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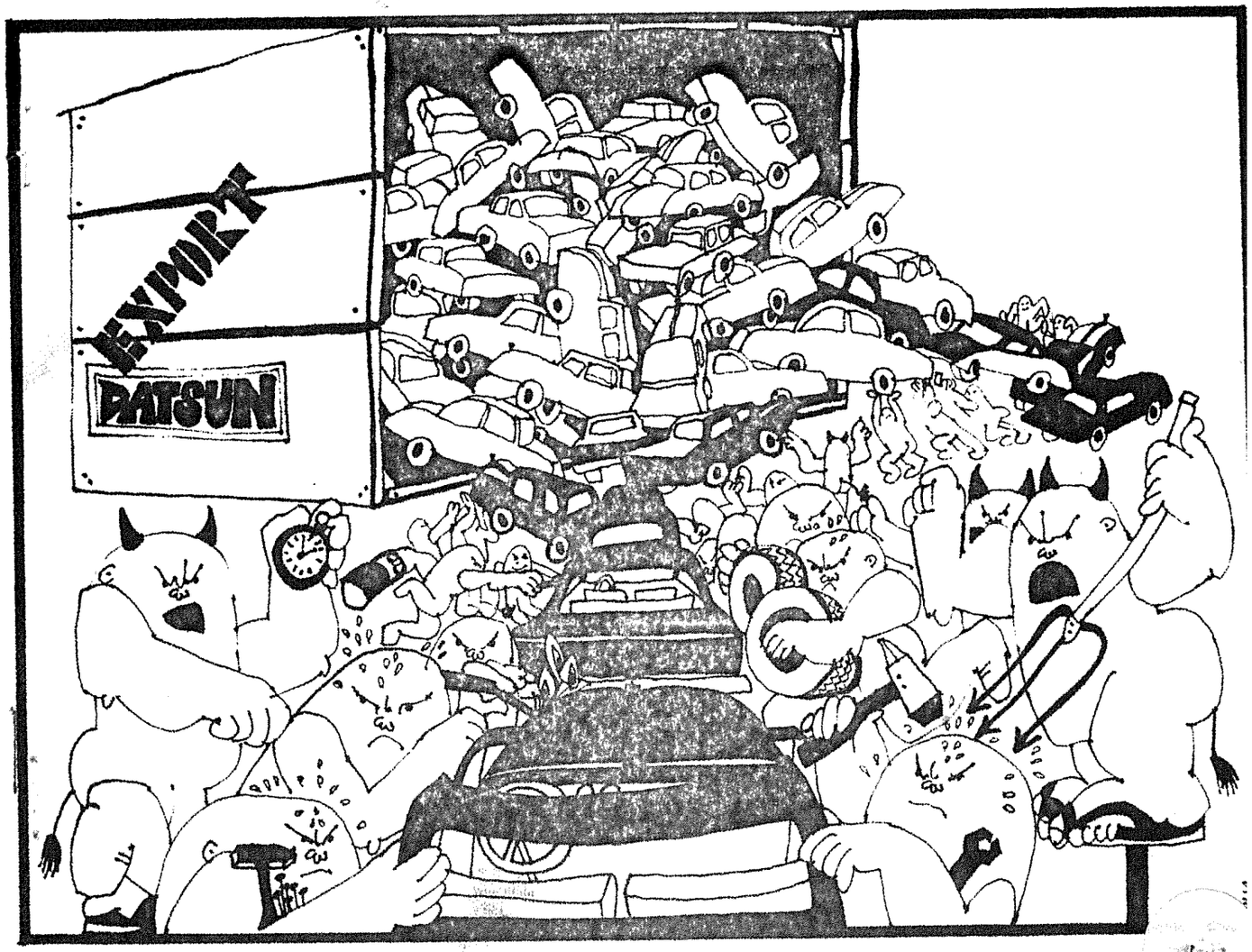
SOLIDARITY MOTOR BULLETIN 3

DATSUN: HELL'S BATTLEFIELD



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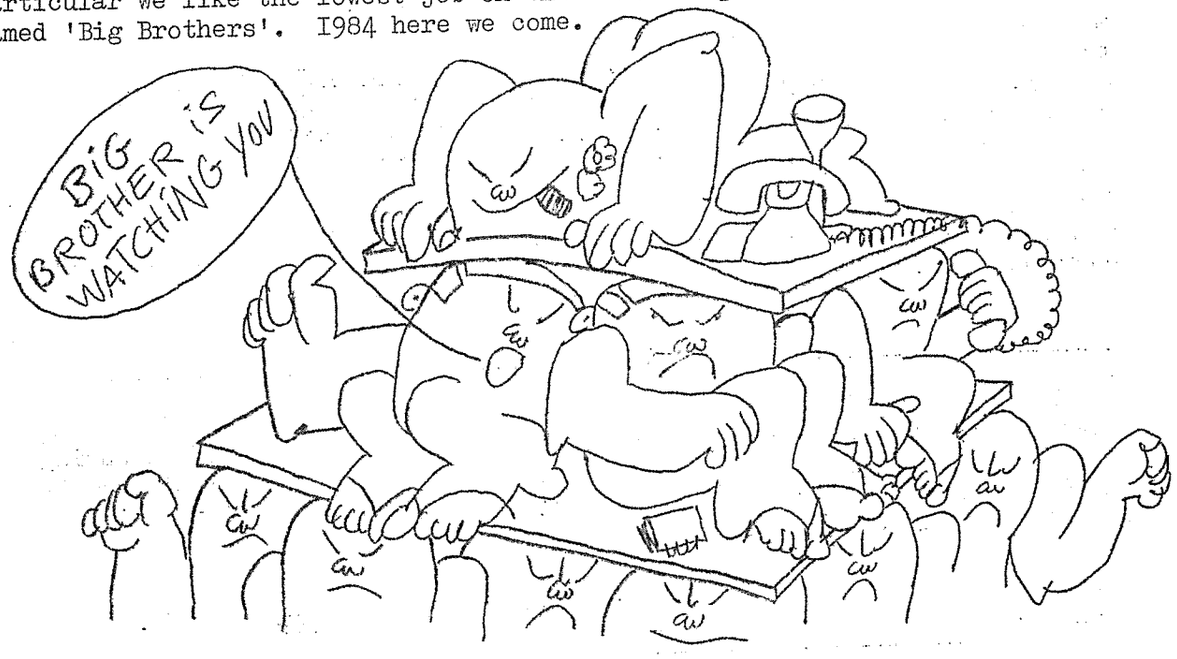
INTRODUCTION

This third issue of our Motor Bulletin deals with recent struggles at the Nissan-Datsun motor plants in Japan. Militants in the West should find it of great interest. Virtually nothing is known here about the real situation of car workers in Japan, and all too often workers there are seen as getting a bowl of rice a day and quietly accepting a completely paternalistic managerial set-up. In fact, as this article clearly shows, the problems facing Japanese car workers and the processes going on within the industry are fundamentally the same as those here.

The article shows that the role of the union in Japan is quite similar with the added complication of actual company unions, and these unions are active agents in the export of the ideology of Japanese capitalism to South Korea, South East Asia and elsewhere. The seasonal workers described in this article are like their equivalent in the West, in many cases spearheading the struggle.

Some of the appalling conditions described here are by no means unique to Japan and in fact many of the descriptions of the situation at Nissan will strike a familiar chord in many car workers here. Even the peculiarities of the Japanese motor industry are more apparent than real. For example, out of the 6,000 workers at the Nissan factory at Tochigi no less than 3,500 live in relatively cheap - if nasty - company owned tied accomodation, but this much vaunted paternalism is quite common in Europe, for example at Fiat and at Volkswagen because of the tremendous hold it gives the boss over the workers.

