

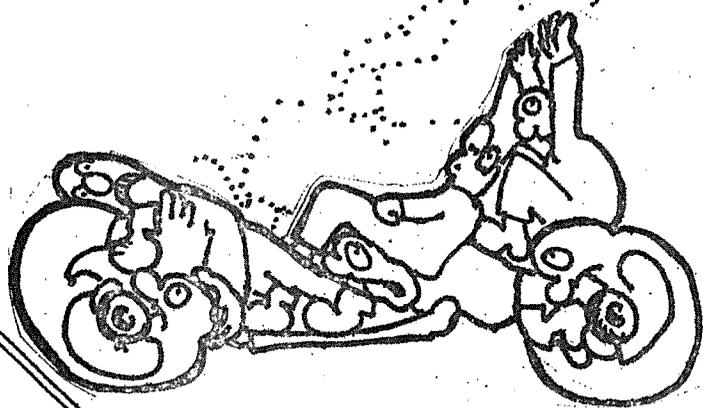
SOLIDARITY

Motor Bulletin

10p

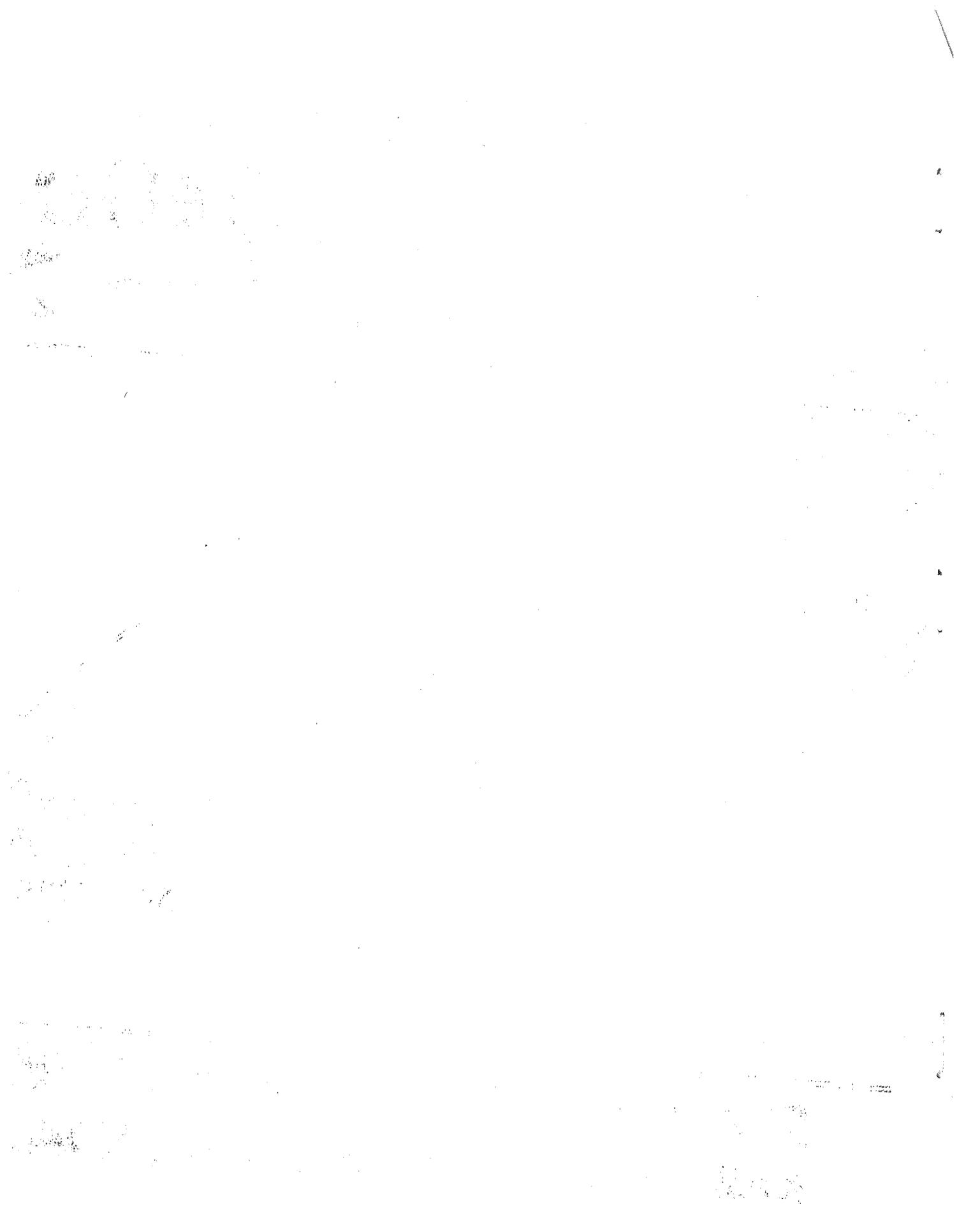
Number 7

This is a special motor car.
It is made by putting
workers in restricted
positions.



Only bosses and
bureaucrats and full-time
officials can ride in this
car.

STRUGGLES AT STRASBOURG AND STE.-THERESE, CANADA.



TO OUR READERS

This issue of our MOTOR BULLETIN deals with struggles at two General Motors plants. Although separated by thousands of miles these struggles had many features in common, for example the role of the trade union bureaucracies, the managements' use of the world-wide downturn of 1974/75 to go over to the offensive, and the methods used by workers to resist.

It is no coincidence that the present growth of production has been associated with an upturn of shopfloor militancy. Managements in the motor industry throughout the world have used the recession (and the fears and insecurity it created) massively to increase productivity and to cut labour costs. They are now reaping the benefits.

For example operating profits at Vauxhall (GM's British subsidiary) for the first half of 1977 were up to £8,498,000 (from £6,652,000 in the first half of 1976).* The signs are that current profits will be higher still.

The situation at Ford of Britain is even better/worse. Profits for 1976 were £121 million, from £14 million in 1975, while vehicles produced per employee went up from 7.97 to 9.47. Meanwhile direct labour costs per vehicle went down from £469 to £461, and this does not even take the effect of inflation into account. (See Ford Annual Report and Accounts, 1976) There is every sign that this process is increasing. For example Ford US profits are up by about 20% in the first half of 1977, even compared to the record levels of 1976.

Figures of this size make pathetic nonsense out of the national trade union demand at Ford and Vauxhall for a 15% increase in basic rates. Even if achieved in full, such claims would leave Ford and GM workers worse off than they were before. Unless, of course, the shop floor takes a hand...

* * * * *

The article by Strasbourg GM workers is a slightly abridged version of a French text, available from 'Echanges et Mouvement' (B.P. 241, 76886 Paris, Cedex 18). The text by Walter Johnson about the strike at the GM plant at Ste Thérèse, Québec, Canada is reprinted from 'Our Generation' (3934 rue St. Urbain, Montréal, Québec, Canada)

* This is only the tip of the iceberg. There is every sign that GM, along with other motor manufacturers and indeed multinationals in general, have been engaged in a massive operation to cover up real profits. For example a Federal Enquiry is under way in the US into alleged tax frauds at GM (totalling nearly 500 million dollars) based on understating income. Financial Times, 4/3/77.)

As always, we are anxious to hear from motor workers anywhere in the world with information and feed-back of all kinds. Money would be welcome too! We hope to hear from you.

SOLIDARITY MOTOR BULLETINS

(available from address below, 10p plus postage)

- No.1 : FORD STRUGGLES 1973 (Amsterdam, Antwerp, Bordeaux, Cologne, Genk, Melbourne). The rank and file speaking to the rank and file.
- No.2 : UAW - SCAB UNION. Some struggles at Chrysler's.
- No.3 : DATSUN - HELL'S BATTLEFIELD. The struggle of Japanese car workers against powerful employers and a rigidly hierarchical and paternalistic management.
- No.4 : WILDCAT AT DODGE TRUCK (Detroit, June 1974). How the struggle against work itself is playing an increasingly important role in modern industrial disputes. The 'radical bureaucracies' and their relation to the rank and file movement in industry.
- No.5 : STRUGGLES AT SEAT (Barcelona). The role of the state in modern production. The workers' reactions.
- No.6 : FORD (UK) : 1976-1977. The year of the Fiesta. The struggle at Ford, Valencia.

* * * *

THE LORDSTOWN STRUGGLE by Ken Weller. What happened at this General Motors plant in 1972. The new tendencies in production and the developing critique against work itself. (20p + postage)

TRADE UNIONISM OR SOCIALISM by John Zerzan. A detailed documentation of how deeply, cynically and consciously the trade unions have become pillars of the established order and obstacles to social change. (10p + postage)

STRIKE AT GENERAL MOTORS STRASBOURG, MARCH 1976*

This pamphlet was produced by people who got to know each other during the strike - about 10 initially, five of whom did most of the work, then fifteen in the final discussions. They are mostly in the C.F.D.T. but some were in the C.G.T. or non-unionised (C.F.D.T. is the French Democratic Confederation of Labour; C.G.T. is the General Confederation of Labour.).

