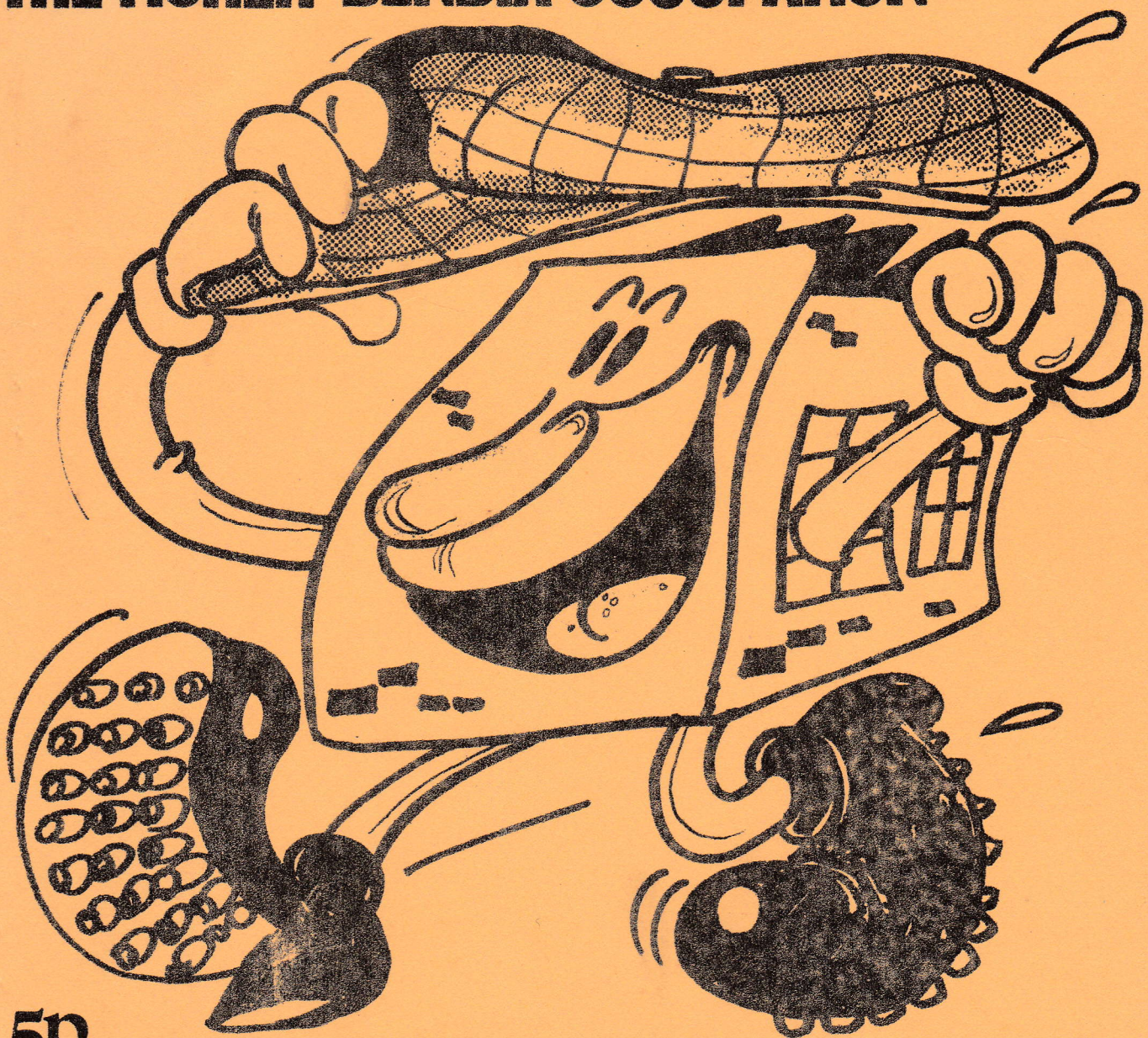
UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT?

THE FISHER-BENDIX OCCUPATION



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UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

The workers at Fisher-Bendix, Kirkby near Liverpool, occupied the entire factory and offices on Wednesday, January 5, 1972. This action by all the workers, manual and non-manual, represents an advanced form of struggle. Simply to outline the events, as they happened, will provide more real knowledge to be used by others, than any attempt to interpret what is happening according to particular political outlooks.

On January 11, along with 2 members of 'Solidarity' (Manchester) I visited Fisher-Bendix in South Boundary Road, Kirkby. The factory is in a big industrial estate which has been developed with the help of large government subsidies. Attached to the railings near the main gates a huge notice had been put up by the workers. In letters about 2 feet high it said: 'Under New Management'.

