

FORD HALEWOOD REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION. Instead of giving a long analytical report, with its theoretical and practical implications spelled out, we are going to contribute to the conference by presenting this chronology. It's the chronology of the last month of struggles at Ford Halewood, our intervention and our role. This is by no means a normal month - we haven't experienced for a long time such a high degree of insubordination. Nevertheless it will be very easy to abstract from this chronology, to understand the theoretical implications, and see how we operate. We think that this is a constructive way to contribute to the debate at the conference; it is the product of our hard daily work, our discussions and our level of integration inside the masses.

2. A SHORT NOTE ON THE CAR INDUSTRY. It must be said that all these struggles at Halewood are not happening in a vacuum. After the crisis period of 1974-75-beginning 76, the situation has now changed. The market has picked up again. In other words the workers feel stronger. A new cycle of struggles is starting, or so it seems. After a period of capitalist offensive, rationalisation, redundancies, which saw the important victories of capital at Chrysler, Vauxhalls, BLMC and Ford Dagenham, now most motor manufacturers are hiring again. It must be said that the workers at Halewood, unlike those in most other car plants, have not suffered any defeat throughout all this period. This is due partly to their peculiar position in relation to the market (producing Escorts), partly to their resistance to management's material and ideological offensive - and we've played a good role in this. You've probably read on the papers a distorted version of what was going on in BLMC, in this past month. Here is what was going on at Halewood.

3. THE CHRONOLOGY.
Monday 16th August. Back from the holidays. 8.30 a.m. One section in the Body plant, the discers, walk out after finding out that management had honoured a promise of better health and safety facilities. The whole of the plant is laid off. Two of the main components of struggles are there already - health & safety and lay-off.

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Thursday 19th and Friday 20th August. We sell the newspaper as usual. It's the old copy, produced during the shut-down. Altogether we sell only 45 papers - much below our average. In the Transmission Plant we sell only two papers.

That same day in the Transmission Plant the foremen walk out in protest demanding more men, i.e. more foremen.

Monday 23rd August. The foremen in the Body and PTA (Paint Trim & Assembly) go out in solidarity. In the PTA the maintenance too walk out, because of the dispute of 4 machine operators regarding grading. The day shift, which this week is the 'B' shift (they rotate every fournight) is told that they will be off pay from 10.00 a.m., both in the PTA and Body. As a result they all go home immediately. The Transmission Plant works normal.

That night, in between shifts, from 7.30pm to 9.00pm we hold our planned Big Flame Ford Halewood Base Group Meeting. Together with two full time members of the organisation, 6 Ford workers are present. 3 from the Body Plant (1 from the White Lines, 2 from the Door, Boot & Bonnet Section), all of whom in the 'A' shift; 3 from the Trim Lines

all of whom in the 'B' shift. Only one of them is a full member of the organisation. Another one is not a member formally, even if he operates generally as Big Flame at every level. A third one has been putting forward the Big Flame line inside for years (and has contributed a lot to the formation of the line), the other 3 are very solid sympathisers.

It is generally agreed at the meeting that we should not support the foremen. That's the feeling of all the militants inside the plants, and the majority of the people. The foremen demand for more men is a demand which goes against the interests of the majority - to them it means more foremen, more people who harass them etc. It is agreed that that the maintenance strike should be played down. It will be used by management. We should say it is an ill-timed strike,

We should concentrate on lay-off. That issue will unite the shop-floor. Everybody will want some money - especially after being skint for the holidays. We also think that the demand of lay-off pay has a very high anti-capitalist content, putting the blame on management and the capitalist organisation of production in general.

We also discuss the contract - the fact that this contract expires in October, what we should demand for the new one. Agreed that can't win much on straight wage rise. Agreed that we should put emphasis on the 35hour week paid 40.

Also discuss the fact that Ford are desperate for production. They trying to give pep-talks to all employees and lower management, praising them for the performance of the first 6 months of the year. We finally discuss the articles for our next 2pence bulletin to be sold at the gates in 3 weeks time. Everybody present commits himself to one article.