Our main intention was to inform ourselves and those who struggled with us. No-one could be everywhere and see everything. We thought it was important to understand our strike: what was new in it, its limits, what it changed. This is why we focus on the strike itself.

FACTS AND FIGURES

G.M. in the world

Although it has only the third largest cash turnover in the world (after 2 oil firms, Exxon and Royal Dutch) General Motors may be described as the world's most important industrial company, in terms of production and of work-force.

In 1975 the company's turnover totalled 35.7 billion dollars, compared ** with 31.5 billion in 1974. Net profit after tax was 1,253 million dollars, compared with 950 in 1974. - an advance of 32%.

Share prices rose from 30 $\frac{3}{4}$ at the end of 1974 to 58 $\frac{1}{2}$ at the end of 1975. The dividend on ordinary shares rose to $\$4.32$ from $\$3.27$.

Total sales of cars and lorries throughout the world were 6,629,000 in 1975, as against 6,690,000 in 1974.

Lastly, the average number of employees of the company during 1975 was 681,000, compared with 734,000 in 1974. We note in passing that the increase in dividends, in spite of a slight decline in production, was achieved thanks to the liquidation of 50,000 jobs.

The recovery in the motor industry, if it profited the shareholders, did nothing to solve unemployment.

* Translated from a pamphlet written and edited by a group of General Motors workers and published by 'Uss'm Follik' No. 91 (101 Grand Rue, 67000 Strasbourg, France).

** In the USA a billion is 1000 million.

G.M. in Strasbourg

Year	No of Workers	Turnover In Francs ¹	No of Units Produced	Turnover per Customer		
				OPEL	FIAT	VAUXHALL
1967	346					
1968	1698	11,325,798				
1969	1510	96,438,177	117992			
1970	1173	87,064,695	85695	74,543,081	4,424,177	8,097,437
1971	1059	128,636,387				
1972	1049	128,199,807				
1973	1141	162,431,535	149427	128,784,461	24,527,416	8,801,502
1974	761	94,391,893	71528	67,771,908	17,370,112	7,407,662

BACKGROUND

In 1967 the General Motors Corporation decided to establish a plant in Strasbourg for manufacturing automatic transmission units, initially for Opel motors, later for Vauxhall and Fiat as well.

There were three good reasons: 1). the proximity of the Opel factory at Russelsheim, near Frankfurt; 2). the site was placed at their disposal gratis by the Autonomous Port of Strasbourg; 3). labour was relatively cheap - they could take their pick from the traditionally hard-working people of Alsace.

The project, which was greeted with inflated publicity in the local press, envisaged 3,000 new jobs in the region. This figure was never reached, any more than the theoretical annual production of 300,000 units.

An Information Bureau hand-picked the first recruits, seeking out information in town halls, and from candidates' neighbours. (Many came from the country, from up to 60 kilometres away, which had an effect on the atmosphere in the plant). The first recruits were sent to the G.M. Opel plant at Russelsheim for training. After sorting them out, the firm acquired a sufficient workforce to begin production on D-day.

Production started in June '68. The factory was officially opened in a wave of publicity with reporters, politicians, and the American Ambassador to France.

There were three unions in the plant - C.G.T., C.F.D.T. and independent (later to become the C.F.T.) - plus the C.G.C. for staff. The first elections to the Works Council² on June 20, 1968 resulted in one C.G.C., one Independent,

-
- 1). Exchange rate about 8½ to the pound.
 - 2). In France, a Works Council has to be set up where more than fifty workers are employed. A management representative takes the chair. From 3 to 11 members, according to the size of the plant, are elected by the workers, on Trade Union lists for 2 years at a time. The Works Council is entitled to consultation and information on general and internal administration. Meeting time is paid.

three C.G.T. and one C.F.D.T.

By early 1969 work was going on in two shifts, plus some Saturdays. But from the end of that year difficulties began to appear due to wrong sales forecasts. This reduced schedules.

From 1970 to 1972 the schedules changed in accordance with the needs of production. There were a few small strike movements. At that time, unity was not on the agenda between the C.G.T. and C.F.D.T. and the two office-workers on the Works Council collaborated openly with management, which led to conflict inside the C.F.D.T. During this period repression was used against militants including transfers, suspension and dismissal, and many of them left G.M.

In 1973 the first important action occurred with, this time, unity between the C.G.T. and C.F.D.T.: there was a go-slow, renewed daily by a mass meeting. Result: the bonus handed out at the discretion of the management was replaced by a fixed bonus, as well as a wage increase varying from 7 to 17%. Following this struggle, Dercaine, Personnel Manager since 1968, was transferred.

1974 was a year of crisis in the motor industry. Workers had to accept a 32-hour week and compulsory leave. After that, about 400 left. The trade union sections were partially disorganised. The C.G.T. (3 members) and C.F.D.T. (2) were then in the majority on the Works Council, which led to numerous conflicts with management, including a court-case that is still going on.

Early in 1975 the situation in the motor industry was improving, and management decided on a restructuring of certain services. Among others, the teams of power workers, who operated three 8-hour shifts, were reduced, but their work load remained the same. As a result, in June 1975, one week before the holidays, the power blokes stopped the air compressor. Management 'locked out' the men two days before the holidays. It was a defeat for the time being, but this form of action was to be remembered.

After the holidays, massive recruiting. Following a government bonus for taking on young workers, management experimented by signing up youths who had not yet done their military service. This was to change the atmosphere in the plant.

1976 looked promising for management. In their 'Happy New Year' letter to us they regretted the difficulties and 'sterile conflicts' of the past year and expressed hopes for a loyal, honest stable work force - most sincerely!

3). Trade Union Sections: Organisations of the most 'representative' unions within the factory. Functions: representation, and internal union activities.

STRIKE DIARY: EVENTS AND DOCUMENTS

INFORMATION TO PERSONNEL

Work Schedule for the Afternoon Shift

In accordance with the undertakings given to the delegation yesterday afternoon, opinions have been sounded among the personnel concerned. Out of 165 people consulted, 103 came out against a timetable of 8½ hours (from 3pm to midnight, with ½ hour break) and 62 in favour.

We should like to point out that the majority of the people consulted would have wanted to work 8½ hours, but on condition that the shift should end at around 11pm. As this was not possible for reasons explained to the delegation, it was decided to take account of the wishes of the majority of personnel consulted and bring back the afternoon shift time to 8 hours, i.e. from 3pm. to 11.30pm., this to take effect from Monday 8 March.

The management has taken into account the wishes of the majority of the morning shift in bringing back the timetable for starting work from 5.30 to 6am. Unfortunately it is not possible to comply with this wish without extending the afternoon shift time-table by one half-hour.

Personnel Manager.

Thursday March 4th 1976

Distribution of the leaflet calling for a strike at 6 o'clock, after stoppages each day since Monday over the new timetables, and management's refusal to let the shifts overlap. The C.F.D.T.-C.G.T. leaflet added:

Wages: G.M.'s business is going very well; production has gone up 52% in 2 years, but wages haven't.

Increases of 3.5% are ludicrous compared with price rises: 15% on electricity, 8% on gas, not to mention CANTEEN CHARGES, 5.3%.

According to M.Fourcade, car production is recovering. We notice this in the work speeds, but not on our pay-slips. We are right to demand an increase of 250F (£30) per month: going back to a normal timetable will not enable us to keep up with the cost of living.

Schedules: The evening timetables do not allow for normal rests, going home time is 1 or 2 in the morning.

Thanks for the half-hour 'freely offered' following our strike, but it's not enough.

Work-speed: it's being intensified continually; production is going up and up...

AT G.M. LIKE EVERYWHERE ELSE YOU GET NOTHING WITHOUT A STRUGGLE, AND PAST LESSONS PROVE WE MUST ALL ACT TOGETHER.

- 250 F. for all; overlapping shifts; end of inhuman speeds.

A small group of workers gathered round the Delegates⁴ and went round the various shops, gradually gathering strength. At 10 a.m. there were about 200 strikers in the canteen, greeting the non-strikers with boos. Some of them didn't go back to work.

After eating, we settled down to football or a siesta, and the unions organised a meeting at one o'clock about continuing the strike. Out of 207 who voted (not all the strikers took part), 197 were in favour of carrying on the strike. At 2.30 p.m. the afternoon shift, which had originated the action, came in and declared unanimously in favour of going on with it.

Friday 5th

We met at the union office at 6 a.m. No overalls today! After going all round the workshops, where a lot of non-strikers hid behind their machines, there were about 300 of us. At 8.30 we greeted the office workers, who were coming in to work, by blocking the entrances. Then we occupied the office corridors, waiting to see the management, who had locked themselves in. At 10 a.m. Vange, the General Manager, managed to get away, protected by the factory security guards. About 1 p.m. we got fed up waiting and went en masse to Dalbourg's office, where there were some clashes with the bluecoats defending their master. As the door was shut, the metal-workers removed a pane of glass, enabling us to put an end to the self-sequestration of Dalbourg.

