

**TRUTH
ABOUT
VAUXHALL**

BY KEN WELLER

(A.E.U. Shop Steward)

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INTRODUCTION TO 1962 EDITION

'Truth About Vauxhall' was first printed in Vol.II, No.5 of the monthly journal 'Solidarity'. We are reprinting it as a pamphlet to ensure it wider circulation in the working class movement. The issues it discusses are important ones. They affect not only car workers but workers in the whole engineering industry and in many other sectors.

The more far-sighted sections of management are today prepared, where necessary, to concede increases in wages. They are even prepared to concede slight reductions in the working week. They prefer to avoid struggles on these issues which might involve the mass of rank-and-file workers.

In return for these concessions management insists on absolute domination and control of the labour process. They insist on the right to speed up the production line whenever they want; to introduce time and motion study at will; to impose 'rationalization' regardless of the human cost; increasingly to subordinate the workers to the productive machine.

These are matters in which the trade union officials show little interest. They are even prepared to bargain away gains in this field. Their own conditions of life are not involved. A successful struggle on these issues can only take place in the shops. It depends on the strength of shop-floor organization. A strong organization threatens all those managerial 'rights' which increase productivity at the expense of the workers.

To smash shop-floor organization modern management seeks to establish further 'rights'. It breaks up work gangs and groupings which might act as growing points for collective resistance and opposition. It transfers men at will - from shop to shop, and even from factory to factory. It seeks to victimize those who put rank-and-file action before back-stairs manoeuvres.

More and more disputes in industry today are on issues of control. What is at stake is the whole master-and-servant relationship in factory or office. In these struggles ordinary people are constantly asserting their right to run their own lives. They are doing it at work, and showing that for them life does not begin at 5.00 pm.

This pamphlet does not offer ready-made solutions to what are complex problems. It does not tell people how they should act. In this it is different from ordinary political pamphlets. We have merely attempted to dig out the facts behind the 'industrial peace' at Vauxhall. And we have dared to publish them.

PREFACE TO 1987 EDITION

This pamphlet was written nearly five years ago. At that time substantial numbers were sold outside both the Luton and Dunstable plants, and we received a number of encouraging letters. The pamphlet continued to sell well and this is our second reprint.

Since those days, changes at Vauxhall have been enormous. In the past, the firm was known to car workers as the 'cabbage patch' - because of the success of the management in heading off and suppressing job organization and struggle. Today Vauxhall workers have entered the ranks of those who are prepared to fight for decent conditions.

The two-union monopoly at the plant has been broken (early 1965). The collaborationist Management Advisory Committee and its tame pussy cat members has been weakened and by-passed. (In January 1966 four of these 'workers' representatives' joined the management in a body, to act as 'trouble shooters'). In the May 1966 issue of their paper 'CONTACT' the Vauxhall shop stewards for the first time vigorously attacked the MAC. The previously strike-free plants have recently been racked with a series of disputes. On June 10, 1966 the American Managing Director issued an appeal to workers to refrain from unofficial strikes: in the first 5 months of 1966, over 20,000 man hours had been lost, an unheard of figure at Vauxhall.

After 40 years of passivity the men are again beginning to recognise their true enemies. They are beginning to realise that they will only get real improvements in their conditions of work, and a relatively human existence at work by taking matters directly into their own hands.

It would be silly to pretend that everything in the garden is rosy. That is far from being the case. General Motors is an international cartel and they have already shown signs of responding to the new pressures by transferring work to less militant plants, to Merseyside and even to Germany. Moreover the same union officials - or their natural heirs - who so ably cooperated with the management in the past in keeping the men down are still there. The conditions still exist for the bosses' comeback: the main battles still have to be fought.

However we like to feel that over the last period our little pamphlet has contributed in a very small way to a greater awareness among Vauxhall workers and helped them to see a way forward. This is why we are reprinting it now. We feel that it still has something to say.

the truth about VAUXHALL

BY KEN WELLER, A.E.U.

Jim Matthews, a National Industrial Officer of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, recently proposed a 'solution' to the 'situation at Fords'. Matthews' suggestions include 'full-time divisional shop stewards' who, if they could not reach agreement with the management, would immediately refer the disputed issue to the local full-time officers of the unions involved. His proposals are based on a set-up common in the U.S., where the trade union machine dominates the shop floor organization to a far greater extent than in England.

