

AN OPEN LETTER BY A GROUP OF HALEWOOD
FORD WORKERS TO THEIR BROTHERS AND
SISTERS

MARCH 1973 - THE NEW CONTRACT
ONLY MASS ACTION CAN WIN

At Halewood management has tried to make up for production lost during the '71 strike by continually increasing line speeds, harassment, threatening and sacking many workers, hidden redundancies, foremen trying to make our life impossible.

And they've had a pretty easy job because of the two year agreement signed by the union leaders.

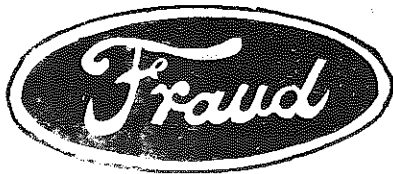
It also became clear how the conveners and many stewards went along with the management policy of trying to cool down any initiative coming from the shop-floor.

For instance, after a steward was re-instated after a solidarity strike in June '71, a secret agreement between conveners and management decided that he would not go back to his old section and also he was no longer allowed to be a steward.

All this at a time when we were taking successful militant action and Ford were becoming more and more desperate for production.

Despite all this, there have been a great number of disputes, especially against speed-ups, mobility of labour and sackings. And some of these have been victories, when the shop-floor has succeeded in taking action without delegating it to anybody.

An example of this is in the wet-deck where, due to increased line speeds the men asked for an extra man on the job. The men refused the con- vener's offer to negotiate for them, saying that they wanted to win this one. And in fact they did win it, ending up with two more men.



These are some of the reasons why a small group of us got together with Big Flame, which is a socialist organisation on Merseyside and which is active, beside Fords, in Standard-Triumph, among building workers, students and in some communities. The aim is to encourage rank-and-file action inside the factory, new tactics and forms of struggle which would involve everybody, new forms of organisation which would be controlled by all of us.

One of the ways bosses keep control in factories is because workers are isolated from each other, not knowing what's going on in other parts of the same factory or in the same firm nationally.

Bosses know this perfectly well and use it to divide us. We believe that the interests of the workers and the bosses are totally opposed and the bosses' power in the factory is based on the isolation, division and silence of the workers. To overcome these divisions is the first step in the struggle against the ruling class and its government and state.

THE NEW CONTRACT

This autumn the unions open negotiations for a new wages and conditions agreement for all British Ford workers.

It looks like they will be asking for this:

- * A substantial wage increase.
- * Shorter working week.
- * Longer holidays.
- * Improved pension scheme.
- * Better lay-off pay.
- * Average earnings for holidays.
- * No penalty clauses.
- * Mutuality on line speeds.
- * Status-quo agreement.
- * No time limit agreement.
- * TU membership compulsory.

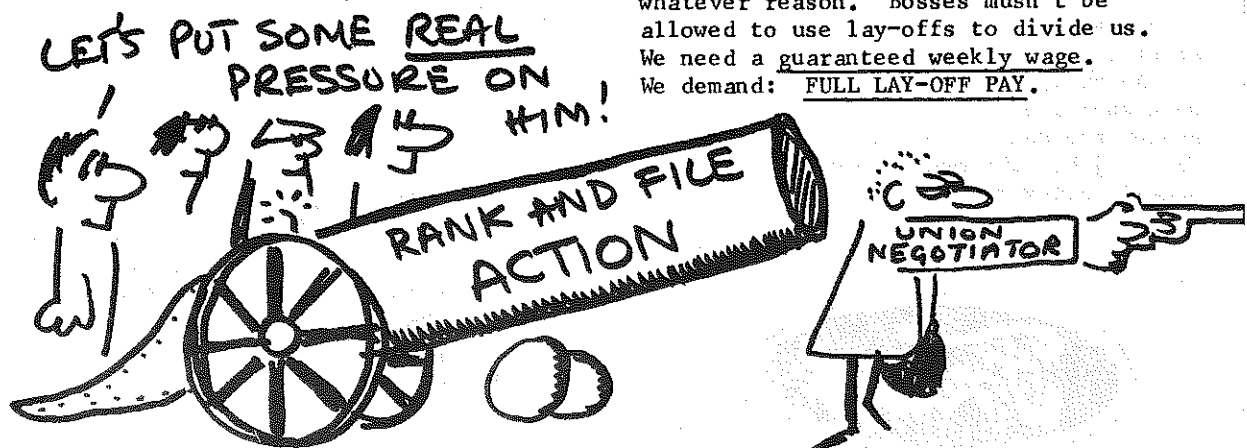
This is what we think of some of these demands:

1) A substantial wage rise.

In '71 we gave a clear mandate to the union negotiators for parity - nothing less. But they ducked it and sold out for a pittance. With a vague demand like this they've sold out already.

We must be clear what we want.

- * In the last 18 months the cost of living has risen by 18% so £30 then is now worth £25.
- * The "Fair" Rents Act will push up council rents by £1 in the autumn. Other rents will follow.



* British Leyland workers are now getting at least £13 more than us.

If we are to get a wage rise that means anything we must get £15. With the money Henry Ford's made from us over the years this is over-moderate.

Like the miners we should say we don't give a damn about Ford's profitability. We need this money and we are going to get it.

And we want the £15 across the board. No more percentage increases which keep differentials between us.

We all have the same needs - we all need the same increase.

£15 ACROSS THE BOARD.

2) Shorter working week.