We went to the lodge where a group of workers were in control. All entering the factory had to 'sign in' after passing through an entrance which only permitted single file movement. As visitors we were asked to wait for someone to see us before we were allowed to enter. Tom Staples, Treasurer of the Occupation Committee, arrived in a few minutes. He asked to see our credentials (T.U. membership cards). We showed them to him and informed him that we belonged to 'Solidarity' and that it was our intention to learn all we could about their action. We wanted to know if there was anything we could do to help.

Satisfied with our reasons for being there, Tom gave us a warm welcome. He led us towards a building which turned out to be the Administration Block which included the Executive Offices. We were not able to enter before the workers in charge of various gates and doors saw that Tom was with us. We were taken to an office where visitors were received. This turned out to be the office previously occupied by the Sales Manager of Fisher-Bendix. On our way there we saw the names of various committees on notices which had been pasted up over the names of the various executives whose offices had been taken over.

After making us comfortable Tom and another member of the Committee, Stan Ely, proceeded to give us an account of the background to the occupation. They also told us how the action had been prepared and carried out.

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THE BACKGROUND

During 11 years the firm concentrated on trying to break the organised strength of the workers. Having failed, they decided to close the factory. 600 workers would be made redundant (all that remained of an original labour force of 2000).

The firm is part of Thorn Electrical Ltd. Last year the Thorn industrial empire knocked up a profit of £37,000,000. Between 1962 and 1968 they received £6,558,420 of public money in investment allowances. When, last May, Thorn bought the factory from Parkinson-Cowan for £4,000,000 they knew exactly what they would do: maintain the profitable parts of the Company, sell or transfer plant and surplus equipment and eventually close down the Kirkby factory. Their reasons are easily understood if one looks at the different wage rates within the company's factories. The Thorn Combine Shop Stewards Committee reported some time ago that weekly rates for some women employed at Merthyr Tydfil were £13.95 against £24 in Kirkby.

The workers had had 12 different factory managers in as many years. The last one, Mr K.G. Lucas, was sacked just before Christmas having failed to carry out his openly stated objective of 'dealing with the men'.

The process which reduced the work force from 2000 to 600 had been spread over many years. Six unions had been involved in the negotiations. The firm had also succeeded in smashing the staff unions at this factory. The owners, first BMC, then Parkinson-Cowan, and now Thorn have made many top quality products under the labels Fisher-Ludlow, then Fisher-Bendix. These have included Moulton bicycles (a profitable patent was sold to Raleigh), quality sinks (the production of which was later sold to a competitor: Carron's of Scotland), and now radiators and gas fires. Production of other items has been started and stopped at very short notice. The production of Bendix tumble dryers was taken from the Kirkby factory earlier last year and transferred to a firm CARSA in Madrid, to be manufactured under licence. It should not be necessary to point out that wage rates in Madrid are not likely to match those at Kirkby. The firm had also decided to move production of Bendix washing machines to CARSA.

When the workers' representatives produced evidence that all this was going on, Thorn denied it. They lied brazenly even when presented with copies of contracts, etc. In addition they started to move production of radiators to their subsidiaries in Newcastle. While all this was going on the firm was trying to get the men to accept productivity schemes based on measured day work.

All this rationalisation at the workers' expense - and much more - was known to the men. The balloon went up when the management finally presented their proposals for a phased programme to close the factory down

completely. They had already aired the general idea as far back as August 1971. The decision was not presented as a subject for negotiation. While the stewards were being informed, notices were posted up and hand-outs distributed cynically inviting the workers to assist in the dismantling and transfer of machinery, etc.

Thorn had only taken over the factory from Parkinson-Cowan in May 1971. They had wasted no time. There had been over 500 redundancies between May and October. This provoked token stoppages of one day and half a day. Then there had been a nine-week official strike starting in June. At the time, mass meetings had been hald in the canteen, a prelude of things to come. The firm had sent letters to the individual workers and a counter had been set up in the yard, to offer redundancy payments.* An Army recruitment office had even been opened for business. All this was resisted successfully. The firm climbed down and some 400 jobs were saved.

The final notice which brought things to a head outlined the firm's intentions: these included the proposed sacking of 60 manual workers and one staff on January 28, the dismantling of machinery, etc, to begin after Christmas and to proceed throughout February and March along with more redundancies leading to a total shut down by May 31, 1972. At the same time efforts were made to increase production of work in hand.