The rigidly hierarchial managerial structure happens here too, but in particular we like the lowest job on the Nissan supervisory ladder: the aptly named 'Big Brothers'. I984 here we come.



JOBORGANISATION

The relative weakness of job organization dates at Nissan - and in Japanese industry in general - back to the early I950's. In I953 when production had been rebuilt after the war the Nissan management engineered a showdown with the workers and after a I00 day strike won a complete victory. As a senior company executive commented (Times, 5.I2.72) "It was good we had a major strike so early in our growth. It taught the workers a lesson." *

For what it is worth - we have no illusions about percentages of trade union memberships as infallibly reflecting the real state of job organization - the defeat of job organization in Japan was reflected in the rate of trade union membership. In I949 55.8% of workers were in unions, while in I970 it was 34.48 and this latter figure includes the substantial membership of company unions.

This series of defeats of the Japanese working class is one of the major bases on which the 'Japanese miracle' rests. Because of it, combined with massive capital expenditure, management is able to extract unheard of production levels out of 'their' workers. In I972 50,000 Nissan workers produced I,800,000 cars and trucks. In the same year I65,000 workers at British Leyland produced only about I,000,000 vehicles. (Times, op cit) At the Nissan Tochigi plant 6,000 workers assembled 30,000 cars a month including all body and foundry work. **

At the same time to try to keep their workers relatively passive management have conceded higher wages. In the motor industry wage rates increased by about II% a year up until I967. (Labour Relations in the Motor Industry, Turner, Allen & Unwin, I967, page 323) From I968 until I972 the rate of increase was between I5% and 20%. (Times, op cit). Throughout Japanese industry the tendency has been the same. Real wages increased from I02 in I952 (I934-6 = I00) to I46 in I960 to 269 in I970. (Japanese government statistics published by UNESCO). Wages are still quite low compared with the West and when combined with very high productivity give the Japanese motor industry an enormous edge.

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* It is an interesting fact that Nissan entered motor production in I952 (before then it had only produced commercial vehicles) when it started producing a few thousand Austins a year under licence for sale to the car starved Japanese market. British Leyland is now probaly regretting its bountiful financing of this venture.

** The rate of production at Toyota is even higher, see Sun, 24.5.73. Compare also with The Lordstown Struggle.

Yet in spite of the massive explosion of production in the motor industry which turned out 7,087,000 vehicles in I973, it too has been badly effected by the oil crisis following the Middle East war. For the first time ever both domestic sales and production dropped in the early months of I974 and it has been estimated by Toyota that its sales in Japan will drop 9.6%. * This year compared with I973, on the otherhand, exports are expected to rise 7.5% - a net total drop in production of 4.I%. (Bulletin of Anglo-Japanese Economic Institute, March I974) Nissan prospects are probaly quite similar, although there are signs that sales are on the upturn again.

This article describes how workers in the motor factories in Japan are again stirring. We are going to hear a lot more from them. SOLIDARITY is very anxious to hear from motor workers so that a real exchange of information can take place. We hope readers in Japan will do everything they can to establish contacts in the motor plants there for us.

While we think this article is important, useful and informative, it does not mean we agree with all its formulations. For instance, the attitude to Third Worldism; the loose use of the word Fascism; the writers' concept of imperialism which is clearly meant to refer to the West only, and excludes the U.S.S.R. and China; and on page I6 the reference to a workers vanguard, although we appreciate that this latter concept is clearly a different one from that normally put forward by the various Bolshevik sects.

This article is reprinted from the Spring I974 issue of Ampo, PO BOX 5250, Tokio International, Japan, which often publishes informative articles on the labour movement in Japan and South East Asia.

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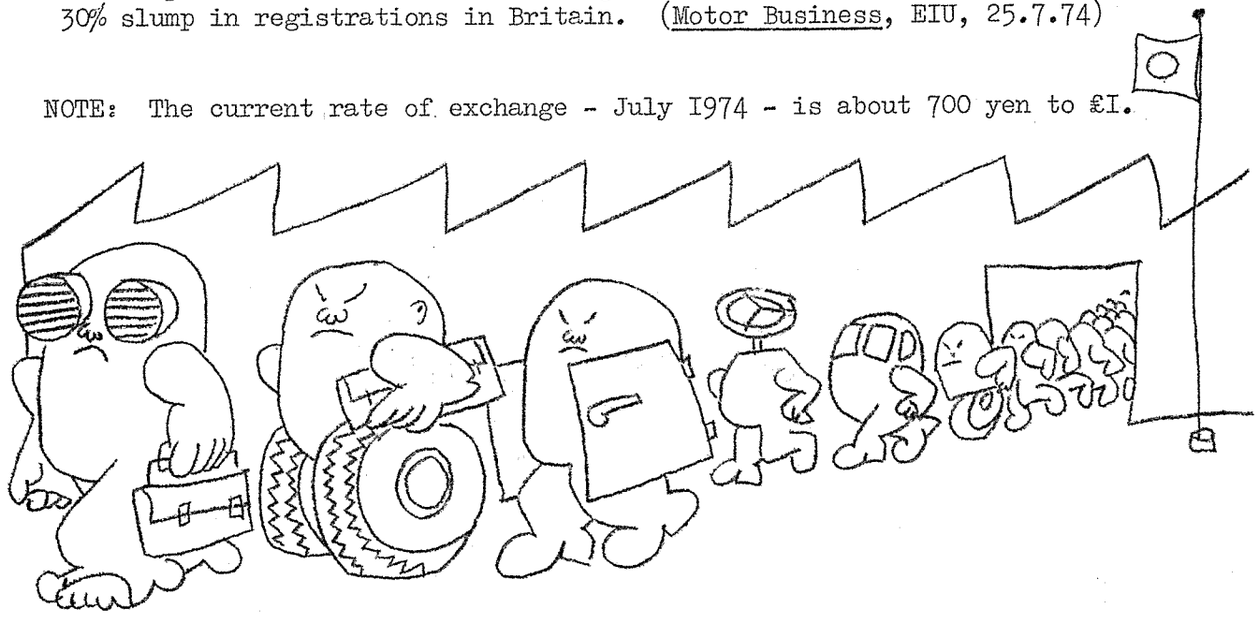
*For comparison The Economist Intelligence Unit estimates that there will be a 30% slump in registrations in Britain. (Motor Business, EIU, 25.7.74)

NOTE: The current rate of exchange - July I974 - is about 700 yen to £I.



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THE GREAT FLINT SIT-DOWN STRIKE AGAINST GENERAL MOTORS 1936-37 by Walter Linder. How to struggle... and win. On the need for a new strike strategy. 10p

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MOTOR BULLETIN No.2 U.A.W. Scab Union. A hard look at the one big industrial motor union in the U.S. - the U.A.W. The lessons to be learnt. 5p

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Nissan Motor: Hell's Battlefield

by Matsuo Kei

A former Zenkyoto student activist in the late sixties, Matsuo Kei, 27, is a labor organizer who has been working closely with militant autoworkers. Currently he is coordinator for the Nissan Socialist Study Group and the National Autoworkers' Front Coordinating Bureau, both of which are part of Zenrokatsu, a national liaison center for radical labor activists.

The Japanese automotive industry is a crucial link in Japan's economic machine and a strategic front in the battle of Japanese capitalists to overtake the United States in industrial production. In part the centrality of the industry lies in the fact that it transforms the finished and semi-finished products of almost all crucial sectors of the economy--steel, non-ferrous metals, electrical machinery, machine tools, and many others--into some seven million automobiles a year (in 1973). It also lies in the fact that the automotive industry is among the leaders in Japanese capitalism's drive for the markets and materials of Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. But the automotive industry is also a leader in the effort to domesticate the Japanese labor movement and bend the workers to acquiescence under the dominion of the all powerful machine.