Once inside the office, the delegates opened the dialogue. Some of the lads settled down in armchairs. Everyone gathered round, and Dalbourg was completely surrounded. The lads were not afraid to tell him what they thought; he couldn't stop fidgeting in his chair, appealing to the delegates to keep us at a distance. Finally seeing that we were wasting our time, we left the office. We agreed to meet again on Monday morning, firmly resolved to pursue our action.

Monday 8th

300 at the union office. After going round the sections, where a few blokes joined us, we went on to the foundry, then to the power control centre where our objective was - to wit, the compressor that supplies the compressed air necessary for the functioning of the machines. The compressor

4). Personnel Delegates are elected for one year, to make representations to management. They are, perhaps, the nearest thing to Shop Stewards in France. They are a legal requirement where more than 10 workers are employed.

was on. If it was stopped at once, the furnaces would be smashed, as well as some machines that were still going. We gave the management an ultimatum: if negotiations were not opened within two hours, we would cut off the compressed air supply.

At 9 a.m., since the blokes who worked in the power centre did not want to take responsibility for switching off the air, we screened off the stairs leading to the basement, protecting ourselves from the gaze of Michkney, Head of Protection, and Dutcher, Head of Power Supply. In a group of about ten, we went down to close the valve. A few minutes of agonising suspense... the temperature-gauges rising... then suddenly everything came to a stop. We gave a yell of victory. We'd done it: the whole factory was just ticking over.

In the course of the morning, some strikers proposed a Strike Committee to organise the struggle. The C.F.D.T. was in favour, as well as some C.G.T. delegates. But the arrival of the C.G.T. official, Bauer, put paid to it: "The initiative in the struggle must remain with the union." Shortly afterwards membership forms for the C.G.T. appeared. The campaign for '3 million members' was in full swing!

In the afternoon we walked around, played football, etc. A union representative and others produced a 'solidarity' leaflet. Management put up a notice detailing a progressive lock-out plan. In the evening, we settled down to spend the night in 'comfort': first night in occupation.

Tuesday 9th.

Wakened at 4.30 by a siren. We went to the entrance to greet those who were still working. In the morning we had some trouble with the company cops. The bluecoats were ferociously guarding the entrance, and tried to stop us bringing in sleeping-bags. So we occupied the gate-house and removed the gate, which was taken to the power centre.

We were getting organised. There was a proposal to form committees. The C.G.T. agreed, on condition that they should be headed by the delegates. Their small number sometimes meant they had to sign on two committees at the same time. There were committees for solidarity and finance, publicity and public relations, organising the occupation, internal matters and entertainment. Only a small number enrolled on them.

About 1 p.m. management organised a meeting with non-strikers' delegates (mostly supervisors). The first attempt was abortive as the strikers wanted to be present. The second time, the strikers were there. Management confirmed the progressive lock-out. But their trial of strength between strikers and non-strikers did not go too well. Vange declared: 'I thought I was dealing with honest, loyal workers, but I see we can't discuss anything here!'

At 2.30, delegates met management, who proposed a meeting every day at 11 a.m. as well as a vote by all shop-floor workers for or against the resumption of work.

In the afternoon, delegates from the Civil Servants (many political militants) came to give us their support; it was a national day of action for them.

Leaflets were distributed giving an account of our action so far and the list of demands. They were handed out at Clark's where several G.M. workers used to work, and where contacts had been made at the time of the recent strike over job security, and at Telic. The leaflet was well received.

During the night, the security guards welded the entrance gate. We smashed it..

Wednesday 10th

150 of us there in the morning. No one working in the assembly and production shops. The mass meeting answered 'NO' to management's request that we cease the occupation of the power centre.

11 a.m.: delegates-management meeting. Management asked delegates to put a stop to illegal actions (making a row in the workshops, removing the gate). Management agreed to consider the demand for 250F. and repeated the point about the mass vote.

Visits from other factory delegations in the afternoon. An unplanned collection at Clark brought us 500F.

Thursday 11th

The vote cooked up by management was rejected again and a fourth demand was added to the list: pay for the time on strike. Management promised to announce its position on the 250F. question on Monday morning, and sent out its first letter to workers, giving its account of meetings with delegates.

Preparations for the weekend were made by the Public Relations and Entertainments Committees. A leaflet was written, approved by the strikers who were present, and printed in the evening at the C.F.D.T. local office. We made contact with the Co-op.

Friday 12th

Morning: Transport to the plant has been cancelled. The effect was seen in the number of strikers: about 60 at the mass meeting. The C.G.T. says the leaflet produced yesterday is terrible! So they printed another, or rather the same one, without the last paragraph, and with the C.G.T.-C.F.D.T. imprint prominently displayed - this hadn't been put on the original draft and so had not been printed, although we had put 'Printed at the office of the C.F.D.T.' - hence the outrage.

The committees met to prepare for the weekend. Opinions differed on whether we should take over the kitchens to make a cooked meal. In the end we opted for a kind of barbecue in the car-park (to be adjourned to the bike sheds, if it rained). Of course it would all be free.

A decision was also taken to collect money in Kleber Square on Saturday morning because someone thought that was when most people did their shopping.

Later in the morning, we handed out leaflets at Bougard and Alcatel (3 teams, for three 8-hour shifts). At mid-day, money was collected at the Co-op, where the trade unionists invited us to eat.

Afternoon: Management climbed down. For the first time in Strasbourg, G.M. management agreed to negotiate, before any return to work.

The same day, the delegates and a section of the workers began to put emphasis on negotiations, saying that we had to negotiate because that was what we were struggling for. Some said 'No strike for the sake of striking'; others 'No negotiations for the sake of negotiating'. Some came out in favour of negotiations while others were trying to develop the struggle. The first hint of defeatism also appeared: 'This weekend, there won't be anyone here!'

Money was collected at Bougard. The Force Ouvriere delegate gave us 10F. and said "Surely striking is not the only way".

Saturday 13th

One of the lads, helped by two mates, collected money in the local market. The rest went by car to the town centre, sounding their horns all the way. But as we didn't have enough cars, we didn't block the traffic as planned. In Kleber Square we felt a bit shy. We brought out our placards, the C.F.D.T. delegate took the load-hailer, but the square was practically empty. We spread out along the sides of the square, in front of the big shops, handing out leaflets and collecting money. At twelve we went back to eat. It didn't exactly convert the masses!

In the afternoon we brought provisions at the supermarket. Raised eyebrows at the check-out when we appeared with trolleys filled with food and assorted drinks. Later they got used to seeing our supply convoys. Meanwhile, some comrades from outside were busy contacting singers and musicians.

A small group of strikers, supported by some comrades, went to the Place de la Bourse to a meeting against black-listing (Berufsverbot) in the German Broadcasting Service; to talk about our struggle. An appeal for financial solidarity was made. Our funds had never been so well supplied.

Sunday 14th

Delegates-management meeting at 11 - no result. We didn't give a damn! Today we were having a good time.

In the afternoon we had our 'Fete'. Friendly atmosphere. A picket stayed to occupy the powere centre.

Strikers brought their families. A lot of political militants were seen. Some discussions between groups, but the mood was more concerned with football,

12 March, 1976

LETTER TO ALL SHOPFLOOR WORKERS

Dear Sir/Madam,

You have already received a letter informing you about the situation in your (sic) factory.

No doubt there are three main questions you would like to ask about the steps management is taking:

- Why is the management doing nothing?
- Why are certain employees able to go on working?
- Why is the management refusing to pay those willing to work?

Before trying to answer, it must be pointed out that, whatever Management decides, it must and will remain within the law.

These measures, which may seem arbitrary to you, have become necessary for reasons which we shall explain.

1. You wonder why some people are still working.

Management provides work wherever a reorganisation of work is possible, where compressed air is not needed, and where effective work can be done. This will enable production to get under way as soon as the factory is re-opened.

2. With regard to the problem of partial or complete payment for people obliged to stay at home because of the closure of certain shops, Management is adhering to the policy it has always followed. This policy consists of offering work to all who want it as far as this is possible and after taking account of reorganisations of work. Consequently, it is clear that after all possibilities have been exhausted, Management cannot give pay for hours not worked.

Management regrets having been obliged to take these steps. However, it will continue to seek solutions with a view to settling the conflict as quickly as possible...

C.F.D.T.

C.G.T.

GENERAL MOTORS ON STRIKE

SOLIDARITY

The workers in the G.M. plant have been taking industrial action since Monday 1 March. Following the management's persistent refusal to negotiate, the workers have been effecting a complete stoppage since Thursday 4 March and stopped the compressor on Monday 8th (which prevents most of the production machines from functioning).

- Half an hour overlapping for the two shifts.
- Improvement in working conditions and reduction of work speed.
- Rise of 250F. for all.

This company is in no position to refuse fully justified demands.

