

Fraud

NEWS



Volume I. Issue I

October 1977



This is a newspaper for Ford workers, published by the FORD WORKERS GROUP, DAGENHAM and the FORD LANGLEY ACTION COMMITTEE.

IT'S GOT TO BE EVERYTHING!

WE ALL KNOW Ford's latest offer is not adequate. It means yet another cut in our standard of living. Reaction to it has been quick and angry. In the body plant at Halewood last Friday night, workers in the 'Elephant House, (the welders) walked out when they heard the details. The week before, a mass meeting in the Dagenham body plant totally rejected the earlier offer.

The claim is nothing but another wage-cut. Nothing compared to the 25.8 per cent cut in our standard of living over the past three years according to official figures. We'd need £15 a week just to make up for that. And it's nothing compared to what we need to keep up with inflation in the coming year.

Ford is trying to play it cunning. They're yet again dividing us. They're trying to buy off the higher paid D and E grade workers with 12 per cent rises — leaving A grade with just 9 per

cent. We say no to this divide and rule. We want an across-the-board offer.

What about our other points? **On the lineworkers' allowance — no answer.** Working on the line is the hardest, heaviest, and most boring job. The claim is for a half hour's extra pay a day. Ford paid an allowance before, and can be forced to pay it again.

On the 37 1/2 hour week — nothing. We've been asking for the 35 hour week for ten years,

and now we've got to fight for a real reduction in hours. With 1.6 million on the dole, Ford has no excuse. It would mean less work for us, and a chance of a wage for those out of work.

On the extra month's pay — nothing. In Germany, Italy and Spain, Ford pays an extra month's pay as a holiday bonus. That's £180 to us. Ford has offered to increase our holiday bonus £15 to make £50. This is peanuts. We have a right to the extra month's pay.

On the cost of living safeguard — Ford say they'd only give this safeguard for a 2-year agreement, not a 1-year agreement. They don't explain why they couldn't. Prices go up every day not every year!

And finally, on our demand for a guaranteed week's pay every week, whatever the cause of lay-off, Ford has offered nothing. The dispute in June at

Dagenham showed that we're no longer prepared to be treated like casual labour. This is one of the most important points in the claim.

These are not 'fringe benefits'. They're the major part of the claim. The 15 per cent asked for by the union is just not enough to keep up with inflation. Rates up, rent up, food up, and school meals are up. We need at least £15.

So — to sum up — we need to fight to win everything in this claim, if our standard of living is not to fall yet again this year.

10% BROKEN

With the latest offer Ford has now broken the Government's 10 per cent wage guideline. So they cannot hide behind the Government's limits as an excuse for not

meeting the full claim. An inch is as good as a mile. So now we're in a strong position to win everything in the claim.

NO MORE SACRIFICE

This might be the last chance for a long time to get what we need. We have to act now — when we can. The Government is asking us to make another year of sacrifice. Meanwhile the bosses are having a bonanza. Profits are booming and the stock market's on the up and up. Last year, when we got a 4 1/2 per cent rise, Ford had three price rises and made £121 million profit.

We must say 'No' to any more sacrifice. But we'll have a fight to make sure that happens. At Ford's money does not fall from the sky — it only comes through struggle. Ford can pay, and can

be made to pay — if they see us united, determined and prepared to take action.

The only way we're going to win is to tell Ford right now that we're prepared to go all the way. That we're prepared to take strike action. And we have to tell the unions that this year, there'll be no sell out.

Already at Langley, Dagenham and Halewood, people are talking about immediate action to back up a strike threat. Among the suggestions are imposing a ban on overtime, and a go-slow or withdrawal of co-operation. With their walk-out last Friday, the workers at Halewood have got the ball rolling. Now let's give it a good kick.

We need everything in this claim — and we can get it by sch... you know what!

WHOSE CLAIM?

IF WE accept that the Ford wage claim — drawn up by the union officials and the convenors — is based on a genuine desire to improve the lot of the Ford worker, then there are these questions which need answering:

* Why was the claim not put before any mass meetings before it was submitted to the company?

* Why did the platform refuse to allow any votes on the proposals and amendments put forward by individuals at the national shop stewards conference held in Coventry?

* Why have no plans of action to achieve the claim been discussed or decided upon at mass meetings or at national shop steward level?

* Why has the recall shop stewards conference to discuss the strategy to achieve the claim been postponed or cancelled?

