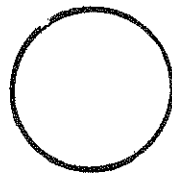


**WORKERS' STRUGGLES AND THE
DEVELOPMENT OF FORD IN BRITAIN.**



RED NOTES



Red Notes is not an organisation. It's a small group of people publishing pamphlets which we hope will prove useful to revolutionaries and militants involved in building working class organisation.

Our first pamphlet is about the Ford Motor Company. It was originally written by Ferruccio Gambino, a comrade active in the Italian movement (who is also corresponding editor of the US journal "Zerowork", and who is not a member of any particular "Italian" school of Marxism). He wants to emphasise that this pamphlet would not have been possible without the generous and unconditional help of the late Bob Lovell, a militant of long standing, and AEU official at Dagenham from 1943 to 1955.

The translation of the article is ours. Since it is a complex document we have added explanatory notes here and there. The text of the article is printed on the right-hand pages, and on the left-hand pages we have printed illustrative material about the history and development of Ford. Much of this was gathered during the activities of the Big Flame group at Ford Dagenham, 1973-75.

We have also added Appendix 1, explaining some of the terms used in the text, and Appendix 2, giving a framework for a new political understanding of the present capitalist crisis. And, to end with, we have prepared a reading list of the main books, pamphlets etc, which deal with the history of struggles at Ford-UK.

We shall be doing more work about the motor industry, as well as work on other areas of the struggle. If you have criticisms or contributions that you would like to make, feel free to contact us, as below:

Red Notes,
c/o 154 Swaton Road,
London E.3.

INTRODUCTION

1976: Books and pamphlets are rolling off the Left-wing presses, about "THE CRISIS". But somehow the working class gets left out of the picture. The working class is usually stuck in a footnote somewhere, as a passive spectator, while academics and experts debate the role of "market forces", "objective contradictions" etc in bringing about the crisis of capitalism.

Many people will not accept that the working class is strong - let alone admit that working class power has brought about the crisis. They point to a lack of "class consciousness"...and they say the Crisis is a result of blind, irrational forces. But we would point out, first, the growth of revolutionary, communist movements all over the world; and second, the inability of individual employers and government to reassert their class control over a working class power that might not be "Political" with a capital P. but is still a huge block to capitalist accumulation.

Our pamphlets intend to build up a way of understanding this class power. We say that the present Crisis can only be understood starting from the working class. We say that the post-War working class, raised on Keynesianism and Social Democracy, has struggled and created itself as a political power against the capitalists system. This post-War working class has attacked capitalist conditions of life and work, fighting for higher wages, for less work, for better work conditions...and has built up a system of needs and expectations - but especially a political behaviour - which has now undermined the entire post-War capitalist strategy of trying to integrate working class demands. The international working class has undermined the whole capitalist structure.

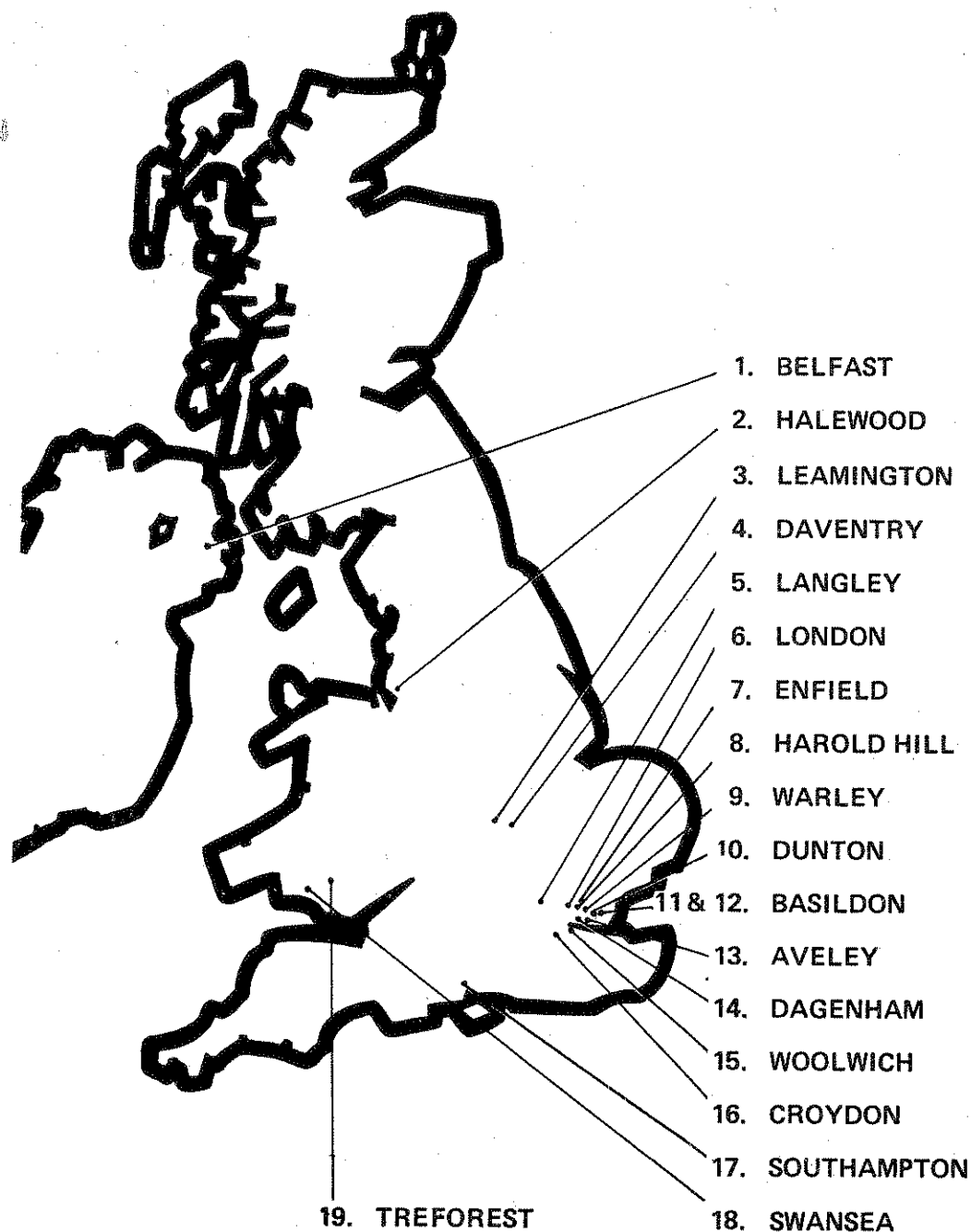
So, with this brief series of pamphlets, we intend to establish the truth of the matter: namely that THIS PROLONGED CRISIS IS A POLITICAL MECHANISM WHICH WILL BE USED BY THE CAPITALIST CLASS AND BY THE STATE IN ORDER TO TRY TO DESTROY THE STRENGTH AND POWER THAT THE WORKING CLASS HAS BUILT UP, INTERNATIONALLY, OVER 20 YEARS OF STRUGGLE.

This pamphlet analyses the nature of the battle between capital and the working class, inside a particular sector of industry - inside the Ford Motor Company, the vanguard of motor industry capitalists. It provides us with the tools, the method to understand what we mean by "the power of the working class" in this period (the power that the capitalists and their State are now trying to destroy). And it puts the working class in the middle of the picture, instead of a footnote or appendix.

In short, the present attacks on the working class (rationalisation, cutting jobs, demolishing the Welfare State, the uses of fascism etc) are not just "accidental". They aim to destroy the power of that working class whose development our pamphlet describes. They have developed over the past 5/6 years, and will continue for as long as is needed to fulfil this purpose, OR until the working class forces are able to re-gather strength and organisation and overthrow this system. Without being sectarian, we would say that very rarely have Left-wing publications in Britain come close to a working class view of what power means in the daily struggle against capital....and unless we understand that, we will find it hard to make the next step, which is to arrive at a new definition of the political means, of the kind of revolutionary organisation capable of destroying capitalism.

June 1976

1. Ford in Britain



Location	Employment (including staff)	Floor Space ('000 square feet)	Main Function
1. Belfast	1,100	281	Carburettor and distributor production.
2. Halewood	13,000	4,991	Production of Capris, Escort car and van range/Transmissions for vehicle range.
3. Leamington	1,300	229	Production of truck and tractor transmission castings.
4. Daventry	1,700	1,772	Parts headquarters and depot, and service training college.
5. Langley	2,500	1,130	Medium and heavy truck assembly.
6. London - Regent St.	170	48	Registered office/showrooms.
7. Enfield	1,350	301	Electrical components manufacture.
8. Harold Hill	500	68	Apprentice training school.
9. Warley	2,000	440	Administrative headquarters.
10. Dunton	3,300	912	Research and Engineering Centre.
11. Basildon Tractor	3,100	1,360	Production of tractors and engines.
12. Basildon Radiator	900	330	Radiator production.
13. Aveley	900	682	Ford Advanced Vehicle Operations (specialist car production).
14. Dagenham	29,000	9,571	Cortina and Consul-Granada production/Engine manufacture.
15. Woolwich	700	203	Parts machining.
16. Croydon	300	114	Manufacture of small stampings.
17. Southampton	3,750	1,154	Production of Transits and truck cabs.
18. Swansea	2,450	1,103	Production of rear axles and heavy CV
19. Treforest	360	60	Production of spark plug ceramic insulators.

Other facilities include:
Six District Sales Offices, 16 Ford Motor Credit Offices, a Marketing School and a Service Training College, 11 Service and Administration Offices and 7 Storage and Workshop areas.

1974.



TEXT

FORD'S IMPACT IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE UK CAR INDUSTRY

About two thirds of any car made in Britain today is made up of parts supplied by an outside component company (Lucas, Dunlop, Pilkington etc). This is a very high percentage compared with the international figure, where outside component suppliers provide only 20-50% of the finished motor car [Note 1].

In other words, compared with the motor industry worldwide, UK motor manufacturers have a relatively low level of vertical integration: they don't have so much of the final product under their direct control [App. 3].

The reason why Britain is so different is because, unlike other industrial countries, in Britain the internal combustion engine was developed as a means of production (industrial machinery, marine engines, pumps etc) for a long period, whereas elsewhere it was already expanding as a means of consumption [App. 3], and was being developed as part of the mass production of private cars for the consumer market [Note 2].

In other countries, especially in America, the two types of production developed with much less of a time-lag. Some people say that the reason for the secondary position of the motor car production in the UK was that British capitalists were slow to see the potential of the mass-production of cars. But it was also because it was much harder for British capital to get workers to transfer from the production of internal combustion engines to the mass production of cars as a consumer product - since most of these workers were skilled men, and the change-over would mean a process of widespread de-skilling in the engineering sector as a whole [App. 1].

Before the manufacture of cars as a mass consumer product could take over from the manufacture of engines as a means of production, there would have to be changes in the existing labour force: it meant that a new and much larger supply of suitable unskilled labour had to be made available, and this had to be organised at a social level, as well as inside the factory (providing housing, schools, health services etc).

So, in the early days, right up to the end of the 1930s, a combination of workers' defence of their skills and a lack of capitalist initiative meant that the production of motor cars was secondary to the production of internal combustion engines. The latter therefore was less of a driving force in the economy than elsewhere (eg America).

However, after the Second World War things began to change. Far more people were buying cars, and the motor car was beginning to be used within a framework of capitalist policies aimed to promote consumer spending-power (Keynes). This meant that the car industry began to come to the fore.

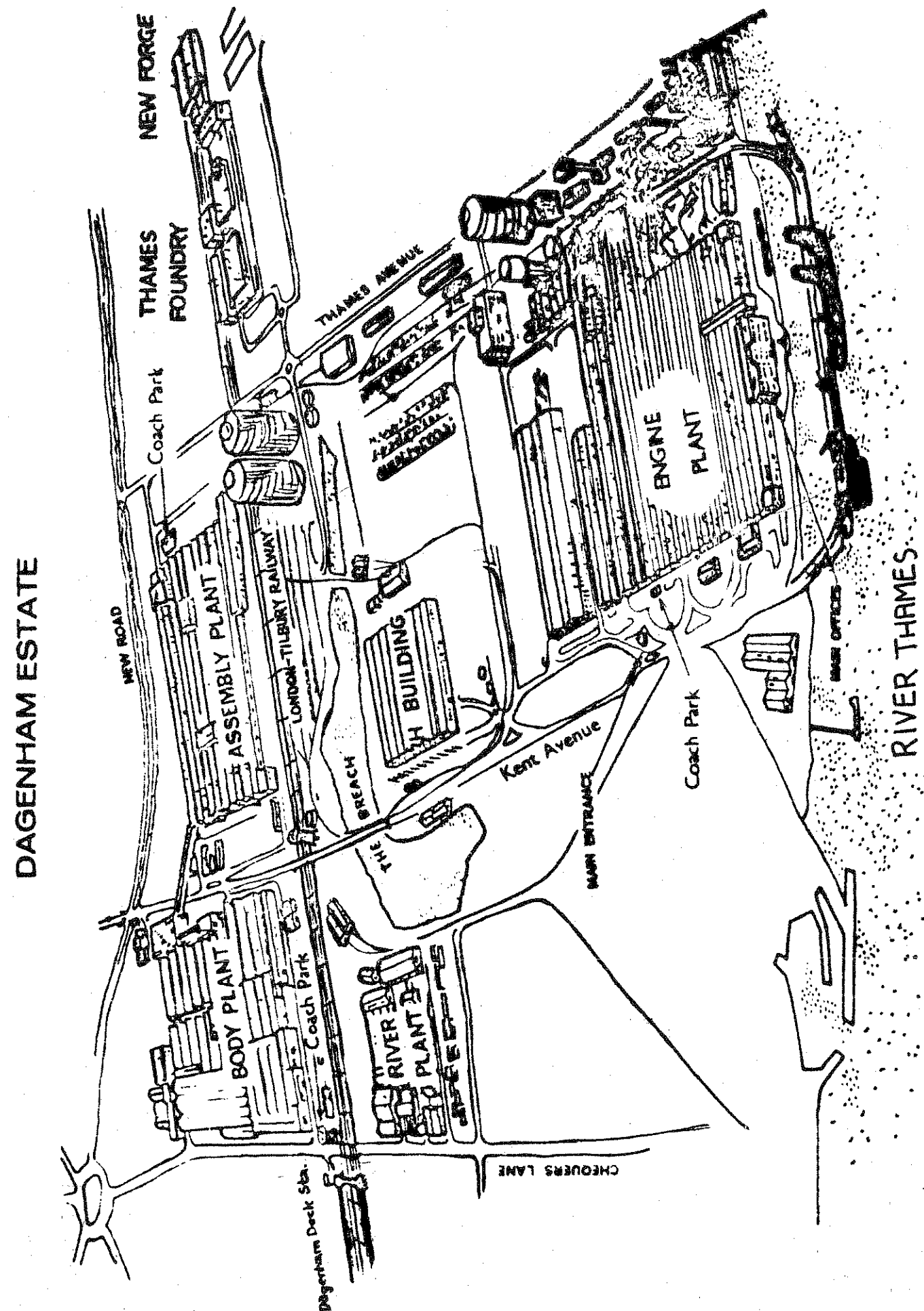
It was only at this point that Ford (who had pioneered the spread of the motor car in America, and was now introducing a similar distribution in Britain), together with Vauxhall, part of the US General Motors combine, became part of the leadership of the British employing class - although they never saw completely eye to eye with the big manufacturers in other key sectors, let alone other motor manufacturers.

This happened at a time when the working class at Ford had already

2. Layout of Ford Dagenham



TEXT



taken a certain political leadership in the struggle, in a direction which the rest of the working class in Britain would later follow.

