

59 E C H A N G E S

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This issue n° 59 must take place after the issue n°58 and is the missing link in the English edition; it is the translation of an article on the Ford strike published in French two years ago .We have added some complements to put this translation up to date .

STRIKES IN THE CAR INDUSTRY 1987-1990.
Internationalisation
of Capital , of Industrial Relations and of Class Struggle.

A WEALTH OF CONTRADICTIONS

After the long miners strike (march 84-march 85)(1) ,after the equally long fight around Wapping during the struggle with the press group Murdoch-News International-(2) (janvier 86-janvier 87) , financial capital found the same conservative clan winning the elections again (june 87) : it could hope to have the free hand it had already had for eight years to eliminate what it thought to be the last traces of the 'English disease ' ,(3)

End of summer 87 brought a cold wind on this triumphalism;a slow rebirth of strikes , even of wildcat strikes and some big conflicts during the winter 87-88 pushed the wildcat strikes ghost out of the

(1)on the miners' strike : 'To the bitter end 'Grève des mineurs en Grande Bretagne(mars 84-mars 85)'-H.Simon -Acratie (in French) and articles in most of the Echanges issues between n° 40 and 50

(2)see all issues of Echanges in 86 ans 87 , the collection of Picket and the pamphlet Paper Boy (review in Echanges n° 53)

(3)Lutte de classe autonome en Grande Bretagne -C.Brendel-Echanges

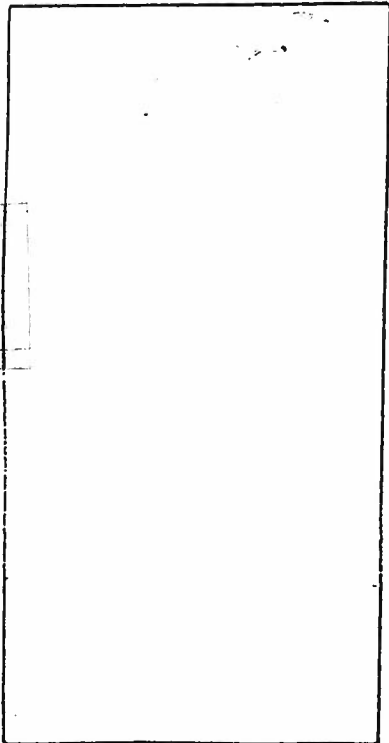
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N°59



periodical
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to



cupboard .The Ford strike filled the papers with recollections of the 'winter of discontent '(78-79) when a Ford strike broke the dam erected for years to stop the autonomous movement of struggle.The overflow of strikes swept away the Labour-Trade Union partnership ;to date it has not yet fully recovered its credibility about its ability to manage the capitalist society i e to dominate workers through methods other than a strict State control on wages .Nobody tried to recall that in 1972-74 a conservative government -Heath's - was swept away all the same and with him the Industrial Relation Act supposed all the same to stop wildcat strikes.Yet , present class struggle -a widespread general strike similar to the Ford or the dockers or miners strikes in the past or any other more insidious form of struggle- could place the Thatcher government in the same situation.

The Ford strike, officially begins on the 8th february 88 and ends on the 21st with some management concessions(enough for the unions to claim a 'victory '); most of the restructuring in labour relations were maintained. This strike was far from the 1978 Ford strike.Then wages were the focus point; the Labour government tried desperately to limit their increase imposing a minimum in what was called the "social pact" negotiated with the Trade Union.For the first time wages were linked closely to productivity ; the low ceiling of wage rise could be overtaken only if the productivity was increased. The united struggle spreading all around Ford was the reaction against this pressure on wages and consequently for years a lower standard of living.The strike was immediately a political strike not because the workers were against the government, but their strike on wages was against the policy aimed at the salvation of English industrial capital;the direct management of essential industrial branches and the strict control of the price of labour commodity were the credo of the Labour Party and of the Trade Union.

The conservative governments with Thatcher have followed the same policy since 1979 though with a different method and pushing ahead the interests of international capital rather than of properly British capital .Getting rid of all kinds of industrial protectionism,leaving the so called international 'market laws' playing without restriction aimed only to bring pressure on the workers to oblige them to bending front of an increased exploitation (reduced wages and intensification of work) and then attempting to increase the rate of profit , 'Privatisations' and North Sea oil brought money for the State and so allowed a diminution of the tax pressure on firms directly increasing profits.All that was completed by new industrial laws aimed at allowing the same 'market laws' to play out their functions on the 'labour

So the comment incriminates the 'British work culture ' adding that this situation was not at all unique in the UK and not limited to the construction industry .To come back to the car industry it was revealed in october 1990 that Jaguar (taken over by Ford at the end of 1989) was seeking to reform this 'shop floor culture '.Some examples were given , for instance that the employees stopped work after they had produced the specified number of cars in a day '.Ford's proposals for Jaguar were exactly the same it tried unsuccessfully to implement in the 1988 agreement and again in the 1990 agreement ; removal of job and union demarcations, take on individual responsibility for quality by seeking out and repairing faults, reduce unofficial work stoppages ...If we consider that Jaguar was part of the Leyland empire which was subject about eight years ago to a drastic restructuring with a strong manager Edwards ,we can get some idea of the success of restructuring and of the size of class struggle in the UK .Considering the Jaguar -Ford proposals , a line worker judged them 'totally unreasonable' adding that 'Inspection is the job of inspectors , not us ; our job is to fit components'.

The conclusion about working practices can again be given to Ford.In a report leaked in june 90, Ford management is highly critical of the performance in the past decade in Dagenham (supposed in 79 to have a better 'work culture' than Halewood);'By the late 80's Dagenham had become unreliable and at times almost out of control .Continuous labour disruption , poor quality and adverse cast performances ...".So class struggle is still at work with more or less the same forms as ten years ago and it has without doubt contributed a lot to the present state of affair of the British capitalism .It raises all the same the question of a political change to try to impose on the workers at first a new limitation of wage rise and , again with the pressure of unemployment , a new screwing on 'working practices '.No doubt that ,if the government and capital try to go that way at once as apparently they proclaim it , struggles will not stay at the rank and file and factory level but will take a more general stance with political consequences .

H.S. 10/88 and 10/90

(the complements to the original text were written before the fall of Thatcher,which of course could be directly related to the situation we have described; it will be the subject of another text)

IS THE UNITED KINGDOM A DIFFERENT COUNTRY ?

In 1979 an industrial relations officer discussing Halewood could declare that this place near Liverpool was 'a different country populated by cowboys... a kind of underdeveloped area, a part of Britain left behind in the second industrial revolution... Workers had lower material aspirations than their colleagues in Dagenham and much higher preference for leisure'. But was this true only for the Liverpool district? Was it not the same, with differences of course all over the U.K.?

According to another manager in the same Ford factory at Halewood, ten years later 'Halewood is a lot healthier than it was but it is still not completely fit... labour at Halewood has not lost its ability to enter into conflict with the employers...'

In March 90 a study concerning the building industry could give an answer to both questions:

-what are exactly these working practices which some sociologists also call 'work culture'?

-are they limited to some specific branches of industry or to some localisations?

An American building firm managed the construction of two almost identical plants for Eastman Kodak in Workington (Wales) and in Columbia (South Carolina). The productivity in the American site was 42% higher than that of the UK counterparts even if by British standards, the Workington job was one of the best according to a manager: 'Relations with the union were excellent...we have very few industrial relations problems and quality of work was excellent...'

'The US workers were virtually working bell to bell... Few people were seen to be standing around aimlessly. Nothing was lost at meal or break times. There were no coffee breaks, a drink when needed being taken at the workplace. Lunch was taken during the half an hour break at any suitable resting place...'

'British employees... lost time at start and finish times and morning tea and lunch break... 90% of the day was spent on productive activity in the US, 60% in the UK... Welders for example went on strike for eight days at Workington after one of their colleagues was given a final warning for threatening behaviour to a supervisor...'

