

Learn from the Ford strike



We are proud to publish this pamphlet by a rank and file participant in the 1973 great struggle of the workers of the vehicle building industry. It is a very valuable summing up of experience from which all can learn. It will lead to even deeper lessons and more experience.

Its summary increases in value every day as Australian workers, working and other patriotic people take up more vigorously the struggle against the multi-national corporations and for Australian independence and socialism.

1974.

**Central Committee Communist Party
of Australia (M-L)**



The nine-week strike at the Ford Motor Company factory at Broadmeadows in May-July, 1973, was a magnificent example of workers' struggle. As a result of the bold and militant action of the Ford workers during this strike certain lessons regarding the nature of the Ford Motor Company, the nature of official unionism and the nature of various State organs (the role of the newspapers, the role of the Arbitration Court, the role of the ALP as the parliamentary party presently in power) stand out with clarity.

Australia, in the present period, is dominated by U.S. imperialism. Ford Motor Company, the third largest monopoly in the world (behind Standard Oil and General Motors) is a major representative of this avaricious invader. In Australia, the struggle to achieve a genuine national independence is gathering in strength. It is necessary to build a united front led by the working class against U.S.-led imperialism. In order to make working class leadership a reality within this united front we should examine the experience of the Ford workers and learn from it.

FORD IS A FOUR LETTER WORD!

Ford workers are treated like dogs. During the strike a Ford worker described what it was like to work on the line —

“ . . . I have always pictured the car coming down the line as being like a great queen bee cruising down the line as the workers swarm over it servicing it and then jumping off as they move onto the next, only to

be replaced by other workers repeating their jobs 54 times an hour, 400 times a day, two and a half thousand times a week . . .

“The pressure to keep up is so great that men are often ready to fight each other over a single action such as shutting a car door or leaving it open, which repeated once a minute as a hurdle in the steeple chase race against the line assumes gigantic proportions (in fact such fights are common). . .

“Again trying to get relieved (to go to the toilet) can and often does take on humiliating dimensions . . . if nature doesn't conform to timetable then you must engage in negotiations with one of your mates . . . it often leads to the sort of conversation – ‘I have to go badly’, ‘I'm sorry my friend but I need to go more’, ‘But I'm desperate’ . . .”

Ford workers are exploited to the limit so that Ford can make super profits (\$14 million in 1972).

Ford was racing to overtake General Motors for the biggest share of the car market. Staff members are given pep talks on this subject, encouraged to wear the company tie pin etc. Meanwhile, down on the line, the “wogs” get the “hurry up” without explanation.

There is the speed-up – 54 cars an hour. The fastest in Australia. The foremen always tell the men to “hurry up”. Sometimes there are 10 or 15 men away sick but the speed is just the same.

Everyday on the assembly line, eight hours a day, often six days a week, workers have to do the same monotonous job.

Before the strike, a typical assembly line worker took home only \$65 for a 40 hour week (some got less). At the same time, under a Labor government, the price of food and other essential items rocketed.

This is the reality – the super profits of Ford, the speed of the line as a major production factor in the fierce pressure exerted on the workers, the humiliation of having to negotiate to go to the toilet, the monotony of the job, high absenteeism, low wages and the rising cost of living.

This reality is a horrible expression of the basic contradiction in capitalist society. Ford Motor Company, with all its assets, is privately owned by a handful of monopoly capitalists. However, the production of motor cars, the maintenance of machines etc., is carried out by workers working together socially. Workers are forced to sell their labour power to the capitalist in order to survive and feed their families.

Ford is a gigantic multi-national monopoly, based in America. They always try to maximise profits, much of which flows back to America. They make profit from the labour of workers all around the world. In 1970, their gross annual sales of 14.98 billion dollars exceeded the gross national product of countries such as Austria, Yugoslavia and Indonesia.

The contradiction between the private ownership of the means of production and the social character of

production itself has assumed an enormous magnitude in today's world. The above facts — on the one hand a description of the workers' exploitation; on the other hand a description of the enormous profits and sales of Ford — testify to this.

