

# **Democracy in the Engineering Union**



**Edmund and Ruth Frow  
and Ernie Roberts MP**

“In every trade union are to be found men occupying high official positions who prior to their appointment were militant and progressive-minded men; but, alas! what a change comes over these erstwhile militants when the mantle of responsibility is cast over their shoulders. What hitherto was bad becomes good; what was arbitrary becomes reasonable; what was near progressivism becomes extreme; what was wholesome criticism becomes unwarranted attacks. ‘Be reasonable and have implicit trust in your officials’ is the lamentation of all the little-minded Caesars who are at the head of the Labour army.”

J.T. Brownlie: *Some Dangers Which Threaten Trade Unionism.*

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# Democracy in the Engineering Union

## *Pioneers lay the foundations*

The parent body of the *Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers* was the *Friendly Union of Mechanics*. This became established in Manchester in 1827 following the repeal of the Combination Acts which had made Trade Union organisation illegal.

From the first, the Union formulated a democratic constitution. Branch meetings were held fortnightly and all members were expected to attend. Absentees were fined sixpence, a considerable sum in those days. At a summoned meeting held in February, May, August and November, the President and Vice-President were elected to serve for the following quarter. An indication of the illegal conditions in which trade unions met is shown in the Huddersfield Branch of the Old Mechanics minute book of 1831, which showed that a Bible, a Pistol and Heavy Curtains had been bought. The Branch had to meet in secret. New members were blindfolded. The heavy curtains were drawn, the new member placed his hand on the Bible, the pistol was pointed at his heart, and he swore not to disclose anything about the Branch. Such were the conditions under which workers organised into our trade unions.

After merging with a Yorkshire Union, the name was changed to *The Journeymen Steam Engine Makers' Society* affectionately known as the Old Mechanics. The 1843 Rules continued the principle of maximum participation that had already been accepted. Members absent after being duly summoned to a meeting were fined three pence. A member who left a meeting before it was closed by the President was also fined three pence unless he had first obtained permission. Emphasis was placed firmly on the obligation of each member to take part and accept responsibility. Any member who was proposed and seconded to hold Office in the Branch had to accept, unless he could make a convincing case for refusing. If he failed he was duly fined.

## *The Amalgamated Society of Engineers*

Government of the Union was vested in a biennial Delegate Meeting held at Whitsun to which each Branch sent representatives. Before 1850, there was only one full-time Official, the General Secretary. When a number of Unions joined together in 1850 to form the *Amalgamated Society of Engineers*, the Executive Council continued to be composed of men working at the trade. It was not until the 1892 Delegate Meeting that the decision was taken to establish a full-time Executive Council of eight members. At the same time, six full-time Organising District Delegates were instituted.



James Jefferys in his history, *The Story of the Engineers*, commented that "the credit for most of the changes of the Delegate Meeting of 1892 must go to the forces which had been brought together by Tom Mann's candidature for the General Secretary in 1891". Tom Mann made his motive for contesting crystal clear in his election address. In the spirit of the pioneers he stated:

"I entered the contest in the hope of assisting others in stimulating some of the latent energy of our members to increased activity."

What a fine ambition: not office seeking to become a bureaucrat, but to stimulate the members to activity and democratic control of the Union. Tom Mann did not win that election, but he lost by only a thousand votes in thirty-five thousand, a result which laid the basis for his eventual election as General Secretary in 1919.

### *The Clyde in 1902*

The election of a full-time Executive Council solved a number of problems, but it also led to conflicts with some of the District Committees. In 1902, this conflict surfaced on the Clyde.

The Engineering Employers on the Clyde demanded a wage reduction of a shilling a week. Executive Council recommended that it be accepted, but the members concerned decided to resist the reduction and withdrew their labour. They maintained their determination and in spite of two ballot votes in which the attempt of the Executive to influence them failed, they continued out. They were then ordered to return to work. The sequel of this undemocratic procedure was seen in the election of four members of the Executive Council. The sitting members were soundly defeated. The action of the members was vindicated when the matter was raised at the Final Appeal Court. Appeals from the Glasgow Branches were upheld and strike pay was granted to all those who had been on strike.