Toyota Motor Co., Ltd. and Nissan Motor Co.,Ltd. (whose products are known abroad as Datsuns) together control 70 per cent of Japanese automobile production. Nissan (Nissan Motor with its subsidiaries such as Nissan Diesel Motor Co.,Ltd. and Nissan Shatai[Chasis] Co., Ltd.) is typical of the industry in its notoriously crude and unrelenting control of its workers. Back in the early '50s Nissan was a stronghold of the most militant workers in the country, and Nissan workers were among the leaders in the struggle against the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (AMPO) in 1952. But with the imposition of a goyo kumiai, a company-patronized union, throughout the sprawling combine, Nissan has become known among its workers as "Hell's Battlefield," and today is a leader in spreading Japan's counter-revolutionary and exploitative labor-control mechanism throughout Asia.

I. WORKERS AT HELL'S BATTLEFIELD

ATOMIZED LABOR

Every week, Nissan places a "help-wanted" ad in major papers: "Want to earn a stable income at a super-modern factory located in green forests? Two days off every other week! No previous experience required!"

It takes no more than a week for the newly employed to realize that the attractive words of the ad mask a chilling reality. The "super-modern" factory roars around the clock; it is so noisy that one would imagine that hell, should one exist, would be a bit quieter. In his first day at Nissan, the newly employed worker takes part in a day-long orientation program. It consists of a factory tour and brief instructions on the specific work he is supposed to do. There is no explanation of the whole process by which an automobile is assembled. All that a worker is required to know is how to do his task, how to follow a set of instructions. There are many workers who, after spending years at Nissan, still do not know exactly what part they are making every day.

Today's automobile plant is built around a drastically improved version of the Ford system first introduced in the '20s. Division of labor is pursued to the extreme; each worker's operation, not to mention each line of operation, is divided into tiny fragments and arranged in such a way as to attain maximum efficiency. Forced to complete each fragment of his work within 100ths of a second, an individual auto-worker in 1974, like Chaplin's worker in Modern Times fifty years ago, is no more than a convenient supplement to a machine.

The supervisor says: "You'll find the job more interesting as you get accustomed to it." But thousands of millions of repetitions of the same simple work become monotonous and soul-killing. The speed of the assembly line is decided not by man's ability, mentality, desire and what

not, but by a computer in the company's head office, programed only to see daily or monthly sales figures.

"You feel like you're swimming in oil," says a worker in these "super-modern" factories. Without exception a newly employed worker's exposed skin soon is heavily burnt by oil splashes. Aches in the shoulders, waist and neck are normal, since workers hoist parts weighing dozens of kilograms or concentrate on minute parts measured in milimeters or in fractions of a milimeter. "I've lost weight since I started working here" is a common comment. "We won't be able to live long, if we keep working in a filthy place like this."

During the daily 8 or 9 hours of work, workers are allowed only a one-hour break at noon if they are on the day-shift, or at 3:00 a.m. if on the night shift. At meal time, the 1,000 workers on a floor jam into a tiny dining hall capable of accommodating only about 100, and are served with a meal they say "tastes much worse than what you get in jail." During the dayshift lunch hour, all the lights are turned off in order to "save electricity"; there are no facilities where the workers can rest after a meal; all they can do is to take a nap lying on a newspaper spread on the floor.

DISCRIMINATORY WAGES

For the terrible jobs the workers are forced to perform, Nissan pays very badly. (See Table 1.) It is impossible for a worker of 31, with wife and one or two children, to survive in the jungle of inflation with a scanty monthly paycheck of 70,000 yen (c. $250). He must work overtime or on double shifts to earn extra money, but the maximum he gets hardly exceeds ¥100,000 ($357).

The pay scale at Nissan is not only low, but it is elaborately tricky to the company's advantage.

(1) The company reserves all rights to determine a person's wages and to give differential raises to encourage "loyalty." It punishes "undesirable workers" by giving them the short end of the "average annual wage increase" which is negotiated with the company-sponsored union. For the last few years the "average" annual wage increase has been about ¥10,000 a month, but the members of a minority union struggling for their class interests against management and the company-sponsored union have received only about ¥2,500. Today these minority unionists receive a monthly wage fully ¥20,000 less than the average.

(2) The already wide gap grows wider every year since Nissan offers more generous wage increases to supervisors and union officials than it does to the rank-and-file. (See Table 2.)

(3) The base salary accounts for only a small fraction--between 15% and 20%--of one's total monthly pay, including overtime allowances. It is only one third or a quarter of that paid by other typical Japanese companies. Even if a Nissan worker receives the same monthly pay as one in another company, his retirement allowance is only a fraction of the national standard, since it is calculated on the base salary.

TABLE 1. AVERAGE MONTHLY WAGE AT NISSAN

(Unit: yen)

	1972	%	1973	%
Base salary	14,924	24.0	15,322	20.9
Special allowance	44,047	71.1	54,690	74.8
Dependent allowance	1,829	3.0	1,880	2.6
Job performance allowance	1,149	1.9	1,252	1.7
Total	61,949	100.0	73,114	100.0

N.B.: As of 1972, an average Nissan worker is 31.3 years old, has been working for Nissan for 6.4 consecutive years, and has 1.2 dependents. Allowances for overtime and night shifts are not included in the above figures.

TABLE 2. WAGE INCREASES AT ONE NISSAN FACTORY (1973)

Age	Years of service	Rank	Increase in monthly wage over '72 (yen)
30	7	2	11,300
27	9	3	13,500
24	5	2	11,600
23	4	2	11,200
57	28	Supernumerary	11,300
46	17	3	11,400
41	15	3; Foreman	15,600
26	7	3	12,300

The union makes no effort to challenge this extremely discriminatory and exploitative wage structure. Indeed it doesn't even explain to the puzzled workers what each allowance and benefit item actually means.

DECEPTIVE REDUCTION OF WORKING HOURS

In recent years, big businesses in Japan have eagerly started introducing a "two-days-off-a-week" system. And of course Nissan is no exception. In 1972, it started operating on a "two-nights-off-a-week" basis, switched to a "two-days-off-every-other-week" system in 1972, and finally launched a genuine "two-days-off" system in 1973. The alleged purpose of the new system is to "enable the employees to have more leisure and enrich their lives" by cutting the total annual working hours.

But this tricky system, endorsed wholeheartedly by the union, has much in common with the one at Ishikawajima-Harima Heavy Industries. (See "IHI, a Fake 'Kingdom of Shipbuilding,'" AMPO, #17.) The working day at Nissan was lengthened first from 7 hours to 7 and half hours, and then to 8 hours, with the daily base wage kept intact; the worker is now forced to work one extra hour a day for nothing. The longer working day means fewer overtime hours, a serious blow to workers who barely survived by working overtime. As the result of the reduction in overtime work alone, Nissan workers lost an average of ¥2,244 a month in 1971, ¥3,996 in 1972 and ¥6,916 in 1973 compared with the preceding years.

These are not the only effects of "shortening" the work hours. The company management and union leaders, while expansively talking about "a drastic reduction in working hours," hide the fact that the reduction is only about 12 hours a year. In part this is achieved by playing with vacations. Nissan has a special Nissan calendar, to which the company union has agreed, which disregards most official holidays. Twice a month it is "two days off a week"; the only other holidays are: New Year holidays, summer holidays, and --why not!--August 30, the anniversary of the foundation of the Nissan Workers' Union.