BACKGROUND TO THE STRUGGLE

Negotiations between the unions (Vehicle Builders' Union — VBU, Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union — AMWU, Electrical Trades Union — ETU, Australasian Society of Engineers — ASE) and the car monopolies began in April 1973 around union claims for increased over award payments (increases from 17½% to 45% over the award were sought), for 17½% loading on annual leave and for abolition of the penalties relating to over award payments.

The campaign began amid objectively very favourable conditions for the workers. The overall employment situation had improved resulting in a drift in labour from the car industry to jobs with better pay and conditions. This had in turn brought an increased labour turnover and decreased productivity at a time of record demand for cars in both local and overseas markets. In particular, the increased penetration of the Japanese car monopolies into the Australian market was worrying the American giants.

Circumstances were to prove, however, that the "labor aristocracy" of the unions involved were in no way prepared to exploit these favourable conditions, to fight a militant campaign, for the benefit of the working class by relying on their strength.

Instead a story of incredible betrayal emerged

WHY DID THE FORD WORKERS REBEL?

The unions never wanted the Ford workers to go on strike. They had their own plan, concocted in the comfort of an AMWU office, without any consultation of workers or shop stewards, to go after GMH first. This ignored the fact that Ford workers (55 cars an hour) were more oppressed than GMH workers (30-40 cars an hour) and therefore more eager to fight.

Both Ford workers and GMH workers have had previous bad experiences with the unions (1969 Ford strike and 1964 GMH strike). The general overwhelming feeling at Ford and GMH towards union bureaucrats is one of contempt.

At a lunchtime meeting on Friday, May 18, the Ford workers rejected the pre-concocted union plan by hurling a barrage of fruit at the organiser and storming off the job. The strike had begun!

Did the union "leaders" learn from this experience and re-examine the situation? No! They still dreamt of sending the Ford workers back and getting GMH out on strike, despite the fact that they were severely rebuffed by GMH (Dandenong) workers on Monday, May 28. The Dandenong workers distrusted the unions so much that they rejected all union motions.

After three weeks strike, Ford made an offer of \$3-\$4 increase in wages. This was acceptable to the union leadership and they attempted to "sell" it to the workers at a mass meeting at Broadmeadows Town Hall on Monday, June 11.

The workers rejected the sell-out. They voted narrowly against it. But Carmichael, in the chair, called the vote his way. He told the workers to go back to work.

This was to become Mr. Carmichael's celebrated "mistake". The angry workers attacked the platform.

No doubt it did occur to Mr. Carmichael, as he sprinted for the rear entrance of Broadmeadows Town Hall (luckily escaping with only a torn coat), the hot breath of angry workers on his neck, that he had made a "mistake".

However, he must have been unclear of the exact nature of his "mistake" at this stage because he immediately called the shop stewards together and stressed that everyone must return to work on the following Wednesday.

Only when Mr. Carmichael heard from afar (for he did not dare go near the Ford Motor Company on Wednesday, June 13) that the workers had attacked the factory, rather than obey his directive and return to work, could he have realised the enormity of his "mistake".

And so, on Friday, June 15, in order to regain his shattered credibility he said to the workers:

"I say to you sincerely that we have made a mistake and you have taught us a lesson."

What balderdash! People of Mr. Carmichael's experience and political persuasion don't make mistakes

of this nature. In fact, their whole method of operation is by manipulation, "selling" their preconceived ideas to the workers, militant rhetoric combined with moderate action, distorting the facts and history in order to project their aims and achievements in a noble light. However, this time Mr. Carmichael didn't get away with it. Something very dramatic had to happen for this doctrinaire, arrogant and conceited bureaucrat to be forced into admitting error.

During the Ford strike, rank and file workers produced leaflets which were handed out at stop-work meetings. On one occasion, Mr. Carmichael led a charge of union bureaucrats to seize these leaflets by force from the distributors.