- G.M.'s quotation on the Stock Exchange has more than doubled in 1 year.
- The price of cars has increased by 52% in 2 years, but not wages.

And don't forget the factory was installed on the cheap, at the taxpayers' expense. And in 1974 this firm made the workers put up with a 32 hour week on starvation wages for 9 months.

In 1976 it would like to go on paying starvation wages, but for 50 hours per week.

In actual fact the starting wage is 1600F. a month on the basis of a 40-hour week. Which means workers are practically forced to do overtime to survive, given the continuous rise in prices.

But what will happen to their survival when our overtime isn't needed any more?

The struggle at G.M. could be long and hard seeing that management is planning a lock-out.

There is no such thing as an isolated struggle when workers go on strike. The result of their struggle will affect workers as a whole. The struggle going on at G.M. is EVERYONE'S.

Show your solidarity by coming to see us... publicising our struggle... contributing to the solidarity fund.

barbecue, folk-music, than with sectarian polemics. Several hundred people came to demonstrate their solidarity. For the occupying group, the fete went on into the night. Atmosphere warm, morale high.

Monday 15th

Quite a number at the morning mass meeting: so the weekend has gone well. Meeting at 11 - nothing new. During the day we collected money. In the evening we had a visit from a pop group. 30 people were there. Good fun! We split up about midnight.

Meanwhile, a group of us had gone to the cinema which was showing a film about the situation of women (part of the Rights of Man Festival): A striker gave an account of the strike. The collection went well.

Tuesday 16th

The strike has found its own rhythm. Participation in the mass meetings is regular, there are discussions. A group was invited to go to the I.U.T. plant, and in the afternoon to U.L.P. which was on strike.

Collecting of money proceeded. At night, we enjoyed ourselves.

A letter from management announced their decision to appeal to the authorities and to get the Regional Manpower Service to help towards a settlement.

Wednesday 17th

In the morning, the delegates saw the Labour Inspector.⁵

Slanging match at the mass meeting between the C.F.D.T. official and some union members with opposing points of view. The official's view was that it was a minority struggle, and that we had to back down (in fact, only half the strikers were coming to the mass meetings). The workers replied that we had to develop the struggle. Every concession would lead to another, and the reason why there weren't more of us was that the union leadership had maintained the illusion that it could run the entire strike on its own. Then the official made accusations about would-be dictators, trying to impose a hard line. This point of view was taken up by the C.G.T. delegates, who accused a small group of being extremists - the same sort of thing management was saying.

We noted that those who had taken up extreme positions at the start of the strike (like locking-up Vange) were now in favour of negotiations, even claiming that we had refused negotiations.

5). Labour Inspector: official with duties of monitoring labour regulations and the implementation of agreements, liaising with Personnel Delegates, etc.

Then the delegates carried a proposal for conditional evacuation of the power centre during negotiations, with the strikers remaining in the factory precincts. But they had to swear that this was the very last concession. Management rejected these proposals.

Something new: several machines in the foundry were working again, thanks to emergency compressors, and making urgent items for Bochum.

Management produced a notice and letters announcing their intention to canvass opinion about a return to work. They offered work to 40 people. They were ready to negotiate if the strikers left the factory. They urged the need to convince 'certain elements' that these conditions should be complied with.

Thursday 18th

150 at the mass meeting. We decided to go round the offices, proceeding via the foundry to stop those who were working. Some clashes (a striker pulled one bloke away from his machine).

We went up to the offices and cornered Vange in his office on the way back. He tried to get away and we followed him, surrounding him at the car-park. We started a war-dance, watched by the office workers. It was the first time we had seen the 'boss'. He didn't seem delighted to see us. He explained through his translator that he didn't discuss things under these conditions. In the end we got tired and left him. Anyway, faced with our 'lack of understanding' he was getting marked.

Another meeting between delegates and Labour Inspector. The principle is adopted of coming out of the power centre, leaving only a small number of us there, during negotiations, which should take place on 'neutral' ground, outside the plant. Some of the lads were discouraged. In the end it wasn't accepted by the management, because we continued to reject the ballot of all workers.

During the night, several compressors were disconnected.

Friday 19th

New proposals from management. The mass meeting agreed to evacuate the factory, but with 30 'observers' staying behind. Lively discussion. Things were hotting up. On one side were those who wanted to negotiate at any price, on the other those who didn't want to leave the centre.

Management were ready to negotiate inside the factory, but asked us to accept a vote, including the non-strikers, on the result of negotiations. Naturally we refused.

After the 11 o'clock meeting, the delegates let us know that they were going to appeal to the Conciliation Committee.

In the evening a group went out on the town, picking up 50F. at a concert. Back inside, we had a game of hide-and-peek with the security guards in the workshops, and some more compressors were put out of action.

Saturday 20th

In the morning there was another row because the 30 'observers' had been reduced to ten, when the delegates had sworn blind they would never go below 30.

Management gave up asking for a ballot as a preliminary. It offered negotiations at 10 a.m. the next day. We would withdraw two hours earlier.

Sunday 21st

At 8 a.m. we moved out of the power centre, taking the cooking equipment, and into the bicycle sheds. It was chilly.

Meanwhile we made something to eat, had a drink, or froze doing nothing. There were only about ten of us. Two strikers had their families with them. People came in to get news from time to time (because today 'proper' negotiations were under way) but didn't stay long.

The delegates came back at about 6 p.m. There were 15-20 of us. They asked the strikers not to occupy the power centre. A C.F.D.T. official proposed a democratic vote. We laughed and went home to bed. First night without occupation, apart from a C.F.D.T. union delegate who spent the night in the union office.

Monday 22nd

The negotiations took time: 10 a.m. to 12 noon, 3 p.m. till evening. Outside, it was raining. We kept a fire going.

During the afternoon negotiations, about 3 p.m., the delegates came down for an hour, and there was a big discussion in the bike shed. The delegates, especially Bauer, suggested lowering the 250F. demand to 200, on the basis that it would include the general increase (3.5%) and that 200F. wasn't bad after all. Quite a few blokes said we'd get nothing, it didn't make sense to ask for 200F. - in other words, we should have asked at least 400F. to get something. Bauer went through his performance, proposing a vote - which was in favour. Bauer kept promising 'We will never go below 200F.'

The delegates went back. We decided to resume the occupation that night if there was no concrete result. Nothing came of the negotiations. Fed up, we reoccupied the power centre and cut off the heating. During the night, several locks in the workshops were bunged up.

Tuesday 23rd

A striker drafted the notice for the Solidarity Gala to be held on Thursday. The workers who thought up the poster wanted to sign it C.G.T.-C.F.D.T. The strikers in the mass meeting, were in favour of non-union members being included. The C.F.D.T. agreed, as well as some of the C.G.T. and the strikers in the power centre. But the C.F. leadership of the C.G.T. refused, saying that those not in a union have only to join and 'only the T.U. organisations are responsible'.

Management announced the results of their opinion poll. 'Yes':436. 'No':37. 11 inconclusive. They inferred that most workers wanted to resume work and regretted this was not yet possible. Incredible that 484 workers sent in their voting slips, wasting the free stamps management had so generously donated to us!

Wednesday 24th

Management wanted to start negotiating again, but went on imposing preconditions: evacuation of the factory for 36 hours, apart from 10 observers. After a quick discussion we agreed on a new 24-hour evacuation period.

In the afternoon we made a tour of several factories to contact their union branches about the Gala, and telephoned others. A delegation went to B.M.W. (next door) to support the workers in a one-hour token strike for a rise of 150F. across the board.

In the evening we put up more posters. We didn't occupy.

Thursday 25th

Meeting at the C.F.D.T. Regional Office, at 8 a.m., between the Metal Workers' Union of the Lower Rhine and I.G.-Metall (German Metal Workers' Union), with delegations from Opel-Russelsheim and C.F.D.T. from G.M. Strasbourg. I.G.-Metall refused to meet the 'Communist' C.G.T. The German unions informed us of 2 facts:

- The strike at G.M. Strasbourg would put the screws on Opel at Bochum and Russelsheim;
- Out of solidarity with the workers of G.M. Strasbourg, they themselves were refusing to do overtime, so as not to break our strike.

It must be noted, however, that the majority of G.M. Strasbourg workers were not immediately brought up to date concerning the results of this meeting.

Negotiations at the factory were due to start at 11 a.m. but in the absence of the C.F.D.T. official, management refused to start.

In the afternoon the delegates came back to negotiate for payment of strike time and a guarantee of no reprisals over strike action. At all events, the C.G.T. official had lost interest in harping on the point

about strike pay. He argued: 'We're not going to go on striking in order to be paid for strike time'. But pressure from the workers sent them back to negotiate this point. Management conceded the ridiculous amount of 100F. for strike time.

While the delegates were negotiating, management sent in the foremen to occupy the power centre and set the heating going again. This was in breach of the preliminary agreement. The workers who were awaiting the outcome of negotiations in the parking lot, re-took the centre, climbing in through the windows as the doors were shut.

