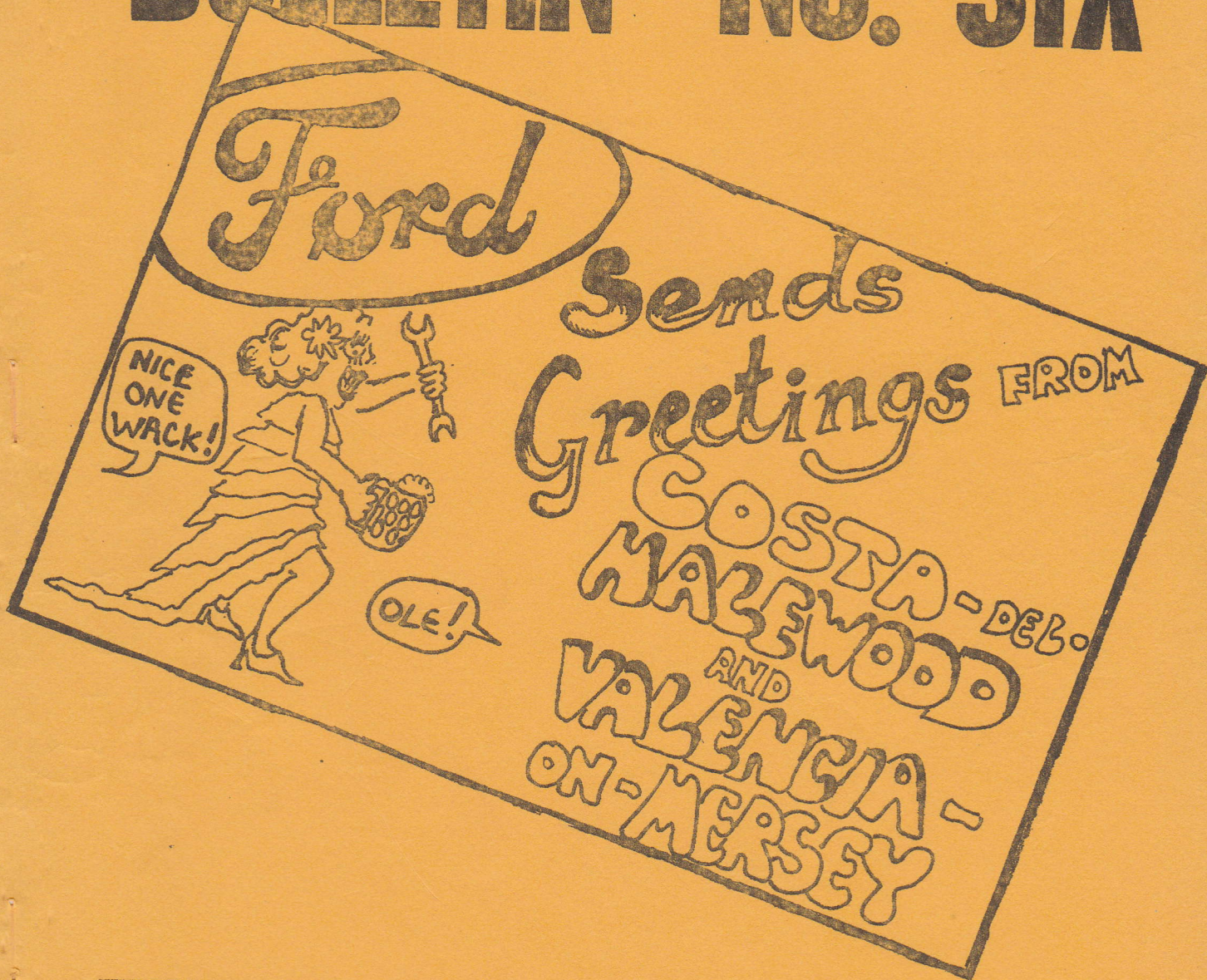


SOLIDARITY MOTOR BULLETIN NO. SIX



Struggles at Ford, Halewood & Valencia. 10p.

FORD 1976-77

to our readers

This bulletin has been slightly delayed due to events at Halewood and Valencia which we wished to cover to their conclusions. Response to the last issue was encouraging. We are gradually building up a more substantial network of correspondants and informants which has helped a lot in improving this Bulletin.

From the beginning we have hoped - while in no way playing down our political positions - to be of practical use to militants in the industry, even those who do not share all our attitudes. One modest aspect of our work is that of putting workers in the industry (whether here or abroad) into direct contact with each other so that information can be exchanged. If readers in the motor industry have problems in getting contact with workers in other plants and other countries we will do what we can to help. To do this effectively and improve our own coverage we have greatly to expand our range of contacts. If you know of others who might be interested in the Bulletin send us their address and we will send them a copy. All addresses will be treated in a responsible way and in the strictest confidence. They will not be passed on without mutual agreement.

To continue and develop our work, we must have the help of our readers. We need more information, feedback, reports, criticism. We would like to hear more from white collar workers not only because of the intrinsic interest of their situation but because they can be an important source of information about management intentions. Lastly we need money. This bulletin is necessarily run at a considerable loss. To help us keep going send us every penny - well every shilling - you can afford from your grossly inflated wages.

HELP WANTED

We have a number of further Motor Bulletins in the pipeline but are always open to ideas for more. In the meantime we particularly need information on the motor industry in Eastern Europe, Sweden and Spain. All material (leaflets, pamphlets, documents, cartoons, agreements) is grist to our mill. (We would particularly like to get comments on this bulletin especially from Ford workers - Halewoodites, please note!) We hope to include a correspondence section in future issues and to get a dialogue going.