These and a number of similar ideas being touted by politicians, trade union bureaucrats and journalists of both 'left' and 'right', are worthy of serious study by militants. They illustrate an important trend of thought about industry today. As a first step towards this study, 'Solidarity' is going to take a look at a firm where American methods already operate - Vauxhall.

The self-appointed spokesmen of the 'left' have largely ignored such phenomena as Vauxhall, presumably because they don't fit with their pre-misconceptions. They have generally concentrated, in a very shallow and ignorant way, and with a total disregard for basic research, on places such as Fords, B.M.C., or the

docks where a militant struggle is already being waged without their help. A key question, on which discussion is badly needed, is why some factories, industries and areas (basically similar in most characteristics) are militant, while others are passive.

This article cannot fully answer this specific question, which is a very deep and complex one. But we hope to throw some light on some facets of the problem.

I. VAUXHALL MOTORS: THE FIRM

Vauxhall Motors Ltd. is a totally owned subsidiary of the General Motors giant. Other parts of this empire in Britain include Frigidaire (with their main factory at Cricklewood, London), A.C. Delco and Delco-Remy (who make electrical components and who have a factory at Luton), and Euclid of Glasgow (who make earth moving equipment). General Motors itself has some spares and maintenance facilities at Luton.

Vauxhall have two main factories: a 264 acre one at Luton, and another of 98 acres, 6 miles away at Dunstable. A third factory for the manufacture of mechanical

components is under construction at Ellesmere Port, at the Wirral, in Cheshire. It is hoped to complete this plant early in 1963. There is also a £2,500,000 research and development centre being constructed at Luton, which will employ about 1,400 staff. This centre will be completed early in 1964.

After the British Motor Corporation and Ford, Vauxhall are the third largest motor manufacturer in Britain. The Vauxhall Motor Company Ltd. and its subsidiaries dominate the labour market in Luton. Ferdinand Zweig in his book 'The Worker in an Affluent Society' gives Vauxhall alone a 45% share of the total male labour market. This situation gives the firm a very big say in local government and services. It also means that it is virtually impossible to get a job at even approximately similar wages within a reasonable distance from Luton. It follows that people attracted to Luton and Dunstable from all over Britain are virtually tied to Vauxhall, particularly so when they get themselves involved in commitments such as hire-purchase and house buying. This is of course an additional aid to the maintenance of 'labour discipline'.

The Government's policy of restricting the expansion of existing firms in South Bedfordshire* (other than Vauxhall) and of refusing planning permission for new industry in the town also helps make Luton a company town. It even further diminishes the chances of alternative employment, and thereby reinforces the domination of Vauxhall over 'their' labour force.

* See 'The Times', 8.9.62.

2. CONDITIONS

It has always been the declared policy of General Motors in Britain to establish a higher general level of wages and conditions in each of their factories than those existing in other factories in the same area. A week of $41\frac{1}{4}$ hours is worked* (compared with the nationally agreed 42 hour week worked in the general engineering industry).

A Grade 1, semi-skilled male production worker receives 7/7 an hour for the first two years and 7/8 thereafter. There is also a 'guaranteed week scheme'. But in the event of the Company meeting exceptional difficulties in production which might be met by working a shorter week (thus involving continuity of employment), the Management holds the right to waive the guaranteed week. It will do so only after discussion with the M.A.C.** representatives.***

In return for these wages and conditions, management demands its price: absolute control within the factory. They attempt to achieve this by the skilled and subtle use of 'scientific management'.

They demand the arbitrary right to speed up the production line

* Most of the other major car firms also work a $41\frac{1}{4}$ hour week. Fords now work a 40 hour week.

** Management Advisory Committee; see section 5.

*** From 'Something About Vauxhall' p. 12, the handbook of the Vauxhall Personnel Department.

at will. They claim the freedom to break up work gangs, the power to move men at the whim of the management from shop to shop or even from factory to factory, without question. Ferdynand Zweig (loc. cit. p. 238) says:

'The Company (Vauxhall) is at liberty to transfer men from one job to another, and even from the Luton to the Dunstable factory, AND THERE IS NO RESISTANCE FROM THE UNION SIDE TO SUCH TRANSFERS (my emphasis, K.W.). The transfers are frequent and occur nearly every month, with changing schedules, shifts, overtime, etc. Most men do not like transfers and that was the most frequent subject of complaint I heard. "It is like an army camp here, the shifting from one place to another all the time", or "you don't know half your mates when the men are shifted around". Most men acquire a certain confidence in their jobs and frequent transfers upset them. They would often say to a supervisor announcing the transfer "why, what have I done?"