We found the foremen playing with our cards and chess sets! Now both groups were occupying the centre. But the foremen began to wonder what the hell they were doing there. They left about 3 p.m.

Negotiations finished around 7 p.m. The results were practically the same as management's original proposal:

- Increase of 110F. for workers on the monthly rate;⁶
- Official break of 10 minutes in the assembly in the afternoon, without stopping the line; temporary workers to be taken on for relief;
- Solution to the question of overlap: the morning shift to start half an hour earlier, whereas after the token strike against over-time there was complete agreement about not starting before 6 a.m.
- Universal compensation for strike time: 100F.

Management had already fixed Friday March 26th as the date for going back to work. The delegates proposed that those strikers present should vote on whether to go back now that the results of negotiations were known. For the C.G.T. the situation was clear: 'You're at the end of the line!', their official said, 'But you can go back with your heads high, because it's the first time you've made a multi-national like G.M. concede so much. You've done all that could be done, and I don't think you'll get any more out of it! If we go on querying the management's 110F. increase, they might go back on their proposal.'

The C.F.D.T. official was inclined to think the same, but considered it wasn't up to him to influence the workers' decision (especially as the majority of the C.F.D.T. section was against going back). Remember that most workers were still unaware of the results of the morning meeting between the French and German unions and that the Opel factories in Germany were beginning to experience difficulties as a result of the strike at G.M. Strasbourg. In the end, a majority of the strikers present decided to sign the agreement (28 to 15), when 300 strikers were concerned.

The agreement was signed. The delegates asked that there should be no sanctions against those who did not come to work the next day.

6). Since 1968 there has been a policy of 'mensualisation' in France, making the conditions of manual and non-manual workers more like each other.

Agreement concluded between the C.G.T. and the C.F.D.T. represented respectively by Messrs. Bertrand, Fussner, Klein and Messrs. Guntz, Benoit, Bildstein and the management of the General Motors Strasbourg Co. represented by M. Dalbourg.

Article I - Wages

a). A uniform monthly increase of 110F. is granted to all personnel on the monthly rate, to take effect from 1st April 1976, in addition to the increase of 3.5% agreed on 1st March.

b). Every employee on the monthly rate who is on the company payroll on the day on which this agreement was signed will collect a sum of 100F. towards the end of March.

Article II - Arrangement of Timetables

Management will take on enough personnel to enable overtime to be limited to 2½ hours per week for the first shift only up and until the holidays at most, according to the following timetables 5.30 a.m.-2.30 p.m.; 2.30 p.m.-11 p.m.

Article III - Amelioration of individual work-speed of Assembly workers

An official pause to last a maximum of 10 minutes will be taken by all assembly workers after the meal. This pause will not entail stopping the lines and will be taken in rotation by agreement with those nearby.

Management will procede with the recruitment necessary to arrange this pause. Effects of delays will be caught up with in reasonable limits.

Provisional programmes of production will be brought to the notice of personnel each month. Management undertakes to work for and improve the assimilation of newly signed-on personnel.

Article IV

No reprisal will be taken for action committed in the course of the strike between March 1 and the date and time of signing the present agreement.

Article V

Days lost due to the strike will be regarded as working days for the purpose of calculating annual leave.

Article VI

The present agreement puts an end to the conflict between the parties.

Signed for/by C.G.T., C.F.D.T., Management, Labour Inspector.

The solidarity meeting had already begun while the delegates were settling the final details of the agreement. First there was some music and speeches from the Rhenalu and Clark delegations. Then a rapid account of how the strike developed. The C.G.T. union delegate spoke next, defending the C.G.T.'s attitude during the strike. Among the points to arouse anger among G.M. workers were: 'We put trade-union democracy before workers' democracy' and 'the mass meeting takes the decisions, but only the unions are responsible.' The C.F.D.T. delegate's contribution emphasised the positive aspects of the strike, avoiding the controversial points.

Some workers from G.M. took up these points of disagreement, provoking a confrontation that warmed the room up for a while. But it was getting late, and the meeting ended in confusion.

The return to work scheduled for the Friday actually took place on Monday March 29th.

THE TRADE UNIONS : ANALYSIS

In a period of calm

They are there to settle everyday problems, but their powers end as soon as the company's profits are affected. This makes them as valuable to management as to the workers, uniquely placed as they are to assess discontent, and to propose improvements which cost the company nothing but are often acceptable. But if they are to play this role the unions, on their side, have to agree to play a dialogue game, running with the hare and hunting with the hounds, and trying to reconcile the irreconcilable - company profits and workers' interests.

As a legal organisation recognised by the state the union has to respect (bourgeois) legality. So their everyday gains are conditional on their not putting demands that run counter to the smooth functioning of the plant. We are not here reproaching the union for not struggling at times when the workers are not in struggle, but want to show the inevitable consequences of having such a permanent organisation representing the workers. In order to 'represent' the workers in dealings with the management, the union must be recognised by the boss, i.e. must not demand the 'impossible'. On the other hand the union must also be 'recognised' by the workers, for otherwise it is of no use (like for instance company unions which only act in the interests of management). The union must also represent the immediate interests of the workers in order to be recognised by them. Caught up within the limits imposed on it by the need to be 'representative' - limits which they gladly accept - the unions in quiet periods (i.e. in periods where the domination of the boss is unquestioned and where they play their role to the best advantage) can only propose a 'reasonable' level of exploitation.

The union plays its part of regulator and insulator, preventing exploitation from becoming intolerable and channelling discontent. But the logic

of capitalism is to reinforce exploitation and increase profit. The delegates are committed to going cap-in-hand to management, so the workers get used to them acting as intermediaries. As soon as a problem arises, they ask the delegate to solve it for them. This might be convenient in the short term. But in the long term it puts the workers in a position of dependence on the union, which the latter does not discourage - on the contrary.

From childhood, the worker learns to be passive, to obey, to confine his initiative to the carrying out of orders from above: father, school-master, sergeant, foreman, one boss after another. So he gets into the habit of waiting for orders. If no orders come, he's at a loss. But this can never be entirely true, because if all the workers stuck to orders (as in a work-to-rule) everything would immediately grind to a halt.

In a period of struggle

The traditional formula for struggle, advocated by the T.U. organisations (as was demonstrated in preceding strikes at G.M.) was not adequate to the task. Faced with a multi-national, it is necessary to break with the tradition. Only a strike uniting the will of all, where each individual is responsible for everything, can succeed. Waiting with arms folded or playing at participation can only lead to demoralisation.

New forms of struggle were brought into being by objective facts, such as the recruitment of young semi-skilled workers who had not been broken-in to the union scheme of things, and did not want to be confined to that role, or rather to that absence of role. Throughout the strike the idea was asserted of constantly developing the struggle. People thought up all sorts of initiatives, opposing the wish to leave everything to the unions.

The C.G.T.'s attitude was summed up in their delegate's statement at the end-of-strike meeting about 'trade-union democracy' and 'trade-union responsibility' being paramount. The C.F.D.T. official was more moderate (or more opportunist). He confined himself to asking the workers to join the union, instead of acknowledging the existence of non-members. Both took for granted the primacy of the union.

The way the workers were suddenly to be called out on strike one fine day (when most of them didn't even know what was going on) is typical of the way the 'base' is taken into consideration. To begin with the mass meeting only ratified union decisions. What was worse was that delegates and strikers found this normal. Playing the 'democracy' game as long as it went the way they wanted, the unions brought all their weight to bear, threatening to withdraw when it no longer suited them. Throughout the strike they held the monopoly of workers' representation and did all they could to keep it.

C.G.T. and C.F.D.T.

The C.F.D.T. lacks the organisational apparatus of the C.G.T. Its structure is more flexible and can reflect different opinions. The character of a branch is partly dependent on that of each delegate (or of the militants)

and is independent of the Regional Union. By contrast, the C.G.T. has a rigid hierarchical structure: decisions are taken by the delegates, but they have to refer them to the official, who has the final say.

Conflicts arose between the local C.F.D.T. section and its official. Not so in the C.G.T. The C.F.D.T. may not have made all the suggestions for action, but they did not oppose them and in fact usually supported them, which was far from being the case with the C.G.T. There was no party or political group within the C.F.D.T. which could impose a particular line. Most C.F.D.T. militants were against going back at the end of the strike.

Practical Work

We did most of this ourselves, as described in the Strike Diary. Union contacts were sometimes useful, providing us with addresses, etc. Enough strikers were available to collect money and distribute leaflets, sometimes printed on union premises, with no bother. Only the publicity in the press, and on radio and T.V. remained a union monopoly.

SOLIDARITY

The committee set up on Tuesday March 9th for the express purpose of fostering solidarity did not really fulfil this function. This did not prevent us from carrying our struggle beyond the factory gates.

In other factories, we made contact with the delegates first. We had opportunities to talk to the workers during leaflet distributions and collections of money. At G.M. itself, those who came along were mainly 'political' types, militants of various organisations or union delegates, or else people we knew. Elsewhere, we would explain our position and the development of our struggle when we were collecting.

