



LETTERS to the FREE PRESS

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24 WAPPING, LIVERPOOL 1.

So honest!

Mr. Gorie wants companies bringing new jobs to Merseyside to pick their labour force carefully.

"It is significant that new companies, especially small and medium sized ones, which have paid careful attention to recruitment, have not experienced any difficulties in the field of labour relations," says Mr. Gorie.

Above: The words of Mr James Gorie Liverpool's industrial development officer, as reported by the Echo.

I AM well aware that the Echo is not pro-worker, but I must confess to feeling a bit surprised that they would print Gorie's call for firms to blacklist workers without trying to disguise it in some way.

Perhaps the rising militancy amongst the working class is so worrying our 'Masters' that they are losing their subtle touch and being more direct. I hope so.

J. J. MOLLOY
20B Lyelake Road
Southdene
Kirkby, L32 8SU.

Fair rents fight

I THINK that we are all concerned with the same thing, the betterment of the council house tenants of this country, and the fight against the 'Fair Rent Act', which is looked upon by many people as a cut in our standard of living.

To those of you who are fighting the recent rent rise I would like to suggest that our weakness is fighting on our own. After all, we are fighting a government and not local councils.

Whilst a lot of councils could have put up more of a fight against the Act on our behalf, their hands have been tied by the Act which makes them

liable for the loss of profits in the council housing accounts.

If you are interested in forming a national group to enable us to have a louder voice against the rent rises, I shall be pleased to hear from you.

I am writing to many trades councils all over the country asking for their support in amalgamating as many of their local groups as possible.

If this effort is successful we shall have a voice loud enough to make everyone who matters listen.

Don't forget, without you this country is nothing, just so much land. You fought for it. Now it's up to you to make it a decent place for us all to live in.

T. SEAGER
Birkenhead Rent Action Group
78 Neston Gardens,
Birkenhead, Cheshire.

Cancer claims

I HAVE read with some amazement your article entitled 'Cancer claims - 7 year wait' included in the December issue. Obviously you have been somewhat misled as to the facts concerning Dunlop and I write to put the record straight.

First, and most important, Dunlop did not appeal against the judgment of Mr Justice O'Conner delivered on April 20, 1971.

Second, Dunlop did pay the damages of £1,000 awarded to Mr Cassidy on June 24, 1971 and the £1,000 awarded to Mr Wright on June 22, 1971.

Although there are other inaccuracies regarding your article I think that the above two points are the most salient features.

A.R. BULFIELD
Public Relations Officer
Dunlop Limited
25 St James's Street
London SW1 6RA.

● Mr Bulfield is correct and we apologise for the mistake. As far as Dunlop are concerned, Mr Cassidy's wait was therefore six years, not seven. Since our article was written ICI (the other firm involved) seem to have changed their minds for the better - it's now unlikely they will appeal to the House of Lords.

Ford workers could lead the freeze fight

FORD workers once again find themselves in the front line of a crucial wages battle. Their claim for parity with other car workers is an old one. As far back as 1964 they had demanded an extra shilling an hour towards parity.

But this time the conditions are different - the claim is not only against Fords, but against the government's pay freeze as well.

It is not difficult to argue the workers' claim for an extra £10 a week in the light of Ford profits and in comparison with wages in other car plants.

This sort of comparison cannot be made for the gas and hospital workers, and the danger of this argument is to leave these industries in isolation.

The success of all these claims depends upon the ability of all workers in dispute to put up a united front against the pay freeze, and Ford workers could take the lead.

Ford's predictable Phase Two offer, an across-the-board increase of £2.40 a week on basic rates, or

£2.20 plus two extra days' holiday has already been rejected.

The present 'Grade B' rate - covering the majority of production workers - is an average of 83p an hour (less, if the man has not been with the company for four years). With an average 'shift premium' of 6p an hour, this gives a weekly wage of £35.60 for a forty-hour week, before deductions.

British Leyland signed a new measured day work deal with the unions the day before Heath announced Phase One of the pay freeze. So now an accurate comparison can be made with Fords.

British Leyland gave across-the-board increases guaranteeing a minimum rate for the majority of production workers of £48 for a forty-hour week, rising during the lifetime of the deal to £50.

Ford's estimated profit for 1972 is £60 million. Not only do Ford's workers receive the lowest wages in the car industry, but sales per employee are the highest.

Latest available figures give the

value of Ford's sales per employee as £10,628. British Leyland's figure is £6,067.

