Preface

This is the story of the reaction of participants in one of the most bitter disputes, outside of coal mining, in West Durham and the North East of England. It documents metaphorically the workers' deep interest and involvement in their particular industry, with detailed examples of work processes.

But—more important—it illustrates the deep frustrations that develop among workers engaged in industrial disputes, and their struggles to sustain and seek to improve their living standards and welfare against overwhelming odds.

Against the power of wealth and industrial capital—against the supporters of capital, the whole state apparatus—against the bureaucratic machinery which effectively sought to frustrate state benefit payments—against the police who not only zealously enforced oppressive anti-worker laws, but sought to enforce prematurely anti-union laws in the pipeline—and against a compliant trade union bureaucracy.

The story reflects the way workers in struggle look towards what they see as their "natural" supporters—the Trades Unions and the Labour Party for help and solidarity, and how, when that helpline fails to meet expectations, when unions are compliant with companies, their frustrations arise.

An example was that the CPC Strikers decided to attend the Regional quarterly meeting of the Northern Region TUC to seek to broaden support—they were promptly refused an audience, because their own Trade Union, NUFLAT (National Union of Footwear, Leather & Allied Trades) refused to 'officially' recognise their dispute.

Eddy documents how he and fellow-worker Terry Twiname undertook to walk to London to visit the 'mother' of Parliaments—the 'centre' of 'democracy'—they went with high expectations to meet with the highest echelons of the Labour Party—Michael Foot, its Leader—only to have the briefest of meetings and leave with no positive support.

Such actions from established Labour movement 'pillars' inevitably fuelled frustrations. Here was the classic situation, whereby workers and sections of their organisations, like Trades Union Councils at rank and file, shop-floor level had no difficulty in identifying themselves with the workers in struggle—while the establishments of the Labour movement, by their inaction, lent their weight to capital.

It was the culmination of these realities and frustrations that led to the decision by Eddy and Paul Sitwell to take up arms—as workers—against the
system.

Who, then, are the real criminals?
The company—by its intransigence and insensistivity?
The state and its oppressive elements?
Our whole system of ‘democracy’?

Much has been documented on this dispute. With very few exceptions, the whole media machine was hostile—the visual media—TV—only last year showed a play, The Wallpaper Warriors—this was billed as a slot in their major crime series.

In the ultimate, the weight fell on Eddy and his fellow workers, in the vanguard of class struggle.

The outcome is there for all to see.
Eddy incarcerated—Paul Sitwell now released and is in a monastery.
Tim Bean is now dead, as is Mike Smiley, all scarred victims of this system, as are also the family of P.C. Packman.

Lessons have to be learned from such incidents; questions have to be raised.

Is this system of ours, based on capital and property rights, really democratic?
When challenged does it resort to reactions close to fascism?
Are the Labour movements in this class struggle sensitive enough to their class?
Should the lone figure of Eddy be allowed to shoulder such weight any longer?

If this little booklet motivates thinking and dialogue around such questions—and answers and actions are forthcoming, then something positive will have been achieved.

CPC continue to operate in West Durham, on the Greenfield’s Industrial Estate, Bishop Auckland.

Investigations, following a long campaign involving local residents at Woodhouse Close Estate, against the effects of the plant’s emissions on their health, are now taking place.

But that’s another story.

David Ayre,

July 1993.
Chapter One
In the beginning

Eddy Horner closed the garden gate behind him and studied the road outside; it ran left to right down the hill. If he turned to the left he would head straight towards Shildon, to the right Bishop Auckland. He turned down the hill to Bishop. As he set off, his thoughts turned to the disturbing dream he had had that night. With most of his dreams they were soon forgotten not long after he had awoken, but this one seemed to linger, he pulled his jacket closer to his body then stuffed his hands deep into its pockets, for the day was windy and raw for the start of April.

Today was a Saturday and just three weeks since his release from prison. As he kept up his brisk stride, Eddy began thinking of how he had come to be there. He reached the bottom of the mount, crossed over the side-road which was free of traffic, and continued on his way, passing the petrol station on his left. He only stopped when he came to the bridge, briefly looking at the swirling muddy water, then carried on with both his walk and his thoughts, the path was getting steeper as he took the slight rise to Cabin Gate.

He realised that his problem had really started when he had applied for a job at CPC. He’d been out of work for over a year and was eager to be re-employed, even if it meant factory work. It was 400 metres from his home to the factory and on arrival was given an immediate interview with the Personnel Manager, a Mr Colin Bland, who gave him some questions to answer, then offered him a contract to read which he did just for effect: he was in no position to quibble, money being as tight as it was at home. Mr Bland said: “We are agreed then, sign it here at the bottom, go on sign your life away”. When Eddy signed, that was exactly what he did.

He began work the following Monday. CPC made a luxury product,
washable wallpaper. Eddy’s job was to help man a pre-pasting machine with two
other operatives, a Mr Windrush, who was in charge, along with a Mr Scroggie,
a Scotsman as the coaterhead operator. The process of producing vinyl wall
coverings is an interesting one and as it plays a big part in Eddy’s downfall it is
worth taking a closer look at it.

The best way to describe the wallpaper process is to see it from the
point of view of inputs. There were basically four, Utilities, i.e. manpower, gas,
electricity; paper; powders and liquids. Every day wagons arrived with supplies
of PVC (Poly Vinyl Chloride), titanium dioxide (rutile), flour and talcum powder;
tankers brought the liquids, four plasticisers and white spirit; paper came via
Southampton from a company called KYRO in Finland, the paper ranged from
thin 80 paper, more like tissue than true paper, up to 120 gauge, which had the
consistency of soft cardboard. The paper started off at the rear end of the coating
machine. The liquids were treated in two ways, two plasticisers were put into
barrels, two others and the white spirit were kept in 5,000 gallon tanks and pumped
over as needed, the barrelled plasticisers wheeled in as needed by hand. The
powders also were stored in the factory. However, the factory being only small,
quite often a loaded wagon had to wait all day to get unloaded.