It is a condition of service for Grade 1 men that the management can shift them as required. Even the Company's Grading Scheme is such that men can be transferred to the widest variety of jobs. There is gross disruption of the personal lives of workers consequent to this practice of arbitrary transfer, even if only because of the great difference in travelling time between Luton and Dunstable, which are several miles apart. However, in my view, the worst aspect of these transfers is the conscious and constant breaking up of work groups within the factory.

This transfer of men from one job to another is used with great effect against shop stewards. In fact in some shops the men have ceased to elect shop stewards, whose

names have to be given to the management, but elect 'collectors' instead. Men once elected as shop stewards rarely remained in the shop for long. Once a foreman has applied for a man's transfer, no other shop will keep him long. He is regarded as a 'trouble-maker'. One Vauxhall worker told me that 'once a man has been transferred at the request of a foreman, you can guarantee that he will be moved from 10 shops within six months'.*

It has been noted by Vauxhall workers that the technique of either frightening or forcing a man out of the factory (without actually having to sack him) is not only used against shop stewards and militants. It is also quite frequently used against men who are simply popular, or 'have a following' within a shop. These men are presumably regarded as possible foci of opposition groupings.

The management also claim the right to work study any job without consultation, and to give merit awards 'at the sole discretion of the management'. The schedule of qualifications for such 'merit money' includes 'applied intelligence, quality of workmanship, initiative, loyalty, adaptability, cost-consciousness, time-keeping, and long service'. One is tempted to add 'blue eyes'.

Another problem is the repetitive nature of the work. This is

* There have been a number of disputes in the motor industry against the introduction of systems of arbitrary transfer; two cases were the British Light Steel Pressings strike of October 1959, the famous 'Honeymoon Strike', and the struggle at Fords in July 1962.

common to all mass production industry. Anyone who has ever worked at this sort of job will know that it is often not the physical hardness of the work, but the repetition the constant performing of a single operation, which is the most frustrating and exhausting aspect of it. As the shift progresses you gradually tighten up and by clocking-off time it takes some time to 'unwind'. Zweig in his book (loc. cit. p.241) quotes a worker at Vauxhall as saying 'When I was younger, I could not stand the monotony. It made me irritable and dull, sort of scatter-brain. So I left it. Now I don't mind. It doesn't affect me at all.' A very revealing statement. It is this factor which leads to the relatively high labour turnover. During their first 6 months, about 10 per cent. leave or are dismissed. Some men are clearly unable to accept what is euphemistically called 'the realities of mass production'.

An amusing illustration of the management's policy of complete control within the factory were some court cases, reported in the press in February and March 1962. The Dunstable magistrates protested at the continual bringing before them, by Vauxhall, of employees charged with offences such as 'selling cigarettes and tobacco without a licence', 'selling of uncustomed watches', and acting as bookie's runners, etc.

In most factories there is a large network of such 'unofficial' businesses. For example, the Customs and Excise authorities estimate that two million watches are smuggled into England each year, and that most of them are sold in large factories. I don't know what proportion of 'surgical rubber goods' are sold in factories, but it must be a high one. Anyone who works in a factory knows

you can always place a bet, once you know the ropes. The management usually turn a blind eye to these activities. But not Vauxhall.

A rather gruesome example of the firm's sense of values is shown by the fact that on several occasions, after an accident on the production line, the injured man is dragged to one side, the line restarted, before the first aid man is called. There has recently been some agitation within the factory for men to refuse to work in unsafe conditions. Let us hope this campaign for what is normal workshop practice in a number of car factories* meets with success.

3. DIVIDE AND RULE

The Grading Scheme at Vauxhall, which operates with the full agreement of the trade union officials, is a clear breach of the principle of the 'rate for the job'. The men are paid according to the skill which the departmental supervision decides they have achieved. This is a clear break from the normal practice in engineering, in which each type of work has the same rate for all adult male workers doing it. At Vauxhall, men doing exactly the same work can receive up to four different rates.

For example, there are four different rates for production setters varying from $7/7\frac{1}{2}d$ to $8/5d$ an hour exclusive of merit money, and of the $1d.$ an hour increment received after two years' service. There are four

*See 'The B.L.S.P. Dispute', by Ken Weller, p. 5.

different rates for rectification fitters, who can receive from 6/11d. to 7/10½d. There are three different rates for material handlers and store keepers, varying from 5/11½d. to 6/7½d., and three rates for production assemblers from 6/11 to 7/7d. ... and so on 'ad infinitum'.