Comparisons between European and U.S. car workers within the Ford empire show British workers far behind on wages.

The Ford workers' claim for a reduction of hours from 40 to 35 without loss of earnings, and a fourth week's annual holiday are both national objectives of the main engineering unions, and come as no surprise.

Vauxhall workers at Luton, Dunstable and Ellesmere Port will follow Fords with a similar claim for parity within a few weeks.

British Leyland is facing a fresh claim by its Cowley workers, where agreements on measured day work are running out. All very unfortunate timing for the car companies and for the government.

Ford's recently announced £200 million investment programme in Britain may be crucial if Detroit decides to get some cars made rather than fight on behalf of the British government and its pay freeze.

On the shop floor...

DURING the two years since the last dispute at Fords, a number of isolated but significant developments have taken place on the shop floor, developments which could play an important part in the outcome of the present claim.

To a large extent matters are no longer in the hands of the union. The lead at the moment is coming from the shop floor. The first reaction to Ford's offer was a walkout at Halewood. About 15,000 workers are banning overtime, and some plants are on a work to rule.

The Halewood Paint Trim and Assembly plant (PTA) were the first to hold a mass meeting at Liverpool Stadium. The convenor suggested lifting the work to rule, but before he had finished there was uproar and shouts of disapproval. The work to

rule stayed.

During the work to rule the company tried to pick off the last man on the Capri trim lines, where a job was being blocked. When the management asked him to go to the office he refused. The whole section stopped work: either they would all go to the office or no-one would. In the end no-one did.

This shop floor militancy is not simply an angry reaction to Ford's pay offer. Incidents like this have been happening at Halewood for some time.

In January this year the management took four men off the lines. Their section staged a march through the press shop - and the men there joined them in solidarity.

The next few days saw a walkout of 1,700 from PTA. At first the body plant worked on at a line speed which the management had been forced to reduce from 67 to 35.

Next day the body plant came out in sympathy with the engine department, who were working to rule.

The issue was mobility of labour, i.e. the management's right to move men around and split up what they regard as militant sections - an old Ford tactic.

The shop floor is not without its own tactics.

'The Snake' (used as early as 1962 at Dagenham) is a march through the plant to quickly spread the word of any trouble in other sections and to gain support.

'The Snail'. When sections lose men, they can reduce their output drastically. This has an effect right through the plant and forces management to accept lower production scores to keep the lines moving. Since the 1971 parity strike Fords have attempted to break up solidarity on the shop floor.

Almost as soon as the Halewood men were back inside the plant, supervisors warned that things were going to be tougher from now on. Indiscipline would not be tolerated.

A shop steward on the night shift explained: "When we got into the plant I said to my lads, 'No matter what happens, we take it. That way we'll all be paid for Good Friday

and Easter Monday. Management did everything in their power to get us out.

"There was a meeting in the canteen and most of the stewards were all for walking out, but I spoke against that. In the end we stayed in and got our full pay."

Also, the day the men went back Fords brought in a new plant manager, Dennis McCrone, who was responsible for the 17 victimisations at Dagenham in 1962.

Provocation by management continued up to the sacking of shop steward John Dillon, when solid shop floor action forced Fords to reinstate him.

In September last year at a meeting of Ford's work committee, a proposal to deduct union dues through payroll 'check-off' was defeated. This move was backed by union officials and would have put Ford in the role of banker to the unions. It would have stopped the movement of shop stewards through the plant as they collected the dues - a useful way for stewards to keep in touch with the shop floor and inform them of what's been happening.

There have also been similar disputes and walkouts at Dagenham. On one occasion eight women from the knock-down shop (where unassembled cars are prepared and packed for export) had their wages stopped for being late. They were late because a lorry delivering materials caused a traffic jam inside the Ford estate. 120 men stopped work in support, and by the next day 300 had stopped. The women got their money.

The unofficial work to rule and overtime ban now in operation are costing Fords dearly. The beauty of a two-year agreement for the company is that they can stockpile supplies and parts to keep the plants going before another round of pay talks looms up.

Now, stocks are rapidly running out at the Saarlouis factory. At Halewood they are losing 300 cars a day.

If this sort of shop floor militancy can be developed to dictate the course of events, pressurise the unions and check any attempts at a sell-out, Fords will be in for a tough fight.

LIVERPOOL 1973

BY MIKE WILLIAMS



"Gott in Himmel! If only we'd dropped bulldozers in '42!"

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