On December 7 the workers spontaneously stopped work and marched from the factory to the Admin Block shouting slogans, including 'We demand the right to work'. When we said that we didn't think this was a good slogan and that it might sound as if the workers were demanding the right to be exploited, we were told that what they really meant was that they did not accept the bosses' right to decide who should work. They felt that they themselves should be able to decide whether they worked or not and under what conditions. This meant that the factories could not be privately owned but must be managed by the workers themselves. We pointed out that we did not think their slogan made this clear.

On December 8, the Convenor informed the employers that the stewards were not prepared to discuss the closure of the factory - but only how to organise continued work, retaining all the workers. At this stage there were some divisions in the ranks, the white collar workers thinking in terms of better severance pay, and the production workers of how to fight the closure proposal itself.

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* They had offered an extra £75 on redundancy payments (called the Kirkby allowance) because of the high rate of unemployment in the area and the difficulty of finding alternative employment. Spread over the remainder of most of the men's working lives, the total redundancy payments offered seldom came to more than between 25 and 50 pence a week!

At about this time there had been a march to the local Labour Party. Local M.P.s had been contacted (including Harold Wilson) in the hope of bringing pressure on the firm to halt the redundancies. The M.P.s had agreed to propose a motion in Parliament on unemployment in Kirkby (where the figures reach 20% of the working population and where some young people are still out of work 2 years after leaving school). But as we shall show the workers at Fisher-Bendix were not going to leave matters in the hands of the Labour Party or any other 'leaders'.

PLANNING THE ACTION

As the firm wouldn't negotiate, the workers began to think about other ways of dealing with the situation. The management were possibly expecting (or even seeking) to provoke a strike, which would play into their hand and result in an earlier closure of the factory, which they would then follow up with alternative methods of dismantling and transfer of the plant. This did not happen. Instead a delegation of Fisher-Bendix representatives decided to contact the U.C.S. workers (at Clydebank) and Plessey workers (at Dumbarton) to see if they could learn anything from their actions. Consultations were also held through the Combine Shop Stewards Committee to see what could be done.

We were told the result of the Kirkby men's contact with U.C.S. Although Tom Staples was not personally critical of what had been happening at U.C.S., the Committee did not consider that a 'work in' would be the best course of action at Kirkby. In talking to the Plessey representatives they had found a more useful set of ideas. But the Kirkby men felt that they could do an even better job themselves. They wanted to undertake an occupation before the factory had finally paid the workers off (as had happened at Plessey's).

The delegates came back to Kirkby and the stewards then started to plan a course of action. They would still seek to reach an agreement but were also thinking in another direction such as an occupation. They knew that if they announced a date and time for occupation the management would step in and close the factory down before this could be done. The stewards finally got the management to agree to 'negotiate' on the basis of their proposals for the phased closure of the factory. A Mr Karne would be arriving from the firm's top management to lead the negotiations with senior shop stewards on January 5.

The management (and many others) thought that the workers would be unlikely to take action prior to the outcome of these negotiations. It is quite common in industry for action to be deferred in the hope that negotiations will produce positive results. In fact negotiations are often

planned and entered into by management and unions, deliberately designed to prevent workers from taking matters into their own hands at the most appropriate time. False hopes are built up that the negotiations will come up with an acceptable offer.

The elected representatives of the workers at Fisher-Bendix were well aware of this process, from a long and bitter experience. They knew full well that the management would not seriously discuss any plan for continuing production. The negotiations began to change in nature. The stewards were now negotiating with their own objectives in mind. According to tradition, workers would hardly be expected to act while such negotiations were actually proceeding.

This was the kernel of the plan. The occupation would take place when least expected. It was agreed that the workers would respond to a call from their stewards, whenever it came, to stage a demonstration inside the factory. All kinds of false trails were laid as to time and place. None, of course, ever mentioned that the occupation would start during the negotiations. The stewards had agreed that this was the most likely time to catch the management by surprise.

Since the unions' proposals of December 7, 1971 (for discussing continued production) had been turned down, the stewards knew that the proposed negotiations on January 5 were 'phoney'. They agreed to turn up, but only as part of their secret plan to facilitate the effective occupation of the works.

THE OCCUPATION

Came the big day. The senior stewards met the management led by Mr Sidney Karne. He had been sent to ensure no compromise on the firm's proposals to close the factory by May 31. We were told that the stewards, in a last effort to negotiate before finally deciding to go ahead with the occupation, had asked the firm - on January 4 - to reconsider the proposals.

The negotiations started with the stewards proposing that there be a 15 minute adjournment for the directors to consider discussing future jobs - not closure! After more talk the directors offered a 26 days standstill on movement of Plant but would not rescind notice of redundancy to the 61 workers due to be made effective on January 28. While this was going on the workers in the factory had begun to move. The stewards remaining in the factory had given the signal for workers to join in a march to the Admin. Block, as previously arranged with the stewards who were 'negotiating'. The workers felt they had every right to be there.

