

Reluctant work-in at Triumph plant



Factory sign at Wigan... wonder who their customers are...

MANAGEMENT motives for apparently breaking usual procedures and provoking the dispute are not certain.

Recently, there has been difficulty in obtaining some parts. And a strike might have been a good cover for local management shortcomings. Or alternatively, because the men were worried about being laid off through the shortages, management might have considered it a good moment for an offensive.

A new management team took over the Speke plant last year, the new Plant Director being imported from Ford. Coming from Ford's, he would probably not like the look of some parts of an agreement reached at Triumph in May 1972: the "Protected Earnings Plan".

One section of it gives shop stewards negotiating rights over manning levels for new jobs. Temporary arrangements are allowed while disagreements are sorted out, perhaps over a period of time.

This gives stewards some real control over the job. And, in fact, until recently manning levels at Triumph were comparatively high. Obviously, this could be regarded as a serious obstacle by management.

Shop stewards think this agreement was under attack in the "body in white" dispute.

If they are right it reveals the management's cynical attitude to 'participation' at the very time that British Leyland are supposed to be trying it out. Workers will participate it seems, on management terms only. Whatever the company's reason-

AN IMPORTANT industrial dispute has taken place at the British Leyland car plant in Speke.

Workers on the new Triumph TR7 sports car staged a (so far) unpaid work-in after two welders were suspended for not carrying out extra work.

When the welders continued working, others in the "body in white" shop supported them. Eventually, around 600 men on two shifts were working without pay.

Maintenance men restarted machines stopped by supervisors; inspectors told to drink tea worked instead; and stacker-truck drivers and body-handlers continued to supply the section with materials. All were taken off pay.

These unusual events raise important questions for the Triumph workers:

- Was the new management team making a serious attack on gains achieved in recent year?
- Were the shop stewards right to keep production going despite the immediate widespread wish for a walk-out?
- Is the "work-in" tactic a good one?

ing, the first reaction of the shop floor workers was to walk out. "A lot of the lads, all they think of is getting home," said one man. "They don't want to stay."

The men are there for the money. And when Leyland said there was no pay, the reason to work was gone. But shop stewards persuaded the men to stay.

Senior steward Mick Everitt explained: "In the past the membership has gone home without consulting the stewards. What we've been doing is insisting that our members stay on the job until the shop stewards make a decision on their behalf."

There were also good practical

reasons for avoiding a strike just now. The annual holiday starts on July 19 and it could have left the men short of money. A strike in one section leads to others being laid off without pay. And this leads to bitterness which management exploit.

However, as another steward told us, communications between the stewards in different sections are not good during disputes. Shop-floor workers know even less. So a "plant approach" to the problem does not occur.

To the outsider, the idea of shop stewards urging men to work without guaranteed pay seems extremely odd. (Negotiations over the money are

still going on as we go to press.)

There seems little doubt that the injection of government cash into Leyland, all the talk of participation, and the company's general difficulties, have altered attitudes - even though these developments have meant no real change in conditions on the shop-floor.

Mick Everitt: "It's our plant now as much as anybody's. We have a responsibility to the taxpayer and we consider ourselves to be responsible shop stewards."

He points out that their good industrial record has brought the new TR7 model to Speke, with 1,400 men taken on since Christmas, and the possibility of another new model in 18 months.

But Mick Everitt recognises that the 'work-in' is not a popular tactic. He says that when it was tried in a TR6 shop two years ago, the men ended up with only a percentage of normal pay. The men "felt they would reap better results if they'd have gone home."

But the 'work-in' has not yet been fully tested at Speke. After similar action at a Midlands car plant some time ago, the men blacked the cars they had made until they were paid for their work.

NOTE: There is no intention here to put Mick Everitt on the spot. He is quoted extensively because of his position, because he was helpful, and because many of his views were shared by other stewards we spoke to. Reactions, especially from the shop-floor, would be welcome.

Help Formby way

THERE IS no shortage of kids eager to spend a few days at Formby Hall. But there is a shortage of helpers.

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Murder

(Continued from page one)

the same person.

David Smith was at his home alone when the police called at one o'clock in the morning, and he went with them to the police station. He made a statement tracing his movements that night.

He said he played 'pool' in the Carousel pub in Myrtle Street, left about 8.45 p.m., arrived home at his flat in Bedford Street South at about 8.55, and watched TV. He named the programmes.

Unfortunately his wife was not there as he had had a row with her earlier in the day.

David Smith was allowed home at 4 a.m. And he heard nothing more till the following Thursday.

He had no reason to object to being questioned. He had a criminal record both for robbery and assault. The attack on Mr McGee happened close to his flat, and he vaguely fitted a very vague description.

But the evidence, despite the police assurances, seems to have been almost non-existent.

Two important witnesses attended identity parades, where Smith was in the line-up. One witness was Mr McGee, another was a lady who possibly saw the murderer. Neither picked out Mr Smith.

What's more, Mr Smith had known the murdered man, Mr Jones, since he was young, as he lived in a block of flats nearby. Both the Jones and the Smith family were fairly friendly. There is clear proof of this. Mr Jones was a painter, and many years before he had painted a picture of Mr Smith's sister.

Throughout the nine weeks the police claimed they had found fibres of Smith's jacket on the dead man. But they refused to give any details to the defence solicitor, although he checked and found twenty similar jackets had been sold the same day Smith bought his.

Certainly the so-called forensic evidence didn't impress the Director of Public Prosecutions. And the case against him was eventually dropped.

The police must have known they had little or no evidence. As soon as David Smith was arrested, they ransacked his flat, cutting open a large teddy-bear, and bashing a hole in a door while looking for a murder weapon. But they found nothing. They made Smith change his clothes and took away the rest from his flat. But again, except for the talk about fibre... nothing.

Meanwhile the police had also been threatening to charge at least two other men with the murder.

One of these was John Baker, who is Smith's closest friend. John Baker says the police frequently tried to make him say Smith had 'confessed' to him. When he refused, he says, they threatened to charge him instead.

Time and again, he says, they pressurised him. Eventually the police acted. They charged John Baker with stealing six cans of dog meat worth £1.50 from a supermarket. He was supposed to have committed the offence with David Smith thirteen months earlier.

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Stapely

Special out-patient

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Mr Price points out that mornings are a very busy time when nurses have to change bedding, bath and dress patients, attend to lots of bed pans and so on. For safety reasons, much of this work involves two nurses attending each patient at the same time.

Mr Bennett commented: "We pride ourselves on being regularly overstaffed. Although we didn't have as many as we'd like to have, we were still well covered and certainly nobody was neglected."

But he did confirm that the hospital had taken on two extra nurses "when one or two of them went sick". (The new nurses arrived a couple of weeks after the hospital staff began looking after Mrs Makin).

He said Mr Price had "got the wrong end of the stick". Mr Price's information had come from the

staff. "Naturally, getting it from the staff you get a different version of it."

And naturally steps have now been taken to ensure nobody else gets the wrong end of the stick from the staff. They've all been forbidden to talk to the Press.

Mr Bennett said he had urged Mr Makin not to resign. "He's doing such damn good work. I'm at the head and I see it all. He's there nearly every day and he's got the whole thing in his grasp."

"I should hate him to even think of resigning because everything he's done, he's done it the honourable way."

Whether he resigns or not, it looks as though the nurses' work will be confined to the hospital in future. A time clock has just been installed, and it's expected the staff will have to start clocking on and off shortly.

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