As a leading light of the so-called "Communist" Party of Australia, Mr. Carmichael formally adheres to the spurious principles of "workers' control". His interpretation of workers' control is that a small band of entrenched bureaucrats have discussions, make decisions and then "sell" them to the workers.

Mr. Carmichael has an interesting, powerful and well paid job as a union leader and is very afraid of workers' militancy when it challenges his position of authority. In no meaningful sense can he be described as "Communist" or "left wing". He is a traitor to the workers. The Ford workers ripped off his working class mask and taught us a valuable lesson.

The role that Mr. Carmichael played during the Ford strike was one of attempting to head off and control the struggle of the workers that spontaneously developed against Ford exploitation.

THE REBELLION (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13 INCIDENT)

Before the day scheduled for the return to work, Ford sent out telegrams asking many workers to start early (7.00am instead of the normal 7.30am). Most of the men arrived between 7.30-8.00am to picket the entrance to the assembly plant in defiance of the union directive. About 1000 workers went back to work and 2000 remained outside.

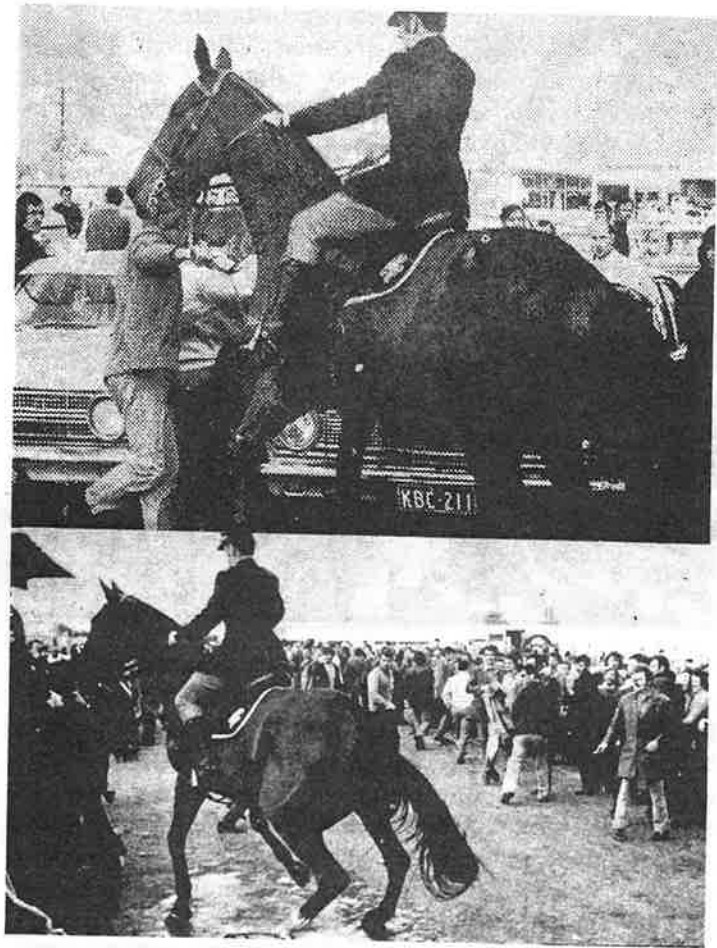
The police were called in by Ford. This action angered many workers who believed that there should be no outside interference in a workers' struggle.

However, the reality of class society is that the various forces of the State, including the police, always support the owners of the means of production against the working class. It was quite obvious whose side the police were on. Mr. Inglis, the Managing Director of Ford, Australia, was seen driving a police car with a high ranking police inspector as a passenger. On this day illusions that workers may have held about "police neutrality" were shattered.

