" replied those within.

"What happened then only those taking part in the scrimmage actually knew. But I am told that there was a hard struggle for the premises. As soon as one set of barricades was broken down another was set up. But the carpenters eventually conquered with hammer, chisel and saw they cut their way into the house. They entered the secretary's private house next door to the offices, and literally hewed down the strips of wood with which the doors in the partition were barred. Into one room after another they forced their way until they had mastered the situation and took full possession, turning out the old committee members neck and crop into the street".

The dispossessed Executive Council was isolated. To take issue with the Delegate Meeting over their own office was bound to be bad tactics as it could be construed as self-interest. The breach between the Council and the General Secretary, Jenkin Jones, was of first importance because it placed the administrative machine and his experience at the disposal of the Delegate Meeting and the Provisional Executive Council. He was also regarded as a neutral force and his support for the Delegate Meeting weakened the Executive Council's claim to constitutional authority. When the battle for the head office began Jenkin Jones's assistance to the invading party rendered the Executive Council's defensive plans ineffective. He had a flat adjoining the office, from which the Provisional Executive were able to break in and eject the old Council.

The Delegate Meeting's unity on the central issue of their right to amend the rules without interference from the Executive Council was extremely important. Even those delegates who had opposed the disputed rules unanimously rejected the intervention of the Executive Council.

The checks and balances of the A.S.E. constitution worked in favour of the Delegate Meeting. They were designed to thwart an over assertive Executive Council and in this they succeeded. The Trustees were worthy members who were not prominent in national affairs - all five supported the Delegate Meeting, thereby depriving the Executive Council of funds. While the Final Appeal Court played no formal part, its presence hung over the whole crisis. It must have been clear to the Executive Council that the Appeal Court was likely to favour the Delegate Meeting as the members of the Court regarded restraining the Executive as one of their most important functions. Further, there was bound to be some overlap between the membership of the Delegate Meeting and the Final Appeal Court.

The maladroit behaviour of the Executive Council is the oddest part of the affair. They were men who had considerable experience of A.S.E. politics, otherwise they would never have become Executive Councilmen. The elections of 1910 and 1912 showed that they retained the confidence of the members, yet they chose to contest the Delegate Meeting's decision to hold elections for the entire Executive in 1912. We have seen that given the establishment of an Independent Chairman, the reduction in the number of Councilmen and their election by division, this was an inevitable decision. The Independent Chairman was bound to become more important than the ordinary Councilman since he was nationally elected. Nevertheless he would be little more than primus inter paras as a majority of the Council could over-rule him.

The Executive Council could have sought to reverse the decisions of the Delegate Meeting without breaking, or even appearing, to challenge, the constitution of the Society. It would have been a mistake to raise the question of their own electoral positions, for this exposed them to damaging

charges. On the treatment of the machinist members they could have appealed to the members as men of experience concerned that the Society would suffer in the long run if the machinist section was seen to be treated unjustly. They were right to re-call the Delegate Meeting but wrong to expect it to act as their rubber stamp. Once they attempted to dictate to the Delegate Meeting the constitutional rights of this Meeting became the only important issue. Given the existence of the Final Appeal Court, and the attitude of the Trustees, the Delegate Meeting was likely to win any serious dispute with the Executive Council.

Executive Councilmen, as has been said, were experienced in the politics of the A.S.E. when they joined the Council. Their experience, however, was a different kind to that required in administering an important trade union. Despite electoral militancy the Council had decided that until "something turned up" the Society had to exist as best it could in a difficult situation. This meant negotiating to the powerful "Engineering Employers Association" and making the best possible agreements. It has been argued <sup>above</sup> below that for this reason they concluded the unpopular Carisle agreement.

The active lay membership which included the members of the Delegate Meeting realised there was a gap between the militant protestations of the Executive and their actions. They also knew that there was a big difference between what the Society agreed to with the Employers' Federation and what actually happened on the shop floor.

There was a strong case for the Executive's view but it was very difficult to persuade the members and, in particular, the active members that given a strong employers' organisation the Society had very little room for manoeuvre. The Executive seldom sought to persuade - either making aggressive noises, particularly at election time, or simply confronting the members in an authoritarian fashion with what, in their view, constituted the realities of the situation, such as the ultimatum to the Delegate Meeting. Because they sensed authoritarianism the Delegate Meeting was only too willing to seize the excuse to dismiss the Council.

The failure of the Council to attempt persuasion can be seen at many different levels. Trying to compel the Society to accept things by the dubious exercise of power was the negation of persuasion. The absence of a policy-making body made communication difficult and also meant that the Executive bore the odium of unpopular decision. Yet the Council opposed all attempts to create a policy-making national committee. The O.D.D.s had close contacts with the active membership but these officials were excluded by the Executive from all central conferences with the employers. On many occasions the O.D.D.s counted among the opponents of Executive Council policy. Instead of manipulating the system they fought it and their judgment deserted them. The Trustees were vital for if they sided with the Delegate Meeting the Executive Council would be deprived of money. Yet there is no record of the Council consulting them. No attempt was made to put the Council's view to these five important men. On the other hand, the Delegate Meeting took the Trustees into their confidence. They were asked to form a Provisional Executive Council together with four other London members selected by themselves. The Executive Council, deserted by the Trustees, opposed by the General Secretary and unanimously condemned by the Delegate Meeting, was isolated.

The Councilmen lived in London and met for six days of every week, so living for much of their lives in each other's company. With no fundamental political divisions between them they tended to develop a considerable corporate feeling. Despite the dangerous and ultimately disastrous course they embarked upon, they were unanimous throughout the entire dispute with the Delegate Meeting.

Councilmen were elected by the entire membership and they tended to lose contact with their former home districts. Some only returned in the event of a dispute and then in a highly charged atmosphere. There was no real communication between the Council and the members. But, just as their

industrial influence was limited by the power of the employer, so their constitutional influence within the Society was severely limited by the combined power of the Delegate Meeting, the Trustees and, in the background, the Final Appeal Court.

### The New Regime

At their first meeting the Provisional Executive Council<sup>1</sup> re-instated Jenkin Jones as General Secretary and ordered that the building should be repaired. But were they legally in office? The dispossessed Executive Council sought an injunction declaring that they were the legally elected Executive Council<sup>2</sup> and on 11 January the Provisional Executive Council were summoned to appear in court where, pending a hearing of the case, the Judge empowered them to administer the Society. There then followed a period during which the dispossessed Executive let it be known that they might withdraw the action but they actually failed to do so. The period of indecision ended when the Provisional Executive Council refused to accept the nominations of members of the "late Executive Council" either for the new Executive Council,

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1 The members of the Provisional Executive Council:-

- (1) James Albert Kidd, Chairman 1907 Delegate Meeting, Supporter of Labour Party, anti premium bonus, aged 64. Trustee.
- (2) John Arthur Howett "Politics a dangerous element", aged 63. Trustee.
- (3) G.W. Cummings had worked as clerk at Head Office. Trustee.
- (4) Arthur Beechey. Trustee.
- (5) James A. Welch. Trustee.
- (6) J. Lane
- (7) H. Hisee. Member 1912 Delegate Meeting, aged 35.
- (8) Dan Cernack, Treasurer, Barnes's Committee in campaign for General Secretaryship, 1896.
- (9) Mess Sidgwick. Secretary, Barnes's 1896 Committee. Long time Chairman, London District Committee, Socialist, aged 56.

2 The legal aspects of the dispute are fully covered in the Monthly Reports, January to June 1913.



or Independent Chairman, because they had "entered an action in the Law Courts against their fellow members".<sup>1</sup>

The case finally came before Mr. Justice Baillocke in the Kings Bench Division on April 23, 1913. Council for the dispossessed Executive argued that the Delegate Meeting by rule could only consider amendments submitted by three branches and that the decisions effecting the Executive Council, and the new rules starting on January 1, arose from the deliberations of the Meeting. For the Provisional Council it was stated that once an amendment to a rule had been received, the Delegate Meeting was free to amend as they thought fit. With this view the Judge agreed. He ruled against the dispossessed Executive Council and in favour of the Provisional Executive Council, who also received costs.

The old Executive was now completely defeated being excluded from nomination for the new Executive and declared in law to have acted against the constitution of the Society. Their own Counsel's argument implied that if the Delegate Meeting considered properly constituted proposals then on all disputed points they had the power of decision and the Council must accept them.

A very interesting situation now existed within the A.S.E. The well-known members of the Executive Council, with the prestige of office behind

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1 Provisional Executive Council Minutes, February 19, 1913. Minutes read:

"Re Nomination for the position of Independent Chairman and Executive Councilmen for the 7 Divisions. The acceptance of members desiring to contest these positions, having been laid before the P.E.C., that body took into consideration the conduct of the members of the late Executive Council since 31st of December last i.e. - Entering an action in the Law Courts against their fellow members, who under instructions of the Delegate Meeting were carrying on the work of the Society. Attempting to obtain an injunction against the carrying on of the whole business of the Society. Holding up the registration of our rules, which is due to law proceedings pending.

We hereby resolve that the names of each and every member of the late Executive Council be omitted from the ballot papers issued for the election of Executive Council and Independent Chairman".

Carried unanimously.

them, were excluded from office.<sup>1</sup> Since the establishment of a full-time Executive Council in 1893 four members had been defeated when seeking re-election.<sup>2</sup> But other than on these occasions, Executive Councilmen, better known than most other candidates, were re-elected. The 1913 election was unique, because the entire Executive had to be elected, with an Independent Chairman and all positions had to be filled by new men. The Provisional Executive Council was excluded from standing - the five Trustees by rule, and the other four by personal decision, or by resolution of the Delegate Meeting.

The field was completely open and was the perfect opportunity for an organised group to take over control. If those committed to syndicalism, or industrial unionism, or Socialism, could have organised wide support, here was a chance of securing representation on the Executive Council; perhaps even the control of the A.S.E.

The London Reform and Amalgamation Committee issued a statement saying they would not nominate for the Independent Chairmanship if "a suitable candidate from the provinces can be found".<sup>3</sup> A suitable candidate was found in the person of George Colwill, an I.L.P. member, of Swansea City Council, a member of the Delegate Meeting and of the Committee which clashed with the old Executive Council over the rules.

There were only three candidates for the Independent Chairmanship. Colwill was strongly for political action and called himself "a confirmed Socialist". But "the strike should be used wherever there is a chance of

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1 The Provisional Executive Council's decision to exclude the old Executive Council members was criticized on two grounds. Firstly that it prevented the members choosing between the Delegate Meeting and the old Executive. And, that by excluding the old Executive Council., after nominations had closed, candidates who supported the old Executive Council were not available. Were the old Executive Council so naive that their exclusion was totally unexpected? If not why were "stand by" candidates not nominated, to withdraw if the old Executive Council were able to go forward to election?

2 John Black was defeated on a local issue in 1898, when the elections were held on a divisional basis. Three members were defeated in 1903. See Chapter Six.

3 Monthly Report March 1913.

success". He raised the common cry for "more unionists and less unions". A militant address but in no sense syndicalist or industrial unionist. Brownlie presented himself as an experienced worker for "social and economic emancipation". He attacked the old Executive Council. He called for fewer unions, attacked the "pernicious method of premium bonus and long term agreements". Robert Smillie supported his candidature.<sup>1</sup> The other candidate T. Rawson did not present an address.

Brownlie, no doubt benefitting from his many articles in the "Journal", and his moderate stance on trade union questions (he was the obvious candidate for those opposed to the London Reform and Amalgamation Committee) was victorious on the first ballot.<sup>2</sup>

No candidate for the Executive Council defended the old Executive Council. Militancy and more democracy were familiar themes. London was the most militant area with F.S. Button of the London Reform and Amalgamated Society easily elected on the first ballot.<sup>3</sup>

The main conclusions to be reached from studying these elections was the failure of the amalgamation committees to produce a challenge outside London. With regard to syndicalism and industrial unionism as ideological influences they appeared to play no part. Industrial unionism was defended

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1 Election addresses in A.E.U. archives.

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Brownlie	14,028
Colwill	8,227
Rawson	4,858

3 The extremism, by comparison with the rest of the country, of London was confirmed when later in 1913 Tom Rees was elected the first full-time District Secretary for the metropolis. Rees stood as an Amalgamation Committee candidate. He defeated Thomas Clarke who had for three years been part-time District Secretary. Rees's candidature was supported by Noah Ablett and George Barnes. Very wide support indeed.

but only as a solution to the organisation of trade unionism within the engineering industry. There was not a single candidate who wished to withdraw support from the Labour Party because political action distracted from the industrial struggle.<sup>1</sup>

The history of the A.S.E. since 1897 and the attitude of the old Executive Council produced an excellent climate for demands that the A.S.E. should become more democratic. Many such demands were made, adding up to a view that the Society should be controlled by the rank and file. The Delegate Meeting's constitutional powers were defended, an annual policy meeting was advocated, and pledges were given that no agreements with the Employers Federation would be signed unless ratified by a ballot vote of members. For the more radical, democracy meant less power for the officials which could best be achieved by limited periods of office, to allow a return to the workshop. But no candidate linked these issues either with workers' control or industrial unionism. No one even related them to ending affiliation to the Labour Party.<sup>2</sup> Almost every candidate supported the amalgamation of trade unions but as the Society's name made clear this was an old issue about which no one disagreed. They wanted an amalgamated society of all engineers. Did a more radical and militant Executive Council emerge from the constitutional crisis? A comparison has been made between

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1 This was Tom Mann's position at this time. See election address for General Secretaryship 1913. A.E.U. Archives.  
For a detailed examination of the Executive Council election see Appendix VII.

2 Later in the year the A.S.E. was to vote against having a political fund. But this view was unsupported by active national officers of the Society and those taking part in national elections.

the old Executive Council as it existed on December 1, 1912 and the newly elected Executive Council of June 1, 1913.<sup>1</sup> This comparison shows that there was no perceptible radicalisation of the Executive either in terms of political views or industrial policy. The old Executive contained five convinced Socialists while the new Executive had six. Button, of the new Executive, took a somewhat more extreme stand on industrial matters than any member of the previous Council; his colleague Rose put more emphasis upon defending craft rights than had any previous Council member.

### The defeat of Jenkin Jones

With a new Executive Council and Independent Chairman elected it might have been expected that the A.S.E.'s legal and constitutional troubles were over. This, however, was not the case.

Robert Young had been one of the first A.S.E. members sent to Ruskin College, Oxford. He was afterwards employed on clerical duties in the head office and when the 1907 Delegate Meeting decided that these duties should be performed by an elected Assistant Secretary he was easily elected to that position. He became increasingly critical of Jenkin Jones whom he considered to be incompetent and on these grounds decided to contest the General Secretaryship in 1913.

There was no particular reason why a man elected to the General Secretaryship of a major trade union who had proved himself a competent trade unionist (i.e. negotiator, speaker, recruiter etc.) should also possess the special skills of an administrator.

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1 See Appendix VIII

Jenkin Jones had been a successful Organising District Delegate before becoming General Secretary in 1908 when he was fifty years of age. He was unfortunate in three respects. George Barnes his predecessor was a very efficient General Secretary and this was universally recognised. A.S.E. membership grew from 108,000 in 1908 to 161,000 in 1913 and such a growth is always a serious administrative problem for a Society with a large benefit policy. The Executive Council was always reluctant to recruit sufficient extra staff to service the rapidly growing membership. Jones, unlike Barnes, was not able to fight the Executive hard enough on this issue. Finally the Insurance Act, under which the A.S.E. became an approved Society, imposed further strains on an already over-worked office staff. He would probably have managed to keep the administration ticking over if these extra burdens had not been added but was clearly not a man with natural administrative ability. His decision to support the Delegate Meeting and the Provisional Executive Council in the way he did may have arisen through his views on constitutional propriety. Alternatively he might have regarded the Executive Council as the administrative authority. He would then have served the old Executive up to December 31, 1912 and the Provisional Executive from January 1, 1913. There would seem to have been important reasons for his reservations concerning the constitutional changes made by the Delegate Meeting. The General Secretary was the senior officer of the Society but, with Executive Councilmen representing only their divisions, the new nationally elected Independent Chairman would be likely to challenge the General Secretary's position as did indeed happen. Yet Jones, who must have been aware of this gave his complete support to the reformers. It is possible he feared that the old Executive Council would expose his administrative shortcomings and perhaps dismiss him from office.<sup>1</sup>

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1 John Anderson was dismissed by the Executive Council in 1896.  
See Chapter Two.

