



FORD'S "OFFER"

Three weeks ago the struggle for 40 hours pay - work or no work was leading to a situation in which neither the union nor the management had control. Fords sacked Winston Williams to divert us from this struggle. Instead of a united fight of PTA and Body we ended up with the body fighting for Williams, and the PTA not knowing anything about his case, except through the papers.

The solid action by the metal framing sections on both shifts in the body recognized that the sacking of Williams was also part of the fight against the speed-ups that have been going on, especially downstairs in the body. The fact that Ford caved in and reinstated Williams shows our strong position at the moment.

Look what's happened to our demand for 40 hours pay since it went into procedure. Next to nothing. All we've got is some vague offer of 8 hours work once we've clocked on and some meaningless promise that we should have work until Christmas. What the PTA weren't told by Ron Todd at the meetings last Friday was that this was dependent on our giving up the overtime ban, and that the stewards had rejected the deal outright at their meeting last Thursday. This offer comes nowhere near meeting our demands. Why then did the officials want us to accept it?

WHERE WE'RE AT NOW

The 'offer' does not mean a guaranteed week's pay which is what we are after. Ford can still lay us off at a day's notice or use an internal dispute as an excuse. Fords have learnt their lesson. They don't want to provoke any more riots by laying us off while we're still in the plant.

But we don't want work as an alternative to lay-offs. This is just the kind of thing Ford wants - to make us more mobile, more flexible - so he can solve his manpower shortage by making us do more jobs and more work. What we want is money.

So far we've got nothing from the company for all the times we've been laid off. When things go into procedure they never come out. What suits the full-time union officials sitting in their offices trying to work out Ford's problems for them does not suit us. And most of the convenors are more interested in solving Ford's production problems and offering even more "flexibility", which means more work for us, than in fighting for the 40 hours pay that we need in order to live. The only thing relevant to getting anything out of Ford is our actions.

Some people say we're only going to lose good money if we fight for this one. Of course you always lose something in a fight. But look how much we've lost this year alone, being laid off at Ford's convenience. We want to make sure that we don't go on losing it in the future. And we can do that by fighting while Ford is weak and when they badly need cars.

The Ford's "offer" does show one thing though. It shows that we don't have to wait for the contract to hit Fords. They are scared stiff at the actions we've been taking to get our money. They think they can use the union officials to get us to accept the crumbs that they are offering us. We haven't won anything worth having until we've got our guaranteed 40 hours pay, and this isn't going to be easy. Ford is only offering us the 8 hours work once we've clocked on to keep us quiet in the plant. We can't fight for anything when we are at home.

HOW DO WE ORGANISE?

First we can't keep waiting for the convenors to call meetings. And few stewards are reporting back as they should do. More meetings must be held, especially in the PTA, both at section level and plant level.

And when necessary, such as when one shift is laid off against the other, we must have mass meetings of both shifts. And also meetings between plants. There should have been a mass meeting of PTA and Body 4 weeks ago when Williams was sacked and the PTA was being laid off. Then we could have had a joint fight of Body and PTA over both the sacking and the 40 hours pay. Then we might have got somewhere on both fronts.

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But mass meetings mustn't be the shambles that most are now. We must start organising meetings when we need them, not when it suits the convenors or union officials. And these meetings must be proper meetings so that everyone can make their points and get a hearing. As often as not when you want to ask a question or say something you get ignored or shouted down by whoever's taking the meeting. We don't want to be lectured to like kids any more. Unless we get ourselves properly organised first we won't get anywhere.

MEANWHILE AT VAUXHALL

Dagenham workers aren't the only car workers who've got problems over lay-offs at the moment. At Vauxhall, Ellesmere Port, near Liverpool, the T&G workers went out on strike over lay-off pay last week. On Tuesday this week the AUEW members were laid off. The T&G members have been picketing the plant since the strike started to stop supplies going in and out. Now there's no production at all. Body, Assembly, Press, Transmission and Engine are all at a standstill and it's likely that Luton and Dunstable will be laid off soon. The following report comes from Big Flame, Liverpool.

"It's almost a month since the last lay-off at Ellesmere Port. That time a mass meeting of Vauxhall workers, voted that if there was any more mid-shift lay-offs, they would immediately go on strike for a 'guaranteed shift'. Well it's happened, though not in the way management have claimed.

For some time, AUEW men on a part of the engine line that get lent out to cover labour shortages on the seat framing, have been pressing for the same overtime conditions as the rest of the men on this section.

In other words, if they've got to be lent out they want a reasonable amount of overtime too. Finally, at about midnight last Wednesday, they walked out. Instead of sending the rest of the area home - mainly T&G - management kept them in, idle apart from brushing up.

The next night there was a walk-out again, but this time the rest of the area were laid-off soon afterwards. Although inter-union relations at Ellesmere Port aren't too good, within the T&G there is a one-out, all-out agreement which applies across the shifts. So, instead of just going home many of the night-shift stuck around and picketed the gates when the day-shift arrived. The shift did not go in. The pickets have been kept up since, all around the clock. Their aim is to halt all supplies to the other VM plants in Luton and Dunstable. Shelters have been built outside the gates, and there is heating, food and hot drinks all day and night.

THE DANGERS

At Vauxhall the main demand is for a guaranteed shift, but there are dangers in this that have to be seen carefully. For instance, management could guarantee a shift's work at the beginning of the day on condition that the workers guarantee production so that there is work for everyone. What this means is that men would be asked to scab on each other, or to put pressure on striking sections to go back to work before the factory stopped. Where relations between workers in different unions have at times been bad (like at Vauxhalls) a guaranteed shift could easily lead to a situation where T&G members are pressurising AEF men to give up a justified struggle.

There is another reason why the demand for a guaranteed shift can be a trap. There are times when there just isn't any work. When it's not profitable for the company to have the lines going. (eg. when there is a shortage of supplies, or the management have provoked an internal dispute because they have production difficulties.) Unless we're prepared to accept lay-offs in that situation, the only useful demand is guaranteed pay, work or not. 'Guaranteed shift' is just a loser in that context.

But some workers at Vauxhall have adopted the slogan for Guaranteed Pay. The point of this demand is that it means we want to be paid, and need to be paid, whether or not cars are coming out of the factory. That's the bosses' problems, not ours. We work because we need the money, not because we get a thrill out of making cars.

If the Vauxhall workers win this guaranteed pay, it will be another step forward for all car workers in the fight against casual labour in the car factories."

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