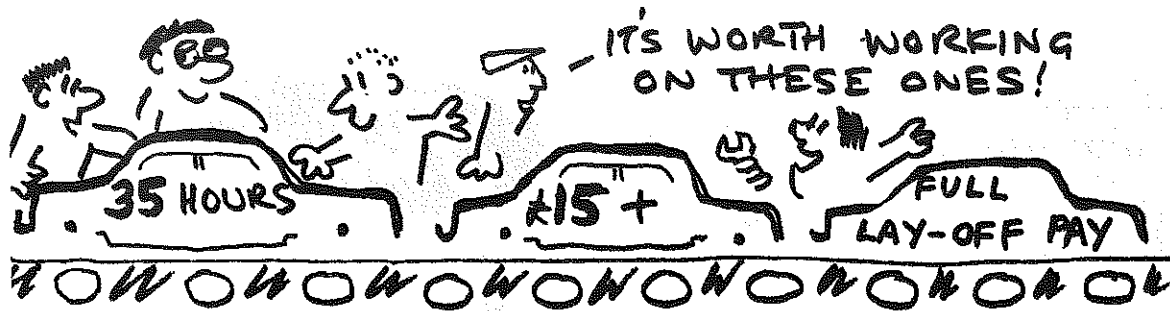
What does this mean? 39½? Again we must state it clearly. At Halewood we've been campaigning 6 months for a 35 hour week. (The unions have been campaigning for it since 1961 when we got the 40, so they've got more experience than us)

Wage rises they can take back in the shops by raising prices, a shorter working week they can't.

The dockers have already won it. Building workers are fighting for it. Now it's our turn. 5 hours less work for Henry - 5 hours more time for ourselves. We demand: 35 HOURS, PAID 40, NO SPEED UPS.

3) Better lay-off pay.

We don't want "better" lay-off pay. We want full pay when laid-off for whatever reason. Bosses musn't be allowed to use lay-offs to divide us. We need a guaranteed weekly wage. We demand: FULL LAY-OFF PAY.



4) Mutuality and status-quo.

We believe that we should control the conditions we work under, not management. But this isn't a demand that can be won at some high-level meeting. These terms by themselves mean nothing in the conditions we work under.

If return to status-quo means a return to the frantic line speeds, atrocious job conditions and manning levels that we had previously, then it's not a lot of use.

The only way we are going to make it any better on the shop-floor is by making ourselves strong and united in each shop, in each section, and to be able to kick the procedure out the window.

What we'd all like is a line speed of 0. But seeing that management isn't likely to agree to this the only way we are going to get it is to get rid of the system that keeps us down. And that means not just unity within one factory but between all workers, tenants, women, unemployed - all members of the working class.

And we'd like to add 4 more demands:

* 6 BREAKS A DAY. On most lines at Fords we get one break before dinner and one after. But Fiat workers in Italy have won a fifteen minute break every hour and are now fighting to get 15 mins. every half hour. In order to win this they simply stop work for 15 mins every half hour.

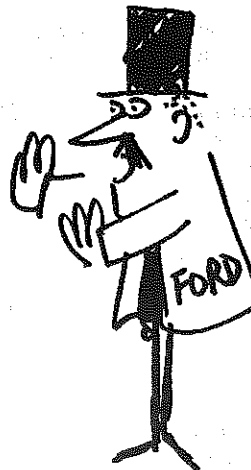
* FREE TRANSPORT. Ford must pay our costs to and from work. We must refuse to pay the extortionate fares demanded from us. Henry Ford's lucky we turn up to work for him at all. He should pay the cost.

* PAID TRAVELLING TIME. We start to work for Ford the moment we leave for work. We should be paid accordingly.

* FREE FOOD. We do a lot of work for Henry. He does nothing for us. The least he can do is provide us with free meals.

We must discuss our demands and real needs with our work-mates, in section meetings and, just as important, with our families. Unless everyone knows what's what we will always be sold out.

And, equally important, we must fight for ALL our demands so that we don't end up half-winning just one.



HOW DO WE WIN THESE DEMANDS?

The '71 parity strike was badly organised:

* It was run by officials, conveners and some stewards; there was no rank-and-file control of the struggle; this made it easier to sell out.

*For the vast majority of strikers it was 9 weeks of boredom; there was no involvement and thousands of us who could have helped spread the fight and made it bite harder were left out.

* It was purely defensive. There was no attempt to take our struggle to other sections of industry and to the communities. It is now no longer enough to pacifly picket empty factories. The miners, dockers and building workers have all developed their own ways of fighting, so must we.



We believe that we should start organising together now for the '73 contract struggle.

A victory then will be a victory for the whole of the working class. It would help everyone gain a higher standard of living and better conditions.

But we can't leave this up to the union officials and conveners. It's us who will win this struggle, not them

As a first step we are distributing this leaflet at several Ford plants around the country.

In the hope of meeting and making contact with people who work at Dagenham and the other plants in and around London we are calling a small meeting at which we'd like to establish the first link-ups.

Written and distributed by a group of Ford workers and Big Flame:
78, Clarendon Rd., Wallasey. 051-639-5448 September 9, 1972



MEETING
FRIDAY
22
SEPTEMBER
7 pm
AT
THE
CHURCH ELM
HEATHWAY
DAGENHAM

This leaflet is being distributed round the country from the following:

London: 659-3895, 79c, Anerley Rd., S.E.20.

Liverpool: Big Flame, 78, Clarendon Rd., Wallasey, Cheshire. 051-639-5448

Swansea: Swansea Solidarity, 18, Windsor St., Uplands, Swansea.