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Reference:
D.182/61866/PJC.

Notes of a meeting held in the P.L.A. Building, Trinity Square on Wednesday 20th March 1968

Present:

Mr. R.H. Butler - Chairman

Mr. J.A. Boyce, Ellerman & Bucknall Steamship Co. Ltd.
Mr. P.M.R. Bingham, Cunard Steamship Co. Ltd.
Mr. M.J. Brazier, Asbestos Fibre Importers Committee
Mr. W.A. Cameron, Thomas Wallis Ltd.
Mr. W. Chapman, Furness Withy & Co. Ltd.
Mr. W. Exell, Thomas Wallis Ltd.
Mr. J. Futter, Port of London Authority
Mr. J. Harper, Scruttons Malvby Ltd.
Mr. R.T. Lewis, Asbestos Fibre Importers Committee
Mr. D.C. Randell, L.O.T.E.A.
Mr. H.M. Sabin, Canadian Pacific Steamships Ltd.
Mr. W. Scott, Asbestos Fibre Importers Committee

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In attendance - Mr. P.J. Camp

Mr. Butler opened by explaining that the meeting had been called to discuss the problem of handling asbestos in the Port of London and he requested Mr. Brazier to outline his proposals.

Mr. Brazier outlined the position regarding the handling of asbestos in other U.K. ports, as set out in the Agenda for the meeting, and commented that - with the improvement in packaging and the research into the problems of handling asbestos - the A.F.I.C. were anxious to explore any avenue whereby it might be possible to overcome the refusal to handle asbestos by certain sections of the London labour force.

Commenting on the present position in London and the circular letter distributed by Mr. Munday on the 27th July, 1967, Mr. Bingham stated that his Company had not been shipping asbestos because of the current difficulties and Mr. Cameron stated that, whilst his labour were at one time willing to handle the commodity in impervious bags, they would not go against the Union directive, which was aimed at preventing the handling of asbestos unless it was packed in metal drums or containers. Mr. Cameron also stated that he had discussed the possibility of re-opening discussions regarding the handling of asbestos in bags with the N.A.S. & D. and had been assured that no useful purpose would be served by such a move. Mr. Futter stated that palletised asbestos was still being handled by the Authority's labour at South West India Dock and mentioned the possibility that any attempt to persuade labour in other sections to handle the commodity could possibly have the adverse effect of extending the Ocean Trades embargo to the Authority's men.

Referring to the progress that had been made in unitisation, Mr. Scott produced samples of Canadian Crysotile Asbestos and South African Amosite Asbestos and illustrated that the former type of asbestos, as distinct from the latter variety, did not lend itself to press packing and palletisation. Mr. Chapman produced photographs of palletised carbon black (enveloped in cardboard) and suggested that this type of packaging might be a possible solution to the problem. The opinion was expressed, however, that in the present situation containers or drums were the only pack acceptable to the Ocean Trades men. Continuing upon the use of drums, Mr. Brazier stated that it had been estimated that this type of packaging would increase the price of asbestos by some 37% - some 5½ m. drums being required annually.

Possible ways of approaching the workpeople in an attempt to improve the current situation were fully discussed and both Mr. Harper and Mr. Butler expressed the view that - as the Factory Inspectorate's pamphlet "Problems arising from the use of Asbestos" did not state that there was no risk at all - and in consideration of the fact that the difference between Asbestosis and Mesothelioma and blue and white asbestos had already been fully explained to the men at Union meetings - the Ministry of Labour's publication would do little in itself to help solve the problem. The possibility of a trial period during which consignments would be handled under medical, and possibly Union, supervision - enabling dust counts to be taken - was also discussed but concern was again expressed that until the men could be assured that there was no risk at all, little improvement would be made. In this connection, Mr. Butler suggested that an approach should be made to the medical team which produced the Factory Inspectorate's pamphlet with a view to them establishing (a) which type of asbestos and packs can be handled ex ship without safety precautions being taken and (b) the precautions to be observed aboard ship when other asbestos is handled.

Mr. Scott stated that he did not consider that there should be any problem in getting a medical opinion stating that the handling of "white" asbestos did not give rise to any risk of Asbestosis in the conditions experienced in the holds of vessels and it was, therefore, agreed that the A.F.I.C. and L.O.T.E.A. would have further talks with a view to progressing the handling of Canadian asbestos in impervious bags, Mr. Brazier ensuring that the Committee would be well informed as to medical opinion. The Port Authority would not be involved since they were not concerned with the handling of Canadian asbestos and the existing Transport & General Workers' Union ruling was passed by the Ocean Trades and not P.L.A. representatives.