Unit labour costs were more or less the same on both sites in the US and UK and there was no significant differences in working time.

market. Mainly workers were prevented from using their class solidarity and the wildcat strikes so they could no longer disturb a capitalist organisation forcibly engaged fighting a fierce international competition. These laws did not aim to break union powers, as the political and union left pretended, but on the contrary to reinforce them as organisation ruling the labour force. They were practically compelled to impose on their members and on all workers in general a discipline conforming to the present interests of the firms, i.e. the policy chosen at that very moment to try to increase the rate of profit. In other words, the Trade Union became a tool to directly repress the rank and file movement; the miners strike and the battle around Wapping had shown that it was not that easy for the unions to use this new power but, with time it was working. Capital could believe that new fields were open with hope of an increased profitability. Yet it was clear that these 'victories' did not draw a pattern for the future and that class struggle could at any moment pull down a fragilely built structure..

The opening of the English market of capital and commodities to international world capital had immediately produced some effects: a spectacular jump of unemployment (one million more for only 1980) and a much lower inflation when low prices of the world market prevailed. The pressure of unemployment and consumer price stability allowed the lowering of labour cost. More than ever, wage rises were linked to productivity increase but in a different way: formerly it was a government policy with the central control of wage rise; now every company was given the tools to impose such a policy at its own level. Management had ever more 'liberty' to be even more strict in pushing the balance of struggle towards its own side. The miners' strike and the conflict with the London press unions were good examples of the use of this 'freedom'.

The government has moved the conflict between capital and labour onto the 'free market'. The advantage for capital and the government was evident considering the forms of the class struggle. For a time they were not exposed to a general action opposed to a national wage policy but to separate conflicts arising from separate firms, even from one factory as in Leyland or one pit as with British Coal. A strike wave was almost excluded since the workers' interests were not dealt with nationally nor even according to the branch of industry but at firm or even factory level; capital could even reinforce this peculiarity by using juridical loopholes as did Murdoch in the conflict with News International. The new laws forbidding solidarity strikes were commonly considered the main cause of the failure to spread the local or branch

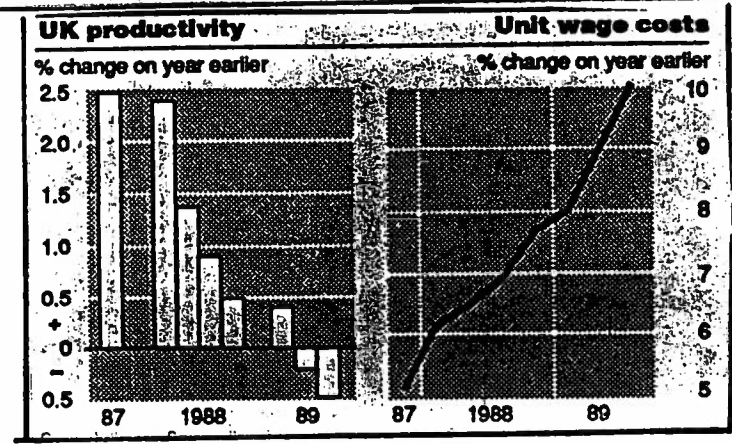
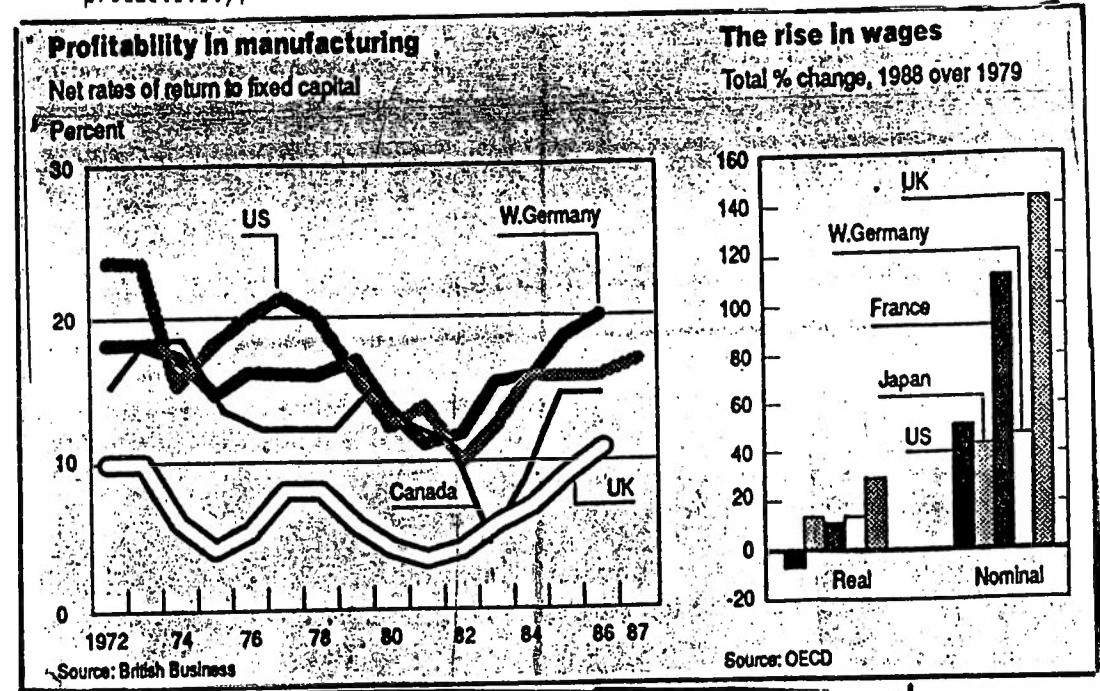
conflicts :no law has ever prevented a strike from extending when the conditions exist for such extension;it was not this law which prevented solidarity strikes but the new economic structures that capitalism and technical evolution imposed on firms for pressing ahead in world competition. Every production unit had to be considered as a separate unit even if it belongs to a firm with a lot of similar units in the same country or in the world. The new law was the consequence and the protection of this new situation and helped to reinforce these factory particularisms. A wave of strikes brought about by a strong real solidarity could only be supported by the powerful unity of a common immediate interest :such a situation does not exist presently , not because of the efficiency of the legal system but because the evolution of the restructuring of all industries has not reproduced the conditions for such a unity. Another consequence of this evolution was to enlarge the gap between the social movement and the political and union movement which becomes more or less obsolete. In such a complex situation every strike could appear isolated in a peculiar context because it has to deal with the specific situation of each factory even when looking for wage increase, this increase being always linked to the local specific improvement of productivity . Everywhere in every industry a common effort associates managers and union leaders in finding the specific peculiar criteria to adapt the labour relations to the new production techniques and to international competition . For a time , this policy , strongly helped by the international economic background allowed all leaders to claim successes. The 23 april 1987, the Employment Secretary explained at a CBI meeting that U K had come into a new era of good labour relationship. To sanction his words , he could effectively quote a lot of example : for instance Vauxhall (General Motors) where the time lost in strike had fallen from 27% of working time in 1976 to 1% in 1986 .

THE RETURN OF THE ENGLISH DISEASE: again wildcat strikes in numbers.

More than the starting point of a wave of strikes , the Ford strike in 1988 has to be seen as the piling up of quite a few different elements developing separately or mixed up throughout the previous year in a number of conflicts not only in the car industry but in other branches too. These elements can be related to two main points which are at the center of the Ford strike:

-a new dynamics to keep on with the profits in high international competition. The opening of the borders to international trade had accelerated a process already more advanced than in other european

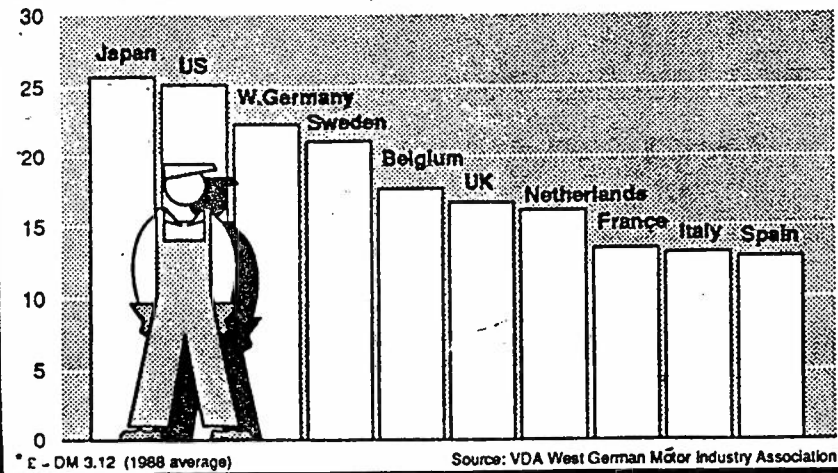
This fundamental question of productivity is closely linked with what the management calls 'working practices ' and was years ago at the center of the discussions about the 'English disease'. The following charts casts more light upon the core of the problem of British productivity.