Young wrote two letters to members of the Portsmouth Branch named Quanton and Merritt. In both he detailed his case against Jones. No one in the office thought him to be qualified; Jones was accused of "incompetence and bungling"; he gave the Delegate Meeting no lead; the old Executive Council were wrong on many things "but their suspension of Jenkin Jones was only an error in time. It should have occurred long ago, but a weak and incompetent man at the head meant more power for the Executive Council.

"Jones has proved himself a boss without ability, an egoist who manages to survive on the credit of work done by assistants. He has deliberately set one set of officials against the other. While he was denouncing the Executive Council to assistant secretaries he was at the same time attributing his own blunders to one or other of his colleagues. The snake-like methods adopted by him have exasperated and irritated every man in the office..... The insurance work had been reduced to an expensive muddle".<sup>1</sup>

Young's election address was in the same terms. While the election was under way Button did his best to assist Jones in an article called "Impressions of General Office" which was a long tribute to the General Secretary. "Not only is Bro. Jenkin Jones shrewd in dealing with the Employers Association, but his knowledge is a deep well in all organising matters, his long training, his diplomacy, his unfailing tact, are invaluable ..... when the late Council were wrong, Bro. Jones was right....."<sup>2</sup>

It was all to no avail; Young defeated Jones.<sup>3</sup> The Executive Council made their displeasure with this result very clear by presenting Jones "with a very fine silver cigarette case" on which was inscribed "Presented to Bro. Jenkin Jones by J.T. Brownlie, Independent Chairman, on behalf of the

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1 Letters printed in the Monthly Report, May 1913.

2 Monthly Report August 1913.

3 Young 22,091, Jenkin Jones 18,697 (second ballot). 1st ballot Young 14,532, Jenkin Jones 11,204, Tom Mann 8,771. Mann campaigned on "one union for engineering, working class solidarity and direct action". He was overshadowed by the internal dispute.

Executive Council and General Office Trustees as a mark of esteem....."

"..... Bro. Jenkin Jones ..... is one of those who has achieved greatness. He is not showy and does not shine on the platform. It has been truly said that Demos is a hard master, and yet there are over 18,000 of our members who, in the midst of calumny, abuse and misunderstanding have stood loyally by the man who has given his life to their service....."

"My experience of the last years" said Bro. Jones "has been a long and strenuous fight for the members and against autocracy and I claim that the democratic development of our Society has been safeguarded by my actions".

..... Bro. J.A. Howett said "The same men who drove out Barnes have now been successful in robbing the Society of Jones<sup>1</sup> ..... While personal aggrandizement has been the dominant factor with other men, Jones had always placed first the A.S.E. At the same time my objection to the methods of the man coming into office will never cause me to jeopardise the position of the Society....."

"The future will prove how utterly and completely wrong has been the estimate of the character and worth by a majority of our members".<sup>2</sup>

It must have been rather daunting for Young to take office knowing the entire Executive Council to be hostile to him. Jenkin Jones brought a suit for libel against Young based upon the two letters already quoted. Once again the recent history of the Society was aired in a law court. Young claimed his charges were true and that Jenkin Jones was incompetent. A long list of examples was produced including the fact that the insurance books were delayed, the rent for the Delegate Meeting hall unpaid, 10,000 too many Journals had been printed and the liquid financial reserves were run down so far that the Society had to borrow money to meet day-to-day needs. Jenkin Jones had his articles in the "Journal" torn to pieces in order to show that his grammar was somewhat less than orthodox.

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1 An odd remark. Barnes supported Young!

2 F.S. Butler, October Monthly Report.



Despite a favourable summing up by the judge, Young lost his case and had to pay Jones £225 damages.<sup>1</sup> The Executive Council therefore dismissed Young and declared the post of General Secretary vacant.

Young appealed against this decision to the ASE Final Appeal Court. He protested that resolutions against him "in the London branches ..... were solicited by typewritten letters from a member of the late Provisional Council backed up in some cases by active members of what is known as the London Reform Council". The Court upheld Young's appeal by 22 votes to 1. He was reinstated as General Secretary.

The effect of all this was very damaging to the status of the General Secretaryship. Naturally during the period when Young was dismissed, Brownlie was able to exercise effective control. When Young was reinstated the Executive Council were only too pleased to be able to push him into an administrative backwater. The constitutional changes prepared the ground for the decline of the Secretaryship but this decline was accentuated by the conflict between Young and the Council.<sup>2</sup> Today's constitutional arrangement in the AEU with a powerful General President and administrative General Secretary comes directly from the struggle between Young and the Executive Council.

Tom Mann contested the General Secretaryship. Mann was a very well known leader of the Militant Industrial Movement. By 1912 his election campaign for the General Secretaryship of 1891-92 was a legend. He was a popular ASE speaker. Yet even with a considerable personal following he could muster a mere 8,771 votes and came in third place. The contest between Jones and Young dominated the scene and Mann's candidature was hardly noticed.

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1 "I am advised I have an excellent case for appealing against the jury's verdict on the grounds that it was against the weight of evidence and contrary to the judge's summing up." Young to ASE Final Appeal Court 1914. Case report in ASE Appeal Court report. Young was correct but he had a habit of upsetting people - including perhaps the jury.

2 When Young became an M.P. in 1918 he was compelled to resign because of a rule which forbade the holding of a national office while a man was in parliament. He offered to remain while his successor was elected but the Executive insisted on his immediate departure.

Some historians have seen the years 1912-13 as the years of doctrinaire militancy in the British Labour Movement.<sup>1</sup> This view has no support from the history of the ASE. Although amalgamation committees existed they were, in part at least, no more than a continuation of the ASE's amalgamationist tradition.

The 1912-13 constitutional crisis was not an ideological struggle and the Delegate Meeting had no extremist ideologically motivated group. There were some issues that could be associated with syndicalism and similar doctrines. For example, the annual meeting demand and the amendment calling for officials to return to the workshop after a period in office but both of these suggestions were rejected by the Delegate Meeting and played no part in the crisis.

The weakness of left wing groups within the ASE was remarkable. In these years of considerable industrial unrest and militancy no group outside London was ever able to take advantage of a very open Executive Council election. A small organised minority could probably have won a majority of seats on the Executive Council.

Many of the members of the Delegate Meeting were dissatisfied with the policies of the Executive Council and this may have prompted the extreme character of their response. But, without doubt the Delegate Meeting's primary motive was to defend their constitutional rights against the actions of the Executive Council. For this reason on the important question of dismissing the Executive Council all delegates acted together irrespective of their political views.

The division of power between Executive Council, Delegate Meeting and Final Appeal Court, which was the basis of the ASE constitution was preserved and strengthened by the outcome of the 1912-13 constitutional crisis. What many active members saw as autocratic leadership was condemned and defeated

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1 See Dangerfield "The Strange Death of Liberal England" for example

## CHAPTER NINE

### The New Executive Council, June 1913 - August 1914

The Provisional Executive Council which took office on January 1, 1913 limited its function to routine administration, upholding its action in superseding the previous Council in the law courts as well as before the members and conducting elections for a new Executive Council. Due to the length of the elections process the new Council was unable to take office until June 16, 1913.

Although the constitutional crisis of 1913 did not arise because of deep differences about policy questions, the critics of the old Executive and the new Executive, appeared to take a straight forward stand against the premium bonus and the terms of agreement. It is likely therefore that there was some expectation that the new leaders, unencumbered by previous policies, would be able to bring about some improvement in the Society's industrial position.

Fourteen months after taking office the Executive Council found the whole situation transformed by war. The Executive was in office for too short a time in peace conditions for a definitive judgement to be made on their record; but by August 1914 there was little evidence to suggest that much had changed beyond the membership of the Council.

The Delegate Meeting with doubtful constitutional propriety had instructed the Executive to hold a ballot vote on whether the premium bonus system should be abolished and the terms of agreement terminated. With some enthusiasm the Executive concurred, making it quite clear that they expected the membership to vote against the terms of agreement and the premium bonus system. It is remarkable that Brownlie, a Socialist with experience that went beyond the confines of local A.S.E. matters, remained a craft trade unionist. Speaking in Barrow he declared his position:

"I am one of those that hunger for the time when we will be no longer mere cogs in the wheels of industry, but when there will be master workmen taking a pride in their craft, and when the work left their hand it could stand on the table of the museum of the mechanics institute ..... Today they were not making craftsmen but were destroying all the artistic spirit in their nature, and sacrificing all their inner feelings on the altar of capitalism".<sup>1</sup>

It was not clear how this conception of the craftsman could be reconciled with the requirements of the engineering industry or how Brownlie proposed to move towards his ideal. In truth the conditions of perfect craftsmanship were like Socialism, some way in the future and meant to act as an inspiration rather than as an immediate prospect. While it could be argued that Socialism gave some direction and unity with the rest of the Labour movement to A.S.E. politics, craft unionism divided the Society from the general movement and encouraged illusions about what could be achieved.

Brownlie's link between craft unionism and the non-alienated Socialist conception of work was to become important. It enabled traditional craft unionism to be clothed in Socialist rhetoric and perhaps to be mistaken for the genuine article. But the similarity was purely rhetorical. Craft unionism was (and is) about closing avenues and protecting one section against others whereas the Socialist view of work is presumably meant to be universalised.

The members duly voted by big majorities for the "abolition of the terms of agreement" and for "ending the premium bonus system".<sup>2</sup>

It was now possible for the Executive to give the Engineering Employers Federation three months notice of termination of the terms of

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1 Monthly Report, August 1913

2 In favour of the abolition of the terms of agreement, 26,335, against 5,156. For ending the premium bonus, 24,314, against 4,777. At the same time the Society voted in favour of political action under the 1913 Trade Union Act. In favour 20,586, against 12,740. Monthly Report, December 1913.

agreement. The same applied to the Carlisle agreement although this was not quite the same as "ending the premium bonus system".

Two other issues were assuming some importance. There was renewed pressure for the eight-hour day and the amalgamation of the trade unions within the engineering industry was widely advocated.

The Executive sympathised with the eight-hour movement and viewed the trade prosperity of 1913 and 1914 as providing the necessary pre-condition for success. But with the events of 1897-98 in mind they were understandably cautious. They wanted to avoid a dispute on hours which could develop into a general conflict. Further, they required from the other unions in the engineering industry some assurance of united action.

In December 1913 there was established a Reduction of Hours Committee;<sup>1</sup> from its first meeting the A.S.E. made it clear that the Society would not proceed faster than the other organisations.

As the unions made preparations for negotiations with the employers on hours reductions the A.S.E. gave three months notice<sup>2</sup> to the employers of termination of the terms of agreement and the Carlisle agreement on the premium bonus. It became apparent that if the terms of agreement ended, ipso facto there was no recognised procedure for, or employers organisation willing to, negotiate on hours of work.

Termination of the agreement showed that the Society was bankrupt of policy. For some of the members ending the agreement meant a return to pre-1897 conditions. This however was impossible because the employers' organisation remained, individual employers usually were unwilling to allow the Society to determine trade conditions and collective bargaining was now the accepted method of dealing with outstanding questions. Ending the

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1 Unions represented, Boilermakers, Shipwrights, A.S.E., Associated Ironmoulders, Gasworkers, Steam Engine Makers, Carpenters and Joiners, Amalgamated Cabinetmakers, E.T.U.

2 Letter to employers, December 8, 1913. Three months notice from January.

agreement meant in practice unchanged workshop conditions, the absence of a procedure for avoiding disputes and no method of negotiating new conditions.

The decision to ballot members on the terms of agreement was made by the Delegate Meeting. It was not a rule and as such was outside the scope of the meeting in a strictly constitutional sense. Because of the difficulty of a Delegate Meeting dealing with such an issue it is not clear how they could have dealt with the policy implications. The decision could have meant either, the terms of agreement were to be ended once and for all, or better terms were to be negotiated.<sup>1</sup> When the Executive ended the agreement they had no mandate to negotiate better terms or any idea about how to manage without an agreement between themselves and the employers.

At a conference with the Organising District Delegates<sup>2</sup> it became clear that the negotiation of improved terms was the issue, "the undue length of time that elapsed between local and central conference" being the main complaint.

The employers refused to enter negotiations on hours reductions until the terms of agreement were re-negotiated.<sup>3</sup> As the Executive had no mandate they felt unable to enter negotiations for a new agreement as such. (A mandate required a ballot vote of members which would take several months to complete). The problem was overcome by the Executive negotiating a truce, a memorandum which was to stand pending a new agreement. Thus the Executive were able to present the York memorandum as an interim agreement to stand while the Executive negotiated a new agreement. The

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1 The decision to hold a ballot on the terms of agreement was in practice a decision to terminate. There was never any doubts as to the result.

2 Held Friday 13 February 1914. Report in Executive Council Minutes.

3 Executive Council Minutes, March 30, 1914.

memorandum asked the members to authorise negotiations.

When presenting the York Memorandum to the members the Executive Council was able to claim two major concessions:- (1) the Organising District Delegates could now enter the factory at the second stage of the procedure for avoiding disputes and (2) the procedure was speeded up.<sup>1</sup>

The Executive asked the membership to endorse the memorandum placing the decision in its historical perspective.

Before 1897 "... the state of disorganisation amongst the employers enabled us to secure our demands with little or no previous negotiation". Great emphasis was placed upon speedier settlement. Central conference could meet monthly, no question could be delayed more than six weeks and might be considered in three.

"Under this voluntary system you have full control over those who represent you; the shop stewards, district committeemen, O.D.D.s and Executive Council all come under your personal criticism and control". The alternative to the terms of the memorandum was "compulsory arbitration".<sup>2</sup>

By a large majority the new provisions for avoiding disputes were approved and the Executive given permission to enter negotiations for a new agreement.<sup>3</sup>

The York Memorandum enabled negotiations to proceed on hours of work reductions. When the War came, the employers having rejected a straight forty eight hour week, the unions were seeking a mandate to negotiate an "amended proposal" to which the employers were prepared to give "very careful consideration".<sup>4</sup>

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1 York Memorandum, Appendix X.

2 Monthly Report, June 1914.

3 For the new provisions for avoiding disputes 19,497  
Against 8,056

In favour of Executive Council negotiating with the employers for an agreement in place of the 1907 terms of agreement 20,051  
Against 7,677

Monthly Report, September 1914.

4 Appendix XI Memorandum on hours reduction.

The Executive, having secured the members' approval to the Society taking political action under the terms of the 1913 trade union act, sought to raise a political fund levy but by ballot the members declined to agree to this.<sup>1</sup> Brownlie was incensed:

"By this vote the members have placed the Society in a most unenviable position indeed. The position of the Society is very much like that of a man who was presented with a motor car and denied petrol by the person who gave him the car. The situation becomes more embarrassing in view of the fact that branches have nominated over sixty members to contest elections to become A.S.E. parliamentary candidates. Information has reached the general office that reactionary political organisations have been very active in disseminating literature amongst our members, thus influencing the votes against the levy. Be that as it may, the vote is a serious setback to the forward movement of the A.S.E. The Executive Council have decided to consult the members further on the matter".<sup>2</sup>

When the war came in August 1914 a doubt hung over the A.S.E.'s relations with the Labour Party. The eight hour day negotiations appeared to be moving towards a compromise solution and the terms of agreement were to be re-negotiated.

Without question the latter carried the most important implication. A new Executive with a mandate to end the terms of agreement had been able merely to improve these terms. Despite the Society's strong industrial situation arising from the high level of employment there was no consideration given to operating without an agreement with the Engineering Employers

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1	In favour of Political Fund	15,336
	Against	17,324

2 "Daily Herald" April 14, 1914. The Herald commented "It is understood that the adverse vote .... was due largely to advanced Socialists who disapproved of the Labour Party".

The following month A.S.E. members voted against a levy for the "Daily Citizen"

-	For	13,874
	Against	15,288



Federation. This decision meant in effect that in the Executive's view there was no way of returning to the 1897 situation and that the Society had to concentrate upon improving the collective bargaining arrangements with the employers.