Ford in Britain was out of line with other manufacturers, but also pointed the way for them in two respects: first, Ford's investment levels were high in comparison to the low level of organic composition [App. 2] in the British motor industry as a whole; and secondly, they began to affect State policy on investment (traditionally the State had been unwilling to provide the infrastructures that are needed for new investments).

The secondary position of the manufacture of motor cars over a long period in Britain had many effects. For instance, it was American, not British firms that emerged as the driving force in the car industry. It also explains why there were so few British companies that combined the production of means of production with the production of means of consumption within a single firm. For instance, Pressed Steel Fisher - a producer of sheet steel - did not come under the control of the motor manufacturers (BMC) until the mid-1960s.

After 1945 Ford began taking over as the political leadership in the vehicles industry, and this was achieved partly by their use of the State. Ford's recruitment policies follow a pattern: they look for places where there are already large concentrations of labour available - but they leave it up to the State to organise this, and only then step in to take control themselves. Ford made it clear, both at Dagenham in the mid-1920s and at Halewood in the late 1950s, that unless this workforce was available, there was no question of Ford investing.

From the moment that Ford began producing in Britain in the 1920s, they made it clear that they were not willing to operate with the low levels of capital investment (organic composition) and vertical integration that were typical of the UK motor industry: from a working class point of view, low integration and low investment result from workers' resistance to the process of de-skilling represented by Ford's way of producing cars [the Ford Assembly Line: App. 1].

This meant that Ford UK linked directly with the high levels of organic composition and vertical integration typical of Ford's production in America, and therefore that Ford struggles in Britain tended to take a similar form to workers' struggles in America. It also meant that Ford workers were having to fight harder than workers in other big UK motor manufacturers and their suppliers - because their struggle stemmed from a process of drastic change in the structure and composition of the work-force [class composition: App. 1], brought about by the higher levels of capital investment at Ford, and which in turn led to further investments and still further changes in the work-force.

However, in the longer term, the extent to which Ford invested in fixed capital (machinery etc) and integrated their cycle of production [App. 3] in Britain and America was brought about by the pressure of workers' struggles within Ford's international operations, and not vice-versa: it's workers' struggles that provide the spur to investment.

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4. Motor Industry Suppliers



TEXT

A TABLE OF THE INDUSTRIES WHICH FEED THE MOTOR INDUSTRY.

[The figures are from 1963 and 1968, the most recent available. They give the value of commodities, in millions of £. The headings are classified according to the 1958 Standard Industrial Classification]

1958 SIC	COMMODITY GROUP	SALES TO VEHICLE GROUP (£m)	
		1963	1968
101	Coal mining	£3.6	£1.5
262-3	Mineral oil refining	£5.8	£11.9
274	Paint & printing ink	£11.5	£12.3
261	Coke ovens	£0.2	£0.6
276	Synthetic resins & plastics	£1.2	£2.4
271/3/7	Other chemicals & allied industry	£5.9	£6.9
311-3	Iron & Steel	£203.0	£256.8
321	Light Metals	£25.5	£40.2
322	Other non-ferrous metals	£22.0	£26.4
332	Machine tools	£1.5	£5.7
333	Engineers' small tools	£7.7	£3.2
334	Industrial engines	£0.2	£1.4
336-7	Contractors' plant & equipment	£0.5	£3.9
339	Other non-electrical machinery	£2.0	£6.1
341	Industrial plant & steelwork	£0.6	£2.8
342-9	Other mechanical engineering	£62.5	£25.9
351-2	Scientific instruments	£2.1	£8.5
361	Electrical machinery	£6.7	£13.6
362	Insulated wires & cables	£4.4	£6.3
363-4	Radio & telecommunications	£1.1	£2.1
365-9	Other electrical goods	£63.4	£48.8
391-4/6-9	Other metal goods	£166.2	£137.2
381	Motor vehicles	£345.4	£602.9
382-5/9	Other vehicles	£1.5	£2.3
412-3	Cotton, weaving, spinning	£1.0	£3.3
414	Wool	£1.0	£0.6
415/6/9/21-2/9	Other textiles	£16.5	£12.4
431-3	Leather, fur etc	£2.9	£2.1
461-9	Other building materials etc	£1.0	£4.0
462-3	Pottery & glass	£12.1	£19.0
472-3	Furniture etc	£16.8	£0.4
471-4/5-9	Timber etc	£9.8	£11.3
481	Paper & board	£2.3	£2.3
482-3	Paper products	£4.8	£3.1
486-9	Printing & publishing	£2.7	£3.4
491	Rubber	£58.9	£75.9
492-6/9	Other manufacturing	£14.9	£8.5
500	Construction	£3.9	£5.6
601	Gas	£3.7	£4.2
602	Electricity	£13.0	£20.2
603	Water supply	£1.2	£1.0
701-3	Road & rail transport	£10.1	£9.0
704-6/9	Other transport	£8.1	£8.2
707	Communication	£4.0	£5.2
810/20/31/2	Distributive trades	£54.8	£35.2
870-90	Miscellaneous services	£52.1	£59.5
496	Plastic products N.E.S.	£ -	£41.2

SOURCE: Input-Output Tables for Great Britain, 1963 and 1968 - C.S.O.

Total: £1240.2 £1525.2

reduced to a minimum, unlike the present situation in metal-working, which requires constant manual intervention by workers in a series of separate operations. Plastics would iron out this discontinuity.

WORKERS' INSUBORDINATION AND CLASS AUTONOMY

Insubordination is the ability of the working class to organise the struggle against work. It's always there among workers, but is organised to a greater or lesser degree according to the state of the class struggle in a particular period. As class autonomy [App. 4] grows, this insubordination comes more and more into the open, and the 'technological collaboration' so much loved by preachers of 'workers' control' collapses as entire sectors of industry go into crisis (compare the Scanlon Plan at Pressed Steel-Linwood in 1965 with the accusations of 'anarchy' made by MP Fortescue against Halewood workers in 1971).

At Ford the majority of workers are indifferent to the 'suggestions box'. This is usually the case in situations of strong workers' autonomy, partly because people aren't concerned to increase the employers' profits, and partly because they know that 'increased efficiency' might end up putting workers out of work. If capitalists need the support of the working class in order to increase productivity, they only get this support in the objective form of workers' struggles, forcing them to re-organise production.

This passive attitude of non-cooperation is widespread among workers at Ford. Of course, when a new machine comes into operation workers cooperate to a certain extent to get it working, on the orders of foremen etc. But apart from that, workers are not inclined to apply their intelligence to the needs of capital.

In situations of less workers' autonomy (Langley compared with Dagenham), any tendencies towards cooperation are directly linked with the individual worker's hopes of up-grading and promotion. But in general, Ford has never managed to solve the problem of how to use the "intelligence potential" of assembly line workers.

THE MANUFACTURE AND SUPPLY OF FORD COMPONENTS

Ford has gone much further than the other 3 major car manufacturers (BMC, Vauxhall and Chrysler) in re-organising their supply of component parts and sub-assemblies. The company was driven by the wage struggles that were hitting its component and sub-assembly suppliers, into continuously re-organising its own vertical integration (bringing the supply of more and more basic components under the Ford umbrella). This process of concentration has been accelerating since Ford America took over total control of Ford-UK in 1960. Ford policy was increasingly to have at least 2 suppliers of any one component - with the exception of the few components supplied by companies directly controlled by Ford. This policy was an anti-strike measure.

From some points of view it might be an advantage to have a lot of the manufacture of components carried out by companies outside the

3. Plastics in the Motor Industry

Since this was published, the Oil Crisis has raised the price of plastics. However, for various historical reasons, Body Plant workers in the motor industry continue to be a key political bottleneck. The cost of their struggles might make the higher cost of plastic car bodies seem cheap at the price.

Advantages:

In their application to car components and accessories, plastics are at an advantage compared with other materials, in that they are:

- 1) Light without sacrificing strength;
- 2) Corrosion and rot-proof;
- 3) Easily moulded into complex shapes;
- 4) Inexpensive per unit volume.

Current Applications:

These advantages, together with improved production techniques, have led to a rapid increase in the use of plastics in the modern British car - in the last 3 years, for example, the average quantity of plastics per car has doubled. At present plastics are used specifically for:

- 1) Seat fabrics, headlining and floor coverings;
- 2) Steering wheels and steering column housings;
- 3) Miscellaneous small items such as horn buttons, door lock wedges, brake and clutch pedal bushings, handbrake grips, gearshift and instrument knobs;
- 4) Instrument cluster housings;
- 5) Fuel lines, windscreen fluid containers and tubing;
- 6) Distributor caps and voltage regulator housings;
- 7) Heater bodies;
- 8) Rear light housings (metallised plastics);
- 9) Heater fans;
- 10) Various decorative items.

Most modern paints, such as acrylics, also have an important plastic content.

New Applications:

In addition, research is in progress into the possible use of plastics for float chambers and carburettors; engine fans; petrol tanks; more metallised plastics for wing mirrors, hub caps etc; brake and clutch fluid reservoirs.

Reinforced Plastic Bodies

In spite of all the uses of plastics, they represent no more than 2% of the modern British car by weight, and total usage of c.30,000 tons a year. If the industry chose production of reinforced plastic bodies, however, the rate of consumption would rise dramatically. Is this a possibility?

Reinforced plastic bodies would be about half the weight of steel bodies, enabling lighter and smaller engines and other mechanical components to be used, cutting costs and fuel consumption. Their strength and resistance to corrosion would also be adequate.

On the production side, RP entails much lower tooling costs and could cut design and production time by two thirds. The outstanding mouldability of plastics would also permit drastic reductions in the number of body parts (possibly down to 10-12) with obvious potential economies.

The major disadvantage is that there is no RP equivalent to steel's high-level production techniques. At present moulding cycles for RP parts are at least 30 seconds long, and do not compare with current steel stamping technique.

RP production also requires more labour than does steel, and material costs are higher, partly because an RP body has to be 3 times as thick as steel to give equivalent strength. This makes it a doubtful option at present.

However, if plastic prices fall and steel costs rise, and if equivalent large scale production techniques can be developed, the time could arrive when the steel motor body becomes a thing of the past.



TEXT

FORD'S CHOICE AND SUPPLY OF RAW MATERIALS

When we turn from fixed capital (machinery etc) to circulating capital [App. 2] (raw materials, fuels etc), we see that Ford's operations unite workers in the "developed" countries and workers in the "under-developed" countries into one vast cooperative network. They're still trying to involve workers in the "socialist" countries as well (Kama River project, Rumania etc).

The way that Ford choose and obtain their raw materials is also dictated by the state of the class struggle:-

Energy: For supplying energy, Ford have their own power sources (eg the electrical power station at Dagenham). But they still depend on the State to provide coal from the nationalised coal mines. The change-over from coal to more labour-saving forms of energy (nuclear etc) is being left for the long-term, although in the United States the decisive shift is planned for the end of the 1970s.

Metals: Unlike the other UK motor manufacturers, for the last 40 years Ford has processed a fair amount of its own metals, after having imported them from Africa. Most of their steel supplies are produced in the UK, particularly in South Wales (Port Talbot), but they also have an anti-strike policy of keeping open alternative supplies from EFTA and the Common Market countries as a self-protecting measure against possible 'shortages' resulting from the frequent strikes in the UK steel sector.

Rubber: The production of rubber is still one of the strong points within the car production cycle as a whole. As the Times 'Rubber Report' (19th March 1969) said: "Industrial relations in the rubber industry are remarkably good". [Note 3]. The national Rubber Industry Agreement in 1967, which was based on a productivity deal, was the starting point for a complete re-structuring of the industry. It aimed to eliminate the 'hotch-potch of men, materials and plant' which characterised the industry, and claimed that the present large numbers of workers in the industry would soon be a thing of the past. This was to be achieved by maximum efficiency at all stages of production, which of course mean maximum exploitation of the labour force.

The rubber sector supplies more than 300 parts for the average car, and the tendency internationally is for natural rubber to be replaced by synthetic rubber. In 1948 one tenth of the rubber used in world-wide production of cars was synthetic - by 1968 it was two thirds. But in the UK the position is different - 34% synthetic rubber, as opposed to 66% natural. This is despite the strong position of American companies within the UK rubber industry, and is largely due to supplies coming from Britain's ex-imperialist presence in South-East Asia.

Plastics: As with other UK motor manufacturers, the percentage of plastic in Ford cars is still low (2% in 1968) [Note 5]. Ford might consider using plastics for car bodies - but even if they did, it would be in response to workers' insubordination [App. 4] - ie as a result of workers in the Press Shops and the early stages of the Body Plants refusing to produce, even if this was only expressed by the fact that these workers physically couldn't keep up the number of operations required as the rest of the plant speeds up. Ford, in such a situation, might turn to a fluidification of the work process by means of plastics: this would mean that manual handling is

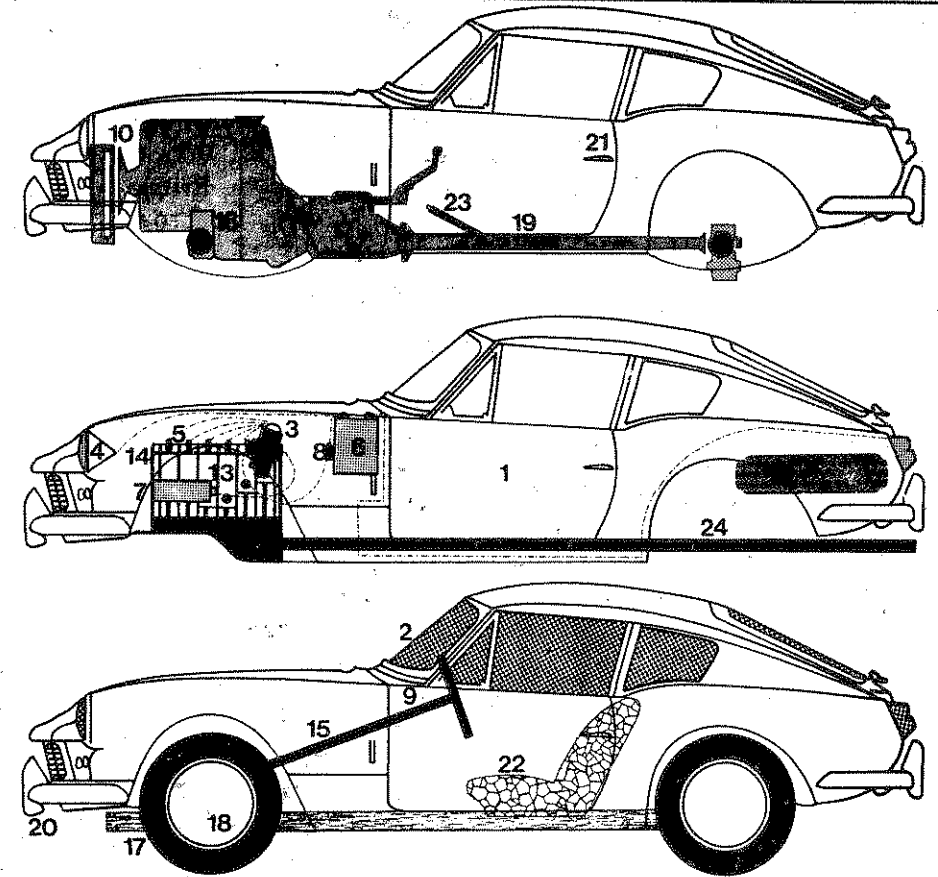
petrochemicals

labour force with the aim of...