Decide to call for a meeting on Thursday 26th August, in a pub in Speke near the factory, in the afternoon, after people had collected their wages on Thursday morning. Meeting to be advertised by leaflet to be distributed to people collecting their wages. Also few posters are done.

Wednesday 25th August. Third day of total shut down of the FTA & Body plants both shifts. Some maintenance occupy the power room in the Transmission Plant, stopping all production there too.

During the night the Big Flame full timers stick up the posters in strategic positions. As usual they are caught by the security guards, while doing that. (Need a lot of education on guerrilla activities inside the enemy's territory). Still a couple stay up.

Thursday 26th August. In the morning both foremen and maintenance hold meetings. They decide to return to work. The night shift is going back in the night. The day shift the following morning. Transmission back to normal.

We decide that our leaflet is out of date and we don't distribute it. But go ahead with the ~~xxxxxxx~~ meeting for the contacts. The meeting takes place.

Besides 2 Big Flame organisers, there are 14 Ford workers and 1 unemployed mate of a couple of workers. 1 from the Body 'A' shift, 1 from the Press Shop, 1 maintenance, all the others from the Trim Lines 'B' shift, with 4 of them out of the same section.

Again the discussion is centred on the dispute, the lay-off, what to do now and what to say in the next leaflet. The unemployed bloke, very militant, possibly a paper member of the C.P., with a lot of 'extremist' ideas, does not agree with our line on the foremen. Every body in the room answer to him, pointing out what the rôle of foremen is. Generally the workers there who are at their first B.F. meeting put forward a much harder line on the foremen than we do.

We also agree that we should suggest some sort of action against the lay-off, to be paid. A lot of anger and dtermination. Also discuss the contract, the 35 hour week, the wage rise, threshold, canteen prices, gradings etc. Everybody there speaks. This must be considered the largest and best meeting we've had since the 3 day week in 1974.

Thursday night. The leaflet is distributed at the gates. The headline: The Foremen's Lesson: DON'T TALK - WALK. (This is a pisstake of management's new slogan: Don't walk - talk.). The leaflet (written in the afternoon by one full-timer and one worker) goes down well. ONE CAN SENSE THAT ACTION IS GOING TO TAKE PLACE VERY SOON.

Both the BODY PLANT AND THE PTA, DON'T START WORK. Meetings take paae everywhere. The stewards are asked to fight for the lay-off money. The Body Plant start working at about midnight, but the PTA force the deputy convenor to call for a mass meeting outside. At the meeting MOST OF THE ARGUMENTS CONTAINED IN THE LEAFLET, PLUS MORE ARE FORCIBLY PUT FROM THE FLOOR. The convenor recommends a return to work pending negotiations on the lay-off pay. He is hooded and heckled. The vote is taken. It is honestly split 50-50. The convenor declares the motion carried. All back in.

But once inside, the meetings in the sections continue. The foremen desperately go around begging to start work. Production finally starts at 3.45a.m. after the deputy convenor has been forced to guarantee a mass meeting on Tuesday night, to report back on the negotiations with management. IT IS FOUND OUT THAT EVERYBODY WILL BE PAID FROM 11.30 pm THAT NIGHT, EVEN IF PRODUCTION NEVER STARTED TILL AROUND 4.00am. ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF FORDS DESPERATE NEED FOR PRODUCTION.

Friday 27th August. The same leaflet is handed out to the 'B' shift going in. A lot of discussions, but no meeting. The lines start. No action is taken. Production will be normal on Friday night minishift too.

In the afternoon a janitor of the PTA, rings up the office, saying that he wants BIG FLAME to represent him against management. He is being victimised and the unions are doing nothing about it. He is on strike on his own. He is met in an alehouse later on where he explains his case. We tell him how much we can do for him. In fact there is very little we can do. But we advise him to go back to work, and we'll see if something can be done from the inside. (The dispute by the way was pretty irrelevant.)

Tuesday 31st August. Nothing happens during the day. (B shift). When the 'A' shift go in at night, all sections of the PTA plant have section meetings and then they drag out the convenor for a mass meeting as promised. The convenor says that it will have to go through national channels, or as they say here, procedure. He can't do nothing. He's won nothing ~~xxxxxx~~ on lay-off money, but recommends people to return to work.

