Spanish Revolution, 1936.

CHRYSLER WILDCATS workers’ councils in revolution... it makes a difference.

END OF THE LINE

KRONSTADT, 1921

WILDCAT DETROIT, 1973
A revolutionary situation now exists in one of the most strategic locations in the structure of American capitalism. During the past month, three Chrysler plants in the Detroit area have been the scene of wildcat strikes and other forms of direct action against the prevailing conditions of misery in the workhouses of spectacular society. As a result of the spontaneous action of Chrysler workers, lines have been shut down, supervisors have been fired, and factories have been occupied. All of this has taken place outside of and in defiance of the would-be mediators of the UAW bureaucracy. The operations of Chrysler have been seriously disrupted and it is clear that the whole industry is in danger: it can no longer manage those who are forced to produce its cars. Management and the UAW have lost control of the wheel. Someone else—the auto worker—is in the driver’s seat.

The workers of Detroit have quite literally thrown a wrench in the social machinery of advanced capitalism. Through their radical practice, they have sabotaged not only the production of ’74 model cars, but the collective bargaining apparatus which maintains and enforces their alienated labor. It is no wonder that the UAW-Chrysler contract contains a “no wildcat” clause. In bypassing and ignoring the contract talks now underway between the bosses of industry and the union bureaucrats, the Chrysler workers have rendered them irrelevant. As a result of the events of July and August, real initiative in the auto industry has passed into the hands of the workers, and everyone knows it. From the executive suites to the local union halls, the specter of an autonomous workers’ power haunts Detroit.
The current radical situation has its origins in the wildcats at Jefferson and Forge. The Jefferson occupation, which began when two workers seized control of a power plant in order to protest the abusive behavior of their supervisor, marked the beginning of a crisis of power, not only at Jefferson, but throughout Detroit. With the unanimous, spontaneous support of their fellow workers, the two occupiers exercised direct control over the main line. As a result, they brought an entire corporation to a standstill. The workers—and not management or the union—were in charge of the plant; they bargained from a position of strength and Chrysler had no choice but to capitulate to their demands. As one worker remarked, “We can shut this plant down any time.” The lessons of this occupation’s success were soon drawn by other workers.

The subsequent wildcat at the Forge plant again demonstrated the effectiveness of spontaneous, direct action. The Forge workers, like those at Jefferson before them, became the real power at their plant and organized their wildcat activity completely independent of any external authority. Despite the frantic intervention of a hastily formed tactical squad composed of the UAW’s chief cop, Fraser, Chrysler’s Osann, and the county court, the Forge wildcat movement held out for almost a week in protest over the hazardous and miserable conditions of their work. Fraser himself was taken completely by surprise; local 47 was not “supposed” to be militant. Appropriately enough, the (ex-) members of local 47 told him to “go to hell.”

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**Do You Ever Feel Like Killing Your Boss?**

- Tilt & Telescoping Steering Wheel.
  - Makes driver entry/exit easier and increases comfort.
  - Adjusts to many positions.

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**The Pleasure of Stopping Work Leads Nowhere Unless It Leads to the Destruction of Everything That Stands in the Way of What We Want to Do & What We Want to Become!**
The present crisis cannot simply be made to disappear, no matter how hard the UAW and management may try. The only “magic wands” these cowards have are the night-sticks of the Detroit police. But if the workers’ movement in Detroit is to advance, it must dispense with all its illusions. It cannot allow the initiative to pass back into the hands of the negotiators; it must keep up the attack and put the bosses constantly on the defensive. Unless the wildcats of the past few weeks extend themselves beyond the doors of one or two plants, they will be defeated in isolation. A situation has been created that could go far further than anything that has happened before in Detroit factories, and it must be taken advantage of by those who brought it about.

In communicating a radical analysis of the Chrysler wildcats, we speak to others as equals. We are not interested in “organizing” anyone, but in contributing to a common project: the abolition of existing conditions through the power of workers’ councils. The wildcat movement cannot escape the conclusions of its own actions. By pointing out the radical nature of what is taking place, we have revealed the possibilities for the future. We have also revealed who we are and what we want. Everyone must make their aspirations known. From now on, nothing can be the same.