5. Role of Outside Suppliers



TEXT



Cross-section of a Triumph GT6. These three diagrams illustrate the dependence of the motor industry on its component suppliers. The key will show you the large number of different component manufacturers involved in assembling a car; with the help of Exhibit 3 and an atlas you can locate the suppliers of components to the Coventry works of Standard Triumph, and you will see the problems of transportation and organization which face motor assemblers.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 1 Body : S.T.I. | 9 Instruments : Smiths | 16 Shock absorbers : Girling
Brakes : Lockheed
Springs : Tempered Springs |
| 2 Glass : Triplex | 10 Radiator : Cov-Rad (Coventry)
Thermostats : Lucas | 17 Tyres : Dunlop (Birmingham) |
| 3 Distributor : A/C Delco
Wiper motors : Lucas
Heater : Somnus
Starter motor : Lucas
Carburettor : Stromberg
Water pump : S.T.I.
Oil pump : Hobourn Eaton
Bolts, nuts etc. : G.K.N. | 11 Cylinder block : Beans (S.T.I.)
Cylinder head : Beans (S.T.I.)
Crankshaft : Garringtons
Timing chain : Reynolds (Coventry) | 18 Wheels : Sankey of Wellington |
| 4 Lighting : Lucas | 12 Gearbox casting : Beans (S.T.I.)
Gears : S.T.I.
Clutch assembly : Laycock | 19 Prop shaft assembly : Hardy Spicer |
| 5 Sparking plugs : Champion | 13 Pistons : Hepworth and Grandage
Rings : Hepworth and Grandage | 20 Bumpers : Sankey |
| 6 Battery : Exide | 14 Valves : Valves Ltd (Coventry)
Valve Springs : Tempered Springs
Camshaft : Garringtons | 21 Door handles : Wilmot Breaden |
| 7 Dynamo : Lucas | 15 Steering gear : Burmans | 22 Upholstery : Coventry Hood/S.S. |
| 8 Coil : Lucas | | 23 Hand brake : S.T.I. |
| | | 24 Exhaust system : Burgess |

WHO LOSES WHAT

The following British companies who supply parts for the Capri model will lose this work to West German firms from August:

- Wheel assembly: Kelsey Hayes (Ford subsidiary). Brake pedal: Concentric. Clutch lever: Concentric. Headlamp bezels: Pianoforte. Turn signal flasher: Wipac/Butlers. Rear lamp assembly: Butlers. Clock assembly: Smiths/Delco. Spotlamp switch: Wipac. Front fender part: Pianoforte. Windshield nozzle: Ball Plastics. Heater switch: Bonella. Steering wheel emblem: Lucas/Ball Plastics. Shield clutch bell: Tratt Plastics. Door moulding: Pianoforte. Dash insulator: Press Felts. Lower inst. panel and radio cover: Ball Plastics/Tratt Plastics. Ash tray receptacle: Ball. Inner

- back applique panel: J Burns/Ball. Bezel assembly, instr cluster: GKN/Sankey. Relay and bracket (headlamp): Lucas/Autolite. Clock housing: Ball. Clock base: Ball/Tratt. Cigar lighter: Ball/Tratt. Foglamp switch assembly and switch part: Bonella. Heater panel and retainer: Concentric. Strip heater: Primographic. Retainer spring: Dart Spring. Lamp assembly (glove compt.): Butlers. Air scoop grille: Hills. Quarter panel moulding: Pianoforte. Special washer: GKN. Absorber cowl top panel: Press Felts. Crash pad: J Burns. Hinge: Creator. Bracket: Palmer Shelley. Moulding (lower back applique): Pianoforte. Air cleaner: AC Delco. Heater hose: Auto Rubber. Exhaust mufflers: Walker (UK), Bowden, Ball, Amy Plastics, Euro-Kay and Ed. Rose.

The diagram above shows how much one British motor manufacturer - British Leyland - depends on outside component suppliers.

This note is taken from the Liverpool Free Press of July 1972. The paper carried news which had been leaked by white collar workers inside Ford-Halewood, about Ford's intentions to shift Capri work to Germany. The list shows the supplier companies who would lose work if Ford made that move.

production cycle of the big motor companies, since only the supplier companies are in a position to make the economies of scale that would reduce the costs of research and production of components (eg supplying all motor firms with one standardised product; Lucas, Pilkington etc).

But this is really an admission of the difficulty that British firms face with international competition. In order to keep an edge on international suppliers in the components field, British car producers are in danger of following a defensive line of expanding the supplier firms in the UK, in the short term, rather than vertically integrating production. This would mean that they were relying on their components suppliers in order to keep technically ahead of their foreign competitors, rather than having this capacity within themselves.

For a while this independence of the supplier firms was a useful line of defence for the UK car manufacturers, but it was exploded by the wage struggles of the 1950s and 1960s [App. 5]. Then a process of concentration started among supplier firms, which merely paved the way for them to be taken over by the bigger motor manufacturers. In any event, the future of each of the bigger companies supplying transmissions and electrical parts is more dependent on the motor manufacturers than vice-versa. For instance, over the past few years, Ford have broken the "monopoly" that existed in the UK supply of gear units, by beginning to supply 50% of their own needs [Note 6]. This process was also under way in other sections of industry, and reflects a concern of the capitalist class as a whole to reduce their dependence on component suppliers with a "monopoly" position in the market. 152

But it wasn't the capitalists of those particular supplier companies that decided whether or not the monopoly would continue: it was the working class. When workers in a particular supplier company use the rigidity of the production process (ie refuse flexibility, mobility of labour, new wage systems etc) as a weapon against that company, capital has to step in and break the workers' strangle-hold at that point in the production cycle. This was the case, for instance, with Briggs Bodies, which Ford took over in 1953.

This means that it will become increasingly rare for a strike in one of the component or sub-assembly companies to bring the larger UK motor combines to a standstill. It will be even harder now that the motor companies are setting up coordination at an international level, which in moments of strike action in the UK will bring in parts from other parts of Europe.

The level of integration in the UK motor industry was too low in the 1950s and 1960s, and this made the flow of production very vulnerable to stoppages in the supplier companies. Ford saw this, and learnt the lesson early. They saw the dangers of struggles by workers who were in a "monopoly" position, and pre-empted these struggles by setting up an international reserve pool for components and sub-assemblies. This is something that is worth studying in greater detail - but at the same time it should be said that the increasing integration of big companies also makes them more vulnerable to the actions of workers.

MACHINES, MEASURED DAY WORK AND SHOP STEWARDS

When it comes to the research, design and introduction of the heavy machinery that makes up the primary assembly lines and the auxil-

6. Fighting Mobility

Fraud

TEXT

SOME POSSIBLE WAYS OF FIGHTING MOBILITY IN THE PLANT

" Here is something that I wrote a while ago, on mobility and how to fight it (which is the obvious next step):-

Mobility hits job organisation - movement of militants, breaking up good sections, destroying relationships and morale. It enables the Company to introduce higher line-speeds, more jobs per man, disposal of militants, higher production (even the terrible jobs are fully manned, through forced mobility). Oldies go onto bad jobs, new starts go onto good ones - to make them stay longer than they might otherwise. [Mobility also has good points - militants move around, get info, spread struggles etc]

Ways of Fighting Mobility

Ford's intention is to isolate, smash, speed-up.

A] Before you are moved

Keep the conversation on mobility, bringing up examples, arguments against it. Spread the struggle by stressing the need for a permanent job. Find other areas in the plant where mobility is being used. Exchange information. Adopt a deliberate strategy - of non-cooperation and permanent resistance - making it as unprofitable as possible for the Company to move people about.

Ideal situation: if you are taken off because of a drop in production, get the lads to make sure it's you that is put back on when production increases again.

If your entire line is to be closed down, insist on an agreement. Recent example: Ford tried to shut down a section. Workers said: "You can move us only if it is to jobs in similar conditions. The Company was frightened and let them stay on their old jobs."

In the case of meaningless, provocative mobility, be definite. Stop work, get the steward, stay on the job if suspended (not letting anyone else work it). Or go slow if the issue is unresolved. A solid front frightens Ford - but make sure that you have a solid front, because you will have played your full hand - nothing up your sleeve, all out in the open etc. Do not allow new starts onto jobs that men have been moved off (onto worse ones). Instead, insist on having the old man back. Stick together.

B] If you have to move

However, there are times when being moved is unavoidable, especially under present circumstances (Crisis). So, after creating a stink, you find yourself out of your usual environment, unaware of work standards and practices. So - find out those which are relevant. Like numbers, reliefs, who is the steward, what the exact job consists of etc.

Then get down to the business of screwing them good and proper. The usual ways - you have an IQ of 10, are hard of hearing, cannot speak English, are crippled with headaches, rheumatism, gammy leg, flu etc, you have never seen a car before, have bladder trouble/constipation/diarrhoea, don't know how to tell the time (so don't know that you have taken half an hour relief instead of 10 minutes), fall asleep, can't count, read, or understand anything, can't stand noise/physical exertion/fumes etc. The only thing you know is your clock number - so's you get paid!

Got the idea? You harass them! Make it totally useless and downright unprofitable for them to move you. At the same time, use that movement to establish new contacts. Try not to isolate yourself from the new steward - he may be the only buffer you have in an unfamiliar section (although he could also be a real right-wing bastard who is liable to cut the ground from under you."

By A. Worker. (1975). Dedicated to Mad Harry.

inary lines in the factory, it's obvious that Ford UK depends heavily on Ford in America and its associates [Note 7]. Investment-per-employee in Ford's UK plants is higher than the average for Ford plants outside America [Note 8]. In Britain, compared with the other manufacturers, in 1945 Ford had a level of fixed capital [App. 2] which was slightly below Vauxhall's and double that of BMC [Note 9]. 153

So, Ford UK is located somewhere between the 'American' level of organic composition, and what I shall call the 'BMC level'. The 'BMC level' was typical of the motor companies in the Midlands, until the second half of the 1960s, when it was plunged into crisis by the combined pressure of Ford and Vauxhall. This went hand in hand with a crisis in the workers' "control" relationship to production, which for a long time was the basic bond between workers and shop stewards in the Midlands [Note 10]. This relationship could be called "piecework discipline" [App. 6]: under the piecework system, each steward acted as a policeman to ensure the productivity of his own group of workers. It partly explains why British Leyland could achieve surprisingly high levels of productivity, even though their fixed capital investment was lower than Ford's [Note 11].

In the Midlands plants, the fact that workers were willing to produce meant that employers could continue to operate with levels of organic composition that were lower than in other sectors of the motor industry - at least, until wage drift [App. 6] eroded the productivity of the piecework system. There were two factors that undermined the workers' willingness to work: on the one hand the wage drive which had been continuous in the Midlands ever since the War, and on the other hand the fact that, during the 1960s, Ford workers had begun demanding parity with the Midlands wage levels.

The Midlands level of capital investment (organic composition) placed the shop steward in a certain role. In wage negotiations, first the Unions and the Engineering Employers' Federation (of which Ford and Vauxhall have never become a part) define a general framework for national settlements. Then the shop stewards come into the picture: it's the stewards themselves who negotiate real wages under piecework, and through them piecework discipline is imposed [Note 12]. The Engineering Employers were very interested in this subject, and in their statement to the Donovan Commission (1965) they said the following:

"For those firms in the motor industry where the piecework system is operated, negotiations at national level are much less important than they used to be. With the continuance of full employment, impatient customers, and ever-increasing capital investment, managements are forced, or disposed, to bargain with shop stewards to keep their plants in full operation. This has led to the growth in plant bargaining. Although no official statistics are available, BMC knows that about 1500 items are dealt with yearly as part of the negotiation procedure above foreman level. This, together with the effects of technological change, has meant that the engineering industry's procedure is now used to an extent undreamed of in the past..A further consequence of the increase in plant bargaining is earnings drift - ie the gap between earnings and nationally negotiated rates. The containment of this gap, which is largely unrelated either to the economic circumstances of the country generally or to the productivity of the firm in particular, is difficult to achieve when our present system of bargaining provides no positive link between national and plant levels...In this part of the motor industry it has been found that the existence of a 154

7. Struggles under MDW

With Measured Day Work, the struggle over wage levels is increasingly removed to the national level. The struggle in the plant becomes a political question of our power against theirs. Manning levels and cooperation are a crucial area of battle.



with apologies to Guinness

OVERMANNING FOR STRENGTH

★ MDW at Ryton ★

by Eddie Tomlinson,
Sheetmetalworkers Union
Chrysler, Ryton

Four years ago Measured Day Work came in at the Coventry Chrysler plants. The attempts to enforce this new method of screwing the shop floor are the real background to the current dispute. And with the pay claim due to end on 30 June there is a clear connection.

Despite all the waffle about earnings, the real impact of the deal has been simple. Average earnings have slipped from 6th to 18th in the district. The effect on profits has been as spectacular. In the first year of MDW Chrysler turned a £10m loss into a profit of £¾ million, followed by profits of £1½ million last year.

But for all the increase in supervision and discipline, the fight over control on the shop floor is not over. Management has been forced to introduce bonus systems in an effort to keep up production.

But the real failure for Chrysler is in the man assignments. If they were followed nothing would be produced, because of the complete disorganisation of the industrial engineering department.

On the door hanging section last year, Superintendent Tommy Ord instructed the section to work to man assignments. These read that they did 14 two door cars, 14 estates, and 21 four door saloons.

The men accepted, but management couldn't get the cars into rotation. The result was chaos. Two door cars were coming down the line with doors for two door cars hanging on seven inches too short. Doors for four door cars were being hung on the back of estates, estate doors were being smashed into position on whatever car turned up next.

Ord came tearing down the line and begged the men to revert to their own patterns, but the men insisted on working to man assignment for the rest of the shift.

The result of this was an investigation into the Industrial Engineering Department. After this management allowed us to work to our own patterns. They left it to us.

The situation is the same today; they simply can't get the rotas sorted out. In fact at times when there's industrial peace in the plant, if it wasn't for us MDW couldn't work at all. It's our co-operation which keeps the place going at all. But now management are making us the scapegoats for their own useless confusion. Chrysler now take the foremen off for an hour's training each week to try and lessen the confusion.

In fact we make the place work in spite of the management and the foremen. If there's sabotage at Ryton it doesn't come from the shop floor.

well-organised shop stewards committee, fully representative of trade union membership in the factory, can assist greatly in overcoming the problem of leap-frogging wage claims, and also inter-union friction, demarcation disputes, and in controlling their more militant members." [Note 13]

Wage drive in the Midlands was organised jointly by pressure from workers and negotiations by shop stewards. It got to the point where wage increases far outstripped increases in productivity: the balance of the piecework system was beginning to tip against the employer. The recent hard-fought attempts by British Leyland to introduce Measured Day Work are a sign that the Company are trying to restore the balance in their favour. They're aiming to wipe out the position of BLMC workers as the leaders of this wage drive that has affected the car and engineering plants where wages are based on piecework.

With Ford, however, the position is different. They have maintained higher levels of constant capital investment [App. 2] than the average for British motor manufacturing, and have combined this with a system of hourly pay based on the "Ford organisation of work" [App. 1]. The Ford assembly line, which controls rigidly and constantly the productivity of the labour force, has enabled Ford to be the first British motor company to free itself from the workers' use of the incentive system (ie using incentives to push up wages without correspondingly increasing productivity), and to make speed-up independent of corresponding increases in wages.

Relative exploitation [Note 14 and App. 2] is higher at Ford than at BLMC. Part of the difference between the two is negotiated - ie the fact that Ford negotiates wage levels that are lower than the other motor companies. But the other part is not negotiated - ie the rate of work (speed-up etc) which is imposed on workers by the Ford assembly line, in which they have little say.

The organisation of work at Ford partly explains the fact that, for a long time, Ford shop stewards were very close to the interests of Ford line workers. At first, in the 1930s, factory organisation was hard to establish, because Ford, like Vauxhall, were prepared to concede wage increases. Then, after the 2nd World War, union bargaining made company planning of wage levels a very precarious and temporary affair, and at the same time, shop stewards were put in a position to negotiate, by the fact that there was a strong rank-and-file drive against work-speeds and conditions of work in general.