Shouts. Boos. Threats. 'What do you want us to do, go back in and grovel?'

'Look at what happened after the Press Shop Strike, 2 years ago. Went through procedure. Waited two years. Got £7.' 'We want lay-off money!'. 'We are not casual labour'.

The vote is taken. This time it's at least 60-40 in favour of staying out. The convenor says that the vote is split, he has got the casting vote, and he says in. Chaos and pandemonium. Many go home anyway. Around 300 stay outside to talk among themselves. The rest go in angry and frustrated. After a few hours the 300 go back in and decide to occupy the convenor's office. But few participate for fear of sticking their neck out too much.

A lot of stewards admit that the vote had gone against the convenor. The foremen start going around to each individual asking them to start work. No chance. The stewards are called up to the convenor's office. They are told to toe the line. 'Those who won't start work, will be without union representation'. The lines move at 4.00am. EVERYBODY IS ON PAY, SINCE 11.00pm.

WEDNESDAY 1st September. Work normal on the day shift. We write a well balanced leaflet for the night shift. We take up a strong position on the union inside. We ask shop-floor workers to ask their stewards whether they thought that what had gone on the night before was in accordance with the principle of union democracy. We also suggest what to do from now on. General political principles are made, as well as concrete tactics suggested. We call for a work to rule, or some sort of protest action TO BE TAKEN FROM THE INSIDE, WHERE THE POWER LIES, LIKE A SIT-IN FOR A FEW HOURS OR SOMETHING SIMILAR. The leaflet is discussed twice with one of the leading militants before being given out.

Another leaflet is produced for the Transmission Plant. It is about the contract, pointing out our main demands. Also stating that the rational unions have decided on a platform, but noone has heard anything about that inside Halewood.

Nothing happens inside the plants that night. The leaflet goes down well in the Body and PTA, it provokes many discussions, but we won't know that until the following night.

During the night, another leaflet is produced for the 'B' shift, Body and PTA, trying to draw the lessons of the struggles going on in the 'A' shift. In all honesty it's not a great leaflet.

Thursday 2nd September. Nothing during the day. At night we sell the Big Flame newspaper at the gates. We sell 15 at the Transmission Plant and 43 in the Body and PTA. We sell out 15 minutes early at every gate. The reception is fantastic. People praising us and our work. We go to the alehouse in a really good mood. The best yet to come.

Around 11.00pm the Paint Shop walks out demanding pay for an extra hour, which they had spent at a meeting the previous Tuesday. The PTA is sent home. The Body are told they'll be off pay from midnight.

THE BODY HAVE A MASS MEETING. IT IS ADDRESSED BY ONE OF THE VERY FEW SENIOR STEWARDS. WE HAVE SOME CONTACTS WITH HIM. HE WAS IN SPEKE TRADE UNION COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENCE OF JOBS. HE ALWAYS BUYS OUR NEWSPAPER. HE SAYS THAT THEY ARE FED UP WITH BEING LAID OFF. BUT DON'T WANT TO WALK OUT. THIS TIME THEY'LL TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT - A WORK IN. THE PLANT IS OCCUPIED FOR THE NIGHT, IN THE STATIC AREAS PEOPLE DO HALF THE SCORE. ON THE LINES PEOPLE JUST SIT AROUND. WE RECEIVE PHONE CALLS DURING THE NIGHT. AT 2.00am TWO MILITANTS

FROM THE PLANT COME AROUND TO THE FLAT WHERE SOME OF THE FULL TIME ORGANISERS LIVE. THEY WOULD LIKE TO PRODUCE A LEAFLET FOR THE MORNING, BUT THIS IS TECHNICALLY IMPOSSIBLE. WE AGREE TO WRITE SOME WALL NEWSPAPERS. AT 4.00 am four BIG FLAME POSTERS ARE TAKEN BACK INSIDE THE PLANT. THEY START WITH THE HEADING 'WORK-IN IN THE 'A' SHIFT. THEN, UNDERNEATH THE BIG FLAME SYMBOL, 4 POINTS EXPLAINING THE EVENTS. FINALLY THE SLOGAN WHICH THE PEOPLE INSIDE SEEM TO REALLY LIKE: 'WE ARE NOT CASUAL LABOUR'. THE FOUR POSTERS ARE STUCK UP WITH BOSTIC IN SOME KEY AREAS IN BOTH THE BODY AND PTA.