Now the utilities: water by tens of thousands of gallons came from the
mains as did the electricity, the gas came from a gasometer about 300 meters away.
Now manpower: this consisted of all sorts of locals, although many had come to
live in the vicinity from other areas; the workforce comprised about 60 hourly paid
workers, half a dozen managers, three or four lorry drivers, a few fitters and three
supervisors; in the front office were a handful of women who worked as general
office staff and pay clerks.

The process of manufacture began in the mixing room. Here the
mixing team had at its disposal three mixers and a couple of sets of scales. Some
of the plasticisers that came from outside had to be pumped over and deposited into
a large cut-down barrel set at head height on a set of scales, thus the right amount
was guaranteed every time. Other plasticisers were taken from drums and placed
into a large half ton metal can on wheels. Once all the liquids were in the can,
which was harnessed with a chain to the first mixing machine, a hydraulically
operated paddle was lowered, turned on, and rotated. A pipe was the slug over
the side of the can, so that the extractor fan could remove excess dust. The next
stage involved the dumping of PVC powders into the can and mixing it up, next
was added some white spirit, rutile, talc and a small amount of white lead
(stabiliser). Some blue-coloured dye helped to make the plastic extra white. After
22 minutes the can was put on slow spin under the No 2 mixing machine and then
the next mix was started.

Depending on how the coater ran, it was decided how much paste was
required. On a bad day only half a dozen cans might be produced, but on a good
day or a heavy coating day, 120-140 gauge, as many as 16 cans might be expected.
Once a mix was needed, the forklift truck collected it, taking it over to the coaterhead. A valve was opened at the bottom of the can and the plastic ran onto an electrically operated sieve. Once sieved, it went into a holding can then pushed away to the applicator roller as needed.

At the coaterhead the paste was applied to a roller which in turn applied it to the paper, once on the paper it passed through a hundred feet long ovens that made the white spirits flash off leaving a hard deposit of vinyl. At the take-off end the paper emerged from the ovens, passing between a rubber roller and an embosser, this being a steel cylinder that has had tiny pit marks sand-blasted into its surface. As it revolved, it broke up the surface to allow the plastic surface to accept printing ink. An electric bar heater above the embosser roller helped by reheating the plastic to make the embosser’s job easier.

Once through the ovens, which run at over 200 degrees centigrade, the paper was cooled down by its passing over large cooled steel drums. From there it went through tension bars and on to a wind up drum. If the correct metres had been wound on to the core, it was spliced. This was done by slowing down the machine and forcing the paper into contact with a fresh roll which had sticky plastic tape on it. The old paper carried the new paper through the machine, which was then speeded up to 300 feet a minute, leaving the take-off team to splice and remove. This was done with a piece of wood being snagged along by two fingers on the side of the drum. The wood being under the paper, it made a mounch; a hydraulic arm with a toothed blade came down, caught the raised paper and wood, and neatly split the paper off. At the same time, a spare was rotating above the splice, sticky-back plastic paper wound on to the cone when it was caught by the arm. The operation now complete, the full roll was removed from the drum, hoisted off electrically, and placed on the floor. Surplus paper was cut away and samples taken and the roll, which was 66" long, was rocked with a mandrel until it split into 3 x 22" inch rolls. The papers were pre-cut by revolving blades beneath the drive drum. The rolls were now either wrapped, after quality control, or sent on to the pre-pasting machine.

Eddy wrapped rolls, put rolls on the hoist, or took rolls off the resealer. The pre-paster was a machine that could take a roll of paper that weighed somewhere between half and a third of a ton. This was rolled to the air hoist, then placed between moveable arms, screwed into the core and the hoist lifts. The roll was spun to see that there were no torn edges which could be removed, a splice was made. This consisted of a square flap of paper with a broad piece of sticky tape. Once the paper now running had got down the last 50 metres, the creeper motor was accelerated and more paper was fed on to the bottom line: this way it built up a reserve. When the core was reached, the machine was stopped, and the operator ripped the paper free from the old core and made the splice; he lowered the top paper on to the sticky plastic, firmed it down there, tore off the surplus paper, rotated the roll to take up any slack—everything complete the motor was restarted.
After passing through the feed creeper machine and on to the conveyor belt a while later, the far end of the machine was reached. The paper was dragged into the saddle, which was a pair of interlocking metal parts that guide the paper to the coater; next it passed through some tension rollers and a revolving steel drum. This was the colour box, the place where the paste was applied, a mixture of starch, fungicide and water.

The speed of the colour box decided how much paste went on to the paper. It now travelled over another steel roller, then passed between the roller and the air knife, a device that blew compressed air on to the paper to remove any surplus paste, as well as obtaining an even finish to the surface. The next stage was being sucked onto the blanket fan, a continuous piece of rubber pierced with holes; a fan sucked air through the holes and held the paper in place. From here the paper rose to pass over a wooden roller and enter an oven 80 feet long, with an average temperature of 122 degrees centigrade. It travelled the whole length and returned, emerging completely dry. Then it moved over cooling rollers and down to the outfeed creeper machine which was made of rubber. Once through this, it was folded into loops and moved along to the far end, towards a re-reeling motor. The standard roll ran for half an hour, roughly 2,800 metres at 100 metres a minute, giving the average shift 15 rolls per shift.