To succeed nowadays, a struggle has to become known and to develop outside, wherever it can. Information and publicity are needed for each struggle. The Regional Unions did not contact the factories to invite them to the support gala until near the end of the strike. Fortunately we had done so ourselves. Those who helped us from outside did so as workers showing solidarity with other workers, not as representatives of such-and-such an organisation. This explains the absence of a Support Committee.

Apart from the Berufsverbot demo. and the meeting with the German unions, international solidarity was shown by telegrams from G.M. plants in Mexico, Belgium, Germany, Australia and France, bringing us important moral support. We learned later that the information had not been spread in England but had been sat on by foreign-affairs specialists at union HQ.

It was regrettable, to put it mildly, that the result of the meeting with IG-Metall was not made known to all the strikers because of the C.F.D.T. official having to proceed immediately to negotiations following it. Bochum was short of parts. The assembly line at Russelsheim was about to stop.

The German unions were refusing to work overtime. Some blokes said later that they would have voted to go on with the strike had they known all this.

The need to develop solidarity within the multi-national was conspicuously demonstrated. Faced with modern capitalism organised on an international scale, the working class will, of necessity, have to move towards this form of struggle.

LIFE DURING THE OCCUPATION

The fete had trouble getting started. 'What for?' delegates asked, thinking it was enough to call on the workers to spend the weekend at G.M. But the idea was soon accepted. It enabled us to keep up our combativity. The following weekend, when nothing happened, there were only about a dozen of us on the spot. But the main idea was to enjoy ourselves a bit. And the food was free, keeping cash relations in the background for once.

At night only about 20 of us were there but the rotation system worked all right. Women also occupied the power centre overnight, although this was hushed up by a C.G.T. delegate. The nights were often quiet: we would play cards, read or talk. Sometimes there was music, but more could have been done in the way of entertainment with theatre groups, films, etc. We were quite comfortable all the same, each with his/her own sleeping-bag.

Transport was a problem from the time the regular service was withdrawn at the end of the first week. No serious attempt was made to deal with this problem. There was talk of making a list of available cars with their routes, but no-one took the initiative. Delegates moaned on about 'workers who carry on the strike at home', then proposed a commando operation to get the list of personnel, which management of course refused to hand over. It would have been simpler to take the strikers' addresses at the same time as their names and work numbers at the start.

The idea of seeking out the strikers was followed up, however. For example, two women brought in the C.G.T. Personnel Delegate who had been doing the washing up at home.

For food we started off going to the canteen in turns. Then came the 'cold' period which lasted nearly the whole of the strike until, towards the end, came the glorious era of the 'Food Committee'. The question of occupying the canteen, which was not done, highlighted the role of the unions in undermining initiatives that did not conform to their self-image as responsible organisations (is it 'legal' to occupy a factory?). Occupying the canteen would have given quite a number of blokes something to do. And it would have been a more pleasant place to be in than the power centre. Rhenalu workers who spoke at our meeting emphasised that when they occupied the canteen it gave them a convenient and comfortable strike HQ.

The cash collected was enough to provide food and drink for the strikers in occupation. But it was insufficient to allow all strikers to last out for

any length of time. There could have been more discussion during the strike on the best way to allocate the cash. This question will have to be worked out in any future struggle.

MASS MEETINGS

The mass meeting reflects the strength of a strike. It can be the place where decisions fundamental to the organising of the strike are taken; or it can be simply an assembly of strikers, ratifying decisions taken by the delegates.

At G.M. the weaknesses were many. A lot of strikers had something to say, but would only express it to the person next to them, not daring to state it publicly out of respect for the specialists who were used to making speeches. This was reinforced by details, like having to use the loud-speaker equipment and having to get up on the makeshift platform. It was also noticeable that some immigrant workers did not understand French very well. Often they were not given enough time for what had been said to be translated.

More fundamentally, the mass meeting was only called for the purpose of ratifying decisions and initiatives adopted by the delegates or by small groups. It never expressed a will of its own. This deficiency usually came over as a lack of life and animation. Debates grew more animated with the conflicts over negotiations, although even then only a minority took an active part. By this time discussions dealt exclusively with the negotiations; nothing was said or done about extending the struggle. 'Democratic' meetings only came with the need to make the mass of strikers accept retreats.

As a struggle progresses certain actions have to be abandoned and others undertaken. The mass meeting did not provide this function of innovation and imagination in which strikers could analyse their actions. We paid the penalty of seeing the struggle confined within traditional limits and being largely ineffective.

A mass meeting is not 'good in itself'. It can operate against the workers by making them accept a defeat. It can only reflect the organised will of the workers to the extent that it corresponds to real knowledge and real strength.

The Strike Committee, similarly, should not be made into a fetish, to be instituted at all costs. The strike with regular-mass-meeting and an elected-and-responsible-strike-committee-revocable-at-any-time-by-the-workers is a theoretical formula that does not necessarily correspond to reality.

In fact it is their variety that makes on-going struggles interesting: actions involving people deciding for themselves about what they're doing, and calling into question the traditional values: respect for work, legality, property, the authority of superiors and specialists, all the things that dominate us the rest of the time.

An Action Committee would likewise have done nothing but create one more division, and mark out a group for eventual hidden reprisals. It was pointless, when we knew each other well enough to act together.

In our view, a Strike Committee can be valid when a strike is strong enough, when it allows strikers to take on responsibilities and when the base is strong enough to control it.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS

One of the limitations of the G.M. workers' struggle is indicated by the small extent to which it modified their daily lives. Apart from the 30 or so of us who regularly stayed in the power centre overnight, many came in to the factory just as they did, for work, on other days (though not at 6 a.m.!) it was also noticeable that few strikers' wives went to the factory to find out what was going on. The distance between homes and factory was certainly a factor. But so was the fact that, for many workers, the strike stopped at the factory gates.

The weak part played by women was significant, too. They were allowed to stay at home, instead of actively participating. We had the spectacle of a delegate getting indignant because a female worker wanted to spend the night in the factory. When people at a mass meeting asked women to speak about their particular problems during the strike, another delegate answered 'what do you expect them to say in addition to what's been said already?'

As far as practical results go, we got less than we demanded on all counts. But there were some useful by-products: contact with Opel and with other factories in Strasbourg; and breakdown, at least for a while, of the usual divisions between workers, helping us to get to know each other better.

The main point we want to make about the form the struggle took, is to stress the negative role of trade-union ideology. Negative, because if workers questioned the traditional union strategy, they found themselves facing a blank wall. They were not able to take the struggle into their own hands, in real terms, except for a few actions. The unions did all they could to confine the strike within 'reasonable' bounds. They were aided in this by the workers' legalism - demonstrated when we let Vange run away and when we let the 'bluecoats' follow us step by step with their walkie-talkies. The workers legalism was also revealed in the minimal aggression towards those who went on working, and in the lack of reaction to the installation of standby compressors. But there were a few tentative moves towards breaking these bounds: what management called 'unreasonable acts' like the storming of Dalbourg's office, the gates and the compressors.

Another limitation on the strike was its isolation in time (for many it was only a question of a few hours a day) and in space - we tried to publicise it outside, but nothing was done to spread it inside the works, to the office, canteen, gate-house, etc.

Every strike tends to throw off the weight of entrenched habits, which constitute the greatest obstacle to struggle. At each stage we noticed we had to fight habit, or risk being stifled. The strike did not succeed in ridding itself of the traditional divisions between men and women, French and immigrants, not to mention managers and managed as reflected in the relation between delegates and workers.

At the onset, the strike movement did not openly attack the barriers which sought to confine it to proper channels. It tried to express itself through the Committees. It obtained some results, most importantly extending the dispute outside (although this still remained formal). Later, it could express itself only in isolated outbreaks (fete, gala, 'senseless acts' etc.). It was during the negotiations that conflicts broke out between the unions and the most active strikers. Violent as this opposition might be, it did not take concrete form. Characteristically, it was only expressed clearly at the gala, once the strike was over.

Although attempts at self-organisation remained tentative, the strike in March 1976 was the longest and toughest ever at General Motors, Strasbourg. Many strikers felt that the traditional passive strike (a symbolic presence, while the mass of strikers watch 'their' strike on television) had now been completely by-passed. Faced with companies as strong as General Motors, that kind of strike is doomed to failure.

To obtain any result, however slight, it is necessary to invent new forms of organisation and action, in which everyone is responsible, and which affect every aspect of our lives.

STE. THÉRÈSE EN GRÈVE

by Walter Johnson

This plant has been the scene of many disruptions since it was built in the mid-sixties, the latest being a plant occupation which was initiated by rank and file militants in defiance of management and the local union. It was precipitated by the failure of the union to resolve outstanding grievances related to working conditions. But before describing this event, it is important to trace and explain how a once militant union degenerated into a tool for management control.