The denial of workers democracy has meant that we are left with a claim that does not adequately meet the needs and aspirations of the Ford workers. Pay, hours of work, and health and safety are all clearly inadequate in the claim.

Nevertheless, we must support the claim as it stands despite its shortcomings. Our job now is to unite around a strategy to fight for the claim.

We on the shop floor cannot afford to rely on the trade union side of the negotiating committee to decide our future. We've left it to them over the last three years, and where has it got us? On our behalf our representatives have supported the Social Contract which has meant at least a 25.8 per cent cut in real wages!

The trade union officials have shown that they will use any methods necessary to implement undemocratic decisions against the rank and file. For example, in the summer at the Ford Dagenham Assembly plant, the union officials even tried to prevent the convenor from addressing a mass meeting unless he agreed to call for an end to the lay-off pay strike.

Shop stewards who recognise the official sabotage have been hamstrung in trying to take up the challenge of pursuing the claim against the stifling tactics of the trade union negotiators. An example of the sabotage was seen at the stage-managed

Coventry stewards conference. This conference took up less time than the press conference afterwards! Its only functions seemed to be to rubber stamp the official wage claim and leave everything in the negotiator's hands.

As Ford workers we must begin to organise ourselves against any back-sliding away from an all-out fight for the complete claim. This will only be done by bringing the negotiators under the control of the shop floor. We must make sure that all decisions affecting the outcome of the claim are put before mass meetings. We must also demand that the shop stewards conference is recalled immediately, & plan and co-ordinate an action strategy for all Ford workers to achieve the claim. In the event of a strike, the shop floor must elect a strike committee to run the day to day activities and organisation in the plants.

It is in this way that we, the rank and file Ford workers, can become confident and unify ourselves to make the best conditions possible in taking a step forward in working and living conditions.

Tired of living...? Henry Ford needs YOU!



Making poxy Fiestas and Cortinas. There's MORE for you at Fraud...MORE night work, MORE overtime, (in fact you need never go home!)

Not to mention the Big Fraud Benefit Package: long holidays (whenever you are laid off); excellent funeral facilities, free toilet paper and that special Never-Never-Never car purchase plan.



Unemployment = overtime and your health

The union declares that nightwork is 'unsociable'. But in practice union bosses become the police who enforce nightwork. They have never led a struggle against it, although they know full well the health and social aspects involved. At Ford's the union even allows its members to work 2 hours' overtime on nights in many areas. If night work is 'unsociable' for 8 hours, what about 10 hours?

When a person is working 10 hours — one hour before and one after the shift — or when the worker arrives late on the job on nightshift, the union doesn't question actions taken by management: warnings by letter, suspension, and finally, sacking if the worker is still coming in late.

What humbug to condemn

nightwork and then let a worker be sacked — just because workers don't consider they should have to work nights and so take a few nights off.

In Halewood, workers kept taking Friday night off. They picketed the gates and argued that 'Friday night is music night'. The union was forced to make a limited stand on this issue in Halewood, but what did Dagenham do? Nothing!

Why is there no demand for a four-night week? Why has the demand been dropped by the union for 35 hours, and replaced by 37½ hours? Why are no arguments raised about the diabolical levels of overtime — when unemployment is at its height?

The convenors are allowing many men to work in

excess of 56 hours, rather than the 40 hours that the labour movement has fought for some years. The level of some Works Committee members can exceed even this — so how can they lead a struggle for 40 hours, let alone 37½ hours?

By the way...if we accept the present bum deal from Henry Ford, we will not only be poor, but also dying. By the end of our next agreement we will be working 50-55 hours a week to keep above the poverty line. Add travelling time to that and you become either a human zombie or a candidate for the morgue! They wouldn't do this to a dog! Overtime should be abolished, and the only way to do it is by fighting for a decent basic rate.



Get off our backs

FORE[WO]MEN. They are the company's overseers, and one of the bosses' instruments for maintaining speed-ups, staffing cuts and all general attacks on the workforce. And they do it all for a few extra coppers.

The minute you first start on the job they become your closest 'friends' — like leeches. They appeal to your better nature: 'Look at the fucking mess you've made — you wouldn't buy one of those would you?' The set answer: 'I couldn't afford it on these wages anyway'. It's difficult to tell supervisors to piss off, especially when this is said six inches from your face. (I think I'll start eating pickled onions).