FORD 1976-77

After two years of recession and the shift in the balance of power inside the plants in favour of management, 1976 was a year of revival of production with a consequent heightening of shop floor struggle.

In the first 10 months of 1976 the average weekly production of cars and vans by Ford of Britain was 7,409 compared with the average rate of 5,928 for the same period in 1975. This expansion is continuing with an average weekly production for 1977 planned at over 9,100. In the light of the way things are going inside the plants, however, this could prove overly optimistic. With the Fiesta coming fully on stream in 1977 Ford will need all the production it can get. This could be the year of opportunity for the shop floor.

FORD PRODUCTION STATISTICS 1976 - 77.

	1976 (Actual)	1977 (Planned)
Halewood	178,984	186,891
Dagenham	145,114	225,576
Southampton		
(Transit)	52,693	57,053
Langley	26,247	28,199
K.D.	3,001	7,150
Cologne	241,924	215,918
Saarlouis	244,426	249,127
Genk	326,108	279,413
Valencia	17,508	137,119
Portugal	11,354	11,500
Amsterdam	13,951	14,553

Ford have used the recession and the insecurity it has created, an insecurity reinforced by threats of redundancies, especially at Halewood, to push for increased 'efficiency' in the plants. Manning levels have been reduced, workloads increased, militants have been victimised and there has been a general tightening up. The effects of these changes have only become fully apparent as production has built up. As a result the last few months have been marked by a number of struggles both at Halewood and Dagenham, some of which are documented in this bulletin.

1976 has been a very profitable year for Ford in Britain - in fact embarassingly so. The Company is busily trying to disperse these profits by a number of methods. The sort of technique multinationals can use for

this purpose include internal pricing policy(1) and converting cash into capital assets such as property. We hear that Ford of Europe made a profit 520 million dollars in 1976. It is estimated that profits will be much higher in 1977. None of this takes into account the 'dispersal' of profits outside Europe by the methods we have outlined.

HALEWOOD

Ford hasn't needed the full potential capacity of the Halewood complex for nearly 3 years. One of the ways in which they have used this situation has been to send assembly workers home in the event of the slightest trouble, whether real or imaginary. This has created divisions and tensions within the work force which in turn have led to a series of conflicts in the plant. The management's aim in this was and is to weaken job organisation so that when they need all the production they can get, resistance will be weakened. Happily all the signs are that Fords will be disappointed. We publish below accounts by two workers at Halewood who give their views on the current situation. We would welcome further contributions.

TWO NEW SOLIDARITY PAMPHLETS

ON THE BUSES. A clippie describes her experiences.

The struggle against the new schedules. The story of the Willesden Garage strike. 10p + postage

BUREAUCRATS AND WOMEN CLEANERS by Lynda Finn and Gavin

Williams. How women cleaners took on Durham University.

How their struggle was defused by GMWU and TGWU bureaucrats. 10p + postage

(1) Ford, like many other multi- and not so multinational companies, would have no problems in transferring profits abroad. By juggling internal prices a vehicle or component made in Britain, or anywhere else, can have its price raised or lowered for a subsidiary/associated company abroad depending on which direction it is desired money shall flow. This is a largely unexplored area of modern capitalism. It certainly makes the 'accounts' of most major companies not worth the paper they're written on as far as showing profitability is concerned. So much for all the learned exposés on the falling rate of profit.)

HALEWOOD 1976

There have been a number of difficulties in the Halewood plants over recent months. In my opinion these have been due mainly to general dissatisfaction, frustration with the job, wage restrictions, etc. Lay-offs, always a sore point, have also taken their toll. One example of what has been happening was when the foremen went out on strike, lost the lads a week's pay and came back as management tools. (1)

A MAN(AGEMENT)'S BEST FRIEND.

It has been stated through the years that a man's best friend is his dog, so why should Ford not recognise this and use all the guile and training methods that a master employs to control his dog who has the name of A.S.T.M.S. A.S.T.M.S. is a Union, or at least pretends to be one in the Ford Combine which represents SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND MANAGERIAL STAFF.....

Many of its members both in and out of our factory who are Trade Unionists, have seen the deployment of the dog and abhor it, but say there is nothing they can do when its leadership is sitting up and begging for the proverbial pat on the head from its now considered master, not their members, but the foreign few (outside and inside of Great Britain) who attempt to control Halewood.

Like any dog they enjoy sniffing about latrines searching for their own backside and there are a few latrines posing as men in charge at Halewood. As so called Trade Unionists they are playing a most despicable game with their masters by attempting to dismiss as many other innocent Trade Unionists as they can.

Ford let the dog have its little play a month or two back which was designed to take any understanding between the men they supervise and themselves away, when they let them strike for three days. They then brought it back to the kennel and so piously said "we understand that dogs do go a

(1) There have been a number of strikes by foremen in the motor industry recently. At one such strike at the Leyland plant at Cowley, production actually increased!

little haywire at times, but now you will not get off the lead unless we say so". They said so on the 15th November and now the Dog is Running.

Trade Unionists must sidestep the Running Dog for it may go rabid and then we will have to stamp on it, for we are in the vicinity of the Dog's Home for 365 days of the year and unless the dog sheds off its crippling collar and sees itself in the light of man and not of animal, it will be treated as the mangy mongrel its being called now.

- from a leaflet distributed at Halewood.

Production has gone down, quality dropped, not all due to the lads but they have got the blame. Management sent out letters complaining about lost production, claiming that 'welt'(1) working was to blame and warning that if things didn't improve there would be trouble.

"DEAR EMPLOYEE...."