But this question of an increase of wages higher than the inflation rate is only part of the problem. If we consider the following chart giving labour costs in the motor industry in the main car producing countries, we can see the the highest labour costs corresponds to the highest productivity. Ford can again give an example : a study carried out at Ford in Cologne shows that cars are cheaper for the company to produce in Germany than in France or Britain despite considerably lower wages in those two countries.

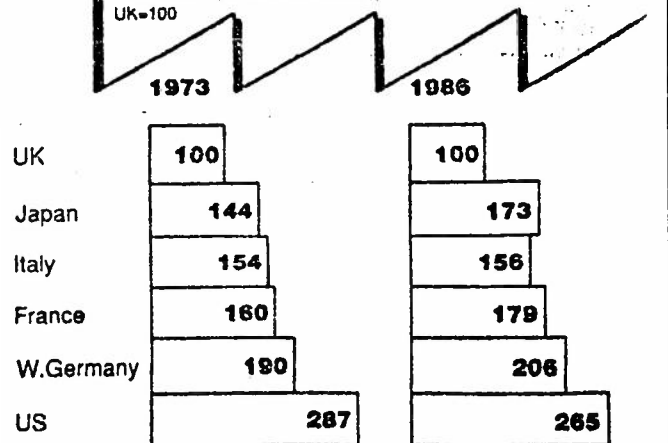
Motor industry labour costs

Gross hourly wage in 1988 (D-Mark*)



Labour productivity*

Output per man hour



Source NIESP

* In manufacturing

countries. What is called here 'the Nissan factor' (not only in the car industry) brings to the forefront consequences which will be determinant in future struggles. On one hand the creation of only one kind of proletarian worker with the disappearance of all demarcations between unskilled, semi skilled, professional, technicians and even white collars and of low management; on the other hand a modernisation of the union structures not because of the disappearance of the professional unions but because of the new function of a modern union exactly adapted to the need of a modern factory and to its economical and technical dynamics.

-the internationalisation of the problems not because Ford is a multinational but because modern capital is international and can deplace its site of exploitation to where the prospects of profit are better; the firm strategy is elaborated according to quite a few elements always mobile, among them on one hand the fight with the other capitalist groups (sometimes identified with State conflicts) and the currencies movement, on the other hand the class struggle.

We can get an example of what has just been written by considering only the car and car components industry. In January 1987 a conflict broke out at the Caterpillar factory in Uddington near Glasgow in Scotland. This multinational has suddenly declared the factory will be closed soon, some months only after having announced a plan for the extension of this factory. It is, they say, part of a world restructuring of the group: its 1,200 workers will be made redundant, buildings will be sold and the machinery, all the goods will be transferred to other european factories. Immediately, the workers occupy the factory to block the transfer: at the end of march, they are 800 involved in this sit in, the white collars having accepted their redundancy money. To show what their fight aims at, they push ahead the building up of a symbolic 'white tractor' for a developing country. They have to fight hard against the opposition of the union national bureaucracy; against a court injunction they decide with a small majority to go ahead with the sit-in till the end of april. Then a AEU bureaucrat Jimmy Airlie (ex-member of the CP and famous for having broken in 1971 the Clyde shipyard strike with a 'work in') persuades them to leave the factory on the fake promise of some obscure and unreliable proxy to buy the factory; some months later it is closed for ever. What will appear in this strike, we shall find in other struggles: the up to the end resistance in a wildcat strike with strong financial local support (15,000 to 20,000 £ will be collected each week); nevertheless a complete isolation of the strike, the uncertainties about the activity of a multinational able to change its mind suddenly and to move elsewhere even when a high rate of fixed

capital is involved , the support of the unions in getting the workers to accept this situation .

The 23 april 1987 , at the Luton Vauxhall factory (GM) 48 welders stop work on a question of bonus ;2,500 workers are sent home.In may and june a number of small strikes on this question of bonus follows the transfer of the van assembly line from Bedford -Luton in a joint venture with the japanese Isuzu;a general strike breaks up the 16/10 which ends the 29 with some concessions .The following 11 november, 4,400 workers are going on strike at Ellesmere Port near Liverpool still on the bonus and another wildcat strike burst out at Luton in the part distribution center;600 workers were on strike for 24 hours .

In Coventry -Jaguar factory , the 17 august , 60 forklift drivers stopped work in solidarity with one of them suspended 24 hours for a professional mistake;1,200 have to be laid off.The Rover factories are plagued from the very beginning of october with a lot of conflicts : the 9, 150 begin a wildcat strike against the sacking of a shop steward of the Longbridge factory (near Birmingham), for a very short time because the management gives in .The 16 november , 3,500 in wildcat strike against a proposal to change retirement financing; similar strikes blocked some suppliers among them Lucas .The 15 january, 18 night shift drivers carrying parts to the other factories in the group go on strike to oppose a proposal to remove part of their work by rail; 50 day shift workers follow them; Cowley and Longbridge lay off workers for three days when an agreement ends the conflict .

The Ford strike breaks up at this very moment;its size (42,000 employees in 13 factories,15% of all car workers)pushes all these creeping strikes into the background ;they will not stop and will relay this central conflict when it is settled.

HOW TO CHOOSE A POLICY ?

to rationalise the labour management structures ?

33,000 out fo 42,000 Ford employees are workers.Ford is the second car builder in the UK but one of the first european ones; in its UK factories work about 1/3 of its european workers, but the UK is its chief market supplied for a large part with imported cars.Most of its UK factories are still unionised with what remains from the old professional unions;21,000 unskilled workers are affiliated to T & G, most of the professional are AEU members but all the electricians are affiliated to EETPU.The Ford 'blue book ' 'recognise' 8 unions for all

'In spite of a decade of legislation intended to make the labour market more flexible , in spite of the fall in the number of traditional male jobs in manufacturing industry, the Ford pay talks have retained their old mystique'. During the winter of discontent (1978-1979)the class struggle had swept away the labour wage policy in a movement unified by the attempt at a national control of wage rises.The subsequent conservative government taking the lesson of this disastrous period for British capitalism tried the opposite policy with the credo of non intervention in the wage agreements which had to be discussed at factory level .The decentralisation of pay bargaining has long been a favourite theme of the government campaign to ensure that wages were more responsive to the labour market . The result was effectively an apparent division of class struggle as the workers had to fight locally and separately at factory or company level.But on the other hand , it was more difficult to keep a lid on wage inflation and to avoid a copy cat effect.So the new policy worked for a short time when redundancies or threat of them were used as a pressure to oblige workers to accept lower wage rises.But quickly , all the agreements brought the rate of wage rise above the rate of inflation and the lack of skilled workers (and even unskilled) , linked to the consequences of the other restrictive aspects of government policy,obliged most companies to give , even without open fight , individual or collective supplementary wages rises simply to keep their factory or office going .

Between 1979 and 1988 real earnings in the UK rose by 28% more than double the increase in Japan , West Germany or France .The manufacturing 's share of fixed capital formation fell from an already low share of 18% in 1979 to a mere 13% in 1988 even with an output per man rising at close 5% a year from 1981.The wage increase was supposed according to the government policy to be financed by an increased productivity ; at the end of 1989 , the rate of manufacturing productivity increase slowed to 3% when the wage increase was about 10% .In october 89 a comment stated that ' the bulk of the increase income generated by higher productivity has accrued not to profits but to those lucky enough to remain employed whereupon it was promptly spent'.This was a clear recognition of the balance of struggle with the workers having taken during this period any opportunity to get more money from their work even though they were subject to a lot of external and internal pressures and most of the time did not fight in open struggles for better wages .

