

WASC 410

On Her Majesty's Service

WASC-0410

Mms

MEETING HELD AT R.G.P.F. ON 21ST JUNE, 1945.

Present :-

R.G.P.F.	Mr. R.F. Smith,	M.C. (Chairman).
H.Q.	Dr. Bowden,	D.O.F. (X).
	Mr. G. Clamp,	D.O.F. (A).
	Mr. Read,	S.E.1.
	" Hewitt,	S.E.2.
	" Price,	D.A.D.O.F. (L).
	" Bowen,	S.S.5.
	" Bowley,	A.L.M.
A.R.D.	" Highfield,	Secretary, A.R.D.
	Major Harvey,	A.O., A.R.D.
R.G.P.F.	Mr. H.N. Stutchbury,	P.C.
	Mrs. Baring,	L.M.
Min. of Labour & Man Power Bd.	Mr. Gibbs,	
	" Haytor,	
	" Turner,	
Trade Union Dist. Organisers.	" McNamara,	Plumbers & Glaziers.
	" Reardon,	Trans. & Gen. Workers.
	" Skilbeck,	A.S.W.
	" Thursby,	Electrical Trade Union.
J.S.S. Committee.	" Wilkinson Franklin,	A.S.W.
	" Mr. Lowe,	Plumbers & Glaziers.
	" Edwards,	A.E.U.
	" Bowker,	E.T.U.
	" Burgess,	Trans. & Gen. Workers.
	" Goodey,	" " "
	" Goodman,	" " "
	" Hassell,	" " "
	" Leader,	" " "
	" Moore,	" " "
	" Reid,	" " "
	" Wollin,	" " "

The Chairman asked Dr. Bowden to open the proceedings.

Dr. Bowden. Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, the purpose of this meeting is to signify formally the cessation of the Royal Gunpowder Factory as an Ordnance Factory. That decision has been taken at a high level and the operative date is 28th July, 1945. That this decision would be taken has been known to us since many years before the war. None the less it is a sad day for those of us to whom Waltham has meant so much, and on this occasion it was my earnest wish in view of my past association to come among you today.

The factory has a very long historical tradition. It is situated in a very historical spot, Waltham Abbey, which is full of history. The factory was acquired in the year 1789 as a result of a report rendered by Capt. (later Sir) William Congreve, when for the first time the government decided to manufacture its own gunpowder. In government hands the manufacture of gunpowder reached an extremely high state of perfection. The subsequent history of Waltham Abbey runs closely parallel to the history of the development of smokeless propellants for half a century. I cannot go into the full details of that history at the moment, but it is sufficient to say that the government itself was the pioneer of that development and at Waltham Abbey we find that Guncotton, Nitro-glycerine and Cordite were manufactured. The processes

which were used were invented and developed in the Royal Gunpowder Factory, and the achievement was so great that the fame of Waltham Abbey spread throughout the explosives world and you will find it on record in the literature of explosives in no uncertain manner. Employees have travelled overseas to our dominions to take with them the art and craft of explosives manufacture and danger building conditions. Wherever these employees have worked they have set a very high standard of excellence and this has been testified by all those with whom they came into contact.

I have spent a very long time in the factory itself. Actually I find I have spent 23 years of my life in the R.G.P.F. and I can from personal experience testify to the devotion to duty of the employees of R.G.P.F., and I am very glad to have this opportunity of doing so. That standard of devotion to duty has always permeated the men of Waltham and every record of national crisis bears witness to that, the Napoleonic Wars, the Boer War, the Great War, and now during the present crisis you have maintained that standard and contributed a magnificent effort. I could say a great deal about this achievement but it would take far too long at this time, but it is on record. On behalf of the Ministry of Supply and myself personally I say "Thank you".

Now I must touch upon the future. It has been decided, for the present at any rate, to carry on at Waltham Abbey an Experimental Establishment that would fall now to the direction of Chief Superintendent of Armament Research and this will mean that a certain number of employees already at Waltham will still be required. I do sincerely hope and trust that those who will be released will find speedy and congenial re-employment. I have no doubt that a number of problems may arise but I am confident that those who are responsible will settle them in the best manner possible.

Before I sit down I want particularly to say "Thank you" to the Ministry of Labour for all their help and guidance not only during this crisis but in the years before the war. I would also say "Thank you" to the Trade Unions for the able manner in which they have conducted negotiations with the factory, and to the Shop Stewards for the very co-operative manner in which they have always come forward to make representations and for dealing with them in an understanding manner. (Applause).

Mr. Haytor. The Ministry of Labour's part in this cessation of activity falls in the future disposal of the people who are made redundant. At the present time we have in London a very large number of unfilled vacancies and I feel sure that the people who are at our disposal in this connection will be speedily placed in other employment. Normally we have to apply an agreed procedure under which we first of all have to consider people who are available for the Forces and their age groups, and then we have to take regard to people who have some wish to return to their previous employment in their home town. Those people know they can return to their home town if they so wish.