1. Some employees are consistently not working to process and are not doing their job properly because they want to create more time off the job for themselves.
2. Because we are not building quality into the car at the first attempt we have to slow our production and spend far more time than is necessary to correct defects to ensure that customers get a good quality product.

We have sufficient people in this plant to produce 70 cars of good quality per hour. Allowing for such things as breakdowns, we are capable of producing 63 units every hour of every shift. We demonstrate this each day when we build schedule on the occasional hour. The problem is that we are not consistent.

(1) 'Welt' working is a Merseyside name for a very common practice in British industry whereby workers doing a similar job will organise themselves in such a way that in turn a group will take a breather while their work is covered by the rest. A praiseworthy form of work sharing.

What we actually built in October was an average of 47 cars per hour.

As we have said many times, and it is still true, the Company can sell every Escort that Halewood can make. That is why we have temporarily phased out the Capri and increased Escort production.

However, the company cannot continue to make these vehicles at the exorbitant cost which results when we produce the normal straight time schedule at costly overtime rates and still do not meet sales demand. Neither can we continue to produce vehicles on an overtime basis, when this time is currently required to rectify defects so that they do not reach our customers.

Therefore, if we do not make a drastic and immediate improvement in our production performance we cannot justify working overtime any longer.

Everyone has a personal contribution to make. By EVERYONE I mean not only production operators, but also service personnel, engineers, supervisors, administrative staff and management.

- management letter, 5.11.76.

Management then went into their predetermined act, they met the foremen and were promised co-operation and then issued them instructions to operate a three phase discipline plan. Their instructions to supervisors stated:

- Ensure that all your employees know when they should be on the job and when they can take their reliefs.
- If any operator leaves the job without permission, do not allow it to pass without doing something about it. Detailed guidelines are attached.
- While a man is on the job, i.e. not on relief, he is expected to remain on the line. Do not permit any non-work pursuits, e.g. card playing, darts, table tennis, billiards at the line side.
- If operators apply other methods of work restriction which are less obvious, e.g. broken tools, process problems, alleged safety problems etc., be patient, but call on support from your General Foreman, Industrial Engineering, Safety, Maintenance, etc.

- If it is clear that bad quality work is being produced deliberately, this must be dealt with in accordance with the attached guidelines. (Halewood Supervisors' Bulletin 12.11.76.)

In the event of non satisfaction, in the first instance the men got a warning letter, in the second, 3 days suspension without pay and in the third they got the sack. This plan was known, so the stewards met the day-shift men on Monday morning (November 15) and advised them to drop practices like working ahead, to keep things cool and avoid trouble. The men accepted this and stayed on the job and worked to process. Management, however, were not satisfied. They had planned trouble and they were going to have it. A team of personnel had been brought in from Warley to carry out the plan.

On Monday and Tuesday there were a number of incidents which prompted warning letters. Two of these in particular were important. The lead discers are allowed one hour a day to don protective clothing and clean up after work, for this they are paid one hours overtime. Since all overtime was stopped by management and the men saw no reason to work the additional hour to suit the convenience of management, they decided that they should have the clean up and preparation time inside their eight hours. They stopped work at 12.15 for lunch instead of 12.30 and 5.30 not 5.45 in the evening. The first time they did it they got the letter. The second time - Tuesday - they were suspended for three days as per plan. All production workers then met and decided to support the suspended men and take the three days off together.

The other incident involved welders on the track. They complained that there was not the required gap between each car, which meant that they could not stand behind the car to weld the inside of the boot. Management said that the welders had leaned over the side when they had been working ahead to make a blow, so they could do it now.

The welders replied that they were now working to process as instructed and it was an unsafe practice. The safety officer agreed there should be a gap between the bodies. They received letters then suspensions in parallel with the discers.

After the return to work the same pressure was on, both the the discers and the welders still claimed their right to the practices. Management conceded a point to the welders that there should be a gap between the cars, but they insisted that if cars did come down together they should still be welded over the sides. The welders let cars go untouched that had no gap.

On Monday November 22, 10 welders and discers were sacked having already been through the two previous stages of discipline. The stewards' response was to call in the officials on Tuesday. The results of the discussions involving the TGWU District Secretary and Regional Officer

were: the reinstatement of all the sacked men on condition that they all gave a signed undertaking that they would not commit any breach of discipline again, they would do the jobs as instructed, the officials and representatives accepted managements interpretation of the methods of work. The jobs were manned up by other workers during the time the miscreants were away doing penance. Failure to comply meant instant dismissal.

THE ROLE OF THE OFFICIALS

At the end of the discussions it was agreed that:

1. The above employees would be called into the plant this morning to be interviewed by the full-time Union Officers.
2. They would be asked to sign a statement individually that they would not be involved in further breaches of discipline and would agree to work normally - that is strictly in line with the Agreement on Preparation and Clean Up in the case of the Lead Discers and would not miss welds when there is no gap in the case of the CO² welders. This has now been demonstrated again and accepted by the Union Officials and employee representatives as a safe and feasible working method.
3. Only if they were prepared to give those undertakings would the Company be prepared to consider reinstatement of those who were dismissed, or ending the suspensions for the other employees. Any further breach in these undertakings would lead to automatic dismissal of the employee concerned.
4. During the interview programme other employees would agree to man-up the operations.
5. The full-time Union Officials would assist in the resolution of problems in other areas of the plant.

- Ford Industrial Relations Bulletin, 23.11.76.

I am personally very unhappy with the position. The saga isn't yet over, management will continue to move through the plant taking their toll. It may well be that the standard has been set by the official agreement. Management set out with a definite plan to create a struggle and defeat it. They have won the first round easier than expected. The big question is: have they won the whole battle with the help of the IGWU?

