

BENDIX- how the workers took over

A GROUP OF WORKERS SAY HOW IT HAPPENED

*After the Xmas holiday the factory grew tense. Thorn's said the run down would begin on January 3rd, a Monday. Everybody felt things were coming to a head. Sit-ins were being discussed.

There was a false start on the 4th, Tuesday, when the stewards issued a half hour ultimatum to the bosses. But it was soon extended for 24 hours. It was obvious Thorn's didn't really take our threats seriously. They weren't taking any precautions against a sit-in. Over the last few weeks some of us had got together because we felt something had to be done about the close down. There were about 18 of us. Our idea was to stage a demonstration that would prove to management that we were dead serious, the stewards were not alone in the struggle. On Wednesday the ultimatum ran out and the stewards were meeting the management in the boardroom. We were only certain about five minutes before it happened that we wanted a demo. And we had to keep quiet because of security.

*And there's another thing about sit-ins. He (pointing to a worker across the table) works 9 feet away from me but this is the first time I ever talked to him. This has brought us all closer together and everybody's talking about things. In a way, we're not so inhibited now! These sit-ins should be the start of our industrial revolution. The workers should be left to run the factories providing they do it efficiently. We can't leave it to anybody else anymore. There's no choice between the governments.

The problem here is that we're not all involved in what's going on. Twenty stewards are doing nearly everything. I'm just a glorified telephone arranging pickets, so that a few people can go to meetings to make decisions I'll follow. There weren't enough stewards - one department has 2 for 240 men. It's a big problem we're going to have to sort out together if we're going to stick together.



*So when we started the march to administration, it wasn't really spontaneous for us. About 150 workers filed up the stairs shouting "Industrial Assassin", but as we got nearer to the boardroom it turned into a softer chant of "Out, out out!"

This was it. We'd forced the issue, and shown how militant we were, but outside the boardroom door we suddenly felt childish. Nobody wanted to go in. It was like a barrier at the door that we hadn't the nerve to cross, after we'd spent months and years taking orders from the managers.

Outside there was this terrible feeling of frustration because nobody would walk in. Suddenly, Tom, probably knowing there was no choice, stepped in and the rest followed. Once you're in, there's no problem - they're only men.

Within a few minutes the boardroom was packed tight with over 50 of us. The atmosphere was so tense that one wrong word would have turned it into a barney. Then Jack Spriggs, the convenor, got up, and told the management they had 15 minutes to make up their minds or we would have to ask them to leave the premises. If they were scared - and they must have been, seeing the looks on our faces - they didn't show it. Of course they left. You see, there comes a point when demos have to stop and action to begin. We'd no idea until it happened that there would be an occupation that morning. It just happened spontaneously, it came out of the situation, and suddenly everybody knew what we had to do without anyone saying, "Right lads, we're going to have a sit-in!" During the 9 week strike, only about 50 of us were involved, it was difficult to find pickets and some workers were out there 14 hours a day. I also think we're doing Thorn's more damage this way. Of course a sit-in would be useless if Thorn's were skint, but we don't believe they are. They've got orders for £1m. worth of radiators for the next few years.

I think this has shown the utter folly of strikes. Women we couldn't get out with us on the 9 week strike are now as involved as anyone else in the occupation.

STATEMENT FROM THE WORKPEOPLE

We are in occupation of the Fisher Bendix Plant, and the workpeople are resolute in their determination and solidarity to defeat the attempts of the Thorn Empire to sack 1,000 workers and close the factory. When we took strike action at the end of June 1971, against the company's intention to sack 500 workers in July and October and to sack the rest and close the factory at the end of 1971, the company was forced to withdraw all the redundancy notices and to come to terms. NOW THEY ARE TRYING AGAIN! Then we resisted and won. Now we intend to do the same.

Fisher Bendix workers' action has been endorsed by the Thorn Combine Shop Stewards Committee, AUEW, T&GWU, all the Merseyside Labour and Trade Union movement and the London and Home Counties Federation of Trades Councils - it is being recognised more and more that militant action against sackings and closures must be supported - it is a fight that can't be shirked - there are "NO JOBS" - we call on all Confederations and Federations of Trade Unions, all Trade Unions, Trade Unionists, workpeople and housewives not to handle or buy any Thorn Industries products (Sir Jules Thorn has waxed fat, as has been said by a national newspaper, on judicious buying out and selling off competitors) and in doing so, put thousands on the dole. A list of Thorn companies and products is overleaf.

In the political field, the Merseyside Labour MPs have tabled a motion for answer by (lame duck) John Davies in the House of Commons calling for an enquiry into the affairs of this company, especially when they have been in receipt of generous donations of taxpayers' money from the Exchequer, the amount they have received is being asked for, the motion also calls for the shelving of the redundancies and the closure. We support this.

