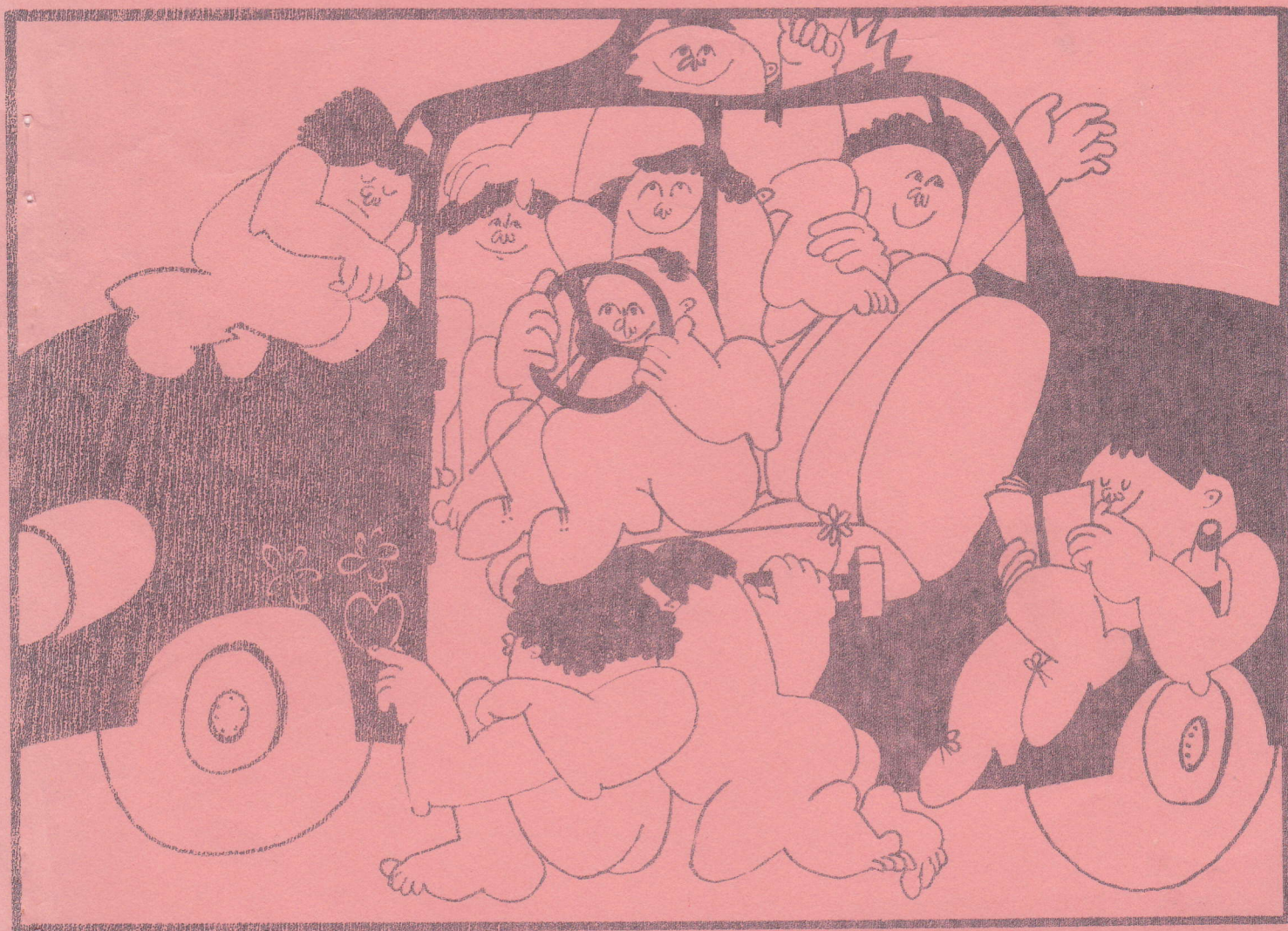


SOLIDARITY MOTOR BULLETIN 1. FORD STRUGGLE 73

ANTWERP · GENK · BORDEAUX · COLOGNE · MELBOURNE · AMSTERDAM



INTRODUCTION

1973 has happily been a bad year for Ford, for quite apart from the struggles which have taken place in Britain, virtually every centre of production outside the U.S. has been hit by major strikes. And resistance inside the factories seems to be taking a dramatic upwards turn. All this is happening while business is booming.

Yet in spite of - or more likely because of this - Ford workers throughout the world are taking the offensive. No longer are they prepared to accept the sort of treatment they have received in the past. They are beginning to challenge the authority of the boss within the factory. Most of the struggles documented here show a radically increased combativeness on the part of the workers.

The articles in this bulletin show a number of clear international parallels - for example, the consistent role of the trade union leaders in weakening workers struggles and their collaboration with the company in putting over phoney ballots to break up strike solidarity. Another theme is the record of the Communist Party and the groups of the traditional left, which again illustrates the point that the experience of Ford workers in Britain is not unique. Another problem which these articles underline is the urgent need for international rank and file links. We hope this bulletin makes a small contribution to the growth of strong autonomous rank and file bodies in the motor industry.

Solidarity has for over twelve years published scores of substantial articles and pamphlets dealing with the motor industry in general and Ford in particular. Because of this we receive far more information than we can publish. The aim of this bulletin is to make this information more widely available to car workers. Hopefully future issues will develop a life of their own.

For this initiative to be a success we need the help of socialist militants in the motor industry. This help needs to take three forms:

1. Help with distribution. We need people, groups or branches to take bundles; we need individual orders and we need to be put in touch with potential contacts.