Until recently the most highly charged dispute at Ste. Thérèse centered around the language of work in the plant. There was, from the very beginning, a poisoned atmosphere on the shop floor because of the inability, and sometimes unwillingness, of English-speaking supervisors, many of whom had been parachuted in from Ontario plants, to communicate effectively with French-speaking production workers. Many workers felt that unless their language rights were guaranteed, they would be relegated to a second class status in the corporate framework. On this issue the local union and the rank and file were in complete agreement from the outset.

The local union, however, had been experiencing great difficulty convincing the International Union executive that the language of work was a crucial issue in local negotiations. Top-ranking English-speaking officials in the United Autoworkers from the United States didn't want to provide services in French either, so they urged the local union to down-play the language issue, and concentrate instead on the usual "negotiable" demands of wages and benefits. The local which had been pushing the language issue very hard could not afford to backtrack at the bargaining table, completely undermining the confidence which had been arduously built up among the French-speaking membership. On the other hand, if the local defied the International executive and attempted to fight the company alone, the strike fund would be quickly depleted, forcing workers to fall back on their own resources. Members of the local executive had seen martyr plants that went on strike for six to eight months to fight for local issues only to be slowly crushed because the International union wouldn't back them up at the bargaining table. In addition, twenty percent of the production workers in the plant were not French-speaking and could not be expected to endure a lengthy strike on the language issue alone. In spite of these problems, French-speaking rank and filers

and their union representatives were never closer together than when in opposition to their colonized status both in the plant and in the society at large.

This dispute co-incident with the provincial election campaign of 1970 and, indeed, became one of the issues in the campaign. With Quebec nationalism on the rise, Robert Bourassa and the provincial Liberals tried to diffuse the language-of-work issue by promising future government action to settle such problems. This move blunted the language conflict at Ste. Thérèse and allowed the union to drop the demand thus avoiding a split with the International union. But, as a result of the militancy generated by the language issue, some members of the union executive were no longer content to return to the rather tame negotiating mechanisms of the traditional collective bargaining process. These people had been radicalized not only by the attitude of the company but also by the cavalier treatment that they had received from the International union on the language question. Rather than remain on the union executive and risk degenerating into bureaucratic hacks, a few decided to renounce their positions and work for their goals outside the trade union process. Those who were most concerned about the status of the French language in the plant, and the position of French Canadians in North American society, gravitated towards the nationalist stance of the Parti Québécois.

Others considered the language issue important but only as one of the many problems concerning the work environment. This group had witnessed first hand the reluctance of the local executive, and the International, to deal with any problem outside the normal framework of negotiation. They recognized the role the union played in maintaining the structure of authority and control in the plant. One militant, a member of the union executive for six years, describes his metamorphosis from union bureaucrat to rank and file militant.

"I wanted to use the union structure as a rallying point for radical social change. So I went up to the International President with this idea. To use this structure as a real arm of power for workers. But the International President and the rest felt that it wasn't our job to push or raise shit or question the value of the system. They were telling me that everybody was happy and that's just not true. And they should know but they forget very goddamn fast once they're off the shop floor".

Union control over shop floor discontent is maintained by the grievance procedure which channels problems through three levels of union-management negotiations, after which, if no settlement is reached, cases go to outside arbitration. Over eighty percent of the grievances which have gone to arbitration have been settled in management's favour, leaving no other "legal options" for the people affected.

"The arbitration process is one of the most unjust procedures that workers must suffer through. In most cases the worker is condemned before he's judged. During the arbitration process the worker is forced to live without his regular means of support. He's not allowed to work and often has to wait as long as two years before a judgement is handed down. The company has got nothing to lose as they just throw the guy out and they wait for a judge to decide. And about ninety percent of the time, the judge is a guy who went to school with the bosses, goes to the same golf courses, drinks in the same nightclubs, and sleeps with the same whores. He doesn't know what it means to be a worker."

With the departure of the militants the local union became more bureaucratized and less responsive to the concerns of the membership. Vacant union positions were filled by people with little or no desire to confront the company on important issues related to the workplace. The company, sensing the weakened position of the union, began exerting pressure on production workers over matters such as discipline, paces and methods of work. Workers who expected their elected representatives to lead the fight against an increasingly autocratic management were sadly disappointed by the timid, limp-wristed tactics of the local executive. But while the union leadership had become more conservative, the reverse was true on the shop floor. The militants who had relinquished their positions on the union executive were busy orchestrating the shop floor struggle against poor working conditions and management arrogance. One of the main architects of this strategy explains.

"I felt that workers didn't need any more union reps telling them what to do. What they really needed were people in the same position as they were who knew the way the system operated."

The presence of these knowledgeable and articulate ex-union reps had a tremendously invigorating effect on rank and file morale. Here were people who had renounced positions of prestige and authority, and who were no longer answerable to the trade union structure, struggling alongside fellow workers rather than dictating tactics from

some remote bureaucratic inner sanctum. Because this struggle was being waged outside the formal union structure, management was unable to control the escalating occurrence of shop floor skirmishes between foremen and production workers. Some departments would refuse to work unscheduled overtime, forcing supervision to scramble for extra manpower. Union committeemen were inundated by grievances on every imaginable issue. The quality of the product deteriorated, minor sabotage increased and absenteeism skyrocketed. Without the mediating influence of the union the situation would have erupted into full scale revolt much sooner than it actually did. Through this entire period the union exhorted workers to keep cool, to follow the normal grievance procedures, and to trust their elected representatives to solve their problems for them. What the union was really saying was to maintain regular production at all costs.

The company responded to the shop floor revolt with characteristic toughness dishing out verbal and written reprimands, separating troublemakers, and suspending ringleaders, while at the same time expecting the union to "keep the lid" on the membership as a whole. As the discontent intensified many workers began to realize that the union could do absolutely nothing about the problems which really affected them the most. By law, the union was bound to uphold the contract, or master agreement, which ceded all important job-related, decision-making power to management. The union had no choice but to attempt to maintain production; the alternative would be to cease being a union in the formal sense, supporting instead the actions of the rank and file. Rather than relinquish power, the union leadership cannily decided to divorce itself from the actions of the militants, neither condemning nor endorsing their behaviour but instead waiting for some opportunity to re-assert its hegemony. The company, of course, would have preferred the union to take a hard line against dissident members but, tactically, they appreciated the shrewdness of the union position and so did not press too strenuously. The objective of both the company and the union was to regain control of the situation, which meant leaving enough room to manoeuvre especially if the militants displayed a failure of nerve.

By this time discontent had been building to such a point that the plant was transformed into a giant powder keg requiring only some minor incident to ignite the fuse and blow the situation out into the open. The explosion occurred on the morning shift of August 28, 1976. At the beginning of the shift a worker on the motor line was asked to catch up on production by completing three jobs left

unfinished by the previous shift. He refused to do this, claiming that he had just recovered from an injury suffered in the plant which classified him as disabled. The foreman ordered him to do the job, and, upon hearing another refusal, escorted him to the nearest plant office for "disciplinary action". He was given a written reprimand and sent back to his section. On the way back he waved the written reprimand, known as an ST13, at his co-workers to let them know just what the company had done. An employee can be suspended indefinitely after receiving three of such reprimands. Perceiving yet another case of blatant injustice, the militants on the motor line decided that the time to act had finally arrived. The motor line is crucial to the operation of the entire plant and a sit-down there would quickly bring production to a complete halt. The workers ceased production activity. Word of the sitdown quickly spread through the plant with militants from other lines rushing to the motor line area to bolster the ranks of the rebels. Within minutes dozens of workers were milling about the area sensing that a real confrontation was about to begin. All plant supervision was called off the shop floor but returned minutes later urging workers to go home.

Some men began to leave but were met at the exit gate by militants who warned that emptying the plant was the easiest way that management could gain control of the situation. Once outside the gates the workers would have to rely on the usual negotiating mechanisms of the union. Most people stayed and headed for the motor line area where several hundred people had since gathered. There, several wire mesh baskets were hastily shoved together to create a speaking platform. Militants urged that the sitdown continue until all outstanding grievances were settled. Cheers and wild applause greeted such exhortations. Union leaders asked and were granted permission to speak but not without a good deal of heckling and catcalling. They suggested that workers return to their jobs, to give the union some time to iron out the difficulties with the company. They were roundly booed and denounced in very graphic terms. Speeches were continually interrupted by loudspeaker announcements reminding workers that they were engaged in an illegal work stoppage which would provoke disciplinary action. In an effort to gain some control over the situation, the local summoned U.A.W. Regional Director Bob Dean who attempted to placate the men with promises of swift action on all legitimate grievances. The strikers wanted no part of Dean's "solutions" and resented the presence of an outsider trying to "lead them out of the wilderness." Real leadership (in-

fluence might be a better word), resided on the shop floor with the militants who were trusted and respected by their co-workers. In a series of speeches and private talks, the insurgents persuaded most workers that a physical occupation of the plant was the only meaningful tactic which could be employed to force the company to deal in good faith; anything else was mere window dressing. To the amazement of everyone there was almost unanimous acceptance of the occupation strategy. Militants who had written off the rank and file as being hopelessly conservative, stood around shaking their heads in disbelief. Not only did workers agree on the occupation strategy but they actually began to take the initiative in making it a reality.