When a job or a production line is being timed by a company 'expert' the workers will of course have one of these management representatives on their backs trying to make them speed up so a 'reasonable' — in the words of the company *Blue Book* — timing can be made. This has happened quite recently in the Dagenham plant on the Cortina Estate framing line. The foreman picked out four 'trouble makers' and pressurised them with 'verbal warnings', 'recorded verbal warnings' and so on.

So what do we do about it? Obviously, keep going slow, and put an eye to safety and other

common sense items. Above all, maintain your unity. Have regular meetings to discuss tactics, such as stopping over bad conditions and refusing to work out of your space. Absolutenon-cooperation. Refuse to work with forepeople on the line. Act 'thick' so that the fore[wo]man takes half an hour to get through to you that you've let ten jobs through untouched. By the time he or she has finished, let another ten jobs through! But to

be serious... The fore[wo]man's role is purely for the benefit of 'Poor Old Henry' as we have illustrated above. So to finish it now it is our turn to misquote the bard: 'To fight or not to fight, that is the question... whether it is nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous tactics, or to take up against the bastards and, by opposing, crush them.'

What is the union?

Question: Why is Ford workers' organisation so bad nowadays? Why are we slipping further and further down the wages league? In the Dagenham Ford Workers' Group we have discussed this question in our meetings. We think it's got a lot to do with the Unions. We see the position as follows:

Bureaucratic Machine.

It is no accident that many workers see 'the union' as standing against them. Because, in place of bargaining on the shop floor for better wages and conditions, the Union Machine has taken it out of our hands, and has centralised negotiations. This is an instrument of the bosses against the workers.

that needs to be done. The old Dead Wood Defeatists among the shop stewards and convenors have got to be cleared out, and we've got to start building a Fighting machine that will fight on behalf of the Ford Workers. So...how about it, brothers and sisters!

CHANGE THE UNION

Now that negotiations are centralised, the Government has imposed wage freeze. This means that the wages of twenty five million workers in Britain are now decided once every few months by about 20 TUC officials and a few Government ministers.

The Union Machine that we pay every week to maintain, has become degenerated. Originally, its only use was to fight for our interests. Today, the whole purpose of the Union Machine has changed. We find increasingly that we are fighting against the Union bosses when we want to win something. Often the Machine only functions to stop us fighting.

So, how do we get out of this hole? In Fords there's a big job

UNION AGAINST US

We find that the trade union officials are acting against our interests. A lot of little men in suits and ties — who have forgotten what it's like to work for a living — run round selling us Insurance, Cheap Holidays, and so on, taking money from us each week to pay for their



The motor trades workers

Words: Dan Perrygrove
Tune: Birmingham Boys

I'm one of those motor trade workers
Who're labelled as loafers and shirkers.
We're crippling the country, the newspapers say,
With too low an output and far too much pay
FAR TOO MUCH PAY, FAR TOO MUCH PAY,
WITH TOO LOW AN OUTPUT AND FAR TOO MUCH PAY.

Each morning we leave around seven
And drive to our mechanised heaven.
We make cans of tea, have a laugh and a crack,
Till the half-seven bell rings then off goes the Truck, [Repeat].

With pressing and turning and milling,
We're finishing, trimming and drilling.
We paint and wet-flat and we rivet and bore,
While the foreman walks round like an arm of the Law [Repeat].

The big banker who's running our nation
Claims we are the cause of inflation,
He sits at his desk on his fat, pin-striped ass,
While we do the donkey work, he counts the brass. [Repeat].

Our trade fluctuates with the season:
That's mainly the cause and the reason
We organise now and go in with both feet,
For tomorrow we may well be walking the street. [Repeat].

Investors and financial backers
Are greedily counting the aekers
A fiver an ounce for a working man's sweat,
Then the bosses begrudge us the wages we get. [Repeat].

So a word for those wealthy fat Tories
What dreamed up those newspaper stories,
If it's true what you say and we're all in a stew,
Then we're the red peppers, the dumplings are you! [Repeat].

Fords Langley Action Group

THE FORDS Langley Action Committee is a group of rank and file workers at the Langley truck assembly plant. FLAC believes that the hierarchy of the unions are out of touch with the needs and desires of the ordinary workers. For too long the unions at Langley have been run by a clique taking the easy way out of difficult situations — the easy way for them and Henry Ford! It is time for change and FLAC will ensure that change takes place.