2. We need money to get this project off the ground, and to get the information into the right hands. Substantial numbers of this issue are being distributed free but obviously this cannot continue. We hope to make the bulletin self-sustaining. If you want to help us in our work please send all the cash you can afford to us c/o 123 Lathom Road, London E.6.

3. We need more information. This bulletin is about struggles at Ford plants abroad and we hope to continue this theme, but we also hope to have substantial material about developments in Britain too, as well as reports from workers in other companies. We therefore need articles, reports, letters and criticisms not only from Ford workers and not only from Britain but covering the whole international motor industry. We hope to hear from you.



7 WEEKS STOPPAGE AT ANTWERP

In October 1972 workers at the Ford Tractor plant at Antwerp put forward demands which included:

- that the period of the contract be reduced to one year.
- 15 Belgium Francs per hour increase (about 17p).
- Shift hours to be 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 10 p.m.

These demands were completely ignored by both the unions and the bosses - their proposals included a 3 year contract, a 19 Belgium Francs increase spread over 3 years and continuous shift working. A ballot of the men showed 729 against acceptance. The unions then issued a formal strike notice which expired on January 15, 1973. The unions tried to use the intervening period to cool tempers and achieve a slightly modified compromise, but on January 11 the night shift walked out without warning and the next day the whole tractor plant was completely paralysed, and there were numerous and well organised pickets.

The strikers demanded and received union strike pay, but in return the unions took over. They sent the mass pickets home, telling them they would be kept informed about what was going on by the media. By the second week the pickets consisted of about 20 people. At the same time workers at the small nearby Ford Motor Plant stopped work, but similar action at the General Motors plant and at Ford Genk was blocked by the union.

Belatedly on the 3rd week of the strike a rank and file committee was formed and the struggle was revitalised, a mass demonstration was organised, pickets were beefed up to stop scabs who had been recruited by management from rural areas.

Not surprisingly the union bosses were hostile to these new developments. Van Eynde, leader of the FGTB stated on TV that he defended the demands of the strikers against his own inclinations and went on to call the militants an irresponsible minority. This had the good effect of dispelling many illusions about the trade union leadership and the bad one of spreading confusion.

The strike committee was confused in its attitude towards the officials, whether to trust them or not. By this time links had been established with Britain, Cologne and Amsterdam, though at the same time the strike committee didn't integrate the non-unionists who were on strike, many of whom were very active in supporting the strike. In the meantime the government had appointed a 'social conciliator' to bring the strike to an end.

THE T.U.s AND THE STRIKE BALLOT

The crisis came on the sixth week of the strike. The company made modified proposals which still did not cover any of the workers demands. The officials had promised to refuse all company suggestions for a ballot and to refer all proposals directly to the strikers. Notwithstanding this promise, the officials did accept a ballot, theoretically run by the 'social conciliator'. The proposals to be voted on included none of the mens demands and the vote was on the basis of a list drawn up by management. Not only this, the ballot paper was drafted and printed by the company.

At a mass meeting the following day the officials were booed, the strike committee opposed the ballot, but it went ahead anyway. When the result was declared 62% of those who voted accepted the 'settlement' and on the following Tuesday in the seventh week of the disput the men returned to work. The 'settlement' differed very little from the original proposals. None of the workers demands were met. Just like at Ford Genk later the workers were taken in by a phoney ballot.

The strike committee was formed because of the apathy (at best) of the unions. It was systematically sabotaged by the union leaders and the press which described the strikers as irresponsible elements and outsiders. The union leaders did everything to break the strike. By accepting a ballot during the negotiations, then by disowning it and then letting it take place they sowed confusion and played management's game. Because of all this there were towards the end of the strike problems inside the strike committee. But the final collapse of the committee can be put down to three other factors.

- * It did not involve the mass of workers in its activity.
- * It did not achieve joint action with workers at General Motors who were putting forward the same demands.
- * It didn't get united action with Ford Genk.

Because of this there was uncertainty and lack of confidence amongst the workers.

E.D.

The Genk struggle

The Ford plant at Genk, in Belgium, is part of Ford (Germany) Co. It employs 10,000 workers, 20% of them immigrants, and produces 1,400 vehicles per day. It has its own parity problems and the differential between wages at Genk and the Ford plant in Antwerp has been reduced over the last few years from 20 to about 5 francs per hour. (The Belgian franc is worth about 1p.)

The old contract ended on December 31, 1972, but negotiations were dragged out till March 8, 1973, when a conciliation commission proposed a 14 francs per hour wage increase, in stages, spread out to October 1974. This recommendation was endorsed by the unions and, in a ballot, accepted by 50.37% of the workers. But on March 11 a strike started despite this. According to the local press 'teams of propagandists' spread the strike throughout the plant. There was a partial occupation of the Assembly Shop and some damage to material there.

Management sent letters to all employees, reminding them that the agreement which the unions had signed meant 'wage increases higher than in any other sector of the engineering industry'.

The unions admitted that 50% of workers were on strike, but militants claimed that the vast majority were not working. On March 14 there was a mass meeting which elected a strike committee, and put forward the following demands: 1) Regrading of jobs; 2) Slower production speeds; 3) Payment for days on strike; 4) No transfers, sackings or other victimisations. The strike committee also called for a boycott of a postal referendum being organised by the unions. On March 14, police attacked and dispersed several hundred workers in front of the factory.

The ballot went ahead with the following results: 7,648 workers voted; 4,625 (60.47%) voted to continue the strike; 2,977 (39.9%) voted for return to work. There were 47 invalid votes.