Eddy quickly decided he wanted to be a coaterhead operator, as this was by far the most interesting of all the jobs. The coaterhead was a tricky piece of work needing skill and judgement to get the best from it. One had to get right the speed, getting the in and out feed tensions right, the correct colour box speed, not to mention the right amount of air pressure for the air knife. It was all a delicate balancing act to achieve the maximum efficiency out of the machine.

The first thing Eddy noted when he started his new job was that the union, National Union of Footwear, Leather and Allied Trades, had a monopoly—it was a closed shop—as well as being favoured by the management. The part-time union man was a Jimmy Steward, senior, and he approached Eddy, telling him he had to join the Union. Eddy did not find this a problem; he was also informed that the Union Branch would very soon be holding a meeting at a local pub called the “Station” in St Helen’s, Auckland. Although Eddy was not a drinking man, he said he intended to go to the meeting. In the meantime he was becoming better acquainted with the people on the factory floor. In charge of handling all paper work and running the re-reeler was a Peter Wescabber; and he got to know Mike Smiley, the eccentric and occasionally drunk coaterhead operator, Bill Gruel and Arthur Stitham, the mixing room men, Old Jimmy Rusher, the forklift truck driver, and many more.

After working a week lying on, Eddy received his first week’s wages of £112, which included 8 hours’ overtime and a full £30 bonus. He didn’t understand how they worked the wages out and nobody else seemed to know either. The next thing he learnt was that the rule “one man one job” did not apply.
here, you went where you were sent. At one time or another he would be doing all the hourly paid jobs.

Into his second week Eddy changed his shift and before too long he started to feel the effects of the system in his sleep pattern. First it was 7 am to 3 pm, then 3 pm to 11 pm, then 11 pm to 7 am, then back again. He became dry-mouthed, sticky-eyed, and most aware of the constant sound of the electric motor that drove the takeoff ringing in his head: it would take months before it seemed to go away.

The meeting at the “Station” came round. About twenty men, around one third of the workforce, were regular attenders. Jimmy Steward’s attitude and handling of the meeting soon revealed the transparent fact that no one wanted the post of full-time official, mainly because the Union supported the management on most of the issues. The meeting broke up an hour later with few decisions or concrete resolutions having been taken, it was a depressing performance.

Back at work, time was passing. Labour lost the General Election of 1979 with the Tories storming to power under Mrs T; no one seemed that surprised at the result, Labour’s economics were disastrous.

By the time a year was over in Eddy’s working life he had ingratiated himself with most of the men on his shift. Then he got into an argument with two of them, Mike and Peter, over the reason he wasn’t being trained to run the coaterhead. The angry exchange of words ended with him changing his shifts and working alongside Kenny Mounter and Jimmy Steward, Jnr., the union man’s son. Within weeks he was sharing the coaterhead responsibilities. Things carried on much the same until, one day, the management cut the wages by altering the bonus payments. It meant an immediate reduction of £10 a week after tax. They also wanted the big coating machine to run through the coming Saturday to help fill an order.

The wages scheme was in theory, if not in practice, simply, you turned out a certain percentage of good quality paper at so many metres and you got a full bonus. In practice it was not that simple. The production quotas had a 250,000 metres limit. If you exceed the limit, you got not a penny more for the extra metres, but you were penalised for any waste that you created. This meant that there was much resentment amongst the coaterhead teams. When the following Monday came, everyone was dragooned into cleaning both coater and ovens, so that the machine could be started up as quickly as possible. Eddy had the worst job, that of having to climb into the inky blackness of the ovens and scrape all the loose plastic chippings out. The doors were opened on the rear side of the machine, so he crawled inside and set to work. Then he heard the slamming of doors; gradually the light inside the oven faded, someone was closing the doors for preparing the machine to be re-started. Eddy shouted loudly to let whoever was closing the doors know that a person was inside the oven, but whoever they were did not hear and soon he was in total darkness.
Blinded by the lack of light and nauseated by the smell of gas, he worked his way back to the front of the machine. He knew that unless he could attract some attention to his plight, and quickly, before they turned on the extractor fans, he wouldn’t be heard. He would be gassed to death and burnt. He banged with a brush on the thick insulated door, then on the metal side panels, and eventually the door swung open, with the leading supervisor standing beside it. The bespectacled Scotsman said, “there’s no need to panic, son”. Eddy climbed out and gave him a piece of his mind, especially as the management’s greed could have cost him his life. After a drink of orange juice, he opened all the doors, climbed back inside the oven and finished his work.

Eddy had heard of enterprise zones from the TV. Now it seemed that CPC had decided unilaterally to introduce one at the factory. Managers went on courses and came back with charts and booklets on management, the word soon circulated that a new computer control coating machine was to be installed, as well as a second pre-pasting machine, the B. & D. design company were contracted to build the machines and install the computer.

The machines were duly installed but not to schedule. The main manager, Mr David Sackman, had inserted a penalty clause into the contract, and subsequently B. & D. went bust. The new machinery brought with it a change in work patterns at the factory. On the pre-paster, where three men had run a single machine, now four men operated two. On the coater, the workforce was also cut: only one coaterhead instead of the usual two, thanks to automatic splicing. On the take-off end the same number of men were employed, but the machine ran twice as fast. In the mixing room, where Eddy now worked, the process was the same, but the amount involved was five times greater. An extension having been built, it now doubled both factory and mixing room space. Paste now had to be provided at three times the volume of before: for the old coater, and double for the hungry mouth that was the new coater. The pre-pasters were also demanding more paste. Wages bonus likewise were cut; the second one in two years. Wages were down to less than £80 per week, at a time when the national average was £150 a week for semi-skilled workers.