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Workers at the meeting complained about floors slick with oil and water, electrical wires that were not insulated, faulty equipment.

One man said his wife had brought his children, aged 6 and 4, to the plant to pick up a paycheck from him: “My kids broke out in tears. They said ‘Why are you so dirty — so filthy?’”

Auto-Temp II. Automatically keeps the temperature inside your Chrysler at a preset comfort level all year long.

The actions at Jefferson and Forge went far beyond the immediate issues involved. What is at stake is no longer the fate of one supervisor, or the working conditions at one plant, but the collective future of everyone who is denied everything at present. The Chrysler workers have exposed the whole of society through their attacks on its industry. In Detroit—and everywhere—it is only the style of cars that changes. People are reduced to the status of mere objects, and it is only things that appear to be alive. Everywhere, dead material dominates life. The automobile is a star commodity in the commodity spectacle; its banal image promotes the generalized banality of capitalist society itself. But this wasteland is now in danger of being completely transformed. In refusing to remain at the level of the objects they produce, the Chrysler workers became the subjects of a radical history made by themselves. Their actions directly expressed a desire to change everything.

In completely reversing the perspective by which existing society is organized the Chrysler workers have opened a large hole in the prisons that enclose contemporary life. But even before this exit for escape can be widened, various concerned parties are working overtime to close it off once more. Like two old gangsters, management and the unions have joined forces against the workers of Detroit. This “new” line-up, where Chrysler and the UAW both block for each other, has surprised no one, least of all the Chrysler workers. What must be recognized, however, is that unions—by their very nature—stand in the way of radical change. The UAW and all the other unions have been playing capitalism’s ballgame from the beginning. They are one of the essential components in Power’s line and will always attempt to divert struggles into the “acceptable” realm of partial solutions and of “compromise.”

But while the union’s claim to “represent” the workers has easily been seen through, another equally dangerous threat remains to be confronted: the influence of the bureaucratic “leftist” sects. This influence was directly responsible for the recent fiasco at Mack. In a clumsily planned putsch, elements of the Stalinist WAM deliberately provoked police repression in a spectacular effort to forcibly place themselves (and their advisors from PL) at the head of the wildcat movement. In contrast to the earlier spontaneous
(and successful) wildcats, the “organized” action of WAM was an utter failure, even on a tactical level. Those Mack workers who had instinctively sided with WAM after two security guards had been attacked abandoned them as their “sit-in” appeared more and more ludicrous. In an attempt to bolster their numbers, PL imported outside shock-troops as pickets. Even though it was completely isolated from the Mack workers, WAM waited for the police in order to become “martyrs” for the PL cause. It is through such desperate measures that the Stalinists hope to build their movement; it is clear that they are prepared to drag others into the mess in order to take “credit” for the whole manipulative affair.

Predictably, the press has responded in a hysterical fashion, denouncing the presence of “radicals” at Mack. But what was really radical about the events of July and August had nothing to do with the attempted manipulations of the boring little “vanguard” organizations. For all their talk of “organizing the working class” and providing the “correct consciousness,” PL, IS, SWP, RU, and all the rest of the bureaucratic alphabet soup did not bring the Chrysler wildcat movement into being. In their own actions, the Chrysler workers have given a living, positive meaning to the old revolutionary slogan: “The organization of the working class must be the task of the working class itself.” The Chrysler workers did not have to be told what to do or how to “smash racism.” They responded in an immediate and radical way to confront the oppressive situations in their factories. All the separations—between black and white, young and old—that capitalism has used to its advantage were overcome by the wildcat movement. Even the press could not ignore the fact that workers of all ages and races participated.

Meanwhile...

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 15, 1973

French Police Seize a Watch Factory That Was Run by Striking Workers

Two lines of policemen keeping workers away from the Lip watchmaking factory in Besançon, France, yesterday after the plant was seized by the national police.