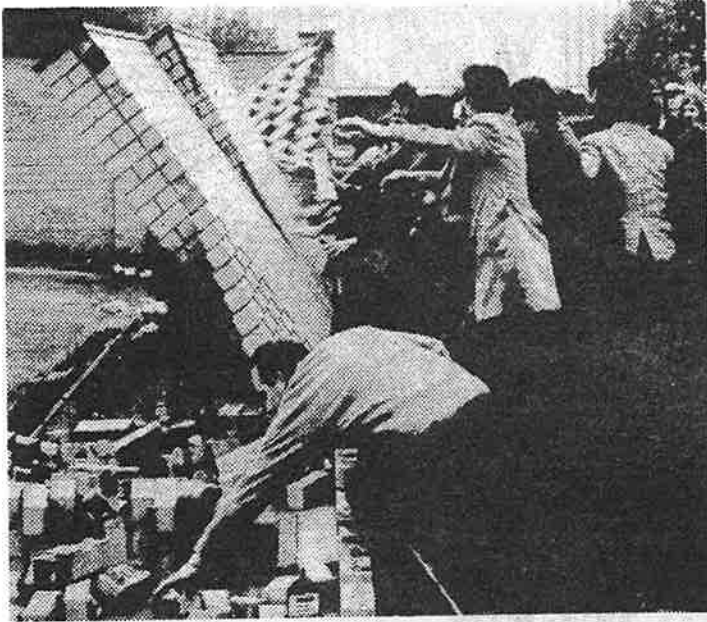
Outside the factory, a union shop steward (who had been influenced by Carmichael and Co.) told the workers that they should go back to work. He was booed and some workers attacked him. Another shop steward (who supported the workers and is popular amongst them) went to the assistance of his fellow shop steward. The police stepped in and arrested the two shop stewards for fighting. The workers became

furiously and demanded that the police release the arrested men. To protect themselves the police were forced to yield to this demand.

Ford management became afraid that the workers might go inside the factory to get the other men out or wreck the machines and so decided to close the factory gates. This action enraged the workers. The long years of oppression, exploitation and humiliation came to the surface and they vented their fury on Fords! They stoned the factory and plate glass windows, attacked a security box, pushed over a brick fence, sprayed offices with a fire hose, pushed over factory signs etc. \$10,000 damage was done to Fords.



OPPOSE POLICE INTERFERENCE IN WORKERS
STRUGGLES



Οἱ ἥρωϊκοὶ ἐργάτες τῆς FORD
γκρμίζουν ἕνα μ τούβλινο τοῖχο.

Operai della Ford distruggono un muro .

Heroic Ford workers knock down a brick wall.

More than 100 police, 20 police cars, two riot wagons, six police horses were called to the scene of destruction. The police were pelted with lettuce, stones, cans and horse manure. No charges were laid on any workers. The ruling class was shaken by this struggle and anxious to pacify the workers. Their strategy was to contain the struggle by diverting it back into the grip of the trade unions.

However, on this day union officials were afraid to visit Ford Motor Company. In a panic, the VBU sent home all the female office staff and shut up shop. A VBU meeting was scheduled for the night of Wednesday, June 13, but this meeting was cancelled!

The workers carried out their attack in high spirits. Many photos were published in the daily press showing the workers grinning from ear to ear as they attacked Ford property. The following Herald editorial shows that this particular aspect rankled the ruling class:

"That Ford affair was NOT funny."

"Victorians who have been left stranded, grossly inconvenienced and humiliated by virtually fact-of-life stoppages thought they had seen everything in industrial action — until yesterday. What kind of rancor about pay and conditions made men smile and laugh at the Ford Broadmeadows plant as they wielded steel-pole battering rams, pelted police with rubbish and stones, smashed windows, demolished a wall and uprooted shrubs? The men they were intimidating inside the plant were working (after gaining large pay rises) under orders from their union officials — who had been warned to stay safely away!"

"A veteran union chief had not seen 'a more violent industrial dispute since the depression'. Some men in those days were driven outside themselves by hunger and by despair of ever regaining self respect. That is not Broadmeadows 1973. Violent and irresponsible rioters working out frustrations upon people and property at Broadmeadows destroy both their work opportunities and all public sympathy."

— from Herald Editorial, Thursday, June 14, 1973.

The ruling class tries to control everything. The newspapers are one organ of their dictatorship. They distort the facts and tamper with emotions.