The unions, CSC (Catholic) and FGTB ('Socialist'), ignored the fact that many militants had boycotted the ballot, declared that as the required 66% of workers had not voted for the strike it must be called off, and that work should be resumed on March 19. And so it was.

FIRST FORD STRIKE IN FRANCE

The first Ford plant in France at Blanquefort near Bordeaux was opened in June 1973. It cost 55 million pounds to build and it employs 1400 workers so far and has a planned production of half a million automatic gear boxes a year, with 50% of production going to the U.S. for the Ford Pinto and the rest to European Ford plants.

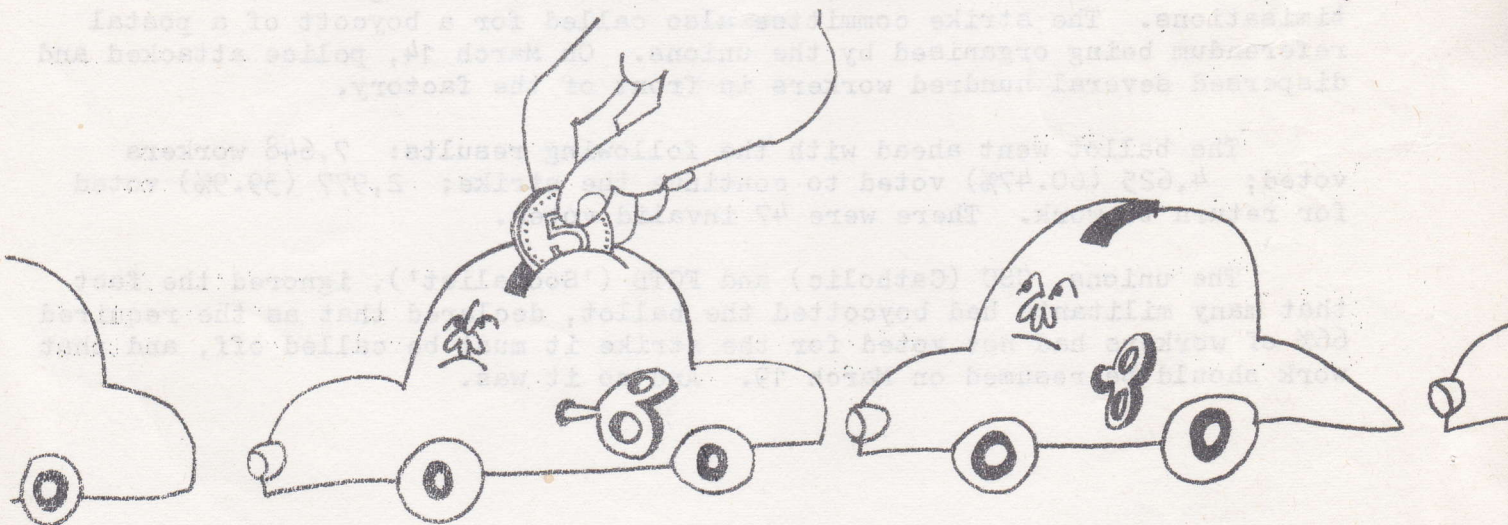
On the 11 September the vast majority of the workers in the plant - about 1000 - supported a 24 hour strike call.

The three main demands - of a very long list - show clearly the sort of wages and conditions the company have been able to get away with - so far. They were:

1. A 5% wage increase backdated to June 1 - when the plant opened - and a minimum basic wage of 1000 francs a month (about £106). In France workers usually also receive a 13 months pay in the form of an annual bonus.
2. A travel allowance of .25 francs a kilometer (about 4p a mile).
3. Better working conditions.

On September 25 the company offered 5 centimes a kilometer travel allowance based on the straight line between the factory and the town hall of the place of residence. The workers regarded this offer as ridiculous especially since their other demands were not met, so they had another 24 hour stoppage.

What has happened at Blanquefort - so far - is of a very limited character, but obviously this is just the beginning. We hope to hear more from the workers there.



EXPLOSION IN AUSTRALIA

When the workers on the Ford production line at the Broadmeadows plant, Melbourne, Victoria, finally exploded into a furious rage and caused over 10,000 dollars worth of damage to the plant they brought to Australia an event which had occurred many times overseas. The brutal pace of production line work has led to some of the most militant, and emotional, working class actions in a dozen countries around the world. (The Australian Ford strike is not unconnected with the Fiat riots in Milan in '69. Many of the Ford workers are recent Italian migrants, some were involved in Italys 'hot autumn'.)

Ford Australia is perhaps the most heavy-handed of the U.S. multi-nationals operating in Australia. It is completely U.S. owned, the top echelons of management are all Americans, last year it sent 15,336,000 dollars in profits back to the States. Ford uses Australia as its base for exports to Asia, as does General Motors another U.S. firm which together with Ford dominate the car industry in this country. Both these huge concerns manufacture and export parts to South Africa on a large scale, where they are assembled by what can only be called slave labour.

Since establishing its Broadmeadows plant in 1963 Ford has practically tripled production in this plant, an indication of the speed ups and general decline in working conditions in the plant since its opening. The comments below are by a young Italian shop steward interviewed during the strike.

'to keep idle time to a minimum you get tea-breaks so short you can't even smoke a cigarette in peace'
'35 minutes for lunch, mostly spent battling for food in the canteen. It's a shithouse anyway'
'you haven't even got a say in when you go to the toilet... you have to wait for the foreman to find a relief for you and maybe you wait 90 minutes...'