Here was proof of the much vaunted "spontaneity" that many radicals spend so much time talking about. An almost festive atmosphere prevailed as workers traded jokes, played cards, and hooted at the efforts of supervisory personnel to undermine the feelings of fellowship and solidarity which permeated the plant. Workers arriving at the plant for the evening shift and who were turned back at the gate, quickly demonstrated their support for the strikers by buying take-out fried chicken, soft drinks, and beer, passing it over the wire mesh fence which surrounds the plant. Despite repeated pleas by company and union spokesmen to leave the plant, the strikers became even more firm in their commitment to continue the occupation until important concessions were won on all matters affecting the work environment.

Just before midnight, about fourteen hours after the occupation had begun, the company decided to bring out the heavy artillery to end the wildcat. A fully equipped squad of riot police was called to the scene to restore the holy prerogatives of private property, now threatened by this surly mob of working class ingrates. A phalanx of 22 police cars, lights flashing and sirens wailing, screeched into the company parking lot with a theatrical flourish that would have warmed the heart of Cecil B. De Mille. The party atmosphere in the plant was quickly dissipated by the dramatic arrival of the police. The threat of actual physical violence injected an element of doubt and fear into the minds of many strikers. The company played on this fear to the hilt by allowing a rather lengthy interval between the time the police arrived and the loudspeaker ultimatum ordering the strikers to leave the plant. During this period militants in the plant prepared several contingency plans in case the company should carry out its threats. The first and most widely accepted tactic would be non-violent resistance. The police would be forc-

ed to remove bodily over eight hundred people, and there just wasn't enough manpower or police vehicles to undertake such a task. Should the police come in swinging, however, workers would knock out the lighting system and try to destroy as much machinery as possible. The militants knew that the idea of physical resistance would meet with much more opposition from the workers than a sitdown. Most workers had never been in open confrontation with police, and that prospect in itself was having a palpable effect on the strikers' morale. At this time, the leaders of the union, seeing that a failure of nerve was now a distinct possibility, widened the breach in solidarity by amplifying the worst fears of the strikers. Stories were spread about the brutality of the riot police when dealing with striking Quebec teachers. Nightsticks would be used mercilessly, mace and machine guns might be turned on any workers who resisted arrest or engaged in sabotage. The militants tried to counter this flood of rumours and half-truths by claiming that the company would not dare risk the bad press that a bloodbath would create. Union leaders, reminding workers of what had happened at United Aircraft, implored the men to leave the plant, and allow the union to resume negotiations with the company the following day. A show of hands was called for, and, despite the best efforts of the insurgents, a slim majority of men wanted to get out. One worker, a former paratrooper and policeman himself, describes his feelings.

"Since the arrival of the riot police a knot had been growing in my stomach. I knew what these guys were capable of and like many others in the plant this fear made the union's position seem more reasonable. Once out of the plant, however, with the immediate fear lifted I realized that we had blown our chance. We had allowed ourselves to be bluffed and a long time would pass before anything like this would happen again."

The union had regained control of the situation on the promise of swift negotiations the following morning. The militants had warned the men that no meaningful negotiations could be conducted from a position of weakness. To leave the plant would be to demonstrate a failure of nerve which the company would never let them forget. However, workers decided, rather reluctantly, to give the union one more chance and so vacated the premises following the company's order.

The next morning the plant resumed normal operations for the first four hours of the shift. At noon, word spread through the plant that the company had refused to discuss with the union any of the grievances which had resulted in the sitdown the previous day.

Furthermore the company intended to take disciplinary action against those workers who were responsible for the loss of production. On receiving this news, workers on the plant floor downed tools; the sitdown strike was resumed. There was a difference this time: the union was orchestrating the protest from above. Since a real occupation of the plant was illegal the union's strategy was that workers should remain in the plant during the hours of work, ready and willing to resume production if, and when, the company showed a willingness to negotiate on all outstanding grievances. Knowing that the union had to abide by the rules of the private property game, the company decided to use stonewall tactics, refusing to discuss anything but the most innocuous issues. The company assumed, quite correctly as things turned out, that workers would not be willing to continue this shutdown for longer than a few weeks. For most men, coming to work is bad enough during normal times, but to sit around the plant for eight hours a day without pay is almost unbearable. At the outset, however, the men were solidly behind what seemed to them to be a revitalized union leadership. The work stoppage was continued.

This renewed faith in the union was quickly shaken by subsequent events. The company decided to take punitive action against some of the most popular and influential militants by suspending one or two of them every day for insubordination or attempting to incite co-workers. Once suspended a worker is refused entry at the plant gate. Within a week, twenty of the prime movers behind the initial occupation had been removed from the plant while the union looked on helplessly. To rank and file workers the impotence of the local was never more apparent. By this time the local was under tremendous pressure from the International union to end this dispute. Major contract negotiations would soon be underway with the Ford Motor Company and local strikes were considered a nuisance. A rumour was spread that the local would be put under trusteeship if it couldn't keep control of the membership and end the strike.

With the union backed into a corner, management began a smear campaign to discredit the suspended militants and undercut any possible rank and file resurgence. It was suggested that the insurgent group had been influenced by outside communist agitators and other malcontents. Daily memos were posted disparaging the sitdown as a futile effort which would only result in a loss of pay and possible disciplinary action in the future. By the eighth day of the strike the morale on the shop floor had badly deteriorated. The company still refused to deal with the union, strikers had gone without pay for

two weeks, and most of the militants had been either fired or suspended. Pressure to end the strike was now being exerted on the local from below as well as from the International union. At this point, union leaders were more than willing to hold a secret vote which might get them off the hook. A hall was rented in the east end of Montreal and the vote taken. A sizeable majority of those present voted to end the sitdown and resume production but provisions would be made to financially support the fired and suspended militants until their cases were resolved. Members agreed to a compulsory dues check-off of two dollars a month to cover this expense. The union also promised that the re-instatement of those fired or suspended would be a major issue in the forthcoming local negotiations. What this amounted to was a total capitulation by the local union on every important issue which had been raised either before or during the shut-down.

Never had the limitations of conventional trade unionism been more clearly demonstrated than in this dispute. Only when workers had dared to go outside the formal negotiating channels were their grievances taken seriously by the company. Most workers acknowledged this fact but, when pressed to the wall, were not prepared to completely repudiate either the local union or the International. After all, it is the bargaining power of the International, with the compliance of the local union, which insures that wages in the auto industry remain higher than the average for industrial workers, whether unionized or not. To pursue a truly radical course would be, in the opinion of many workers, to threaten the institutionalized structures which, no matter how irrelevant on the shop floor, are, nevertheless, responsible for a better-than-average standard of living (if measured in terms of wages and benefits).

Another factor, which cannot be stressed enough, is the dependence of assembly-only branch plants, like G.M. Ste. Thérèse, on the major parts processing plants located in the United States. On several occasions, usually as a result of some disruption, the company had threatened to close the plant and pull out of the province. This threat always carried some weight because of the economic and political circumstances surrounding G.M.'s decision to build a plant in Quebec. Workers knew that, in return for locating in the

province, G.M. had been granted certain tax concessions by the provincial government of Jean Lesage. The company could simply transfer production to other plants, dismantle and ship any moveable parts, and write off the loss of the plant through tax loopholes. The union often used this "vulnerability issue" to dilute or undercut the arguments of the militants.

There also existed, among people who had been around since the plant was built, a residual loyalty to the union stemming back to the language-of-work dispute in 1970 and the initial struggle to gain acceptance for the union only twelve years before. Yet in spite of these loyalties and concerns, a healthy minority of workers, including many who had never been considered militant, were prepared not only to repudiate the union but also to continue the shutdown and even occupy the plant again if necessary, regardless of the consequences.

The momentum had been lost, however, with the capitulation of the union and the expulsion of the militants. Lacking any ties with other insurgent groups in Ontario or the United States, strikers would be engaged in a quixotic struggle with little hope for the future. Rather than risk a total rout strikers decided to regroup and plan future strategy. Efforts would be made to link up insurgent unions in a continental extra-union challenge to management control. Control issues would be raised in future union elections and pressure would be put on the International to grapple with problems of the workplace. Lessons learned from this shutdown would strengthen the militants' position in any future action.

As this piece is written, (November, 1976) management at Ste. Thérèse, now stronger than ever, has quickly moved to grind down any remaining vestige of workplace rebellion. To make up for lost production, overtime was immediately scheduled, plant rules are rigidly enforced, and the despotism of lower level supervision has never been worse. The company has adamantly refused to negotiate the return of five of the fired militants, claiming that they represent too great a threat to future stability. On the surface it would appear that management and the company has emerged the victor in this dispute but the long term consequences of this shop floor revolt might very well prove otherwise.