The reality is that the workers were 100% right to rebel against the rule of private property. They were right to attack Fords. And the Ford workers were right to celebrate as they vented their anger on their enemy.

Millions of Australian workers, that night and next day, smiled and laughed with them.

The vision of a Ford worker singlehanded trying to beat down a factory wall with a long handled shovel won't go away. It symbolises the fighting spirit of the Australian people, which includes migrants of all nationalities, against U.S. imperialism. This struggle will occur again and again and continue to grow until U.S. imperialism is booted out of Australia for good.

We must prepare each day in our work, by patient political education and organisation amongst the workers, for the inevitable armed clashes that will occur in the

future. Needless to say in such future clashes with the forces of the State, the ruling class will have done its preparation.

U.S. IMPERIALISM VERSUS THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE

After the workers' rebellion on Wednesday, June 13, Ford decided on a brutal two-pronged policy.

The first prong was reliance on their international economic strength, attempting to starve the workers back. Ford's world-wide profit in 1971 was \$657 million.

The second prong was reliance on the ALP, newspapers, trade unions and Arbitration to coerce the workers back and to sway public opinion.

In general, public support for the Ford strikers was very strong. One indication of this was the enthusiastic response to strike fund collectors on the street.

Progressive organisations and progressive unions gave their support to the Ford strikers. The Ford strike committee collected over \$100,000 during the nine-week strike. The Furnishing Trades Union put a ban on the repair of windows broken during the Wednesday rebellion. The Melbourne branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation put a ban on the handling of all Ford parts in Port Melbourne. Workers on the Westgate Bridge levied themselves \$5 a week during the strike. Students at Melbourne's three universities donated generously to the Ford strikers. Students at Melbourne University besieged representatives from Ford and BHP who were holding a seminar on industrial relations at the

university. Support also came from overseas. The Communist Party of Sweden (Marxist-Leninist) sent their moral and monetary support to the Ford strikers.

Despite this strong support for the strikers, Ford still managed to wear down and defeat the strikers in the protracted struggle.

Within the ALP, Acting Labour Minister Senator Bishop and the Minister of Secondary Industry and Overseas Trade, Dr. Cairns, made many moves "behind the scenes" to settle the dispute. The Federal Labour Minister, Mr. Cameron, made a belated attack on Ford Motor Company (June 24) from overseas in London. His militant rhetoric against Ford contrasted with his lack of concrete action to help the strikers.

The newspapers played their role. Excessive newspaper space was devoted to the laying off of men at Geelong. TV and newspapers sought to portray the severe hardship suffered by some strikers as a measure of the foolhardiness of strike action. For example, this was the message put across when a destitute Greek worker whose children were sleeping on the floor appeared on "A Current Affair". Such cases should have been used as a rallying cry to raise money for the strike fund.

The role which Mr. Inglis, Managing Director of Ford, Australia, visualised for the unions was stated clearly when he said:

"Once you start using violence as a negotiating tool you have anarchy."

"The union must gain control of its membership."

What he is saying is that the union bureaucrats must regain control and herd the workers back to work. We thank Mr. Inglis for his excellent lesson.

We have already detailed the treachery of union "leader" Carmichael. Without exception, the union leaders directly involved in this strike (the most active were Carmichael — AMWU; Wilson, Townsend, Hirst — all VBU) revealed a fear of workers' militancy and treachery that had to be seen to be believed.

Mr. Wilson, Federal Secretary, VBU, lost his nerve midway through the strike and went on a caravan holiday around Australia!

On the day of the rebellion, the Vehicle Builders' Union (VBU) meeting, scheduled for that night was cancelled. Union officials were afraid that the Ford workers might turn up!

On occasions Ford workers who rang up the union office were abused and told that they should not be on strike.

The VBU played a very minor role in raising money. For example, most GMH workers had to wait seven weeks for the opportunity to give money to their Ford brothers.

