

## MOTOR INDUSTRY SCHOOL

In general, whatever the subject, we would need with all our pupils to discuss the purpose of this school.

It shall seek to equip our Comrades so gathered to understand the field and that they be briefed to enable them to conduct the struggle to lead to revolution. This is its only purpose. Consequently they do not need to be experts on the miniature or detail of a section of industry, and we say "industry" since the line of our Party demands the acceptance that only the working class can make industry, which class is in every section. Therefore the Comrades must come together to understand the particular facets inherent to the area of struggle, that is all. In a word, it is not necessary that they should work in that area or have experience of it by personal contact. This is very important as an added advantage only, and should never be underestimated. Therefore, if we have a school on the Motor Industry we would need to know that this section in engineering terms is an unreal growth, based on a candy floss economy and in the words of Ford now transplanted to Britain, "Every motor worker shall have or has a car", which is not fact. We would be required to examine in the Internationalist sense the multi-national aspect of such a mass-produced industry as car manufacture.

In Britain it immediately leads us to know that the car industry and the vehicle industry is dominated by what is termed, "the big four", three of which are U.S. capitalists, Chrysler, General Motors and Fords. There exists only one real car manufacturer claiming British origin without being chauvinist, to compete, i.e. B.L.M.C. So, the Comrades must consider the implication of all struggle in Britain, not just nationally but on its impact in Europe, and also in the U.S.A.

We have also to understand the role of the Trade Unions within this industry. First, the Comrades must come to think that the motor industry is not traditionally in engineering, although of course, the vehicle builders is as old as the wheel. The motor industry in today's concept is a mass produced industry. It eschews in the creating of the product every engineering tradition. There, the Managements designers, planners, methods-men, seek always to de-skill this industry. In a word, the manufacture of a car all over the world, not just alone in Britain, is parallel to the manufacture of the cheapest alarm clock and most probably, examining the finished product, just about as reliable. Consequently, the Trade Unions involved in the industry take on the aspect of this environment. By way of diversion it is important enough that Rolls Royce car manufacturers is conducted on a patriarchal basis. There is practically no real struggle of a class nature in this factory. Therefore, you cannot take into account in assessing the motor industry, this freak luxury product. Perhaps only in the general mass of car production does there still exist the earlier engineering skilled tradition that would be in the Rover Car Company for still here there is piece-work and a basic struggle of worker v. the boss.

We must see in a mass produced industry, first, the foreign financier not British capitalists, not that we make the point that the capitalists English pattern is a nicer one than a foreigner - all of them are bastards and have no nationality. One must remember that the greatest rise in motor manufacture comes from Japan. This followed their alleged renunciation of a military statesmanship to a military economy, in other words an economic war and not a military war and their application of mass production and copyist methods have transcended all the older growth stemming from the industrial revolution in mass production. The environment of such a section of industry has perforce altered the characteristic upon the Union membership within that section. It is not a fact that the struggle of the workers within the motor industry in the Midlands has always truly been progressive. In fact, examination of the Midlands shows that again and again they will advance, they the workers, a reactionary demand by nature of the industry. On examining the motor industry as a whole in Britain, in the U.S.A., Italy or in France, or even in Sweden, all which areas must never be ignored, one must consider Japan a new born industry section, as the most material in its approach to the development, would it be the employer, the capitalist, or the worker.

First, in Britain, Comrades should discuss the economics of the motor industry. Motor manufacturers, British or the U.S., constantly implore the Government to treat them the more favourably on the home market and by way of export. They claim of course that their manufacture, their product, is the money spinner of British economy today. Hence, from time to time they have argued expansion of the home market by way of easing of H.P. restrictions, they have demanded subsidy for export drive in the world, particularly U.S.A., to accelerate export or assistance, but if capitalism in manufacture bases itself as in origin it always did, on a home market, then the Comrades should consider, is, in relation to Britain, the motor industry an expanding industry, a contracting industry or yet, a replacement industry?