Another feature of the Grading Scheme is the way the various grades are awarded, at the whim of the shop supervision. Some men without previous engineering experience will be put straight on to Grade 1 when they start. Others with exactly the same qualifications, or lack of them, will have to wait up to two years to achieve that honour.

The skill differential is decreasing due to the splitting up of skilled jobs. For example, the old-time toolmaker is a thing of the past. In his place you now have toolroom turners, tool fitters, jig borers, etc. At the same time as this process goes on, there has been a tendency for the wage differentials to increase. A classic application of the maxim 'divide and rule'.

Even if the Grading Scheme were acceptable, its method of application would still be open to question. For example: failing satisfaction about upgrading from the management, a man can appeal to the 'Grading Appeals Committees' which consist of 'three specially skilled men', appointed by the management. However, despite these 'appeals committees', the firm's 'Grading Scheme Handbook states quite clearly that 'All grading is the general responsibility of the Departmental Manager concerned, and his supervisory staff. This is a Management responsibility which is accepted and discharged

fairly by all supervision'.*

I wish I could be as certain of the supervision's 'fairness' as the 'Grading Scheme' handbook is. Again the management, while retaining final control, have managed to spread the onus for inequalities and injustices. They use the craft consciousness of their 'specially skilled' appointed men as a restricting factor. Anyone working in engineering knows that it wouldn't be difficult in any shop to find 'specially skilled' men who regard themselves as the 'cat's whiskers', and who feel that everyone but themselves is grossly overpaid. The thought of appealing to such men for recommendation for upgrading is a very sobering one. To be objective the system is a subtle way of splitting the workers' ranks and of using the more backward elements to help apply the management's own policy. A militant at Vauxhall told me that far from the 'Grading Appeals Committees' putting the views of workers, they were in fact more difficult to convince than the foremen! 'Nothing good had ever come out of them'.

There is also a 'profit sharing' scheme. This has a share-out once a year. The sum distributed is quite substantial. It is arrived at through a complicated calculation, based on the net profit made by the firm in the given year.

The text of the 'Profit Sharing Plan' issued by Vauxhall starts:

* Details for the section of this article dealing with the Grading Scheme came from the 'Grading Scheme for Hourly Paid Wage Scales' handbook, issued February 1961, with modifications added on March 23, 1962.

'Vauxhall Motors Ltd. has adopted... the following Profit Sharing Plan for the purpose of giving its employees a direct share in any future profit earnings of the Company, and in so doing, to advance further that spirit of cooperation between Management and Employees, which can have such a large effect on our profit figures and the ultimate success and solidity of our Company as a whole'.

The factory is one of the most highly automatized in the motor business. Many millions of pounds have been spent in recent years. This has had very important results within the plant. For example, when the Half Shaft Machine Shop at Dunstable was re-equipped with automatic transfer machines, its production capacity was doubled. The number of workers engaged fell from about 110 to just over 20. Those remaining received the same wages and worked the same hours as before.

4. COLLABORATION: THE M.A.C.

In 1942, to help them dominate the workers within the factory, the management set up the famous 'Management Advisory Committee' (hereafter called M.A.C.). This is a body consisting of 22 'employee representatives' and up to 6 management men. The permanent Chairman of the M.A.C. is the Managing Director of Vauxhall Motors or his deputy. The secretary and his deputy are also selected by the Managing Director. The 'employee representatives' are elected for 3 years, one-third coming up for election each year.

The scope of discussions on the M.A.C. are laid down in its constitution (October 1961):

'The subjects for discussion shall not be defined in any narrow or explicit way, but shall be allowed to embrace any matters that are pertinent to the general well-being and improvement of the Company and its employees, excluding only those matters for the settlement of which an organization already exists. Such matters (as an example, canteen affairs) will only be discussed by the Committee where questions of a larger principle be involved; items of operation being held to be matters which should be transferred to the appropriate responsibility, i.e. in this case, the Recreation Club..... No other matter is excluded from discussion and the Management will supply any information required to the best of their ability'.

While the M.A.C. can pass 'resolutions' by a two-thirds majority, (i.e. 18 out of the 22 employee representatives would have to vote for a resolution with which the management disagreed), the constitution piously states: 'it is hoped that resolutions forwarded will be, as far as possible, unanimous or agreed ones'.