That the Executive Council should conclude that some form of national agreement (which included a procedure for dealing with disputes) was necessary is perhaps not surprising. For without such an agreement their own functions would be much reduced. It may be concluded that in 1913-14 there was no alternative policy. But, an Executive which appeared to be against the terms of agreement before election, afterwards accepted them with limited amendments (such as would surely not have been beyond the power of the old Executive Council to negotiate).

What those who wanted the terms of agreement ended in effect desired was an Executive of the old pre-1897 style. The argument about the Society's relations with the employers was in practice also concerned with the kind of leadership the Executive Council should provide.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Conclusions

During the years 1880-1914 the A.S.E. aspired to remain in membership a craft union; but from 1898 it was unable to exercise the trade policy functions of a craft society. This change occurred under the influences of external pressure from the employers and technical innovation. In 1914 the Society retained the trade society constitution of its origin without the prospect of ever being able to carry out the functions of trade regulation on other than a limited scale.

I have not attempted to write a comprehensive history covering every aspect of the A.S.E.'s activity. My concern has been to describe the events and forces that destroyed a conventional trade society and to provide an account of how the conceptions of craft unionism remained powerful even in a hostile industrial environment.

The bitterness and frustration of the years after 1898 can be appreciated only if account is taken of the Society's pre-dispute character. It was a Society of almost autonomous trade societies with a system of central benefits. The reform movement was concerned to make the Society more democratic and more efficient. Although the question of widening the Society's membership was raised it never became a serious issue.

The defeat of 1897-98 was not merely a humiliating defeat for the eight-hour day movement; it was a forced surrender to a view of the total working environment that was entirely hostile to the principles upon which the A.S.E. was founded. That this defeat should have arisen from an ill-supported attempt to secure the eight-hour day merely added to the Society's general paranoia. It was not sufficiently appreciated that many unions were reluctant to support a dispute which, although at first concerned with the hours of work question, was also concerned with the continuation of an exclusive brand of craft unionism. In any case the view that the T.U.C. could have saved the engineers from defeat was no doubt unrealistic. It has always proved very difficult for non-involved unions to bring considerable

aid to those in dispute.

The widespread introduction of self-acting machines and high speed steels, together with new techniques of management which placed great emphasis upon the re-organisation of the work process, was having the effect of subdividing the old craft job demarcations without providing a technological basis for a regrouping of craft skills. The effects of technical innovation made the employers' victory decisive. There could be no return to the traditional trade society.

The employers were not easily able to take advantage of their victory. District committees and the branches were the foundation of the old craft system and they were not prepared to concede their previous powers without a struggle. The dispute about the control of the tasks was forced underground and those grievances which could not be disputed formally became the subject of countless shop floor issues. During the years after 1897 the Society made a considerable attempt to ensure that all organised shops had an authorised shop steward. The informal system of industrial relations which today characterises much of the engineering industry has its roots in the period before the first world war when the A.S.E. was forced to sign away its formal rights in respect of the way in which work was to be organised. Much of the shop floor bitterness came to the surface during the fight against the hated premium bonus. By signing the Carlisle agreement the Executive turned the bonus question from an underground struggle to an open dispute about the policy of the Society.

After the Society's defeat, some attempt was made to redress the balance of industrial power by calling forth outside assistance. Federation was the most popular proposal for achieving this but increased industrial strength through federation proved to be an illusion. This confirmed the historical view of the Society that only amalgamation could provide effective strength. Powerful federation, if formed, raised the problem of how to reconcile trade union autonomy and the collective control of considerable

funds. In practice this problem might have been solved by drawing up detailed rules covering the use of such monies. But this would tend to make a federation cautious and not the fighting federation some A.S.E. members demanded. In practice federations of the kind suggested (crossing industrial boundaries) are most favoured by the weak. The A.S.E. joined the General Federation of Trade Unions only to find itself a large organisation among many small ones. It made little difference to the A.S.E.'s industrial strength but while the Society remained out of the T.U.C., membership of the G.F.T.U. preserved links with the Labour movement.

Like federation, political action was favoured by some as a means of redressing the balance of industrial power in the engineering industry. Yet it was never clear how political action could achieve this objective. The reform movement, together with the activities of John Burns, produced an Executive Council and many local leaders who favoured political action by the Society. To judge by the numbers voting on political issues the membership was apathetic and there is no evidence that any Socialist organisation was influential or active within the A.S.E. Affiliation to the Labour Representation Committee (and the personal influence of George Barnes) gave considerable impetus to the forces working for the formation of a Labour Party based upon a Socialist trade union alliance. The Liberal Party had even less influence than the Socialist organisations, within the Society and appears to have gained no benefit from the 1892-95 Liberal Government's introduction of the eight-hour day into government factories and dock yards.

It can be argued that the Society, through the Labour Party, helped to achieve the social reforms of 1906-1914. Even this appears to have had little impact upon the membership for, by 1913, temporarily at least, those who opposed political action were in a small majority.

Attempts to redress the balance of industrial power by political means or by federation were bound to fail and concentrate attention upon what

the Society could achieve through its own resources. There were two policy questions which were of considerable importance. Should the Society remain a craft union or move towards industrial unionism? Should they seek to develop and extend collective bargaining?

There was little open debate upon these questions partly because there being no policy-making body within the Society it was therefore not easy to direct debate on policy questions. The A.S.E. continued to be organised as a trade society and such were the pre-conceptions of the members there was little chance of industrial unionism in practice however the rules were changed. Even the timid rule changes of the 1912 Delegate Meeting establishing non-craft sections had little effect because the majority of branches did not recruit members into the new sections.

The Executive Council favoured the development of collective bargaining. Support for collective bargaining implied the continuation of a system of industrial relations imposed upon the Society after defeat. It would have been easier for the Executive to advocate such a policy, without widespread charges of treachery, had they been able to demonstrate their ability to improve the members' conditions through the bargaining process. Any attempt to advance the case for central collective bargaining was retarded by the signing of the Carlisle agreement which gave further sanction to the employers' right to introduce premium bonus schemes without any compensating advantage to the members. Once Barnes had resigned no leading member of the Society openly and unambiguously presented the case for repudiating the past and developing the terms of agreement in the Society's favour.

From 1898 until the war the Society was virtually ungovernable. The terms of settlement and later the terms of agreement,<sup>1</sup> forced the Executive Council to administer a centralised procedure for avoiding disputes

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1 The terms of settlement were somewhat improved in 1907 and became the terms of agreement. See Chapter Six

and bargain with a powerful employers' organisation. The constitution of the Society took no account of this situation. Any chance of changing the rules to meet the demands of the new agreement ended when it became clear that the terms of settlement were contrary to the craft protection functions of the Society.

It is possible to argue that the A.S.E. constitution made the Society ungovernable and prevented it from benefitting in any way from the collective bargaining arrangements. A more secure leadership might have been able to follow a consistent policy. Against this it can be said that the constitution protected the interests of the members and in so doing ensured that, despite central administration, the A.S.E. continued to be a democratic trade society.

The constitution protected the existence of autonomous local trade societies by dividing central power between three institutions. Administration, within the terms of the rules was the function of the Executive Council. From 1893 the Council became full-time and was elected. The events of 1903 (when three council members were defeated) showed how effective the election system could be in limiting the Executive Council's freedom of action. By convention groups were able to organise in order to contest elections and there always existed an opposition candidate to take advantage of a major sense of grievance.<sup>1</sup>

The Delegate Meeting, made up of lay members conferring and discussing until the agenda was completed, was responsible for amending the rules. No Executive member could attend this meeting unless there by invitation. The events of 1912-13 underlined the power of this institution.

All Executive Council rulings were subject to appeal to a lay Final Appeal Court. The Delegate Meeting and the Final Appeal Court protected the rights of members' branches and district committees against the Executive Council.

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1 The system of electing officials meant that the Executive Council lacked the influence which derives from being able to dispense patronage. Those seeking office in some cases gained support through the Executive's known hostility towards them.

The constitution established the powers of all the Society's institutions. These activities were constitutional not according to the terms of settlement but according to the constitution of the A.S.E. We have seen how powerful district committees were able to wage disputes against the terms of settlement, but within the terms of the constitution. There is little doubt that the active members, in many cases holding to the tradition of trade regulation and local autonomy, found their interests protected by the constitutional limits placed upon the powers of the Executive Council. Opposition to the policies of the Executive Council tended to centre around the unrealistic demand for an end to the terms of settlement and a return to the 1897 conditions. This was in practice a plea for the avoidance of a central trade policy. The experience of the new Executive Council from June 1913 supports this contention. When they attempted to put their policies into practice, (and the terms of agreement) the power of the Engineering Employers Federation forced them to accept the York Memorandum which showed little advance on the previous situation.

If we look forward to the industrial disputes of the War period, and the characteristics of the shop stewards' movement, we can see that the pre-war condition of the A.S.E. is in some ways reflected.<sup>1</sup>

The local organisation and leadership of industrial action was familiar to many A.S.E. district committees. Further, they were accustomed to industrial struggle waged on the shop-floor without the support of their full-time officials.

Craft attitudes which were the root of A.S.E. organisation placed emphasis upon control over the working environment. Many aspects of the Shop Stewards Movement programme of workshop organisation, control over "work" and complete rank and file democracy, can be found reflected in the pre-war A.S.E.

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1 See "The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921" by Walter Kendall. This excellent account does not fully recognise the importance of the pre-war A.S.E. influence.

## APPENDIX I

### Increased destitution in Manchester

Chapter 4, dealing largely with the politics of the dispute does not deal with the social consequences of a major engineering dispute at the end of the 19th century. There is no doubt that the dispute caused great misery among the many who lived on or close to the poverty line. The 'Manchester Evening News' half way through the dispute (21.9.97) carried the following account headed "Increased destitution in Manchester".

"There is in Manchester always a tolerably large percentage of people on the verge of destitution. After fairly favourable conditions they first contrive to keep the wolf from the door ..... The slightest dislocation in the industrial world has its speedy effect, and under these circumstances it is not difficult to understand that this class is now very severely feeling the pinch of poverty. It is remarkable how far the influence of the look out are felt. Labourers and unskilled workmen generally are chiefly affected. Not only are those who work in engineering shops deprived of their wages, but so many men have been thrown upon the unskilled labour market that those who do not depend for their livelihood on engineering have had to face the competition of those who do. Jacks of all trades and odd jobbers are having a particularly hard time of it, and are being compelled to migrate from the lodging houses to the workhouse. Upon these people many others contrive to live. The hawkers of fish, of watercress and of other "relishes" now find no demand for what are regarded by those who live in ~~in~~ coats as luxuries, and in turn is forced to go to the relieving officer. Then the mechanic's wife can no longer afford to soak the occasional help of a charwoman and consequently quite a number of these women are now in receipt of temporary relief. Small shopkeepers are also suffering very severely ..... 332 more people are receiving relief than last



year but this 'by no means represents the real increase in destitution'."

The poor law authorities took great care to avoid the break up of families. Outdoor relief was given at the rate of 2/- per week for adults and 1/- for children.

The A.S.E. strike pay was 15/- and 6d. per child, non-Society men were paid 8/-.

The 'Clarion' scheme for Federation<sup>1</sup> and the wider Federation Movement

The 'Clarion' scheme was widely discussed within the A.S.E. and was regarded as a serious alternative to the scheme eventually adopted by the T.U.C. It was drawn up by Blatchford and P.J. King who was described as the "founder of the Chemical Workers Union".<sup>2</sup>

Federation will enable men to stand on an equal financial footing with the masters. "Such arrogance as that of Lord Penrhyn<sup>3</sup> would be impossible and the hardship of the last great coal, cotton, and dock strikes could never recur ..... with power - which only federation can give .... to support any trade or group of trades in comfort and security throughout a strike of long duration, trade unionism would have advanced from an attitude of hazardous and uncertain defence, to one of readiness for swift and decisive attack." The work of building up a Federation has been approached by union leaders "in a come-day-go-day-god-send-Sunday spirit and with a Lord-deliver-us-from-all-hurry-and-rashness kind of caution, which have naturally resulted in the triumphant production of nothing - and plenty of it."<sup>4</sup>

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- 1 The I.L.P. also had a scheme but it received little support or consideration.
  - 2 'Clarion' scheme described in 'Clarion' Pamphlet No 17 "Trades Federation" sold over 12,000 copies.
  - 3 The North Wales Quarrymen's Union had been involved in an intermittent struggle with the major local employer, Lord Penrhyn, since 1865. In 1885 a new Penrhyn withdrew recognition. A strike of 2,800 Penrhyn employees was called in 1896 for recognition and higher wages. The employer refused the Board of Trade conciliation. Eventually the men were forced back to work (August 1897) without union protection. "No other disputes of the nineties brought into sharper focus the opposing attitudes in the country towards trade unionism, collective bargaining and the states role in industrial relations. The unions rallied to the support of the quarrymen, seeing Penrhyn as the spearhead of the employers' counter-attack. Extremists among the employers cheered Penrhyn's refusal to recognise the union or to permit the Board of Trade to intervene". Clegg, Fox and Thompson p.212-214
  - 4 'Clarion' 16 January 1897, Blatchford.

The 'Clarion' scheme had been produced in February 1896<sup>1</sup> by "an unpaid agitator" (King) and was an alternative to the T.U.C. scheme of 1895. Previous schemes were criticised because the scale of benefits did not correspond to the scale of payments. Also they were not based on one man one vote.

"In the following scheme I shall try to make it possible for every man to be equally represented, and for every man to get the full value of his money. The representation must be proportional and the scale of benefits must correspond to the scale of payments. These are the only conditions upon which Trade Federation can be built up into a solid and enduring institution .....

"Millions of money have been heaped together, mightysyndicates have been called into existence to enable capitalists to resist the workers from getting, whenever they try to get it, a fair share of the wealth they produce; and unless we are able to devise some scheme of united effort acceptable to the larger unions, the wealth producer will continue to be victimised, and the reaction that has set in will continue until we are deprived of everything we have heretofore gained by standing up like men, for our rights." King thought the Clyde, Belfast engineering lock out of 1895 greatly strengthened his case.

The scheme was simple and ingenious.

"Each (Society) to give the other assistance to the extent of one week's income, or a portion thereof, for every week on strike or lock out, the income of these societies would be available for the smallest and weakest as well as for the largest and strongest, each getting the exact financial assistance decided on when the unions agreed to federate."

A list of 60 societies was given based upon a subscription of 6d per week per head. For example:-

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1 'Clarion', 8 and 15 February 1896

<u>Society</u>	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Weekly Income</u>
A.S.E.	75,000	£1,875.0.0.
Weavers	70,000	£1,750.0.0.
Boilermakers	39,000	£975.0.0.
Carpenters & Joiners	36,000	£900.0.0.
A.S.R.S.	34,000	£850.0.0.
Dress Makers	30	15.0.

In the event of a dispute each society guarantees a sum not to exceed the weekly income of the receiving society. If the engineers strike they get the weekly income of all unions (60) - £15,074.15.0. The Weavers get same less £125. Dressmakers 15/- per week from all. In this way each society guarantees only what each other union guarantees it.

A Federation committee was to decide whether a society in dispute should have benefit. To prevent a society drawing benefit and when leaving the Federation without having made an effective financial contribution benefit would not be payable until twelve months after joining and paying.

The 'Clarion' scheme got a good deal of support from trade unionists but it had certain serious practical difficulties. There was the problem of a society having a pay subscriptions while strike payments had to be sanctioned by a Federation committee. More importantly there was not equality as between individual members. A small society would get 6d. (or if they affiliated on 3d. - then 3d.) per member from almost every other society. The Dressmakers would get 15/- a week from each union or (on the 60 union basis) £749.5.0. or £24.6.0. per head! If any other society were in dispute the Dressmakers would be expected to pay 6d. per head to each. Now with three or four strikes in addition to their usual subscription they might have to find 1/6 or 2/- per member. And this would probably not be possible. In any case the hope that 60 societies, including the largest, would join was widely optimistic.

The 'Clarion' scheme revealed a lack of understanding of the trade union movement and this was to be confirmed by the attempt to establish a Federation based on it.