FRIDAY 3rd September

Other posters are prepared in the early hours of the morning, so that when we sell the paper at the gates, we also hold the placard, informing people of what has been going on the previous night. We also show how well informed and right on the spot Big Flame is. People coming out are really amazed at our 'being at the right place at the right time'. "We had a sit-in" sings one bloke coming out. "It was a work-in" says his mate. "Same difference - we never did a thing the whole night". We sell 42 papers to the 'B' shift and another 3 at the Transmission Plant. It must be said that, due to lay-off we had offered the paper to Ford workers for just 5p, but had added that all those who could afford it, should give more. Whereas some people obviously skint payed 5p, the majority gave the right money, a lot gave 10p ("It's worth ten, brother") with some of our contacts giving 20 and even 48p. In fact we made a lot of money.

In the afternoon one of our leading sympathisers in the PTA is seen. He confirms that the leaflet the previous Wednesday had gone down really well; even his steward, had had to admit that the leaflet was really good, and that he felt ashamed of the unions in there. At the minishift, we sell a further 15 papers, again selling out before time.

SUNDAY 5th SEPTEMBER. One of the full time organisers meets in London with the Langley group, and with a comrade of the ex-Dagenham group. They decide on a draft for the National Leaflet to be distributed in all major Ford plants, dealing with the coming new agreement. The unions have decided to go for only one demand - £4 increase across the board. In addition they have drawn up a list of what they call 'genuine aspirations' of Ford workers. They want management to recognise that they are good points, but don't want to fight for them, as yet. Our line is that we go along with the wage demand, but think that the rest should be fought for now. We put our priority on the 35hour week, paid 40, which was in the list of genuine aspirations drawn up by the unions; and on the 100% lay-off pay, work or not. We also include things like a freeze on canteen prices abolition of grade 'A', etc.

Monday 6th September. A quiet day. We hold a meeting, with the presence of two full time organisers, one bloke off Trim 'B' shift, one Trim and two Body, 'A' shift - they are our best lot. Discuss the ideas about the national leaflet and agree with the report back given by the comrade who had gone to London.

Tuesday 7th September. WE hand out to both shifts of the three plants, the leaflet of the Antifascist committee advertising the Blackburn Demo, and talking about fascism and racialism. The leaflet is not received as well as the others. A lot of people are not interested, some are clearly against. A few are screwed up, after reading the headline - which definitely does not happen usually - still much less than 5%. A clear proof, if anyone needed it, that the contradictions among the people are many and hard to fight.

Tuesday night, ('B' shift because of the change-over at the week-end), the solderers walk out. The solderers are one job, 15 men involved, on the White Lines; the most militant part of the Body. Their job consists in melting down lead bars to fill in the cracks between the

panels of the body. They have been on dispute on and off for a good two years. IT'S OVER HEALTH AND SAFETY. THEY CLAIM THAT THE AREA IS CONTAMINATED WITH LEAD, ABOVE THE SAFETY LIMIT. THROUGH WALK-OUTS, AND SIMILAR TYPES OF ACTION, THEY HAVE FORCED SEVERAL TESTS, THE LATEST ONE AT THE PRESENCE OF THE TUC ANALYST. THEIR LONG TERM DEMANDS ARE: FULLY PROTECTIVE CLOTHING, 'SPACE HELMETS', EXTRA WASH-UP TIME, PREPARATION MONEY ALLOWANCES, AND WORK TO BE DONE INSIDE A VENTILATED BOOTH, LIKE THE DISCERS DO. THE REASON OF THE DISPUTE TO-NIGHT IS TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE TUC ANALYST TO COME UP WITH THE RESULT, WHICH IS LONG OVERDUE. As a result of the walk-out, the whole of the Body and FTA plants are laid off. No resistance to the lay-off. But in some sections of the Trim some resistance is prepared for the following night.

