

NEWS FROM DETROIT

We all know Henry's got Ford plants all over the world -- he likes it that way because he can keep us all at one another's throats internationally. If we start to fight here he can just threaten us with moving his production somewhere else. He's a likeable chap our Henry. It wouldn't do to call him a blackmailer. The trouble comes when Ford workers round the world get together to start fighting back. One Big Flame comrade visited Detroit this summer to meet some Fordworkers and see where it all started from. The biggest Ford plant in Detroit is called Rouge plant. (There's nothing red about the Rouge plant except for the workers' blood.) It's built on the lines of Dagenham with a Body-Plant, PTA, Engine Plant etc. even down to producing its own steel, though the hourly rate over there is about £2.50 for production workers. It employs about 30,000. And it's even more of a sweat-- hole.

THE LAYOFFS LAST DECEMBER

With redundancies possibly on the way here this winter, we've got a lot to learn from what happened with the lay offs at Fords Detroit last winter. The blokes had been working their backs off all last year with the company throwing overtime at them -- 2 hours a day whether they wanted it or not -- and building stocks up all the time. Then came the phoney petrol crisis and all of a sudden thousands were thrown out of work. With unemployment running about 13% in Detroit there are no other jobs to go to. But there wasn't much fight against the lay-offs because for the first few months workers are usually happy to get a short lay off and you get up to 95% basic pay with unemployment money plus redundancy money..

OVERTIME + SPEED-UP EQUALS LAYOFFS

However the lay off in Detroit has lasted 8 months now, and still a lot of workers haven't been re hired. The ones that have been taken on have been carefully selected for age, lack of militancy, family commitments etc. They've used the lay offs as a way of streamlining the work force. In addition they've speeded up the lines and moved blokes all over the place to break up sections. (They pretend that it's necessary re-organisation) There was resistance to the speed up for about a month but it was too split up and eventually was defeated. Now there's very little overtime so workers have taken a big cut in pay, and a lot are in trouble with their H.P. etc. And the bad feelings over who gets the available overtime is hurting the fight against Fords. As far as we're concerned, the lesson in Dagenham should be not to work ourselves out of a job now, by giving Fords the production they want. And to be prepared to resist lay offs and speed up if they start to come our way this winter. (Speed up is already coming in the PTA; last Thursday on A shift window fitters struck after two men were taken off their team on the fast line.)

Before the strike, workers used to say "UAW means Useless As Workers" - since they say "UAW means United Against Workers."

The car union (United Auto workers) over there is even more of a corrupt set up than it is over here. From being an organisation of struggle in the 1930's and 40's, when thousands of car workers occupied their plants to win their union, it has become an organisation against the workers. The UAW never did anything about the massive lay offs last year. The stewards all have cushy jobs, and the committee men, who are in between the stewards and the branch president, don't do any work on the line. They each get their own office and they're allowed to come in week ends to make up overtime. They spend much of their time in local bars with personnel, or playing baseball games with management.

During last years Chrysler wild cat at Mack Avenue in Detroit, UAW national vice presidents led one thousand union goons, including members of the Klu Klux Klan, to beat up the pickets and break up the strike. In the wild cat strike in the Dodge truck plant in June the workers occupied the union hall and took it over for themselves. The union sent for cops to get the workers out. In the end a local judge went down to the picket line and set up court - he was ordering arrests and sentencing workers on the spot. How long before it comes to this at Dagenham? But the wild cat was still strong. So despite the union and the cops Detroit workers are very much on the move.

ABSENTEEISM

Because the union is against them, workers in Detroit are finding their own ways of fighting Ford. Henry's biggest headache is absenteeism otherwise known as trying to live a human life.. Most workers take a day off a week -- you can do that on a higher basic rate! Henry keeps a pool of part time workers to fill the gaps, and as usual the union is the first to be on the blokes backs if they take time off for themselves.

WOMEN WORKERS

Another thing the company has been doing over the last two years is hiring a lot of women as production workers. This is OK in as much as women need the lousy jobs like anyone else to earn money to keep their families. But the company has a different motive. They reckon that women will be more 'reliable' than blokes and less likely to tell the foreman where to get off. Also they reckon women will be easier to lay off in a period of uncertainty. The company claimed that all this was a good gesture under the American Equal Opportunity Act. But there was a load of cobblers, as most of the women who were taken on are finding out. The women are beginning to be just as aggressive as the blokes there. After all, most of them are lumbered with another job to do when they get home so they don't want to wear themselves out at work.

About 85% of the production workers at Ford Rouge are black and like at Dagenham nearly all the foremen are white. Most skilled workers are also white. They try to divide workers along race lines, giving white workers the cushy jobs so they won't fight with the black workers. But the black blokes don't take any shit - they want to keep their self respect - if a foreman gives them any lip he gets threatened.

MOTOWN - MURDER CITY

Detroit is known for its music - 'Mo-town' was born there. It's also known for its violence against its workers. Police violence and violence that is the product of the ghetto conditions and sweated labour of 'motor city'. In the States workers are threatened by inflation just like here. Workers are not buying houses or cars; families are afraid that more lay offs are on the way. Unemployment is especially high among black youth - about 30%. They get continually harassed beaten and shot by the Detroit cops.

But the bosses and their cops don't have it all their own way. In the summer of 1967 lay offs were also high. The black people of the ghetto workers and unemployed, men women and children rose up. They attacked shops, took what they wanted and left them burning and they attacked the bosses cops who were sent to pacify them. They were ANGRY and ready to fight instead of accepting their condition. And this year people are again predicting that the unemployment will lead to another hot summer in Detroit.



BIG FLAME - DAGENHAM FORD GROUP - PHONE 659-3895

The back of the poster for a film showing of 'FINALLY GOT THE NEWS'.
Big Flame - Dagenham Ford Group (1974 or thereabouts)