All paste was now pumped over to save time; the days of the forklift truck were gone. In the mixing room they had embedded a new mixer into the floor coming up to crutch height. With this they could make two and a half tons of plastic paste in fifty-five minutes; they also had two full-size storage tanks, so that they could keep up with demand. All this computerisation and speed put a lot of the strain on the men’s relationship with the management. They were working twice as hard for less pay; one man remarked, “they won’t be happy until we are working for only bowls of rice”.

Sometimes, in order to help the pre-pasters, Eddy would have to make a mix for them. He would put ten gallons of water into the can of No 3 mixer, add the captan 88 fungicide, then 9 bags of cold water starch, after which he set the paddle to fast forward and by the time he had returned from dumping the empty
bags in the compressor skip, the mix would be beaten to a fine paste the consistency of porridge. He would add more water up to the mark, slow down the paddle, and take a sample over to the laboratory. The lab. test for the two types of paste were identical: a container with a hole in it was filled to the brim with gunge and, as it flowed out, it was timed. For the starch paste it might be seventeen seconds; this was too slow. Eddy would return to add minutes of water at full pressure, twenty seconds per point. Usually it took a couple of visits to the lab. to get it down to 10-11 seconds which was the optimum. This concern with the 10-11 seconds for the paste was very important, as the paper was supposed to have twenty grams of paste for so much area. A new device made this easier, being an infra-red camera that gave a reading as to how much water was passing before it, if you knew the consistency of the paste you only have to judge the amount of water and had a fair idea how much paste was being applied; too much and you put up the air knife to remove the surplus, too little and you toned the air knife down.

One of the most infuriating performances that Eddy and the others had to endure was the six-monthly visits from their union representatives; first Mr Waterman, then Messrs. Echoman and Mentor. The men were angry and wanted to strike, but the union officials always talked them out of it. The complaints of the men were that they were sweating like hell and getting a pittance in return; and was or wasn't their bonus scheme financing the running in of the new coating machine? Mr Waterman admitted that the basic £55 a week was appallingly low by industrial standards elsewhere, and he would get to work at getting it improved. He suggested that they hang fire until the new yearly pay award had been announced; in the meanwhile, he would get on to the management to see if he could get the bonus restored. The men grumbled but agreed to wait, not only to see what the new pay deal would be, but also for the election of the new shop steward. For the first time in years it was being contested; those contesting for it were the incumbent, Jimmy Steward, Senior, and Eddy's old chargehand and adversary, Peter Wescabber. The ballot would be held after the pay increase had been announced.

When the pay increase came, it both shocked and angered the men, for the so called “increase” consisted of three parts, a seven and half pay increase, a revised bonus scheme which meant an immediate reduction of £16 a week, and an additional £4 a week for chargehands; in short the offer translated into a £6 a week pay cut, the third in three years: in that time the wage had dropped £72 after tax.

On three occasions, at well attended Union Branch meetings, the men rejected the offer outright, then the union dropped a bomb shell: it transpired that they had accepted the offer over the men's head, three weeks before the third and final rejection. The meeting exploded in anger. Peter Wescabber told the men that, if they elected him as union representative, he would sort it all out, a veiled threat that he would call a strike. When the ballot was due, Eddy decided to vote for Old Jimmy, as he didn't trust a man like Peter Wescabber because of his pro-
management leanings. As it turned out he never got a chance to vote; the ballot form was not in his wage packet but, because of the shift he was on at the time, he could not collect one before the ballot box was sealed. Eddy was sceptical about Peter Wescabber's election, firstly not everyone had voted who was entitled to, secondly the ballot box was opened in the presence of the management and the top union officials, thirdly an ugly rumour was circulating that some lorry drivers had received ballot papers.

The next union meeting was going to be a dose, when it came. Eddy attended, Peter Wescabber thanked everyone for electing him and proposed that someone from the floor move a strike call, he himself suggested a one-day strike. Someone said he would have to go to a ballot of all the workers and so their fate was sealed. After a resounding "YES" to strike action in the ballot that followed, the date was set for September the twenty-third, the strike was on.

Chapter Two
The Strike

The new shop steward gave the employers twenty four hours' notice of strike about to take place. According to the handbook he was required to give them three days, but the gloves were off now. Mr David Sackman, the main manager, let it be known that, as not every single worker had voted for the strike action, consequently it was undemocratic and he intended to sack anyone who took part in it.

The day of the Strike arrived with both morning and afternoon shifts outside the factory; the police were also present. The shop steward remarked that this was great, just what he had always wanted, and continued to consult with the men as the day wore on. Then, at twenty three minutes past the hour of three, twenty minutes after his shift had been sacked in mass, he addressed the strikers saying he had some bad news for them: he was going into work; and with that, he and three other men made their way to go inside. The shop steward, on passing two policemen on duty, said: "Watch this lot as they are in an ugly mood". Then he and the other men proceeded to enter the factory.

The strikers immediately held a meeting, sacking the shop steward and appointing someone else in his place. He went off to phone the union, informing it of the happenings. The new steward returned to convey the fact that the union still continued to recognise Peter Wescabber, as the official shop steward. The men naturally were angry at being told this and denounced the union as traitors for
A Plea For Solidarity—Don't Cross The Picket Line
Women Played A Large Part In Progressing The Strike
Children Suffered The Hardships Of The Strike
not endorsing the strike. A strike fund was set up and a picket imposed.