As a rule, with the Ford organisation of work, the more that flow production is introduced, and the assembly line is "fluidified, smoothing out the bottlenecks and discontinuities that are typical of the UK engineering industry, the less room there is for anyone to negotiate the particular conditions of any one group of workers. At this point, either the shop steward "rejoins the workers" instead of fulfilling his role as a go-between in relations between the shop floor and management, or he comes closer to the Union, and tries to use it and make his presence felt in the negotiation of money wages.

The fact that Ford's day wage has been so much lower than wages in the other motor manufacturers has been the main driving force of struggles through the late 1960s and early 1970s - the demand for Parity [Note 15]. As this campaign starts to develop, the motor manufacturers will start to coordinate a double strategy on wages: on the one hand they aim to stop the

Reprinted from 'Carworker' Chrysler Special, Summer '73

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8. Ford on Absenteeism



Supervisors Bulletin

PER & ORG
JULY 68 8188

Halewood Operations

No. 216

21. 7. 72

New regulations covering hourly paid personnel with effect from August 1972 concerning absenteeism

Sickness

This is no longer an excuse. We will no longer accept a Doctor's statement as proof as we believe that if an operative is able to go to the Doctor's surgery, he is able to go to work.

Death

(other than your own) This is no excuse. There is nothing you can do for them and we are sure that someone else with a lesser position can attend to the arrangements. However, if the funeral can be held during your lunch hour, or in the late afternoon, and providing that your work is ahead enough to keep that job going in your absence, we will be glad to let you off.

Leave of Absence

(for an operation) We are no longer allowing this practice. We wish to discourage any thoughts that you may need an operation as we believe that as long as you are an employee here you will need all of whatever you have, and you should not consider having anything removed. We hired you as you are and to have anything removed would certainly make you less than we bargained for. Anyone having an operation will be fired.

Death

(Your own) This will be accepted as an excuse. We would, however, like two week's notice. We also feel it is your duty to teach someone else your job before you go.

Toilet

Entirely too much time is being spent in the toilets to the detriment of vital export production. In the future we will follow the practice of going in alphabetical order. For instance, those whose names begin with the letter 'A' will go from 09.00-09.15 hrs; those whose names begin with 'B' will go from 09.15-09.30 hrs. If you are unable to go at your appointed time it will be necessary for you to wait until the next shift when your turn again comes round.

Industrial Relations
Halewood Operations

wage drive which has developed, based on the Midlands piecework system (as BLMC), and on the other hand they aim to take the wind out of the Ford workers' struggle for Parity.

FORD LEADS THE WAY IN SHOP-FLOOR CONTROL

Because production at Ford is more tightly coordinated than other motor manufacturers the Company has to maintain a much tighter discipline at shop-floor level. Every time insubordination [App. 4] by a small group of workers causes a hold-up, the whole flow of production is threatened. Ford know this, and in the company agreement of March 1969 they tried to introduce their "Penalty Package". This aimed to modify the Labour Government's anti-strike legislation (Barbara Castle's "In Place of Strife") [Note 16], and bring it into line with the needs of a big company whose concern was to keep strikes at its UK plants within the average level for its plants internationally. The Government was planning a 28-day "cooling-off" period for "unconstitutional" strikes [Note 17], but the Penalty Clauses proposed by Ford went further. They were designed to play on and exploit the isolation of single groups of workers - which is the other side of the ability of small groups of workers to plunge the whole of Ford's production process into crisis. 156

If one small group of workers somewhere along the line is in a position to organise a stoppage that will seriously threaten production, then management must exploit the smallness of that group of workers, and use the fact that they are a minority, so as to break any possibility of support and sympathetic action from the rest of the work-force: ie isolate them from the mass of workers. The Company aimed to ensure that the mass of workers would, in the short term, lose more than they would gain from the action of small groups of workers. For this reason Ford went further than the Government's proposals, and once again paved the way for future action by the State. Then, at the crucial moment of negotiations on the "Penalty Package", the management side declared that they would be willing to abandon all the proposed penalties - if the Unions were prepared to accept lower wage increases. But at this point the Minister for Employment stepped in and blocked this move, and managed to get the principle of penalties accepted in the final Agreement [Note 18].

The clauses introduced in the "Penalty Package" threatened that in the event of an unofficial strike in a given Plant, workers in that Plant would lose lay-off pay, the yearly holiday bonus, and sick pay benefits for a six-month period. This would apply to all workers in the Plant where "unconstitutional" action occurred: the definition of "unconstitutional" was extended to include all forms of action - strikes, overtime bans, even go-slows and working-to-rule - ie anything which stood in the way of the Company achieving "flexibility of operation" and "efficient utilisation of plant". 157

The fact that Ford concentrated on penalising forms of struggle inside the plant implied that they had plans for still further concentration of production.

This "Penalty" experiment was being tried in a key sector of British industry, and the State followed it with eagle eye. The fact that it failed was another factor that led to the far more vicious clauses in the 1970 Industrial Relations Bill. The original penalties

9. The Creation of the 'Fordised' Worker



TEXT

The text below is taken from the writings of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, imprisoned under the Fascist Mussolini. The article - "Americanism and Fordism" - looks at the Ford method of production, and asks whether it could be developed as a progressive force. He also compares Europe's archaic society with the "rational demographic structure" of America that brought about this capitalist leap forward in the organisation of production.

"Fordism" was a new way of making motor cars - the Assembly Line. But as Gramsci points out, it also broke the power of the old skilled engineering working class by creating a new type of worker who was to be constrained and remoulded inside a puritan "Fordised" strait-jacket. The typical Ford worker would be an immigrant worker, fairly young, sober, probably married, and highly "moral". This "morality" was imposed at Fords through the introduction of a bonus-incentive scheme [the "5-Dollar Day" in 1912] by which each worker was graded into 4 grades according to whether or not the Ford investigators thought he was morally worthy to receive the bonus payment!

Taylor is in fact expressing with brutal cynicism the purpose of American society—developing in the worker to the highest degree automatic and mechanical attitudes, breaking up the old psycho-physical nexus of qualified professional work, which demands a certain active participation of intelligence, fantasy and initiative on the part of the worker, and reducing productive operations exclusively to the mechanical, physical aspect. But these things, in reality, are not original or novel: they represent simply the most recent phase of a long process which began with industrialism itself. This phase is more intense than preceding phases, and manifests itself in more brutal forms, but it is a phase which will itself be superseded by the creation of a psycho-physical nexus of a new type, both different from its predecessors and undoubtedly superior. A forced selection will ineluctably take place; a part of the old working class will be pitilessly eliminated from the world of labour, and perhaps from the world *tout court*.

It is from this point of view that one should study the "puritanical" initiative of American industrialists like Ford. It is certain that they are not concerned with the "humanity" or the "spirituality" of the worker, which are immediately smashed. This "humanity and spirituality" cannot be realised except in the world of production and work and in productive "creation". They exist most in the artisan, in the "demiurge", when the worker's personality was reflected whole in the object created and when the link between art and labour was still very strong. But it is precisely against this "humanism" that the new industrialism is fighting. "Puritanical" initiatives simply have the purpose of preserving, outside of work, a certain psycho-physical equilibrium which prevents the physiological collapse of the worker, exhausted by the new method of production. This equilibrium can only be something purely external and mechanical, but it can become internalised if it is proposed by the worker himself, and not imposed from the outside, if it is proposed by a new form of society, with appropriate and original methods. American industrialists are concerned to maintain the continuity of the physical and muscular-nervous efficiency of the worker. It is in their interests to have a stable, skilled labour force, a permanently well-adjusted complex, because the human complex (the collective worker) of an enterprise is also a machine which cannot, without considerable loss, be taken to pieces too often and renewed with single new parts.

The element of so-called high wages also depends on this necessity. It is the instrument used to select and maintain in stability a skilled labour force suited to the system of production and work. But high wages are a double-edged weapon. It is necessary for the worker to spend his extra money "rationally" to maintain, renew and, if possible, increase his muscular-nervous efficiency and not to corrode or destroy it. Thus the struggle against alcohol, the most dangerous agent of destruction of labouring power, becomes a function of the state. It is possible for other "puritanical" struggles as well to become functions of the state if the private initiative of the industrialists proves insufficient or if a moral crisis breaks out among the

working masses which is too profound and too widespread, as might happen as a result of a long and widespread crisis of unemployment.

The sexual question is again connected with that of alcohol. Abuse and irregularity of sexual functions is, after alcoholism, the most dangerous enemy of nervous energies, and it is commonly observed that "obsessional" work provokes alcoholic and sexual depravation. The attempts made by Ford, with the aid of a body of inspectors, to intervene in the private lives of his employees and to control how they spent their wages and how they lived is an indication of these tendencies. Though these tendencies are still only "private" or only latent, they could become, at a certain point, state ideology, inserting themselves into traditional puritanism and presenting themselves as a renaissance of the pioneer morality and as the "true" America (etc.). The most noteworthy fact in the American phenomenon in relation to these manifestations is the gap which has been formed and is likely to be increasingly accentuated, between the morality and way of life of the workers and those of other strata of the population.

Prohibition has already given an example of this gap. Who drank the alcohol brought into the United States by the bootleggers? Alcohol became a luxury product and even the highest wages were not enough to enable it to be consumed by large strata of the working masses. Someone who works for a wage, with fixed hours, does not have time to dedicate himself to the pursuit of drink or to sport or evading the law. The same observation can be made about sexuality. "Womanising" demands too much leisure. The new type of worker will be a repetition, in a different form, of peasants in the villages. The relative stability of sexual unions among the peasants is closely linked to the system of work in the country. The peasant who returns home in the evening after a long and hard day's work wants the "*venere facilem parabilemque*"³³ of Horace. It is not his style. He loves his own woman, sure and unfaithful, who is free from affectation and doesn't play little games about being seduced or raped in order to be possessed. It might seem that in this way the sexual function has been mechanised, but in reality we are dealing with the growth of a new form of sexual union shorn of the bright and dazzling colour of the romantic tinsel typical of the petit bourgeois and the Bohemian layabout. It seems clear that the new industrialism wants monogamy: it wants the man as worker not to squander his nervous energies in the disorderly and stimulating pursuit of occasional sexual satisfaction. The employee who goes to work after a night of "excess" is no good for his work. The exaltation of passion cannot be reconciled with the timed movements of productive motions connected with the most perfected automatism. This complex of direct and indirect repression and coercion exercised on the masses will undoubtedly produce results and a new form of sexual union will emerge whose fundamental characteristic would apparently have to be monogamy and relative stability.

It would be interesting to know the statistical occurrence of deviation from the sexual behaviour officially propogandised in the United States, broken down according to social group.

were planned to meet the productive needs of the Company in a period of expansion. But in fact the clauses threatening loss of lay-off pay for workers in any plant affected by "unconstitutional action" only played in favour of unconstitutional action, since once the 'truce' had been broken, then workers would have nothing to lose [Note 18].

WORKERS' STRUGGLES AND THE "FORDISATION" OF WORK

When we look at the part played in Ford production by workers at the Dagenham and Langley plants, we see that there's a permanent under-current of tension, which accumulates at shop floor level in the struggles of small groups of workers, and then finds outlet in the periodic strike confrontations with the Company and the State. Both Ford and the State accept this structure of "industrial relations" (in fact they encourage it - as in the new "American-style" 1971 Agreement, aimed at a long-term contract, ending in a set-piece confrontation every 2-3 years), and when the confrontation comes, they bring to bear all the pressures possible within the balance of class power at that time [Note 20].

Throughout the 1950s, Ford were integrating their production at Dagenham (bringing in Briggs Bodies etc), and this process accelerated after Ford-America took over total control of the Company in 1960. The fact that there were a number of Ford plants concentrated round Dagenham, all within a few miles of each other, meant that it was possible for workers to establish immediate contact and common action [political composition: App. 1]. In America, where Ford plants are more decentralised (this is made possible by their higher technological level), this kind of contact is only really possible when a given struggle has been going for some time.

The Dagenham factory is fed by a number of smaller factories proliferating around the main factory, and in the same way Dagenham also acts as a feeder for the Ford factories in the "developed" and "underdeveloped" countries of the world (supplying components, knock-down parts etc). The process of transportation brings into close contact two strategic sectors of the British economy - motors and containers - by creating a link (a link that is also political) between Ford workers and the large numbers of dockers working at Tilbury - a dock that is in the process of being containerised. Ford have their own ships coming into Tilbury. As for knock-down parts, these are exported for final assembly in the countries to which they are sent. [This is happening increasingly, as overseas governments seek to build assembly plants which they hope will eventually be the ground for building up a vehicles-industry that is locally-based.]

This means that West Indian and African workers - who at this moment are about 20% of the 22,000 workers at Dagenham - are preparing material and working on the manufacture of knock-down parts for export and final assembly in South Africa, which, along with Holland, is the biggest overseas market for Ford UK. Needless to say, if they were working in South Africa, they would undergo intense racial discrimination.

Dagenham produces all the engines for Ford cars made in Britain, while Halewood, the other big Ford plant with car Final Assembly Lines, sends out transmission units. The link between Halewood and Dagenham is by rail/Freightliner, yet another intervention by the State in coord-

Reprinted from the "Prison Notebooks" of A. Gramsci: pub, I&W 1971

10. Management Chaos

Ford

TEXT

"Look, if you've never seen it, then you're never going to understand it. If you've seen Chaos organised in a car plant, then you've really seen something! And this is the way to win! Because instead of you going to the man with your cap in your hand, you create the conditions where he has got to come to you and say: "Look, turn it in, will you..." And you tell him to get knotted...and you tell him that what he's offering is not enough...and you want a bit more.

"What's happening now is that Ford is able to produce his marketable goods in half the time. So he can afford to have a strike, every year. And he can afford to wait the lads out, and they'll go back demoralised after the strike. And it'll take them a long time to recover...

It's not just Fords. It's a lot of other industries as well, which have reached the same position. The struggle now has got to take place inside the plant, and has got to be disruption. Because it hurts.

"I mean...organised Chaos...you just imagine a big plant with 15,000 people...they're all timed to the point of a minute...everything depends on the next fellow...and you just start disrupting it. I mean, it only needs a few people and things start...going wrong. Like leaving something off a car. The next bloke can't continue. You twist the electrical system about a little bit, and it starts shorting off...the next bloke puts the next thing in and...bang bang!

"In the old days, when the stewards reached 'failure to agree' on timings, they would say: "Right. We're on a go-slow". But they never called it a go-slow. They called it 'management-organised Chaos'. The Company had given the blokes too much work to do, which meant they were all going down the line...an assembly line with all the blokes working on it, and everyone working out of his space. If you start going down the line it means you drift further and further down the line. Your stock is back up the line. So you've got to walk. And the further you walk, the further your car goes down the line. And sometime or other you fall off the edge. And when you fall off the edge, the car goes onto a transfer line, where there's another group of men, who are following on from where you left off. If half the job's not done, it means they can't continue. So it goes straight through the process, from one line to another, and it finally finishes up in Final Assembly with half the gear left off...Ford lose all their profit on the car. They're hurt... and they come back to you and say: "Well, look, we're prepared to give you such-and-such". And it's up to you.

"I mean, they're terribly vulnerable. For instance, after a line settles down - ie when they've put men on it and now they've got a 'stable' labour force - they'll get a big bloke, a great big bloke, to work on the electricals. And he's got to squeeze inside the car and work bent double. Which means he's slower. They'll gradually tumble to it that a smaller bloke would do the job better. So then they'll get the right-sized bloke, so that he can nip in and out of the cars and do the job. And they'll keep speeding him up and up, and the more he does the harder he works, until in the end he gets demoralised, and starts taking days off. And when he takes the day off, they have to get three men to do the job that he was doing. And then, after a while, he might decide to leave Ford. And it'll take them months to build another man into the job, to train him so that he can maintain that speed."