About 300 workers proceeded to the main gate where they demanded, and obtained, the master keys. With these in the hands of the workers, the management could not deny the men free access to all parts of the plant. They occupied the restaurant and invaded the Boardroom. They were stamping on the floors and stairs shouting slogans when Convenor Jack Spriggs, on behalf of all the unions represented and of all the workers of Fisher-Bendix, asked Mr Sidney Karne and all the other directors to leave the factory premises.

They protested that they could not leave right away. They were told they had 10 minutes to comply, otherwise the stewards could not be held responsible for their safety. They left immediately and the workers shouted at them all the way out. The workers of Fisher-Bendix were in control - the occupation had begun.

All work in the factory stopped. The manual workers were joined by the staff side who had taken over the Admin. Block, once again as planned. The members of 6 unions had become one body of workers bent on pursuing a line of action which would serve their common interests. Differences between them which had been fostered and used by both employers and unions in the past to keep them divided seem to have disappeared from that moment. That certainly was our impression seven days after the occupation started.

From the moment the directors had left a plan was implemented to take over all the main entrances to the factory. All possible points of entry by hostile forces were controlled. The press, radio and T.V. had been alerted. The whole of the work force available then assembled for a mass meeting.

A resolution endorsing the action just taken and calling for maximum effort to ensure the continuing success of the occupation was put to the vote. This was approved unanimously. There were no abstentions. One worker told us that his arm was aching because of requests to repeat the vote so that all the photographers present could get good pictures. Good relationships with the press and T.V. reporters were established. The latter explained to the workers that, while they would report what they had seen and heard, the workers should not be surprised if reports appeared which would not be very helpful. Some would even be completely false and hostile to the workers. They would do their best, but workers should not expect any help from the press, radio or T.V. which were controlled by people just like the ones they were now fighting. After security arrangements had been completed, the workers set about organising Committees to take charge of various aspects of the occupation.

Among the Committees was one which arranged a rota listing attendance times. All the workers would take part in manning four 6-hour shifts, to ensure that the premises remained occupied 24 hours a day. Two special day-time shifts were arranged for those, like women with young children,

who could not do night shift. Another Committee took charge of amenities. It would look after the supply of food, etc., and arrange entertainment and other ways of using the time available to workers during the occupation. The canteen, which had been run by an outside firm of caterers, was abandoned by them. The workers took it over. We understand that there was an immediate improvement in the service, which was now being run by engineering workers.

Naturally, there was a Committee responsible for handling finances. At the time of writing the fund which had been started some time ago stood at around £2000. This Committee would be responsible for raising money, which began to arrive from the beginning. Many of the girls in the offices were helping, sending out thanks for donations, etc. Tom Staples was the Treasurer. He told us that a Catholic priest who asked to remain anonymous gave them £5. Many local people including O.A.P.s and other local organisations were contributing. This Committee, along with the main Occupation Committee, would be dealing with the question of income for the workers who would not be receiving wages, unemployment benefit or any other income. The Claimants' Union was contacted with a view to jointly working out means of obtaining Social Security benefits as soon as possible. In addition money would be available for distribution when the support from other workers grew, as was confidently expected.

Another Committee was set up to deal with publicity and liaison with other factories and organisations. Fisher-Bendix workers would visit other factories and meet their potential supporters. While we were there some comrades from 'Big Flame' called with some silk screen equipment for the production of posters. The Liverpool Free Press had already produced a special supplement dated January 9, outlining the workers' case and calling for support. We have used some of their background material in this pamphlet.

The Kirkby workers were in close contact with the other factories of the Thorn empire. These were represented on a united Combine Committee, representing over 20,000 workers. Dockers and other transport workers were being contacted with a view to securing a total ban on the movement of Thorn products. The Merseyside District of the Amalgamated Engineers have declared their support for the take-over with a decision for a one day stoppage of all Merseyside members.

Jack Spriggs said 'The nine week strike convinced us that Thorn can be beaten. Now we are adopting a new way of tackling the Combine. We will fight from within'.

Tom Staples, who also happens to be Secretary of Huyton, Kirkby and Prescot Trades Council, and Treasurer of the Occupation Committee said 'The Trades Council are fully supporting our occupation and intend mobilising the support of other factories on the Kirkby Estate in token stoppages and mass pickets. It is the local build-up of support that is immediately important'.