There were, nevertheless, features of the 'Clarion' scheme, particularly its sense of urgency, which were more appealing than the official schemes. In May 1897 the A.S.E. Monthly Report editorial, and a letter from H.S. Wooley of the Blackwell 2nd branch, drew attention to the 'Clarion' scheme.

"We should thus have half a million men drawn from nearly all industries contributing to a common fund a sum of £216,666.13.4. per year. Can it be done? If not, why not?"

J.F. Brownlie called for a "federation of all trades for militant and defensive purposes - The Employers' Federation<sup>he</sup> stated:-

"Assuming their threat was to come into operation, and that 40,000 of our members were locked out, how long would our funds be able to maintain them? Seeing that it would cost us £30,000 a week to keep our lock out alone, and with others on donation and sick benefit and our 2,959 superannuated added to the number, our £300,000 reserve fund would not hold out long." A complete federation of all labour organisations would deter employers from locking workers out.

"Our General Secretary refers in the May report to what is called the 'Clarion' scheme, and I earnestly entreat all our members to give it consideration

.....

"If the 'Clarion' is too large an undertaking at once, let us join the existing federation of societies in the iron and shipbuilding industries; and let that be a basis to work upon and as there is strength in unity, let us all be united!"

'Clarion' claimed growing support for their scheme. The Scottish T.U.C.<sup>1</sup> was in favour. Hull branch of A.S.E. declared:-

"Having considered the scheme drawn up by the T.U.C. Committee, we consider it useless, and thereby recommend the 'Clarion' scheme."

Swindon 3rd Branch, A.S.E. recommended approval of:-

"The 'Clarion' scheme ..... and instruct our delegates to bring before Swindon Trades Council ..... a motion to test the feeling of all trade unionists in the neighbourhood ....."

The next stage in 'Clarion's' Federation campaign illustrated how remote King and Blatchford were from the realities of power in the trade union movement. On June 8, 1898 'Clarion,' no doubt seeking to cash in on the opposition to the T.U.C. scheme, carried a letter from King headed 'National and International Federation of Trade and Labour Unions calling the first meeting of a 'Federation Parliament' in Manchester for July 18.

"The qualification requisite for a delegate is that the branch sending one or more should be in favour of federating with the 'Clarion' scheme ..... branches for federation purposes composed of people connected with different industries may be formed in every district where ~~a~~ a federation branch exists, and these branches will be entitled to send a representative ..... After the first meeting the 'Clarion' and those at present connected with the proposed federation will absolutely sever this connection with it and leave it entirely in the hands of the executive, and whatever officers the Federal Labour Parliament may decide to appoint."

King signed himself "Secretary (pro tem).

The provisional executive committee looked quite impressive:-

"J. Hallinson, J.P. ex-President, British Congress.

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1 Claims 'Clarion,' 7 May 1898, various Trades Councils passed resolutions in favour from 1897 to 1899.

Robert Smillie, Chairman, Scottish T.U.C. Parliamentary Committee.

M. H. Irving, Secretary, Scottish T.U.C. Parliamentary Committee.

John Simmons, Secretary, Irish T.U.C. Parliamentary Committee.

A. Taylor, Secretary, Belfast Trades Council.

J. Merryweather, Secretary, Stoke-on-Tees Trades Council.

George B. Hobbs, a Miners Secretary

P.J. King<sup>1</sup>

The Federal Labour Parliament took place.

"The success of the 'Clarion' scheme of Trades Federation is assured. It has been taken in hand by practical men representing the cream, if not the bulk of trade unionists, of the country."

Delegates represented 750,000 trade unionists. The National and International Federation of Trade and Labour Parliament had the following officers.

President	Robert Smillie
Vice Chairman	J.T. Toyne, M.F.G.B.
Secretary	Thos. Wilson, Scottish Bakers
Treasurer	Ben Turner, Yorkshire Textile Workers
Committee	George, A.S.R.S. Coulthurst, A.S.E. Williams, Musicians Harrop, Litho Artists, Reilly, Bookbinders <sup>1</sup>

Such an organisation not comprising of trade union branches, was hardly likely to become a serious force. It invited damaging criticism.

"Whatever may be the view entertained of the Federation scheme of Mr. P. J. King and his friends, the methods pursued in launching it confirm the worst fears of its critics." Fears that Mr King was seeking to displace

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1 'Clarion', 23 July 1898

the Parliamentary Committee. "The meeting of what is called the 'Federal Labour Parliament' has more than justified it ..... Promoters seemed chiefly impressed with their own importance ..... Surely this is the road to discord not unity."

No proper basis of representation was established "and the names of the provisional committee dispose of the fallacy that the "Parliament" in any way represents the bulk of trade unionists. Take away Mr Arrandale,<sup>1</sup> J. Hodge<sup>1</sup> and J. Toyne and those left are men of no real weight in the trade union world, though excellent in their own spheres of usefulness. The fact is that with one or two exceptions the larger unions are not represented .....

"(The) Federation has been captured by a few men who intend to run it in opposition to the Trade Union Congress, and hints thrown out by Mr King about political action are sufficient to indicate the way the wind blows .....

"It is all very fine to draw rosy pictures of federated labour, with visions of a general strike in the background but there is another side to it. That other side is represented by R.s.d. It is probable that by next year the "Parliament" will have found out that it is not quite so easy to get money as it is to elect a committee and a secretary. Certainly if workmen are wise they will hesitate to give their hard earned substance until federation is in safe hands."<sup>2</sup>

The second issue of 'The Trade Unionist' (November 1898) had a "Symposium on Federation". W.J. Davies, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee defended the G.F.T.U. plan:-

Federation must be practical and not simply concerned with an ideal. The T.U.C. Committee have proposed two leading principles:

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1 Not mentioned in 'Clarion'

2 The Trade Unionist, Vol. 1, No. 1 October 1898. Editorial



1. "That only Societies of approved standing can join the Federation.
2. That, as a condition of benefit the sanction of the general body must be given to any dispute .... such a federation as this would be no menace to trade ..... It is a league for defence ..... The wild ideas about Labour and Capital being national enemies, and that Labour will be safe only when it has got Capital under its heel have no place in the minds of common sense trade unionists ..... It might be said, that a good test of the soundness of any scheme would be that it met the approval of the Capital class."

J. Whitburn, General Secretary, Northern United Engineers Association

wrote:-

"The Federation of Trades will not accomplish all that some of its enthusiastic advocates seem to think. It will not be the means of compelling the capitalists to operate for the benefit of the workers alone, nor will it compel them to hand over to labour 'the last margin of the profits'. That will only be accomplished by the workers themselves becoming the proprietors of the works in which they are employed."

Federation was desirable. It would help prevent internecine strife. But there were many difficulties. It would not be easy to bring about uniformity of trade union structures and objectives. Every trade has several societies with different contributions and benefits. Some societies wanted a Federation for fighting, while others wanted it for conciliation.

Thomas P. Hastie a 'rank and file' member of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners produced the familiar Federation case. The masters had federated. All trades should help others in the event of a dispute.

A note of harsh realism was struck by William Straker of the Northumberland Miners Association.

"Those who cry loudest for Federation are those who feel themselves weak because of disorganisation in their ranks..... When a Federation of any

utility is possible there will be little desire and little need for it....."

The T.U.C. Committee want Federation "to promote industrial peace but most who advocate Federation want something different.

"Federation as a fighting force would be futile. We never could have the funds, organisation, and discipline necessary to cope with the force which could, and would, be brought against us.

".....I know no society of workmen who are prepared to hand over any question in dispute between them and their employers to a committee who may know nothing whatever of the subject."

Isaac Mitchell, A.S.E. member of the Federation Committee was not enthusiastic about the proposals.

"Is then, this Federation likely to prove sufficiently powerful (financially and otherwise) to overcome by the old methods any probable combination of employers. To this there can be only one answer - decidedly no! And if there was no probability of it being amended, it would, I am afraid, be of little value to us ..... the scheme is not a hard and fast one, being simply an outline or basis around which may be build up an organisation well suited to the requirements of the trade unions of this country. At the first General Council meeting which will take place I expect, shortly after Congress, every one of the rules can be altered."

Fees and contributions were too low. "It is problematical, even with a strong federation, financially, if we could be successful in a struggle and certainly much misery would be occasioned. Political action should be our policy; it is methodical and scientific. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain, and with a federation ..... we have machinery at hand wherewith to ensure the return of working men to represent us. The cost would be infinitesimal in comparison to a strike, and in the proposed district committees we have the means whereby the whole trade union force of a constituency can be brought to the support of our candidate."<sup>1</sup>

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1 A.S.E. Monthly Report

The special T.U.C. to consider Federation repudiated the 'Clarion' scheme:

"British workmen can stand a good deal, but the nonsense of this farce (the Federal Labour Parliament) was too much for them. The net result of it was that Congress, by an overwhelming majority, refused any other but the official report, and after this opening act - in which by the way it played no part - the 'Clarion' scheme passed into nameless obscurity. We can well afford to draw the veil over this audacious attempt to capture the unions by a small clique for when the Congress ignored them its reputation was established."<sup>1</sup>

'Clarion' reported that Congress only discussed the official scheme. This scheme was no good, benefits were not enough and subscriptions were too low. The 'Clarion' scheme would continue and Richard Bell was now its treasurer.<sup>2</sup>

The 'Clarion' 'Federal Labour Parliament' was soon revealed to be an organisation without substance. In September 1899 King reported that the Parliament had adjourned and 'no provision was made ..... for funds to meet necessary expenses'. He charged six members of the executive with being against the scheme.<sup>3</sup>

Mitchell on September 14 accused the 'Clarion' scheme of being a fraud.<sup>4</sup> Where was the money? Blatchford defended King and said the money was in the bank. King received no salary.<sup>5</sup>

In a letter Mitchell claimed that "Executive Committee of 'Clarion' Federation has never held a meeting; that its secretary has never issued a balance sheet ..... For all practical purposes the 'Clarion' Federation did not exist."<sup>6</sup>

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1 The Trade Unionist, March 1899

2 'Clarion', 4 February 1899

3 'Clarion', 23 September 1899.

4 Speech to Lancashire Operative Clothiers. Reported 'Clarion', 30 September 1899.

5 'Clarion', 7 October 1899.

6 'Clarion', 7 October 1899.

On October 14, 1899 'Clarion' announced its withdrawal from the Federation scheme which it had established. Blatchford was still satisfied that King's scheme was good and the official scheme was bad.

"..... but the British Workman prefers the bad one, after both have been explained to him, it is no business of ours to find fault with him.

"Here than we leave the British Workman and his adopted scheme and his leaders to do with him as seems best. Speaking for myself I must say I have found federation a greater bore than John Smith of Oldham and I have no doubt our readers have felt must as I have about it.

"As to Mr King and his committee and their quarrels and misunderstandings we have no wish to interfere ..... We do not keep 'Clarion' as a cockpit for federation officials to fight it, and we will not allow our readers to be annoyed by squabbles in which neither we nor they are concerned..... The 'Clarion' is not responsible for Mr King's acts or views and no more letters will be printed ....."

APPENDIX III

The Carlisle Agreement. A.S.E. Documents

Copy

Amalgamated Society of  
Engineers,  
110 Peckham Road,  
London.

To Branch

Dear Sir,

re PREMIUM BONUS SYSTEM

The question of the Premium Bonus plan which had been discussed locally in your district and referred to Central Conference was discussed last week as between ourselves and the Employers' Federation. After lengthy discussion the agreement as herein following was provisionally agreed to, with the understanding that there should be a further discussion later on, when a complete and comprehensive agreement could be reached, and the difficulties or objections that may be disclosed as the result of tentative agreement, again brought for discussion.

Meantime, we have sent a copy to the D.C. in your district, together with a letter, copy of which is here appended, following the document as signed by ourselves and the Employers.

It has been thought advisable to put you and your branch thus in possession of the full facts of the situation, and, no doubt, you will hear from the D.C. as well in due form.

Yours sincerely,

Geo.N. Barnes.

THE ENGINEERING EMPLOYERS' FEDERATION  
AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF ENGINEERS.

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MEMORANDUM OF DECISION  
IN CENTRAL CONFERENCE

between

The Executive of the Engineering Employers' Federation, and the Executive Council of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers held at Carlisle on 19th and 20th Aug. 1902.

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QUESTIONS DISCUSSED:-

Working of the Bonus System at the Works of -

1. Messrs Sir W.G. Armstrong, Whitworth & Co. Ltd., Newcastle-on-Tyne.
  2. Messrs The Central Marine Engine Works, West Hartlepool.
  3. Messrs Richardsons, Westgarth & Co. Ltd., Hartlepool.
  4. Messrs Browett, Lindley & Co. Ltd., Patricroft, Manchester.
- 

The Representatives of both parties being of opinion that instead of dealing with each of the foregoing cases separately it was desirable to come to a general understanding on the Bonus System, it was mutually agreed:-

1. That the Employers' Representatives should convey the terms of the following memorandum to the members of the Federation; and
2. That the Representatives of the A.S.E. should, on the other hand, remove all restrictions to the working of a Bonus System in Federated Workshops.

MEMORANDUM REFERRED TO

The Employers' Representatives have not the power to settle the conditions which should be observed in connection with the working of a Bonus System, without having previously obtained authority from the Federation, in proper form.

They are, however, prepared to advise all Employers who wish to establish such a system, in the meantime, to adopt the following suggestions:-

1. The Time Rate of Wages (for each job) should in all cases be paid.
2. Overtime and nightshift to be paid on the same conditions as already prevail in each workshop.
3. A Time Limit, after it has been established, should only be changed if the method or means of manufacture are changed.
4. No firm should establish the Bonus System without intending to adhere to it.

On behalf of the Engineering Employers' Federation.

(Signed) Alex. Siemens,  
Chairman.

On behalf of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

(Signed) Alfred Sellicks,  
Chairman.

(Signed) George N. Barnes,  
Secretary.

Amalgamated Society of Engineers,

110 Peckham Road, S.E.

To D.C. August 22nd, 1902.

RE PREMIUM BONUS SYSTEM

Dear Sir,

Please find herewith copy of provisional agreement drawn up as shown at Carlisle Conference. The Premium Bonus System of Working has agitated a good many districts for some time, and fears have been expressed that its inauguration might lead to the evils with which we have been made familiar in piece work districts. It will be observed, however, from the terms of the enclosed document that under the premium plan as agreed to provisionally by ourselves and the Employers' Federation, these evils have been guarded against. It should also be said that the matter will be again discussed later on, when a complete and comprehensive document will be drawn up, which will settle other points here left open, and deal with difficulties as disclosed in the practical working of the provisional agreement. Meantime:-

- 1st. The Time Rate of Wages is in all cases guaranteed, and guaranteed for each job, so that no matter how short a time may be occupied in any one operation for which a time basis has been set, the day rate of wages will be paid, at least while engaged on that job, thereby preventing a bonus on one job being lost through failure to make a bonus on another within any one week.
- 2nd. The existing practice of additional pay for overtime and nightshifts will be continued and paid for apart altogether from the time limits as under the premium plan; that is to say that if overtime is worked it will be paid for through the office as a thing entirely apart.
- The 3rd. clause provides for fixity of prices on time basis once such has been established, so providing against that ever-recurring cause of trouble, viz. cutting of prices. In regard to this, however, it should



be said that there may be some readjustment necessary in the process of "establishing" the basis, as in starting a new system of working errors may be made, and it may, therefore, be found necessary to either shorten or lengthen the time first tried.

The 4th. clause is intended to provide against mere experimentation for the purpose of gauging capacity and then reverting to day-work.

Council advise that a fair and honest trial be given to the Bonus System as under the terms set out in the enclosed document, and of course we should have a right of raising any question arising from the introduction or continuance of the system, if it was found that any firm was introducing it and not adhering to the terms therein set forth. This advice which is now tendered to your committee should be passed on to the members in the area over which you have jurisdiction. Perhaps it would be as well if copies of this document and letter be sent on by us to each branch in your district. That may be done in a few days. Meantime, Council desire you to convene a meeting at as early a date as possible, and submit the full matter to the members of such Committee.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd.)