A comment on the M.A.C. by a worker at another General Motors owned factory in Britain*: 'This Committee with elected worker representation can in theory consider any matter, but its recommendations are subject to the approval of the general manager. In fact, while minor matters concerning the canteen or the cloak-rooms may be dealt with satisfactorily, any major advance on such issues as wages, redundancy or hours is extremely unlikely. Nonetheless the company has in the past and does still

* See 'Inside the Frigidaire Strike' by D.C.F. Methane, in 'Trade Union Affairs' issue No.2, p.68.

hold up the M.A.C. as a model machinery for raising grievances. They are forced, on occasion, to meet shop stewards bodies because of pressure from the factory floor, but wherever possible stewards are bypassed. Facilities offered to worker members of the M.A.C. to carry out their duties are far in excess of those accorded to shop stewards, and the obstructive tactics exercised by supervisors against stewards are not applied to M.A.C. members. In short, the situation which existed as regards labour relations until the late '50s has been well defined by a supervisor who explained to one of his subordinates that a master-servant relationship existed. The words he used to make his meaning clear: "I'm the master, you're the servant".

Most active trade unionists reading these lines will note some similarity in function between the M.A.C. and Joint Factory Committees or Joint Production Committees which exist in other factories. The main difference seems to be the role played by the M.A.C. at Vauxhall in collaborating with the management on such questions as speed-up. They even participate in disciplinary action! For example the 'Personnel and Absentee Sub-Committee' of the M.A.C. interviews all workers whose time-keeping, etc, 'is not up to standard'. It then makes recommendations for disciplinary action.

Many managements employ the tactic of promoting 'troublesome' shop stewards wherever possible. At Vauxhall they use a slightly different method of syphoning off 'troublesome' elements. They are elected on to the M.A.C. - or rather some of them are, for it would be wrong to think that all members of the M.A.C. are ex-militants. Far from it. Some of them never were.

Membership of the M.A.C. has a number of advantages. Those elected no longer have to work on the line or at the bench. They have a nice comfortable office in the administration block. Their time is spent on sub-committees discussing whether to discipline a man for being late, whether to whitewash windows in the factory during the summer, or possibly a new colour scheme for the offices. They also spend a lot of time organising inter-departmental sports and social activities.

In fact M.A.C. members are rarely seen by the men they 'represent'. Apart from the advantage of not having to soil their hands with work, they get paid the average wage of the factory, which includes the average overtime (which, of course, they do not work). Another advantage for the M.A.C. member is that his wages are much less affected by seasonal fluctuations than those of the 'ordinary worker'. It is widely suspected at Vauxhall that the average wage they receive is more in the nature of a 'happy medium'. It was noted that even when large numbers of workers were being laid off, the wage packets of M.A.C. members still included large amounts of overtime pay.

There is a growing disenchantment by workers in the M.A.C., and for that matter in the trade union machines. A little while ago a 'voters' veto' was organized at an M.A.C. election. Only about 5 per cent of the electors bothered to vote. The constitution of the M.A.C. was then changed (by the M.A.C. itself). If there was a poll of less than 15 per cent, the holder would remain in office! A sort of 'heads I win, tails you lose' arrangement. So much for the much vaunted democracy.

5. COLLABORATION: THE TRADE UNIONS

The management of Vauxhall do not recognise any special right of shop stewards to represent workers. In fact, they make every effort to by-pass the shop stewards' organization. In this they have received the able assistance of the local officials of the trade unions. In a series of points mutually agreed between the Divisional Organiser of the AEU (J.R.Longworth) and the management, one may read (point 7):

'It was agreed that, in the light of the Company not being a member of the Employers' Federation, and in the particular circumstances of the Company, no full and formal shop steward system or Committee could fairly be operated* (my emphasis, K.W.)

The Management only extend a limited recognition to two unions: the AEU and the NUVB, thus restricting the number of officials with whom they have to keep a 'happy relationship'. This also has the effect of excluding members of other unions from representation.

The firm has a distinct policy of obstruction of shop stewards, quite apart from victimizing them by transfer. For example, if a man wants to call in his shop steward to negotiate on his behalf, it is frequently found 'very difficult' to find a man to stand in for him on the line. Men have had to wait up to three days before the steward was available. At the same time the foreman will emphasize how easy it would be for him to phone up the office block and call down the M.A.C. member straight away.