An Ex-Ford Worker: 1971.

inating a delicate area of the Ford production cycle, reducing Ford's dependence on road transport.

In the event of strike action, the main bottleneck in the Dagenham estate is the Engine Plant. If the old capitalist dream came true and the Engine Plant was working full shifts, 168 hours a week every day of the year, it would be producing 1,000,000 engines a year. But effective production from the Plant is no more than half that number, and it's a typical case of the capitalist problem of "full utilisation of plant and machinery", which is the opposite of the worker's point of view - that social life is more important than Ford's needs. [Note: since this article was written, Ford's Dagenham Engine Plant production has in fact passed the million mark - October 1972].

The 5,500 workers in the Engine Plant have a leading position in setting line-speeds for the whole factory, and therefore this plant has been the main target for Ford's attempts to eliminate non-productive time (dead time), using computers and cybernetics. Since the section has not suffered defeats, not even following the 1962 strike, and since Ford has needed to increase productivity [relative exploitation: App. 2] in the Plant, they introduced a system of computerised control of the flow of production, and managed a considerable reduction in dead time. This key position of the Engine Plant also explains why Ford are so worried when these 5,500 begin stoppages or overtime bans, especially when stoppages here are organised to alternate with similar action by workers in the Foundry and Final Assembly. 159

The Foundry and Final Assembly are two other bottlenecks within the whole Ford process. In the Foundry workers have used the fact that the organisation of work was more flexible, and have managed through their struggles to reduce the number of Grades, which had been very marked in the Plant previously [Note 21]. In the second case, it has been the Final Assembly lines which have borne the full brunt of the strikes in the component and sub-assembly manufacturers, which have become more and more frequent in the last 10 years. This is also the section where workers have been least willing to buy Ford's "job evaluation" scheme, and where the demand came up for back-dated lay-off pay after the layoffs in 1968 [Note 22].

On the one hand, the workers' demand for full pay in the event of layoffs is very damaging to Ford: it tends to lead to long, drawn-out overtime bans, which can then lead into equally long strikes. But on the other hand, Ford were able to use the question of layoff pay against their workers. They could use the demand for full layoff pay in the event of a strike in another section, to exploit the lack of political coordination between individual plants and factories within the Company. This was shown in the lack of support for the women sewing machinists in 1968 when they struck at Dagenham: 200 Halewood workers came out in support, and Ford responded by laying off 5,000. This was by no means the first or the last time that this had happened.

Nobody could say that Barbara Castle's Bill was defeated in 1969. In fact, its main proposals as far as the interests of British capital were concerned, came up again in the Industrial Relations Bill. Tory critics of "In Place of Strife" criticised it, not because it went too far, but because, given the balance of class forces at that time, it didn't go far enough. It was for this reason that the Tories found it necessary to accompany the Industrial Relations Bill with another law - the Immigration Act, to limit the basic civil rights of those sections of workers who were not yet part of the settled population - ie immigrant workers from Britain's ex-colonies. This means the 700,000 West Indian 160

Reprinted from "Dossier of Fear for Ford" (Factfolder, 1971)

11. Restriction of Effort



TEXT

THE BOSS' RULE

In the Beginning was the Rule
 And the Rule was in the Book
 And the Rule was Boss
 And the Boss was God
 So the Rule was God.

But woe unto them that worketh to Rule
 For the Rule worketh not
 (Even as the Boss worketh not)
 And upon them that abide by the Rule of the Boss
 Shall great strictures and vengeance be visited
 By the press of the Boss, thy God.

For the Rule worketh not
 Even though It be written in the Book
 By the Boss and His agents in the working class movement
 Great therefore is the woe to the National Economy.

For the Boss thy God, who created the Rule,
 Who created the Book,
 Is the Creator of great confusion.

And they that worketh to His Rule
 Shall post Epistles that shall not arrive
 But be lost forever.
 They shall sit all day in Great Confusion
 In trains that runneth not
 Even according to the Rule of the Boss, thy God
 They shall assemble faulty components
 Following blueprints that meaneth little.

For although He made Heaven and Earth
 The Boss resideth outside of production
 And knoweth not its ways and means
 Therefore thou shalt do only the works of the Boss, thy God
 - And this sparingly -
 Thou shalt heed not His Rules
 Thou shalt use thy loaf
 Thou shalt take over His factories and manage production
 For the Boss is both alpha and omega
 The Beginning and End of Great Confusion.

E. Morse

The Company cited as a typical instance of restriction of effort the case of the Headliners, whose job it is to fit the interior roof lining in a vehicle. It had been calculated that with reasonable effort a headlining on a small car could be fitted in 22 minutes, which meant that in a normal 8-hour shift at least 20 should be fitted by each employee in the section. The Company stated that the Headliners had resolutely refused to fit more than 13 headlinings in any one shift, saying that Management's request was unreasonable. And yet, the Company's statement continued, they had in fact fitted each headlining in less time than allowed, and spent the remainder of the time between jobs sitting down. Any attempt by Supervision to improve the situation had resulted in a "go slow" by these men; they took so long over each car that they prevented other employees on the line from performing their operations thus causing congestion and frequently leading to the lines being stopped and sometimes other employees being sent home. This also took place when the Headliners were suffering any type of grievance, real or imaginary; on one occasion the Company had had no choice but to send other employees home at 3.30 in the morning as a result of this type of action. The Company stated that this practice had caused great resentment in areas where employees were making a better effort. Shop Stewards however, supported by the Convenor, had always maintained on these occasions that the employees concerned were working normally and refused completely, in spite of numerous appeals, to persuade their members to remove restrictions. One of the seventeen employees discharged on 31st January, 1963 had played a major part in the continuance of this restriction in spite of frequent warnings.

The Company stated that employees elsewhere had also been encouraged by certain Shop Stewards not to achieve production schedules and had been known to organise stoppages of work just because a Work Study Engineer entered a department. As the level of efficiency at which the Plant was running was so low there was usually ample scope to make up time lost through short interruptions in the flow of cars down the line, but the men kept careful record of all such interruptions and made sure that the Company was prevented from regaining the lost production.

"The Gospel According to Rule"(above) is taken from the excellent Solidarity pamphlet: "What Happened at Ford". Published in '67 it gives the story of the 1962 defeat from the workers' point of view.

← The employer's point of view was presented in the Ford Motor Company's evidence to the Jack Court of Inquiry in April 1963. [HMSO Cmnd 1999]

workers, the 300,000 Indians and Pakistanis (not to mention countless Irish workers), who were brought to the UK at a time when unemployment here was low, and the "underdevelopment" of these ex-colonies made them good recruiting grounds for labour to be drained off towards the "mother" countries [Note 23].

At the end of the 1960s, the capitalist class began a counter-attack, which among other things included ways of punishing 'passive solidarity action' between plants (ie anything short of strike action) and introducing a new wage hierarchy by means of job evaluation. Ford was a leading force in both these attacks. As regards job evaluation, Ford took on Urwick Orr & Co as consultants to set up a new wage structure. If we want to understand how they arrived at the "relevant" gradings for each job, we would have to look at the relative strength of the different sections of the factory at that time. There was little "scientific" about the evaluations. The highest ratings were given to the smallest sections. In general, Ford uses the "smallness" of a work-group as a basis for calculating the "worth" of that group of workers.

Thus, it's Company policy to oppose any upward alteration of the grading system when it's a matter of upgrading hundreds of workers: but when it's only a matter of 10 or 20, they're more willing to agree. So, although Ford claimed that the evaluations were made on the basis of "skills" etc, in fact they were made by taking into account only the cost of labour, and of course, any increase that threatens the stability of the factory wage hierarchy is avoided like the plague [Note 24]. As it happened, the workers' response to the introduction of this artificial job hierarchy was to use grading grievances as a way of advancing their claims, and for this reason Ford imposed a standstill in grading alterations for the 2-year duration of the 1971 Agreement.

FLEXIBILITY, LABOUR MOBILITY AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WORK

The managements of Britain's big motor manufacturers have one over-riding interest in common: they are constantly reminding the State of the need for flexibility of labour ^{power} to be achieved. They made this very clear in the Report that they prepared for the Donovan Commission [Note 25]:-

"The 1964 TUC Annual Conference called for the 35-hour week; and similarly the Conference of the International Metalworkers' Federation at the end of 1965 expected European carworkers to follow the United Automobile Workers of America in demanding the 35-hour week. This ambition, however, could only be realised with the greater utilisation of automated machinery, and the latter can only be achieved if it is to run for the optimum length of time. This clearly requires flexibility in shift working and staggered rotas. Thus, if the Trade Unions wish to press for shorter hours, their claims need to be qualified by a corresponding willingness to accept work on a regular basis at times which are now regarded as overtime, outside the traditional Monday-to-Friday 40-hour week. The idea that scheduled overtime might vary in length between winter and summer, and that weekend and afternoon and night shifts can form part of the standard work-time, will require increasing attention."

Sabotage at Lordstown —how General Motors' bright star was dimmed

Labour relations at the Vega plant of General Motors in Lordstown, Ohio, must be worse than they are anywhere in the British car industry, one which is not exactly trouble-free.

Mr Alvin Anderson, the Vega plant manager, has complained on nationwide television: "We have had sabotage and we have had deliberate missing of work."

He said examples of this sabotage were: "Slashing of seat covers, caving-in of radios, scratching of instruments in the instrument panel, scratching of paint, tearing glove box doors, destroying or bending the shift levers, and various other things of serious consequence."

These are not the actions a car company in normal circumstances wants to draw to the attention of potential buyers of its product—particularly when that product is the main thrust of its counter-attack against foreign car imports into the United States.

But then the situation at the Vega plant is abnormal. The car, named after a bright star in the night sky, is causing more labour problems than any other General Motors' product.

The main reason for this bad state of affairs is probably the youthful work force. Most of the workers are in their early 20s. Many of them with their long hair and beards look like rock musicians. They are not motivated by the old Puritan "work ethic". In fact it is difficult to find anyone who feels any sense of loyalty toward the Vega.

The company first moved into the Lordstown area in the mid-1960s, in an attempt to explore virgin territory and to break away from the traditionally hostile relationship between managers and men in the auto towns concentrated around the shores of Lake Erie.

Pontiac Firebirds and large Chevrolets were made at the factory, until General Motors decided to switch to production of a sub-compact car to compete with the Datsun, the Toyota, the Volkswagen and the other foreign imports which were making heavy inroads into the United States domestic market.

The company worked with great speed to install the most up-to-date assembly line in the history of the car industry. The line was capable of turning out just over 100 cars an hour, against the usual 50 to 60 cars an hour. Innovations included a robot called the unimate which automatically performs the welding work.

GM's main priority was to produce as many cars as possible as quickly as possible, and in this limited objective they were successful. The first Vega rolled out in the summer of 1970 and it quickly proved the fastest selling sub-compact car made in the United States.

Then someone took a hard look at the balance sheet. The Vega was not making a large enough profit

and the General Motors assembly division, famed for its ruthless cost cutting efficiency, was sent in last October to take over the management and boost profits.

The GMAD promptly "rationalized" the assembly line. The experts gave some workers jobs that two had performed before and cut the 8,400 workforce by about 700 to 800—according to the United Autoworkers Union, and "by something under half that amount"—according to General Motors.

Things have gone downhill ever since. GM had to start sending home workers on an eight-hour shift after only three hours' work: they had already generated enough work for the repair division to keep the repairmen busy for the rest of the shift!

In the period up to the end of January such assembly line problems lost GM about 12,000 cars and 4,000 trucks valued at more than \$40m. The complaints of workers when I spoke to them in Ohio at their homes and on the picket lines earlier this week quickly filled a notebook.

Complaints fall under two general related headings: Too much work and inhuman working conditions. No one I met complained about wages. "My take home pay is at least \$140 a week and sometimes \$260 a week and that makes GM a goldmine," said one young worker relaxing at home over his marijuana.

Few workers deny that some sabotage has occurred at the plant; but they unanimously claim that most of the deficiencies are caused by "missed work" because people simply cannot keep up the pace. Each person on the assembly line has about 35 seconds to perform his assigned task, moving along with the car as it proceeds along the assembly line.

Workers complain that they have to miss one car in ten or one car in twenty if they are to avoid "a bump in the backside". And others simply get round this problem by only putting in nine bolts or nine wires when they are supposed to put in ten.

General Motors replies that most of these complaints are groundless. But the company concedes that, because of some unavoidable imbalance in job assignment, it would be "crazy" to maintain that all workers have sufficient time to do their particular job.

But the main complaint of workers is that they are treated like machines not people. This complaint is voiced mildly by the so-called "hill-billies" at Vega—workers from the rural areas of West Virginia—and strongly by workers from the neighbouring

area which includes Kent State University.

They want more interesting, more responsible work. At present they feel a strong sense of alienation, of no pride whatever in what they are doing. Some even confess that they are telling everyone they meet not to buy a Vega. They say they are "doing them a favour. It's a lousy car".

This is a problem facing General Motors now. But it is difficult to see how car companies throughout the industrial world can avoid a similar crisis in labour-management relations.

General Motors made its difficulties more acute by first hiring too many workers, and then causing an inevitable uproar by dismissing the surplus. But this should not obscure the core of its problem.

This is that the company is having to strive harder and harder merely to prevent a fall in its profits. Last year GM sold 7.8 million vehicles and net sales totalled \$28,264m; both figures are records.

Yet net profits totalled only \$1,976m as against \$2,126m in 1965 when sales totalled \$20,734m. When allowance is made for inflation this represents a very significant deterioration in profit performance.

Prevention of further slippage demands more automation, which in turn causes greater strains in labour relations.

This highlights the real dilemma facing General Motors. Does it move, as Saab has recently decided to do in Sweden, toward a more individualistic system of car assembly providing workers with more satisfying jobs? Or does it continue to regard the maximization of profits and corporate growth as its over-riding objectives?

These two alternative goals (except in a very long term view), are not compatible; and there are no signs that General Motors has faced up to the dilemma. Its most obvious move to contain labour resentment at Lordstown could hardly be described as adequate.

This has been to paste up slogans around the factory written in Japanese and German to instil in workers a sense of the threat of foreign competition. Other slogans include such bromides as "waste not want not" and "A fair day's work for a fair day's pay."

This escapism is not sustainable for very long. It does not take much insight to see that young people in the more affluent countries today are not going to tolerate even more boring and repetitive assembly line work than that performed by their parents and grandparents.

General Motors' big new investment in the Lordstown, Ohio Vega plant was supposed to provide the ultimate capitalist control of car workers. Its failure - documented in this article - showed how Fordism had reached its limit, as a policy of class control.


TEXT

But we should look at another even more important aspect of flexibility of labour - ie workers' mobility [App. 4]:

In the Dagenham plant at the end of the 1960s, the weekly turnover of labour was running at about 1%. At Langley it was reported as being about 40% in a year. The reason for this was the speed-up. In the words of one black worker: "When the pressure gets them, they run... They finish with Fords."

Langley is the plant out near Slough where Ford concentrated their productions of trucks and vans in 1959. Out of the 2,000 workers employed here, about 75% are West Indians and Asians, compared with Dagenham which at the time of writing has about 20-25%. In both cases the percentage of immigrant workers is increasing from year to year, and this is due to the fact that not many local workers are willing to put up with the pace of production at Ford. [In late 1972 Ford were having to advertise as far away as Liverpool to get assembly line workers for Dagenham]. At Langley, out of every 80 new recruits into the factory, only 10 are likely to stay there for more than 12 months, and many don't even last out the week. There are a few old hands who have been in the factory for years, but by the time they start taking the new recruits in hand, the new men are already on their way out, looking for something better, "because life at Ford is hard".