Geo. N. Barnes.

October 1902

EXTRACT - AMALGAMATED ENGINEERS MONTHLY JOURNAL

Monthly Preface

The Bonus System.

The front place this month may fittingly be given to the following communication from Mr. Sidney Webb, which deserves careful consideration:-

To: The Editor of the Engineer's Monthly Magazine.

Dear Sir, - I was very glad to read in the September Monthly Journal that a provisional agreement had been come to for the introduction of the "premium bonus system of working". I believe that system to be a good one for Trade Unionism.

In our long study of Trade Unionism, for the History and for Industrial Democracy, my wife and I were keenly impressed with the evils of competitive piecework in the engineering trade. Unregulated by any definitely established list of prices, and beyond the reach of collective bargaining, such competitive piecework inevitably leads to degradation and sweating. However spacious it may seem at the outset, it is diametrically opposed to the standard rate - the principle of equal pay for equal effort. Any attempt by the employers to introduce such a system should certainly be resisted as contrary to the teachings of experience, disastrous to the workman's standard of life, and really, in the long run, no less injurious to the employers than to the operatives. No one with any knowledge of the past experience of such a system, or of its actual working in other trades, would dream of introducing it. In resisting it the men have political economy on their side.

On the other hand, the crude and primitive device of payment by the hour has many drawbacks. It is, when you come to think of it essentially

the method of the slaveowner. It in no way secures equal pay for equal effort - the standard rate - but only pay for equal time, which is a very different thing. It always leads to suspicion, even when not actual cheating. The employer is never quite sure that he is getting from all the men in the shop a fair amount of energy in return for his wages. He is naturally apt to protect himself by incessant supervision and "tasking", sometimes approaching tyranny. What is no less objectionable from the point of view of the trade unionist is that payment by time is a most unscientific and inaccurate method of remuneration. The essential principle of Trade Unionism is the maintenance of the standard rate of remuneration for effort. Without a fixed and accurately defined standard rate of equal pay for equal work, no successful collective bargaining is possible. But with time wages only the standard of pay is defined, not the standard of effort. Thus, for the collectively agreed rate of a shilling per hour, one workman may be giving twice as much effort as the normal standard adhered to by his colleagues. Another may be giving only half as much as that normal standard. The first is undermining the standard rate, upon the maintenance of which the welfare of himself and his own class depends. The second is meanly defrauding his employers to the discredit and dishonour not of himself alone but of the whole wage earning class. I do not believe that the industry of any intelligent class of manufacturing operatives will continue permanently to be remunerated by this crude and inaccurate device of time wages. It is, as I have said, the method of the slavedriver as it is of the "butty-man" or sub-contractor anywhere.

In our Industrial Democracy my wife and I have analysed in detail the various methods of remuneration and their results. If the engineering employers would only take half as much trouble to study their business of organisers of men as they do to study their business of sellers of machines, they would, I am convinced drop all idea of introducing competitive piecework.

They would learn a lesson from the experience of the cotton trade, or from that of the Birmingham Brass Manufacturers, and make up their minds to surmount all the difficulties that now stand in the way of definite piecework statements in the Engineering trade. For whole branches of the engineering trade, at any rate, it cannot be possible to have printed piecework lists, expressed in elaborate detail, and collectively agreed to by the Associations of Employers and Employed. If the example of cotton spinning were followed, these piecework lists would be authoritatively applied to particular jobs, not by individual employers or individual workmen, but jointly by two unprejudiced salaried officials representing each side. Let anyone but enquire how smoothly and successfully this system works either in an Oldham cotton spinning mill or in a Birmingham Brassware Workshop, and he will wonder why men of intelligence should so long retain in other trades the primitive wage methods of industrial barbarism.

But for definite piecework Statements in the engineering trade, neither employers or workmen are yet prepared. Under these circumstances the premium bonus system as provisionally agreed to, seems to me an admirable expedient. The A.S.E. may, in my humble opinion, safely agree to it. The standard time work rates is fully protected. The danger of a future cutting of rates is well guarded against. As it is the first class firms who are desirous of adopting the system, not the producers of "cheap and nasty" work, the necessity of attracting and maintaining first class workmen (who will certainly not continue under the system unless they make top wages) enables us, in my judgment, to dismiss the fear. And, what to my mind is a great advantage to Trade Unionism in the engineering trade, the system makes a distinct advance in rendering more accurate and scientific the working of the standard rate itself - the securing of equal pay for equal effort.

The only objection that I have heard to the premium bonus system is that it will lead to more work being done in a given time, with the result,

as is imagined, of throwing some men out of work. But this is really a gross fallacy. If every member of the A.S.E. turned out 25% more work, and was duly paid for it, this would be to the advantage of all the men, as well as to that of the employers and the whole community. There is no fixed quantity of engineering work to be shared. The demand for machinery of every kind is indefinitely expansible and grows every day with every lowering of price. The better the engineer's work the more they make, the greater amount of engineering work will be done, and the more numerous will be the men employed. If throughout the whole world every man's labour was suddenly rendered half as productive as it now is we should be worse off, not better. So if every man's productivity were suddenly doubled we should all be better off, not worse.

My conclusion is that the A.S.E. would be well advised to ratify the provisional agreement which their Executive Council has very ably secured.

I am etc.,

(Signed) Sidney Webb.

41 Grosvenor Road,  
Westminster Embankment.

20th September, 1902.

October 14th, 1902.

To The Home Branches.

Dear Sir,

The Premium Bonus System

In accordance with the promise made in the Monthly Journal, Council now desire to submit to the members a further and more detailed explanatory statement in regard to the above and the action taken thereupon.

It has been stated that Council has gone beyond the powers given by rule in signing an agreement without consultation with the members. This would be so if Council had signed any new condition of labour, or anything contrary to rule, or to the Terms of Agreement with the Employers' Federation. As a matter of fact nothing of the sort has been done. The Premium Bonus System is not a new condition of labour - on the contrary, it is now in operation in many workshops, and has been in operation in some of them for many years. Further, the Employers are entitled to introduce it into any workshop where it may not at present exist. Employers were, as a matter of fact, introducing it in many places at the time of, or just prior to, the date of the conference at Carlisle, and it was in consequence of this that the conference was held.

Such were the conditions which determined our course of action at Carlisle. It was perfectly obvious that Employers could introduce, and that, therefore, what we had to do was to safeguard such introductions by conditions making the working of the system to harmonise with Trade Union principles, with our rules, and with the interests of the members. This we succeeded in doing by the provisional agreement drawn up and which has already been submitted to you.

The first clause provides for the day work rate of wages being paid and not only so but also that each job should be considered quite distinct and apart from any other, so that the failure to make a bonus on one will not entail the making up of loss out of a bonus earned upon another in the same week.

The second clause provides for the continuation of payment of overtime rates, time and a quarter, time and a half, or double time, or whatever may be the custom existing at present in any district. Such will be continued to be paid over and above any earnings as under the premium bonus system.

The third clause provides for fixity of prices once established. This is an improvement on the methods which have existed in piece workshops of cutting prices so that men have been compelled to work at greater intensity for but little over the daywork rate, and at times under it. Of course there may be some alteration until the time basis has been established, but these will only be in the experimental stage, and that, once passed, the time will not be altered.

The fourth clause is intended to safeguard the men from mere experimentation by Employers, without any intention to maintain the system, but merely for the purpose of gauging capacity of men.

On the whole, as before stated, Council has succeeded in safeguarding the working of the Premium Bonus System, so that its operation can never reduce the man below his day work rate, nor take from him the conditions of extra pay for night work. There is also the safeguard in respect to the cutting of prices, so that the position now, as compared with that existing prior to the Carlisle Conference, has improved. Thus, prior to that conference, the Employer could introduce the system without safeguards, now he cannot introduce it - at all events not with the concurrence of the Federation - without the safeguards for which we stipulated.

The position in regard to the Bonus System was in some respects the same as was the position in regard to the one-break system prior to the conference held thereupon some six months ago. We found in regard to bonus, just as we had found in regard to the one-break system, that it was being introduced with the concurrence of our own members and without any safeguards, and what we had to do was either to forbid its further extension or acquiesce in its further introduction with the safeguards in question. To forbid its extension necessarily involved the drawing-out of all those members who had already begun to work it, and, moreover, would have been a breach of the Terms of Agreement. It would also have involved the Society in a struggle, which experience in regard to piecework disputes shows would have been a hopeless one. That is putting the matter on the same plane as piecework, from which, however, the system essentially differs in favour of the workmen.

The opposition to the system in so far as it has reached us appears to be based upon an entire misconception of the facts of the situation, and of the economical considerations surrounding the subject. We have dealt with the former. Space and other considerations forbid us dealing fully with the latter. It may, however, be said that the argument in regard to the employer getting an undue advantage because of the workman not getting the whole of the time saved from the basic time is fallacious. The essence of the system is in the cheapening of production, and therefore a lessened price for the product, with consequent increased demand, as explained by Mr. Sidney Webb in his letter <sup>in</sup> of the current issue of the Journal. It does not follow that more work being done per man implies a less number of men employed. The number of men employed depends upon the demand for their products, which is elastic in character, and depends to a large extent upon price.

Of course we have no desire and no right to advise or acquiesce in



the acceptance of any system of working which, whatever may be its effect in facilitating and cheapening production, would have an injurious effect upon the health or permanent efficiency, or general welfare of the members. We have not done so. We believe that there will be an all-round advantage in men being given increased wage for increased effort, which we believe to be possible in some workshops without injury to anyone.

Yours sincerely,

Geo. N. Barnes

To The Secretary.

APPENDIX IV

PROCEEDINGS AT MEETING OF ENGINEERS  
WITH  
MESSRS. VICKERS, SONS & MAXIM'S STAFF  
AT WHICH  
MR. BARNES  
WAS PRESENT  
AND SEVERAL OF THE ENGINEERS

PROCEEDINGS AT INTERVIEW WITH MR MCKECHNIE  
AND STAFF OF  
MESSRS VICKERS, SONS & MAXIM LIMITED  
AND DEPUTATION FROM  
ENGINEERS  
AT WHICH MR BARNES WAS  
PRESENT

July, 8, 1902.

Mr Barnes, after friendly salutations with Mr MC KECHNIE, and several members of Messrs Vickers Sons & Maxim's staff, opened with bringing forth the three points over which the meeting was called, as follows:-

The statement of our men that the terms of agreement have not been adhered to in certain respects, I think we might put under three heads:-

1. That you have not observed the terms of agreement in respect to the rating of piecework.
2. That the men have not been paid through the Offices, as under terms of agreement.
3. That there had not been that mutuality that was hoped had been provided for in the agreement.

The Clauses of the document are as follows:-

Prices to be paid for piecework shall be fixed between the Employers and the workman or workmen who perform the work.

Further, all wages and balances shall be paid through the Offices, and then in addition to that, there is a local agreement by which that has been supplemented to some extent by yourselves, as a result of correspondence in 1899, wherein the agreement that any workmen should not be paid under their usual weekly wage in the event of the piecework rates not properly covering for this, provided there is no neglect of work, and you further agree to give the month's notice, presumably before reducing payment for piecework jobs. The men state the terms under which they and you are working have not been

complied with.

A meeting was held re certain correspondence from us on the 21st Jan, when on the 27th you stated that you did not see that there was any need for interview, and suggesting that the workmen should see the representatives of the Firm in the event of them having any grievance. You were wrote on the 9th Feb, and on the 12th you wrote fixing an interview for the 20th Feb, and that was the last one, and upon that date it is stated certain terms were made by the Firm, which were not fulfilled.

1. Fixing of prices in piecework, as under the terms of agreement it stated that in no case was a man to be paid less than his day's wages, and the mutual fixing of prices was to be between Employers and workmen, and certainly this has not been done.

The first case I have here is a man named JAS AIREY, which was mentioned at meeting on the 20th Feb.

J. Airey was a blacksmith, as a matter of fact the man did not know whether he was working piecework or not, and was told at the end of the week, that he had been working piecework, and on one particular occasion, singularly enough, his mates were paid through the Office, and the balance handed to him, (8/2d less than his day rate). This is contrary to agreement under which we are supposed to be working.

I am not sure whether that has been referred to you or not.

MR MC KECHNIE I was here on the 20th Feb, and it was not so.

BARNES With regard to the next case, Mr Mc Kechnie. ROBERT

HOWARD was a turner, and was engaged in gun work. The particular job had been fixed at a price of £3.10.0. and the man was asked to do the work in 41 hours. According to all information we can obtain, the man is an exceptionally good man. He had offered to do same in 52 hours, and according to all information, we are convinced he had carefully made calculations to do the work in 52 hours. This was a considerable reduction. He was willing to do the work on the 52 hours basis, and was told he must do

it in 41 hours or leave the job, and we are told that you are in a position to verify this, and the job has not been done now in 41 hours, and therefore the man was unjustly treated.

WILLIAM TAYLOR Turner.

Been employed in turning a crank at a certain price, and was asked to do it for 17/-. The foreman stated that he could do it for 20/-, and the man could not do it for either price.

This man is an exceptionally skilled workman, who has been accustomed to Engine Work, and had been brought up to it as a lad in his native place.

ARCHIE SHIELDS

This man has been paid 4/- less than his weekly rate of wages. This was mentioned on the occasion of our last meeting, and a promise was made on your behalf that the matter would be enquired into, and presumably that the man would be paid his 4/-.

In regard to not being paid through the Office - I have had a large experience in these matters, Mr Mc Kechnie, and I can assure you that there is nothing gives greater difficulty and more trouble than this method of paying, other than through the Office of the Firm, when a man may be working for you. It is one of the greatest evils of piecework that men are paid by piecemasters, who resort to all sorts of little dodges against interest of the trade, and discredit piecework. By this unsatisfactory custom, we are told of certain men, with some little grievance, who do trust you implicitly. I think I may mention names. Hill, Evans, Chargeman in the Gun mounting department No. 9 bay. These men were not paid from the Office as laid out, and a complaint being made, although Evans was quite willing that the men should be paid through the Office, and they were told that if they did not like the system of pay, they must leave. That was told them by a Foreman named Walmsley.

There is rather a significant feature about these men. They were instructed that while working day work, they should write piecework on their boards, whether or not they were working piecework.

It is therefore recommended that in terms of agreement, all wages and balances shall be paid through the Office.

Addition - And since this has been done there have been no complaints and I believe this is the only firm in the Federation which has adopted methods ..... (writing indecipherable).

### Prices

There has been no mutuality with regard to prices. Men have been told that if they did not like the prices they could leave.

In reference to this, we have the case of a man named Radcliffe, who was working in the Gun Mounting Department. This man had been paid 5/10 under his weekly wage, and had seen representatives of the Firm, with no result, except that he had been removed off the particular job to which he had been engaged, and we have statements that the work is not done satisfactorily. We do suggest that you have regard for the fact that men have to undergo a considerable sacrifice in serving their time, and also a great sacrifice to their parents during their apprenticeship.

It is to be hoped as a result of this little meeting today that the friction between you and us will be at an end, and it is with extreme regret that we in London have heard of these little cases of friction here. We hope that these will now be removed, and you will go on as one, to the advantage of both sides.

MR MC KECHNIE Well, Mr Barnes, I hope that this meeting will enable us to clear away a great number of misunderstandings that we have had. There is no doubt of course that we have a very large place, and we cannot answer for all of these, especially those matters that are not brought under our notice.

There are one or two cases wherein you state that we have broken the agreement.

CASE OF MAN NAMED HOWARD

This man was offered 35/- for a piece of work. He wanted £3, but was offered 35/-. This was given to a man and apprentice, and had been done for 25/-, the man earning time and a quarter, and apprentice double time.

MR BARNES An apprentice has a very low rate.

MR MCKECHNIE He was in the last year of his time.

MR BARNES It is a matter for your discretion as to whether a man or apprentice could do it. We say that the man was given a time in which to do the job of 41 hours. Our information is that it has not yet been done in 41 hours, or even 5 or 6 hours over that.

MR BANNISTER The fact of the case is this. We offered Howard 35/-. He pointed out that it could not be done for 35/-. He met us in the matter, and he also had the idea that we could not get any other man to take the job, so we put an apprentice on the job, for one reason because he thought nobody else could do it even for the price (£3). We did it for less than £3, and taking it with the man and boy, so that the man's argument is entirely wrong.