The noise of the plant is unbearable for those unaccustomed to it. Everybody is deaf for ten minutes after knocking off. The air is full of fumes and filings and everywhere is the flare of arcs and the accompanying

* Another example of the continued obsession by the bosses and Ford in particular in lavatories is given in The Company and the Union by William Serrin, Knopf, 1973, p 115. A quote from a retired Ford worker talking about the Dearborn plant in the 1930s: 'You know what they done at Ford's? And this is the goddamist truth - they had the servicemen follow you into the restrooms and you're sitting in there and he made you get up and lift the toilet seat to see if you were doing something. And if you wasn't you was fired.'

cancer causing ultra-violet rays from which no protection is offered. But despite all this the worst working condition of all is the boredom of the stupid and repetitive work from which no respite at all is offered. All this effects the quality of the cars as well as the men that make them. In 1971 the R.A.C. tested 672 new cars and found nearly 3000 faults. The average car lasts 4 to 5 years, just long enough to pay it off. Pay is low by comparison to other sectors of the workforce and the men are given very little security. Last year during a slump in the industry hundreds of men were laid off at a time of high unemployment.

There are two major factors in the vehicle industry being one of the most exploitive in the country. Firstly, a major part of the workforce are migrants. Italians, Greeks, Yugoslavs, Turks and Lebanese being the major groups at Fords. Australia's immigration scheme was started to supply labour for the post-war boom. £10 assisted passages enabled 'suitable' (ie white) immigrants to come and work in some of Australia's dirtiest and unwanted jobs. Most cannot speak English, and are enticed here with stories of the land of opportunity and colorful brochures with pictures of the upper-class suburbs and Surfers Paradise. Most come to ex-army huts left over from World War Two, which pass as migrant hostels, and to jobs on the assembly lines. Many of these migrants were peasants in their home country and have little idea of industrial struggle. Some however are militants but with memories of repression in the country they just left. On the lines they find it impossible to talk to each other because of language barriers and the nature of the work which keeps them tied to the machine all day. Their position in the unions is no different to the rest of society. The Vehicle Builders Union, which has many thousands of migrant members from a dozen different ethnic groups has only one migrant, a Greek, full-time official. Almost all union activity is carried on in English. This effectively excludes migrants from activity in the union.

The nature of the VBU itself is a second factor in the continuation of conditions on the lines. Supposedly 'left' it has a low record of militancy and makes little effort to involve the rank and file, even the English speaking members, in union matters. The other major union in the plants is the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union, a monolithic organisation covering every metal worker in the country. The leadership is mostly Communist Party of left Labor Party. The AMWU is a relatively militant union in appearance, but as the Ford dispute showed, this is appearance only. The shop organisation at Fords is extremely poor with little co-operation between the two unions and practically no rank and file involvement. There is no joint shop committee. In 1971 at the General Motors Elizabeth plant in South Australia the workers took it into their own hands to organise a shop committee covering all workers including tradesmen. This met with the opposition from the VBU and only limited support from the AMWU. This shop committee managed to wage an imaginative and ultimately successful battle with management and gained strong rank and file support. The head VBU shop-steward at Fords is also a supervisor and secretary of the company run social club - a real busy little organiser.

HOW THE STRIKE BEGAN

The dispute began when the unions decided to commence a campaign for a 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ % increase in the over award payment, a matter of a few dollars. Laurie Carmichael, leader of the AMWU and CP national executive member, had a plan: since Ford was on the verge of over-taking General Motors as the industry leader then we will call the boys at GM first. All of this was decided without consulting the rank and file as to their opinion. When a mass meeting was held at Broadmeadows to discuss (more likely 'tell the blokes') Carmichael's plan it backfired. The men began an indefinite stoppage. Very few knew exactly what the demands were and most didn't seem to care. Anything for a break from the line. During the next weeks meetings were held at the other car plants. At the GM plant at Fishermans Bend the men threw their lunch at the union officials and the GM plant at Dandenong rejected the plan at a confused and angry meeting. Carmichael's plan didn't appear to be going too well. After a three weeks stoppage at Fords the unions called another meeting to discuss the boss's offer. The offer was for a 5% increase in the over award and Carmichael recommended its acceptance! It must be remembered that most of the workers had very little idea on what was going on. At the end of a very fiery meeting the vote was taken. The officials claim the vote was to return, many rank and filers claim it was strongly against. A group of workers rushed the platform and attacked Carmichael, tearing his coat before he was hustled away by fellow officials. Things were extremely heated. Nevertheless the unions ordered a return to work the following Wednesday, June 13. It never happened.

On Wednesday morning a large group of workers gathered outside the plant to prevent the others from returning. Most complied willingly. They then began to call on those inside - about 200 mostly maintenance men - to come out. Large numbers of workers apparently just didn't turn up. Then they turned on the building, at first to reach those at work inside and then to express their anger at the misery this building had caused them. The mood quickly turned to almost joy as they tore large strips of metal of the plant with their bare hands. They demolished a brick wall and poured fire-hoses into the plant. Laughing workers embracing each other and then hurling another brick at the hated building, apparently oblivious to the mounted police who had arrived, but did not move in. Then they turned on Carmichael and the other officials who had arrived. With shaking fists and multilingual abuse they forced Carmichael to adopt an uncharacteristic humility.