### *ASE Reform Committees*

Satisfactory as this was, it did not solve the problems which by 1910 had become acute. The period 1910-1914 has become known as the years of the Great Unrest. Many strikes took place including that of the Liverpool Transport Workers in which Tom Mann played a leading part. The situation in the Union led to Reform Committees being set up to work for unity.

One of the problems was the function of the Delegate Meeting. Although it was the governing body of the Union, its sole responsibility was to discuss and alter the Rules. This was a poor substitute for a policy making body. J.T. Brownlie wrote an article in the *ASE Journal* in September 1910 in which he said:

"It is the proud boast of our spokesmen that the ASE is a thorough democratic organisation. Each branch has complete control over its own affairs. Each district

manages its own business . . . there are courts of appeal, where any member feeling himself aggrieved may challenge decisions recorded against him, without cost, right up to a delegate meeting. In other words, the ASE may be said to be a federation of small democracies with an Executive authority. That authority — the EC — although democratically elected with clearly-defined powers is in reality an autocracy . . . That is not healthy, as it tends to thwart local initiative, stultify enthusiasm, and intensify irritation . . . The most unpopular body within our borders is the EC.”

With a Delegate Meeting effectively prevented from taking policy decisions, an Executive Council acting in an autocratic manner and a ferment in the trade union movement (where Tom Mann was advocating syndicalism and direct action) the 1912 Delegate Meeting met in Liverpool. The gulf between Executive Council and the delegates rapidly became apparent. One of the first Rule changes allowed for the direct election of a Chairman by the Delegate Meeting instead of appointment by the Executive of one of their members. After increasing the number of full-time Officials, the Conference decided that an election should be held in January 1913, to elect the entire Executive Council. This decision arose out of the administration of the new Insurance Act which provided for benefits to be dispersed through the Society.

This decision caused a furore because some of the EC members had only held Office for a few months, and protests were received from a number of Branches. Executive Council appealed to the membership over the heads of the Delegate Meeting and succeeded in inducing the members to endorse their objections to the proposed election. The EC then re-called the Delegate Meeting to alter their Ruling. This they refused to do, claiming that according to Rule, they were the supreme authority in the Union. They claimed that the EC’s ballot vote of the members was unconstitutional.

As no election had taken place for an Independent Chairman, nor had any election procedures been instituted, the delegates appointed a Provisional Executive Council comprised of four Trustees and four London members. This gave rise to an episode in which the old Executive members barricaded themselves inside the Union Headquarters in Peckham Road until they were ejected by members of the Reform Committee and the newly elected Provisional Executive installed in their place. The General Secretary collaborated with the Reform Committee members by allowing them into the General Office through a side door from his house. Although the members of the old Executive took legal action against the Provisional Council, they lost their case. J.T. Brownlie then became the first independent Chairman of the new Executive Council which was duly elected and took office.

### *The Amalgamated Engineering Union*

In 1920, the Amalgamated Engineering Union was formed from seven unions. The last ASE *Journal*, 1920, reported the passing of the ASE and the birth of the AEU. The ASE they record was described as the “Brigade of Guards of British Trade Unionism”. For two generations

the ASE had been in the forefront of trade union struggles. At the first amalgamation in 1851 the wage of a skilled engineer was £1.5s. per 60 hour week. In 1920 the average wage was £4.7s. for a 47 hour week.

The members who drew up the new Rules gave careful attention to ensuring that the established democratic procedures were continued. They created a series of checks and balances within the union structure: Final Appeal Court, National Committee, Rules Revision Committee, Executive Council, Rights for Branches, District Committees and Divisional Committees.

Policy making was vested in a National Committee of 52 delegates elected from Divisional Committees which represented the District Committees in their area. The National Committee every fifth year became the Rules Revision Committee and considered amendments to the Rule Book which branches had suggested. This procedure answers those like Harold Wilson who when Prime Minister claimed that our Rules and Procedures were archaic and should be confined to the dustbin. Our Rule Book is as recent as the last Rules Revision meeting, and is binding on ALL members.