Nissan introduced the new system to enhance its reputation as a progressive company. But in shortening work hours, however nominally, the company management found it imperative to raise the rate of productivity. The workers thus suffer doubly from an intensification of labor and a sharp reduction in pay. Far from being able to "have much leisure," the dead tired workers look forward impatiently to a free Saturday when they can have a day long sleep. In fact the "two-days-off" system is nothing but a grandiose rationalization scheme, and Nissan's management and its union leaders will adopt any strategy which promises to raise productivity, whatever its effect on the workers.

FREQUENT LABOR ACCIDENTS

One sees dozens of "safety first" slogans posted on the walls of any Nissan factory. But these slogans are betrayed by the number of "super-modern" machines --Nissan's weapons for productivity, rationalization and technological innovation--which are laid out in the building with little space for the operator or human movement.

As this contrast between the slogans and the factory layout clearly shows, the "safety education" and "safety counter-

NISSAN CALENDAR (OCT.'73 - MAR.'74)

	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
OCTOBER		1	2	3	4	5	(6)
	7	8	9	10°	11	12	(13)
	14	15	16	17	18	19	[20]
	21	22°	23	24	25	26	27*
	28	29	30	31			
DECEMBER							[1]
	2	3	4	5	6	7	[8]
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15*
	16	17	18	19	20	21	(22)
	23 30	24 31	25	26	27	28	(29)
FEBRUARY						1	2*
	3	4	5	6	7	8	[9]
	10	11°	12	13	14	15	(16)
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23*
	24	25	26	27	28		

	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
NOVEMBER						1	2 (3)•
	4	5	6	7	8	9	[10]
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17*
	18	19	20	21	22	23*	(24)
	25	26	27	28	29	30	
JANUARY				(1)•	(2)	(3)	(4) 5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	(12)
	13	14	15°	16	17	18	(19)
	20	21	22	23	24	25	[26]
	27	28	29	30	31		
MARCH							1 [2]
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9*
	10	11	12	13	14	15	(16)
	17	18	19	20	21°	22	(23)
	24 31	25	26	27	28	29	[30]

N.B.: ( ) = Nissan holiday other than Sunday
[ ] = Holiday cancelled by labor agreement
* = Holiday reserved for special emergency attendance
• = National holiday but not necessarily Nissan holiday

The New Year's holidays last from Dec. 29 through Jan. 4.

measures" adopted by Nissan are at most nominal. Workers are invited to make proposals for improving their job environment during company-wide "safety first" campaigns, but the company adopts only those proposals that cost no extra money and contribute to "productivity first." Exhausted in the rat race with constantly speeded up assembly lines Nissan workers suffer frequent labor accidents. The following examples are but a sample.

In April 1968, immediately after graduation from a technical high school, Mr. K got a job at Nissan Motor's Murayama plant in a Tokyo suburb. He was assigned to an assembly line to attach the engine and tires to the car body--a very tough job for an unskilled worker. After his third week on the assembly line, he was ordered to work on the night shift. Half a year later, in October, he fell ill from a cold and months of overwork. When he did not report to work, a supervisor dragged him out of bed in the company dorm and escorted him to his post on the assembly line. Mr. K soon broke down, and his temperature went up to 41.5 (F104) degrees. The doctor at the company's clinic sent him back to the dormitory with no medication, saying that his was a simple cold and could be shaken off after a nap. When he got worse he asked the doctor to visit him but the doctor refused to do so; the dormitory caretaker did not show any concern for him. And when his roommates came back from the night shift the next day, they found Mr. K dead in the toilet, bending slightly downward, with his shorts pulled half-way down. Mr. K's death was no accident, but an inevitable result of the inhumane labor practice at Nissan, "hell's battlefield."

Nissan Diesel Casting Co. in Saitama Prefecture was established in September 1971 as an outgrowth of the former casting department of Nissan Diesel Motor. With its construction the Nissan group boasted that the new plant, "capable of attaining drastic rationalization with its most advanced labor-saving facilities and devices, is unequalled by any casting plant in the world." In February 1972, less than half a year after it went into operation, the "labor-saving" plant claimed its first victim. A worker's head became caught in a large transfer machine which he was repairing and he was instantly killed. The cause: a foreman pushed the switch on without first confirming whether it was safe.

About a month later, a worker had his left hand cut off by a lathe at Nissan Diesel's Kawaguchi plant. Such an accident is practically impossible for a skilled turner, but this turner had been feeling ill. Although he had urgently requested sick leave, it had been denied. Another example comes from Nissan Motor's Yokohama plant, where a worker was caught in a shower of hot metal discharged from a cupola while operating a platter. Five days later he died.

Whenever business is prosperous and automobiles are in high demand, Nissan sends many office clerks and salesmen to plants, or recruits new employees, to help increase production. Complete strangers to assembly lines, these emergency reinforcements can hardly avoid accidents. Immediately after the accident mentioned above, emergency workers at the Yokohama plant suffered a whole series of serious accidents: a worker assigned to the casting department had his head caught in a machine and almost lost his life; another worker assigned to the heat treating section required 30 stitches in a wound; and in the forging section,a worker was laid up for a month with a broken bone.

Most victims of labor accidents--and there are many--are new workers employed on a trial basis. They are temporary employees and seasonal workers who are not eligible for membership in the Nissan Workers' Union or for the institutional benefits and insurance available to regular employees. After accidents they are thrown into the streets like old rags without sufficient compensation, insurance, or retirement allowance. With every accident, the company management and union leaders utter the same refrain: "What? Lines are not moving? You mean, at this busiest moment?" Instead of looking into the causes of accidents, they simply try to thrust all the responsibility on the victimized workers. They even tried to evade responsibility for the death of Mr.K by offering his family a condolence gift or ¥10,000 ($35). "World famous Nissan" and its Datsun car is a bloodsucker grown fat by sucking at the lifeblood of the workers.

"DIVIDE AND RULE" TACTICS

The management of Nissan knows very well the workers cannot silently endure

such working conditions forever. The capitalists have therefore equipped themselves with devices to prevent and suppress explosions of anger.

Most important is a strictly structured hierarchical supervisory system. The ranks of supervisors in this hierarchy are: (1)director, (2) manager, (3) assistant manager, (4) foreman, (5) job instructor, (6) section leader, and (7) big brother. Employees with the rank of (5) or lower are supplementary supervisors not eligible for a "job performance allowance." At the lowest ranks of the hierarchy, one supplementary supervisor is chosen for every 5 workers.

According to the unwritten law of promotion, ranks (3) and above are open only to college graduates or those who have worked with Nissan for a minimum of 15 consecutive years. In order to be promoted to ranks (4), (5) and (6), an employee must be either a highschool graduate with a minimum of 4 years of service or above 35 in age; and the low rank of (7) is held only by those recommended unanimously by their superiors. The road to supervisory rank is thus effectively closed for many workers, especially for those who start working for Nissan in their late 30s and 40s.

Various other devices include: the QC (quality control) and ZD (zero-defect) circles organized at the workers' "own initiative"; the labor union; and management conferences jointly run by the union and the company at different levels. Nissan has thus managed to spread into every corner of the factory a closely-knit spy network enabling management to trace every single move of an individual worker. Under such a vigilante system, each worker is divided so perfectly from his colleagues that he never dares voice his complaints openly, even though he knows they are shared equally by others.

A "divide and rule" tactic becomes all the more effective when it is supplemented by tacit discrimination against certain segments of workers. Even the regular employees are differentiated into multiple layers of ranks and posts, so that they keep watch on each other. Members of the minority union are ruthlessly screened out in the promotion system. Other workers, such as those in their probation periods, temporary workers, seasonal workers and outside subcontract workers, are exploited and discriminated against even more severely.