Mr. Haytor mentioned various industries which were being built up and mentioned required categories of workers. He presumed a list of these could be exhibited to the workers in the form of a notice and the Chairman agreed.

He added that people who are available would be dealt with by Mr. Gibbs at the local office and there should be no difficulty

in getting them into employment as there were a large number of unfilled vacancies of various characters. This point was one of those uppermost in the minds of the people and representatives. If there were any points the representatives would like to raise he would try and clarify them.

Mr. Lowe. Is it the intention of the Ministry of Labour to remove the under 30's, especially skilled tradesmen, Chemical Plumbers, Engineers, Carpenters?

Mr. Haxton. If there are such people available we would very naturally like to get them as there are vacancies for this class of worker. The actual individuals who are due for release will be listed and reported to the Ministry of Labour. We would like to know the class of people to be retained.

Mr. Smith. We presume that some of the men under 30 in the classes mentioned will be retained.

Mr. Haxton. What you would require is a balanced labour force to carry on with.

Mr. Beardon. I would like to get from the Ministry of Supply officials what proportion and what grades are proposed to be dispensed with.

Mr. Smith. The total number of people to go from here is approximately half the present number in the majority of grades but Millwrights would be less. No precise figures can be given now.

Mr. Beardon. I would like to point out that there are many men here on the 20/- top lead rate who should be considered craftsmen in this industry but they will go on the market as unskilled labour. They are doing important work here but what would their position be when they leave this factory? What is the percentage of unskilled labour to be released?

Mr. Smith. About 50%.

Mr. Skilbeck. Many men skilled in other jobs have been directed to this factory to do unskilled work, particularly the building trade. I would ask if these men had been given the opportunity to volunteer to go back to those trades.

Mr. Smith. We have not yet asked for volunteers. This will not be done until after this meeting.

Mrs. Doring. A notice was posted some time ago asking for volunteers to the building trade.

Mr. Haxton. It will probably clarify the position if I read a notice regarding these points. This notice gave the various headings relating to the release of men, i.e. those men required for the Forces, those who wished to return to their home town, and also various classes of work to which men could transfer.

Mr. Beardon. Why wait for this meeting before asking for volunteers. On the 12th we had a meeting at Hayes and they had lists all ready. I should have thought these lists could have already been prepared here as you had known about this redundancy since about last September.

Mr. Clamp. The two cases are very different. Waltham Abbey is a case of closing down a Royal Ordnance Factory, Hayes is a question of normal reduction of programme. The first step has been to decide the ultimate future of the R.G.P.F. and until the Trade Unions have been taken into the confidence of the Ministry it would be very wrong for any action to be taken locally to call for volunteers which may prejudice the outcome of the decision.

Mr. Reardon. London is a big place and with my mind going back to workers transferred to Acton from here, I would like to know what Mr. Haylor meant by vacancies in London. Would they be in the immediate vicinity? I would like to ask what is the position of the men returning from the Forces and starting work at R.G.P.F. If the last in first out basis is used as per Section 4 of the Reinstatement Act, how will these men stand regarding seniority.

Mr. Haylor. I can answer the first question by saying that I referred to London as a whole. It depends on where the vacancies fall. Generally however, we should consider the individual and not give him unnecessary travelling. We cannot undertake that he will not be used in other parts of London if demands in these areas are very important and very heavy.

Mr. Reardon. I would like to ask if a man was able to find a job himself would there be any objections raised. I should like to give full credit to Mr. Gibbs for his help in the past.

Mr. Haylor. So many factors have to be taken into account. We shall deal with every case as it arises and it will be up to the local manager to say in what manner these men would be employed. We shall make it as smooth as possible.

Mr. Gibbs. I will use any discretionary powers within my limits.

Mr. Bowen, answered the second of Mr. Reardon's questions. The Trade Union Executives had raised a number of problems and these were in process of being examined. The Trade Union Headquarters would be informed as soon as possible.

Mr. Clamp. Men in the Forces have a claim to reinstatement but all will not want to exercise it.

Mr. Bowen then read from the minutes of the meeting between Trade Unions and Headquarters agreeing to the terms of these reinstatement claims.

Mr. Skilbeck. If a man who has been directed here from another trade, e.g. building, is declared redundant, will he be given a job in that particular trade in which he may be a skilled man, in the London area. I refer particularly to transferees on bomb damage of which they have had some experience.

Mr. Gibbs. The building trade has its own peculiarities and we have been given special instructions and regulations regarding this. There are various grades and types of jobs, some are urgent and some not, and it is impossible to say where a man would be sent on these jobs.

Mr. Haylor. This is not a question that can be dealt with at the moment as it depends on various factors which change from day to day, but I am sure the local exchange will deal sympathetically with people in this category.

Mr. Skilbeck. I hope the local office will deal with these questions in the light of present day circumstances.

Mr. Thursby. I would like to know the exact intention with regard to apprentices.

