

PRESS MEN CLEARED BY OLD BAILEY JUDGE

A barrage of criticism was levelled at the Inland Revenue on Thursday when an Old Bailey judge stopped an eight-week trial involving alleged tax evasion by the giant engineering and construction company William Press & Sons and its executives.

Judge Charles Lawson QC directed the jury to return verdicts of not guilty of conspiracy to defraud against the company and 11 of its executives. He also directed that costs, expected to equal £1 000 000, should be paid for out of public funds.

The money will go to a team of 29 barristers and an army of solicitors and accountants who were engaged in the fight to defend what the prosecution had called "a deliberate and calculated plan to cheat the British tax payer of £500 000".

George Carman QC, for the company, said: "William Press has now been vindicated and shown to be totally free from fraud. It had co-operated with the Inland Revenue by providing all the material they would require in considering whether this prosecution was brought."

Counsel revealed that it had cost William Press alone £330 000 to defend itself from what he described as "an ill-conceived and ill-considered prosecution".

The judge also rapped the Inland Revenue for the way it had handled the prosecution. "I don't see why it should have been necessary for 150 of its officers to descend on the company in the way they did," he said. "It was over-reaction as far as they were concerned."

He was also critical of the way the company's executives had been arrested. The court heard they had been invited to a police station and then charges were preferred against them.

Anthony Hidden QC prosecuting, said the case was of great interest to the company's shareholders and more than 12 000 employees. He alleged that the fraud was carried out over a number of years. Although the plan was detailed and elaborate it was based on what was really a simple device - setting up dummy or shell companies that were used to avoid PAYE on employees' wages.

The judge said there had been references by defence counsel to delay, oppressiveness and "The Spanish Inquisition" on the

part of the Inland Revenue but he added: "On reflection I think those comments were quite unjustified. They had a duty to perform."

After two and a half weeks of submissions the judge said he had come to the conclusion that it would not be right to allow the trial to continue.

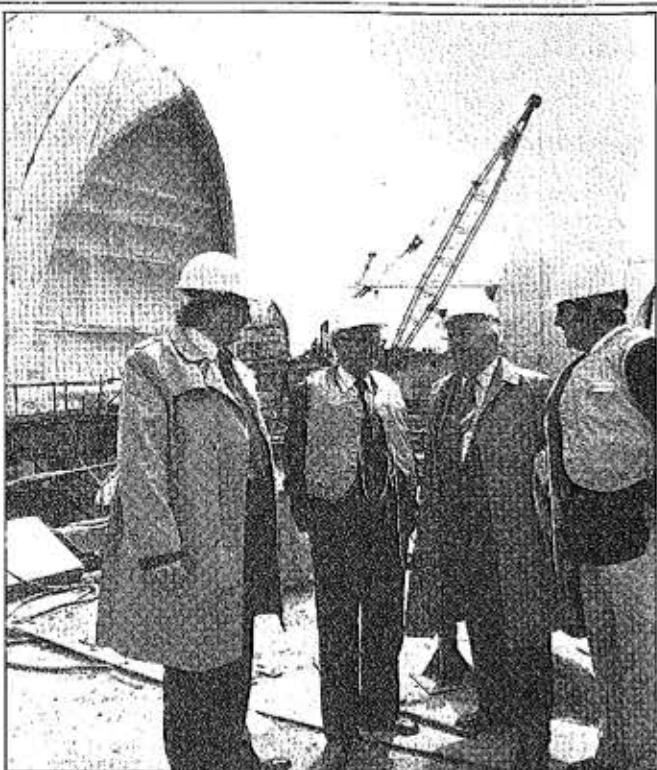
The acquitted men were Alan Gravelias, 42, financial director; Cecil Nightingale, 63, manager of the special services department; Ronald Reddy, 45, financial controller of the northern division; Dennis Searle, 51, general manager of the southern division; Norman Sherwood, 47, general manager of northern division; David Gibson, 56, Scottish unit manager; Ronald McGregor, 44, administration manager for Scotland; David McGregor Mills, 59, contracts manager for Scotland; Andrew Hendry, 47, wages supervisor for Scotland; Edward Swaysland, 50, an accountant; and Brian Buckley, 40, the company's taxation manager. They had all pleaded not guilty to conspiring together and with others unknown, between January 1972, and May 1977, to defraud the Inland Revenue.

LIVERPOOL DEFIANT OVER HOUSING

Liverpool's housing committee is planning to defy Government instructions to cut its housing programme expenditure by 13 per cent. The gesture of defiance came from the council's deputy housing committee chairman, Councillor Chris Davies, following a DOE announcement on 28 June.