Some union officials (namely Hirst, Asst. State Sec. of VBU) relied on the same arguments as used by Witts (Industrial Relations, Ford) and Inglis (Managing Director, Ford), namely:

"Majority voted to go back to work." (False)

"Trouble caused by militant migrant minority due to communication barrier." (The main communication barrier was on union policy, not language.)

"On Wednesday, June 13, a majority of men actually went back to work." (Approximately 1000 went back and 2000 stayed out.)

Following the rebellion, the union bureaucrats were petrified of the Ford workers. They did not call a mass meeting for a period of 5½ weeks, from Friday, June 15 to Monday, July 23!

Instead the unions continued to follow their original wretched policy – to go after GMH. Previously, GMH had adopted an intransigent position on any wage increases. Two factors made them perform a rapid about-face.

First, GMH had attempted to break the spirit of its workers by stealing all over-award payments when the workers attended a ½ day stop-work meeting (enforcing the penalty clauses on the over-award payments). This amounted on a \$10-\$25 wage cut. However, the angry GMH workers fought back! On Friday, June 1, they sat down and refused to work. After six hours, GMH gave in and agreed to return the stolen money. Obviously GMH workers were prepared to fight, and further they had used a more effective weapon than the strike weapon.

Second, GMH had observed the Ford rebellion. They were terrified that the same thing might happen to them.

By negotiation GMH made a measly offer of \$2-\$4 increase. In a typical cynical manner, the base \$2 went to the most experienced workers, since they are less likely to leave.

By accepting this offer and successfully "selling" it to the GMH workers, in the middle of the Ford strike, the union bureaucrats continued their betrayal of the Ford workers' struggle. The Ford workers were left high and dry. The militancy of their GMH brothers had been defused. And no decent increase could go to the Ford workers in the form of a flow-on.

The way in which GMH workers were manipulated was blatantly dishonest. The union added on wage increases made by GMH in April (independent of union negotiations and offered, on their own admission, as an incentive to keep labour – 300% labour turnover rate in some sections) thus making it appear that they had negotiated an increase from \$4-\$8.

Carmichael and Townsend wrapped up the deal in flowery and complicated language including references to the "valiant struggle of the Ford workers". GMH workers were not given sufficient information or time to realise the full implications of the deal. A suggestion from the floor that a collection for Ford strikers be taken up immediately was arbitrarily rejected on the grounds "we are not prepared for this" and "we can't do two things at once".

Now the stage was set for the final sell-out. The efforts of the different reactionary forces of the State began to dovetail.

Mr. Justice Moore, president of the Arbitration Commission, recommended that Ford workers return to work on condition that he would inspect the factory and arbitrate a decision. Mr. Len Townsend, Assistant Federal Secretary of the VBU, said that Mr. Justice Moore's action was "certainly a most positive move." (The Age, July 18.)

At this stage, Hawke, president of the ACTU, broke his long silence and urged the Ford strikers to return to work. After talking to Townsend, Hawke said "It is my understanding that the meeting of delegates is likely to recommend a return to work."

On TV, Hawke referred to the Ford dispute as a "corpse".

This was the second prong of Ford's brutal policy. Ford knew in advance that they could rely on the ALP, the newspapers, the backward trade unions and arbitration to help Ford in their effort to crush the workers. They were certainly not disappointed. The forces of the State proved once again to be the faithful servant of U.S. imperialism.

THE RESULT OF THE STRUGGLE

After nine weeks of strike, on Monday, July 23, the workers voted 689-290 to go back to work, despite a shop steward recommendation to stay out. At this stage the shop stewards rebelled against the union leadership.

Why did they go back?

The workers were hungry and had been worn down, physically and mentally, by the protracted struggle.

At all stages of the strike there was a substantial minority of workers who didn't want to strike. They were confused and misled by the union bureaucrats, the press and the Ford stooges.

A large number of workers who had obtained other jobs (at least 1000), did not attend the meeting. Many of these were enraged when they learnt of the decision to return to work.

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Are the Ford workers demoralised?