Wednesday 8th September. Nothing on the day shift. The solderers are sent a cable by management to return to work. They do, only to find out some clerks handing out a management leaflet at the gates, to masses of astonished people. One of the clerks shouts: "GET YOUR BIG FLAME!" THE leaflet is just a pack of insults and lies. The solderers find that the situation has not changed one inch - so off they walk again. But, inside some sections of the trim, work has'nt started. The whole thing is organised by some of our comrades or sympathisers, but it rolls on spontaneously so well that nobody has to stick his neck up too much.

The sections on the TRIM are refusing to start, and demand to be paid for the night before. They want to hear what their stewards have to say about it, but they usually disappear in these hot situations. The foremen go around the lines asking each individual whether they are prepared to start. The answer is 'NO', or even better "I'm not telling you pal. You've got no right to go around asking people". Only an hour later, they are all told they'll be off pay from midnight. BUT THESE SECTIONS WHO HAD REFUSED TO START GET PAID FOR THE 2 1/4 HOURS ANYWAYS. BY 11.15 the plant is empty.

Thursday 9th September. We produce a leaflet for both shifts. Try to contact the steward of the solderers, but he off sick. He is a very militant steward, with some socialist ideology as well, with whom we have regular contacts - in fact we've had some drinking sessions with the whole area, and our relationship with the steward can be described as friendly cooperation. WE GET THE FACTS RIGHT ANYWAY AND PRODUCE THE LEAFLET. AT THE GATES THE RECEPTION IS ONCE AGAIN PHENOMENAL.

"IS THIS THE BIG FLAME?" "YEHA!" "THANK GOD FOR THAT. I THOUGHT THAT IT WAS THAT MANAGEMENT SHITE AGAIN". ANOTHER COMMENT: "BIG FLAME, THE ONLY FELLOWS WHO TELL THE TRUTH". AND ANOTHER: "WE SHOULD PAY YOUSE OUR SUBS. WE NEVER GET ANY INFORMATION OFF THE UNION". AND FINALLY, JOKINGLY, "DO YOU REALISE THAT YOU ARE THE ONLY PEOPLE WORKING IN HERE TO-NIGHT?" It's pay-night. A lot of people turn up in suit, ready to go to the club, immediately after. But this time the senior steward turns up on the lines. "Hey, we've got a steward here to-night!" He addresses the Trim Lines, by stating that they have got a good case, and that they should get paid for the Tuesday night. The unanimous reaction, even the moderates, is: "Well what about last night then. And to-night."

They all walk home at about 11.00, again on pay till midnight.

Friday 10th September. THE TUC ANALYST SUDDENLY APPEARS, WITH UNION OFFICIALS STRAIGHT FROM BRIGHTON. A MEETING IS CONVENED, AT THE PRESENCE OF ALL THE SOLDERRERS; INCLUDING THEIR STEWARD. MANAGEMENT CONCEDES A FEW POINTS. THE SOLDERRERS CONCEDE ON A FEW OTHERS ON A SHORT TERM. I'LL LEAVE THE DETAILS OUT. THEY AGREE THAT THEY'LL RETURN TO WORK ON MONDAY NIGHT.

In the evening in the office, while typing out this report, a nice phone call from a bloke off the Door Build, Trim 1, 'A' shift.

This is a very militant area. This particular job is a very hard one. We know, through different sources, that they have been on dispute against the foreman for some time. He just thought we might be interested to know. The foreman had just walked out that afternoon, refusing to work with them, saying that they were not cooperating. "Which is true, you know what I mean, like". "It's all a power struggle, and we are winning. We are not walking out. We are staying in. And we are winning". He'll let us know about further details.

Saturday 11th September. In Blackburn, one of the few banners from workplaces present at the antifascist demo is that of Ford Halewood. Behind it march about 20 blokes, some in the C.P., most non-aligned militants.

Tuesday 14th September. During the day, the final draft of the national leaflet is written in Liverpool, after the comments of Langley and Dagenham.