THE OTHER CAR FACTORIES HAD THE SAME PROBLEMS AS FORD

To consider only this period autumn-winter 87-88, quite a lot of small or more extensive conflicts brought us proof that Ford was not an isolated case in the car industry. All the British car builders were concerned by the same kind of rank and file resistances and claims. The following report of small strikes may perhaps seem insignificant but gives the measure of what other general reports would confirm later:

- On October 6 1987 Jaguar try to transfer one worker from one production line to another; 3,500 workers walked out at Coventry. The transfer is immediately called off.

- On November 6 1987 Vauxhall (General Motors) tried to introduce what has failed at Ford: individual bonus with a system called 'individual estimate on six months according to performance'. Strikes broke out which brought an agreement on January 7 1988 on wages (between 11 and 14%) and some changes in working practices; but on January 18, 800 electricians are on strike in defence of a shop steward sacked for having used a photocopying machine without permission; 2,000 are laid off and an agreement on reinstatement ends the strike.

- Land Rover has discussion about wages from the beginning of February 88; some wildcat strikes are on when it is offered a two year deal with 14%; the strike is total from February 2 and a journalist could write on February 20: 'The simplicity of the strike is alarming; it is a situation in which workers see their company getting more profit and asking for a share of it'. The strike lasts five weeks and ends with a 79% vote of acceptance of some cosmetic changes above the initial proposals. Though it is not said, we can ascertain that the strike was the expression of a strong rank and file power which will not end with the strike.

- On March 7 1988 a 12 day strike of 700 workers cripples the Renault Dunstable truck plant; they resume work with 14% over two years and 38 hour week.

We could go ahead with more examples all through 88, 89 and 90 in the car factories. We think it better to turn now to a more general view of the consequences of this class struggle in the car industry and in the British economy as a whole.

**THE REAL EARNINGS ALWAYS ABOVE INFLATION
A GOVERNMENT POWERLESS TO CONTROL WAGES RISES**

At the time of the Ford creeping strikes (February-March 1990), a comment underlines:

the Ford staff. The 13 Ford factories depend for their general working conditions on a Joint National Negotiating Committee (NJNC), an official negotiating committee in which 12 unions have their representatives. This committee settled by Ford and agreed by unions interests both; for the management it is a unique place to discuss everything but with the inconvenience of unifying the struggles in all the English factories; for the unions it gives power to the top bureaucracy on the local unions mainly in the control of struggles at national level (drowning the local wildcat struggles in controlled general token movements) but with the inconvenience of dividing power conflicts between union bureaucracies and of wildcat local conflicts. On the other hand in a quickly transforming industry, such a committee is a brake to rationalising the labour management structures.

The 9 October 1987, Ford Motor US unveils an agreement with the only AEU union for the control of workers to be engaged in a new factory to be built in two years at Dundee (Scotland) to make electronic components for Ford Europe. This new factory would be managed directly from Detroit and will escape the control of Ford Europe and of the unions involved in its factories, especially of Ford UK and UK unions. Openly, Ford follows the way already traced by the Japanese firms (Hitachi in Wales, Nissan near Newcastle). With this example and certainly more to come, Ford could escape the complex and out of date situation of industrial relations in the other UK factories, which for a lot of reasons, primarily class struggle, could not be removed from today to tomorrow. This new factory with a new juridical situation (what Murdoch used in Wapping) opens the road. The moment it was put on the table it was chosen without doubt as a master card in the discussions to be opened for the renewal of the agreement covering all the UK Ford factories.

The 29 October Ford puts forward its proposals for the two year contract ending last day of November:

- a three year contract

- 4.25% more on the basic wage every year which could be revised according to inflation.

- no demarcation lines between jobs; every professional could be posted anywhere on the line even for unskilled work.

- a revision of the wage system bringing progressively white and blue collars into the same simplified grid.

- complete transformation of the foreman job which will have only to coordinate between teams of production and look after the maintenance of machinery and buildings on a larger scale; though having control

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over the leaders of the working teams, they will no longer interfere directly in the production process.

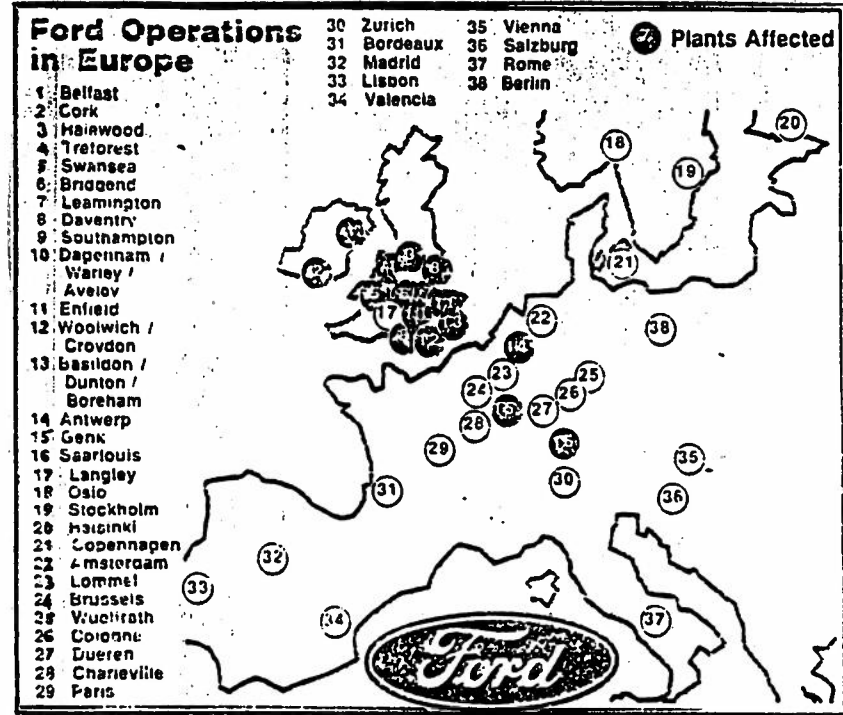
-The workers, unskilled and professionals will be organised in teams in which they could be affected to any job (production and maintenance); these workteams will work with the supervision of a 'team leader' appointed according to his 'qualifications'; this 'leader' will decide on the organisation, the distribution of workload, on the supplying of the line and on the control of production (mainly of the quality); he will receive 10% over his basic wage.

-Groups of discussion gathering together white and blue collars will discuss quality at every level of production.

-a pool of workers will provide immediate replacement for any missing worker (total flexibility)

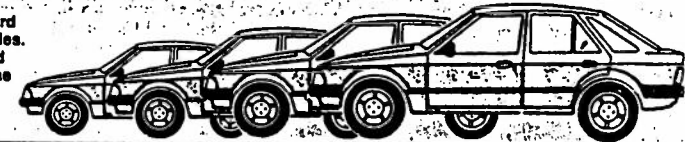
-recruitment of ancillary workers, which appears more the officialisation of a practice when workers ask for the total suppression of this category.

For the Ford workers, these two proposals for the new Dundee factory and for all the other UK factories, contain big differences. The new workers engaged for Dundee will have no choice other than to wear the ready made suit cut by Ford US and AEU; the workers of Ford UK have still the choice to vote or not for the new proposals and in doing so will retain a certain power in the discussion of their conditions of work. In fact, the difference is not as great as it appears: in the new factory, workers will always have this power even if it is not 'officially' recognised; in the old system, the workers don't have the possibility of rejecting the main core of the new proposals and the deep transformation of their conditions of work, even if they succeed in preserving part of the 'advantages' they have kept till now; for both, it will be the balance of struggle which will decide the new size of their exploitation. The unions are placed in a very different situation. Their real power is only the power coming from workers and from capital, as intermediary in the sale of the labour power. Their structure and the content of their function is not the result of some idealist projection but the direct product of the system itself and first of the methods of production working in this system for the domination and management of labour. The resistance to the transformations proposed by capital, Ford in our case, could come from the bureaucracy itself (threatened in its very existence) and from



Building the Escort

Global manufacturing at work. The parts of this Ford car come from at least 12 different Western countries. In turn these are increasingly supplied by the Third World. Final assembly, at present, takes place in the Netherlands.