The Tory ministers have shown no concern about the Fisher Bendix closure or the loss of 1,000 jobs, or the high unemployment in the area (we have written proof of this) - these hard faced men are not fit to govern - they are taking away a man's right to live a decent life with his family in human dignity - WE HAVE HAD ENOUGH - we are challenging a boss and his government who deny us the RIGHT TO WORK, this challenge is now being taken up by the entire Labour and Trade Union movement - Fisher Bendix workers will win, we are in control - redundancies have been declared, but we are refusing to accept the sack, and this we will continue to do - WE HAVE OCCUPIED THE FACTORY AND HERE WE STAY - WE ARE DEMANDING THE RIGHT TO WORK

We need cash to sustain our struggle - URGENTLY!!!
Your solidarity can make victory certain.

Send donations to:
Tom Staples (Treasurer)
42, Kennelwood Avenue,
Northwood, Kirkby,
Liverpool L33 6UF

Jack Spriggs (AUEW)
Dick Jenkins (T&GWU)
Archie Breden (EETU)
Jim Jenkins (ASTMS)
Brian Shephard (AUEW-TSS)
Charlie Lyons (CAWU)

BIG FLAME

At Fisher Bendix 18 angry young workers started a march through the factory. As it snowballed along it was joined by another 150 workers. Together they took over the boardroom and sacked the boss. This initiative - which smashed the sanctity of the boardroom - sparked off the occupation.

NEW MOVEMENT

Many of the workers who took part have a new attitude to politics. No matter what Party governs it means more or less the same to them. What concerns them is their day to day struggles on the shop floor, between the working class and the bosses.

THE MORE YOU PUT IN - THE MORE YOU GET OUT!

These workers no longer leave everything to their shop stewards and the negotiators. They realise that the only way to win is UNITED ACTION ON THE SHOP FLOOR. New forms of struggle inside the factory like the internal marches and sit ins, give every worker the chance of taking part in a collective struggle.

These are the weapons of a new movement which scares the employers and their government. A new force which they hope to smash with their Industrial Relations Act - which along with mass unemployment, rent increases and rising prices - attacks the whole working class.

So we've learnt that our needs and the bosses' needs are completely opposed. And gradually workers are realising that their needs can only be met by getting rid of the bosses.

They want us to do what suits them - we must say what we need and what suits us. They want us divided - so we unite. They want us passive - so we take action. They want us to leave it all to the union officials - so we must organise ourselves.

OCCUPY

Occupying the factory means that we can stay together with the chance to discuss and to move around freely. It means every worker can take control of the struggle and not let it fall into the hands of the union officials who time and time again have stifled the initiative of the rank and file. Look what happened to the power workers and the postmen last year.

During an occupation we have the opportunity to begin little by little to control our own lives - instead of always being told what to do, when and how fast to do it, by the people who have ruled us for years.

In the last few days at Bendix, workers have got to know for the first time people who often worked right next to them. AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, THEY ARE ALL WORKING TOGETHER FOR THEMSELVES.

But not just themselves. An occupied factory can become the focal point for struggles throughout the community. We can draw in our wives and families who can find out what's happening and give each other support.

The opposite happens in a strike. We stay at home and are isolated from each other and the struggle and left open to the full blast of the lies of the press and TV.

There can be regular mass meetings where everybody can get up and make his point and where decisions are taken by the whole meeting.

SOLIDARITY

If they're going to win, Fisher Bendix must have the active support of the community. There are a

new lock-out—but now we're inside

lot of small factories in Kirkby which must support each other to survive. Financial support is not enough.

Marches must be organised through Kirkby and Liverpool

Thorn Electrics goods must be blacked and boycotted
Talk about helping the Bendix workers with your families and mates

But the best way is to continue the struggle where you work:

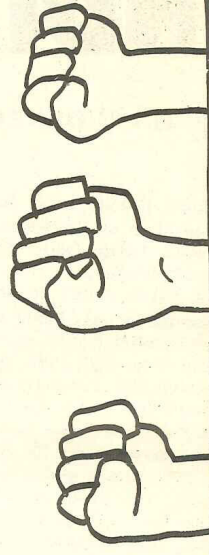
DON'T ACCEPT REDUNDANCIES! OCCUPY!

DON'T WALKOUT! OCCUPY!

At present, sit ins have only been used as a last resort to fight factory closures. But occupations could be an even more powerful weapon when the employers need full production.

If the boss threatens to lay you off, don't go home, march to the office and refuse to accept any loss of pay.

At Fords, this is the way to fight against speed-ups and victimisation. At Standards, this is the way to fight against the introduction of Measured Day Work. And wherever you work, use the sit-in to win the 35 hour week.



This broadsheet was produced collectively by a group of Fisher Bendix workers and Big Flame.
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