Shop Stewards' representatives were allowed for on District Committees and they were elected at Quarterly Meetings. Procedures were firmly delineated and a number of important safeguards were embodied in the Rules.

Resolutions for the Agenda of the National Committee were formulated at Branch meetings and sent to the District Committee whence they were forwarded to the Divisional Committee. It was clearly laid down that Executive Council had no right to veto such resolutions although frequently this was done. In that case, the delegate from the Division could appeal to the Standing Orders Committee at the National Committee meeting to have them restored to the Agenda. This was often successful. The authority of the National Committee was "final and binding on the Executive Council".

The Final Appeal Court was to meet annually and adjudicate on appeals "against the ruling of the Executive Council in strict accordance with the Rules . . . The decisions shall be final. It shall be incumbent upon the Executive Council to give immediate effect to decisions of the Appeal Court".

### *1931 cuts*

The importance of the Final Appeal Court was demonstrated in 1931. In June of that year, the Engineering Employers demanded cuts in piecework prices, overtime and nightwork premiums, together with longer hours. When, in July, the Employers threatened to impose these conditions, the Union leaders capitulated. Overtime rates were reduced from time and a half, to time and a quarter, while the other rates were brought into line. The Executive Council was strongly criticised for accepting such terms without reference to the membership.

Criticism was led by members of the Minority Movement. A statement was issued both in London and Manchester; the Executive Council retaliated by sending a letter to each member who signed, asking them to give reasons why they should not be dealt with under the Rules of the Union. One of them, Joe Scott, replied, "I shall never sit quietly down and see the conditions of myself and my fellow-workers constantly worsened without a protest, and if this is the crime which in your opinion can only be met with expulsion from the union, then it proves conclusively that I am justified in my efforts to arouse my fellow-workers to fight against the attacks of the employing class". Executive Council then decided to expel all the members concerned with the exception of Jack Tanner, the only full-time official on the list, who had made his peace with them.

A Members' Rights Movement was formed to secure reinstatement of the expelled members. Petitions circulated in the workshops, resolutions were passed in many Branches and a lively campaign was developed. In 1932, a monthly paper, *The Monkey Wrench*, was published by the Members' Rights Movement and meanwhile, the procedure for appeal was instituted by those who had been deprived of their membership. When the Final Appeal Court met in July 1932, it decided unanimously to reinstate all the expelled members in the Union. Some of them subsequently became full-time officials in their turn.

Jack Tanner was elected President in July 1939. This created a vacancy on the Executive Council in Division Number 7. Joe Scott, who had won wide support for his leadership and who was a respected and popular member of the Union was nominated. However, when the list of the nominees was published his name did not appear. A Court case in December 1939 heard his submission that he had been duly nominated in a proper manner and that the membership were entitled to cast a vote for or against him. The Judge, Mr Justice Simonds, ruled that "it was clear that an administrative blunder had been made by the Officials". He said that he had been unable to find any provision in the Rules with which Mr Scott had failed to comply and he therefore issued an injunction restraining the Executive Council from conducting any election to fill the vacancy in Number 7 Division unless Joe Scott's name appeared on the nomination paper. In spite of the clear instruction, the EC did everything possible to delay the proceedings and flout the decision. It was nearly two years before the ballot was eventually held and Joe Scott was returned with nearly seven thousand votes, a significant majority over the other six candidates. He took Office in January 1942.

### *Shop stewards under fire*

The first reference to Shop Stewards in our union rules was 1897, but it was not until the First World War that they won official recognition. The issue was brought to a head in November 1917, when the firm of White and Poppe's of Coventry refused to recognise the right of shop stewards



to negotiate with them in the dispute with their toolmakers. The engineering Joint Committee in that town which led one of the strongest shop-stewards' movements in the country and itself issued cards to all Coventry stewards irrespective of union, took up the demand and on 27 November brought out 50,000 workers. They resumed work on 4 December after they had received a pledge that the recognition of shop stewards would be the subject of negotiation between the unions, the employers and the Government. On 20 December, 1917, an agreement was signed between the employers and the engineering unions which gave the stewards the right to negotiate with the management on issues affecting the men they represented. The ASE, however, refused to sign the agreement, since they considered that the degree of recognition granted was inadequate and it was not until 1919 that agreement was reached with the employers regarding ASE shop stewards, although in practice there were few employers who failed to negotiate with the stewards after the Coventry strike.