The introduction of black immigrant labour at Ford was a result of the labour shortages of the 1950s and 1960s. It was a slow process, more noticeable at Langley than at Dagenham. And right from the start there were tensions between black and white workers: for instance the fact that the Unions took no action to ensure a fair distribution of overtime between blacks and whites:

"To give an instance of how this operates: in any section where there are about 30 workers, 25 blacks and 5 whites, four of the whites are sure of overtime, three of the blacks are sure of overtime, about five blacks are given overtime at intervals, and the remainder none." [Note 26]

Management know that for many black workers overtime is a necessity, because as well as paying for food, housing etc, they also have to earn the money to cover the costs of coming to Britain in the first place - and this can take months or years. Also, many black workers travel in from London and outlying areas, and need the overtime to cover travelling expenses. Foremen exploit this situation in order to make life hard for the militant: anybody who is not prepared to toe the Ford line suddenly finds that he's not getting the overtime. Inevitably, bad feeling over the allocation of overtime led to certain attitudes about the Union:

"The vast majority is split, one side saying that it is best to be with the Union, and the other side saying: 'The Unions are no help anyway'...The result of this is that even though 90% of the men are in the Union, the active support comes from a minority of around 25%, even on issues of major importance, like the present (1969) wage dispute."

However, more recently, the gap between workers and the Union/shop steward structure has narrowed. This has happened through the recent shop-floor pressures on the Unions to get wage parity with the Midlands, but also through a consolidation of shop-floor organisation. In some sections workers have fought, and have improved conditions. This has lowered the level of labour turnover (mobility), which in turn means that groups of workers have managed to force management to respect their rights within the terms

13. Working at Langley

Ford

TEXT

"When I was at Langley, you had a situation where the workers were something between 70-75% black. Of which I would say, in those days, 80% of black workers weren't in the Union. They weren't not in the Union because they were anti-union, but because they found the Union anti-them.

"You had a situation where the men used to settle their problems with the supervisors, or with anybody, outside of the Union. You know, a word and a blow, and that's it. It's not unusual to be at one end of the line and see a man running the foreman up with a couple of spanners or a couple of bolts in his hand...

"Mind you, there's a lot of people don't stick it. In Langley, for instance, I think you'll find that there's an annual 65% labour turnover. A very high percentage of people just leave. People don't stay. They come, they go...they stay a week, they stay a month...they stay 2 months and that's it.

"Mind you, there's all sorts of tricks that Ford plays to keep you in line. According to our line foreman, after you've been there for about 3 weeks, the period of intimidation sets in. Either they break you, and see which side of the fence you'll fall on, or you're an outcast for ever. But there are ways of not letting yourself be provoked. I mean, the first day I started at Fords I was doing a bolt up, just tightening an axle bolt, and there were some punches going like hell over my head. A whole lot of shouting: "You lie to me...you liar...you bastard...Oh... Ouch!" And there was the foreman up there, and he was saying: "I'm not supposed to hit you back..." Anyway, one of the supervisors came up to me and asked me if I saw what was happening. And I said: "I couldn't see because the incident was over my head, and anyway I don't understand Cockney accents." Because I wasn't going to get involved. I wasn't going to do any talking, because the bloke was a worker and he's on my side.

"Sometimes in the middle of the day you hear a rumpus coming from down the line, and you know that some foreman has got his arse caught...

"Against speed-up you've got very little choice. Of course, you can fight it, but you daren't do it too consistently, because if you're all by yourself, you isolate yourself. There are some jobs, though, where you're in a very good position against speed-up. For instance, if you're shifting trucks from one line to another - if you're working on a transfer line rather than a full circular line - you're supposed to keep a limited gap. You're supposed to drop the trucks on the line 30 feet apart. But if it's less than that, then you're in trouble - or rather they are. You're supposed to use your discretion, see. So, if you want to start an argument at a point that is convenient to you, all you've got to do is drop one truck 6 inches behind the other, which means that they have got to stop the line, and shift it back.

"That is just one tactic that you can use against speed-up. The other tactic is that when they speed up the line, you take the most difficult bolt to do up, and just leave it undone. So that when it gets down to the drag line, you've got 30 or 40 trucks for the inspector to go over, and the line definitely has to slow up, because the trucks start piling up. And that's got other advantages, because it provides overtime for the men on Saturdays and Sundays. That's just another of the tricks of the trade."

West Indian Ex-Ford Worker: 1971

of the accepted custom and practice. This means resisting transfers unless they have been mutually agreed between foremen and stewards, limiting speed-up, and insisting on certain safety conditions, which Ford always tries to erode with the continual introduction of new machinery and methods. This shop-floor struggle has given the stewards a certain base from which to operate.

When a new starter enters Langley, he's not yet part of an established group. The foremen make a point of putting the screws on him, by intimidating him. But very soon a group of workers will take him in hand, to make sure that he's not left isolated, and will make him part of the informal network that exists to look after new workers. The fact that new entrants are forced to make a decision, right from the start, whether they're going to be 'hard' or 'docile' has a lot to do with the labour turnover: high mobility breeds weak organisation.

For many young West Indians, the question of organisation is made even harder by the fact that many of them have a long way to travel between the factory and their homes, unlike the 'old' Langley working class, made up mainly of immigrant Irish workers, who live close around the factory, and who don't seem worried by the fact that it's hard for many black workers to attend branch meetings: "The Union continues to hold branch meetings in the Slough area, after work, instead of pressing the firm for permission to hold them on the premises."

Up until 1967 not one of the 75% black Union members at Langley had ever been elected shop steward. Then there was the drive for 'proportional representation', which led to the election of a few West Indian stewards. From then on, life at Langley became very tough. And the harder it became, the more new recruits fought to get out of the 'Hell' of the lower-grade jobs. This took many forms - like playing up to the foreman so as to get yourself upgraded - but in general it was a losing battle.

The manual labour force at Ford is organised, nationally, fairly rigidly into a wage hierarchy of 5 Grades, and the first crisis of a new recruit at Langley usually comes when he tries to challenge this hierarchy. Before he comes to a position of refusing Ford's organisation of work, he starts by accepting it and trying to better his position within the factory. The foreman begins to smell a rat when a man's eager to show that he can work harder than his workmates, and begins to become a threat to the factory hierarchy.

Sometimes, for instance, a worker who is trying to improve his position manages to get overtime on a job which - for other workers (usually white) but not for him - should carry a higher grading. His first mistake will be to go along to management and ask for a higher grading for the job. The first reply is usually a simple 'No'. So he goes away and comes back with his shop steward. The personnel manager simply ignores the steward, and merely refers to the agreement signed by the worker, which offers a choice: either he can work overtime, or he can be upgraded - but not both. He knows that upgrading will mean an extra £2 a week, but the overtime is worth £8 or £9. He abandons his demand for upgrading, but by now he has lost out on both counts, since by making a fuss, he's probably forfeited overtime in the future. He's been defeated, and from now on he's in the same boat as other workers who have not bothered to improve their position, and others who, after a period of absence, return to find that they've been transferred or down-graded as part of the policy of continual change-round that management manoeuvres in order to avoid giving higher grades to workers.

When the individual solution fails, the worker moves towards fighting Ford's organisation of work, and this is usually based on

14. Mobility of Labour

- Who controls mobility of labour - the capitalist and the State, or the working class - is a basic question of class power. This article shows how Ford used mobility against Dagenham Engine Plant workers.

"Right from the early days in Detroit, Fords has been skilled in the use and exploitation of immigrant and migrant workers as a way of enforcing speed-up and keeping down wages. Scots and Irish at Halewood; West Indians, Irish and Asians at Dagenham; Turks and Yugoslavs at Cologne etc. At Dagenham recently we have been seeing a dirty policy in the Engine Plant - and that means employing coloured workers, bringing them into the factory attracted by the so-called high wages, and then moving them around from job to job so that they cannot resist or organise.

"Everyone knows that Ford can't get workers for love nor money, these days. One week in May, 70 workers joined the Body Plant, and one week later 80 men left. Conditions are that disgusting, and most lineworkers never see that magical "£47". White workers will hardly touch Fords now. Most new starters are black, and very many are Asians. Many Asian workers end up in the Engine Plant...and Ford plays tricks on them.

"New starters arriving in the Engine Plant are put in the Machine Shop where there's plenty of overtime, and where you're not so tied to an assembly line. This is so as to get them to stay. But when they've settled in, Ford takes them off these jobs, and puts them onto the Commercial Line or the OHC Line, where there's no overtime, only permanent days. In other words, a wage cut of about £15 for some people. And the Unions do nothing about it.

"Ford has a tremendous power when the Unions do nothing. We have been trying to put up a fight, but see no hope of help from the Union. For that reason, a lot of blokes just leave. And those who stay behind have all the cards stacked against them. Ford's main weapon is mobility of labour. The high turnover acts to prevent organisation, because people drop out of Fords like flies and don't stay long enough to build the fight. Also, not only does Ford move new starters around. They also use mobility to move around militants, whether black or white, so as to make sure that no one militant stays in one section for long enough to build a strong section.

"There are hundreds of cases like this. Immigrants are being threatened and intimidated by Ford and by this use of mobility. Anyone who makes the slightest resistance is dragged up to personnel. It happens every day. You're told you're not working hard enough, you must work harder. You are threatened. Personnel is always trying to push more production out of you.

"I went to see a friend. He was sitting there, crying, at home with his wife and kids. He didn't know where to turn. He said: 'God knows what I'm doing. I'm so much terrified by the foreman. They push you all the time, even push you by hand to make you work. I don't know what to do. I can't carry on like this.' That's what's happening to Asian brothers in the Engine Plant.

"This is terror by Fords management. It's no accident that this is happening in the Engine Plant, which is hidden right at the heart of the Dagenham complex. It's like a prison camp, with security all around, because the Engine Plant is vital to Ford's production and is highly profitable.

"The trouble is that Ford management tries to split us. Each department has 3 or 4 informers in it, and they spy on us to pick out anybody who wants to make a fight. We are all split by nationalities. You've got all sorts of people in here - Sikhs, Pakistanis, Singaporeans, West Indians, white blokes. If all these people could only unite Ford would be really scared."

from the Big Flame Dagenham Bulletin
July 1974.

Fraud

TEXT

collective awareness. His point of reference is no longer the shop steward, but the group of workers who are the real power behind the steward. Class unity begins to emerge when workers start forming informal groups [political recomposition: App. 1] to resist the organisation of work, and to oppose those who exist to make it work (foremen, chargehands etc). The more the resistance grows and becomes conscious, the more the steward 'joins the lads' instead of becoming separated from the group and spending all his time on negotiation. This means that instead of refusing work by the individual solution of always negotiating conditions of work for others, he begins to fight for his own material interests, together with other workers. It's these workers' groups that are the main basis for organisation in a situation where high line-speeds mean a constant massive turnover of workers, since it's these groups that make sure that new recruits abide by the "custom and practice" which has already been won in the factory.

It's on the assembly lines that workers' mobility is at its highest, and it's here that Ford has been least able to create a job-hierarchy to divide workers. When Ford introduced "job evaluation" with the Grading Agreement in 1967, despite the fact that more than 2,000 jobs were "evaluated" at a very high cost (Ford spoke of £1m), and despite the secrecy that surrounded the weightings that were given to each job, somehow the mass of assembly-line workers (30,000 out of 48,000 workers) all ended up in the fourth out of 5 Grades (B Grade).

This system creates a mass of workers with a collective consciousness (which is quite different from the attitude in piecework factories), who fight Ford with collective action. An important example of this collective action is the overtime ban.

What an overtime ban does is to unify sections of workers who are usually divided and separated by large differences in wages. It means that those workers who don't fit into management's plans for a flexible labour force (ie those who are not periodically transferred and upgraded, or those who don't get overtime) are joined by workers who have taken a voluntary wage-cut by refusing to cooperate with management's need for overtime to be done. Management knows that when an overtime ban starts, they can expect strike action in some part of the Plant: when it means a small group of workers taking action unofficially, they know they have to act fast, and usually do this either by reorganising the job, or by dispersing the trouble-makers round the factory (internal mobility).

So, since overtime is used by management to divide workers among themselves, so the overtime ban is a way of creating class unity and breaking down the wage hierarchy. But it's also an attack on the factory plan, in the following way:

In any factory there is always insubordination and a refusal to cooperate, at the individual level, by the individual worker. For instance, when new machinery is being brought into operation, and a section of the Plant is speeded-up, workers respond by sending half-finished cars down the line and refusing to cooperate in the speed-up or in getting the machine to work properly. Langley is not built around one single assembly line, but around a number of lines for all the different models the factory produces, and this fact makes disruption easier - whether it's deliberate or not. By creating bottle-necks or disrupting the line, workers know that they are creating extra work, and from a workers' point of view this is a way of fighting unemployment and guaranteeing overtime during periods of slack production. To a certain

15. Mobility of Capital

Ford's project, when planning on new investments, is either to guarantee large supplies of cheap labour coming from 'underdeveloped' areas, or to go directly to those 'underdeveloped' areas in order to make full use of investment grants, free land etc. This newspaper clipping [Times, 11.12.1972] tells of Ford's arrival in Spain.

"It looked like a remake of the film *Bienvenido Mr Marshall*, but it was for real. Workmen sweated to unload the sacks containing 75,000 letters, from the banner-bedecked lorry parked in front of the American Embassy in Madrid, as two bemused diplomats wondered what to do about Henry Ford.

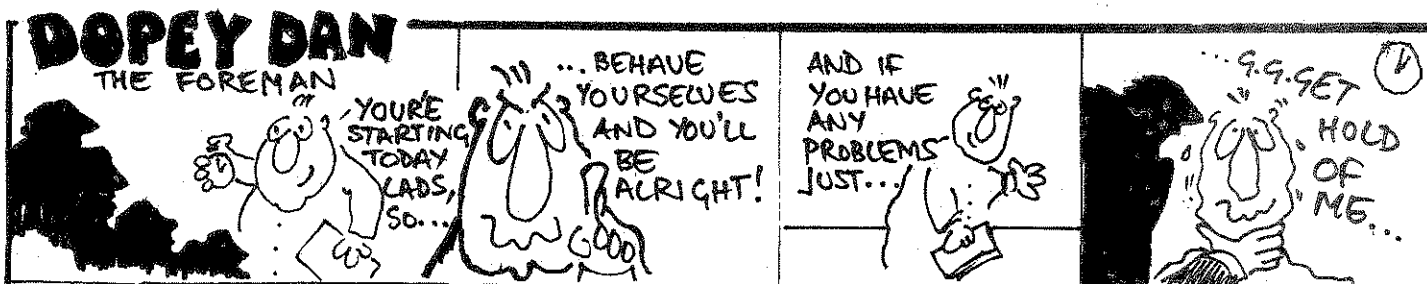
The truckload of letters, addressed to Mr Ford, care of the Embassy, was sent by the mayor of the West Central Spanish town of Talavera de la Reina, rich in history but poor in industry.

The letters were all from the inhabitants of the town, but the one ostensibly written by 5-year old Pepe Lopez probably summed things up best:

"Please sir, my papa has to work in Germany and I do not see him very much. If you come to my town, my papa can work for you. He works very hard, and will be able to come home every day to play with me".

Since it was first reported last month that Ford had indicated to the Spanish Government its interest in setting up a manufacturing plant in Spain, the mayors of dozens of towns and villages in Spain - even the "senorial" old port of Sanluca de Barrameda in the sherry wine district - have made offers of free land and other benefits in the hopes of enticing the Ford Motor Company to build their projected £100m factory in their town."