23.11.76.

MORE FROM HALEWOOD

I've been at the Ford plant at Halewood for three and a half years now and during that period I have witnessed the relationship between Ford management and the union especially Branch No. 562 (Fords) of Region No. 6 of the TGWU.

Why Branch 562? You may ask, and also, is this to be another bashing of the unions by some frustrated worker? Well for a start I don't share a lot of Solidarities views on trades unionism and I have formerly held shop stewards positions for a number of years. My view now of the situation at Halewood is one of sheer amazement at how a formerly well organised union machine - built up by amongst others former shop steward/convenor Eddie Roberts - has declined. Since Roberts moved to a district organizers job he has been badly missed - there has been a very concerted move towards secret agreements and the winking out of militants from any position within the branch. Other militants on the lines found themselves sacked for the most trivial reasons, and they got no support from the union and in the case of John Dillon, a former shop steward, the branch helped to put the boot in.

Groups of lads in dispute would walk out even with the support of their shop stewards only to find that their jobs would be manned up, with the connivance of the convenor, Bill Maguire and his side-kick deputy Convenor John Craig. Ford now really began to have a field day inside the plant. Militants, and even non-political people who put up for shop stewards' positions and didn't appear to be the manipulable type, found themselves labelled as Commies, Trots, Big Flamers etc and a personality campaign was launched against them with devastating results.

By this year the whole branch structure was undermined. The lads had become cynical, frustrated and very angry at the way they could see Ford becoming more and more aggressive and a very open hatred of the Convenors and shop stewards was becoming more and more pronounced.

We now got a situation where lads on the lines now told their stewards to fuck off. Section meetings outside the gates began to turn really angry as Convenor and deputy tried threats against the lads in dispute. Often the men would be told that they mustn't jeopardize other men's jobs and that if they walked out they would find themselves on their own with the lines manned up by others.

After the summer holidays a foremen's dispute and another in maintenance resulted in a rapid succession of lay-offs - and to be laid off in the early hours of the morning without transport to get home makes men very angry. Fords caved in to the foremen. The lads know that this victory was at their expense: "We are so many. We make the fucking cars here and yet we are treated like shit. Other people can win issues but we are told to leave our problems to the union and shut up."

The screws were really on now, we lost the Capri model to the continent, although this is now to be returned, huge gaps now appeared on the lines, rumours of redundancies circulated the plant, the management called for more quality in rapid succession and started the purge over 'welt' working.

One night at a meeting of the PTA Trim workers in September, the deputy convenor and senior stewards received a terrible blow to their egos when the men voted 60% for taking on the company. This meeting got really ugly - the hatred was explosive, we were pissed off with being sent home during the night shift. The union hacks, although now obviously frightened, appealed to the deputy convenor John Craig to accept the vote for action. What did he do? He disconnected the public address system and walked back inside the plant. There was uproar. A lot of the lads called for an occupation: 'let's drag those snivelling bastards the senior shop stewards and convenors out here and make them carry out the will of the 60% vote for action.'

Some lads seeing the increasingly angry situation, but confused by the union men's behaviour, shouted that the best thing was for us all to go home. Others had gathered rather threateningly around some shop stewards who had been disgusted by the whole issue and were trying to regain some face by staying with their sections. Others now shouted for a march into the plant and an occupation of the convenor's office. We started with about 80 odd blokes but by the time we reached the office only about 20 of us remained. The shop stewards shit themselves, they must have thought we were going to start fighting. Those of us remaining (mostly hardy perennial militants) felt somewhat let down by our reduced numbers but we decided to sit in and get Craig to give us an explanation for his actions.

About an hour later Craig came into the office with a few cronies. He tried to ignore us at first, so we got stuck into him. After a while we could see that we weren't going to get any satisfaction, especially as he had made a statement in front of everybody present that he would never accept a majority vote with which he did not agree. The news that we had occupied the convenor's office had spread rapidly. The PTA was all of a buzz. Lads started to gather around the office in anticipation of a fight, but we had already decided that if there was to be any trouble we would let the union men start it. Two things gave Craig the opportunity to get out of the office. The first was the news that the PTA would be kept on pay for the night which helped cool things down a little. The second was Craig's plea that he was needed urgently elsewhere as a result of a phone call.

The 562 branch leadership had lost its grip and its nerve was beginning to break. The deputy convenor is looking for a new job as district organiser in S.W. Lancashire. Ford is still after blood and section after section is walking out. They will not be intimidated. The heat is on. We have taken some bad knocks but shop floor organisation is still intact and even the union is making a very belated fight back.

On Saturday December 4 we are voting whether to accept the lousy £2 offer or not. Our convenor didn't even want us to have a mass meeting. Anyway the lads need a few bob in their pockets for Christmas, so one can be sure the fight will intensify.

'Get Some In', Halewood PTA (Trin), Dec. 1976.

SOLIDARITY MOTOR BULLETINS

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

This new series, dealing in depth with major problems facing motor workers throughout the world, is available (10p + postage) from Solidarity (London), c/o 123 Lathom Road, London E.6.

NEW YEAR POSTSCRIPT - HALEWOOD

Since my last letter we at Halewood have experienced the marvellous show piece staged at the Liverpool Stadium, scene of boxing matches and freak-out concerts. Bernard Delfont could not have put on a better show than that laid on by the convenors. On Saturday December 18th it was begrudgingly decided by Bill Maguire the convenor and John Craig the deputy convenor of the PTA to hold a plant meeting to explain the Ford Motor Company's latest and final wages offer. It was apparent that a fix job was on the cards. Just 2 weeks before Christmas the decided Saturday was the day of the plant's main children's party when most employees take their children and collect them later on. The union was well aware of this clash. (Also the weather on the day was appalling with black ice and freezing conditions all over Merseyside) There was no notice for the meeting until 3 days beforehand and no advertising of the event until the day before.