Source: World Bank

CANADA Glass, radio		
SWEDEN Hose clamps, cylinder bolt, exhaust down pipes, pressings, hardware	UNITED STATES EGR valves, wheel nuts, hydraulic tappet	
FRANCE Alternator, cylinder head, master cylinder, brakes, underbody coating, weatherstrips, clutch release bearings, steering shaft and joints, seat pads and frames, transmission cases, clutch cases, tires, suspension bushes, ventilation units, heater, hose clamps, sealers, hardware	JAPAN Starter, alternator, cone and roller bearings, windscreen washer pump	NORWAY Exhaust flanges
GERMANY Lenses, pistons, exhaust, ignition switches, front disc distributor, weatherstrips, rocker arm, speedometer, fuel tank, cylinder bolt, cylinder head gasket, front wheel knuckles, rear wheel spindle, transmission cases, clutch, steering column, battery, glass		

The 89-90 Ford strikes, though not a total strike and not at all the locomotive of a train of strikes, was perhaps even more significant than the previous ones of the class struggle in the U.K.:

- They followed a lot of strikes in other branches of industry, most of them wildcat strikes, about wages and working conditions.
- They were a challenge to the government policy of restraining wage rises as were most of these other strikes.
- They were a successful strong resistance to persistent attempts to eliminate or reduce what was euphemistically called 'working practices'.

The Ford strikes 87-88 and 89-90 happened against a background of two different kinds of strikes:

- long strikes (Ferries mainly P & O -1988- see Echanges n°58; Post Office strike, September 88, see Echanges n° 58; Health workers in 88-89, see Echanges n°60; dockers, summer 89 see Echanges n°62; ambulance men 89-90, see Echanges n°64), which more or less failed in their attempt to break a deadlock about wages or conditions of work but were nevertheless highly significant of the combativity of British workers
- creeping strikes in a mixture of wildcat and official strikes as in a series of tube and railways 24 hour strikes in the summer 89; quite a few rolling strikes from council and government employees, lightning strikes at the BBC, ...etc...

This situation has to be related to the engineering unions attempt to capitalise this rank and file discontent to bring fresh blood to the somewhat crippled unions. A big union campaign was launched with the support of a national shop steward committee for a 35 hour week through all the engineering industry, 12 target companies being selected for this action: some gave up before any action had taken place; some others after a few token strikes; only British Aerospace had to cope with a long strike in spring 90 before giving up. In fact the 35 hour week in most cases means, not really a shorter working week but the possibility of increased wages through more overtime; Bill Jordan, president of AEU could declare that 'shorter working week led to a resurgence in productivity'.

The charts published at the end of 87 give a clear insight into what was the main preoccupation of British industry and of the workers resistances throughout the manufacturing industry which performances were described at the same moment as 'still very low by international standards'.

the power (i.e. the 'advantages') threatened by the restructuring. The two Ford proposals are two different ways to get the same result of a greater efficiency in the management organisation of labour. The transformation of the supervisor function is on the same line as the introduction of the one union system: why 18 unions when there is only one category of workers, why supervisors when automation and workteams integrate most of the control functions. The new methods of work mean a complete change in the role of the unions.

So the Ford strike will show two different aspects though linked by their causes: on one hand, a violent conflict between the different unions (more or less curtailed by the strike itself), on the other hand the fight of various professional categories to preserve their situation, sometime unified in the general strike, sometimes isolated in sectorial or local strikes. Of course, both aspects will see conflicts between the rank and file and the union bureaucracy. We can compare such a situation with what appeared during the miners strike in 84-85: an industrial union NUM divided into two currents. One current, the majority of NUM, supported by rank and file historical traditions and different conditions of exploitation looked like the only one dealing with class struggle. Another current, the minority UDM playing its 'modernism' in an apparently total collaboration with the management. Of course the reality was far more complicated than this schematic description. For the Dundee factory, a traditional union AEU (which up to recent years was a professional union more or less shrinking out with the disappearance of professionals in metal work) opens the way to a union evolution and not a "scab" union as UDM or a 'traitor' union like EETPU in the Wapping conflict. The 'Dundee operation' had good godfathers: a Labour member, Laird working in the Scottish Development Agency and Jimmy Airlie, main negotiator for AEU, famous for his interventions to 'solve industrial conflicts' and mentioned above when performing such a function in the Caterpillar closure: both went secretly to Detroit to negotiate the deal with Ford US. A tempest of protest shook the TUC and the Ford NJNC. To fully explain the situation, better to quote these two 'modernists' words:

Laird: "How to retain a multinational when the unions are not able of adopt a common line"

Airlie: "It is a major step for the unions"

Murphy (leader of T & G union): "It is impossible to negotiate with a firm which is legally eliminating you".

It is not by chance that the two unions involved in this 'modernisation process' are the two professional unions EETPU and AEU; the elimination of professionals means less members and they have to poach members elsewhere in order to maintain their power inside the TUC and Labour

Party; the members number means access to the top level bureaucracy of these organisations ;it is a matter of power.All the rest is a problem of 'circumstances .If EETPU has signed an agreement and a non-strike clause with Hitachi in Wales and secretly recruited scabs for Wapping, the lorry drivers of TNT ,subsidiary of News International , all affiliated to T & G have built the Murdoch victory regularly crossing the pickets.But it is the same T & G which will wreck the Dundee agreement because such an agreement extended to all UK Ford factory will deprive it of most of its members.On the other hand we can quote a Japanese style agreement signed by the national leaders of five unions including T & G and AEU the previous 6 july -and practically imposed upon the workers against th shop stewards advice - for the GM Bedford factory ; this agreement obtained through a closure blackmail went far further than Ford US new proposals .

HOW CLASS STRUGGLE FOLLOWS THE CAPITAL PROCESS

'The problem is not to know if changes occurred but if these changes had the needed size ' (Financial Times 11/2/86)

This quotation of a financial analyst on the present state of UK capital could be valid for class struggle too.It is difficult to estimate what remains of the 'English disease ' after ten years of attempts to eradicate it .To take Ford UK as an example we can ask if the manipulation of dubious figures are not only a way of conditioning workers for their acceptance of the proposed deep transformations of their working conditions .More and more the blackmail about closure to impose 'sacrifices' on the workers is replaced by more direct calls to 'support' the management in order to keep a certain level of profits for capital presented as the only way to invest and to keep (or even increase) the level of employment .

When Ford propose this new contract end of october 1987 ,new figures are published to give bad conscience to the english workers :to build a Fiesta or an Escort or a Sierra , it needs 65% more time in the UK than in Germany.Ford UK factories would need 2,5 more time than the Japanese factories to build a similar car; Nissan would soon produce on its UK lines cars including 550 \$ of unit work cost against 890\$ average for Ford UK at Halewood for instance .But on 11 february 88 when the strike is going to its end ,a confidential Ford Europe report unveils that in 1987 Ford GB built 28 cars per worker against 26 at Nissan and 64 working hours were needed to build a car against 110 in 1980 .All these figures are not especially convincing because we never know if they deal with the same factors;the production cost ,if it is estimated in dollars take in account the relative value of the currencies and the part of the

The best way to describe the situation is to refer to some press articles:

'...Hitherto the industrial action has been confined chiefly to Halewood and an unofficial strike by 550 craftsmen ...the impact of the indefinite strike started yesterday by around 1600 could quickly be felt at several other of Ford's 21 UK plants and subsequently in significant parts of the rest of the company's European production network...Halewood vehicle assembly was hit and since January 16 no vehicle has been produced there...On January 18 1990 ,the dispute was joined by maintenance craftsmen at the Halewood transmission plant...The main ripple effect from Halewood has so far been seen at Southampton and at Genk (Belgium)...with a further 3,000 workers laid off...Yesterday all production of Ford 's Sierra model at Genk was also stopped...leading to the lay-off of a further 7,000 workers.This stoppage was caused by earlier disruptions to the supply of engines from Dagenham caused by the rash of unofficial actions...How quickly the strikes by electricians and some maintenance craftsmen will hit further Ford output is clearly impossible to predict...' (extracts of Financial Times 6/2/90)

The last vote was only for the electricians of the EETPU ;it decided on resumption of work amid complete confusion in most of the Ford UK factories.The attempt to clear the way forwards to the 'flexible ' worker ended with the company dumping its plans 'to sweep away the demarcation lines ' and promising a review of the wages structure.Again the Ford workers had made the demonstration :

-of the strength of their rank and file power ; even if the 89-90 strikes were limited to skilled workers ,the situation was similar to the 87-88 strikes when at the end the Ford workers imposed their agreement to any restructuring at the workshop level; the skilled workers action had the same consequence .