As far as the management are concerned, Luton and Dunstable are one factory. They allow only one convenor for both plants. This means that Dunstable, which is much smaller, rarely sees him. Another factor is the inter-union strife between the AEU (stronger at Luton) and the NUVB (stronger at Dunstable). This situation is not helped, but is made worse by the actions of some of the local trade union officials.

The AEU Divisional Organizer for Division 20 (which includes Luton and Dunstable) is 'Jack' Ruskin Longworth, a well-known right-wing official, believed to be closely associated with I.R.I.S. and a number of other dubious organizations, such as the English Speaking Union. He spent some time on tour in the U.S. as a guest of this outfit, which is a sort of American equivalent of the 'friendship societies' of the Eastern Bloc. It is used for the same purpose: for rewarding or influencing possible or actual friends, with trips to their respective utopias!

The local official of the NUVB is Arthur Leary. He is one of the few Tory trade union officials (not that it makes much difference which of the major parties they are members of). By a strange coincidence, most of the local officials drive around in nice, frequently renewed, Vauxhall cars.

Partially because of the role of the officials, union membership is low. It was estimated by Zweig (1960) as 60 per cent of the labour force. In mid-1962 it was about 53 per cent. Due to the rapid growth of Vauxhall the percentage is decreasing while the actual number of union members is increasing.

* From 'Something About Vauxhall', page 20.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The dual policy of Vauxhall (on the one hand relatively good wages and conditions; on the other absolute domination of the workers while at work) raises important problems. It raises the problem of the overwhelming emphasis placed on purely economic demands by everyone, from the most extreme right-wing official to the disciples of the most 'revolutionary' Trotskyist sects, from the Communist Party to Catholic Action. In industry the major practical difference between these organizations is whether a wage increase of 10/- or of 15/- is asked. This puts them on the 'right' or on the 'left' of the political spectrum!

This unanimous attitude has played a large role in ideologically disarming (pardon the jargon) shop floor militants. We see the results at Vauxhall. It is time emphasis was placed on demands which raise the question of who controls, demands which challenge the arbitrary 'right' of the boss to order 'his' workers about, without consideration for what they want.

The present tendency in industry, particularly in the United States, is for higher wages, sometimes shorter hours, but for the worker to be exploited to an increasingly brutal degree, while at work. The worker slogs his guts out for 8 hours... then spends the rest of the day recovering. We feel that men have the right to a human existence at work, as well as during the few hours between working and sleeping.

Fortunately, the best laid plans of mice and men gang oft astray. We have the example of the four-week long Frigidaire strike at Cricklewood,

in November 1960, in which 1,000 workers were involved. Frigidaire, like Vauxhall, is owned by General Motors. Its labour relations set-up is similar: it also has its M.A.C. The dispute was over the transfer of a man accused of wasting time during work-study to a lower-paid job (for 'time wasting' read normal working). At the end of the strike the management agreed to the settlement offered them by the shop stewards before the strike began. In his summing up of the dispute, one of those actively involved wrote:

'Frigidaire workers have now, after an interval of time, had an opportunity to see in perspective the recent event and the principal lessons that emerge.

'In the first place the strike did not begin and end with an individual grievance; the underlying issue was that the continued existence of effective trade union organization in the factory was being challenged by the management. Negotiations having broken down, this challenge was met and defeated by direct action on the part of the workers.

'Secondly, a certain myth hitherto prevalent among sections of the trade union membership was exploded. Conflicts between management and workers, it had often been claimed in the past, were primarily due to the general intransigence and personal idiosyncrasies of individual Company negotiators and not to a lack of sympathy with trade unionism on the part of the Company. The strike disproved this theory: it was generally admitted that no board of management was likely to permit its paid officials to wage a four-week struggle at Company expense in order to bolster their egos or indulge their personal foibles.

'Finally, it is a widespread practice among U.S. owned firms in

Britain to arrogate to themselves an exclusive right to fix wages and conditions of work. The majority of Frigidaire workers have now understood how essential therefore it is to make careful selection of and give strong support to shop stewards, who must be from the ranks of those who see that their main task is to check and defeat the company's insistence on its 'rights' and who will exert pressure to the point where the present management policy of unilateral administration is abandoned and the principle conceded in full that workers have the right to state and negotiate towards fulfilment of their demands'.*

The lessons I draw from the Frigidaire strike is that 'you can fool some of the people all the time, and all of the people some of the time. But you can't fool all of the people all of the time'. The very heavy investment made by Frigidaire in 'co-partnership' came to nothing over a particularly crude form of disciplinary action (which militants would call victimization).