It seems that a small grouping inside the Press Shop and the Body-in-White lines had - opposed by the convenors and senior shop stewards - won their demand demand for a major plant meeting at the meeting of the J.W.C. (Joint Works Committee). But the senior shop stewards and convenors no doubt feared the prospect of a mass meeting and the reception they would receive. This might have had something to do with the way the meeting was organised.

The meeting was inevitably poorly attended. But in spite of this there was much heckling and the lads expressed their anger by the questioning from the floor. Brother Jack Jones (1) - no relation to the 'social contract' one - a senior shop steward chaired the meeting without a vote to the end when an angry convenor snatched the mike out of his hands saying 'at least we should find out the feelings of the floor'. A vote was then taken and it confirmed the worst fears of the 'mafia' on the platform. 90% of those present voted against the company's offer and the TGWU's recommendation to accept.

What was to happen now? What could we do? We had been laid off continuously since the end of the holidays, we had no money to fall back on. We had been twisted and fucked up by the DHSS. Unfortunately the lads still looked around for a strong leadership - strange this because the rank and file had taken the sole initiative since the summer and the union had lost all respect in the eyes of the shop floor. Since the new year things have been quiet, even the foremen don't seem interested in imposing discipline. But sackings are still going on at a steady rate, mainly bad time-keepers and persistent absentees. It is difficult to foresee just what is going to happen here at Halewood.

G.S.I., 17.1.77

(1) The above mentioned Jack Jones was at one time a militant. He was eager to use Big Flame in his rise in the union branch mafia and was even able to speak at meetings of the SLL (WRP) during the 1971 nine-week strike!

LETTER TO HALEWOOD WORKERS FROM FORD MANAGEMENT.

"Last week Mr. Moss Evans, National Organiser, Transport and General Workers' Union accompanied by the District Official, visited Halewood and discussed with myself and senior management the serious problems we face, due to disputes, indiscipline and inefficient practices. We had to explain that overcoming these problems was vital to the future of these plants and everyone who works here, and whilst we would do everything reasonable to ensure fairness we would not enter into endless discussion in every case irrespective of its merits.

" We concluded that meeting by assuring the union that we would always allow men to be represented by their steward before any disciplinary action was implemented and suggesting that the District Official and JWC members should sit down with us here and discuss the way we operated the disciplinary policy. These proposals were agreed but the local meeting referred to has not yet taken place. It was also proposed that Mr. Evans would meet the Company on February 7 to further review the situation.

" It came as some surprise to us therefore when on Monday we were informed that the Body Plant was on strike until we agreed to make substantial changes to our disciplinary procedure. We are still not clear what the other demands are.

" The strike seriously threatens your future. In 1976 we had only 61 days free from disputes and only built our schedule on 29 days. These disputes lost us 32,000 vehicles and, although this created additional work in our plants overseas, we lost many customers and further worsened our reputation as an unreliable supplier. Unless we can run these plants efficiently and without disputes we cannot convince overseas dealers that they should order cars made here. Without orders we are without work and without a future."

January 24, 1977.

DOWN IN THE BODY PLANT, SOMEONE STIRRED... A CONTINUING POSTSCRIPT

It was mid-week (January 19) that we heard in the Trim Assembly that something was brewing in the Body Plant over the disciplinary procedure. Its really amazing how things can blow up in a place like Ford. One day everything is nice and quiet then 'WHOOM' off we go. The issue in the Body Plant was over some poor bugger getting the sack for allegedly using a welding torch to burn his name on a tatty old bin. We knew something was up as all of a sudden you could feel the tension build. The pressure was particularly apparent on January 24. The 'A' shift was still working nights although the 'B' shift was already laid off or on strike (the B shift being on days.) This is not unusual at Ford Halewood - here we don't know anything about what's happening around the plant. Communication within the plant is almost non-existent.

The real bone of contention is the refusal by management to meet the stewards both in the PTA and in the Body Plant, and their arrogant refusal to follow even the agreed procedure as laid down in the infamous 'blue book' of agreements, the Ford Bible. It appears that over 55 workers in the Body Plant alone have been sacked with no, or virtually no, representation from their stewards. Its impossible to say how many men have 'gone up the road' that we don't know of.

Anyway, its really great to see people fighting back. Ford has taken a smack in the teeth but up to now its unclear what the outcome will be. The convenors in the Body Plant want to stay out until there is written agreement with Ford. They have the lads at the back of them, so they can't very well back down. The situation in the PTA, by comparison, is disgraceful. The convenors are all loyal members of the Labour Party and have compromised their position so much that they cannot do anything to upset management. But its amazing how rapidly the situation can change. Past struggles have proved this. Nevertheless the Trim section has been caught high and dry over this dispute. But the Body Plant has made a fight of it.

Saturday, January 29, 1977: 1 pm, Radio City (Liverpool) News reported that Ford management have refused to clarify the main points in dispute. The strike continues...

G.S.I., 29.1.77.

THE END OF THE STRIKE

The Ford management entered into negotiations with the unions and a formula for return to work was arrived at. This was accepted by the men at a mass meeting. The package, which involved modifications to the disciplinary agreement, was claimed as a complete victory for the men. While it is clear that management got one in the eye, 'G.S.I.' writes (7/2/77)

'The much-publicised victory declared by the senior stewards and convenor Cooper was very much a hollow one. What the men had served up to them was just a few extra lines in a company agreement, which only means that a man can be (in theory) scked quicker than before. How the union "militants" got it accepted by the lads of the "Body in White" (the section most directly involved in the dispute) beats all understanding.