MR MC KECHNIE He would not budge anything below £3.

MR BARNES His former price was £3.10.0. He must do the work in 41 hours. He said, I can manage them at 52 hours.

MR BANNISTER The fact is the man was not trying. When a man goes away for about 2 hours, it looks like the fact.

MR FEENDER The fact of the matter was when we heard complaint over the job, we put him on time, and he stated that he was not going to do task work. It was impossible to do the job at the price given. He said he could do them with any man breathing.

MR BARNES You gave him 41 hours. He was willing to try at 52 hours.

MR MC KECHNIE Did he offer to take the job for £3.

MR FENDER I do not know anything about that, but I know the job can be done for the price offered.

I went to him several times. The last time I decided to bother him no more. He then came to me asking if I was going to increase the price. I said, see Mr Leishman. He then stated that no Newcastle "buggar" could learn him anything. I never had anything more to do with him. I told him that in the Firm where I had worked, the work was done for 28/- by a labourer.

MR BARNES With regard to this particular price. Does not the fact of the time taken upon the job determine whether you were right or he was right. I understand the job takes 47 hours.

MR FENDER I could not say what was taken.

MR BARNES Getting an apprentice to do it at about 10/- per week the price will be cheaper than it was before, and having a man there, the price could be fixed for giving the man his time rate of 36/-. I think the man justified in refusing the job. If it could not be done in 41 hours, 35/- is too little for the job.

MR HEBDEN I take it that the workman has a right to refuse.

MR BANNISTER The man did refuse, and had to go.

MR BARNES Under that arrangement it would be stretching to such an extent that you might bring that price down to anything necessary, and when he came down to the lowest ounce, he would simply leave. There is no mutuality about that. Mutuality means that there should be fairness.

MR BANNISTER Certainly.

MR HEBDEN I say that a man has a right to say whether or not he will take it for that money.

MR BANNISTER We gave him a price, and the man would not take it. We



raised the price. Is that not bargaining. Rightly or wrongly we say it ought to be done at a certain price. There it begins and ends. Are we always to be found by the Workmen? That man did not take it for the price. There the job ended.

MR BARNES I should say that you should fix a price in order to get a fair day's work.

MR BANNISTER Certainly. The man was impertinent and left.

MR LEISHMAN He would get his time, and would see if the job could be done in the time. I am quite convinced that it could be done in the time.

MR PICTHALL There seems to be some flaw on this case altogether. The man, who gave us the case from his own lips, stated that he was offered a time of 41 hours and he gave 52 hours, and you say a price was given in £.s.d. Now these two statements do not agree at all.

REPLY I am confident the price was given.

He would be told that when he refused to go on piece, he would have to do it in an estimated time.

MR MC KECHNIE Have you instances that the job has been done in 41 hours.

MR BARNES Our evidence is to the contrary.

MR THACKERAY If he did it in 46 hours, he would be earning 9d. per hour.

MR PICTHALL The man was told that he must do it in 41 hours. We maintain that to carry out that agreement, a line ought to have been struck between the 41 and 52 hours, which would have suited both sides.

MR BANNISTER All very nice.

MR MC KECHNIE No such thing.

MR HERDEN We want to know what the estimate was.

MR BANNISTER Have you accepted my position. We make an estimate, we place it before the men, the men are free to accept or to

refuse, and there the matter ends.

MR BARNES I do not accept that as an interpretation of this document. It is one sided altogether. A large number of men are constantly leaving because they cannot earn their ~~day's~~ work.

THE LIAN AIREY

I think the man Airey was discussed here last time.

BARNES I believe it has been under discussion before, and it was mentioned that same should be rectified, and this has not been done. These amounts of 8/2 have been given as instances, and nothing has yet been done.

We ask you, Mr Mc Kechnie, if you are going to act up to your document.

MR MC KECHNIE It is the first time I have heard of any of these abuses. I heard of Airey, and gave instructions to have same rectified.

We have here about 8000 men, and you can only bring up cases as far back as Jan. and that is a very isolated one.

MR BANNISTER The same case as was rectified before.

MR BARNES It has not been rectified yet as far as he is concerned. He had not had his money.

I take it that you will pay the amount of money to the men we have mentioned.

MR MC KECHNIE I think in every case it is so.

MR BARNES Oh no.

AVERAGE WAGES Oct. 5/6, 9/5, 12/4, 9/4, 6/7. December 3/5, 6/6, 10/1, 7/2, and 12/10, making an average of about 9/9.

MR MC KECHNIE There must be something particular about that statement Mr Barnes.

MR BARNES I think that that man has very little to complain of.

MC KECHNIE I give you one or two instances where work was done under the prices, and this done on time:-

12" Cylinder Our offer was 10/-, and he rates that at piecework, and he was put on time, and the work was done for 9/7d. Another was done for 9/2.

6" Siding head Price 3/- and done on time for 2/8d.

6" Gland Price was 6/6 and the work was done on time for 6/6 exactly.

5" Carriage axle Price 9/- done on time for 8/5.

12" Roller Price 5/- . Done on time for 4/8.

MR MC KECHNIE There are other cases where men are paid over and above their piecework prices. For instance:-

Gun Slide Waiting for plans etc. 14/2d extra pay.

Valve spoiled in machinery. 19/-

Slide waiting for marker. 10 hours - 6/10.

MR BARNES But I suppose you put the men to other work?

MR BANNISTER Of course as far as possible.

MR BARNES Can you give us the names of these men Mr Mc Kechnie, whereby we can verify these statements?

MR MC KECHNIE Ross was the name of the man in the first case (12" Cylinder).

MR BARNES In the case of prices Mr Mc Kechnie. Do you not think it would be better to have prices so that the man will know what he is going to earn? In many cases you know he does not know about the price until the week-end. Could not we get a middle price fixed on piecework?

MR BANNISTER We do now if we can get a standard, but we are only starting piecework.

MR MC KECHNIE The man is not forced to take out the work.

RADCLIFFE'S CASE

MR MC KECHNIE By a clerical error there is a shortage of 1/8d, and not 5/10d, but in the week stated there is 5/7d. short of his

time money, and he got a note from Mr Thackeray to go out and get it. He did not ask to have the 1/8d rectified, but simply left the works.

MR BANNISTER The man was deliberately insolent.

FOREMAN We arranged a price with him. First he wanted 4/-, and then 3/6d. I considered 2/6 would be reasonable. At first he made over his time money, but he gradually dwindled down.

MR HEBDEN You also promised that you would get some special tools from Hibberts for him.

MR BANNISTER I should like to know what you are working at.

MR HEBDEN Repairing machines.

MR BANNISTER And you know what you are working to?

MR HEBDEN I am working on the information that was given to us. The statement is that the tools had got worn out, and that was the reason why he could not do the job in the same time as it was done before.

FOREMAN The tools were in perfect order.

MR BARNES You promised to get him a special steel.

FOREMAN The steel we got from Hibberts was a special steel, which is just the same.

MR BARNES There is a statement made that he had been promised some special steel.

MR THACKERAY There is no different steel being used now to what there was.

FOREMAN 2/6 was an ample price. The man could easily make 1/- per hour.

MR THACKERAY I told him I did not like to see him earning so little money and I told him to do better.

MR BARNES Why did you discharge the man.

MR THACKERAY Not for his work. Simply for impertinence.

MR PICTHALL I have the statement written by the man's own hand, which if necessary I should like to produce and let you read.

FOREMAN FENDER He came to me and asked what I was going to do as regards his money. I said I would do nothing, but he must see Mr Thackeray. I saw Mr Thackeray after breakfast when I went down to his Office. Radcliffe was there, and Mr Thackeray asked me how much he was short, and I told him 5/7. He said, what I have come to see about is, what are you going to do about my time money, and mentioned about not getting his special tools. Mr Thackeray said. Why did you not tell me you were stopped for tools. We will pay you your time money, and we will be done with you altogether.

MR PICTHALL That is quite conflicting to what we have written here.

MR LEISHMAN There is only this one case, where there is 600 men.

MR MC KECHNIE We originally paid £7. 7. 0 for recoil cylinders. As a matter of fact it is now done for 50/-. One man we discharged earned £5 on the same job. That I put forward as a glaring case.

FOREMAN It will be about 7 or 8 weeks ago.

MR BANNISTER 9.2 gun. The price was 33/-, and the altered price was 10/- - one third, and the same man is now earning 1/- an hour on that.

9.2 garrison body. Original price £11.10.0. Let now to the workmen for £2.15.0.

MR BARNES How long had you paid £11.10.0.

MR BANNISTER Could you answer that Mr Thackeray?

MR BARNES It seems a strange thing to be done for such a price.

MR BANNISTER 9.2 pinion shaft. Original price £2.10.0. Now done for £2. 0. 9.

I think you will see that we have a right to exercise some judgement.

Radcliffe will get his 1/8 as soon as he can come for it.

MR MC KECHNIE

Is it any use going into any more cases?

MR BARNES

There is just a matter I would like to mention with regard to Taylor. You have boycotted him from obtaining employment elsewhere. His manager refuses to sign a transfer.

MR MC KECHNIE

If a man is discharged through insolence or inattention to duty he is not employed by any other department.

REPLY

There was nothing particular re Taylor.

MR PICTHALL

We should just like to know if it was through insolence he was discharged.

MR BARNES

Well, I do not know of anything further to discuss Mr Mc Kechnie, and I beg to thank you on behalf of all present on this side of the table for treating us so courteously, and for my part I hope that the men will try and make the firm successful, which appears to have been the case in days gone by.

MR MC KECHNIE

So far as I have listened to you, Mr Barnes, I do not think there has been very much cause on the part of your members to complain, and I hope we will not have to meet on another occasion on the same business as today.

We, of course, endeavour to carry out the agreement, and to treat all the men employed by the firm fairly, and we will continue to do so.

MR BARNES

Well, if we have nothing further to say, I vote we separate.

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MEETING FROM 2 TO 4 P.M.  
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APPENDIX V

Engineering Employers' Federation Archives - W17/1

Board of Trade Enquiry for Wage Census 1906

Show districts and how designated and Methods of Payment.

T	:	Time Rates
P	:	Piece Work
P.B.	:	Premium Bonus

Aberdeen T.P.	Marine Engineering
Dundee T.P.P.B.	" " and Textiles Machinery
Edinburgh and North West	
Glasgow T.P.P.B.	Marine Engineering
Greenock T.P.P.B.	" "
Paisley T.P.	" "
Johnstone T.P.B.	Machine Tools
Dumbarton T.P.P.B.	Marine Engineering
Troon T.	" "
Motherwell T.	" "
Renfrew T.	" "
Airdrie T.	General Engineering
Kilmarnock T.P.P.B.	Locomotive Engineering
Belfast T.P.P.B.	General and Textiles
Belfast (sub) T.P.	" " "
Barrow T.P.P.B.	Marine Engineering
Border Counties	
Carlisle T.P.P.B.	Marine Engineering
Annan T.P.B.	" "

Workington T.P.	Marine Engineering
Whitehaven T.P.P.B.	" "
<sup>at</sup> Lea <del>er</del> port T.	" "
North East Coast (sic)	
Tees T.P.P.B.	Marine Engineering
Tyne T.P.P.B.	" "
Wear T.P.P.B.	" "
Hull T.P.	" "
Grimsby T.P.	" "
Birkenhead T.P.	" "
Manchester T.P.P.B.	General Engineering
Oldham T.P.P.B.	General & Textiles
Bolton T.P.	" " "
Bury T.P.P.B.	" " "
Rochdale T.P.	" " "
Wigan T.P.P.B.	" " "
Preston T.P.P.B.	General Engineering
St. Helens	
St. Helens T.P.	General Engineering
Earlshaw T.P.	" "
Newton-Le-Willows T.P.	Locomotive Engineering
Blackburn T.P.	General Engineering
Burnley	
Burnley T.P.	General Engineering
Colne T.P.	Textiles
Leeds T.P.P.B.	General Engineering
Otley T.	Machine Makers
Keighly <sup>e</sup> T.P.	Machine Tools



Bradford

Bradford T.P.P.B.	Engineering & Textiles
Dewsbury T.P.	" " "
Cleckheaton T.	" " "
Shepley T.P.B.	General Engineering
<del>Bailey</del> <sup>LEY</sup> T.	" "

Halifax T.P.

Machine Tools

Huddersfield T.

General Engineering

Wakefield T.P.

Machine Makers

Sheffield

Sheffield T.P.

General Engineering

Barnsley T.P.

" "

Doncaster T.P.

General Engineering

Nottingham

Nottingham T.P.

Machine Makers

Grantham T.P.

General Engineering

North Stafford T.P.

Locomotive Engineering

Signal T.P.

General Engineering

Derby T.P.

" "

Birmingham T.P.

" "

Wolverhampton

Wolverhampton T.P.

General Engineering

Stafford T.

" "

Leicester T.P.P.B.

General Engineering

Lincolnshire

Lincoln T.P.

General Engineering

Gainsborough T.

" "

Newark T.

" "

West of England

Bristol T.P.	General Engineering
Taunton T.P.	" "
Stroud T.P.	" "

East Anglia

Great Yarmouth T.	General Engineering
Lowestoft T.	" "
Thetford T.P.	" "
Colchester T.P.	" "
Ipswich T.P.P.B.	" "

Chelmsford T.P.	General Engineering
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London

London T.P.P.B.	Marine Engineering
Erith T.P.P.B.	" "
Dartford T.P.P.B.	" "
Slough T.P.	" "
Southampton T.P.P.B.	" "

Bedfordshire (Luton) T.	General Engineering
Rochester T.P.	" "
Weymouth T.P.	" "
Dartmouth T.P.P.B.	" "

APPENDIX VI

1912 Delegate Meeting - Delegates Political opinions

Delegate Meeting - Home Delegates

John Dykes - representative of Paisley. Signed political statement on behalf of Andrew Forbes who was a candidate for the Executive Council in 1910.

Statement strongly for Labour representations. Labour

Andrew L. Divertic - representative of Glasgow. Chairman Glasgow Blackfriars Labour Party (Barnes's seat). Supported Robert Young (I.L.P.) for Assistant Secretaryship 1910 and General Secretaryship 1914. Young fought on grounds of efficiency not political issues. Divertic probably a Socialist but only sufficient evidence to be regarded as Labour.

G. Higgins - representative of Johnstone. Views unknown

James Garswell - representative of Govan. Supported John Husband for Assistant Secretaryship 1910. Signed Socialist address. Socialist.

John Gibsen - representative of Newcastle. Supported Bewmaker (Assistant Secretaryship) 1910. Bewmaker keen Labour Party supporter. But voted against Parliamentary Levy during Delegate Meeting. Given legal situation still Probable Labour.

John Dixon - representative of Barrow-in-Furness. Member Barrow L.R.C. Supported Swales 1910. Socialist

P. Dickinsen - representative of Newcastle. Supported Swales 1910. Socialist.

J.W. Goudie - representative South Shields. Against Political Levy during meeting, otherwise politics unknown.

Frederick Bewes - representative Darlington. Politics unknown.

Walter M. Couper - representative Leeds. Member Leeds Trade Council and L.R.C. Friend and supporter of Arthur Shaw, A.S.E. member and I.L.P. candidate, Leeds South 1895. Socialist.

A. Tayler - representative Halifax J.P. Socialist at least from 1897 T.U.C. when he supported collectivist resolution. Member Halifax School Board. One time Secretary, Halifax Trades Council. Socialist.

J.H. Blackhunt - representative of Sheffield. Supported Swales 1910.

Socialist.

Jas. E. Scholefield - representative of Oldham. Supporter of land nationalisation and labour representation from at least 1895. Strong supporter of political action. Socialist.

J.J. Hewcroft - representative of Blackburn. Secretary Blackburn branch. Supported for Organising District Delegate in 1907 J.T. Mitchell who made a lot of the fact that he was a Labour Councillor. Probable Labour.

John A. Jones - representative of Belton. Politics unknown.