Mr. Clapp. The position will depend very much upon the employment of skilled men in the Experimental Establishment. There is no reason why apprentices could not continue. The Ministry has every intention of doing everything to see that the apprenticeships are completed if it is at all practicable, no matter what happens to the factory. We can not of course guarantee to keep them afterwards.

Mr. McNamara. Is it your intention to keep the apprentices as it is not known how many Chemical Plumbers are to be retained, and it is essential for the proper training of the boys that they should be in ratio in relation to the skilled men.

Mr. Wilkinson. What is the position of men under 30. Will any be retained or will they all be called to the Forces?

Mr. Haxton. Each case of men under 30 will have to be looked into very carefully as both the need of your side and the need of the Forces would have to be considered. How many men are going to be thrown up.

Mr. Smith. There are very few men concerned.

Mr. Lowe. This factor is very important to Chemical Plumbers. There are 10 of these men, of which 7 are under 30.

Mr. Haxton. These 10 men would have to be considered by the Man Power Board in relation as to whether they were more important for Industry or for the Forces.

Mrs. Baring. Is it essential that the factory retain men over 30 as some of these had less service.

Mr. Wilkinson. Will the men be taken for special work in the Forces.

Mr. Haxton. Yes.

Mr. Lowe. The Chemical Plumbers from Waltham are probably the best in the world and they should not waste their lives in the Army. They could be used to better purpose elsewhere. Although some of them were originally in the building trade it was a good many years ago. Seven of them are definitely R.G.F.F. Chemical Plumbers.

Mr. Haxton. We would consider each man in the special circumstances and decide whether to place them in the Forces or Industry. They would be allowed to volunteer for the special industries mentioned previously.

Mr. McNamara. It has been decided to discharge men over 65 and those over 60 are to be considered.

Mr. Gibbs. Men over 65 are beyond the control of anybody, they can leave on their own or the Management can dispose of them.

Mr. Reardon. What procedure is to be adopted to select the men to be removed. In previous cases of this type valuable work has been done by a Hardship Committee and very few cases had to be brought to appeal. Is the same programme to be followed in this instance?

Mr. Smith. There will be ample opportunity for the work people to appeal against any decision. We shall keep in as close contact as possible with the Trade Unions.

Mr. Reardon. Has a decision been given regarding transfers to Bishopston.

Mr. Bowen. This is still open but a decision will be given today and Trade Unions could put forward names for transfer.

Mr. Reardon. Although Dr. Bowden has expressed thanks and appreciation to the men, that is no satisfaction to those who may be out of work. A town has grown up round the factory and I think the factory could have been utilised in some other way to prevent these discharges.

Mr. Haylor. - Can we have some idea of the number to go?

Mr. Clapp. About 250 to 300.

Mr. Smith. Approximately 290.

Mr. Reardon. What is the position regarding holidays.

Mr. Clapp. The closed week is W.E. 21st July. If any individual has notice to go before that date the last week of his service will be counted as leave.

Messrs. Goodman, Wollin and Wilkinson raised the point that many people had paid deposits on apartments for the holiday week ended 21st July and if they had to have an earlier week they would lose that and also probably be liable to pay for the week they had booked. In many cases this was the first holiday that they had taken for six years.

Mr. Reardon. Will you agree that no discharge take place until after 21st July?

Mr. Clapp. We cannot retain men until after 21st July. We have every sympathy with the workers but there should be no difficulty nowadays in getting rid of bookings. Any special case can be put through the Trade Unions.

Mr. Wilkinson. Can the men be retained at Waltham until placed by the Ministry of Labour.

Mr. Clapp. No.

Mr. Wollin. Can the Ministry of Labour accept men within the period of notice.

Mr. Haylor. We will do everything possible to re-employ the men as soon as possible.

Mr. McNamara. We should like to make everything as smooth as possible but would like to see a Hardship Committee set up. I should like to pay tribute to the Management for their courtesy and consideration in the past.

Mr. Smith. Hardship cases will be considered sympathetically.

Mr. Turner. I would be the link between the local office and the Man Power Board. I would contact Mrs. Baring and the Shop Stewards. We dealt with this position at Enfield. A Hardship Committee was set up consisting of Mr. Bird, Mr. Dickinson and myself and we dealt with many cases on the spot.

Mr. Highfield. I should like to introduce myself as representative of the new department. After 28th July I and Major Harvey will be the ones to be shot at. This meeting has given me an opportunity of seeing many of the Waltham people together. I don't want to make a long speech. Much of what Dr. Bowden said was already known to us. One of our most illustrious scientists Sir Robert Robertson was long connected with this factory on experimental work. My position is really that of an observer, listening and learning. I had hoped that we would take over this department in circumstances much happier from the point of view of labour. It is grievous to see men going when we should be increasing rather than the reverse. We have to have the class of worker we need to do the job. On the redundancy question I know the factory has taken the Unions with them on every step that has been taken, and we shall look forward to taking the Unions with us. I must say I am much impressed with the way in which the Unions have put their cases and have taken advice and suggestions in the right way. We know you have a very difficult job just now but we look forward under the new regime to very happy times.

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