'Since the return to work, tension is beginning to increase once again all over the Halewood complex. We have been in a tussle with the Social Security once again, and we are appealing to the DHSS Tribunal to get our money for the lay off. We'll be lucky on that one, I expect.'

We had hoped in this Bulletin to give a complete coverage to recent Ford struggles at Halewood and elsewhere. But it was not to be, as life is not like that. As the Halewood struggle ended, others broke out, for example in the Body Group at Dagenham over the frame-up of Brother Shand for allegedly assaulting a trainee foreman. And when this dispute ended, on February 22, production was again stopped due to a delivery drivers' strike. If the current wave of disputes at Leyland is anything to go by, it looks as if 1977 is going to be a warm year throughout the motor industry.

Our attempts to cover these events have also been impeded by the very inconsiderate struggle by Post Office sorters at Whitechapel! This has grossly disrupted our mail. We apologise to correspondents whose letters have been delayed and not used as a result. We will return to the subject in future issues of the Bulletin. Keep writing!

READ: THE LORDSTOWN STRUGGLE by Ken Weller.

What happened at this General Motors plant in 1972. The new tendencies in production and the developing critique against work itself. 20p + postage.

LETTER FROM FORD AMSTERDAM

The Ford management entered into negotiations with the unions and...
'Recent years at Ford Amsterdam have shown a steady rise of absenteeism. A year ago this reached a peak of 25%. Labour turnover has now decreased due to a feeling of insecurity in the labour market.

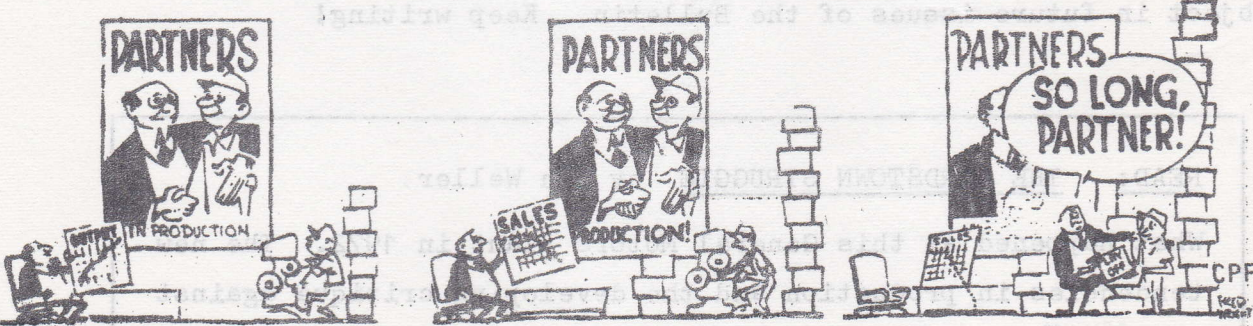
'One of the main problems a few years ago was lead poisoning in the grinding shop (see Motor Bulletin no.1). Today the parts mostly come from Belgium already ground. We would like to hear from workers there now doing this work to see if they have the same problems.

'With the national combined boss-union show for the renewal of the social contract (organised with the collaboration of the media, who are constantly babbling about wage increases of 1%, 1½% or even 2%), there was a meeting of 150 production workers at the Ford plant who voted for strike action this coming week.

'Some of the Spanish workers here have some information about recent strikes in the Spanish car plants. Any good Spanish texts on these would be welcome and will be distributed in the factory at Amsterdam.'

12/2/77

Our attempts to cover these events have also been impeded by the very inadequate coverage by Post Office sources at Whitechapel. This has greatly disrupted our mail. We apologise to correspondents whose letters have been delayed and not used as a result. We will return to the subject in the issues of the...

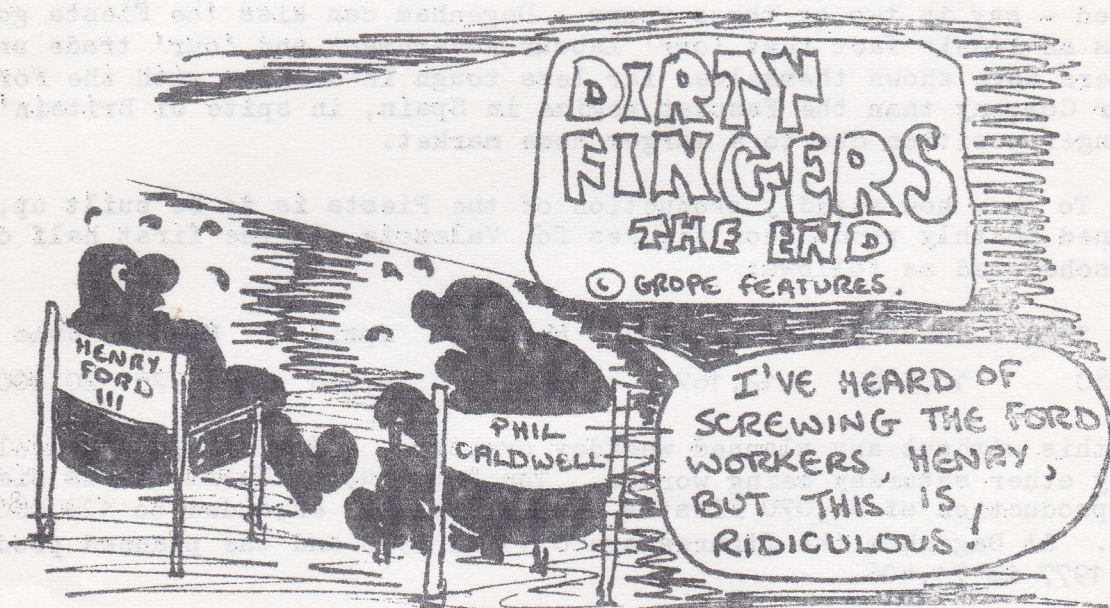


CPF

THE YEAR OF THE FIESTA

Production of the new Ford Fiesta small car started at Saarlouis in April 1976 and - a bit later - at Valencia and Dagenham. The effects of its introduction will be felt by Ford workers throughout Europe in 1977.