James German - representative of Salford. Member Manchester Trades Council and L.R.C. President Manchester District Committee. He said he was a "Supporter of Marxist economics". Member Manchester Amalgamation Committee. Socialist.

Jesse Dawes - representative of Manchester. Was to support Joseph Binns for Organising District Delegate 1913. Signed address in which Binn's work for Labour candidates was prominently mentioned. Probable Labour.

Charles A. Bamford - representative of Openshaw. Candidate for Organising District Delegate 1907 and supported by 7 Manchester Labour City Councillors. Former secretary Stalybridge Trades and Labour Council. Secretary of election committee. Secretary of Manchester Committee 1908 set up to retain the services of George Barnes. Socialist.

William Ord - representative of Stockport. During meeting voted against Parliamentary Levy. Politics unknown.

Joseph Cunningham - representative of Belfast. Very prominent member of Belfast branch. Only delegate not to protest at imprisonment of Tom Mann. No political statement. Suspect he was anti-Socialist. Voted during meeting against Parliamentary Levy, but politics unknown.

Charles Young - representative of Liverpool. Politics unknown.

C.R. Bates - representative of Crewe. Candidate Executive Council 1913.

Supported amalgamation, end of terms of settlement, organisation should be "left entirely to the members themselves". In favour of annual meeting. Favoured more active part in politics. Workers should secure political machinery "so highly prized by employing classes" thus workers will obtain "fair share of the fruits of ...labour". Socialist.

H.C. Hickling - representative of Smethwick. During meeting voted against Parliamentary Levy. 1907 supported George Ryder - who was a Labour Councillor - for Organising District Delegate. Probable Labour.

Frank M. Norris - representative of Coventry. Neutral on question of Parliamentary Levy during meeting. Politics unknown.

William Richards - representative of Nottingham. One time member Nottingham Trades Council. "Trade unionist first and politician after". Industrial interest only.

James S. Thompson - representative of Hull. Supporter of McLaren Couper as Organising District Delegate 1913. Socialist.

George Manwaring - representative of Norwich. Politics unknown.

Alexander B. Watson - representative of Swinden. Supported Swales for Executive Council, 1907. Socialist.

George H. Colwill - representative of Swansea. Member Swansea school board and Swansea County Council. Believed in Labour representation in parliament to secure wealth "from the clutches of the capitalistic exploiters of Labour". London Amalgamation Committee candidate for Independent Chairman 1913. Member of I.L.P. Socialist.

W. Littlewood - representative of Portsmouth. Supported James Gorman for Executive Council 1907. Believed "Political power to be more important than strikes". Socialist.

A.B. Swales - representative of Chelsea. As described above most widely supported Socialist in A.S.E. Socialist.

Henry Hisee - representative of Blackwall. One time Chairman, London District Committee, "personally in favour of Labour representative" but many members "do conscientiously object to the extreme attitude taken up by many members of the Labour Party". Labour

T. Rees - representative of Woolwich. Ex Ruskin. (former) Secretary, Erith District Committee. Anti-conciliation and arbitration on the grounds that too much power has to be left in hands of leaders. Supporter of London Reform and Amalgamation Committee. Believed "Aggressive and militant policy alone justifies the existence of a trade organisation". Socialist.

Arthur C. Hill - representative of Gillingham. Supporter of Swales 1907 and 1910. Socialist.

APPENDIX VII

Election for new Executive Council 1913. Number of votes cast for each candidate and summary of election address.

Division 1. All branches in Scotland and Carlisle

1st Ballet.

Davidson W.	141	Anti old Executive Council. Founder of Coatbridge Trades Council and branches of Gasworkers and Labourers Union.
German A.	777	No address.
Hislop J.	435	Against opening Society to labourers.
Kennedy W.	285	Supported Delegate Meeting. Wanted an annual meeting. Anti premium bonus. Called for the terms of settlement to be amended.
Leiper A.	531	Anti old Executive Council. Wanted terms of settlement amended. Favoured the ending of the trade union - Socialist alliance. Trade Union M.P.s should raise strictly working class questions.
Procter H.	769	No address.

2nd Ballet

German A.	2,299
Procter H.	1,339

German in previous elections had opposed the premium bonus and was a "total abstainer". German and Procter issued no addresses, which they certainly would have done had they taken an extreme position on industrial or political questions. If they supported the old Executive Council they would probably have said so. There was no syndicalist or industrial unionist candidate. It is interesting to note, in view of what was to happen during the war, that up to 1914 the Scottish division of the A.S.E. was the most conservative division in terms of election addresses and results. No extreme Socialist was ever elected. But even here no open defender of the old Executive Council emerged.

Division 2. Durham, East Yorkshire, North East Coast, York.

Denkin C.	968	Socialist. Anti old Executive Council.
Little J.C.	618	Industrial unionism, support for the eight-hour day. Assist Railwaymen and Miners in their struggle.
Wilson H.	208	Attack on London Reform and Amalgamation Committee. Thought Independent Chairman a mistake.

Charles Denkin was a traditional trade union parliamentary Socialist. Little was clearly influenced by industrial unionist ideas but was neither hostile to political action nor did he advocate workers' control of industry.

Division 3. South and Mid-Lancashire including Manchester

Garnet I.	465	No issues.
Hutchinson W.H.	1,226	Supported Delegate Meeting. Wanted amalgamation. Strongly for political action. Labour representation should not be bound by the rules of "an efete party system". Favoured an educational test for officials.
Scholefield J.E.	957	Against premium bonus. Favoured Labour representation in parliament.
Wood J.	771	Wanted members to ballot on the premium bonus.
2nd Ballot		
Hutchinson	2,058	
Scholefield	1,798	

Again no support for the old Executive Council. No extreme candidate.

Division 4. W.E. Lancashire, Liverpool, Cumberland and Ireland.

Bates C.R.	456	Member 1912 Delegate Meeting. Favoured amalgamation and the abolition of the terms of settlement. Organisation should be left to the members themselves. More active part in politics. Workers must secure the political machinery "so highly prized by the employing classes" only then will be obtained "fair share of the fruits of .... labour".
Bentham C.	275	Trade union candidate alone.



Edwards F.W.	378	Labour candidate for Birkenhead Council. Co-operative system provides way for workers to achieve full fruits of labour. The "child like" faith in the Labour Party has been disappointed. But we need more representatives in parliament and "more energy outside spurring them on". Shorten the working day. Amalgamation. Abolish the terms of settlement. Officers should be limited to a three and six year term of office.
McCord S.	204	Shop steward. Revise "if not altogether abolish" terms of settlement.
Morrow W.J.	501	No issues.
Rose H.A.	754	Wipe out non-union element. Keep out handymen (1912 address "Primary object to protect the trade"). Legal eight-hour day. Our own independent Labour Party in House of Commons. Industrial and political action together.
Seay A.	267	Support for Labour representatives in parliament.
Sunnen J.E.	475	Marxist. Wanted annual representative meeting.
2nd Ballet.		

Rose H.A.	2,334
Morrow W.J.	1,687

Rose elected on old "defence of craft" programme. Edwards represented a radical position - industrial militancy plus "spurring" the Labour Party. No open defender of the old Executive Council.

Division 5. Rest of Yorkshire, Derby, Lincoln, Leicester, Nottingham (East Midlands).

Caley J.	266	Supported Delegate Meeting. Amalgamation. Supported annual meeting.
Insdale G.	844	Against old Executive Council because it did not act on amalgamation. Six years as an official is long enough. Active member of the Labour Party.
Mitchell C.	279	No issues.
Merley T.	208	No issues.
Richards W.	496	Member of 1912 Delegate Meeting. Supported decisions.

Sturgess A.	318	Favoured amalgamation and the ending of the terms of settlement. Supported Central Labour College.
Tomlinson A.G.	44	No address.
Ward W.	245	Member of B.S.P. No identity of interest between employers and employed. The old Executive Council failed over insurance act but Delegate Meeting wrong to cut superannuation for some sections.
Williams A.W.	571	Amalgamate trade unions, Labour Party and co-operative societies in one central organisation.
Wilson J.	597	On the militant side. Supported Labour Party for "emancipation from capitalism". (1909). Wanted amalgamation and more parliamentary representation.

2nd Ballot

Iredale	1,526
Wilson	2,496

No extreme candidates or supporters of the old Executive Council.

DIVISION 6 WALES WEST MIDLANDS, WEST TO BATH

Evans F.E.	357	No issues.
Evans E.O.	577	Member of I.L.P. District committees should have greater power. The A.S.E. should form joint committees with other societies as a step towards amalgamation. Support for the eight-hour day. Abolish the premium bonus. End long term agreements and conciliation boards.
Evans R.O.	358	Strong support for Labour representation in parliament.
Fulton T.G.	138	Believed that the "will of the members" should be carried out. Abolish the terms of settlement.
Givens W.	233	No issues.
Kayler J.	670	Belonged "to advance guard of political thought". Member of L.R.C. Anti-premium bonus and long term agreements. Supported forty eight hour week.
Price A.	336	No election address. Socialist supporter of "Clarion" in 1899.
Procter T.	821	Anti terms of settlement and long term agreements. Socialist. A.S.E. parliamentary candidate.
Read J.	603	Against agreements. Amalgamation.

Thomas W.L. 403 Socialist and co-operator. Despite election promises nothing ever seems to change in the A.S.E. Favoured combination of trade unions, Labour Party and co-operative societies into one organisation.

2nd Ballet

Kayler 2,564  
 Proctor 2,506

Evans E.O. was the only candidate in this division who approached an extreme position. But as a member of the I.L.P. he believed in political action.

There was again no support for the old Executive Council.

Division 7. Mainly London, East to Kent and West to Oxford.

Berrie W.	652	Member of local Executive Council before establishment of full time Executive Council in 1893. Wanted Labour representation in parliament but "apart from present political parties".
Butten F.S.	2,973	"I stand for the rank and file". Unanimously adopted by the Reform and Amalgamation Committee. Favoured forward movement on wages and hours. Against premium bonus and terms of settlement. Wanted A.S.E. to re-affiliate to the T.U.C. Supported the Labour Party. In 1910 had favoured officials returning to the workshop "after a time".
Edge J.T.	208	Amalgamation. End terms of settlement.
Hubbard D.W.	365	Strong support for the Labour Party.
Hunt H.	109	No issues.
<sup>1</sup> Littlewood W.	390	Member of Delegate Meeting. Believed political power to be more important than strikes. Amalgamation. Abolish the premium bonus.
Northham G.	347	Anti old Executive Council. Favoured amalgamation. Abolish the premium bonus. All agreements should be put before the members. Workers should be directly represented in parliament.
Phillips H.A.	39	Founder member of Coventry L.R.C. Pro Labour Party. Against both Delegate Meeting and old Executive Council.
Taylor A.	N.A.	Unfettered by party politics.

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1 The fact that all members of the Delegate Meeting who contested either the Executive Council or Independent Chairmanship were defeated has no particular significance. The election areas were very much larger.

This division, and Lenden in particular, was by far the most militant division in the country in terms of the sort of candidate elected to office. In 1912 Swales had become Organising District Delegate for this area. Button, the only Executive Council candidate to stand openly on behalf of an amalgamation committee was elected on the first ballot and no other candidate received a quarter as many votes. He sounded militant and stood for rank and file organisation together with an extremely democratic programme. He did not, however, raise the question of workers' control and he supported the Labour Party.

APPENDIX VIII

Comparison of Policies and attitudes of "Old" Executive  
Council Members, and Members of newly elected Executive  
Council 1913

Executive Council December 1 1912

Division 1. J. Husband, age 44; from Govan. Member since 1910 when David Gardner resigned. For six years secretary of Glasgow District Committee and in this capacity was a leader of the 1903 Clyde strike against wage reduction. During strike came into conflict with Executive Council which eventually cut off strike benefit. Socialist, supporter of Labour representation in parliament. Against the premium bonus.

Division 2. W. Hutchison, age 48; from Hartlepool. A Cooperator. A strong supporter of the L.R.C. and then the Labour Party. Against premium bonus. All agreements should be submitted to a ballot of the members.

Division 3. W.T. Kelly, age 39; from Manchester. Defeated (sitting member) Gelightly 1903 on shipbuilding wage reduction issue. Wanted more Labour representation in parliament, and the premium bonus issue put before the members. Seceded Socialist resolution at 1908 Labour Party Conference (See Labour Party Conference Report).

Division 4. Albert Tayler, age 57. Only member of original full-time Executive Council elected in 1893 to survive. Supported Labour representation from the beginning. Strong Labour Party sympathy. Hoped to end premium bonus by joint action with other societies.

Division 5. J.J. Stephenson, age 41; from Barrow-in-Furness. First elected 1903 by defeating sitting member Crompton. Believed Executive Council should not smother members "aspirations". Executive Council representative to Labour Party. Labour candidate, Newcastle by-election 1908 but compelled by party to withdraw.<sup>1</sup> Fought Birmingham East in January 1910 and was defeated.

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1 MacDonalld thought a contest against the Liberals would endanger Walter Hudson's seat which was jointly held with the Liberal. This decision was embarrassing for the A.S.E. Executive which had been trying to persuade the North-East Coast strikers to return to work, accept a wage reduction, and improve their conditions by political action. See Chapter Six.

In 1912 was against the premium bonus; thought the time was ripe for amalgamation - though deplored how "craft prejudice dies hard". Socialist, wanted A.S.E. to organise for industrial and parliamentary purposes.

Chairman Labour Party 1907. Moved successful resolution to commit Labour Party to Socialism in 1908. (See Labour Party Conference Reports).

Division 6. J. Butts, age 42; from Bradford. Formerly a member of Bradford Trade Council and L.R.C. Defeated Heeson the sitting member in 1903 because of shipyard revolt against Executive Council. Against premium bonus. Socialist. Thought "full fruits of labour" could be secured by parliamentary action. Always very widely supported when seeking election or re-election. (Wide geographical and political support).

Division 7. James Alfred Turnbull, age 51; from Belvedere, Kent. First elected in 1910 when James Steer became a member of the Board of Trade staff appointed to administer labour exchanges. Member of Woolwich Borough Council for 14 years. Anti premium bonus. Wanted stronger Labour Party. Supported proposal to establish annual meeting. Socialist. Enthusiasm for German Working Class movement.

Division 8. T.H. Wilkins, age 57. Member of Executive Council since 1901. Supported co-operative production. Against further introduction of premium bonus. Moderate Socialist.

Executive Council, 1 June 1913. (What was known as of that date).

Division 1. A. German, age 53; from Paisley. Supported the eight-hour day. Against premium bonus. Total abstainer. Never mentioned political issues in election addresses.

Division 2. Charles Denkin, age 54; from Sunderland. Socialist. Took traditional craft position on machine question.

Division 3. W.H. Hutchinson, age 34; from Manchester. Former member of Gorton Trades and Labour Council. Strong supporter of Labour Party. Socialist.

Division 4. H.A. Rose, age 37; from Barrow-in-Furness. Represented a rather narrow craft interest. His "primary interest was to defend the craft". In 1912 he was easily beaten by Stephenson for an Executive Council seat (14,358 to 4,173). He was against widening the A.S.E. to include "handymen". Wanted a trade union Labour Party in the House of Commons.

Division 5. Joseph Wilson, age 55; from Sheffield. Militant Socialist, supported parliamentary representatives. Wanted amalgamation. One time secretary of the Sheffield District Committee.

Division 6. James Kaylor, age 34; from Coventry. Socialist. Member of Coventry L.R.C. Against long term agreements and the premium bonus.

Division 7. F.S. Button, age 37; from Erith. Put forward the most extreme programme of any Executive Council member. Favoured annual meeting. Amalgamation, forward movement on wages and conditions, abolition of the terms of settlement, a return to the T.U.C. and a Socialist Labour Party. Active member of London Reform and Amalgamation Committee.

Brownlie, the Independent Chairman. Aged 46. Socialist. He wanted amalgamation, the end of the premium bonus and an increase in Labour representation in parliament. He had no commitment on the terms of agreement which suggests he grasped the difficulty of imposing a change on the Engineering Employers Federation - particularly when only a negative end the terms of agreement approach was advocated.