Like other Japanese auto-makers, Nissan has extremely high employee turnover. A third of the large number of highschool graduates it recruits to its production lines every spring leave Nissan in six months; another third leave in the latter half of the first year; and by the end of the third year 99% of them leave Nissan. For a company like this, seasonal workers and temporary workers are indispensable, especially for assembly work. Many of the seasonal workers are actually peasants who come to cities after the fall rice harvest and go back to their villages the following spring. Hard hit by the capitalists' regional development and industrialization programs--i.e., agricultural destruction programs--they can no longer live by agriculture alone, thus forming a reliable industrial reserve army.

The capitalists derive a great deal of advantage from employing these seasonal and temporary workers to carry 30 to 40% of the peak work load. Even though they pay short-term workers twice the base salary of a regular employee, they more than save this by not paying them various allowances, insurance, and fringe benefits. Further, they do not have to worry about unorganized workers staging a strike or causing labor disputes--they can be fired at any time.

The working conditions of these seasonal workers have not improved at all since the "seasonal workers' uprising" of 1971. At Nissan three seasonal workers are put in a bare 10 square meter dormitory room. A worker is not allowed to use any electric appliances in the room except a shaver, a hair dryer, a lamp and a simple heater, the last two being supplied by the company and shared by the three rommates.

The dormitory has a "recreation room" --another 10 square meter room--small to serve the 100 to 200 workers living there. Not surprisingly, the recreation room is furnished only with an old TV set and an electric pot for cooking instant noodle.

On the job, the seasonal workers are discriminated against in many ways. While regular employees are given new work clothes, the seasonal workers receive old ones. They are often assigned to the filthy, dangerous, or hard jobs that regular employees dislike. The capitalists make every possible effort to encourage

the regular workers to look down on the seasonal workers as incompetents incapable of securing good jobs. The ultimate purpose of the "divide and rule" policy is of course to prevent the two groups of workers from sharing their complaints and hatred against the capitalists and from staging a joint struggle.

II. NISSAN WORKERS' UNION--A SPEARHEAD OF IMPERIALIST AGGRESSION

THE LABOR UNION, A CHILD OF JAPANESE CAPITALISM

How did Nissan manage to turn its factories into the "hell's battlefields" of exploitation and suppression, and the crude "divide and rule" policies?

After World War II Nissan's management had little interest in reconstructing the company. It was the impoverished workers who took on the task of putting the assembly lines back into operation for the sake of their own subsistence. Until the outbreak of the Korean War, therefore, the workers accumulated tremendous power as the real promoters of production activities, and they waged a series of militant offensives against the company management. In the 1952 struggle against the San Francisco Peace Treaty which, together with the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (AMPO), was to link Japan to U.S. cold war strategy, the Nissan workers (the Nissan Local of the National Association of Autoworkers' Unions) led the labor front's militant opposition movement.

As the production lines began to move smoothly, however, the capitalists started to take revenge. The red-hunting of the early '50s destroyed much of the once flourishing militant labor movement. In 1953 Nissan retaliated with an all-out offensive to dissolve the militant union. Management locked the workers out of the plants for more than 100 days, during which they bought off some workers under the banner of a new company-created union. The Nissan Workers' Union which reigns over a majority of regular workers at Nissan today was thus born as a beloved child of the company management.

The Nissan Workers' Union, capital's left hand, has played a vital role ever since its birth not only in turning Nissan into"hell's battlefield" but also in shifting the whole Japanese working class movement toward the right. In the '70s, as Nissan makes a strenuous effort to transplant "hell's battlefields" to Third World countries, the union has taken on the task of spreading abroad the time tested gospel of Japan's counter-revolutionary autoworkers' movement. In their effort to organize all Asian autoworkers under their own control, executive officials of IMF-JC (International Metalworkers' Federation, Japan Council) unabashedly say: "Unions like the ones at Nissan and Toyota are the best in Japan." I sincerely urge fellow workers abroad not to be deceived by these words, for every single word uttered by these union executives and every single move they make are meant to promote capital's interests at the expense of working class interests.

TABLE 3. PRODUCTION OF AUTOMOBILES BY MAJOR AUTOMAKERS IN 1972

Automaker	Production (10,000 vehicles)	Production as % of '71 figure
G. M. (U.S.)	574.1	99.6
Ford (U.S.)	319.7	113.4
Toyota (Japan)	208.7	106.7
Nissan (Japan)	186.4	117.2
Chrysler (U.S.)	169.3	111.5
Fiat (Italy)	166.1	113.6
Volkswagen(W.Germany)	145.3	87.7
Renault (France)	134.8	114.8

Source: Toyota Jidosha Sokuho

TABLE 4. JAPANESE PRODUCTION AND EXPORT OF AUTOMOBILES

(1,000 vehicles)

Year	Production	Export	Export as % of production
1965	1875	194	10.3
1966	2286	255	11.2
1967	3146	362	11.5
1968	4086	612	15.0
1969	4675	858	18.4
1970	5259	1086	20.5
1971	5811	1778	30.6
1972	6294	1965	31.2

N.B.: Automobiles assembled at overseas subsidiary plants constitute between 15 and 20% of the export; but the percentage is expected to rise sharply in the near future as overseas expansion by the Japanese automakers gets under way.
Source: Japan Automakers' Association

DRIVING FORCE OF RATIONALIZATION DRIVE

The Nissan Workers' Union revealed its own criminal and anti-revolutionary nature in the prospectus it drew up and circulated two decades ago. "We believe," said the prospectus, "that our livelihood depends on our company and that, without improvement in the company's productive capacity, neither our own livelihood nor labor conditions can be improved drastically." An argument like this urging workers to work to the best of their ability for their company's prosperity lies at the heart of the ideology maintained by the rightist Japanese labor movement under the leadership of Domei (Japan Confederation of Labor) and IMF-JC. The Nissan Workers' Union has remained true to this belief. Its recent resolution highlighted: "Firmly standing upon our long-held basic idea and resolutely determined to improve our livelihood through our own strenuous efforts, we have been endeavoring to reinforce our company's foundation."

It is thanks to the union leadership's very "cooperative" attitude that Nissan has managed to stage a series of drastic drives for rationalization of labor. But a new trend is evolving in the '70s. No longer merely a passive collaborator in these drives, the union has begun to take active part in and even lead new drives. After the 1971 and 1973 yen revaluations, for instance, the union took the initiative and urged its members to work harder and raise productivity so the company's exports would not fall.

It is not at all unusual for Japanese company unions to refrain from strongly denouncing the way their companies operate, but the union at Nissan is rather extraordinary. The task of the union, by its own definition, is to "see to it that the company fulfills its social responsibilities," but all it does to fulfill this mission is suppress and neutralize workers' and citizens' movements against the automotive industry's pollution. The union's own proposals for pollution countermeasures are completely dictated by the "logic of capital"; the union leaders speak loudly about the necessity to introduce "a kind of technical innovation that can improve the quality of an automobile and make it much safer," and about enacting better traffic control policies.

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COMPLETE CONTROL OF A WORKER'S PERSONALITY

The union at Nissan does not promote rationalization drives directly, but through a separate organ called the "Management Conference," which is run jointly by union and management for the "achievement of common interests."

A wide spectrum of subjects are dealt with at the "management conference" table: production processes and procedures for quality control; working conditions, including relocation of plants, reassignment of appointments, and improvement of job environment ; introduction of the "two-days-off-a-week" system; and even the "labor-management relationship at job sites." Thus the labor union does not have to busy itself with activities of its own except perhaps some "rituals" like the annual "spring wage-increase offensive."

But the union has become neither useless nor weak. It is an indispensable organ for Nissan, because it adopts all decisions of the management conference as its own program. To assure this, the union has one bureau which is named, accurately enough, the "Labor Management Bureau."