We need also to know that the nature of this section has come to change, or more properly imposed upon Unions within the section the style of work not formally traditional. Better still, the growth of the industry has in fact, provided for, because of backward tradition hitherto, the intervention, the introduction, growth of Unions not properly in tradition having a rightful place in this section. No more marked development shows this than that of the Transport & General and has as the exceedingly weak cousin, the Municipal & General. The whole bent of the Transport & General in Britain today and in its spectacular, that is, its public face, mostly shown in the motor section, is a drift towards Americanism or more exactly U.S. pattern stolen from U.A.W. and since in particular the coming of Jack Jones as the Secretary of the Union, a spectacular claim in public as the leader of the Unions within this industry; this Union in its National leadership in the ultimate did not support the incipient struggle of the workers in the motor industry against the abandonment of piece-work and the introduction of measured day work.

This Union today calls for a 4 day, 40 hour, week. In a word, it lengthens the working day by such a declaration and because of the conditions within the Midlands literally encourages moon-lighting and speciously argues that a 4 day, or 4 night, 40 hour week advances towards the shortening of the week without in fact, according to the season it provides for two things. More than one job and more than 4 shifts - 5, by way of overtime. The demand raised by all Unions for lay-off pay is reaction in the extreme, was always opposed by our Party and now contrasts strangely with the developing (sic) work-in and proves really our position is correct. Workers should never accept lay-off, paid or otherwise, while capitalism exists. They're there to work, the employers job to provide the work. Any reason for lay-off particularly that stemming from departmental dispute is the business of the employer. He must settle with this or what section which claims dispute with the capitalist or the employer. It is for the mass notwithstanding the exigencies of mass production to insist they have come to work, that the employer must pay, that they will not leave, that the dispute with a section is the employers headache or problem and he must settle without delay for lay-off, paid or unpaid, is always a device to divide and rule. The Comrades must consider the so-called affluent section of industry which, generally speaking, is contained within the Midlands, outside of Liverpool and Dagenham, has begun to show over 7% unemployed and is therefore, extremely vulnerable. The origins of the build up of the motor industry in this area stem from the Depression when hundreds of workers from the North, Scotland, Wales, came to be resident in the Midlands, be it Birmingham or Oxford and in Manchester or Dagenham, on the commencement of Fords.

The Comrades should discuss the way to recruit industry, the way to assess the truly class-conscious worker and/or leader in a section of industry which is extremely vulnerable to interruption, it could be compared to newspaper production. Comrades must learn to distinguish between, in relation to persons, the demagogue and the class worker, they must learn to differentiate between the class demand economic or otherwise, which is of benefit to the whole class as against the opportunist demand. Comrades must select those workers who show a native class instinct in leadership and the capacity to transform and learn Marxist/Leninist style of work from which at this School we should discuss how can we insist and increase the pace of workers struggle within this area, much more, how can we recruit for our Party, because whatever the spectacle fundamentally the general struggle is of a very low level.

In the issue of November, 1970 Worker, we carried a story concerning the battle at Oxford - workers versus employer. The issue here was, would the prevailing conditions which had been hardly won, i.e. piecework for the new model A.D.O.28, obtain.

The intention of the Employer was clear in this matter, since they sought to jettison the National Agreement on piecework held with A.E.U. to impose measured daywork etc. for the manufacture of the A.D.O. 28 when in production subsequent to rundown of the 1100 on which the bulk of workers were engaged.

The question here was for the workers, what will happen to us? What will be our wages and working conditions in the interim prior to smooth flow production of A.D.O. 28, and what would conditions and wages be when in full production. We at that time wrote of a strike then proceeding on these matters

There were some of us who argued the heading of such an article should be "Premature Strike." ! This was not done.

Why should those who know say such should be the description of a story of strike here in B.L.M.C., Oxford.

We take the view that it is quite idle to ask an employer what does he propose shall be the wages and working conditions for coming event and labour.

We say this because it must always be axiomatic that we do not ask, we assert, we tell the employer what he shall do. It is our labour power which we 'choose' to sell. He wants, presumably, to buy it. Therefore we do not ask him, but tell him at the appropriate time. This is important. To ask before is to ask in urgency of the Employer's dilemma and desire to get on with the job. We must learn to wait 'till all is smooth to go as the Yanks say, "All signals gogo.!"

To ask of the Employer, "What do you propose?" is to invite a negative or at least a disagreeable retort. We must not ask, only tell, and to repeat at the time when the Employer is most exposed, most vulnerable, as to cause him to have to agree with our terms.

This was not done, and because also of the uneven development within our party and our paper, the heading "Premature" was not forthcoming. Because of course our comrades take the view that all strikes are good, because all strikes are synonymous with struggle against capitalism, without understanding that, if all strikes are good, some are better than others and those which lead to victory and gain are best of all.