In the very difficult conditions of the Second World War, with blackout and long hours of overtime, the Aircraft Shop Stewards' National Council convened a Conference in Birmingham on 6 April, 1940. Discussion ranged over higher wages, control of overtime and democratic rights. A call was made for 100 per cent trade unionism in the rapidly developing industry and a decision taken to set up an extended Shop Stewards' Council to cover both the aircraft industry and general engineering. Executive Council saw dangers in the new set-up and sent letters to a number of the participants stating that "From information received . . . they learn that you attended a Conference in Birmingham . . . thereby acting in such a way as to render you liable to be excluded from the Union". Those who received the letter decided to exercise their right to a hearing before the EC and replied accordingly.

On 29 July, the 14 duly attended at General Office, among them being J.R. Scott and George Crane from London and E. Frow and C. Wellard from Manchester. Jack Tanner stated the case for the Executive and was answered by Joe Scott on behalf of the 14. Joe reminded Tanner of his own activities as a leader of the unofficial Shop Stewards' movement in the First World War. He pointed out that he had, in fact, edited their paper, *Solidarity*. In Moscow in 1920, he had made an impassioned defence of the unofficial Shop Stewards' movement in the teeth of considerable international opposition. Indeed Joe Scott maintained, most of the EC members had at one time or another taken part in 'so-called' unofficial activities. They could hardly have given leadership to their fellow workers without doing so.

Then, after having presented a superb case in defence of the offending Shop Stewards, Scott dropped a bombshell. He produced written evidence to show that at the time he was accused of being in Birmingham, he was carrying out his Union duties by reporting to several London AEU Branches. He concluded by demanding an apology and the

withdrawal of the charges within seven days. Faced with this dilemma and being uncertain which of the other 14 Stewards were likely to produce similar evidence, the EC refrained from pressing the charges.

In recognition of the difficult job the Shop Stewards had to perform on behalf of the members, the following poem was dedicated in the AEU *Journal* of February 1970:

*His Reward*

A Shop Steward stood at the Golden Gate,  
His head was bent and low  
And he meekly asked the man of fate  
Which way that he should go.

“What have you done”, St Peter said  
“To gain admission here?”  
“I’ve been a Shop Steward, Sir”, he said  
“For many and many a year”.

St Peter opened wide the Gate  
And gently pressed the bell,  
“Come in and choose your harp”, he said  
“You have had your share of hell”.

*Carron’s Law*

There is no doubt that during the period dubbed by left-wing activists as ‘Carron’s Law’, attacks on both Shop Stewards and Union democracy were intensified. ‘Carron’s Law’ was practiced at Labour Party Conferences, as in 1958 where the union delegates voted 20 to 6 for the abolition of conscription, and Carron cast the card vote *against*. Such episodes as the notorious facing both ways at the 1960 Trades Union Congress when the Union vote was cast by Carron for the report of the General Council in support of the ‘H’ bomb and also supported the Transport and General Workers’ Union resolution in opposition to it. The policy of the Union on the matter had been hammered out and decisively defined at the National Committee meeting and opposition to the bomb was mandatory on both Executive Council and the TUC delegation. As one press report said of William Carron and his supporters:

“They privately regard the National Committee, elected on a system of very indirect representation, as grossly unrepresentative of their membership and feel justified in almost any manoeuvre to thwart its vote.” (*Manchester Guardian* 5 September, 1960.)

But when there is a right-wing majority on the National Committee their decisions are sacrosanct for the EC.

Naturally, the Final Appeal Court which, according to the Rule Book is the highest authority in the Union, felt that it had to make the strongest possible condemnation of such blatant disregard for the established Rules and tradition of the Union. A unanimous resolution expressed deep concern “at the failure of the Executive Council to implement the decisions of the Court”.