All the administrative positions of the union's hierarchy, from the top executive chairs down through the workshop committee, are occupied by people holding corresponding positions in the company's supervisory system. The centralized

hierarchy of the union thus reflects the centralized hierarchy of the company's supervisory system and provides union leaders detailed information on each worker. When the management conference, with its various subdivisions at each level, engages in "activities for the mutual benefit of management and labor," the union eagerly helps by controlling and manipulating the individual workers. The union's "special program for training union officials" is primarily aimed at decorating as many loyal union members as possible with one title or another. Its purpose is to expand its net of vigilance over all workers.

This manipulation is not limited to such material matters as labor conditions at job sites; it extends to private matters and regulates the life-style of individual workers both inside and outside the factory. Take, for example, the union's "Program of Activities for 1973." Realizing that the members "are becoming eager to lead a more meaningful life"--that they are becoming more and more disappointed with hell's battlefield--the program emphasizes that "union leaders, in their daily on the job union activities, are expected to be careful in handling this delicate problem, which has to do with spiritual welfare." The same program also calls for reinforcing the union's "community organizing" activities aimed at organizing the workers and their families together into a Great Nissan Coprosperity Sphere. The union is attempting to control the workers' lives both at home and at work, all for the benefit of Nissan. What is most horrifying is that the union is doing all this voluntarily, on its own initiative, helping Japan's capitalist rulers in their effort to create a new democratic fascism, which has its roots in the spontaneity of the exploited masses themselves. The horrifying intra-company fascism at Nissan is a harbinger of the new wave now swelling into a nationwide movement.

THE LABOR UNION AS A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

When Domei, the national center of the rightwing labor movement, was established in 1964, labor movement activists on the left were deceived by its apolitical stance and directed most of their criticism at this point. Indeed, in the '60s, Domei (Japan Confederation of Labor) appeared to be mainly interested in struggling for economic gains without threatening the private corporate system. and this strategy effectively made a sizable portion of the masses apolitical. But today, the fact that Domei is no longer apolitical is illustrated by the political action of the Nissan Workers' Union.

Like Domei itself, whose support for the anti-communist and pro-capitalist Social Democratic Party betrays a complete callousness to the needs of workers, Nissan Workers' Union is turning increasing attention to the effort to nominate and elect union officials to seats in the Diet and in local councils of government, manipulating workers for its selfish ends by absorbing their potentially revolutionary energy and anger before it finds a more useful outlet. Union-sponsored political activities are rigidly structured exercises that prohibit independent thought. The union requires every worker to collect the names of 20 friends, family members or others who will support the candidate it approves. Under Japanese election laws, many of the canvassing activities that result from this strategy are illegal, but by threatening anyone who hesitates to participate with lifelong discrimination in salary raises and promotion, by sending union officials and company supervisors to workers' homes to spur them on, and by a multiplicity of other means, such violations are made so widespread that there can be no prosecution. And for the Nissan worker there is no escape--he is either incessantly hounded until he fulfills his quota or efforts are made to force him to leave the company through verbal or even physical intimidation.

IMPERIALIST'S CANDLE HOLDER

Fearing that the rising tide of liberation struggles in the Third World could hamper Japanese imperialism, the union stresses that "in the world today, there still remain dangerous elements that can potentially cause wars." Accordingly, it maintains that "peace and security of our country can never be assured by idealistic arguments about peace which confuse wishful thinking with grim reality," and portrays itself as an important vehicle for assuring peace and security for imperialism. "Our labor union is expected to play an important role both at home and abroad."

Indeed, in the '60s, Nissan Workers' Union played an important role in the rightwing labor movement's successful offensive to make the labor movement inside Japan harmless to the capitalist system. In the '70s, it is to follow Japanese imperialism into countries of the Third World to transplant a Japanese-style counter-revolutionary labor movement, in the name of "international solidarity." Since Japanese investment in the Third World countries of Asia is spearheaded by the auto, electric appliance, and petrochemical industries, the Nissan Workers' Union has an important role to play for Japan's capitalists, especially given the anti-imperialist movements of such countries as Thailand and Indonesia.

Unlike their predecessors, today's Japanese imperialists find it imperative to establish their economic and political control in Asia while making every effort to avoid war. The best way to achieve this end is to buy off the Asian labor movements, and this is exactly where the time-tested imperialist labor movement comes in: exportation of the rightwing labor movement is the prerequisite for overseas capital investment.

Leaders of the Nissan Workers' Union, always willing to serve the cause of capital, were quick to understand the importance of the "actions for international solidarity." "In today's world," says the union's program for 1973,"both economics and politics pivot around the protection of each country's national interests. No one can talk about actions of international solidarity among workers ignoring this fact.....While it is important to remember that we will be able to play an increasingly important role as members of the international society so long as our national economy and industry keep expanding and growing, it is also important for us to offer aid and cooperation to our fellow workers in the developing countries, especially those in Asian countries, so that they can secure their basic rights and enjoy a better life."

Despite the double talk, it is clear that their "actions for international solidarity" are simply for the sake of the continuous expansion and growth of their industry, and for the sake of aggressive overseas expansion by Japanese capitalism. They never spoke of "international solidarity" before the multi-

nationals were challenged by the peoples of the Third World. Some criminal union leaders, like Shioji Ichiro (one of the most active founders of Nissan Workers' Union, who once served as an ILO committee member representing Japanese workers, and who is now Chairman of the Jidosha Soren [the General Association of the Autoworkers' Unions], Vice-president of ICFTU and Vice-chairman of IMF-JC) have even gone so far as to openly support the puppet military regime of S. Vietnam. Nor have they criticized Nissan as one of Japan's crucial weapon manufacturers producing rockets and missiles. Now such leaders have started shamelessly saying that they will help the Asian workers "secure basic rights and enjoy a better life," not because their nature has changed but because they fear the rising tide of people's struggle in the Third World.

They have long been active in various ILO and IMF-JC "educational programs for modernization" of Asian workers.

In September,1973, Jidosha Soren (the General Association of Autoworkers' Unions) sponsored an "Asian Autoworkers' Educational Seminar" in Tokyo, drawing many union leaders from the countries of Asia and the Pacific into which Japanese automakers have made inroads. The Japanese union bureaucrats, including those from Nissan's union, used this seminar to paint a flattering picture of the Japanese unions' roles in making their companies prosperous and to praise the benefits of Jidosha Soren and its parent associations, Domei and JMF-JC.

On the day after the seminar, a new organization, grotesquely named "World Council of Autoworkers' Unions of Toyota and Nissan," was born ready to engage in activities similar to the U.S. counterpart organized by the Big Three.