What followed was a relatively longdrawn (5 week) strike on a question and answer basis, when at the time it was of no immediate moment to the employer to settle. He was not at that time ready to settle, for there was no question of immediate or pressing production. After the return of the workers on strike throughout determining future conditions, there followed conversations, negotiations (sic) directly with stewards when it was quite obvious the employer, when good and ready, would arbitrarily revoke the National Piecework agreement to which he was party.

All the talks, which were naught but shadow boxing, were conducted in a vacuum, i.e. between stewards and management representatives, without the involvement of the workers directly concerned.

In finality, the employer terminated these talks, "negotiations" (sic), and imposed his terms on a worker group who could not now enter into dispute or strike, even supposing they were both clear enough and convinced enough so to do. Because, of course, they had been relatively exhausted in the previous fight without resolution - only because

The employer has quite successfully by-passed the shop-stewards, addressed himself directly to the workers directly involved, individually offered the carrot of £1.00 per hour and no piecework but measured daywork, accompanied with the argument that this means industrial peace, that there will in future be no disputes about payment, all will be peace. No need to stop work to settle a price for work done, it is now fixed. We may, says he the employer, look forward to peace and smooth working, no need any longer to argue prices, and above all, 'mutuality.'

What the employer has accomplished is a model of tactics and a moral lesson to our shop floor leadership. He, the employer, went directly to the workers, spoke directly to him and imposed a bargain, a disastrous one for the workers, due to the neglect and lack of experience of the stewards. They forgot the army, i.e. the workers, in their preoccupation with their conversations with the employer. Believing they were conversing, communicating with the enemy who was himself adroit enough to conduct a dual dialogue vis-a-vis the workers and vis-s-vis the shop stewards who were isolated from their own workmates in this process. In the meantime, he, the employer, addressed himself direct to the worker who, bothered about the rundown of the 1100, i.e. the ending of that job, anxiously cast eyes on the coming task, i.e. ADO 28 new model and unemployment, made bargain directly with the employer over the heads of the shop stewards who in fantasy believed they were actually concluding terms and conditions for new work. How could this come about? It is the old story: stewards sometimes forget their origin and purpose, i.e. they are the voice of their workmates and are elected by them. They become, alas, involved in the expertise in their own fancied expertise also, which they think places them above the common herd. The moral here is the employer never forgets his class root base or origin, neither must we.

Why is this story so important? It is necessary to understand the struggle which has been taking place in the engineering industry for a considerable period of time in connection with piecework and the agreement implicit therein. as well as a whole mumbo jumbo, pseudo science about measured day work, job evaluation, productivity bargains and the like. There is a White Paper issued by the Labour Government (such infidels are they) which describes piecework systems, payment by result systems, and the agreements held by Unions over a long period of history as archaic and anachronistic and it would serve the alleged students of working class struggle well to have a little humility and study this period and such documents. Because of mass production and relative full employment - even as we write we are, of course, not unaware of the rising unemployment - but we repeat, because of that which we have said before, the power to strike a bargain passed from the employer to the worker on the shop floor.

The old A.E.U. were ever champions and held the ring even though all other Unions "almost" conceded, for following and preceding the first World War 1914-1918, the employers insisted and demanded that there should be introduced an incentive scheme for payment of wages, a payment by results scheme, or in ordinary vernacular, piecework. In those days, every tradesman in the engineering industry, led by those within the A.E.U. of that time, and A.S.E. preceding them, opposed the introduction of piecework. They did this because they argued among so many other things that an individual incentive set one worker against another.

Nevertheless, it was introduced. To the eternal credit of the A.E.U. of that time, it refused to be party to an agreement on piecework which provided that if a price could not be fixed, that is to say between the employer and the worker who had the job to do, that whilst the argument would ensue, the job should be undertaken. The A.E.U., the leading Union, refused such understanding and insisted that all prices must be "mutually" agreed, failing which the job would not be proceeded with. In the period between 1926, almost up to as late as 1939, by and large piecework systems were either to the advantage of the employer or in latter day, turned out to be relatively equal in balance of power. For in those days it was always possible for an employer or his representative in this case, the common or garden, mostly common, rate fixer, to bypass mutuality by asserting "That's the price, if you don't want to do it, we will get somebody else to do it.", and this was possible because of the great reserve of the unemployed, but to their credit also, within the ranks of Trade Unionists, they never consciously or wittingly in seeking employment, sought to break down the rates or work conditions obtained by their workmates.