Archie Breeden, senior E.T.U. steward, added 'We are now branching out and moving into the rest of the Thorn empire. We have a common policy with a number of factories to fight redundancies and maintain wages and conditions. We are appealing to these people and expect massive support'.

In addition to the three shop floor unions (A.U.E.W., T. and G., and E.T.U.) there are the staff unions (ASTMS, DATA and CAWU) who have acted together to occupy the Administration Block.

STRENGTHENING *the* OCCUPATION

One of the first things undertaken by the 'take-over' was the removal of spares and supplies from the Fisher-Bendix Moorgate Road Stores, which serves a large part of the North West. These stores, located a mile away, were seized and transferred to the main (occupied) factory at South Boundary Road. There they joined the £200,000 worth of finished radiators, the £50,000 worth of storage heaters, the dozen new articulated waggons and stacker trucks, not to mention the £2 million worth of plant - all already in the occupied factory, and all powerful reinforcement to the workers' bargaining position.

The press did their nut, implying that this was 'looting' and 'theft'. In fact the removal of these stores was one of the main suggestions in the trade unions' proposals of December 7. These had said:

'Point 3: To transfer the whole of the Spares Division, labour and material, to Fisher-Bendix (Kirkby) from Moorgate Rd. (Kirkby).

Point 4: That Fisher-Bendix (Kirkby) be the main storage and distribution point of all Bendix appliances, home and foreign.

All that the workers had done was merely to implement what was already union policy. The reason for the angry reaction on the part of the bosses is that all this had not just remained a declaration written on a piece of paper. It had been made a living reality as a result of direct action by the workers.

Thorn's public statement was threatening: 'We will take appropriate action to protect our interests'. As the workers pointed out, this was nothing new. 'They have been doing just that for a very long time. Their main interest is maximum profit, regardless of the consequences to the workers and their families'.

Workers are now beginning to consider direct action as 'appropriate' in certain circumstances. As one worker who showed us all over the plant said: 'If they want to start anything, they can, but they will have to deal with all of us'. He was pointing in the direction of the town of Kirkby and of Merseyside in general.

The Fisher-Bendix workers are only too aware of possible police or other intervention. On the inside of the two massive main gates they have erected massive steel barricades which will take some moving. In addition we saw two hoses attached to hydrants. The nozzles were pointing at the gates and not towards the buildings (although they could easily be turned round if needed). Pointing at the gates they say more about the intentions of the workers now in occupation than any speech could. Other preparations (which for obvious reasons we can't outline here) have been made to meet any attempt to move any of the plant or to physically take back control from the workers.

According to the Liverpool Free Press (January 9, 1972) an appeal has been made to shoppers to boycott all Thorn household products and services. These include:
Radio and T.V. : Ferguson, HMV, Ultra, Baird, Marconiphone.
Rentals : Radio Rentals Ltd, Domestic Electric Rentals Ltd, MultiBroadcast Rentals Ltd, and Home Rentals Ltd.
Thorn radio valves and tubes for domestic equipment. These are sold under brand names - 'Mazda' and 'Brimar'.
Lighting : Mazda and Atlas products.
Domestic appliances : Electric and gas cookers Tricity, Main, Moffat, Kenwood.
Domestic central heating equipment : Thorn Heating Ltd.

STRUGGLES CONTROLLED FROM BELOW

We were often told during our visit that this fight is regarded by the Fisher-Bendix workers as part of a class struggle of which they are only a part. They know that they cannot rely on their own magnificent effort alone to ensure victory. They realise how important it is to link what they are doing with actions now going on elsewhere.

The workers at Fisher-Bendix said that simply abandoning the factory in the old-fashioned way was not good enough. It was better to fight inside: for one thing it was warmer in the winter. And being inside, it was easier to keep the scabs out! More workers are prepared these days to challenge the right of private owners to retain the physical control of the means of production. This is an effective way of fighting for short-term aims. It also has important wider implications. It is becoming more obvious that this system strictly based on profit for the few at the expense of the many must be challenged at its roots. Those who do the work should take the decisions.

We are moving into a period when ordinary people can show by their actions that they are quite capable of running their own affairs. Self-management is the alternative to relying on self-appointed leaders. The

kind of struggle now developing will make it unnecessary to cry 'We have been sold out'. This can't happen if things are firmly taken into the hands of ordinary rank-and-file workers on the shop floor and not left to leaders of unions or parties.

The workers are developing their own self-confidence to act for themselves. They are showing in practice how to solve problems on the basis of real democratic decision-making. I learned something very new at Fisher-Bendix. We asked about how decisions were made. How did the committees function? What was the role of the unions in all this?