These actions go directly against true international solidarity among workers jointly struggling against imperialism. What the leaders of Nissan Workers' Union want to achieve through

TABLE 5. OVERSEAS SUBSIDIARIES AND JOINT VENTURES

Overseas Venture	Country	Paid Capital	Share(%)	Establishment	Major Operations
TOYOTA MOTOR CO.,LTD. 6					
TOYOTA MOTOR SALES CO.,LTD.					
Toyota Motor Thailand	Thailand	B55.295mil.	100	1962	Assembly and sales
Toyota Astra Motor	Indonesia	Rp806.8mil.	49	1971	Sales and repair services
Australian Motor Industry	Australia	$46.53?mil.	50	1968	Assembly and sales
Toyota Motor Sales,U.S.A.	U.S.A.	$5mil.	100	1957	Sales
Toyota Parts Depot Curacao	Curacao	$0.4mil.	100	1969	Repair parts supply depot for Latin America
Toyota do Brasil	Brazil	Cr$21.6?mil.	100	1958	Production and sales
Toyota del Peru	Peru	$1.618mil.	48.16	1966	Assembly and sales
Salvador Caetano	Portugal	Esc100mil.	27	1971	Assembly and sales
Canadian Motor Industries	Canada	Can$2.379mil.	30.27	1972	Assembly and sales
Ecasa	Costa Rica	$1.68mil.	20	1973	Assembly
NISSAN MOTOR CO., LTD.					
Nissan Motor Corp., U.S.A.	U.S.A.	$6mil.	100	1960	Sales
Nissan Mexicana	Mexico	$155mil.	83	1961	Assembly and sales
Nissan Automobile	Canada	Can$4mil.	100	1965	Sales
Nissan Motor del Peru	Peru	S/73.4mil.	51	1966	Assembly and sales
Nissan Motor	Australia	$A0.893mil.	100	1966	Assembly and sales
Industrias Nissan Motor Chile	Chile	Esc3.866mil.	87.8	1962	Assembly and sales
Zaire Nissan	Zaire	Z0.15mil.	60	1971	Sales
Prince Motors	Thailand	B3.52mil.	35	1966	Assembly
Singapore Nissan Motor	Singapore	S$2.50mil.	21.6	1967	Assembly
Nissan Motor,W.Germany	W.Germany	DM0.60mil.	100	1973	Sales
Tanchong Motor Holding	Malaysia	S$18mil.	5.6	1973	Holding company
Nissan Motor Distributor	New Zealand	$NZ3mil.	10	1973	Assembly and sales
TOYO KOGYO CO.,LTD.					
Asia Automobile Industry	Malaysia	M$4.4mil.	36.8	1967	Assembly and sales
Matsuda Motors of Zaire	Zaire	$0.2mil.	50	1961	Sales
HONDA MOTOR CO.,LTD.					
Asia Honda	Thailand	B10mil.	100	1964	Sales
Thai Honda	Thailand	B20mil.	60	1965	Assembly of motor-cycles
Honda do Brasil	Brazil	Cr1.65mil.	100	1971	Sales of motor-cycles
ISUZU MOTORS LTD.					
Isuzu Motors	Thailand	B34.66mil.	48.27	1963	Assembly and sales
HINO MOTORS LTD.					
Thai Hino Industry	Thailand	B10mil.	35	1964	Assembly
Thai Hino Motor Sales	Thailand	B10mil.	35	1968	Sales
SUZUKI MOTOR CO.,LTD.					
Thai Suzuki Motor	Thailand	B9mil.	75	1967	Assembly motor-cycles

N.B.: Mitsubishi Motor has joint ventures with Chrysler in the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia, whereas Toyo Kogyo, with its "pollution-free" rotary engines, have joint ventures mainly in the industrialized countries. Honda has an extensive 100%-owned sales network throught the world. (Source: Nikkan Kogyo Shimbun, Sept.11,1973)

their "international solidarity actions" is the spread of their domestic industrial policies to every Nissan plant abroad and the "transplantation: of the "friendly labor-management relationship" existing in Japan to Asian countries. All the criminal actions of the union leaders exposed so far in this article and many others left unmentioned are to be reproduced in Asia. These criminal maneuvers must be smashed by the Asian workers themselves as part of their anti-imperialist struggles.

In the beginning of the '70s it once appeared that a Domei-oriented "united front" of the Japanese labor movements would be formed for the overseas expansion of Japanese capital. This is now undergoing a period of reorganization as a result of Sohyo's (the General Council of Trade Unions') announcement of its "Countermeasures against Multinational Enterprises." Long regarded as more "leftist" than Domei, Sohyo's measures differ little from IMF-JC ideology, especially since its lack of organizational ties with Asian labor movements will force it to keep pace with IMF-JC in its international activities.

In these circumstances, Japanese autoworkers are forced to choose between two alternatives: Should they overlook these trends in the labor movements at home and abroad, and thus allow themselves to confront the Third World peoples of Asia as imperialists? Or should they join hands with fellow workers in the Third World and wage a struggle to put an end to imperialism?

III. FROM SMALL RIPPLES INTO ONE LARGE WAVE

SEASONAL WORKERS' REVOLT

Ever since the establishment of Jidosha Soren in fall, 1972, Japanese automakers have been intensifying their rationalization drives and control over workers with help from their faithful union leader partners. It may appear that Japanese autoworkers, under the fascist rule of the two interdependent suppressors, have given up fighting for their class interests. In fact, this is what most radical labor movement activists both inside and outside the automotive industry thought was the case after 1965. At that time all but a handful of hardcore activists of the National Metalworkers' Union local at former Prince Motor, then the most militant union of autoworkers in the country, were absorbed into the Nissan Workers' Union with the merger between Nissan and Prince. The establishment of Jidosha Soren appeared to have added a final touch of gloom.

But not every one submits to a suppressive system which, in spite of its surface efficiency, can only aggravate the basic contradictions. A series of challenges came from probationary and seasonal workers at the Kyoto plant of Nissan Shatai--from those who are not eligible to join the Nissan Workers' Union and are most seriously discriminated against and oppressed in Nissan.

The first wave of struggle began in November 1971, when Mr. Tsuji in the middle of his 6-month probation prior to full employment was unreasonably fired. A new worker in the Nissan group companies cannot pass his probation if he fails to attain a 95% attendance ratio--that is, if he is absent without leave for more than 1 day a month. Mr. Tsuji became ill from overwork and submitted a written notice of absence together with a medical certificate. The company refused to accept the notice and dismissed him, although in similar cases it usually extends the period of probation. The true reason for his dismissal was not "his failure to pass probation"; supervisors thought he was not "obedient" enough.

He tried to get help from the union officials, but they said outright that the union would not trouble itself to do anything for an outsider. Furious at the union and the company, Mr. Tsuji began to fight for himself. Moved by his appeal, a group of sympathetic workers organized a "Committee to Support Mr. Tsuji," largely consisting of underprivileged seasonal workers. They leafleted the factory twice a day for about a month. Then, they passed out leaflets and, as they tried to escort Mr. Tsuji to his work place, a large troop of unionists, mobilized by the company, attacked them and beat them up. This resulted in an increasing number of workers becoming openly antagonistic to the union and the company.

Another wave of struggle came in early 1973, from January through March. Then the presumably impossible happened!; at the height of the struggle, assembly lines, which the company never stopped

even in the case of fatal labor accidents, were finally brought to a halt!

The struggle began on January 8. Upon reporting at the factory after the new year holidays, seasonal workers were told that the factory would start operating on a "two-nights-off-a-week" basis. The introduction of the new work day system would mean a tremendous reduction in wages as well as intensification of labor, as mentioned above. But the seasonal workers, who would be affected most seriously by such a system, were not informed about it until it was actually put into practice.

The enraged seasonal workers immediately took revenge. In the first day of their work, some intentionally made dozens of rejects, others refused to work and milled into the labor management office. Although it started on an individual basis, the struggle soon grew into a collective one. The means of organizing were the assembly line conveyors that kept carrying rejects and leaflets until they were finally stopped for 2 full days when 300 seasonal workers went into a wild-cat strike and occupied plant offices. What makes this struggle outstanding is that it gave birth to a union of seasonal workers, the first one of its kind in the entire history of the Japanese labor movement.

FAR-REACHING INFLUENCE OF THE STRUGGLE AT KYOTO PLANT

The news of the struggle immediately fascinated radical activists on the labor front throughout the country, and induced them to start a similar struggle. In the Tokyo area, radical workers at Nissan's Oppana and Yokohama plants (Kanagawa Prefecture), Murayama plant (Tokyo), and Kawaguchi plant (Saitama Prefecture), organized "Committees for Joint Struggle against Nissan Capital" and started leafletting at the plants to inform fellow workers of the Kyoto struggle. At each plant, leafletters were attacked by special squads organized and mobilized by the Nissan Workers' Union. But the assault only helped workers in general understand the reality of the Kyoto struggle outlined in leaflets.