In the evening, second phone call from P. off the Door Build, Trim 1, 'A' shift. Further developments. The foreman is cracking up. He was crying in there in the afternoon. Management have invited the whole section to have a paid dinner in the office, tea and sanies. They want to sort out the problem as quickly as possible. But have asked to this meeting the whole section, not just the men involved in the job. "I myself reckon that we've got them by the balls, and we should keep on kicking them there. The foreman is desperate, because he's lost all his power over us. Management are not prepared to back him up, because they are desperate for production. We should never go up to the office. Just keep ~~kixkix~~ Kicking them both. The steward, he has handled it alright, at the beginning, he was backing us up. But now he is scared. He wants up to go up to the office. All he is interested in is in keeping production running smoothly. He doesn't want any troubles; no disruptions. All he is interested in is to keep is ~~xxx~~ cushy number, because he is got an easy job, you know...like most of the m in here". Arrange to meet in the alehouse the following Thursday dinner time.

Thursday 16th September. Remember the work-in done by the Body plant, 'A' shift? Well they want paying for the work done, which amounted to 30 cars and 70 crates of Knock Down panels (forget about the technicality). Management are not acknowledging the work-in, so they won't give a cent. But as a sign of good will they are prepared to donate £500 to a spastic fund. This the stewards are told. The stewards decide to put forward the recommendation that management's offer is accepted and, in exchange, the men release the ~~xxxxxxx~~ stuff produced that night and let it go down the lines, to be finished off.

This the stewards propose at a mass meeting taking place at dinner time. Remember the good senior steward who was so good the night of the work-in, with whom we have some contacts? Well, he is not behaving so good. Our comrades inside think that he is after the convenor job... Anyway the meeting turns down the stewards' recommendation by a clear 4-1 majority. Some good speeches are made from the floor. The men know that they won't get paid for the work-in, but the attitude is "Rather than give the work to Ford, let it rot." As far as the 'charitable' offer, everyone recognises that it's got fuck-all to do with it.

Our friend, P. off the Door Build, is not met. Not clear yet whether it was a technical cock-up or x he did not turn up. We'll see the developments in the future. If he doesn't contact us, we'll contact him, within a week.

We produce the national leaflet, thanks to the comrade who does the printing. It is a one sided leaflet. On the other side different things will be duplicated for the different plants. Halewood is the only place where the leaflet goes out this week. On the other side we put the events about the mass meeting that afternoon, plus an advert for our two-pence

Halewood Bulletin, coming out at the end of next week.

We distribute the leaflet to the night shift.

Friday 17 September. Distribute the leaflet to the day shift. We get rid of all the 3,000 of them very easily, but it is clear that in Halewood the contract is not the big issue. For a start the unions have not yet informed the workers of their platform, whereas they have in Langley say, about 3 weeks ago. Secondly the workers are aware of all the limitations of the Social Contract. We don't know as yet, the response to the leaflet.

Late dinner hour, two of us meet the steward of the solderers, plus a gang of clockes working in the same area. We clear up a lot of points about the dispute. Find out that they have planned a walk-out for the mirishift. They had asked Ford management for a sub. If the sub is not there... off they go.

THE REPORT ENDS HERE. IT COULD GO ON AND ON, FOR EVER. REMEMBER THAT IN THE MEANTIME ALL OTHER BIG FLAME ACTIVITIES WERE CARRIED OUT. THE CONTENT OF THIS REPORT DOES NOT NEED ANY COMMENT FROM US. WE MAKE OUR COMMENTS MAINLY AMONG THE MASSES. AND THE MASSES AND THEIR STRUGGLES ARE CLEAR ENOUGH FOR THOSE OF US WHO WANT TO UNDERSTAND THEM. IF ANYONE HAD DOUBTS ABOUT EVENTUAL DISTORTIONS OR EXAGGERATIONS, THEY SHOULD COME TO THE GATES OF FORD. WE HAVE NOTHING TO HIDE. AFTER ALL WE HAVE 13,000 WITNESSES. SOME LOVE US, OTHERS HATE US... BUT THAT'S THE WAY IT GOES.

THE STRUGGLE GOES ON.