APPENDIX IX

Membership Sections changed significantly by the  
1912 Delegate Meeting

Before the Delegate Meeting      Extracts from 1908 rule book

Machinists

The contributions shall be 10d. per week. Levies shall also be charged amounting to two-thirds of the amount charged to full members, excepting in the case of superannuation levy, which shall be a fixed one of 9d. per quarter, and of accident levy, which shall be half the amount charged upon full members.

Candidates shall be proposed and seconded by members of this or any other section, and in any branch of which they are desirous of becoming members, and their admission shall be subject, in matters not specifically mentioned in this rule, to the same conditions that attach to the admission of full members.

Every person joining this section must have been employed for two years consecutively as a machinist in the engineering trade. He must be at least 20, and not more than 40 years of age, and shall be earning the minimum rate of wages as fixed for his class by the local district committee, such wage-rate, however, to be not less than 70 per cent. of the standard rate as fixed for full members.

The members of this section shall become free and entitled to benefit at the expiry of twelve months from date of admission. They shall be entitled to denation, sick, accident, superannuation, and funeral benefits, according to the scale here following, as well as to Benevolent Contingent, Emergency, and Legal Defence Fund benefits proportionate to amount of levy paid:-



If unemployed, to 10s. per week for ten weeks; 5s. per week for twelve weeks; and 2s.6d. per week for fourteen weeks.

If a member of ten years' standing is sick, he shall be entitled to 10s. per week for ten weeks; 5s. per week for sixteen weeks; and 2s.6d. per week for twenty-six weeks, when the benefit shall cease.

If a member of twenty-five years' standing has attained the age of 55, and is, by reason of age and infirmity, unable to earn his living, he shall be entitled to 5s. per week; if he has been a member thirty years, he shall be entitled to 6s. per week; if thirty-five years a member, 7s. per week; and if 40 years, 8s. per week.

A member of this section shall be entitled to £50 on meeting with an accident, or on becoming afflicted in such a manner as to totally incapacitate him from earning his living, providing such accident or affliction is not the result of his own misconduct.

On the death of a free member of this section, £8 shall be paid. Any free member shall, on the death of his lawful wife, be entitled to the sum of £3, leaving £5 to be paid for his own funeral.

#### Admission of Trade Members

Every person joining this section must have been employed for five years consecutively at one or other of the trades mentioned in Rule I., and must not be less than 30 or more than 40 years of age, and earning the minimum rate of wages of the district in which he is working.

Any trade member who has been twelve months in the Society, and whose arrears of contributions do not amount to 5s., leaving his situation under circumstances satisfactory to his branch, shall be entitled to 10s. per week for 14 weeks, 7s. per week for 14 weeks, and 5s. per week for 24 weeks, when this benefit shall terminate. On coming on benefit he shall be entitled to these amounts if he has not received any benefit for the twelve months

before, but if he has received any portion of the benefits stated above he shall be entitled only to as much more as will make up 52 weeks, when the benefit will terminate. He shall not then be again entitled to donation until he has worked eight consecutive weeks at the trade and received the ordinary rate of wages of the shop or district in which he is employed.

Members of this section are not entitled to sick or superannuation benefit, but if twelve months' members they are exempt from payment of contributions when prevented from following their employment through sickness (but shall comply with rule governing all other sick members) or want of employment, after receiving 52 weeks' donation benefit, upon production to the branch of satisfactory evidence to that effect.

Members of this section will be entitled to contingent benefit.

Upon the death of a member of this section, £5 funeral benefit will be paid, provided the arrears of said member do not exceed 10s. In the case of a registered member the arrears must not exceed 25s.

Members of this section are not eligible to hold any of the following offices, viz. General Secretary, Assistant General Secretaries, District Delegates, Executive Councilman, or Branch Secretary, but they shall have power of voting in all elections for branch or general officers, and upon contingent, emergency, legal assistance, benevolent, or other levies in which they share.

Any members of this section, under the age of 40 years, desiring to become a full member may apply at a meeting of his branch for liberty to do so; the branch to decide upon his application on the following meeting night. Should permission be granted, he must pay the difference between the entrance fee paid upon his admission and that to which he would have been liable if he had joined for full membership. He shall at once pay full contribution, but shall not enjoy benefits or privileges of full membership until he has paid full contributions for 52 weeks.

## Trade Protection Members

Persons over the age of 21 years, following any of the branches of trade mentioned in Rule I., clause 2, may be admitted members of this section provided they have worked at least five years at any of the branches of trade mentioned in Rule I., clause 2, and are not eligible to join as full members under Rule XX., but must be working under conditions sanctioned by the District Committee. Members of this section shall be entitled to benefit in times of trade disputes, and to funeral benefit. Mode of proposition to be governed by Rule XX.

They shall pay a contribution of 4d. per week, and shall be in the Society twelve months before being entitled to the benefits hereinafter set forth.

In the event of any member of this section leaving his situation by order of the District Committee or Executive Council, or being locked out for refusing conditions which are considered unsatisfactory by those bodies, he shall be entitled to dispute benefit at the rate of 10s. per week for 14 weeks, 7s. for 14 weeks, and 5s. for 24 weeks, when this benefit shall terminate. Non-free members will be treated the same as non-free members in Clause 9, Rule XXVI. No member will be entitled to benefit whose arrears exceed 3s.

Upon the death of any free member, having joined before the age of 55, his nominee or nearest of kin shall be entitled to receive the sum of £5, provided the said member's arrears of contributions do not exceed the sum of 5s., but for any member joining after the age of 55 years, £2. 10s., as funeral benefit, shall only be paid.

Members of this section shall participate in Contingent, Emergency, Benevolent and Legal Assistance Funds, and shall pay all levies imposed for these purposes.

When unable to follow their employment through sickness they shall be exempt from payment of contributions upon production of satisfactory evidence to their branch, but shall comply with rule governing all other sick members, and, in the event of losing or leaving situations under circumstances satisfactory to the branch, shall also be exempt from contributions if unemployed for six or more days, provided they sign the vacant book as directed by the branch.

They shall not be eligible for any office in the Society, except assistant secretary, vice-president, and doorkeeper; but they shall have power of voting in all elections for branch or general officers, and upon Contingent, Emergency, Benevolent, and Legal Assistance Fund levies.

New Section Established by 1912 Delegate Meeting Extracts from 1913 rule book.

CLASS E

Trade Protection Members and Machine Workers

Persons over the age of 21 years, following any of the branches of trade mentioned in Rule I, clause 2, may be admitted members of this section provided they have worked at least five years at any of the branches of trade and are not eligible to join as full members and persons who have been machine workers for two years, but must be working under constitutions sanctioned by the District Committee. Members of this section shall be entitled to benefit in times of trade disputes, unemployment benefit, and to funeral benefit. Members of former machinist section may transfer to this class, and shall be subject to conditions of this class from date of transfer.

In the event of any member of this section leaving his situation by order of the District Committee or Executive Council, or being locked out for refusing conditions which are considered unsatisfactory by these bodies, he shall be entitled to dispute benefit at the rate of 10s. per week for 14 weeks, 7s. for 14 weeks, and 5s. for 24 weeks, when this benefit shall terminate.

Unemployment benefit shall be paid at the rate of 4s. per week for 14 weeks under conditions laid down in Rule 25, if a member is entitled to State benefit.

Upon the death of any free member, having joined before the age of 55, his nominee or nearest of kin shall be entitled to receive the sum of £5, provided the said member's arrears of contributions do not exceed the sum of 8s., but for any member joining after the age of 55 years, £2. 10s., as funeral benefit, shall only be paid.

Members in this section shall participate in Contingent, Emergency, Benevolent, and Legal Assistance Funds, and shall pay all levies imposed for these purposes.

When unable to follow their employment through sickness they shall be exempt from payment of contributions upon production of satisfactory evidence to their branch, but shall comply with rule governing all other sick members, and, in the event of losing or leaving situations under circumstances satisfactory to the branch, shall also be exempt from contributions if unemployed for six or more days, provided they sign the vacant book as directed by the branch.

They shall not be eligible for any office in the Society, except assistant secretary, vice-president, and doorkeeper; but they shall have power of voting in all elections for branch or general officers, and upon Contingent, Emergency, Benevolent, and Legal Assistance Fund levies.

In all particulars, not specifically dealt with in one or other of the clauses of this rule, members of this section are subject to and must conform with the rules of the Society, and all fines imposed for neglect of duty, etc., shall be imposed upon members of this section to the same amount for similar offences.

Any member of this class who has worked five years at the trade, and is in receipt of the rate of wages fixed by the District Committee for full members, may, if branch is satisfied with answers given on schedule, be transferred to full membership in either Class A,B, or C. He shall pay, as transfer fee, difference between entrance fee paid on admission and entrance fee for age at date of transfer. (No transfers to be made after 45 years of age). He shall then pay full contributions and levies according to scale in class transferred to, and shall, after twelve months, be entitled to full benefits of that class, except in regard to superannuation, when qualifying time shall be computed from date of transfer.

Contributions of State approved members of this section paid by Society whilst member is unemployed to enable member to continue entitled to State sick and disablement benefit on payment of a levy of 6d. per quarter.

APPENDIX X

MEMORANDUM OF SPECIAL CONFERENCE

between

THE ENGINEERING EMPLOYERS' FEDERATION

and

THE AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF ENGINEERS

Held within the Station Hotel, York, on the 17th April, 1914.

Referring to the termination by the Society of the Agreement of 1st October, 1907, and the Premium Bonus Agreement, the Representatives of the Society agree to forthwith recommend their members to authorise their Executive Council to enter into negotiations with the Federation with the view to arriving at an agreement in substitution of the Agreement of 1907 and the Premium Bonus Agreement, and both parties agree that meantime the following provisions for avoiding disputes shall be observed -

When a question arises an endeavour shall be made by the management and the workmen directly concerned to settle the same in the works or at the place where the question has arisen. Failing settlement deputations of workmen who may be accompanied by their Organising District Delegate (in which event a Representative of the Employers' Association shall also be present) shall be received by the Employers by appointment without unreasonable delay for the mutual discussion of any question in the settlement of which both parties are directly concerned. In the event of no settlement being arrived at, it shall be competent for either party to bring the question before a Local Conference to be held between the Local Association and the Local Representatives of the Society.

In the event of either party desiring to raise any question a Local Conference for this purpose may be arranged by application to the Secretary of the Local Association or to the Local Representative of the Society.

Local Conferences shall be held within seven working days unless otherwise mutually agreed upon from the receipt of the application by the

Secretary of the Local Association or the Local Representative of the Society.

Failing settlement at a Local Conference of any question brought before it, it shall be competent for either party to refer the matter to a Central Conference which, if thought desirable, may make a joint recommendation to the Constituent bodies.

Central Conferences shall be held on the 2nd Friday of each month at which questions referred to Central Conference prior to fourteen days of that date shall be taken.

Until the procedure provided above has been carried through, there shall be no stoppage of work either of a partial or a general character.



APPENDIX XI

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE

between

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ENGINEERING EMPLOYERS' FEDERATION

and

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNIONS FROM WHOM APPLICATION HAD  
BEEN RECEIVED FOR A REDUCTION OF HOURS

Held at 24, Abingdon Street, Westminster, S.W. on 29th July, 1914.

The Employers stated that they had been instructed to decline to grant a 48-hours week.

The position was thereafter discussed and the following Memoranda passed:-

- (1) The Employers having declined to grant a 48-hour week are unable to suggest the terms of an amended proposal the Unions desire to submit.

The Employers request information as to whether the present Committee of the Unions are prepared to recommend their constituents to give them power to arrive at a conclusion on the subject with the Employers, or at least to be in a position to arrive at a joint recommendation with the Employers.

- (2) Reply by the Unions

This Committee is not prepared to make any amended offer at the present.

We are prepared to recommend to our constituents to give us power to negotiate and be in a position to arrive at a joint recommendation with the Employers. We anticipate the Employers' Committee will seek the same power from their constituents.

- (3) Employers to Unions:-

The Employers accept the reply of the Unions and will act accordingly.

Signed on behalf of:-

THE ENGINEERING EMPLOYERS' FEDERATION

Alex. Siemens, Chairman

Allan M. Smith, Secretary

THE UNIONS

J.T. Brownlie, Chairman

W. Mosses, Secretary

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## SUMMARY

### The Amalgamated Society of Engineers 1880-1914. A study of Trade Union Government, Politics, and Industrial Policy

In 1880 the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) consisted of largely autonomous local trade societies seeking unilaterally to regulate the terms and conditions under which engineering craftsmen were employed. The Executive Council (which spent most of its time administering the system of centralised benefits) consisted of part-time members drawn from, and elected by, the London members. In 1892 the first full-time Executive Council was elected as part of a general reform of the Society's government; the reforms did not change the A.S.E.'s craft character rather they were designed to improve the execution of traditional policies.

As the climax of a long campaign for the eight-hour day the Executive Council called a strike of its London members in 1897. The ensuing dispute, which the Employers extended to all districts, lasted thirty weeks, and was ended on the terms laid down by the recently formed Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF). Under the terms of settlement the A.S.E. accepted a procedure for avoiding disputes and Management's right to prerogative over matters which previously it had claimed unilateral control. The Society disaffiliated from the T.U.C. because of the Parliamentary Committee's failure to mobilize trade union support for the engineers eight-hour struggle. Affiliation was made to the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) in the false hope that this Federation would augment the A.S.E.'s industrial strength.

It is convenient to discuss the A.S.E.'s reaction to the 1897-98 defeat and its consequences under headings which indicate the main themes.

## Technical change

From the mid-1880's something approaching a revolution occurred in machine technology based upon improved high speed steels. The establishment of the EEF and the sustained attack upon craft methods of production can be largely explained by the employers' determination to fully exploit the new technology.

## Government

Constitutional authority within the A.S.E. was divided between the Executive Council, a lay Delegate Meeting, and a lay Final Appeal Court. There was no policy making body. The Society was governed according to the rule book which was unaffected by the terms under which the 1897-98 dispute was settled. Consequently it was difficult for the Executive Council to develop collective bargaining and to restrain district committees, from acting in breach of the agreement, but within the rules of the Society. Both the Delegate Meeting and the Final Appeal Court tended to defend local as against central decision making authority. The Executive Council's action in 1903, withdrawing benefit from members of the Clyde striking against a wages reduction, led to a serious weakening in their authority. Three Executive Councilmen were defeated when seeking re-election, the Final Appeal Court partially over-ruled the Executive's benefit decision, and the 1904 Delegate Meeting limited the Council's right to intervene in district matters. In 1912 after a complicated dispute the Delegate Meeting dismissed the Executive Council from office. This assertion of authority by a rank and file body was not overtly influenced by syndicalist or industrial unionist ideas.

## Industrial Policy

The Executive Council intermittently and uncertainly tried to develop collective bargaining to replace lost unilateral regulation while powerful district committees attempted to retain their previous methods of operation. In 1902 the Executive concluded the Carlisle agreement for controlling the

introduction of the premium bonus. This proved to be an unpopular agreement and probably discredited collective bargaining. The Executive elected in 1913, to replace the one dismissed by the 1912 Delegate Meeting, after a ballot vote of members, ended the Carlisle Agreement and the general agreement with the EEF. Eventually the York memorandum was approved by the members, which although it incorporated provisions which speeded up the procedure for avoiding disputes, continued those aspects which to many ASE members, were the humiliating terms under which the Society had been defeated. After 1898 with the Society formally precluded from negotiations on management matters an informal system of work place, industrial relations began to develop based upon district committees and the widespread appointment of shop stewards.

### Politics

During these years the A.S.E. became involved in politics for the first time. All ballots on political questions were very small. The A.S.E. affiliated to the Labour Party but neither the Independent Labour Party (ILP) nor the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) were active within the Society. George Barnes (General Secretary 1896-1908) was an influential supporter of the Socialist trade union alliance upon which the Labour Party was established. In 1914 the A.S.E. members voted against raising a political levy under the 1913 trade union act. From the turn of the century most officials and active members supported the Labour Party and it was sometimes argued that the Society's problems (which were industrial) could be solved by political action. How, was never clear.

The developing sympathy among A.S.E. members for a view of trade union democracy which favoured control exercised through district or workshop organisation casts some light on the development of the shop stewards movement during the War.

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