At a meeting called the following Friday the unions turned around and recommended a continuation of the strike. This was agreed to and the strike was on again. The strike was to continue another five weeks. Several aspects of the further strike are worth considering. Firstly, the strike committee which was established to manage the strike fund and other aspects of the struggle - this committee was completely selected by the union leadership and was mainly made up of shop stewards. The head of the committee was

the head shop steward at Fords mentioned above. When asked about the composition of the committee John Halfpenny, State Secretary of the AMWU, said selection was by the union leadership. Hardly the rank and file control of the struggle which had been demanded of Carmichael the Wednesday before. When a group of rank and file speakers arrived to speak to students at Melbourne University, the head of the strike committee appeared to tell these men not to speak and that he was going to speak. The wives of these rank and filers abused him into changing his mind. It appeared the bureaucrats just weren't learning a scrap from this strike.

All negotiations between the unions and Fords took place in Sydney. At first Ford refused to negotiate, claiming in large newspaper ads that in doing so they were defending industrial democracy. The only reason one can think of for the negotiations occurring in Sydney was a fear of demonstrations outside the conference rooms - a fear held by both parties!

THE LESSONS OF THE STRUGGLE

At no stage during this entire strike was any attempt made to broaden the dispute, not even to other Ford plants. Not a single meeting was called in any part of the vehicle industry to discuss the dispute. The union leadership seemed intent on teaching their membership a lesson. They did however do one thing, they made their rhetoric a little more militant. A sign was put up in the VBU offices saying 'When tyranny is law a revolution is in order'. A few wreaths and it would have been like May Day come early.

At almost every meeting subsequent to the riot there was a huge volume of literature from the various left groups offering advice and leadership to the men. It is worth looking at some of this to show the type of understanding these groups have of events like the Ford dispute. The workers showed their attitude to it when they gathered heaps of these leaflets and burned them outside the hall at the final meeting. Most of the groups were Trots of one brand or another. The Spartacist League (a split from the American SWP) saw it as a struggle to "smash Whitlam and the labour bureaucrats" and along with all the other Trots called for the nationalisation of Fords. Communist League leaflets (Mandelists) tried to link the workers struggle with the international dollar crisis. The Healyites cried "Stalinism" yet again. All saw it as a question of leadership, "smash the bureaucrats and build a revolutionary leadership" i.e. theirs. Not one of these groups saw the struggle in terms of the nature of the work and the attitude that this had created in the workers. Not one called for an autonomous shop committee or rank and file control over the struggle. No wonder their leaflets got burnt. During the strike the Self-Management Group produced two leaflets written by the men on the line at Fords. Both of these were received extremely well, being taken half a dozen times. A third wasn't. It was burned along with the rest - a well learned lesson.

11

During the period of the strike two demands came out most strongly from the rank and file. These were for a shop committee made up of representatives from all sectors of the plant and that this committee be responsible for direct negotiation with the management, especially in regard to the speed of the line. That is, the men wanted the right to control their own struggle and would not accept as a management 'right' the control over its own plant. These demands were ignored by the union leadership. The significance of these demands coming from the supposedly 'backward' sector of the class (ie migrants) was completely ignored by the traditional left groups.

During the course of negotiations every demand regarding the nature and conditions of work at Fords was dropped by the leadership, the only outstanding demand was money - they were talking the bosses language again. Finally after a total strike period of almost nine weeks an arbitration judge came up with a solution - if the men went back he would examine their case. The offer in fact amounted to absolutely nothing but a judges promise. The strike committee was to put its recommendation to a mass meeting the following Monday. It took the committee the whole weekend to agree the recommendation on the Monday for a continuation of the strike. The meeting was broken up into different language groups while the committee recommendation was explained. The men were then brought together in one body to discuss the recommendation. At least one official, Halfpenny, appeared to contradict himself by sounding very half-hearted in putting the recommendation to a group of Italians via a translator and then sounding very militant when speaking to the main body, most of whom couldn't understand him. The meeting had an attendance of 800 out of 3000 strikers. When the vote came it was to reject the strike committee's recommendation, accept Judge Moores offer and return to work. Those voting to stay out roared in anger at those on the other side of the room. Most voting to stay out were migrants.

Why did the men accept this ratshit offer and return to work with practically no guaranteed gains? Firstly, it must be remembered that they hadn't had a paycheck in nine weeks and strike pay averaged about six dollars a week. Most would have had very few savings and a large majority would be heavily in debt to the finance companies. Australia has one of the most advanced finance sectors in the world with most workers paying a considerable weekly sum for H.P. This has been a major factor in ending many prolonged strikes. Secondly, many workers had not attended the final meeting and a large number must have got other jobs. Ford is still desperately short of labor some six weeks after the return to work. One worker explained to me in this way: those who got other jobs were those workers with the most 'go' in them, be it in getting a job or fighting the boss. Those with the least to lose by leaving Fords also got other jobs and were inclined to be militant during the struggle. This left two groups in the factory. Those workers with the better jobs, supervisors, maintenance men and tradesmen, together with the 'slack' workers who weren't prepared to fight on and didn't get other jobs. The other group remaining were extremely militant and determined to continue the struggle. This description of the psychology of a strike appears to have much validity when used in similar examples.

It also explains the extreme polarisation which was obvious at the mass meeting which voted to return. A third factor in the return was the complete lack of confidence the men had in the officials. They had done absolutely nothing to assist the men in their struggle; no attempt was made to widen the dispute and very little effort was put into organising job meetings to assist the strike fund. The men rightly saw little point in continuing the way things were.

The current situation at Fords appears to be extremely polarised. The unions have done nothing as regards the job organisation and conditions have not been greatly changed. It seems likely that Fords will erupt again. If some of the workers I've talked to are any indication, they are aware of what is needed at Fords by way of shop organisation and will not suffer a repeat of the recent debacle. They have learned through bitter experience in whose hands their struggle should be. Their own.