The implications of the Chrysler wildcats extend far beyond Detroit and its auto plants; the radical movement that is now underway must spread to all areas of society, to the office buildings and schools as well as the factories. Opposition to the present system of domination exists everywhere, and all that is needed is to break through everything that keeps people separated from each other. No matter how many tricks the old world has up its sleeve, all of us hold the trump cards that can put an end to the game played against us every day.
A revolutionary form of organization has clearly been present in the Chrysler movement. But if this movement (or any like it) is to succeed, it must become conscious of itself as a revolutionary opposition to capitalism. The workers of Detroit must define their own movement and generalize their struggle to other plants and other areas of society. An attack upon one supervisor can form the beginning for an attack against all bosses. An attack upon the health and safety conditions of one plant can become an attack upon the alienating conditions of work everywhere. It is not enough to ask for “better conditions” and more “responsive” unions. These demands, while they express a desire for change, will only preserve the existing system. Real change will only come through genuinely revolutionary action, through the creation of a new society, of a new world. This change obviously does not mean substituting one set of bosses for another. The idiots who talk about the “vanguard party” are only bureaucrats-in-the-making. We must create our own power through new social forms which will abolish hierarchy and social divisions. Bosses aren’t needed on the shop floor; leaders aren’t needed in revolution.

The wildcats of 1973 did not come out of nowhere. During the past two years, the auto industry as a whole has been attacked head-on by the new workers’ struggle: in the large-scale sabotage of cars at Lordstown, Ohio in 1971, in the wildcat strikes that have been occurring more or less regularly in Detroit factories, and in the daily violence against authority that happens on the shop floor, the same desire to put an end to existing conditions has made itself public. The Jefferson and Forge workers are not alone—every day, new possibilities for action are being recognized and explored, and it is clear that in spite of all the efforts of management and the union to keep the lines moving, things will never return to “normal.” The workers have taken the first steps and by doing this they have put the forces of order on the defensive. All they need to do is continue where they have left off. Already radical activity in many plants has reached the level of counter-planning, where workers have asserted complete control over the line by organizing and coordinating sabotage.
But this movement for a new world, for a total change in the way people live, has not yet come to an end, and in fact, its chances for success have become even greater. The possibilities of a modern revolutionary movement in an advanced industrial society were revealed in the May, 1968 explosion in France, where the workers’ occupation of factories was able to bring the government and the economy to a complete halt. The Renault and Peugeot auto plants were particularly vital centers of independent strike activity. Throughout France, people began to question everything about life in capitalist society; even after the movement was ended by a united front of the government and the trade unions, it was clear that something had changed and that the old world could no longer sleep peacefully.

Wildcat strikes are an important beginning towards the seizure of the means of production, which forms a basis for the revolutionary transformation of society. When workers realize that they can carry out their own activity without having to rely on bosses, the stage is already set for even more radical actions. The recent occupation of the Lip watch factory in France shows what could happen when workers start running the machines for their own purposes—despite police repression, the Lip workers have managed to continue producing and selling watches, paying themselves out of the money they receive from sales. It is only a short step from shutting down a factory to starting it up again under conditions of self-management.

The revolt in the auto industry, consciously or not, stands in a direct historical relation to the sit-down strikes of the 1930's, many of which took place in the same factories that are presently being subverted. These spontaneous actions, which often occurred without union sanction, involved thousands of workers and effectively shut down all normal operations, paralyzing the entire industry. Self-defense and the distribution of supplies and food were organized by the workers themselves; the factory floors became places where people danced instead of worked.

All of the forces of the old world have tried to suppress the achievements of genuine revolutionary movements, to the point where the meaning of "socialism" has been confused with its bureaucratic counter-revolutionary distortion in such countries as the USSR, China, and Cuba. But wherever social conflict has existed, there has always been a radical third force which has fought against the combined lies of the bosses, the Leninist parties, and the unions. From Kronstadt in 1921 to Hungary in 1956, workers in various countries attacked the capitalist or bureaucratic order with organizational forms of their own creation: workers' councils which ran all of social life and which were democratically controlled by general assemblies of workers. Precisely because they were created independent of all outside leadership, the councils were the enemies of all those who tried to speak in the name of the workers in order to use them for their own ends.

The Spanish Revolution, which occurred at the same period as the sit-down strikes in America, offers the most complete illustration of this self-management. Workers in all areas of industry took over and managed their factories; coordination between various plants and sectors of society was effected through the election of delegates who carried out decisions that the workers had already made.
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