We were told that the 6 unions involved had all said they supported the action. This was at local or District level. So far nothing had been heard from the national E.C.s. There had been no offer of financial help. Some local officials were helping. In fact we spoke to one on the premises.

The Occupation Committee was based on the original shop stewards committee covering the workers as members of different unions. But it was now an autonomous committee with many additions designed to run the occupation in daily contact with all the workers. This is the great advantage of an occupation. There are always rank and file workers on hand to see what is going on. They can constantly be consulted, or for that matter, intervene if they feel it is necessary.

In the old strike method the workers would sit at home waiting for news from the strike committee which seldom came directly. This often left workers the victims of the press, radio and T.V. For instance this is what happened in the postal strike last year.

We were told that, to ensure a full occupation, all the workers were being encouraged to take part in the work of the various committees, in addition to doing their shifts by rota. Also many initiatives were being taken. New ideas were emerging which were bringing the workers closer to one another. When the phones were cut off, it did not take long to get them reconnected. When there was some worry about fuel supplies to keep the place warm it was soon realised that the firm would not risk allowing the workers to find other ways of providing heat. Oil supplies were delivered promptly. The canteen was also a place where workers could exercise some real self-management.

Most important of all was the answer to our question concerning General Assemblies. The answer sent a thrill right through me. They said all participants could attend and vote. And in addition all wives and husbands, children, brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts could attend. Weren't they all involved in the fight? Why should pressure be put on them by the papers and television to make them pull in the opposite direction? After the first such mass meeting on January 12, a wife who had previously been so hostile that she had denounced the occupation to the press said she now fully supported what the Fisher-Bendix workers were doing. I felt very humble. This was how one learned from revolutionary practice to develop a revolutionary theory.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Just now I don't want to compare what is happening at Fisher-Bendix or at Plessey's with what recently happened at Mold (Flintshire). The 'work in' at U.C.S. is again something quite distinct. But they all have something in common. They are all different attempts, in different circumstances, to deal with proposed redundancies. Each experience must be examined to see what can be learned, what applies and how it can be extended to other situations.

If workers occupy their place of work in connection with a wage claim, or against some managerial attempt to introduce new methods of work - and if this takes place in circumstances when the employer is anxious to keep production going - this method of struggle will have a very different meaning to purely defensive occupations, such as occupations against redundancies.

Occupations may also be seen as a long-term objective, which challenge the employers' right to own and control the means of production. It then demonstrates the ability of workers to manage their own affairs. It raises the level of consciousness and the sense of being directly and collectively involved. It leads to the question of self-management.

In a fuller discussion of occupations we would also need to look both at the role of the trade unions and at the role of 'revolutionary' groups who still assert the need for a vanguard-type party. If occupation is pushed and manipulated by such people, the very form it takes may result in workers being denied the right themselves fully to manage their own struggles. Under such circumstances, occupation would not automatically result in a more advanced type of action. It could lead to a repeat of many disastrous old experiences, in a new form. In these experiences, workers were led up the garden path because of their reliance on professional leaders and because of their own continued acceptance of ideas which keep them enslaved.

In presenting our account of the struggle at Fisher-Bendix (as well as of events at U.C.S. and Plessey's)* we seek to engage all who are interested in an on-going examination of such problems. We in 'Solidarity' have been advocating struggles controlled from below and workers' self-management as the basis of an alternative socialist society in which people

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* See 'Solidarity', vol.VI, Nos. 11 and 12.

will take over the factories and offices, do away with capitalist ownership and establish the means for making decisions based on the widest possible participation.

The action of the workers at Fisher-Bendix has reaffirmed many of our ideas. But they are doing something more. They are teaching us how these ideas can be made a reality. The lessons learnt in such struggles far exceed anything that might come out of discussion alone. In giving the Kirkby workers all our support, and asking others to do likewise, we should also take from them what they have to offer: a living example of courage, initiative, plain common sense in handling their own affairs, and a lesson in self-management.

Joe Jacobs.

Send donations and other forms of support to:

Tom Staples (Treasurer)
42 Kennelwood Avenue,
Northwood,
Kirkby - Liverpool.

SOME THOUGHTS ON OCCUPATIONS

There have been recent sit-ins and occupations at Plessey, Allis-Chalmers and Fisher-Bendix - and attempts at the Don River Plant, BSA and Standard Bottles. The tactic is under active consideration by militants in a number of industries. Occupations are clearly on the agenda of future industrial struggles in Britain.