The DOE circular indicates that Liverpool's £36 million housing programme will be reduced by £5 million in real terms next year. Such a cut could prevent the improvement of older terraced homes in the city and leave 1000 more vacant council houses a year unrepaired. It could also hit the entire programme for building pensioners' warden-protected homes.

There was an all-party agreement on the city council that the city needed £80 million this year, and Mr Davies described the Government decision as "over the top". "We intend to ignore the proposed cut and to tell Mr Heseltine just what Liverpool needs to solve its serious housing problems."



CONSTRUCTION SKILL IMPRESSES MPs

The enormous £800 million Thames Barrier project, hero or villain in the recent industry wages settlement depending on your politics, was visited by the Building All-Party Construction Study Group of MPs last week. The MPs were able to see for the first time the sheer size of a scheme that will have taken almost nine years to complete when it is opened in 1982.

They saw it from the "decks" of the piers, from river level, and from the depths of the piers themselves - nine metres below water level. If they were left in any doubt about the skills of the engineers who have built a scheme that equates to the cost of a new Channel Tunnel, they were diminished by a welter of figures - concrete cills weighing 10 000 tons, steel gates that have to fit 61 metre gaps with a tolerance of no more than two millimetres, 38 metre piles, and cranes hired at a cost of £100 000 a day to do the lifting.

Industrial relations among the 820 men now directly employed on the site were said to be excellent. Early difficulties over demarcation disputes had been resolved and representative shop stewards committees had prevented welfare and safety becoming an issue. There had been only one fatality on the site.

The Building All-Party group was formed in 1976 to focus Parliamentary attention on the activities and concerns of the construction industry.

Aluminium-covered pier housings tower over three of the visiting MPs from the Building All-Party Construction Study Group of MPs. Above, from left: Eric Heffer, Frank Allaun, Sir Albert Costain, and Building editor Neil Murphy.

CONFERENCE FELLOW GETS £2500

American architect-developers such as John Portman in the 1970s, and John Nash and Auguste Perret in Britain and France in earlier years, are models for architects in this country, who can now undertake development and building work in order to increase their control of the design process, according to Roy Turner, 25, a student from Newcastle School of Architecture.

Turner has been awarded this year's £2500 RIBA Conference Fund Fellowship and will use the money to fund a study to show how "once again architects can be the positive master of the physical environment".

The Conference Fund has sponsored the study so that a presentation of the results can be made at the RIBA conference titled "New opportunities" this autumn.

Explaining the decision to award the fellowship to a student for the first time, the committee said that younger members of the profession at the threshold of their career should have the opportunity to influence the far-reaching changes resulting from the relaxation of the code of conduct governing architects' professional behaviour.

EDUCATION THREATENED BY UNIVERSITY GRANT CUTS

The number of university places for architectural, town planning and building students could be severely affected by the cuts in grants set out by the University Grants Committee last week, writes Steve Maevicar.

Architectural and town planning schools have been singled out as one of the prime areas to take significant reductions in numbers as part of the estimated 20 000 places which will disappear following the UGC proposals.

The reason given by the UGC in a letter to all university vice-chancellors circulated last week, is that "There is evidence that existing numbers are greater than the prospects for professional employment in these areas."

Although most universities have yet to decide on details of the imminent reductions, the UGC has made specific recommendations in some cases. Aston University has been recommended to discontinue its architecture, planning and urban studies and to reduce numbers in its engineering department, which includes some building courses. A university spokesman attacked these proposals as being based on "totally inadequate information".

The committee also suggested greater co-operation between architectural departments in Bristol and Bath and the Town and Country Planning Departments at Strathclyde and Glasgow Universities.

No consultation

Neither the RIBA, the RTPPI nor the CIOB were consulted by the UGC and this week former RIBA education committee chairman Philip Groves challenged the committee to produce convincing evidence that there were too many architects; "have they tried to employ any good architects recently?" he asked. President Owen Luder pointed out that any decision to do with the levels of architectural student places is very difficult because students now in places will not graduate until 1986-87.

Salford University, which has been recommended to make a cut of over 30 per cent in its engineering department, where again some building courses will be affected, commented that there was no justification in

reducing courses in building when there are only a handful of them in the whole country.

Although most professors are keeping a low profile in the hope that they will escape the chopping block, the UGC has come in for some vociferous criticism from Professor Page, head of architecture at Sheffield. He warned that the UGC's policy of recommending cuts without specifying where or how extensive they should be will be taken by the universities as a *carte blanche* to cut back on courses, irrespective of their quality or importance. "It could send architectural education right back into the amateur league, and building research with it," he said.

OPPOSITION MOUNTS TO 'TRADITIONAL' MOVES

The Campaign for Traditional Housing, launched last week by concrete blocks and bricks interests to counter the advance of timber frame building, has hit some early snags.