According to the Vehicle Industry Award, Ford was entitled to and had indicated they would deduct all over-award payments from the first pay received after the strike. But when the workers indicated they would stage a sit down, Ford backed off.

After Justice Moore had "inspected" the factory (the workers' eyes were opened when they saw how very rapidly this cretin strode through the factory) and heard submissions from the unions and company he announced that he was "reserving his decision" and did not set a date to announce his decision.

The workers became impatient. On Friday, August 17, one month after the end of the strike, they again threatened "to sit down". This deadline was set some

weeks before. Under pressure, Justice Moore announced on the same day that his decision would be handed down the following Wednesday.

His decision gave the workers another 2% over the award, making a total 7% increase or a measly \$4.50—\$5.50 wage increase for nine weeks strike, and removed lateness penalties from the award. The other gain made during the strike was an afternoon tea break.

Union representative Townsend immediately indicated his approval of the offer.

With inflation at its present level this increase was eaten up before it reached the workers' pockets.

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Car workers are very reluctant to strike again in the light of the Ford experience. However, workers are thinking about more effective types of action, notably the sit down.

The sit down was used effectively at GMH in 1973.

The sit down is a mighty weapon, provided the workers are united, militant and determined. The management becomes very scared during a sit down. Normally, the bosses rely on the union to "control the workers", "keep them in line", "get them back to work". They worry about the safety of their machines with the workers **inside** the factory. In a strike the workers go home and negotiations are left up to the union. In a sit

down, the workers can hold meetings and act inside the factory. The struggle is taken out of the hands of the union bureaucrats and put into the workers' hands.

Overseas, notably at Fiat in Italy, the sit down (occupying a factory for weeks, sleeping and eating inside) linked with industrial sabotage has proved an effective weapon. In an effort to control the militant workers Fiat completely remodelled their factories to take the workers away from the tedium of the production line.

TASKS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

Ford workers are predominantly migrant. In Australia, out of a work force of 5.5 millions, one million are migrant — the most exploited workers.

There is so much political work to be done here. One of the aims of the Australian ruling class in importing unskilled and peasant labour from Europe (and more recently from the Middle East) was to "dilute" the militancy of the Australian working class. A proportion of migrants come to Australia partly to "escape" from a turbulent political environment. Once in Australia differences exist due to language barriers and different cultural backgrounds.

The ruling class has achieved some success in their aim of dividing the Australian working class. However, the Ford strike shows that this success is limited and conditional.

For every weapon the ruling class invents the working class, because of its direct relation to the

means of production, is in a position to devise a more effective counter weapon. However, if necessary tasks are neglected by the revolutionary movement then naturally our cause will suffer.

In Australia, necessary patient, protracted political work amongst the working class must be intensified. Conscious attempts to unite migrant and Australian workers need to be vigorously developed.

There is a crying need for more integration amongst the rank and file of the working class. Those wishing to teach the workers revolutionary politics must, at all times, be willing to learn from the workers, who have a vast reservoir of experience of exploitation, suffering and struggling.

Nevertheless, by integration we don't mean becoming exactly the same as a typical worker. This would often mean giving up politics. Rather it means becoming capable of working at two levels, both as a cadre and an ordinary person. There is especially a need for this in industries with a high concentration of workers, eg. car, food, liquor, clothing.

A most important task facing the Australian revolutionary movement is to create revolutionary organisation amongst rank and file workers. Unless this develops we will never be in a position to deliver major blows to capitalism.

In the workplace, there is a contradiction between the tasks of patient, protracted work at the level of the masses and the correct idea of boldly arousing the

masses and appealing to their dormant revolutionary enthusiasm and their enthusiasm for national independence and socialism. The necessity for patient, protracted political work has to be emphasised—because we must pay attention to this work — but it also has to be qualified. The appeal to revolutionary enthusiasm should be made in the case of certain advanced workers or generally when special circumstances arise (during a strike or sit down or during the Middle East war to an Arab worker). Dogmatic rules cannot be made here. Only when we genuinely make the effort to integrate with all types of workers — advanced, middle and backward — will we gain the knowledge and experience to judge when and how to “boldly arouse the masses”.