The only guarantee against arbitrary actions by the employers is the strength of the workers' own organization. The intelligent employer (and a lot of them aren't) would often sooner concede advances in wages and conditions - which he would have to give sooner or later, in any case - with the aim of undermining the basis of workshop organization. This in its turn would allow him far greater freedom of action in the factory. When a real issue comes along, for example a large scale redundancy, there would then be no organization to challenge his 'managerial rights'.

Managers are basically interested in control. Most of them would sooner pay reasonable wages and have absolute domination (although these don't necessarily go together) than pay low wages and consequently have a constant struggle and a strong shop stewards' committee on their hands.

It is highly significant that militants at Vauxhall claim that every improvement in wages and hours, obtained through struggle at Ford's, is more or less automatically conceded, without a struggle, by Vauxhall, six months later.

It seems to me there are a number of points worth pursuing at Vauxhall. I make them purely as a contribution towards developing a real programme aimed at strengthening the shop floor organization. There are many militants at Vauxhall who are of course much better qualified than I, both to analyse the situation there, and to develop such a programme. This article hopes simply to initiate a discussion.

The issues I feel important, I give below:

(1) The development of a campaign against the arbitrary 'right' of the management to transfer men from one shop to another, or even from the Luton plant to Dunstable and back again. Such a system is almost unheard of in a reasonably organized factory. It is based on an absolute disregard for the effect of these upheavals on the personal life of the worker. It is a planned breaking up of work groups, as they begin to develop group loyalties. It also allows the management to isolate militants at will, and to break up groups which are prepared to struggle to defend or improve their wages and conditions.

* From 'Inside the Frigidaire Strike' by D.C.F.Methane, in 'Trade Union Affairs', issue No.2, pp. 75-76.

(2) The ending of the right of the Company unilaterally to speed up the production line. It should be firmly established that there can be no increase in the tempo of production without the agreement of the men. Surely the speed at which a man is forced to work is a matter for him to decide? Closely linked with this issue is the challenge to the barbaric system of work-study and measurement. This practice of timing each gesture of the worker down to fractions of seconds, leads to a soul-destroying organization of work, without any flexibility such as could take into account the individuality of the worker.

(3) The establishment of 'the rate for the job'. Each job should have a clearly defined rate. Everyone doing the same job should be paid the same rate. This is the normal system. To have up to four different rates for people doing the same job, as well as being unjust, is an obvious invitation to supervisors and their collaborators 'to help their friends and punish their enemies'.

The 'qualifications' imposed by the 'merit money scheme' have in most cases no relation to the right of the worker to receive a fair wage. This should be based purely on whether he is doing the particular job. 'Loyalty', 'cooperation' and 'stability' should have nothing to do with whether he gets the correct wage. A man shouldn't receive a bigger wage packet because he stands to attention when he hears the name Vauxhall.

(4) Forcing Vauxhall to recognize the Shop Stewards Committee as the only negotiating body. The recognition of the right of the men to be in any union they fancy, and the recognition of stewards elected by them.

The establishing of facilities for stewards, not less favourable than those accorded to any other 'representatives'. The ending of the system of private discussions between management and trade union officials. The clear establishment that officials can be called in only by shop stewards, and that the shop stewards concerned are present at all negotiations and discussions between officials and management.

This recognition of the Shop Stewards Committee would at the very least lead to a drastic revision, if not abolition, of the M.A.C. As a very minimum all union members would have to withdraw from all bodies which have functions connected with discipline, i.e. the Personnel and Absentee Sub-Committee of the M.A.C. and the Grading Appeals Committees. All decisions of these bodies would have to be treated as if they had been made by the management in the normal way. The stewards would then have to protect the interests of the workers against the decisions of these bodies.

None of the ideas put forward above are very original. In all cases they are general practice in reasonably organized factories. I offer them with the greatest diffidence. 'Solidarity' would welcome all contributions to a discussion around these ideas, as well as any criticisms, additions or comments on this article from workers at Vauxhall or elsewhere. We hope to publish these (with the writers' permission) in a future issue.

Lastly I would like to thank all those people, workers at Vauxhall and elsewhere, who were so patient and helpful. I must emphasize that responsibility for all errors and opinions in this article is mine alone.

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