-of the vulnerability of multinationals in the modern production process even if the international organisation was settled to prevent such bottlenecks;it was the major contradiction engineered by international competition ,the maximisation of profits bringing more fragility .This time , in these creeping strikes 89-90 , it was only a small number of workers which disrupted the european organisation and not a general strike in the UK ; something to give a lot more confidence to the workers .

TWO YEARS AFTER, AUTUMN 1989, NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED.

Two years after the 87-88 strike, the same contract has to be renewed and Ford try to make another step towards the unidimensional worker, the precondition for overcoming international competition. The 27/10/89, Ford offers a new two year deal, 8% the first year and 7% the second one but as part of a package of deep transformations at workshop level: special teams in some high-technology production areas, retraining of electricians to work on electronics and above all the end of demarcation lines for electricians and engineers with the creation of a new multi-skilled craftsman. It was the most important point of the proposed agreement but the union claims insisted only on wages and a shorter working week (as part of their general campaign for a 35 hour week).

Obviously the offer aimed at consolidating the flexibility concessions: the reaction from the rank and file, mainly from the professionals was very strong: on 1 november the maintenance workers are on wildcat strikes in Halewood (450) and Dagenham (1,300), Bridgend (200 the 8/11), several hundreds at Southampton the 15/11: there are short walkouts over all the Ford factories against the erosion of differentials. On 10 november, Ford raises its offer: 9.5% the first year and inflation + 2.5% the second year but with no effect.

From this moment a period of great confusion begins which will last up to mid march 1990, even longer if we consider that the Iveco Ford truck factory was crippled with a general strike up to 6 june 1990. In this period the unions organised three votes to prevent a general strike without actually preventing the spread of local strikes all through the winter 89-90. In december 89, 80% rejects the second Ford offer and on 24/1/90 59% agreed with the 'final' offer (10.2% the first year, inflation + 2.5% the second year) but this last vote supposed to bring full working back to the Ford factory instead brought them to a standstill: skilled workers, mainly members of AEU and EETPU stayed on strike some unofficially, some officially, till the EETPU called off the electrician official strike; it was for months complete pandemonium which again showed how vulnerable Ford's european operation could be to stoppages (and how wise Ford US was to have moved to Spain for its new electronic factory). The situation was similar to what happened more than 15 years ago when 30 professionals blocked the Leyland factories in a fight for differentials: old ghosts had come back on the class struggle scene.

work from subsidiaries is not given. Nissan is only a line working with imported parts. The same report notes that the quality of cars built in Dagenham is improving (which it is said would mean 'a change in the worker attitude to work') though adding immediately that 'a lot remains to do' and that 'Ford UK tries to develop a mutual confidence and a close collaboration towards a common aim'.

Among the industrialised countries, the UK is the only one to have in 1987 a level of industrial production still 2.50% lower than the 1973 level and the only one where the productivity level even improved is far lower than the level in other industrialised countries. In the car industry if we take the 100 basis for 1980, production has dropped by 15%, employment is 30% lower and productivity has increased by 25%; all these figures, taking into account the technical investments in new machinery, don't add up to an improvement in the 'working practices'. If we consider that during the same period in this same industry, the days lost for strikes has dropped from 5 millions a year to 500,000, we can question the real meaning of what was called in the 80's 'the workshop revolution' with the drastic measures taken by government and management.

To take Ford UK as an example, we must go beyond the open conflicts, the strikes to understand that Ford workers had not waited the unveiling of these projects (anyway they already knew them vaguely in the summer) to try to stop or to break this endless spiral which is the transformation of the conditions of work linked to the transformations of the production techniques. Already in 1985 the union had agreed and imposed to the workers a complete review of the wage grid from 550 differentials to 52 (before the strike this number had dropped to 15) and had officialised the flexibility for the unskilled workers and the polyvalency for the professionals in the maintenance work. In order to eliminate the professionals from the line, the unskilled workers could follow a retraining aiming at increasing their 'mobility': not a real formation but a tricky attempt: in three days, a worker was supposed to get some expertise in welding and become some kind of universal worker: engineer, welder and plumber. A Ford worker explained what it means: 'Every 102 seconds, a car is coming and you have to screw something on it. Between two cars, you have to clean, to prepare your tools, to supply the parts, to check the defects and the quality. If, by chance, you have nothing to do on the line, you are moved where there is some work for you, any kind of work. It was a total change. Formerly we could get some time but now you are busy all the time and all that to bring home 115 f a week....'.

The Ford UK workers obliged to follow the agreement signed by the unions, had to return to the old methods of struggle, the same ones included in the 'English disease':

-the turn over; a worker engaged two years ago explains: 'we leave as soon as possible for another job. I am the only one still in out of six who were engaged with me, after hard selection among hundreds of candidates because I was married so expected to be wise and well-behaved.' The same added: 'I came in with conservative ideas but working in such a place turns you into a militant worker'.

-absenteeism has risen recently up to 15%, at such a rate some days that the factory can't fill its production plans; we can understand the project of a pool of replacement workers.

-the quality: when Ford insists on this point it is not only to cope with Japanese competition; it is intended against sabotage practices; a worker insisting on this point explains the double face of the Ford declaration. On one hand it uses the 'quality circles' as a publicity carrier. On the other hand it aims to reduce the rate of rejected cars which can be so high that market needs oblige Ford to sell cars with defects to maintain its profits.

-various underground resistance mainly from the professionals. They see in the proposals the continuation of a general movement aiming at their elimination. It is not a matter of wages but more a question working time (the limitation of their movement inside the factory with their affectation to a strict location on the production line) and the loss of their professional identity. '5 years of badly paid training to end up on the line under the control of an unskilled worker', summed up a Dagenham professional. Such a situation will generate a lot of individual and collective, underground and open conflicts.

FORD OF EUROPE vehicles per employee	
Plant	1988
Dagenham	22
Halewood	29
Southampton	23
Genk	34
Cologne	34
Saarlouis	42
Valencia	38

Source: Ford internal management report (1989)

HOURS PER CAR	
Plant	1988
Valencia - Fiesta	33
Genk - Sierra	40
Dagenham - Fiesta	57
Dagenham - Sierra	67
Halewood - Escort	59
Southampton - Transit	79

Source: Ford internal management report (1989)

and has been more or less concealed by consideration of the struggles' open aspects.

The February 88 Ford strike had not apparently had the same consequence as the devastating October 78 Ford strike had had on a Labour government policy. Nevertheless it reveals the failure of English capital and of a conservative government to bring unions to the essential point of being a disciplinary force over the workers.

In a certain way, though with a different approach, the unions positions in the car factories can be compared to the union pluralism in France, Italy or Spain. Rationalising and restructuring has the same consequence for all organisations managing the labour force. Old structures are obsolete machinery or work organisation alike. The crisis of the syndicalist movement is raising both sides of their ambiguous position: one foot with the management, one foot with the workers.

The Dundee affair is highly revealing of this uncomfortable and unescapable position. Unions are unable to follow the need of capitalism because of the impossibility of overcoming their own structure and ideology, which is, on the other hand still a big part of their required basis among the workers. Even though some top unions bureaucrats and Scottish officials went to Detroit to plead for the Dundee cause, they failed to bring about a change of mind in US Ford managers. On one hand it is significant to see "workers" organisations behaving like pimps to sell some hundreds of workers to a multinational which will take its decision as much according to the currencies rate as according to the straight jacket proposed by these bureaucrats for the workers. On the other hand, we can be surprised that commotion in the English political and syndicalist world can erupt from rather a minor question.

Apparently the problem arises only with the out of date UK union structures; but actually, the essential and everlasting problem behind this screen is the class struggle. In March 88 it was evident that Ford was abandoning the Dundee project because of the opposition to one only union. Later, in September, Ford announces this electronic factory to be built in Spain at Cadiz where the management could work with only one organism - the workers council (even composed of different unions delegates); more or less openly US Ford management said that the 1988 UK Ford strike and the uncertainty about the unions taming the English workers were the main considerations in their decision.

a come back to the prevailing situation of ten years ago which was the target of management attack. It is difficult to tell what will happen next but the door is open to a lot of local conflicts when Ford will try to push ahead with the introduction of the new techniques .