The launch of the Fiesta has been marked with enormous ballyhoo, including a book,* a film,** and an enormous advertising campaign with all the associated junketings.



* 'Let's call it Fiesta' by Edouard Seidler, Patrick Stephens Ltd., Bar Hill, Cambridge, £4.95, which is an uncritical public relations puff for the Ford Motor Company - albeit with some interesting information.

** This film is a paean of praise for Ford and all his works for the good of mankind. It nevertheless contains some interesting material on the level of automation at Valencia. There is an amusing story about this film. Late in 1976 Phil Caldwell (Ford's Head of International Operations, based at Detroit) decided to show the film at his home. A copy was sent to him from Britain. As he was lacing up the film for his home movies, he discovered that inside the Ford film can there was a blue movie aptly called 'Dirty Fingers'. Caldwell, a member of a Plymouth Brethren-like sect, who presumably prefers the hard porn of modern mass production, wasn't too pleased. An exciting witch-hunt at the highest levels of Ford management in Britain followed. But in vain: the unknown humorist was never found.

The massive Fiesta programme (costing about 800 million pounds) is the largest investment ever made for a new model. It is a Europe-wide project. Most production will come from the specially-built plant at Almusafes near Valencia in Spain (whose construction cost £300 million). The other main site will be the heavily beefed-up plant at Saarlouis in Germany. As an afterthought - due to a belated decision to sell a modified version of the Fiesta in the U.S., which requires additional capacity at Saarlouis - a decision was taken to assemble Fiestas, mainly for the British market, at Dagenham as well.

The Dagenham assembly operation received the pathetic investment of £10 million. This gives substance to the widely-held suspicion among Ford workers that assembly of the Fiesta at Dagenham is simply to get Ford over the hump in terms of production, and that once this problem is solved - say in two or three years - Dagenham can kiss the Fiesta goodbye. It is an ironic fact that 'our' Labour government and 'our' trade union leaders have shown themselves far less tough in dealing with the Ford Motor Company than the Fascist regime in Spain, in spite of Britain's stronger position due to a larger home market.

To show how rapidly production of the Fiesta is to be built up, the planned monthly production figures for Valencia, in the first half of 1977, are scheduled as follows:

Dec. 1976	January	February	March	April	May	June *
8780	10,548	12,167	13,225	10,508	13,975	20,400

all this without any planned weekday overtime, and with approximately every other Saturday being worked. The build-up at Saarlouis is similar. The production of 84,070 Fiestas in 1976 will be expanded to 179,080 in 1977. At Dagenham the figures are 8199 in 1976 and the planned production for 1977 is 71,406.

FORD PRODUCTION STRATEGY

The structure of Fiesta production is interesting, in particular the dispersal of assembly between three locations. A large proportion of body pressings - 48 out of a total of 99 - are produced at both Saarlouis and Valencia. Manufacture of other components is widely dispersed. 16 components are produced entirely in Britain, the most important being

* This last figure represents an increase of 8,762 Fiestas per month over the previous plan. However, in the light of what has happened, these plans could turn out to be rather optimistic.

engine castings (at the Thames Foundry at Dagenham), radiators (at Basildon) and carburettors and ignition equipment (at Belfast).* In addition the engines of the Federal model of the Fiesta (for the American market) are made at the engine plant at Dagenham, for shipping to Saarlouis.

Special precautions costing several million dollars have been taken with the British components. An average of 55 days' supply is stockpiled - including parts in transit - compared with Ford's normal stock level of 20 days. This is to act as a cushion in the event of major disruptions of production over here. British Ford workers can perhaps regard this as a back-handed compliment by management to their growing capacity for the strategic selection of targets. Despite these precautions the whole Fiesta edifice is dependent on reasonable industrial peace, particularly at Valencia, Saarlouis and Bordeaux. Who would blame the workers there if they took the opportunity presented to them on a plate to improve their situation?

RED BORDEAUX?

One of the Achille's heels of the Fiesta programme is Bordeaux, which produces all of the gearboxes and differentials for the new model. It is these components which provide the most critical bottleneck. The second factory at the Blanquefort site near Bordeaux was only completed in September 1976. It had to be enlarged while still under construction due to the increase in projected demand for the Fiesta. This more than doubles production at Bordeaux - to nearly a million transmissions a year!

The total workforce at Bordeaux is now 3500. The figure will rise to 4000 by August 1977. There have already been a series of disputes at the plant.** But they still have a programme of demands which now can be won. One man's bottleneck is another man's opportunity.

* The Ford Autolite plant at Belfast, which virtually never has any stoppages, is in fact the sole supplier of carburettors and some other equipment for the whole of Ford in Europe. A major stoppage there and the whole kibosh would rapidly grind to a halt. We wonder if workers there are aware of the strength of their position?