FLAC was formed during the recent lay-off pay dispute at Dagenham assembly plant when a number of sections at Langley were also laid-off. We were disgusted with being continually treated as casual labour. At a mass meeting of the sections involved, it was decided to put a picket on the plant. The picket was successful until the convenor agreed with management to bring the receiving section in on overtime during the weekend when there would be no picket. We were appalled by that treachery. This situation gave birth to FLAC.

Since the formation of FLAC — with only twenty members — we have gone from strength to strength. Several shop stewards have expressed a desire to join FLAC, but have been forbidden to by the convenor and deputy convenor even though our need to be united is obvious. With freedom marred to that extent who can say the time for change has not arrived?



Occupation Centre in the June lay-off dispute.

Health and safety at Fords

In danger! 'just hard luck'

'A big step forward in collective bargaining'. That is how the 1977 Transport Workers' union claim for Fords UK is being described. Well, as far as Health and Safety are concerned, it's a 'big step backwards'.

First: The claim admits that in the Press Shops conditions are so bad they can cause deafness. Ear muffs are provided — but they don't say that these too can lead to danger. For example, with muffs on workers can't hear warnings.

In the words of the claim itself, '... for workers employed before the company supplied ear muffs, the resultant deafness that many suffer is just hard luck'. (TGWU Claim, p. 16.) This 'just hard luck' might be okay for union bureaucrats, but it's no use for Ford workers who are trying to stay Healthy and Safe!

Second: The claim says that while conditions are bad, Ford may compensate us by paying more money, giving layoff pay, pensions and so on. (This is what you get when you let university graduates write union wage claims from the comfort of their offices in Westminster or Oxford!)

This policy of compensation runs directly against the spirit of the recent struggles at Fords — that our health is not negotiable. You can't put a price on workers'

health.
Third: It is the job of the unions to educate the Ford workers about the nature of the hazards and dangers they work with. On the shop floor we have usually been left to fight health and safety issues by ourselves — usually with union officials trying to talk us back to work.

Struggles at Fords over the past year have included the dispute over dangerous lead fumes at the Halewood plant, the brain-destroying paint sprays and paint-booth noise in the Assembly plant at Dagenham, the use of glass fibre in the KD packing departments, the repeated fires in the Dagenham Engine Plant, the noise in the Press Shops — plus the usual struggle against oil slicks and the rest.

So why is it that this new health and safety awareness has in no way been written into the TGWU claim? The answer, as usual, is that our officials are too far away from the job to care about us.

Fourth: The claim is a long, long way behind the health and safety

provisions which the American United Auto Workers forced out of the American motor manufacturers (including Fords) in the 1976 agreements. And let's be clear — these are not simply 'perks' or luxuries. They are the basic right of every worker.

The clauses in the United Auto Workers agreement with Ford include:

- * reports of all medical tests given to workers, upon request;
- * the Safety Committee to have free use of all the monitoring equipment used by the management;
- * the union safety representative to be given all available information on harmful substances used in the work process;
- * the union safety representative

to be present during all health and safety surveys and to receive a copy of all reports;

* the union safety representative to be promptly notified of all serious accidents;

* all workers using dangerous substances to be given a training programme. (Source: United Auto Workers — Ford National Committee.)

In the course of our activities, the Dagenham Ford Workers Group has invited students, teachers and others who know about health and safety to advise us, give us information, initiate studies. Without hardly scratching the surface, it is clear that Ford is full of horror stories.

They keep the lid on these stories by refusing to allow independent investigators in; by publishing the most vague and rubbishy figures; by stalling and time-wasting on workers' claims; and by employing a high turnover of immigrants who often don't know their rights.

So once again, the whole burden falls on us — the poor bloody Ford workers. We will have to do the work ourselves. It is for this reason that the Ford Workers Group will be printing leaflets on this issue.

HOW TO CALL AN INSPECTOR

Just for information, if you're getting no support from your safety representative, you can call in the factory inspector.

Any worker has the right to call the local factory inspector. Write a letter including the full description of the suspected hazard. The inspectorate will only give your request top priority if it gets the idea that there is a very dangerous hazard.

The inspector may try to pay a surprise visit to the firm, so give him or her a good description of exactly where (and when) the hazard can be found. Give the firm's name and full address, and your name and position in the company. If you fear victimisation, tell the inspectorate in your letter and it will keep your name confidential. Without a name and address, the inspectorate is unlikely to act.

The inspectorate has a duty to answer all letters but it is very busy. It may be reluctant to even step inside a large and very hazardous company like Fords. We've found that you have to write again or phone, and generally keep pestering the inspectorate to do its job.