WILD-STRIKE AT FORD-COLOGNE

The strike at Ford-Cologne from 24 to 28 August came as a high point in the wave of unofficial strikes which hit the industrial Rhine and Westphalia areas of Germany in August this year. Shattering the superficial impression of industrial peace and uninterrupted productivity often associated with W.Germany - despite the similar movement of September '69 - tens of thousands of workers showed that the bosses, government and unions cannot have things all their own way all the time. In doing so, they forced their enemies to show their hands, and the line-up against the workers included, inevitably, their "representatives" on the Works Council.

Another relevant feature of the German industrial scene, besides these organs of "participation" designed to keep the wheels running smoothly and snarl up rank and file initiatives in complex negotiations while fostering the illusion of "co-determination", is the large-scale use of labour from other countries. These temporary immigrants, from e.g. Italy, Yugoslavia, Turkey, generally get the toughest jobs, worst conditions and lowest pay, as well as having to live in tied accomodation. At Ford-Cologne, according to the estimate of Der Spiegel (10.9.73), Turks make up 34% of the work-force, but 90% of assembly-line workers; they live in poor housing, up to 4 in a room, at rents 30% higher than those paid by Germans, and are subject to various forms of exploitation and discrimination. Contact with the Germans and other nationalities is slight.

In addition they naturally share the problems and pressures inflicted on car workers everywhere, in the drive to increase productivity and profits. Wages are eroded by the rising cost of living, work-study methods are applied to squeeze more out of each worker, the speed of the line is increased. In fact, Ford-Cologne is estimated to have the highest line-speed of any car factory in Germany, with 72 cars leaving every hour, compared with 36 off each line per hour at Volkswagen, entailing 0.83 minutes per man-operation in the Final-Assembly. (Der Spiegel, 10.9.73).

A preliminary skirmish took place at the end of April, when 150 workers demanded a cost-of-living bonus, and extra 2 weeks (unpaid) holiday for the foreign workers, who often have to spend about that much time in travelling to get home and back. Their strike was suppressed after a couple of hours, but the issues remained alive. When the factory reopened after the 4 weeks' annual shut-down in July, 2500 of the Turks over-stayed their leave. Of these, 300 (500 according to some versions), accused of having done the same last year, were sacked.

The demand for their reinstatement was put forward in a leaflet of the "Cologne Ford-workers" group on August 23, along with the demand for a permanent cost-of-living increase of 0.60 DM per hour, which had already arisen at factory meetings. The next day, Friday August 24, the strike started. In the Y-shop two workers were asked to do the work of four to

make up for sackings, and were refused a higher wage for the doubled work. Their refusal to go along with this sparked off a widespread display of solidarity. (I)

The men from the Y-shop formed up in a demonstration and marched through various sections picking up support - a technique that was to be used repeatedly throughout the strike. In the Z-shop a banner was made and 3 demands emerged: I D.Mark (about I6p) an hour increase for all; re-instatement of the sacked workers; slower speed of the line. Attempts by the Works Council and Shop Stewards' Group to send the men back to work were resisted, and the demonstration proceeded to the Pay Office to confront the management. By this time, toward 7 p.m., they were around 2000 strong - mostly Turks, but with 200 or so Germans marching along too.

The management's speeches, translated into Turkish, were received with suspicion; workers were denied the right to speak, and an attempt to seize the microphone failed. However one of the German workers, carried shoulder-high by his mates, was able to speak in Turkish and German, and made the point that the Works Council had no right to negotiate on behalf of the workers. To their protests, he told them that they should try working on the line first (most works-councillors are full-time, paid by the management). Talking to the management was obviously useless.

After another march round, bosses and foremen told the strikers to go home, and when the shifts changed over most did so, although about 50 had lingered for a while. There were not enough of them to put the whole night-shift in the picture. On Saturday 25, work was partially resumed, not through any demoralisation, but as the Turks put it: "Saturday work means a lot of money: Normal work 5 days, normal strike 5 days too; Monday strike again." On Monday things got going again all right.

The workers were supposed to go to the Personnel Office at 6.30 a.m. to hear the results of negotiations between the Works Council and the management. Most didn't bother. At 6.45 the German worker who had spoken on the Friday was arrested by security guards, taken to the Personnel Office, barred from the premises and taken outside the gates. He was soon brought in again by the renewed demonstration of strikers that had started up meantime, and became the first elected to the strike committee. This was formed on the suggestion of a Turkish worker after the Works Council's attempt to intervene had been shouted down.

(I) This account is from Befreiung: others vary in detail.

THE WORKS COUNCIL

It was agreed that the 8-man strike committee should have talks with the Works Council, though they took the precaution of bringing about 20 other workers along with them for protection. They presented the full list of demands: 1 D Mark per hour increase for all; 6 weeks' paid holiday; re-instatement of the sacked 300; full pay for the strike period; no victimisation of strikers; a 13 month's pay (most German workers are paid by the month, and many have won the bonus of an extra pay check); 600 DM net for apprentices. They also asked the Works Council to support the strike and endorse the demands - this would have been an insurance for the strikers against the sackings and other reprisals to which wildcat strikes are subject, but it was refused by the Works Council.

The talks broke down but the Works Council did not abandon its attempts to take over. Its president tried to organise a meeting of his own, a fiasco, and failed to show up and answer the assembled workers when challenged to do so. A Turkish works-councillor (there were 5 of them, out of 47) who tried to make a speech was shouted down, and pelted with apples when he called for a return to work. Before the next session of talks, the workers insisted that a member of the strike committee should show himself at the window every half hour to prove they were still there and had not been arrested, otherwise they would storm the building. Their suspicions of the Works Council were well founded. Again it refused to support the strike, and its offer to take up the demands in negotiations with the management at a later date was rejected as a trick.