During the years 1954 and 1955 at Labour Party Annual Conferences, there was conflict over the Party Treasurership between Gaitskell and Bevan. The President of the AEU and the EC refused to allow the delegates to vote and insisted on voting for their choice. The delegates referred the issue to the Final Appeal Court and their right to vote was upheld, but nevertheless the following year the vote was again cast by the President against the delegates' wishes.

The situation was again spotlighted at the Labour Party Conference in 1966 when Sir William consistently cast the Union vote against National Committee decisions and in favour of the platform. However, on the occasion when he happened to be absent from the Conference, Hugh Scanlon, the senior delegate present, passed the *pad* around asking for decisions on military expenditure in Germany and a reduction in the burden East of Suez; the Delegation decisions in both cases registered a vote for a reduction in expenditure and against the recommendation of the National Executive of the Labour Party.

The practice of passing a note pad around the delegates began in the early 1950s when J. Tanner, the President, and B. Gardner, the General Secretary, on occasions during the Annual Labour Party Conference used to cast the union's vote without consulting the delegates. So Ernie Roberts, a member of the delegation, prepared a note pad with the headings For or Against the motion, and put it around the delegates who signed the way they wished to vote, and then passed this pad to the General Secretary. Arising from this the President called a delegates' meeting immediately at the end of the Conference session and demanded to know who had initiated the pad. Ernie Roberts said he had, and J. Tanner demanded to know who was running the delegation and said if a pad was needed, the Executive Council would arrange for it to be done. The delegates said that this was what they wanted, and thereafter in future Conferences this was done on many occasions.

Executive Council's flagrant violation of the Union's democratic constitution led to a number of full-time Officials being suspended from Office. Among them were William McLaughlin, Assistant Divisional Organiser Number 25 Division in 1958; Ernie Roberts, Assistant General Secretary in 1961; and E. Frow, Manchester District Secretary in 1963. Indeed many Officials found themselves under abnormal pressure and strain arising from the dictatorial regime in the Union during that period. Ernie Roberts challenged the EC's right to suspend an elected officer by taking Carron to the High Court. This resulted in the EC paying Roberts his full wages during the suspension and re-instating him in his official position as Assistant General Secretary.

The culmination of Carron's Law was seen in the attempts to prevent Hugh Scanlon from being elected as Executive Councilman for Number 4 Division. On the third attempt at holding a ballot, after every ploy had been used to secure his disqualification, he obtained the highest vote ever recorded in an Executive Council election. Opposition had only made his

supporters determined to ensure his election and their enthusiasm spread throughout the Division and into the workshops. In some cases, workers made arrangements to leave the factory and go as a group to their Branch to register their vote.

One of the significant features of the Scanlon elections, both those for Executive Councilman and later for President, was blatant interference by the media. This factor has increased in recent years and character assassination of progressive candidates has been used to considerable effect. The introduction of the postal vote opened the door wide to this particular distortion of democracy.

The *Sunday Mirror*, 12 October 1975, printed a long article by Woodrow Wyatt, in which he was guilty of gross interference in the elections within the union. He is not a member of our union; in fact he is an employer. He listed the names of the candidates members should vote for: Terry Duffy, Harry Banks, Jim Docherty, George Butler, Harold Robson, Tal Lloyd, Colin Vincent, Ivan Westley, and some others. He wrote at the end of his article: "If any AUEW members are not certain about the rest of the list, write to me through the *Sunday Mirror*. I will try to help you". We must reject such advice from the employers' press. They do not have the interest of our union members at heart. We should reject those whom they sponsor.

### *Postal Ballots*

In the system of balloting in which a member attended the Branch to record the vote, there was an opportunity for participation in Union business through branch life. Moreover, each vote was recorded and accounted for within the Branch. With a postal vote, there can be no check. It is quite possible for non-union participation in a Union ballot. Anyone can fill in the ballot form and return it to General Office. The postal vote is an insecure method of obtaining the Union's opinion.

Many members fail to be registered and therefore do not receive a ballot form. Moreover, it is extremely costly and requires hundreds of thousands of pounds a year to run. It costs the Union more to elect a National Official than it does to pay him for the whole period of his office. The postal ballot results published in the December 1981 *Journal* show that 83 per cent of the membership still do not vote even with a postal ballot. Additionally, the postal ballot system means that ballots can only be held twice a year and there is frequently an undue time lag between a vacancy occurring and a replacement being effected. The losers are the members who cannot receive full service from a depleted staff.