We welcome this development. Ever since 'Solidarity' came into existence, 11 years ago, we have consistently and actively campaigned to popularise this form of struggle. Occupations can be a more effective tactic than simple strike action for example in a fight for wage demands or better conditions. But they are also a precursor, however deformed at the moment, of the forms of industrial organisation and democracy which could exist in a self-managed, socialist society. At the very core of our vision of such a society is the idea that there should be forms of social control enabling people, individually and collectively, to initiate the decisions that affect their lives.

Occupations must therefore be controlled from below. Trade unions officials cannot be allowed to dominate such struggles. Their role in weakening and smashing countless rank-and-file struggles is a well documented fact of life. Nor is Harold Wilson (the architect of the Labour Industrial Relations Bill) going to be much help. We don't need to go through the experience of yet another Labour Government to see that the Labour Party stands for essentially the same ideas as the Tories - or to draw the conclusion that workers involved in struggle must control such struggles themselves if real advances are to be made.

An occupation must be directly controlled by the participants not only in its internal organisation but also in its relations with the outside world. For instance negotiations should take place directly between management and rank-and-file committees. To rely on the 'good offices' of national, full-time union officials, or on the Harold Wilsons of this world, is to court disaster.

So far all the sit-ins have been against sackings, in fact against the actual closure of the plants involved. None have yet taken place against specific working conditions or in support of wage demands. In a sense they have all been atypical and have not yet shown the full potentialities of the method. A struggle against a plant closure is not an optimum situation for any type of struggle. Under these circumstances the most important bargaining counter of the men is their refusal to let the boss dismantle and remove the machinery. Where management intends to close down a plant and make the work force redundant, the stopping of production by an occupation is not likely to be all that serious for the company, although it can be embarrassing. We look forward to the day when workers will take over a factory in which management is keen to see production continue.

One of the major problems of occupations has been the tendency for a sort of industrial Maginot mentality to develop. The occupied factory is seen as a besieged fortress rather than as a base for offensive operations. Too often (for example in France, in 1968) workers have been trapped behind the walls of their self-imposed ghettoes andisolated from events going on in the big bad world outside. Under such circumstances management may allow sit-ins to drag on and die in isolation and despair. This is likely to happen unless the workers in such occupied plants take a much more aggressive attitude and attempt to spread their action to other Company concerns, and to involve the outside community. At Kirkby the men have shown this offensive attitude. There are signs that the management (who are militantly opposed to job organisation) may attempt the physical re-occupation of the plant.

One of the commonest misconceptions about the sit-in is that it can only be attempted in the most well organised factories. This is not the case and the mass sit-ins in America (in the thirties) and more recently on the Continent are there to prove it. Many of these successful sit-ins

took place in badly organised plants. The occupation of the key* plant of a combine allows the militants to concentrate their forces and to a large extent does away with the problem of scabbing. It places and keeps the initiative in the hands of the workers.

The sit-in/occupation can and must be used offensively. A number of industries (not in the front rank of struggle) are capital intensive and rely on centralised, expensive, and non-duplicable production facilities. These would be very vulnerable to a campaign of occupation. To name but a few: glass, rubber, artificial fibres, oil refineries, newspapers, certain parts of the food industry, even large department stores or the central offices of various combines.

The recent occupations have been relatively small, isolated, and limited in scope. The main article, for instance, describes the ten minutes' notice given to the Kirkby management to leave the factory. In many occupations in Italy and France the bosses would regard themselves lucky to receive such an ultimatum. In many cases they have been 'imprisoned' within their own offices, sometimes for considerable periods. We hope and believe that the actions we have seen so far are only the embryonic stage of this form of struggle.

It is both practical and important that workers in occupied plants utilise the facilities available to fulfil social needs for the surrounding community - for instance by providing halls for recreation, printing facilities, repair facilities for appliances, etc. If public service workers (such as busmen) took over their workplaces, they could try to provide some sort of service without charging the public.

If this new form of struggle is to be a real challenge to this rotten system - and if it is to avoid becoming ossified - it will have to reject many of the legalistic rituals that are part of the normal working situation. Traditional priorities and routines underpin the whole of our society, which places profit, property and power before people. We hope to see changed attitudes, among workers, about the bosses' property, and less reluctance to alter the schedules and habits that applied before the occupation. In an occupation internal arrangements should suit the needs of the occupiers (and of workers outside the factory) rather than the employer's future interests.

The technique of occupation must not be allowed to become a ritual of last resort. It must develop, both in form, militancy and scale. Without this development and the parallel development of political consciousness, the occupation can become sterile. With this development, a great deal is possible - and we hope to see it.

M. F. B. C.

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* By 'key' I mean a facility on which the smooth running and/or production of a large unit is dependent, for example a plant which makes a component on which many other plants are dependent. In the U.S. Automobile industry sit-ins in the thirties the metal-stamping divisions were a favourite target.