About mid-day the management sent for the strike committee. But on finding only one management representative, who was willing to negotiate with only two, the workers walked out of the room en masse. By now the strike was taking on a life of its own, with marching round, singing and dancing. The late (afternoon) shift joined in, despite a leaflet distributed by management and Works Council asking them to go home and take no part in the strike. Money was collected and an evening meal organised, with the addition of some wine found in the kitchen of the managers' canteen, and about 300 slept in the factory that night.

On the Tuesday the works remained closed, the management claiming that the safety of those who wanted to work could not be guaranteed. The entrances were sealed off by police and the late shift was again told to go home. But the lads from the early shift took the gates off the hinges, so that the late shift workers could march in as a body and show their solidarity. At this point some scuffles occurred, provoked according to eye-witnesses by police and security men, but exploited in the Press as clashes between Turkish and German workers. National differences were of course played up by the enemies of the strike, which was presented as "the Turks' strike", as well as the work of the usual small group of close-knit left-wing agitators, trouble-makers and unruly elements. The propaganda, and the differentiated composition of the work-force, did have an effect; few Germans supported the strike after the first couple of days.

Meanwhile the Works Council was continuing its tactics of the day before. It again invited the strike committee to talks. This time the workers demanded that two members of the Works Council should be handed over as hostages for the safety of the committee; this was agreed. The negotiations reached the same deadlock as before, and after that the decision was taken to have no more talks with the Works Council.

Another night was spent in the factory, with watches organised to guard against the expected police attack, which however did not materialise. The next day, when the late shift came, there were between 8000 and 10,000 on strike. The results of negotiations between Works Council and management were imparted to the strike committee: the management was ready to concede payment for the strike-shifts, and a one-time-only cost of living bonus of 280 DM - 100 with the September pay and 60 each of the next three months; a precondition was the resumption of work by the late-shift, at 3.15 p.m. This offer was thrown out by the mass of strikers, although by some accounts the German workers were prepared to discuss it. In the evening at Gate 3 the workers encountered a group of foreman, masquerading as ordinary workers, shouting "We want work," "Communists out", etc. That night 1000-1500 slept in Y-shop.

On the morning of Thursday 28, the bosses' strong-arm men were out in force. With 600 armed police, foreman with clubs, and security guards with rifles standing by, the huge march of strikers was met by a counter-demonstration. The strikers saw few familiar faces among the crowd; it was certainly not a spontaneous massive turnout of their fellow German workers. Opinions vary as to whether those shouting "We want work!" and demanding police protection were predominantly civil police, security guards, or thugs hired for the occasion. For a while there was a persistent rumour about 13 bus-loads of strike-breakers from the Ford factory at Genk, but this is not now given much credence; alternatively, security men may have been brought from Ford Genk.

Anyway, they served their purpose. The strikers, confused by the counter-demonstration and adhering to the agreed policy of non-violence against those who wanted to work, were split up and attacked. At least 80 were hurt, between 11 and 35 arrested, and reprisals continued for days afterwards with over 100 getting the sack. Work resumed when the foreign workers were ordered by loudspeaker to restart immediately on threat of deportation. In addition, there was the threat of legal proceedings, with the union - IG Metall - denying assistance to the "trouble-makers".

A solidarity committee was set up by a section of the sacked workers and several political groups to provide the immediate financial and legal help needed. Its work was made more difficult by the tactics of the KPD (**maoist sect**) which set up its own committee with the object of "continuing the struggle" by which it meant obtaining support for its policy of building a "red opposition" in the trade union movement to get its functionaries into office. These tactics alienated workers and the KPD committee has dwindled while the work of collecting funds for direct aid is carried on by the original committee. (See address at the end of this article.)

CONCLUSIONS

Discussion of the strike and the lessons to be drawn from it continues. In terms of its stated demands, the strike obviously did not succeed: the only gain was the 280 DM bonus and payment for the strike period - with the management reserving the right to exclude those it regards as ringleaders - as negotiated by the Works Council. Other aspects are more difficult to assess. The actual defeat by force and subsequent persecution of militants might be expected to have a demoralising effect. On the other hand, the fact that thousands of immigrant workers did collectively resist their oppression, to the extent of taking over the factory for a few days, and apparently enjoyed themselves in the process, cannot be totally obliterated from the consciousness of those involved. Its significance is long-term.

More negatively, it has been suggested that the strike was in the end divisive, deepening the divisions between groups of workers with the isolation of the Turks. At no stage, though, was the separation into two nationalities for and against the strike completely rigid. (2) Those victimised in the aftermath were far from being exclusively Turks. Examination of the issues involved shows that it was not an affair of immigrants, whatever the specific problems and oppressions faced by them, but has relevance for all workers in the car industry. In some ways, the lack of tradition of industrial struggle was an advantage to the strikers, as it also meant a lack of the tradition of compromise and mystification which keeps so many tied to the trade-union bureaucracy. This is not to claim that the strikers were all enlightened libertarians; in fact there is evidence that many of them remained bound by their own conditioning to acceptance of nationalist and religious myths, such as the singing of the Turkish national hymn after militant speeches. But the important thing is that, despite such inhibiting factors, their conditions of work forced them to struggle as they did.