These arguments against postal balloting are not new. Ernie Roberts, when he was Assistant General Secretary, raised a list of complaints with the Executive Council, arising from his contest against Jim Conway for the General Secretaryship in the first series of postal ballots in 1972. He pointed out then that the ballot had commenced in January, when nominations were called for, but it was not decided that Hugh Scanlon,



the President, should be Returning Officer until 7 March. Until then, all procedures concerning the General Secretary had been carried out in the name of Jim Conway, the sitting General Secretary, which was a breach of Rule; and when Scanlon was appointed Returning Officer, this also was a contravention of Rule, since the other Assistant General Secretary, Ken Brett, should have been the Returning Officer in this election.

His other points were concerned with the general operation of the ballot system, which is the same now as it was in 1972, despite the vociferous complaints from the membership. All arrangements for the rooms, staff, machinery etc., are in the hands of the General Secretary (even those for his own election, which should by rights be conducted separately). Complaints from branches and full-time officers were received in the 1972 election, concerning non-receipt of ballot papers, members receiving more than one ballot paper in the same ballot, persons receiving ballot papers who were no longer members of the union, or who had never been members and were not even engineers; ballot papers being sent to members who had died some years previously. Branches complained in 1972 that their official complaints had not been placed before the Executive Council for a decision; branches are still putting up similar complaints to the EC now, after 10 years of postal ballots. The administrative faults in the system still remain.

In the first postal ballot, 20,000 envelopes and ballot papers were returned by the post office to the General Office, because of incorrect addressing. Even larger numbers were involved in subsequent ballots. Members were not aware whether they were on the electoral roll or not until they failed to receive a ballot paper, because there were no facilities for members to check the roll (this has since been rectified). So many members received ballot papers on or after the final date of the ballot that the closing date had to be extended — but many members, not knowing of the extension, did not bother to post their votes.

All these complaints were made 10 years ago. Ernie Roberts wrote to the Executive in November 1972:

“As a candidate, I am not satisfied that there is the same scrutiny as in the previous ballot procedure in the branches. Candidates and members should have the right to scrutinise the opening and counting of ballot votes, as in municipal and parliamentary elections . . . I should also like to know:

- the numbers on the electoral roll in both the first and second ballots;
- the numbers of ballot papers printed in each ballot, who fixed the numbers, who checked the delivery, and what happened to the surplus;
- how many pre-paid envelopes were printed, and what happened to those which were not sent out;
- what happened to all the returned ballot papers and envelopes which the post office was unable to deliver;
- what proof there is that only those members who were entitled to vote actually voted;
- how the Executive Council decided that all votes were valid, and who examined any invalidated papers;
- what steps were taken to ensure the security of blank ballot papers and envelopes, while they were being kept at the General Office;

who was Returning Officer in the ballots while Bro. Scanlon and Bro. Conway were absent from the office.”

The reply to Roberts’ letter skirted round the issues he raised but did not give any satisfactory answers. The Executive said that “the arrangements in connection with all postal ballots are under the control of the Executive Council”, that the Executive had appointed tellers to scrutinise the ballot counts, that all complaints had been put before the Executive Council for consideration; their letter continued:

“It must be pointed out that all reasonable steps have been taken by Executive Council to ensure that ballot papers have been made available to those entitled to receive them . . . Executive Council would emphasise that the extension of the closing dates in any election is a matter purely for their decision . . . The security arrangements in connection with all ballots have been, and will continue to be, constantly reviewed by Executive Council, who are satisfied that the precautions taken are reasonably adequate.”

The points raised about security in Roberts’ letter remained unanswered, since the Executive said that they could not supply such details to individual candidates — even though it is undoubtedly the kind of information which should be available to *every voter*, let alone the candidates!

At the 1980 Rules Revision Committee, attempts to introduce some democratic control into the Postal Ballot procedure were defeated. It was proposed that the ballot be conducted by the Electoral Reform Society, or that the President and two members of the Executive Council in addition to the General Secretary and Assistant General Secretaries oversee the ballot. These changes were rejected, as was a motion to allow candidates to attend the count. In each case the vote was 28 or 29 to 21 or 22.