That night before eleven p.m. the men of the night shift got a surprise visit from a member of the management, accompanied by the shop steward. They told the men’s wives to get them into work or else they would be sacked, three-quarters went in, the other quarter joined the Strike.

A few days had now passed, and the picket line collapsed through lack of support. A meeting was held at “Two Blues” pub with officials from ACAS, the conciliation service, but, as the management refused to join the discussions, the meeting also collapsed and ACAS withdrew. After about two weeks Eddy got a visit from the Strike Committee who were determined to restart the picket line, he agreed to help saying he would be down on Monday.

By this time the factory had resumed full production using men sent up from the dole. The dole office had threatened to stop these men’s dole money for six weeks unless they went to the factory for interviews. Once there they were quickly signed on. The strikers tried to apply for unemployment benefit; they stated their case, saying they had a P45 and a letter of dismissal, but they were told that these were no longer considered as proof of unemployment.

On the picket line, as days passed, a pattern was beginning to emerge; lorries belonging to one-man firms were coming from the southern parts, with loads of powder. Most were T and G members and had not been told that a strike was on at the factory. The pickets let them through so the drivers could be paid for their derv, but only on the understanding that they didn’t return. Needless to say, the management merely hired new drivers, again not telling them that a strike was in progress. The police in the meantime were still making their presence felt; they had warned the strikers not to break the law on picketing, and kept obstructing them when they wanted to talk to the lorry drivers.

When the strike committee chairman phoned up the printers at Muraprint to ask for support from the Lithographic union, he was told that it was not forthcoming, but, he did get one scrap of information. Mr David Sackman, the main manager, had an interest in the printing works at Peterborough and apparently had been buying paper from CPC at 3rd grade, which sold at £80 per roll, then re-labelled it as 1st grade at the other end, making £1,200 profit on receiving the load. He not only cheated the workers at CPC out of their bonus, but was defrauding the company to boot. Not that the company were unaware they were being cheated: they knew. However, they preferred to do nothing about the matter, afraid that a court case would undermine the confidence of the share-holders.

One day there turned up on the picket line a chap called Paul Sitwell, ex-biker and SWP member, his habit was to move from strike to strike. In exchange for his keep, he would help out on the picket line. Eddy struck up a friendship with the unknown Paul.

Mike on the committee was pursuing a claim for unfair dismissal through the courts. The final decision was to be in front of Justice Cadman.
Moot Hall, in the city of Newcastle. His decision, when it came, was a surprising one: he said that the company had unfairly dismissed the man, because they had not treated all the men equally. Mr Wescabber and his three companions had entered the factory twenty minutes after they had been sacked, and had not been ejected from the premises, nor had they been disciplined. Therefore the company had broken the law. However, he couldn’t award the decision to the CPC strikers as to do so would be contrary to government policy. He added that he did not want them to appeal against this decision so he was taking away their legal aid certificate. The men were shocked, to say the least, as were their lawyers, but there wasn’t anything one could do about it. The case was dead.

Meanwhile life went on at the picket line. The routine always the same: there by seven a.m., light the braziers, and sit in the pallet and canvas cabin until a lorry turned up. Every second day, the men went to Durham City to collect their ration of furnace cake from the miners’ ‘Mansion’ on the outskirts of the town (as "Redhill", Durham Area Headquarters of the National Union of Mineworkers, is known). With winter coming on the brazier was an essential godsend.

Money was always a problem to the strikers and so, when the back to Jarrow march was mentioned in the press, the committee asked to join in, getting permission to collect money for the strike fund at the same time. Eddy and Keith Jason carried the strike banner, and Leslie the driver collected the cash along the route. A Jarrow rock band played to the crowd; some of the strikers talked to a couple of Labour MPs. Mr Michael Foot was there, but they did not get to meet him.

The committee was always on the look out for ways of raising cash. It started to go around Labour Clubs giving short lectures on the Strike. Both Eddy and Mike managed to collect a few hundred pounds by their talks. The best club was the 101 Club at Ferry Hill, started by four building workers. A film, a black and white government one called, “When the wind blows”, was being shown when they called there. Its scheme was about the aftermath of nuclear war; the strikers just caught the last half where the police execute some troublemakers.

A few days later, while on the picket line, Mike came over to inform Eddy that Kenny Mounter was dead. Kenny, who had been Eddy’s chargehand and friend, had been suffering under the new regime introduced after the strike started. He had died at home of a heart attack. Eddy cursed the capitalist system and felt like revenge.

The protest march to London was Terry Twiname’s idea. He reckoned that if they marched to London with a petition, just as the Jarrow Marchers had done, that it could help the Strike with the publicity for their cause. So, everyone agreed, Tommy, Mike, Chris Jackmanson, Eddy, and a chap from Newcastle called Fred who was a professional marcher and demo-man, set off after the Christmas was over. The first day they managed twenty-six miles and spent the night in a cricket hut, being waited on by some local Labour Party members.

Three days later they reached Leeds where NUFLAT had offices.
None of the local union men even knew that a strike was taking place; the men picketed the offices of the union and a town newspaper photographer took their pictures. Mike went in, to see the union leaders, who promptly fled into a back office refusing to see him. At Leeds four of the marchers dropped out. Fred had a leg complaint and was sent to hospital. Eddy and Terry carried on. At Doncaster they stayed for an unscheduled day, helping out on the picket line at the mining supplies factory, which belonged to Snipe, it wasn’t one of Eddy’s best days, for he nearly got run over for his trouble. They slept at the miners’ centre with fifty other people, by now they were definitely getting used to hard floors.