Dangers do exist. In overcoming the dangers of dogmatism and impetuosity, we should avoid the danger of lagging behind. Thoughts or habits may appear such as “Seeking a comfortable life”, “It doesn't pay to be a cadre”, “Fear of criticism by reactionaries and backward people”, “Fear of being labelled”. To capitulate to these thoughts is to voluntarily impose on yourself political castration. We can fully integrate with the people and yet hold and propagate our viewpoint in a logical and convincing way, backed by correct fact and sound argument.

POLITICAL WORK AND THE TRADE UNIONS

We have noted the great contempt displayed by car workers towards the car industry unions. We have described how officials of the unions involved in the

Ford strike consistently acted in the interest of Ford and U.S. imperialism. We have stated the necessity to create revolutionary organisation amongst rank and file workers.

The great majority of Australian workers are organised in trade unions. So, it is extremely important to have a correct approach to political work inside trade unions and the relation between political work inside and outside trade unions.

The strengthening of trade unions is an important part in the life of the Australian working class in their struggle to keep their heads above water.

But trade union politics alone (ie. that conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation) does not in the least challenge the whole capitalist system and in fact serves to give the system some credibility in the eyes of the worker.

Revolutionary politics can, and must, be introduced into trade unions by genuine Communists, who are properly integrated with rank and file workers and have their support. There have been good examples of this in Australia in recent years — the seamens' strike against U.S. bombing of Vietnam; various wharfie political stoppages (against the gaoling of anti-nazis); the conservation struggles of the builders' labourers. But it must be admitted that the political strike is the exception to normal union activity.

Strong pressure to adapt to the system, operate on all trade union officials; the higher the position the stronger the pressure. These pressures include:

- The environment in which the trade union leader lives and works is strongly against his/her being a revolutionary leader. Day in and day out, probably seven days a week, he/she is preoccupied with trade union problems — wages, hours, conditions, workers' compensation etc.
- The bribe of a higher wage and the attraction of an "official career" (more interesting work and being in the limelight).

Strong pressures to conform, exist on ordinary workers too. Being a worker, working day in and day out, perhaps having to look after a family, probably having received a poor, formal education, perhaps not being able to read or speak English, often being too tired to study current events or ideology — these things spontaneously generate and regenerate a narrow outlook and indifference towards other political struggles.

Historically, the Australian Communist movement has made important errors on the trade union question. In the situation of economic crisis of the 1930s deficiencies in the work of the Communist Party were:

- Did not sufficiently link the workers' struggle (against unemployment, evictions, wage cuts, speed-up) to the revolutionary struggle for socialism;
- Did not organise the Communists effectively amongst the workers.

The CPA saw its task far too much in electing Communists to trade union positions and leaving it at that. This contributed to the isolation of Communists because the hard day to day contact with the vast middle and backward sections of the workers was not carried out.

The genuine Communist, who the workers will look to as a leader, is a tribune of the people, not merely an efficient trade union secretary.

Our political work should be directed primarily to the rank and file workers and great attention to detail should be paid here. Friendships should be made with all types of workers—the politically advanced, intermediate and backward. Efforts to build up social contact with all types of workers should be made. Only in this way can the Communist develop a natural relationship with his fellow worker, a relationship conducive to both learning from and teaching the working class. The whole process must be viewed in a protracted manner.

An important aim (but only one of many aims) is to set up a rank and file shop committee. The authority of a shop steward can be used to assist here.

But in using legal opportunities to develop workers' militancy, the necessity to keep some cadres "hidden" from the boss should not be forgotten. The relationship between underground revolutionary work and open revolutionary work has to be mastered.

A huge emphasis has to be laid on reliance on the masses on the shop floor. This involves a constant development of communication with rank and file workers on a mass basis. It is not an easy task, but the skill can be learned. Even if a union is an ally in a struggle the principle of reliance on the masses should not be slackened.