[Note: the plant was finally built in Valencia, 230 miles away]



During the 9-week strike in 1971, Ford made threatening noises about their future level of investments in Britain: "It's obvious that we cannot move out overnight. But any expansion planned by Fords will be likely to take place in other parts of the world - primarily in Asia."



"If you're QUITE sure you dunno what a strike is, we're going to build a car factory here."

extent this kind of insubordination threatens the wage hierarchy, since semi-skilled workers have to be employed during overtime hours to repair defects in the vehicles that have come off the line, and this should bring with it higher wages, because it means doing the work of skilled men: the men are paid higher grade rates, but this is presented only as a 'privilege' during overtime hours. Overall, though, this kind of insubordination is incorporated by Ford in the factory plan, because they make allowances for a certain amount of overtime to put right "production deficiencies": that factory plan can only be attacked by refusing to do overtime, and this in turn reinforces the effect of insubordination further back down the line.

FORD'S USE OF INVESTMENT AND THE LABOUR MARKET

Ford's recruitment policies, right through their history, have followed a regular pattern: on the one hand they locate their factories in 'underdeveloped' areas (Dagenham, Halewood, Genk, Bordeaux, Valencia), and on the other hand they use immigrant labour from 'underdeveloped' countries, on the assembly lines. This was the pattern in the early days of Ford Detroit, when 60% of their workers could not speak English. It has also been the pattern in the UK, where Ford have passed from Irish immigrant labour to West Indian and then Asian. And it's the pattern in Europe, where Renault, Chrysler, Volkswagen, FIAT and the others all rely on immigrant labour from the Mediterranean countries and North Africa. This policy of labour mobility at an international level is Ford's reaction to workers' mobility - ie the simple fact that workers won't put up with Ford assembly lines for long, and Ford have to look further and further abroad to get workers willing to work for them.

Capital plans development and underdevelopment, and exploits the one against the other. Ford's operations fit completely into this pattern: on the one hand geographic mobility of labour (bringing in labour from 'underdeveloped' countries), and on the other mobility of investment (investing in 'underdeveloped' regions). However, the workers' response to this manipulation is a mobility of their own - a refusal to work for Ford.

The Trade Unions are waking up to the fact that this puts them in a tricky position. Ever since the "Ford Revolution" and the introduction of the assembly line in the 1910s, workers' mobility has been the main form of struggle in the motor industry. The more that workers' wages are tied directly to productivity, the more the Union's existence as a bargaining agent is threatened, because increased speed-up means an increase in labour turnover: high labour turnover (workers' mobility) is a form of struggle over which the Unions have very little control. It also tends to work against the Union itself as a form of struggle.

The precondition for any Union-led struggle against Ford's manipulation of the labour market, and towards international parity within the Company, would be a stable labour force, organised as trade unionists. This would be needed for any such coordinated campaign at an international level - but needless to say, these preconditions don't exist, and it's not the Unions that are going to bring it about.

[End of Section 1.]

I. Restructuring of UK Industry - 1930s

SECTION TWO:

NOTES FOR A HISTORY OF FORD IN BRITAIN

Ford's penetration into Britain follows the successive phases of imperialist expansion with text-book regularity: first exporting finished commodities into Britain; then exporting part-finished goods, together with the initial capital for developing production in Britain; and finally exporting capital, which was added to profits accumulated in Britain, in order to develop productive capacity in Britain to the point where the UK itself could become a launching-pad for further investments overseas.

Trafford Park

As Ford's penetration began to develop in Britain, there was an unusual absence of tension between existing British capital and this incoming American capital, and Ford was allowed a remarkably stable and secure development. This was due more to the fact that for a long time British capital had little interest in the production of the motor car as a mass consumer product, rather than any common cause between English and American imperial interests. Because of the Ford organisation of the work process, which had been developed in the USA, and because of the remarkable freedom of movement that they were allowed, Ford-UK was able to take the lead as a "driving motor" in the British motor industry, increasing the rate of relative exploitation [App. 2] in motor manufacturing as a whole from 1911 onwards.

Ford started production in Britain with the Trafford Park factory, opened in 1911 on the outskirts of Manchester. This was an assembly plant for knock-down parts imported from Michigan. This took Ford a step beyond the phase of simply importing finished products, which they had started 8 years previously. The factory employed a labour force that was already well suited to the work, since the workers already had experience in the manufacture of vehicles and means of transport in the Manchester area. In fact, the group of workers who started the first phase of struggles at Ford were precisely the coachbuilders employed in the Body section [Note 27].

The shift from simple assembly of knock-down parts manufactured by Ford-USA, through increasing manufacture of parts in the UK, to the final complete manufacture of the Model T Ford, took place between 1911 and 1912. The Assembly line was introduced at Trafford Park between 1913 and 1914, following a rapid expansion of production dictated by the need for heavy production required by the War effort - a need to which Ford responded by building a plant in Cork (Ireland). [When the War was over, this plant was turned over to producing tractors.]

The Move to Dagenham

The next major development in Ford's penetration into the UK came in 1922-23. At that time, in America as in the whole of the Western world, capitalism's margins of manoeuvre were expanding again after the period of intense class conflict from 1917-1920 [Note 28]. At that time, plans were being prepared for the building of Ford-Cologne, which began production in 1931, at the same time as the new Dagenham plant was being opened in Britain. From 1928, the year in which the Ford Motor Company was formally established, Ford of Britain was made the centre of all Ford's European operations: up until 1950 Ford-UK remained the majority shareholder in Ford-Europe, acted as the coordinator of the relatively autonomous Ford-Werke AG, and maintained Ford's position in the face of the European operations of their rivals, General Motors [Note 29]. Ford-UK was

The Depression of the 1930s saw a deep restructuring of British industry. The coal, iron & steel, shipbuilding and textile employers inflicted defeats on their workers, and in the Crisis capital began to shift to other parts of the country. It was followed by a mass migration of unemployed workers, out of the 'distressed' areas.

Newer industries expanded rapidly in this period. The main areas of expansion were London; some smaller towns in the South East (Reading, Slough, Luton) and the West Midlands (particularly around Birmingham and Coventry). These centres of expanding industry were themselves in flux, with population moving outwards from the old, congested central areas. This meant the West London industrial belt, the North London belt, and the Dagenham area. Thus, much new industry (aircraft, cars, electricals etc) was being set up in the outer London suburbs.

Housing development was also spreading outwards, in great suburban housing developments of both private and municipal housing. In London there was no planned connection between housing and jobs, and the new municipal estates were referred to as "dormitory estates" precisely because you could sleep in them and nothing else. It was only as an afterthought that Ford came to settle at Dagenham. Also, the extension and electrification of London's suburban railways, together with more bus services, made it possible for people to live farther from their work than they had ever done in earlier decades - but it meant large amounts of travelling. It added anything from 1 - 2 hours to the working day, exhausting hours of strap-hanging in tubes or buses. By 1937, when overtime was common, many workers were spending 12 hours a day away from home, and the average family's expenditure on fares was 8% of the average income of working class families.

There was a great immigration into London in the 1930s. The workers who had migrated here from one of the older industrial areas found a social pattern quite different from home. In the mining village or milltown or port, the workers had lived close to their workplace, probably going home to dinner. Workers shared leisure-time pursuits with people they met at work. A whole street would have a common interest in a wage claim or a strike. Much of the work would have been skilled, and the workers had a strong interest in organising to maintain wage rates, since they expected to remain in the same trade until they retired. It was a life in which solidarity and organisation flourished.

This sense of community was lacking in the expanding areas of London. Workers in the same street increasingly had little in common, travelling to jobs all over London. Many of them were not tied to one workplace, or even one skill, for the new industries offered a wide range of semi-skilled or unskilled jobs, usually with little training. Workers expected to change jobs quite frequently, and tended to move from one light industry to another as employment offered.

All this entailed problems of organisation for the trade union movement, traditionally based on separate crafts or skills, and organised in branches meeting in the evenings. Going to a meeting for many workers meant missing their supper, or their bus home. The trade union structure was poorly adapted to the new industrial conditions, and for many years the new industries remained un-unionised, except for a handful of skilled toolmakers or maintenance men.

The new 'communities' were also soulless places, with higher expenses, few roots, bad services, a few, far-distant shops, and few centres of communal organising. The new estates were not built to make a humane life, but to house workers for the night so that they could work again for capital during the day.

2. 1932: Barricades in Birkenhead & Belfast

Fraud

TEXT

The defeat of the working class vanguards of the 1910s and 1920s in Britain was accompanied by a re-location of capitalist production out of the traditional areas of working class strength and into new areas, like the London suburbs. Ford Dagenham was a good example of this. In order to understand the general political climate for the working class in that period, there is no better source than Wal Hannington's book: "My Life and Struggle among the Unemployed" (Lawrence and Wishart, 1936). His story is far different from the pathetic pictures of rain-soaked hunger-marchers so much loved by the bourgeoisie.

In 1932, there were demonstrations and riots up and down the country, for the abolition of the means test and the benefit cuts. Hannington describes that movement. He tells how the police beat up demonstrators and invaded working class areas in Birkenhead. And he tells of what happened in Belfast, when the unemployed fought for days in the streets:-

On October 5th 1932, 2,000 Belfast unemployed went on strike. They were being employed on relief work in exchange for a poor relief pittance. The Mayor of Belfast offered terms designed to divide the strikers, but these were refused and demonstrations were organised. The Strike Committee called for a rent strike and a school strike, and demanded an increase in relief rates.

Bonfires were lit in the workers' quarters, and round them gathered thousands of workers who were addressed by the unemployed leaders. The city of Belfast became an armed camp, with thousands of police being imported, dashing through the streets in armoured cars. But the movement only gained strength. On October 10th a special mass demonstration of women was held, pledging solidarity with the men in their fight. The next day crowds gathered to discuss and organise, and the police charged them. After the first shock, the workers met them with a hail of stones, and a series of fierce battles broke out. Armoured cars were called out and drove into the crowds wherever they gathered. Squads of workers rushed to the sites of the relief-work jobs and seized the tools with which they had been compelled to slave for a pittance; armed with these they returned to the demonstrations and fought with the police.

In the Falls and Shankhill, very fierce hand-to-hand battles saw workers using pick-shafts and other weapons, and the police opening fire with rifles and revolvers. Five workers were wounded - and the workers responded by setting up barricades against the mounted police and armoured cars; bravely fighting behind these barricades they repeatedly repulsed the attacks of the police.

On October 12th the fighting continued. British troops now came into action against the unemployed and the workers. Seven lorryloads of the Royal Iniskilling Fusiliers equipped with machine guns were drafted into the city. Barricades appeared in the working class areas, while lorries conveyed forces of police into the storm areas. In the Falls, workers tore up flagstones and dug trenches across the streets. Before the day's fighting was over, more than 50 workers had gunshot wounds, while hundreds of others had been injured by truncheons etc. The police injuries are not recorded. And in the meantime, 4 of the wounded had died.

The murderous action of the police and Army in Belfast provoked solidarity demonstrations throughout Britain and Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Government was forced to grant considerable concessions on pay rates and the character of relief work.

These events coincided with the Hunger Marches to Parliament, and this was also the time that production at Ford-Dagenham was getting into full swing.

able to take on this function of de facto management of Ford's operations in Europe [Note 30]. During this period, British engineering companies were still dubious about Ford's mass production for the consumer market, and continued to emphasise the production of engines as a means of production.

The spot chosen for the future expansion of Ford's production was Dagenham, near London - thereby following the general shift of the centre of gravity of British industry from Manchester to the South-East. Already in the years preceding the General Strike of 1926, the outskirts of London had seen the growth of a considerable concentration of industry, which had moved there to take advantage of a vast concentration of mass labour brought together by production for the War effort [Note 31]. Ford's plan at Dagenham was, from the very start, part of a new kind of capitalist development in the UK, in which the State and the local authorities had an important part to play in creating the infrastructures for these new developments - ranging from the draining of Dagenham's marshlands to the building of houses for the first few thousand workers who were brought to Dagenham.

The announcement by Ford that they had chosen Dagenham for their new site (in 1924) was decisive in speeding up the building of this town - the first of the English New Towns. Ford demanded that there should be a supply of suitable labour ready and available before the factory building programme was started, and this meant making use of the large numbers of Irish immigrants, together with the first wave of workers from London's East End. The main period of building in Dagenham came between Ford's choice of Dagenham in 1924, and the beginning of building operations on the factory itself, in 1929 [Note 32].

The "New Deal" at Dagenham began at the moment of deepest economic crisis for British capitalism, and coincided with the first signs of a political recovery by British capital. Dagenham began production in 1931. Ford was then joined by two other associated Detroit-based companies - Briggs, for the building of bodies, and Kelsey Hayes for the production of wheels [Note 33].

The availability of such a large labour reserve in the Dagenham area was exceptional by British standards, due to the economic crisis and the unemployment that accompanied it. Ford was well aware of this situation when he set about trying to use the crisis in a characteristic Ford manner. Namely, between 1932 and 1933 Ford began to prepare a drastic reduction of the basic wage rates at Dagenham. Ford claimed that the wage cuts were necessary "because of the crisis", but in fact they should be seen as a preparation for the launching of the "£100 car" in 1935.

Wage Cuts in America & Britain

During the period immediately preceding the wage cuts in 1933, the first organised nucleus of factory militants at Dagenham was beginning to build up, around Communists who had emigrated from the factory at Trafford Park, and who were especially numerous among the skilled workers in the Toolroom. They were members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, a union which allowed for a broader political outlook on the part of its members, and partly as a result of this tended to include numbers of Communist Party members [Note 34]. So, it was not only the management of Ford-UK which passed from Trafford Park to Dagenham: it was also the group of workers who began the 1933 strike, and who continued the process of factory organisation after the strike had ended.

At the beginning of 1933, Ford announced their wage cuts, and began

From "My Life & Struggle among the Unemployed" by Wal Hannington.

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3. USA: The Sit-down Strikes - Akron Rubber Workers 1933-6

With the passing of the NRA [Note 37], one sector of the motor industry - the rubber workers of Akron - poured into the Union (50,000 in 1933 alone). But the Union did little to raise wages or slow the speed-up, and when Union officials agreed to a "cooling off" of the 1935 strike, the rubber workers were furious.

Disillusioned with trade unionism and tormented by the speed-up, workers in Akron developed a new tactic - the sit-down - which they themselves could directly control without need for any outside leaders. When Louis Adamic later visited Akron to find out how the sit-downs had begun, he was told that the first had occurred not in a rubber factory but at a baseball game. Players from two factories refused to play a scheduled game because the umpire, whom they disliked, was not a union man. They simply sat down on the diamond, while the crowd for a lark cheered the NRA and yelled for an umpire who was a union man, until the non-union umpire was replaced.

Not long after, a dispute developed between a dozen workers and a supervisor in a rubber factory. The workers were on the verge of giving in when the supervisor insulted them and one of them said, "Aw, to hell with 'im, let's sit down." The dozen workers turned off their machines and sat down. Within a few minutes the carefully organized flow of production through the plant began to jam up as department after department ground to a halt. Thousands of workers sat down, some because they wanted to, more because everything was stopping anyway. What had happened, workers wanted to know? "There was a sit-down at such-and-such a department. A sit-down? Yeah, a sit-down; don't you know what a sit-down is, you dope? Like what happened at the ball game the other Sunday."

Adamic describes the response: Sitting by their machines, cauldrons, boilers, and work benches, they talked. Some realized for the first time how important they were in the process of rubber production. Twelve men had practically stopped the works! Almost any dozen or score of them could do it! In some departments six could do it! The active rank-and-filers, scattered through the various sections of the plant, took the initiative in saying, "We've got to stick with 'em!" And they stuck with them, union and non-union men alike. Most of them were non-union. Some probably were vaguely afraid not to stick. Some were bewildered. Others amused. There was much laughter through the works. Oh boy, oh boy! Just like at the ball game, no kidding. There the crowd had stuck with the players and they got an umpire who was a member of a labor union. Here everybody stuck with the twelve

guys who first sat down, and the factory management was beside itself. Superintendents, foremen, and straw bosses were dishing about. . . . This sudden suspension of production was costing the company many hundreds of dollars every minute. . . . In less than an hour the dispute was settled - full victory for the men!