They passed on through Newark to Grantham where they saw Maggie Thatcher’s father’s old grocers shop, and continued down, down to Huntingdon and finally Potter’s Bar, always staying overnight at Labour Party gaffs. Leslie brought the strike banner down by car, for they were now ready to march to the Houses of Parliament with it held high.

There they were met by Mr Derek Foster, their local Labour MP, who was helping out the Strike by holding meetings and marches, one such march bringing masses of the public on the footpaths. Once inside Parliament the two men were ushered into the Opposition Leader’s study. They then shook hands with Mr Foot, said “Hello” to Mr Silkin, and asked if they could see Mr Benn. They were told by Mr Foot that “Tony is not in the house at the moment”.

They also had an impromptu interview with central radio. When asked what they would do next, if the strike failed, Eddy looked the woman reporter straight in the eyes saying: “We will have to try something else then, won’t we?” She nodded. However, Eddy meant every word, whatever the cost. The Strike and Kenny’s death must count for action.

Week twelve of the Strike arrived, and the union stopped paying out strike money. The men were now being allowed to collect unemployment benefit, but English Industrial Estates told them to quit the picket line situated on their property. The next day Eddy turned up at the picket line to find the brazier had been crushed and the cabin flattened to the ground. Judging by the slush marks in the wet soil, a forklift truck or lorry had done the dirty deed. The men kept the line going for one more week, but had to concede the obvious and so they gave up the picket line for good.

Eddy’s friendship with Paul Sitwell made him take a chance and he told him of his plan to punish evil employers. He had a little money of his own and knew he could borrow a thousand from his brother. As a member of a shooting club he already had some guns; he even showed Paul a small viable bomb he was working on in secret. Paul was impressed and agreed to help. Next day the two approached another striker, Tim Beam, an ex-para who was friendly with Eddy. He agreed to provide help but on a more limited scale.
Soon everything was in place, Eddy bought a 250cc Honda motorcycle and with Paul driving and Eddy the pillion passenger, with a thousand pounds and the guns they both set off the South Coast. As far as anyone knew, they had let it be known they were going to look for work. Only Tim Beam knew the truth. For his part he buried some clothing, spare ammunition and chemicals in a plastic bag.

Chapter Three
The South Coast

Travelling by bike was cold and draughty, but both men put up with stopping only for cups of coffee and petrol on the way. Their journey was nearing its end as they quickly sped through the southern countryside: they rested overnight at Sevenoaks and reached Eastbourne by the middle of the next day, putting up at a guest house. It was on being asked to sign his name on the register, that Eddy changed his last name to Bass.

The next few weeks were unprofitable for the money was running out fast and they seemed to be having no luck with robberies: most of the Post Offices they looked over seemed too difficult. Eventually Eddy robbed a Petrol Station with a gun in his pocket. A car, a yellow Cortina, pulled up for petrol and Eddy hid behind a wall until it had gone. Once it had left, he marched to the front door of the Station, ran inside, and held up the woman assistant; she handed over the cash, about £200, and Eddy ran off. As he was leaving he heard an alarm sound, but he raced to where he knew the bike was already revved, put the gun into the plastic bag which held the money, jumped on to the bike and they were away, soon out of sight. Eddy could not believe how easy it had been: in fact the easiest three weeks’ wages he had ever earned.

Paul ordered a taxi and took £80 out of the money to pay off a debt. On their way back, they passed the Petrol Station, which now had an unmarked car and two plain clothed men at the scene, evidently the police.

After a night’s rest, the men left the town: Paul by bike, Eddy by taxi. They met up again at a pre-arranged spot and headed for different pastures. Further North they found a guest house about ten miles from Stonehenge, but the area was no good, crime-wise; their luck was running out, and so was their cash, so they had no choice but to ride to town and sell the bike, which made them just £250 richer. They paid the guest house bill and bought two tickets for London.

On their arrival in London it was agreed they would try to rob a bank. Paul phoned to one in Finsbury Park and arranged an interview with the bank
manager to discuss the bogus £7,000 that he had inherited. The plan was for Paul to get into the manager’s office and make a hostage of him, taking him to the back of the bank and they would then loot the tills. Eddy would guard the front door of the building. The day of the robbery they entered the bank and Paul announced his arrival for the meeting. Eddy took a seat, unfortunately the manager came out of his office to meet Paul, and Paul had to bullshit the man for nearly ten minutes before he could get away. They both quickly hurried from the bank and went across to the underground which was to have been their escape route.

Later they phoned up Tim Beam, telling him they were coming back up to the North and needed a lift, Tim said he would meet them at 9 o’clock that night at a shopping centre on the Northern line. Paul and Eddy went back to the students’-cum-foreigners’ hall where they had a room, left a bag of clothing behind, loaded up with the rest of their gear and walked out leaving an unpaid bill.

They travelled North on the Northern line and emerged about half a mile from the shopping mall. Tim was already there when they arrived. They chatted for quite some minutes, then they all got into the van and headed for home, getting into Bishop Auckland on a Thursday morning. They still needed some money and Eddy remembered that CPC paid out on a Thursday, so, after a short rest, they prepared to rob the factory. Tim would drop the other two off near to where the factory was, then drive to a spot just over the fields from the buildings. By the time the crime had been reported they would be mobile.

At about two p.m. Eddy and Paul walked towards the factory pulling bikers’ helmets over their head as they went. They drew their pistols and charged the doors of the factory offices. As they entered, they noticed the office tea boy was sitting chatting to a representative but ignored them and forced their way into the corridor. The wages clerk slammed the door to the office shut in their faces, so they smashed the window and fired a couple of shots into the front wall. The clerks, all women, started to scream, one opened the office door and came out, she ran to the safe where the wages were kept and opened it. The two robbers loaded the pay packets into a plastic bag which they had brought with them. While they were doing that, Paul turned and fired a shot at the rep who was coming through the passageway door. The man backed away.