In order to obtain a good report you will need a friendly inspector or a very serious hazard. To get action taken on the report you will need a miracle of industrial action. Calling in the inspectorate can be used as the first step in increasing health and safety awareness.

But when all is said and done, the only way we will ever improve working conditions is by mass organisation and awareness.

HEALTH AND SAFETY OFFICES

Area Offices of the Health and Safety Executive and the Inspectorate:

Fords Langley & Southampton (also Berkshire, Dorset, Hampshire & the Isle of Wight, Wiltshire): Priestley House, Priestley Road, Basingstoke RG24 9NW. Tel: 0256 3181.

Fords Basildon (also East Anglia): 39 Baddow Road, Chelmsford Essex CM2 0HL. Tel: 0245 84961.

Fords Dagenham (also London North East): Royal London House, 18 Finsbury Square, London EC2A 1DH. Tel: 01-638 2841.

Fords Swansea (also Wales): Brunel House, 2 Fitzian Road, Cardiff CF2 1SH. Tel: 0222 497777.

Fords Halewood (also Cheshire, Merseyside): The Triad, Stanley Road, Bootle L20 3PG. Tel: 051 922 7211.

Fords Belfast (also Northern Ireland): 21 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8GP. Tel: 0232 280061.

For any other area, look in your phone book under Health and Safety Executive. For good information on health hazards contact BSSRS, Health Hazards Group, 9 Poland Street, London W1. Tel: 01-437 2728. We recommend their regular publication called Hazards Bulletin.



What is the Ford Workers Group?

WE ARE a group of militants, mainly socialists, working at Fords who have formed into an autonomous, independent organisation at Dagenham. We fight for progressive policies. We fight for a democratic leadership on the shop floor. We fight to build workers' power. And we fight against our exploitation by the Ford Motor Company.

Many workers feel that left organisations spend more time fighting against each other, trying to recruit each other's members, and so on, than helping to organise workers. Many workers are bewildered by leaflets filled with jargon that are often put into car plants. We believe that the best people to lead the car workers' struggles are the car workers themselves, with the active help and encouragement of other people outside the industry who can assist them.

The basis of recruitment into the Dagenham group is that we invite workers who have a history of struggle, or newer workers who play an active part in positive actions, to join the group. If agreed by the majority of the members of the group, these workmates are given a copy of our constitution. If after reading it, they are willing to work with the group, they become members. Workers come into the group as 'individuals' and not as 'organisations'.

The Ford Workers Group would like to see all Ford plants (and other companies) having autonomous organisation like ours, and to have an exchange of information on a regular basis. We have close contacts with workers at Ford Halewood and Langley and we would like to call a meeting later in the year with any like-minded workers.

For information on the Ford Workers Group at Dagenham and the Ford Langley Action Committee, write to: Room 265, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.



On the picket line.

Join the mass picket

MONDAY 17 OCTOBER

FROM GRUNWICK STRIKE COMMITTEE

THE STRIKE Committee is calling for the entire trade union movement to rally once again in our support to bring the historic Grunwick strike to an end. The strike is a Dunkirk for our trade union movement. Ranged up against us behind George Ward are all those forces who want to drive back all the advances that the working people of this country have made.

It was mass action by our great movement that lifted our dispute off the floor during the summer months. The miners, printers, dockers, builders and engineers and others who came from all over the country and the magnificent Cricklewood postal workers helped us to bring Grunwick to its knees. Then, the Court of Enquiry was set up. The steam was taken out of the situation but

we were told that the Court of Enquiry would resolve the situation.

Now Ward has made industrial relations history by defying the Court of Enquiry. It is clear that what we have said all along is correct — it will only be trade union strength that will win this bitter battle.

We call upon every trade union body to send the largest possible delegation on the Monday. Get together with other trade union bodies in your area and book a train or coaches. Bring your banner. We are asking for trade union banners and strike committee placards only.

The mass picketing will then continue after the Monday. When you arrive, please report to the Trades and Labour Hall at the address below. The picket

will begin on the Monday and the following days at 6.30am. We have struggled for 58 weeks on behalf of the movement. Stand with us and we will win a mighty victory for trade unionism.

The Trades and Labour Hall is at 375 Willesden High Road, London NW10.

*Newsreel Collective have produced an excellent new film on Grunwick which pinpoints many of the lessons of the dispute by focussing on the 11 July mass picket. A number of copies are being produced so that the film can be used extensively at solidarity meetings. It can be hired by writing to The Other Cinema, 25 Tottenham Street, London W1. Tel: 01-734 8508.