We would like to have your suggestions, comments, and criticisms concerning the content of these two articles. We also invite all interested readers to write to us, giving us their views on the general subject of occupations. Reports of practical experiences would be particularly welcome.

We also need a lot of help in distributing this pamphlet. We are prepared to send copies at discount rates (40 pence for 10 copies, post free) to T.U. branches or Shop Stewards Committees.

Copies can be had from:

'Solidarity' (North West), c/o C. Clark, 23 Tame Walk, Colshaw Drive, Wilmslow, Cheshire.

or

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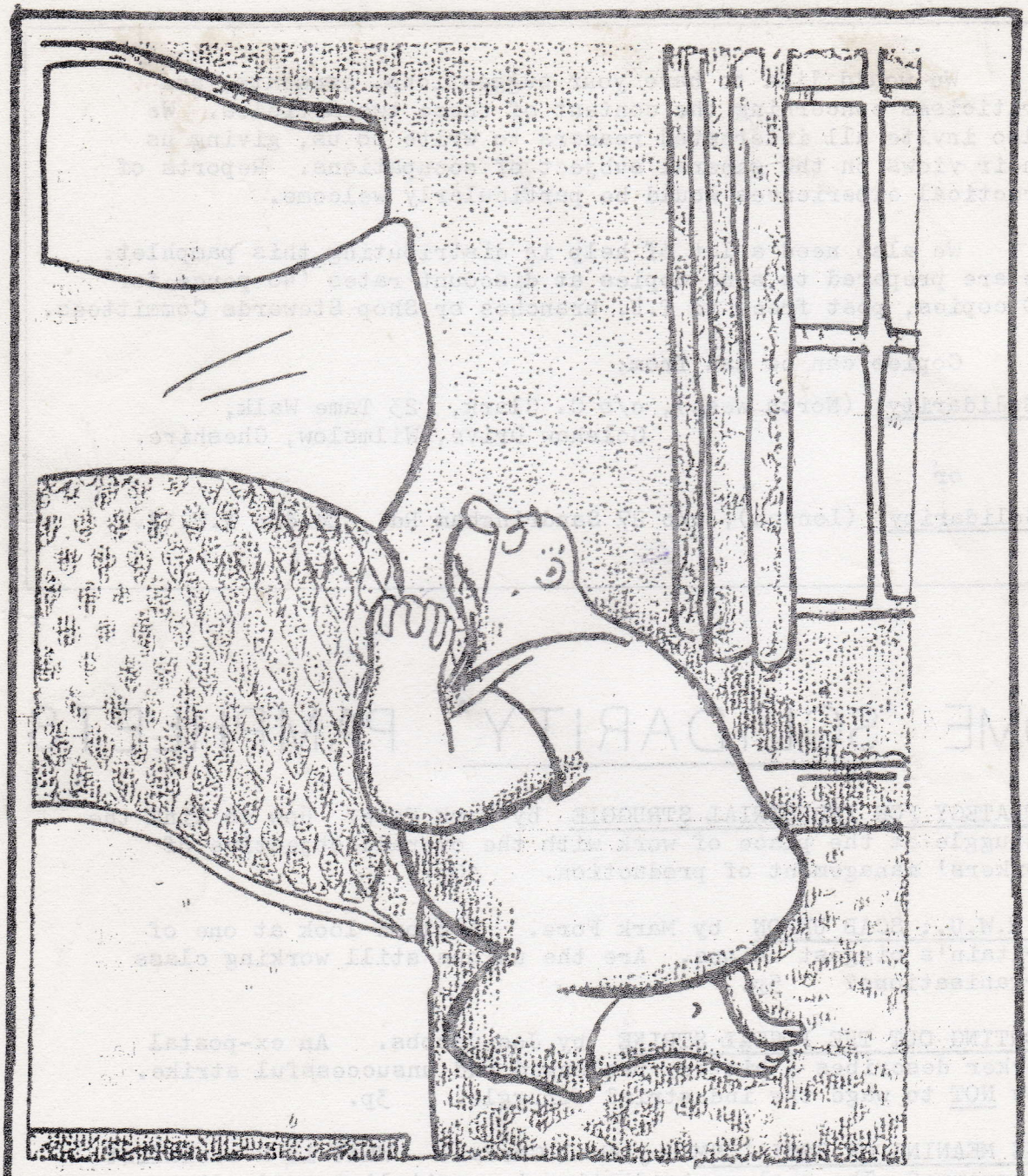

"And please don't let them sit down in my factory"

Industrial Worker, January 30, 1937.