

Britain: Striking steelworkers talk to the World Socialist Web Site

Our correspondent
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Martin Fiddler is a welder at William Cook's Parkway heavy casting plant, where he is also the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union shop steward. He told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "The management took over the company following a hostile take-over bid in 1997. The chairman, Andrew Cook, bought the company back off the banks on the stock market.

"We have not had a pay rise in five years and have now had these wage cuts, so we could be down by £130 (\$184) a week in the space of six months if he gets his way. Last August, we naively believed management when they said they were in trouble, and that if we didn't take these cuts the company would be in dire straits.

"He first attacked the Heavy Foundry in January, asking them to take the pay cuts and he got a 100 percent rejection. After that in February, he decided to go for the IMF plant. In the IMF he has a nucleus of workers that are relatively new starters, so basically he was hoping they would sign the new agreement. But they turned it down. So there is a 100 percent vote for strike action in both foundries.

"He will not let us back at all now. He sent us a letter saying there was no way back and that you won't walk through this door as though nothing has happened. We would not sign away our work-to-rule or the maximum safety agreement. The foundry industry used to be relatively well paid because of the harsh conditions; it is noisy and can be dirty and there are a lot of particles in the air.

"Cook's accident record is terrible. It was in the local paper last summer that it has the highest record of accidents in South Yorkshire.

"We heard that Andrew Cook took a wage cut when he cut ours, and that his pay went from £500,000 (\$709,000) to £200,000 (\$284,000) or something.

When he came to cut our wages last August he turned up in a brand new Bentley, so everyone was cursing, and saying, 'It's all right for you, you've just brought a brand new car'. The next time he called for a pay cut, he turned up in a Volvo. He must think we're wet behind the ears. He'll be on a scooter next time he turns up to cut our wages.

"We are striking for two days a week. We asked the union to have a five-day strike, but they said they did not want to exasperate the situation."

Jerry Grimbley is also a welder at the Parkway plant. He said, "Andrew Cook told us we're lazy and that we don't work hard enough. I'd like him to do some of the work we have to do and then come back and say we are lazy. The only way we can get a decent wage is by killing yourself. We're on a piecework scheme. The more work we do the better off we are. So we are not going to sit in the canteen doing nothing are we?

"After the buy-out we had a profit share system where everyone was supposed to get the same share. It worked out that the management hit their targets but we didn't hit ours! There were little notices put up saying that you just missed your target. Better luck next time."



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