One report and analysis of the strike (Kommunistische Volkszeitung, I2 & 26.9.73) asserts that the lack of unity among the work-force was largely the fault of the strike "leadership" for adopting new forms of struggle - occupation - and confronting the elected organs of worker "representation" instead of playing along with them. By this argument, even if the Works Council is regarded as an arm of management, refusing to talk with them is like refusing to negotiate with a particular Director: this of course ignores the fact that the Directors do not claim to be acting on behalf of the workers in such situations. Even if the German workers are more reluctant to give up traditional methods (the same source gives the figure of 80-90% Germans, compared with 60-70% Turks unionised in IG Metall, the enormous union covering the entire metal industry in Germany), this is no excuse for encouraging their confusion and spreading it to others.

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- (2) Wir Wollen Alles, August-September '73, estimates a hardcore of 6-8000 strikers, mostly Turks but with about 15 Germans, a handful of Yugoslavs and 1 Italian. Evening News says, (1.10.73), 55 sacked were: 37 Turks, 12 Germans, 4 Italians, 1 Tunisian and 1 English.

Instead, the strike developed from the beginning explicitly without the support of the Works Council and IG Metall Shop representatives, and the role of these throughout once again illustrated what can be expected from such bodies. Their loyalty to the bosses did not go unrecognised. Personnel Officer Bergman publicly gave "special thanks to the members of the Works Council, who have taken pains, in an exemplary corporate effort and in collaboration with police and management, to have the ringleaders arrested." We can be in no doubt that the introduction of works councils in Britain, as advocated by an assortment of participation freaks from academics to H. Wilson to the Liberals, would bring the same sort of result.

Similarly, when the bosses, unlike those at Ford-Cologne who prefer old-fashioned slave-driving, introduce more enlightened forms of exploitation - "job enrichment", "job enlargement", etc., as at Volvo and Saab in Sweden, for example - they will be doing so to increase their productivity. And any move by the workers towards taking things into their own hands and working only in their own interests will be met by the same sort of strong-arm tactics as soon as they become a threat to the set-up. The Cologne strike was the first in Germany against speed of the line; it is unlikely to be the last.

Two weeks after our strike there was a small stoppage in Y-shop by women who sew car seat covers, which caused many workers to be laid off. What happened was that women were taken from the sewing shop and made to work on the line. Those remaining women had to produce as much as before. So they stopped work. 2 hours later they won, and the other women were brought back.

We all think that in January ('74) there will be another strike here, because that's when the agreement ends. Many German workers are ashamed that they hadn't struck with the foreign workers, yet still got the wage increase which was won. One German worker said 'during the next strike we will show the Turks that we can strike much better than they can.'

- Victimised Ford worker Cologne

MAIN SOURCES

Befreiung (Cologne) Sept., Oct., Nov., 1973; and articles substantially similar in Freedom, 29 Sept., and 6 Oct., 1973.

Kommunistische Volkszeitung, 12 Sept., 26 Sept., 10 Oct., 1973.

Wilde Streiks '73 Der Ford-Streik Wir Wollen Alles!, Aug-Sept., 1973.

Evening News (London) 1-5 Oct., 1973. Der Spiegel, 3&10 Sept., 1973. plus extracts from Frankfurt newspapers.

Please send money in aid of the victimised men to: Solidarity Fund, Dieter Heinert, Postscheckkonto/Köln, No.264 652 - 505 Sonderkonto, West Germany.

REPORT FROM FORD AMSTERDAM

GETTING THE LEAD OUT

Ever since 1934 there has been medical literature about lead poisoning in the body shops of car plants. Lead solder is used to fill up gaps between panels which are joined to make up the body shell and the surplus solder then has to be ground off in special lead bays. The men in these bays work in suits like divers. It is impossible for them to speak to each other and it's pretty unpleasant even without the risk of lead poisoning.

Every year in his annual report the doctor working in the Ford factory at Amsterdam writes about the injurious effects of work with lead. In spite of this, production using lead solder continues as usual. During the autumn of 1973 the solderers and grinders became completely fed-up. Turkish workers in the department began to grouse. The unrest came to the surface because many workers became ill and left the job, and because work standards deteriorated - twice men had to be brought in from Belgium to bring the work up to standard.

LEADERS AND LEAD

There had been a lot of babbling about working conditions - the personell department had called no less than 15 meetings to discuss the problem, but nothing was done. Early in September at a meeting about investment policy between management and members of the Works Council it was made clear by the latter that all this talk was nice and easy but meanwhile workers were still eating lead. Finally management offered an extra allowance of 52 cents (9p) per hour, which is about 91 guilders (about £14) a month before deductions - workers here get paid monthly. The workers however demanded that the increase should be put on their basic rate, bringing it up to 10 guilders (about £1.60p) an hour.

SOLDERING ON

Next day, to put pressure on the company the workers systematically put the solder on much too thickly, which meant that 5 extra men including the superintendent had to be brought in to grind it off again. Unfortunately this caused some friction between the solderers and grinders, because the latter weren't very pleased about having to do the additional work of getting the extra metal off.

SWINGING THE LEAD

In the meantime dissatisfaction remains, many men have stayed at home because they are ill. Management has tried in vain to recruit workers from other departments to do the work by waving the extra allowance in front of their noses, but nobody has been fooled. The only workers they can get are raw just recruited workers and even the General Foreman has to work in the grinding bay with the consequent fall in quality. The struggle continues.

NO LEAD IN THEIR PENCILS

A leaflet is being distributed in the plant in Dutch, Spanish and Turkish in which the hazards of working with lead are explained, how it is absorbed and the consequences of lead poisoning - ulcers, high blood pressure, kidney damage and impotence - and what the firms doctor should be doing but isn't, and a call for lead to be removed from production. (We have a translation available of this three page hand-out. Workers in the motor industry who want copies should write to us with a stamped addressed envelope and we will send them one).