Fearing that the other plants might erupt, the capitalists and union leaders increased their efforts to suppress the revolting seasonal workers at the Kyoto plant. The struggle at Kyoto was thus short lived and silenced in less than 3 months, but there is no doubt that it announced the beginning of the auto-workers' struggle in the '70s. One of the most valuable results of the struggle is that it helped workers at various Nissan plants who had been waging lonely and scattered battles come in touch with each other and renew their determination to continue fighting. In July 1972, these workers, though an extreme minority of the total Nissan workers, established the "Nissan Socialist Study Group." In a recent pamphlet, the group reviewed their collective struggles and summarized their intentions for the future:

"(1) A genuine struggle to challenge the existing system of discrimination and suppression will always be met by even severer discrimination and suppression by the management and the union, but we, the workers' vanguard, should not be daunted by such difficulties.

"(2) In constructing the movement, the vanguard should be free from evils of elitism, because a movement of the masses which does not identify itself with an overwhelming majority of the oppressed Nissan workers is in itself a failure.

"(3) The fundamental ideas which our movement stand for are the humanity of the masses of workers which is now denied by the union and capital. The fundamental dissatisfaction of the workers can never be resolved by Domei and the Nissan Workers' Union. We must strive to build 'our own world' among the masses of workers, and counter thoroughly the systematic offensive directed against us by the imperialists. To achieve this, it is essential that we keep examining any and all contradictions embodied in the unfair labor practice against seasonal workers, the policy of discrimination against workers of lower strata, the wage policy, undemocratic labor management by both capital and the union, undemocratic administration of the labor union, etc. Regardless of how insignificant these contradictions may appear, we should continue disclosing their true nature before the masses. Ours is an attempt to create a new movement with a structure completely different from those of the existing Old and New Left movements. A new movement is not created by simple 'transformation' of consciousness; it is something to be

constructed by replacing the existing relationships among workers who now relate to one another only through the assembly line with a completely new one. That is, we must thoroughly remodel social relationships."

At present, members of the Socialist Study Group remain anonymous, but they challenge the fascist rule in their work places whenever they can. At this early stage of their organizing activities they are relying on such tactics as raising questions on the job and at union meetings, while secretly distributing their own papers among fellow workers. In large factories where workers are divided into small teams with limited contacts, their struggle is not an easy one. But already workers have started collectively confronting their supervisors, and in some cases they have stopped the assembly lines for one or two hours. It seems that for some time in the future, these small, but unyielding revolts will be persistently repeated.

VARIOUS FIGHTS AGAINST THE SAME ENEMY

These workers are not isolated in their effort to build a movement; their struggle is echoed by those of other groups both inside and outside Nissan.

One such group is composed of those workers at former plants of the Prince Motor Company who have been functioning as a minority union at Nissan, Prince Local of the National Metalworkers' Union. As mentioned above, most of the former members of the local were absorbed by the Nissan Workers' Union often under the threat of violence. In fact, over the last 8 years those who still remain in the local have experienced various kinds of hardships including assaults by company union toughs, undue degradation, large reductions in wages, prohibition of overtime, suppression of rights to engage in union activities, etc. The local has filed suits in court and has already won many of them. It has also been effective in disclosing various crimes of Nissan, the most important of which is the death of Mr. K mentioned earlier. On the basis of the victories it has attained so far, the local is waging an unyielding struggle in close collaboration with the Socialist Study Group.

The automakers' struggle at Nissan must be seen together with those by workers at Nissan's subcontracting companies. At Tachikawa Spring, Nissan's subcontractor for car seats, the workers successfully smashed a plan for rationalization and a new wage system which the company tried to introduce under Nissan pressure. The management of Nissan intervened directly in the dispute, forcing the company to transfer 6 leaders and to prohibit their union activities. The leaders of Nissan Workers' Union forced the union at Tachikawa Spring to add a new clause to the union statute which reads: "Those employees who are denied membership in the union or who try to withdraw from the union must be dismissed from the company."

Nissan, hell's battlefield, has so far been the hardest-fought battlefield in the automotive industry. In recent years, however, similar struggles have occurred at other auto plants. Under the pressure of capital concentration the companies of the Toyota Group are aiming at a tighter intentegration with Toyota. Both Daihatsu Kogyo (Industries) Co., Ltd. and Hino Motors, Ltd. have started bearing down on newly radicalized workers, firing the most influential leaders. Inside Mitsubishi Motor, which is affiliated with Chrysler, the Domei union's reign is under attack; and workers at Honda Motor Co., Ltd., too, are waging a struggle.

Activists from these automakers and their subsidiaries and subcontractors are beginning to learn from each other's experiences through the forum of the recently established National Autoworkers' Front Coordinating Bureau, and from experiences outside the automobile industry through Zenrokatsu (National Conference of Labor Union Activists -- see "Labor Movement in Japan: Its Present and Future," AMPO, #17). They are still a minority, and their struggles are still embryonic. But it is undeniable that they have come a long way from the low point of the late '60s. In the face of this, there is good reason to suppose that the persistent and unrelenting struggles they are fighting today--tiny ripples--will grow into one towering wave in years to come.

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3909

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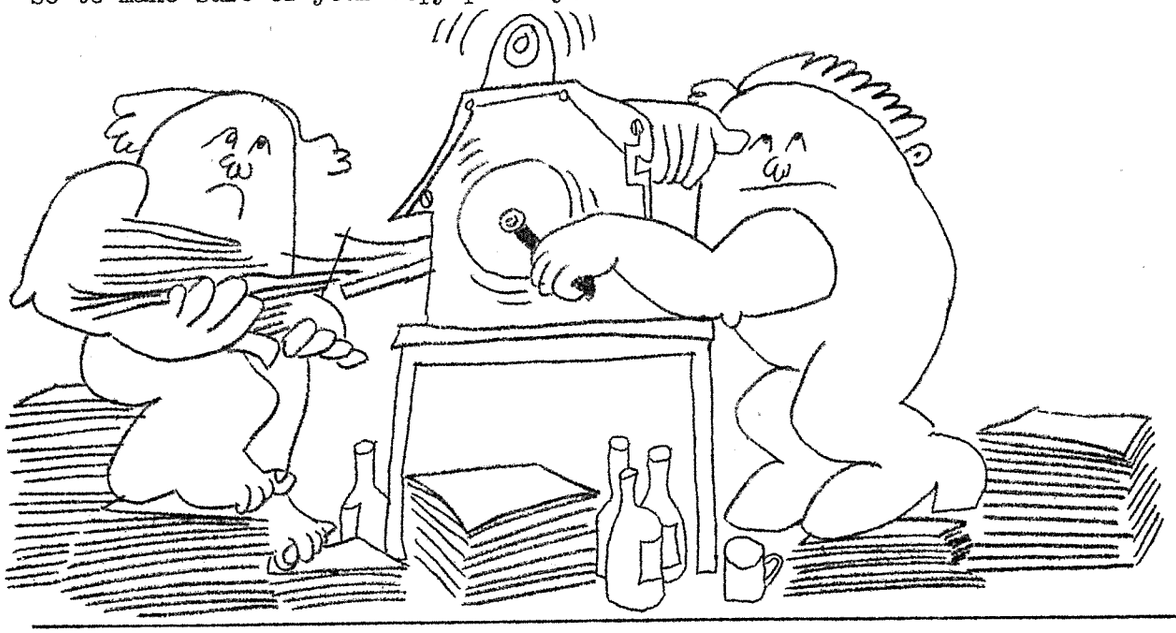

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