All of the £4,812 plus a few pence in wages safely bagged, the two men left the building, running down the road and then heading for the fields, unaware the police had been alerted almost immediately by the office tea boy, who had ran down the back corridor and into the factory and informed Mr. Colin Bland, the under manager, that an armed robbery was taking place. Bland phoned the police who were at the scene in five minutes.

Tim Beam saw the cars with the flashing blue lights and drove off, leaving Paul and Eddy alone on foot. As they approached the stile onto the roadway, a man, big and fat, wearing mufti blocked their way: “Is someone coming across the field then?”, he said mockingly. The range was about thirty-five feet; Eddy fired a single shot from hip level and the man let out a scream as
he fell backwards onto the grass verge. Eddy, followed by Paul, crossed over the stile and found an unmarked police car, white in colour, standing by the side of the road. A man emerged from it and stood up with one hand on the door and the other in his left pocket. As he withdrew it, Eddy thought he had a gun and opened fire. The man, a detective constable on his first job, dived to the ground and started to roll around pretending he had been hit, which he hadn’t.

Eddy told Paul to get the keys of the car from the man near the stile, which he did. In the meanwhile, eight policemen came running up to where Eddy was standing, he turned, levelled the revolver in their direction and faced them out. They got within two yards of him, then turned and fled. One of the policemen got into a police car, turned on the lights and blue lamp, and tried to run Paul down as he stepped into the road to open the driver side door. Eddy levelled his gun at the car; first it stopped, then backed away. Eddy let off a shot which penetrated the window.

Another car appeared from around the corner and tried to drive past the captured police car; the driver stalled it as he had seen Eddy level his pistol at it. He let fly with a single shot, at the passenger side door; it drove on and disappeared over the hill.

Eddy and Paul were now inside the captured police car and Paul proceeded to drive it away, but only got some fifty yards when another unmarked police car came out of a farm gateway and rammed them. All three men smashed into the windscreen. Eddy got the worst of it as, unlike the other two, he had no steering wheel to brace himself against. As he sank into the seat again, he estimated that the combined speed was close to fifty miles an hour.

The door was wrench ed open by someone, and handcuffs were slammed onto his and Paul’s wrists. Then they were yanked out by their arms and laid on the grass. A second pair of handcuffs were slammed onto their other wrists. Eddy felt the hard metal bite into his flesh and his hands went numb after a few minutes. He lay on his side looking in Paul’s direction; then he saw Paul heave as three policemen started to kick him. Other policemen started to kick hell out of Eddy, two were stamping on his head, one man kicked him in the kidneys, while another kicked him in the back of the legs. Eddy’s head was aching and his ear was torn; it went on until the police seemed to exhaust themselves.

They undid the handcuffs and cuffed Paul and Eddy to their own selves. A policewoman who was present said the two should be thrown to the police dogs.

Both men were placed into the back of police cars and taken away at speed to the Police Station. Eddy’s heavy workboots were removed and he was sat down, then a photographer came and Eddy’s coat was removed to reveal his gun holster which was duly photographed. Then he was allowed to use the toilets. As the police had kicked him Eddy’s bowels had given way, so he had to throw away his underpants and clean himself under the gaze of an older policeman. His clothes were taken for forensic and he was given a pair of police trousers and a
brown jersey to wear instead. Then he was taken to a cell and locked inside.

Over the next two weeks a routine occurred at night: the officers on duty in the cell block used various methods to break up any sleep pattern that he may have, rattling things, banging on the door when passing, in fact, anything that was capable of causing noise. During the day, after five p.m., he was taken for interrogation; they used a hard and soft approach. Eddy quite often broke down and wept. After two weeks, the police said they had all the information they needed to wind up the investigation; they had him right bang-on, having been caught with the gun in his hand. Eddy realised he and the others would be going away for a very long time. Paul had been particularly helpful to the police after he had been tricked into believing that Eddy had already given the driver's name to them, which of course was not true. He had in fact said there was no driver, as he and Paul had intended to hide out at Eddy's home, which was only a hundred yards down the road.

Once the police had all the necessary information, the three men were sent to Durham Prison to await trial. Tim Beam and Eddy were put into a room together, while Paul was being processed. Tim told Eddy he was sorry, but he had let the police know of the bomb and ammo he had buried. Eddy said that it didn't matter and that he was not too worry over it. For the first six weeks they were held in a hospital, then moved down on to the secure unit. The two suffered the shock of solitary confinement for twenty-three hours a day in a tiny four and half by fifteen foot cell. Eddy learnt while at Durham that the policeman who had died, James Packman DC, had been a drinking partner to nearly every officer in the Prison, no more needs to be said.

Twelve months passed, and a pre-trial hearing took place at Teeside Crown Court. When asked to plead guilty or not guilty, Eddy replied that he was "guilty to the charges, and proud to be guilty"; Paul pleaded guilty to the armed robbery, but not to murder; Tim pleaded not guilty to all charges.

After a further two weeks had passed, the full trial began. Eddy, having already pleaded guilty, remained downstairs. In the court-room, Paul said the blame was all Eddy's, Tim remained silent. The sentencing, when it came, was not unexpected: Eddy got three years for manufacturing explosives for unpeaceful purposes, fifteen years for armed robbery, life—with twenty years recommended—for murder; Paul got twelve years for robbery, and twelve for manslaughter. Some two weeks later they were all moved from Durham and sent to Walton Jail at Liverpool for allocation.