As a result of his experiences with centrally-conducted postal ballots, Bro. Ernie Roberts put forward the following proposals that are within rule to conduct the postal ballots on a more democratic but secure basis through the branches of the Union.

#### *Postal Ballot based on Branches*

EC to call for nominations and control printing of ballot papers, also giving effect to the rules in these matters.

EC to arrange distribution of ballot papers to all members on electoral roll, as at present, by post.

All members to send to their Branch Secretary the completed ballot papers in prepaid envelopes, as at present, by a pre-determined date.

Branch Secretaries to take all ballot envelopes unopened to Branch meeting, to be opened during Branch meeting by two Branch tellers, under scrutiny of Branch members, and record the votes on the voting result form, for transmission to EC.

The results of voting to be declared in Branch and recorded in Branch minute book. The ballot return form to be signed by two tellers, Chairman and Secretary.

All ballot papers and envelopes to be retained by Branch for three months in the event of a dispute or complaint.

EC to arrange total account, record the votes, and declare the result to the membership through the *Journal*.

Each Branch voting result to be reported in the half-yearly report book. This will allow for a further check by members of the correctness of the result in their branch.

This method of Postal Balloting is more democratic and open. It is a cheaper method because more than 2,000 Branches check ballots and do the counting. It is quicker, it can be done at a single Branch meeting. It would promote more interest in Branch activity and create more discussion about Candidates and their policies.

Further changes in our election of delegates to the Labour Party Annual Conference and the TUC have taken place, which further erode our Union's democracy. Delegates instead of being nominated and elected through the Branches by the members, are now chosen by Divisional Committee meetings. Another way in which Branch democracy is being threatened is that Branch secretaries instead of being elected are to be appointed as full-time officers under control of Executive Council.

### *Union Democracy*

It has become increasingly apparent that democracy in the Union is being eroded. Control has passed into fewer hands and the rights of the membership have been reduced. This process has been monitored over the years by members who, appreciating the rich heritage of participation at factory and branch level, have made efforts to draw attention to what was happening. Ernie Roberts made the position clear in an article in *Engineering Voice* early in 1972. "Don't let the machine control you. You control the machine instead" he advised. He set out the criteria for union democracy.

1. Trade Unions belong to their members.
2. The rule of the majority, and the supremacy of the Rule Book are of prime importance.
3. Protection of all members' rights and natural justice prevail.
4. Officials must be servants, not masters. Control of them must be determined by members' policies, not by outside bodies such as employers or government.
5. Members' right to internal and external democracy must be upheld.
6. The right of members in internal opposition to express themselves freely must be maintained.

In addition, he said that members should be able to communicate with each other through the Union *Journal* and that all attempts by the media to influence Union ballots should be exposed. "Members" he maintained, "must be active within the machinery of their union, fighting every inch of the way . . . Organise and control. Use your Branch and use your Trades Council and exert your powers on the TUC. They have been built to serve our interests, and it is our individual responsibility to see that they do".

At this time, when attacks are taking many forms, from Tory attempts to undermine both Local Government and Trade Union democracy and so weaken the power of the organised working class; to the efforts of the right-wing inside to take over the union in their interests, no one can afford to be complacent. The heritage of democracy is our responsibility to cherish and maintain and that is the job we have to do in the immediate future.

Employers and their Tory Government are attacking the democratic rights of the working class in Britain. Rights which have been fought for and won over centuries of struggle. Attacks are being made on the wages and living standards of our union members. Millions of workers are being denied the right to work. Capitalism is endeavouring to save its system of exploitation at the expense of the working class. It is against this background that a struggle for maintaining and extending the democracy within our union is taking place today. The members of our union who are struggling to preserve the historic democracy of the union have produced a paper called *Engineering Gazette*, and in the December 1981 issue, under the heading 'The Challenge to Final Appeal Court', they state:

"For 150 years the principles of a democratic union have dominated the constitution of the main constituent unions of the AUEW and its predecessors. These included an independent rank and file body of active members elected on to (a) *National Committee* — Policy; (b) rules governing body *Rules Revision Committee* — rules and changes thereto; (c) *Final Appeal Court* — grievances application of rules and interpretation of rules."