Throughout that period mentioned, i.e. 1926 - 1939, generally speaking, to curb the rapacity of the employer, and the imposition of unjust piecework price, a common norm obtained within the workshop. A level was fixed among our Trade Union brothers that jobs would not be accomplished or returned beyond a fixed bonus payment which was limited, sometimes to time and a quarter, sometimes time and a half. Within the A.E.U. in fact, to ensure that this obtained, a Rule of the Union insisted that the shop stewards or convenors had the absolute right to see the pay lines of all or any member. This would prove whether he had sustained the limit at pieceworking pace and had not, so to say, overbooked in such a manner as to expose to the employer or his rate fixer, that the price on the job was of such that they might impose a price cut. So then, in a period when the power was within the employer by and large, notwithstanding the adversity of the constant threat of unemployment, our memberships honourably kept the employer at bay.

With the coming of the War years and the knowledge of this situation within the industry, there came forth so many Ministers, not least of all and by far the loudest mouth, Bevin, then Minister of Labour in a National Government, saying that we must lift all so-called 'Restrictive' practices, for the previous practice of preventing the attack of the employer on piecework prices by the device already outlined was characterised as a restrictive practice, but with the War there was this pledge: "Work as hard as you can, as fast as you can, never mind the price, never mind it be previously returned at time and a half, let it be done in such a time as to return it as 200%, 300%, there is no limit." Such did they say and exhort us to work the harder and the faster. In Bevin's words, "The sky was the limit."

After the 1939-1945 War with the rapid expansion of mass production techniques, particularly in the motor industry, but there are so many others, and with the inability of the employer to tell a worker, "You work for that price or you get out.", there began this incessant campaign and indoctrination that the piecework system was old fashioned, must be discarded, that it hampered production and in latter years the most vociferous exponent of this philosophy was the Labour Government.

The case of the employer, the B.L.M.C. in particular, is boldly, "That's the price.", but with this transference of the balance of power to the worker, they cannot impose

prices which they demand<sup>4</sup> should be. In a laboriously compiled chapter and verse, they seek to show that because of the piecework agreement to which they are party, which demands there shall be mutuality, i.e. that a price cannot be arbitrarily imposed by either side and in the absence of mutual agreement, there is neither a price nor work done because of the absence of their previous power to impose. Therefore, piecework must be jettisoned.

It is a curious turn of the wheel that in the First War the employers were such loud advocates of piecework in the interests of production, they now become the undertakers of piecework agreements and in this case the particular employers argued and listed innumerable strikes which have taken place on this question, within their many establishments. The plain fact of the matter is that within such an agreement properly operated, there cannot be a strike. This can only come about because the employer does not seek mutual agreement but insists on imposing a price, tries to introduce it and, by such an act, abrogates the agreement, hence the resistance and the strikes that ensue. Of course, the employer says unless it be done this way, there won't be any work done at all. What he really says is this, "I cannot have such arguments, I cannot have imposed upon me the need to reason with the worker. What I say goes."

The acceptance by the workers in the ad hoc manner of conditions now introduced in connection with the new production line, is short term indeed. It must be remembered that at this time, there is not smooth flow production, that to a certain extent, the pace of work provides for a certain amount of laissez-faire, in a word, it is not irksome or a tyranny, so the offer of £1.00 per hour will temporarily be seen to be attractive. Once full production is in full swing and under control, the employer will seek to impose a greater and greater speeding up. Without a piecework agreement, he believes that he has "all power" with him. Of course, this is cloud cuckoo land as well, because as the workers come under greater pressure, greater demands of speed up upon them, they will revolt nevertheless, but there will be a time lag before they catch up to this tyranny, and before they stand and defy. They have surrendered temporarily one of the strongest weapons that gave a worker dignity in a workshop. There are many lessons here; and a moral. No struggles can be conducted against the employing class in a vacuum. Shop stewards are not lawyers with fancy brief cases, they are but the epitome of the strength of their workmates as a whole. It is a question of "from the masses to the masses." Let us hope that we will all have such responsibility, learn a little humility and rely on the masses.