What will such an evolution mean if it goes ahead ? We can sum up in short points from different parts of our text :

-The making of an unidimensional worker at an international scale from whom it will be asked more 'initiative and participation' in the iron framework of modern technologies drawn according to the interests of capital; his multidimensional skill will not be a real professional formation but strictly what will be required at that very moment by the necessary current production techniques , the 'retraining' meaning only the adaptation required for a new technique .

-an attempt to have the worker identifying his own interest with the interest of capital .The introduction of more and more sophisticated and expensive machinery needs to work smoothly to pretend that the authoritarian relationship is eliminated which mean the 'cooperation of the worker in his own exploitation' .

-an increased centralisation and internationalisation which are on one hand a strength for capital but on the other hand a weakness in the class struggle as the Ford UK strike just showed .The international links unveiled by Ford in order to break the national barriers can mean a reinforcing of the capital domination. It can mean too the generalisation of this unidimensional worker, the development of an international working community driven by the international tendency of capital itself.

Unions are pushed too but in a different way .If the evolution of production techniques and of working conditions are developed to their utmost point there is effectively no need for a lot of different unions but for only one with a complete different role. In the USA ,according to the agreement passed with the unions, the union is no more than the legal department for the local bureaucrats, the right to strike being limited to hygiene and security problems and the recruitment of temporary workers .Of course all that is only on paper and the workers always have the possibility of struggle and eventually of taking the right to strike. It is this we see in the factories in England with attempts to this end :Hitachi in Wales has seen its first wildcat movement in july 87 ,Nissan in Newcastle has a high turnover because of the 'bad morale ' of its highly selected workers, the 'scabs ' of Wapping refused to follow the EETPU which had recruited them on behalf of News International .What is developing here is only the expression of the day to day struggle inside the walls of the factory which has never stopped

'We have had last time ,but it won't happen this time '(A Dagenham Ford worker)

Ford had just let leak some of its proposals when 50 workers on the Halewood line stopped work , which completely stopped the Escort and Orion production. It was the first stoppage in a long series of wildcat strikes which were not so different from the other above quoted wildcat strikes in other car factories .To try to stop this discontent ,the unions opposed some claims to the management proposals: 10% more on wages (basic wage and bonus) and a reduction in working time (as in the Ford German factories). But not a word on the other management proposals; not a word on the flexibility and the restructuring of the working organisation; on the contrary , to help the management , the unions proposed to go ahead more quickly with the unification of white and blue collar wages and conditions presented as an 'advantage ' for the workers, but in fact allowing Ford to accelerate the flexibility restructuring. When at the end of october , Ford display all its cards, wildcat strikes burst up locally everywhere: on 2 november, 120 workers blocked the body shop in Dagenham and 200 on the line obliged the lay off of 1,000 workers. On 3 november, 800 professionals in Halewood and 1,000 in Dagenham and Dunton are on strike for five days .On 11 november 1,400 workers are on strike for 24 hours in Dagenham and Dunton , followed by 1,500 on 13 november in Bridgend (Wales). On 16 november , 4,000 are on strike in Halewood .On 17 novembre , 750 suspend work for 24 hours at the parts center in Dagenham followed on 20 november by 4,000 at the whole body shop in an overtime strike. Again 2,000 are on strike in Halewood for 24 hours and this same day , there are stoppages in Dagenham , Basildon , Bridgend and Leamington involving 17,000 workers in 8 factories. On 24 november, 36 boilermen on strike obliged Ford to lay off 5,000 workers in Dagenham. On 2 december , 12,500 Ford white collars refuse the wage agreement proposed by the unions; on 7 december , the maintenance workers strike in Halewood brings about the closure of this factory .

At first , the Ford unions tried to stop this strike wave. At the beginning of november , the T & G secretary in Dagenham explains : 'The shop stewards tried to persuade the workers not to go on strike , but they couldn't stop them' and that ' the management and the unions leaders in Dagenham hope that normal production will resume to day and will go ahead without problems up to the opening of discussions

next week'. On 11 november, Murphy (leader T & G), president of the NJNC and 'negotiator in chief' is obliged to admit: 'We witness a kind of struggle we have not known for more than 10 years'. It is more Christmas than the negotiations (they will last up to the 7 January) which suspends the local strikes; the unions misinterpret this respite and think they can unveil through Murphy's lips that 'the unions are ready to agree with the three year contract proposed by Ford if Ford improves its wage offer and guarantees no redundancy'. He even thinks it clever to add that: 'whoever wants to strike must go and have his head checked up but this kind of thing could happen'. To be more precise he will declare after the majority of the Ford workers have voted for the strike that 'a general strike would be a tragedy that the unions hope to avoid'.

THE DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKERS AND UNIONS.

How the unions tried to stop wildcat strikes with a general strike, the united strength of which sweep away their project.

To try to dilute the workers resistance and the 'anarchy of the wildcat strikes' the unions organise a vote during the week of 20 January 1988: out of 87% of voters, 88% vote for a general strike. For the unions leaders, this vote is only a 'warning to the management'. Legally, they have a fortnight to declare the strike but immediately they open new discussions with the Ford management: it is their function to do so. But the rank and file sees things in a quite different way; a Southampton worker has voted against the strike but he says he is ready to follow it up to the end even if it lasts one month; only one thing deeply disturbs him in the proposed agreement: 'the time a worker will have to stick on the line will be decided by the foreman'; in his own words he sees exactly how the new agreement tries to remove the slight degree of power the workers still keep over their work.

Theoretically, the strike is due to begin on 31 January during the night, but this very night, Murphy claims that a new agreement has been obtained and that the strike is cancelled: 'I am happy to have escaped such a strike which would have been a disaster for everybody'. He tries to hide the fact that the agreement was at first rejected by the majority of the shop stewards in the NJNC and that the top leaders had to work hard and to manoeuvre to get a vote for the agreement - 25 votes against 18. Of course, the new agreement does not afford much more than the previous one: wage rise will be 7% instead of 4.25% with

WORKERS AND UNIONS

Two divergent ways.

For the workers, the struggle was polarised around two contradictory though mixed and interacting positions:

- on one hand the defence of present positions got through past struggles and day to day resistances. These positions are deeply disturbed by the introduction of new systems of exploitation. At first concern seems to stem only from professionals and low management whose functions in a modern factory are rapidly shrinking. Even if we consider these categories as defending a narrow professionalism, we have to see them in a step by step more general defence of rank and file power in the daily resistance to exploitation (it is in this meaning that the Ford strike has changed the balance of struggle not in the formal terms of the agreement but in working practices within the workshop). The workers have no illusion about the reality of life inside the factory. If they are professionals, they consider that 'the existing maintenance teams had more freedom so far as their shop was far from the line' and one of them add immediately that this problem now concerns all workers: 'On the line, it is the speed of the line which rules the work, not the team leader. The line will stay monotonous, boring and very hard'.

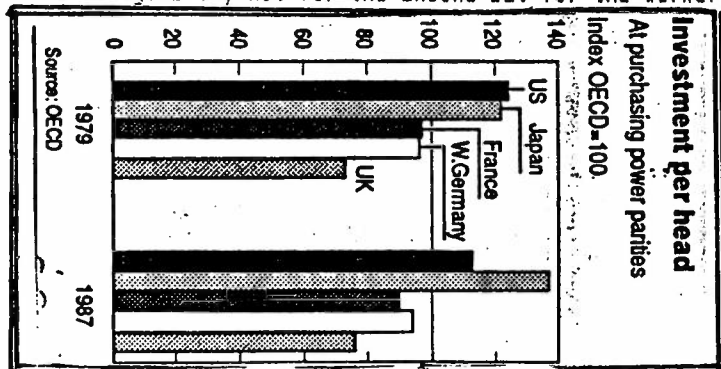
On the other hand, unifying the conditions of work and status between white and blue collars will develop a new unity. The introduction of microelectronics in the production system has the consequence of rubbing out the demarcation line between professionals and unskilled workers; a comment explains: 'to have a robot working normally is partly preventive maintenance, partly productive work'. In the Sharonville (Ohio) Ford factory, the next step of building engines and bodies has already begun. Semi autonomous teams will have not only the responsibility for small work, but for production plans, promotion, retraining and fixation of individual wages. Only one multiprofessional grade will remain called 'technician'; the teams will elect a 'team leader' and the foremen will become some kind of 'advisers'.