The Final Appeal Court is a body of 11 elected rank and file members whose function is to deal with and give final judgement on all matters where a dispute arises between the membership and the Executive Council. The *Engineering Gazette* calls 1981 "shame year" at the Final Appeal Court:

"1980 and 1981 heralded a new approach by this new authoritarian bunch of right-wing leaders who have openly refused to give effect to the decisions and now deliberately justify spending members' money on questionable legal advice to justify decisions not to implement our rules."

The *Gazette* calls on members to ask:

"Why our rules are suddenly subjected to legal advice?

Is it to justify 'moderate' law or 'Boyd-Duffy law', which has led to a series of legal decisions, most of which were against them?

Why is Rule 20 Clause 5 not operated? It says: 'The decision then given shall be final. It shall be incumbent upon the Executive Council to give immediate effect to the decisions of the Final Appeal Court'.

Why have the EC refused to forward correspondence to Final Appeal Court in violation of Rule 20 Clause 4? 'Executive Council shall not withhold any correspondence requested by the FAC'."

The *Gazette* article goes on to point out specific instances where there has been infringement of Rule following Final Appeal Court cases:

"1. Refusal to operate FAC appeal re. Edward and Hughes 1980 Appeal Court. Again upheld in 1981.



2. Boyd's statement to justify failure to give effect to decisions of FAC Nos. 22, 25, 26, 27 and 28 in 1980 ignores Rule 12 Clauses 10 and 19, and Rule 19 Clause 2.

3. Executive Committee's refusal to supply correspondence on three cases:

(a) interference in a candidate's election address (censorship);

(b) Laurence Scott dispute, withdrawal of approval/dispute benefit;

(c) refusal to supply correspondence re Rules Revision, Bro. Callan, Glasgow 2 Branch.

Interfering in the Final Appeal Court's authority is a serious threat to members' rights which must be challenged."

During the General Secretaryship of Bro. Jim Conway, there were many complaints about his use of the union's *Journal* during elections; his prominent position in the *AUEW Herald*, which was printed during the 1972 election, which contained a photograph of himself as editor and which featured him prominently; the appearance of his name on the advertisements taken out in various newspapers at union expense during elections; and the use of his name on millions of pieces of publicity — beer mats, matches, rulers, ashtrays and so on — all at union expense. Because of complaints made during the 1972 postal ballots, the Executive Council took a decision to end the use of the union's publicity resources in this way.

Yet in the December 1981 issue, the *Engineering Gazette* found it necessary to call attention to similar offences during the 1980 election of President:

"Three districts challenged the actions in August/September 1980 when the General Secretary and Executive Council were guilty of blatant misuse of the journal and unemployment campaign to promote Duffy as the great leader against unemployment. Leaving aside the truth or merit argument, it was a violation of the union's rules on elections, compounded when the EC approved in addition to the *Journal* the printing and circulation of 250,000 copies of a four-page extract."

The *Engineering Gazette* reported that the appeals of all three districts were upheld by the Final Appeal Court, but nevertheless "Duffy is reported in the press as saying 'We will ignore them'".

Brothers and Sisters, the democracy of our union is being attacked on several fronts: the postal ballot system is full of flaws and open to abuse, yet the hierarchy consistently resists attempts by the membership to make the procedure more democratic and more secure; grass-roots democracy is being constantly eroded, the latest attack being on the election of branch secretaries, who are to be replaced by full-time appointed officers under Executive Council control; the decisions of the Final Appeal Court are becoming a mockery, to be over-ridden at will by the Executive Council; members can no longer be sure that decisions taken by their democratically-elected representatives on the National Committee and Party Conference delegations will be given effect in the card votes cast at Conference.

It is time to stem the tide of reaction, Brothers and Sisters. Our union has had a magnificent history in the struggle to build a powerful and democratic Union. Let us continue to keep it so.

The price of democracy is eternal vigilance!

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