WE ARE CASUAL LABOUR WE NOT CASUAL LABOUR

LAYOFFS HAVE a long history at Fords. Yet the unions are making little more than token gestures in taking up the constant layoffs. And it has been only through our militancy that the union has been forced to do it now. Just look at two recent cases at Dagenham: the disputes at the engine plant and the assembly plant.

MAY 1977 — THE ENGINE PLANT DISPUTE

In May 1977 a section of workers in the Dagenham engine plant requested to be moved to a safer place of work — due to unsafe conditions, including fire and explosions. Ford took them off pay. A meeting of all the assembly areas was then called. The areas had previously voted that if any one assembly section was laid off, all the lines would walk out and picket.

Immediately a picket was placed on all gates. The picket stayed all night and was relieved by the nightshift.

The next morning, the works committee of the engine plant called a meeting and moved that the picket line should be removed. The night shift workers on the picket line were not invited to this meeting. And the dayshift pickets suspected that the main concern of the senior stewards seemed to be their weekend overtime. They refused to attend the meeting.

The picket continued, but the deputy convenor had already

wards stating the picketing was over and lorries should go through. By the night the picket decided to turn it in, feeling completely undermined by the action of the convenor and senior stewards.

However, within a few months, the layoff fight was taken up by assembly plant workers. It's a story to warm the heart!

FEBRUARY 1977 - THE ASSEMBLY PLANT DISPUTE

In February this year Dagenham assembly plant workers were laid off twice in the one week because of the fight being waged against speed up and discipline. We were angry and willing to fight.

When asked by shop stewards if we wanted a mass meeting to fight these attacks, the 500 trim line workers gave a clear answer — that we wanted one, and wanted it there and then.

We marched along the lines inviting other workers to join our demonstration until we reached the canteen. After a long delay the shop stewards turned down all practical proposals from the floor. They moaned that during

the last hundred years they had tried to fight 'in every possible way', but had never succeeded.

The feeling of the meeting was frustration. But when we returned to work every section began to take action. Different, uncoordinated action. It was then the assembly plant shop stewards' committee proposed a policy for fighting lay-offs.

This policy was later accepted almost unanimously by the assembly workers and it declared that any future lay-off would be answered with a total stoppage and occupation. This action would continue until the company agreed to pay 80 per cent of basic pay to the workers who had been laid off.

JUNE 1977: THE DISPUTE CONTINUES

In June the determination of the assembly workers was to be tested when a strike in the body plant led to 2,000 body workers and 3,000 assembly workers being laid off. The assembly stewards began to implement the policy agreed in February.

Pickets were set up at the main entrance in the Dagenham estate. Transport stewards blocked all goods entering or leaving the plant. The solidarity shown — by lorry drivers from as far away as Scotland — gave us tremendous strength.

Because our convenor Brian Elliot supported our demand for

80 per cent lay-off pay the company refused to negotiate with him. Instead it called in union officials and, with the Dagenham Panel of Convenors, tried to cook up a deal above our heads. They told us to resume work on the basis of a new disciplinary agreement. With not a mention of lay-off pay it was the opposite of what we wanted.

Ford's called a mass meeting to allow the officials to present their 'negotiated' plan. When the officials would not allow our convenor to speak we took over the platform and chucked off the officials. A vote was taken and the sell-out was rejected. By then we'd been on strike for 18 days and were more confident than ever.

But the officials still weren't prepared to accept the feelings of their members. They called another mass meeting. Scabs from other plants were sent to it and half of our workers weren't notified.

At the meeting a new proposal was put forward, offering us at least 24 hours notice before a lay-off. A large number of the workers voted to stay out but the combined effect of the union officials and management had its effect. The strike was called off. We were left with officials telling us that the deal was only a 'bridging agreement' and that the 80 per cent lay-off pay would be pursued 'vigorously' in the national wage claim.

'It's the women who bear the brunt'



We both work for Ford's...

'You're laid off without pay until further notice.' This is the bane of lineworkers in all the Ford assembly plants. And it's the wives and girlfriends — the women — who bear the brunt of it. They have to scrimp and save on social security. They are often forced to take a temporary job in addition to the housework they do already.

The last layoff which affected Dagenham, Southampton and Langley Ford assembly plants was in mid-June. The Dagenham plant took strike action to get layoff pay, fighting for 'Eighty per cent now!'