To consider only the present situation at Ford UK everything will happen now at rank and file level. In the long fight around this power in all the metal factories and chiefly in the car industry, the shop stewards had a central and ambiguous role. The first Ford agreement simply eliminated their function and so the workers control over conditions of work was made far more difficult. The last agreement comes back to the previous situation though in a different manner. In a certain way it is

idea : 'The company will get the transformations it needs but it will have to implement them with the workers '.

Of course all the unions 'recommand ' the acceptance of the agreement. On 18 february a vote ends the two week strike. Most of the workers are not at all certain they have got what they were struggling for, except they will have , as usual , to go ahead with the day to day struggle ; 16,000 are for resuming work , 6,200 for going ahead with the strike and more than 9,000 are confused and don't vot . Work resumes in all UK Ford factories on 22 february .

'Unions and management have underestimated the strength of the workers opposition' will comment the Ford UK head personal manager This recognition of an evident fact was even more evident when considering that Ford had been obliged four times to make 'definite ' proposals that the unions every time considered 'acceptable ' . Murphy , the union leader will be less modest: ' We have got a real historical victory not only for the Ford workers but for all unionists in this country' . Just as he pronounced these historical words , facts were sending them right back. With the agreement ink not yet dry Ford put on the table a five year agreement with important investments for a generalisation of electronics, more automatisisation of the lines and links with other car builders to break national protection and workers resistance . At the same time , the central problem of the role of the unions in this modernisation come again to the forefront. The battle between unions around the Dundee factory flared again, showing that the 'victory' was far from being so for the unions . Two policies were at stake in the Ford strike and its surroundings ; on one hand the union policy of bargaining constantly with the management using the threat of strike as an ace in the bargaining discussions ; on the other hand the workers policy to consider the strike as a weapon to impose discussions on a reluctant coalition union-management ignoring workers interests . Through the strike , Ford workers had imposed a return to the former working practice of some workers control over the working conditions. If there was a 'victory ' , a relative one , it was neither for the management , not for the unions but for the workers .



a guarantee of 2.05% beyond the inflation rate for the second year; the restructuring of the wage grid will be implemented on three years; but all the new restructuring of the working organisation are still there to be discussed only at national level if some problems arise. Against some money , the management is free to go ahead; more , the shop stewards are dispossessed of their intervention to settle local conflicts because of course they are too close to the workers (too much influenced by them) and their function is taken over by the top union bureaucrats who have not at all the same interests when settling local conflicts. The famous Jimmy Airlie will explain: 'It is not at all a matter of money. We recognise the need to improve efficiency but we want an agreement for the unification of the conditions of work and a complete revision of the wage grid which accompanies these transformations ' . When the same Airlie declares that the workers disagree only with the duration of the agreement, he completely conceals the real stake of the Ford proposals because the unions don't want to oppose proposals giving more power to the union bureaucracy.

On 4 february , Ford workers vote again on these 'new proposals': more than 60% of them vote against and against the 'recommendation' of the NJNC. Without waiting for an order to strike, when this result is known, on 5 february , 3,000 workers on the Dagenham line are on strike . A last minute attempt at negotiations to avoid the strike failed and their back to the wall , unions have to launch the order to strike as a last resort: on 8 february in the morning all the UK Ford factories are at a standstill. A worker on the picket line at Dagenham does not hide his hostility towards the union leaders : 'I don't want to be nasty but all the T & G leaders will be warmly welcomed if they come here. It is not in their interest to sell out the strike otherwise anything could happen ' .

As in 1979 , the strength of the strike is only in the workers determination. In the short term , financial problems are only in the background partly because the unions could support the strike with their strike fund and they have to pay strike benefits in so far as they 'recognise' the strike . There is no specific organisation of the strike at national level ; it is the stewards and unions leaders involved in the NJNC who are coordinating the strike and will discuss its end. In every Ford factory , the shop stewards committee controls the strike mainly in the picket organisation; as the strike is total , the pickets are rather idle and there is no need for police to help the scabs . As the strike can end only with a new vote in all factories, management or unions manoeuvres can only be developed in the negotiations area and in the propaganda (eventually the

pressure) for the acceptance of an agreement through the media or the shop stewards. The strike will stay within strict 'legality' ; it follows exactly the rules edicted to contain and limit strikes; but these rules had been completely inefficient in the past four months in preventing the numerous wildcat strikes and in stopping their evolution to a general strike. When a legislation aims to forbid or limit the right to strike, it is useless when the workers are determined and united; on the contrary, in the UK example, the obligation of organising a vote gives the workers the measure of their strength.

THE STRENGTH AND THE WEAKNESS OF A MODERN MULINATIONAL.

'When we see how fast the Ford strike disturbs the continental factories we can see that a lot has been made to be in line with the japanese productivity levels in reducing to a minimum the storage of parts.' (Financial Times 10/2/88)

Strength and weakness of a multinational come from an organisation of work built around two opposite poles ; on one hand the regular supplying of the line and the elimination of stocks (in goods and in labour force) which are idle capital, on the other hand the spreading of the car and parts building over a lot of various factories and suppliers to escape bottlenecks and to reduce the costs of a centralised production. To keep the balance between its 38 factories scattered all over Europe and to maintain an economical rationality for an average profit amongst constant variations of national costs, of currencies and the effects of class struggle, Ford has, like any multinational to adapt constantly to an evolving situation. The distribution of all Ford factories in Europe can be seen as a dilution of all kinds of risks; but in such circumstances as the UK strike it transforms immediately into one huge weakness.

One day after the strike had started, production in Genk (Belgium) and Sarrelouis (West Germany) were affected. Rebban, International secretary of the Metal Union declared his incompetence with these words: 'The company has not adopted a good policy and it was a revelation to us'. All the national union leaders could have been well informed: they had met in Geneva and they might have observed that all the transformations opposed by the english workers were already implemented in most of the continental or US Ford factories, without being opposed by the union buraucracies. A worker of

the Ford Genk factory will declare: 'I don't know for what they are on strike, nobody told us'. The best propaganda agent for the english workers strike was the organisation of the european Ford factories itself crippled by the strike in a way perhaps included in this european organisation but with an evident miscalculation.

On 11 february, 11,000 workers are laid off in Genk in Belgium, Köln, Düren in Germany, Lisboa in Portugal. Some suppliers in the Midlands have to do the same (a paper will say that 75,000 workers are affected). If the strike lasts a long time, the effects will be even more devastating. Even, in tis second week, the strike costs £ 40 millions every day. From Detroit comes the order to organise secret meeting between the Ford UK personal manager and the top union leaders: Ron Todd, T & G general secretary and Bill Jordan, AEU president. When the way is traced, 'official' negotiations can start again on 16 february; quickly a new agreement is on the table:

- return to a two year agreement
- not much more for wages: 7% per year, more according to inflation and 2,50 % on the top the second year
- 100% of wages when there is a lay off, more benefits for sickness or retirement,
- no redundancies; only voluntary departures or retraining,
- discussions for equalisation of white and blue collars status,
- most of the restructuring of working methods is still maintained but the professionals will not go on the line as unskilled workers. The most important point concerns the way this restructuring will be implemented; it will not be imposed unilaterally by the management on the workers; it will have to get their agreement in the workshop which means a cooperation between middle management and workers.

This is the main result of the strike and not the least one: in the first Ford proposals, the management decided and imposed; in the second proposals equally rejected by the workers, the top bureaucrats would have alone discussed the problems raised locally by the restructuring at the top level far from any workers intervention. In the new agreement the workers will be at the center of the implementation of the new methods and will have the possibility of seeing and discussing the practical consequences in the day to day work. The Financial Times (20/2/88) recognise behind the words that 'this struggle for this clause of 'non compulsoriness' in the transformations of the conditions of work will decide if the agreement means really a sliding of the balance of struggle in the collective negotiation'. The chief union negociator, Murphy expresses the same