** For information about some of these see Solidarity Motor Bulletin no.1, 'Ford Struggles 1973', price 10p + postage. We would welcome further information about developments at Bordeaux from any of our readers.

VALENCIA

The new plant at Almusafes employs 9000 workers. Enormous, with its 3.76 million square feet of working space, it is one of the most modern car factories in the world. Its highly automated engine plant is capable of producing well over 400,000 engines a year, with a workforce of only 1800. Planned productivity is very high, with the aim of 39 cars per employee per year. This is over 3 times the productivity at Ford here, which is itself the highest in Britain.

Obviously one of the main reasons for the decision to site the factory in Spain (a decision taken during the Franco era) was to take advantage of the prevailing low wages policy - similar to that of the Labour Government here - and of the corporate state's suppression of job organisation.* However there is every evidence that Ford will come a cropper.

The advantages to them in these fields are rapidly disappearing. By the end of 1976 workers at Almusafes had achieved average annual wages of 320,000 pesetas a year (£2725 at the January 1977 rate of exchange of 117.4 pesetas to the pound). These figures, however, probably include white collar workers too, who generally receive much higher rates.

FIESTA SIESTA

The current and growing wave of political and industrial unrest in Spain has had its effect at the Ford plant at Almusafes too. By the end of 1976 management had already recognised the formally illegal workers' commissions, and negotiations had started for a wage increase. The workers demanded a flat rate all-round increase of 7000 pesetas (about £59.00) a month. Management offered a 22% increase, to be accepted by Friday, January 7. This was rejected out of hand by the workers, who suggested a 'compromise' - namely that 7000 pesetas would be a minimum, and that the Company could feel free to pay the 22% increase to those workers for whom 7000 pesetas would be less than 22%! There was no agreement.

On Monday, January 10 a violent strike broke out. Workers rampaged through the offices and ordered the executives to leave the plant, on pain of having their cars smashed up. The following day the management, true to form, placed all hourly-paid workers on three days' suspension.

* For more information on the motor industry in Spain, see Motor Bulletin no.5, 'Spain: the struggle at SEAT, Barcelona', price 10p + postage.

Staff and office workers were escorted into the plant by police, who also placed a heavy guard on the factory. There were some violent clashes with the workers and stones were thrown. At 10 am a mass meeting was held at the Almusafes town centre which called on the office workers to join the strike. The white collar workers refused.* The police then broke up the meeting.

On Friday, January 14, at the end of the suspension, the workers were admitted back into the plant where they held another mass meeting. The management - who were under intense pressure to get a settlement and restart production to meet the massive demand following the continental launch of the Fiesta, and who were losing 450 cars and 1000 engines a day as a result of the dispute - capitulated completely. They offered a 27.6% wage increase with a guaranteed minimum increase of 7000 pesetas a month.

But the workers weren't having any. They put forward further demands. They argued that since the staff did not strike, and were prepared to accept the 22%, that's all they should get. The additional 5.6% should be withheld from them and distributed as an additional flat-rate increase for the hourly workers! Management weren't prepared to swallow this. The strike continued.

The management, trying to get out of the situation, referred the dispute to Government arbitration. In Spain this has the force of law. The arbitration - surprise, surprise - awarded the workers less than Ford had already conceded. There are parallels here with 'our own' social contract. The Spanish government, like the British, has a policy of wage restraint. The judgment was frozen for 48 hours, pending a local settlement. Meanwhile the Ford management sent out one of its inimitable letters to all hourly-paid workers, stating that if they didn't accept the 27.6% offer by Friday January 21 the arbitration would become operative. The workers remained solid.

Meanwhile the Valencia management were having second thoughts. A shortage of Almusafes-made components was already affecting production at Saarlouis and Dagenham.** Under extreme pressure they made yet another offer. They accepted the principle of the men's later demand, reduced the wage increase to staff by 1%, and offered grade one production workers a flat-rate increase of 8125 pesetas (about £69) a month. The workers accepted the offer and returned to work on Monday, January 24. They had won a complete victory and created a solid basis on which to build in the coming year.

* The staff were prepared to accept the Company's 22% offer, presumably because most of them were on much higher wages and would be better off with a 22% increase rather than with a 7000 pesetas flat-rate increase.

** Total lost sales due to the strike were 7000 Fiestas: 6000 at Valencia and about 500 each at Saarlouis and Dagenham.

CONCLUSIONS

Recent experiences at Valencia and elsewhere raise important questions for workers in the motor industry in general and at Ford's in particular. The present selective expansion of production creates good opportunities - if imaginatively used - for workers to regain ground lost due to the recession of the last few years. This should enable them to go forward and make serious advances in the fields of wages, control of the line and reduction of the arbitrary powers of management.

But there is more. Events at Valencia showed that after 40 years of fascist dictatorship, with trade unions illegal, workers were able to engage in an exemplary struggle against one of the largest companies in the world ... and win. As we said in our last Motor Bulletin: 'The very development of the Spanish economy (and the consequent growth and development of the Spanish working class) will be the greatest source of problems for the Spanish ruling class in the struggles to come'.

The struggle at Valencia, and the great wave of strikes still developing throughout Spain, were carried out without the intervention of any union apparatus - although we don't doubt there must be plenty of contenders for the position standing in the wings. It is an ironic thought that the Spanish ruling class, in suppressing the trade union apparatus as well as job organisation have perhaps deprived themselves of their own most natural allies. With the development of the Spanish economy the necessity for labour middlemen has increased. It is precisely this problem that the current 'liberalisation' is seeking to solve. Spanish workers have set us an example of how we can take control of the struggles into our own hands. We must learn from their experience.

K. W.