Between 1933 and 1936 this tactic gradually became a tradition in Akron, with scores of sit-downs - the majority probably not instigated even by rank-and-file union organizers, and almost invariably backed by the workers in other departments. It became an understood principle that when one group of workers stopped work everyone else along the line sat down too. To explain this, Adamic listed the advantages of the sit-down strike:

It destroys nothing. Before shutting down a department in a rubber plant, for instance, the men take the compounded rubber from the mills, or they finish building or curing the tires then being built or cured, so that nothing is needlessly ruined. Taking the same precautions during the sit-down as they do during production, the men do not smoke in departments where benzene is used. There is no drinking. This discipline . . . is instinctive.

Sit-downs are effective, short, and free from violence. There are no strikebreakers in the majority of instances; the factory management does not dare to get tough and try to drive the sitting men out and replace them with other workers, for such violence would turn the public against the employers and the police, and might result in damage to costly machinery. In a sit-down there are no picket lines outside the factories, where police and company guards have great advantage when a fight starts. The sit-down action occurs wholly inside the plant, where the workers, who know every detail of the interior, have obvious advantages. The sit-downs organize their own "police squads," arming them - in rubber - with crowbars normally used to pry open molds in which tires are cured. These worker cops patrol the belt, watch for possible scabs and many cops entered a factory, they were bewildered, frightened, and driven out by the "sitting" workers with no difficulty whatever.

The initiative, conduct, and control of the sit-down came directly from the men involved.

Most workers distrust - if not consciously, then unconsciously - union officials and strike leaders and committees, even when they themselves have elected them. The beauty of the sit-down or the stay-ins is that there are no leaders or officials to distrust. There can be no sell-out. Such standard procedure as strike sanction is hopelessly obsolete when workers drop their tools, stop their machines, and sit down beside them.

Finally, the sit-down counters the boredom, degradation and isolation of the factory.

Work in most of the departments of a rubber factory or any other kind of mass-production factory is drudgery of the worst sort - mechanical and uncreative, insistent and requiring no imagination; and any interruption is welcomed by workers, even if only subconsciously. The conscious part of their mind may worry about the loss of pay; their subconscious, however,

does not care a whit about that. The situation is dramatic, thrilling. . . . the average worker in a mass-production plant is full of grievances and complaints, some of them hardly realized, and any vent of them is welcomed.

The sit-down is a social affair. Sitting workers talk. They get acquainted. And they like that. In a regular strike it is impossible to bring together under one roof more than one or two thousand people, and these only for a meeting, where they do not talk with one another but listen to speakers. A sit-down holds under the same roof up to ten or twelve thousand idle men, free to talk among themselves, man to man. "Why, my God, man" one Goodyear gum-miner told me in November, 1936, "during the sit-downs last spring I found out that the guy who works next to me is the same as I am, even if I was born in West Virginia and he is from Poland. His grievances are the same. Why shouldn't we stick?"

Late in 1935, Goodyear announced that it was shifting from the six- to the eight-hour day, admitting that 1,200 men would be laid off and that other companies would follow suit. The announcement created shock in Akron - unemployment was still high and six hours under speed-up conditions were already so exhausting that rubberworkers complained, "When I get home I'm so tired I can't even sleep with my wife." As the companies began "adjusting" piece rates in preparation for introducing the eight-hour day, a wave of spontaneous work stoppages by non-union employees forced a slowing of production.

On January 29th, 1936, the truck tirebuilders at Firestone sat down against a reduction in rates and the firing of a union committee man. The men had secretly planned the strike for 2 a.m.

When the hour struck, the tirebuilder at the end of the line walked three steps to the master safety switch and, drawing a deep breath, he pulled up the heavy wooden handle. With this signal, in perfect synchronization, with the rhythm they had learned in a great mass-production industry, the tirebuilders stepped back from their machines.

Instantly, the noise stopped. The whole room lay in perfect silence. The tirebuilders stood in long lines, touching each other, perfectly motionless, deafened by the silence. A moment ago there had been the weaving hands, the revolving wheels, the clanking belt, the moving hooks, the flashing tire tools. Now there was absolute stillness, no motion anywhere, no sound.

"We done it! We stopped the belt! By God, we done it!" And men began to cheer hysterically, to shout and howl in the fresh silence. Men wrapped long sinewy arms around their neighbors' shoulders, screaming, "We done it! We done it!"

The workers in the truck tire department sent one committee around the plant to call out other departments, another to talk with the boss, and a third to police the shop. Within a day the entire Plant No. 1 was struck, and after fifty-three hours the workers at Plant No. 2 announced they had voted to sit down in sympathy. Management capitulated completely.



TEXT

to apply them, starting with the factory security men and working their way carefully up through the manual workers and the lineworkers till they reached the skilled workers in the Toolroom. The wage-cuts were being imposed as part of the policy of Ford-USA, and seemed likely to succeed in Britain, with the high levels of unemployment that existed at that time. But by early 1933 the international cycle of struggles against the wage cuts had already started (it was later to lead to the occupation of the factories and the growth of the CIO in America). After 18 months of continual wage-cutting in the USA, and after the failure of the strike at Fisher Body in Flint, January 1933 saw the strike at the Vernor Highway factory of Briggs Bodies [Note 35].

The miners and the textile workers in the US were no longer isolated. In a sense, capitalism was creating a new equality among workers, and a new unity. Reducing money wages meant reducing wage differentials, and this became a weapon in the hands of the working class. The opposition to wage-cutting at Briggs was victorious after 2 days of picketing. This was an important moment - the first workers' victory in Detroit since 1920, and the beginning of a process of organisation which was to culminate in the occupation of the factories [Note 36]. As Roosevelt was signing the National Recovery Act halfway through June 1933 [Note 37], the other strikes that followed Briggs began to bite, hitting another 7 motor manufacturers, although not yet affecting the Big Three - General Motors, Ford and Chrysler.

Dagenham entered this international network of struggles in 1933, when the wage-cuts reached the Toolroom. Within a matter of days, Dagenham workers had turned the tide of the wage-cuts - a victory which was not achieved in the USA until the occupation of the factories in 1936. The strike at Dagenham involved all the workers. The difficult work of organising the unemployed (National Unemployed Workers' Movement) so as to prevent the growing pool of unemployed workers being played off against striking workers, bore fruit at Dagenham [Note 38]. The pickets held the day. After three days, Ford was compelled to abandon the wage-cuts.

The 'Keynesian' Strategy

The Communists' organisation had made its presence felt in a defensive struggle over wages. In at least one point of Ford's international organisation of labour, workers, acting independently of the formal structures of the Union, had forced Ford to abandon their intention of driving down wages. The lesson of the 1933 strike meant that British capital had to change its strategy. It had to abandon the "Nazi solution" of general wage reductions and direct repression of the working class, in favour of the opening of the longest period of increase in money wages in the history of capitalism, starting from the end of the 1930s [Note 39].

Keynes' policy was to allow money wage increases, while then taking the money out of the workers' pocket by controlled price increases and taxation ("the cash illusion"). The capitalists were forced to make this choice because they realised that using unemployment (creating divisions between employed and unemployed) was not a feasible long-term strategy, and in fact was failing to discipline the working class. From the capitalist point of view, the policy of wage cuts in the early 1930s was a disaster, and was seen to be so - not because it brings with it unemployment, but because for the first time it divides the capitalist forces of the "democratic world" (creating tariff competition and a restriction of the world market), while at the same time creating a new international unity between workers (the international circulation and spreading of the struggles against the wage cuts).

4. Organising among London Engineering Workers - 1937

The growth of War Production meant that the working class in the newly-developing areas like London could build a certain strength. But, as this report shows, the motor factories had developed outside of the orbit of trade unionism, and had still to be brought in [See "Britain in the 1930s"]

* John Mahon, 'Communist Metal Workers' Conference in London', in *International Press Correspondence*, No. 7, 13 February 1937.

The advance of the Communist Party in the metal factories in London was shown at a conference on February 7 when 113 delegates from factory groups and Communist branches discussed the problems of the metal workers. Of the 113 there were 80 who were holders of official positions in the trade unions. Just over 50 per cent worked in factories employing more than 1,000 workers, including aircraft, general engineering, motor and cable. The report was delivered by Comrade J. R. Campbell and was discussed for five hours.

The conference revealed the growing fighting spirit in the factories where the workers are streaming into the trade unions and building the shop-stewards' movement. An increasing number of strikes, often against victimization, and frequently successful, are to be noted. An example of the way in which the Communists are building the unions was given from the Siemens factory in Charlton, where one union branch had been improved from 170 members to 2,700 in nine months. In this factory the shop-stewards publish their own *printed journal* with a monthly sale of 3,000 copies.

London, during the last twelve months, has become a veritable hive of munition, aircraft and other armament and war production. The employers are beginning to compete for the services of skilled engineering workers. The Government is beginning to bring in men from the Glasgow and Tyne districts. This means a much more favourable situation for trade union activity in the factories.

The delegates showed the multiplicity of forms which the workers' movement is beginning to take in the factories and the need for the

Communist metal workers being alive to all the issues and losing no opportunity to champion the cause of the workers.

The rationalized factories bring the problem of the heavily exploited women and youth labour, now comprising 60 per cent of the industry. The engineering trade unions exclude women from membership, consequently the only trade union organization which they can enter is the general unions, the T. & G.W.U. and N.U.G.M.W., neither of which are really equipped to deal adequately with engineering problems. . . . Cases were given of certain machines being operated during the day by unskilled girl labour and at night by skilled men. The shop-stewards' movement is beginning to overcome the divisions by gathering together the stewards of all the different sections and mutually supporting each other's demands in the factories, negotiating directly with the management. In Siemens, Johnson and Phillips and other factories the wages and conditions of the girls have been materially improved.

Juvenile workers, nominally apprentices, are being increasingly used to do work regarded as skilled men's work. A certain number of young workers are being trained in Government establishments and brought to London from the distressed areas. A far greater number are simply coming into the industry off the streets. The wartime issue of the 'dilution of labour' is again arising. The conference declared against any attempt to penalize the trainees and for a drive to enrol all the workers in the trade unions and to secure the district rate.

Overtime is rampant in the London factories. It is now not a case of occasional working late, but of systematic overtime night after night. The employers were using this overtime as a substitute for improved wages and conditions, seeking to bribe the workers with the extra money to refrain from a fight to improve the rates. Union control, limitation and the ultimate elimination of overtime are being considered by the shop-stewards. The existing agreement provides for a maximum of thirty or twenty-four hours per month overtime, and for control by the union District Committees. In the ship-repairing area of the Port of London, the workers have for six months maintained a 100 per cent ban on all overtime, as a means of forcing the employers to discuss demands for a wage increase. The ban has led to much greater solidarity and good feeling among the men, all the previous competition and favouritism which grew around overtime having been cut out, and has led to the employers offering substantial concessions.

In the 'new' sections of the industry - aircraft and motors, a series of problems exist which demand agreements covering those sections. In the motor industry particularly mass production and speed-up are the rule. The Ford factory in Dagenham combines highly-organized exploitation of every minute of the workers' time with a system of factory espionage and refusal to recognize trade unions. The aircraft industry has been brought up to 90 per cent of trade union organization mainly by the efforts of the aircraft shop-stewards' movement whose monthly journal *The New Propeller*, has a sale of 14,000. A drive to unionize the motor industry is now regarded as vital to the improvement of conditions in that section. Not only Fords, but other motor factories have developed outside the orbit of trade unionism, and it requires a well-planned drive to bring them in.

Health and safety are again becoming an issue. The number of accidents in the factories increases, and the increased speed brings with it numerous cases of nervous breakdown and gastric troubles. Skin diseases, due to use of new chemical compounds and fluids, are reported.

The conference recognized that the way forward for the metal workers lay through ever-increasing the strength and solidarity of trade unionism and the groups of the Communist Party in the factories, and endorsed a number of demands around which the workers could be rallied and organized: A national wage increase of 3d. per hour, with return of the 1931 condition, together with a demand for an increase of 2d. per hour in the London rate: 2s. per hour for toolmakers and millwrights and a minimum rate of 1s. 4½d. for adult unskilled workers and wage for age scales for the youth.

Holidays with pay has become an issue in south-east London where five of the big factories combined to run a campaign and attracted mass support. In other districts this issue has yet to be taken up.

There are increasing signs that in carrying on their work of uniting the workers in challenge to the employers on these and other issues in the factories, the Communists and militants will meet with increasing hostility from the small but influential number of Right wing leaders. The conference emphasized that the Communists would not be led into any false positions by provocation from the Right and would continue to maintain the unity of the movement and to strengthen the trade unions. The requisite for so doing and for campaigning to realize the demands is to be found in the still further growth of the Communist groups in the big factories.

Fraud

TEXT

Therefore the new capitalist strategy required to meet the situation was not chosen primarily in order to bring about full employment. It was chosen as a means of re-uniting the forces of capitalism in the face of the unity of employed and unemployed workers, which was the result of the accumulated working class experience of a century of struggles against capitalist use of the Slump weapon. Up until 1929 this unity was continually being broken each time a fresh batch of green labour was injected into industry; it was a unity which first showed itself at an international level during the Great Depression. The most advanced capitalists were pushing for full employment - but only as a means of reversing the real balance of class power - to create a more cohesive capitalist class, and a working class more divided by skills and wage differentials. Through the "cash illusion" it became possible for capital to centralise the reduction of real wages via price rises, and to grant wage rises only within a framework of differentials designed to divide the working class [Note 40].

From the workers' point of view, the immediate price of the victory on the wages question at Dagenham was high at the level of organisation:

"We demanded the immediate withdrawal of the wage-cuts, but we didn't manage to win any long-term victory, because we had abandoned the initiative to get the Union recognised". [Note 41]

Ford tightens up at Dagenham

Ford made use of the high labour turnover and the tight economic situation, to weaken the level of organisation that had been won during the strike: on the one hand they intensified speed-up and launched a counter-attack on working conditions, which resulted in increased mobility and labour turnover. This went together with a policy of sacking the most militant workers in the factory, in the regular process of layoffs that accompanied each seasonal slump in the car market. [Note 42]

Although Ford had not attacked the actual wage packet, the basic wage for a 40-hour week was not sufficient to cover the costs of workers who were moving in and settling in the area. A lot of people started to do overtime [Note 43]. Only overtime worked between 7 at night and 7 in the morning was paid at overtime rates (time and a half). Also, Ford offered very little by way of indirect wages: neither holidays nor sick leave were paid. In the 1930s at Dagenham it was customary to give overtime only to the lowest-paid workers, both at Briggs and Kelsey Hayes, and to deny it to those workers who "cost more" [Note 44]: this was also linked with the high labour mobility of that period.

Wage differentials at Dagenham were not altered by the 1933 strike, nor by the subsequent workers' actions: "Workers with the same work and with the same job: hourly pay differs by 3 pence an hour". [Note 45]. In 1936 the wages of line workers and labourers were lower than the wages of skilled workers by 36% and 50% respectively [Note 46].

This difference between skilled and unskilled, between high and low wages, was one factor which, along with the layoffs due to seasonal booms and slumps, accelerated labour turnover, particularly in the lower-paid jobs.

"The total number of workers employed fluctuates between 12,000 and 24,000, according to the time of year and the demand for production." [Note 47: At Briggs the figure fluctuated between 5,000 and 15,000, and at Kelsey Hayes between 3,000 and 8,000].