At Langley the blokes on the picket line were joined by a couple of wives and girlfriends of the men laid off. We talked to one of the women on the picket line. Julie Gungi is married, with two children and one on the way — she is seven months pregnant. It was her first time on a picket line.

What did you think about your husband being laid off because of a dispute at Dagenham? I didn't think it was fair. They are two different plants. The men at Langley are always being laid off through no fault of their own. What was the reaction of other wives? When I was on the picket line I talked to a lot of men, either on picket duty or picking up their one or two day's pay. I found that many of the wives supported our action — it got quite a lot of publicity in the local paper.

I think it's time Henry Ford realised that we have enough on our plates at the moment — looking after our children and families with inflation like it is — without putting our men out of work just when it suits him. Ford refuses to guarantee a week's pay every week. But Massey-Ferguson in Coventry gives this guarantee — so why not Ford? Did anyone object to you being on the picket line? Yes, the deputy convenor. I was accused of not being a Ford worker, but a university student! I am a fulltime housewife with two children and one on the way — but it was flattering. But I see myself as a Ford worker.

My husband works at Fords and brings home the money. I get him up and make sure he gets to work on time. I make it possible for him to work by looking after the kids and washing his filthy work clothes. The deputy convenor was objecting to the picket itself — because it was unofficial. He asked me if I worked for Fords. I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'Which department?' I replied, 'At home'. You are a member of the Ford Langley Action Committee? Yes, I am chairperson. FLAC

came about on the picket line. It is trying to make the union fight for what the ordinary blokes on the line and their wives and girlfriends want. There are two other women involved in FLAC and that is very important. What are your plans? First, I am trying to get a group of wives together — like if there is a strike. Then we are circulating a petition to wives and girlfriends about the importance of the guaranteed week in this wage claim. We are not objecting to the unions — it is just that they don't seem to think about the position of the wives.

I would support a strike called just to win the guaranteed week. A lot of women should support that, and they should look into the changes coming up in the pension plan. Before, a wife who was widowed would get 2 years wages — about £6,000. But now she will only get one year's wages plus a pension.

If she is young when her bloke dies, then she will get almost nothing each week. This new plan would make her much worse off in that situation. I think that's what the plan involves. It is very complicated. It looks as though the young widow would get much less and the older widow a bit more.

What was the reaction from wives, blokes and truck drivers when you went on the picket line? The truck drivers were very sympathetic, and most turned away. The whole experience was very interesting. The blokes didn't seem at all put out. They were just pleased I was there.

Some of the wives were a little hesitant. They didn't think they could do it. They say 'Not me, I have kids'. But I have kids too, and I am pregnant. If we all pull together, we can do these things.



Workers take over the platform at mass meeting.

AT THE big mass meeting of both shifts of the Dagenham assembly plant in June, 'Freaky Fred' Blake, official of the Transport Workers Union, tried to sell us out with a 13-Point Procedure Plan that didn't even mention lay-offs!

Ford smuggled a powerful public address system through the picket lines — powerful enough to drown any hecklers. They set it up in the car park at the back of the plant so that 'Blake the snake' could do his stuff.

The workers thought

differently. They didn't want Fred. They wanted to hear from Brian Elliott, convenor of the assembly plant. They crowded onto the platform. Fred was a bit nervous. Smiling sheepishly, he adjusted his tie, and spoke into the microphone. 'Brothers...' Immediately there was a roar of abuse: 'Fuck off you scab...' 'No brother of yours, mate...' 'Dirty sell-out...'

Fred became flustered. But his problem soon ended when somebody nicked his microphone. Freaky Fred went pale. He

scuttled off the platform and ran away to hide in the management's offices, refusing to come out again.

The mike was then in the control of the workers. Not just the convenors or the stewards, but the workers too! A very rare event for Fords Dagenham.

Ford thought they were clever: they cut off the big amplifiers. To continue the meeting, one of the stewards brought out a megaphone. Someone must have told the amplifier man that if he didn't switch on the sound system again, there might be a

riot. So the power came on and for the next 20 minutes workers, shopstewards, and the convenor had the platform all to themselves. They made speeches and argued our case. Nice one!

The most important thing about these events was that workers seized the right to control their own mass meeting. The union official ran away to where he belongs — in the management's offices — and we had control of the platform. This is the only way to ensure democracy in the decisions we make. A lesson for the future!