The campaign's plan to distribute its literature through building society and estate agents' offices is in some doubt: in response to inquiries, three major building societies (Abbey National, Nationwide and Woolwich) told *Building* that it was not their policy to allow any displays other than their own material.

Estate agents will be recommended not to display the campaign's brochures either, if they seek the RICS's advice on the matter. The surveyors' body is puzzled that it was not consulted by the campaign, and

is concerned that the title of the House-Building Advisory Bureau could mislead the public into believing they would get impartial information. The RICS is especially angry at very misleading references to their home survey scheme, inadequately corrected - again without any consultation with the institution.

The RICS's chairman of Practice and Techniques, Stuart Povall, whose members survey secondhand houses, has said that there has been no trend which shows deterioration in timber homes and people living in them need not worry.

RIBA president Owen Luder commented on the campaign: "Traditional British housing has been constructed in a wide variety of materials and methods to cope with the very untraditional problems presented by the need for energy conservation and the new and changing social requirements in the late twentieth century."

Building Material Producers director general Nigel Chaldecott was guarded about the campaign since he has members in both camps. He commented however that in his opinion "new and old methods of construction should be able to coexist with each other".

MATERIALS 'PROFITEERS' ACCUSED BY UNION

Accusations of profiteering among materials producers are coupled with a call for massive capital investment in building materials in a new pamphlet from the General and Municipal Workers' Union.

In *Building Materials in Crisis*, the union claims that Government policies intended to restore "the free market" have

been abused and allowed large building materials producers to tighten their grip on the sector marking "fat profits" in spite of the slump.

The union claims that manufacturers have taken advantage of the recession to get rid of out-dated plants "throwing thousands on the dole" instead of reinvesting in new plant and equipment.

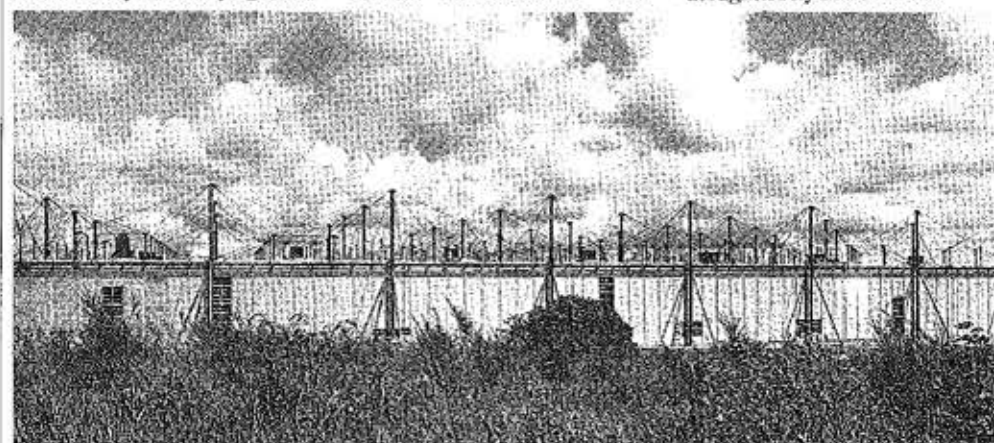
The union notes that cement companies have not abided by the recommendations of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission that they should limit profits to 10 per cent. "The figures show that in 1979 and 1980 their profits were between 15 and 20 per cent".

GMWU accuses other large companies of putting up their prices as fast and as frequently as they like. The pamphlet notes that flat glass, cement, gypsum and fletton brick prices have all risen faster than the retail price index in recent years.

The pamphlet also calls for a massive national insulation programme to be carried out over the next four years at a cost of £250 million and says that Government grants should be made available to householders and that companies be encouraged to insulate their offices and factories. The campaign, says GMWU, could save up to 25 per cent of UK energy costs or £4 billion.

The document has received a cool reception from Building Material Producers director general, Nigel Chaldecott. He points out that to date the Monopolies Commission has not found any of the companies in the sector into which it has inquired to be acting against the public interest.

In addition he was also upset about the trade union's allegations that companies had thoughtlessly laid off staff.



Latest of Richard Rogers & Partners' high-tech sheds to be completed is the Fleetguard engineering factory in Quimper, Brittany. Like Edward Mills' Hall 7 of the National Exhibition Centre and Foster Associates' proposed Renault factory, the enclosing fabric is suspended by rods from a series of steel pylons rising high above the roof line. The 8750 m² first phase was designed and built in only three years at a cost of £2.2 million, with Ove Arup & Partners as engineers, Northcroft Neighbour & Nicholson as QSs and Fleetguard itself as contractor. (The scheme was featured in Building 14 November 1980.)