It was here at Liverpool that Eddy went the same way as Tim Beam: he suffered a nervous breakdown, developing an acute anxiety complex, which to take nearly seventeen years to put it right. Tim was released from prison eventually, after two and half years because of an health problem. Paul might have been released after eight years, Eddy didn't really know or care. He had his own problems to worry over. Prison was, he discovered, all about fighting boredom and depression. He managed to learn how to cope with both; he got through his
sentence, not well, but he survived just like everyone else did.

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Eddy reached the top of Cabin Gate, turned to the right, and walked past houses and a few shops on the main road, crossed over the railway bridge and into the small market town proper. Here shops line both sides of the street; when at the bottom he went left and started going uphill again; he would, after quite a while, come out into the countryside and a mile or two further on would have completed the round trip back home.

Eddy now was taking a look at the man he was and the young fellow he had been. Would he do the same again? He thought of his mother and what she had been through and he was sad. He thought of all the trouble of the Strike and the sorrow beyond and he thought of his dead friend. He didn’t know, he really didn’t know.

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**Eddy**

*An Autobiographical Note*

I was born in Gateshead on 23rd July, 1957. My first memories were, when I was about 3 or 4 years old, of living at 1 Balun Terrace. I went to the local school, though I remember nothing of those days.

Gosforth was better; I was older, and I remember the home and everything.

I was an ordinary kid, firmly in the middle of the class; I was a slow developer; I was also a loner, a habit I still have; I tended to be over conscious and serious.

My home at this time was 56 Woodbine Road. The School was Salter’s Road, under Mr. Nutman; it was good.

My father, Sepp, was a blacksmith in the shipyards, Swan Hunter; my mother, Jesse, worked as a weaver, or whatever.

I had a young brother, Keith, one and a half years younger, and a half (step) sister, from my mother’s first marriage, and she was 8 or 9 years older than I.

My young life was the same as all the other working class kids.

Mother and Father moved to Newcastle, to 134 Meadow Street; it was a bit of a rough area. We went to Elswick Road School. I spent 4 years there. I was a good attender and lost only 4 days in 4 years while there.

Mother and Father fell out and started divorce proceedings; it dragged
on through the courts for about 8 years. This was before the era of 'quickly'
divorces.

After my parents split up, the family fell apart. I stayed with mother,
Keith went with Father; Hazel went off to live with Grandmother.

But, before that, we moved out into the country, to live at Ogle, a small
village near Ponteland.

Mother got a job as an estate worker; my last few years at school were
spent at Coats Endowed, a church-sponsored school, and then at 7, Ponteland High
School for a final year.

From my first memories, I had always, at games and in the school yard,
been left-wing. I saw the idea of "winner takes all", that under-pinned competitions
and games, as unfair. The whole system seemed geared to everything revolving
around the winner.

This made me angry, as all I saw was one winner against 20-odd losers.
It was obvious that a system of co-operation was the best way to conduct affairs.

After leaving school, I went with my CSEs (one A, five Bs, etc.) to find
a job. I worked for a Landscape Contractor; the wages were bad, so were the
conditions.

It was here that I first came face to face with the 'Boss' class, I drew
unfavourable views.

The family moved once more, this time to Bishop Auckland. I helped
out on a piece of land that belonged to my uncle.

After a while I got a job at Elmridge Gardens. The work was excellent,
mostly work in glasshouses, etc. The wages were low, after tax and travel. I stuck
with it for two years, then left, and got a better wage at a local factory, CPC,
Chamberlain Phipps Coatings. I stayed there two and a half years. Then we went
on strike, as every year the work load increased, and the wages fell. The rest is
history.

By the time I was thirteen years old, I had begun to catch up on the rest
of the class, and got fair results at CSE.

I suppose that it became a competition by then; I had had a few knocks,
and knew the score.

Mother brought us up, as in so many Northern families, Father was an
aggressive and shadowy figure.

No one influenced me, except mother. From her I gained the ability
to take hard knocks, and turned me into a man.

My main source of knowledge came from books; I read all sorts. Later
I bought Orwell and Wells, Steinbeck, etc. Right wing politics I hate a lot of,
especially Hitler. It taught me a lot. All this taught me that man and the society
was inherently corrupt, and that little could be done to change it, human nature
being what it is.

THE END.
Kenny And Me

The robber barons of CPC
They took all
from Kenny and me,
My mate they robbed.
In talks they fobbed
us—with lies,
Their compliant spies.

The rises they promised
Were fully uncompromised.
In protest we struck
picket—to halt trucks,
The laws they broke
but,—never brought
to book.
Justice—forsook.

Kenny’s life they took,
my best friend’s—Sad end.
Not a tear was shed
No sympathy—led
me to take on.
The exploiters,
Head on.
Revenge!
I sought
with gun and bomb.
I fought.
After methods—: God!!!

_Not_ without effort
Our defeat profound.
State's heavy boots,
flattened us—
to the ground.

With Paul S. and Tom B.,
an unlikely three,
To hack at the roots,
of Capital's tree.

In the end—
we did prove.
But—: the Barons
called the tune.

Death,—with no remorse,
_was_ my discourse.
Our lives were shattered,
For a cause—:
_we_ felt mattered.

Oh!!! how we suffered,
main enemy unscathed
Left, to continue,
to dig the grave,
to plough the furrow,
that retinue.

_If_—: my life
I were to re-live,
Would I repeat?
Could I take on?
_All_ that pain and suffering,
For what is right,
Not evil.

"I Don't Know."
"I just don't know."

_David Ayre,
March 27th, 1993._