

KIRKBY RESISTANCE

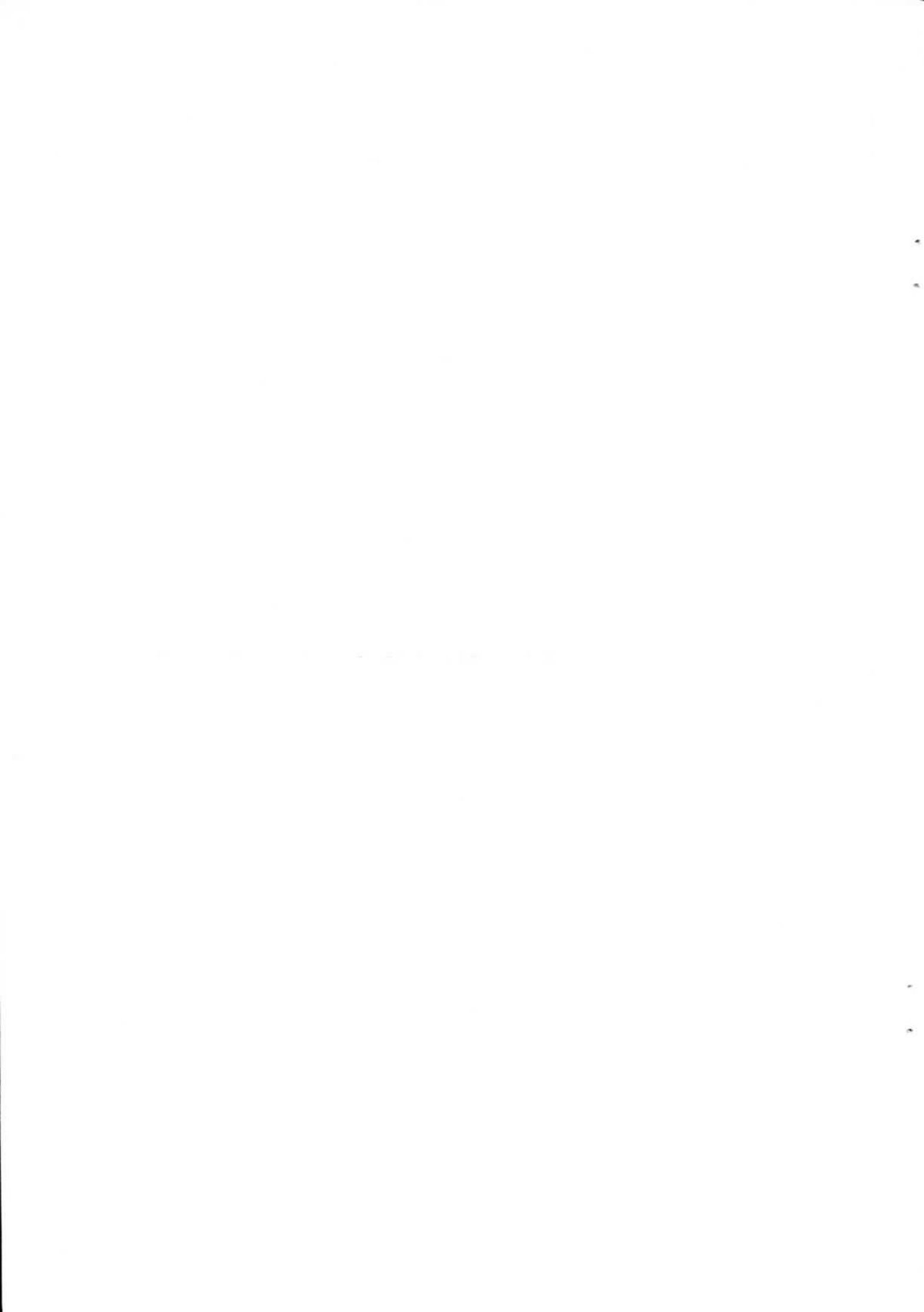
FISHER BENDIX

OCCUPATION

SPECIAL



PUBLISHED BY KIRKBY INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS



EDITORIAL

The head-on collision between the workers at Fisher-Bendix and the Thorn Electric empire shows that the interests of the employers, and those of the Government are incompatible to the day-to-day needs of the ordinary working people.

On 15th January, 1972, the Financial Times - a paper written by the bosses for the bosses - revealed with glee the 'success' of Sir Jules Thorn's policies: 'success' that is measured in terms of profits made and jobs lost; more riches for the few and increased misery for the rest.

"....Company profits will expand sharply, and Thorn (which has done well out of the boom in colour TV) has whetted the appetite of the investors this week by announcing a half-year increase of 30%.

The behaviour of profits is closely tied up with the level of unemployment, which the National Economic Development Office now fear may remain high by past standards even if the Government hopes over the months ahead."

Simply the Government's economic policies are assuring the business mogals' future profits by using unemployment as a weapon with which to batter down workers' defences. The choice for workers is on the one hand a life of increasing misery on the dole, - or to stand and fight to defend their jobs.

Since August 1970, starting with the workers at UCS and then followed by workers at Plessey, Alexandria; Allis-Chalmers, Meld; and now those at Fisher-Bendix here in Kirkby, a new tactic has emerged. It is a tactic that faces the realities of the situation: the tactic is OCCUPATION.

This approach recognises one crucial point; that the struggles against unemployment is not fought by organising hunger marches, or by appealing to MPs, but on the shop-floor - inside the factories. It is here that the working class can flex its muscles.

The only way to defeat the Government is to continue the occupations and mobilise the whole labour movement in a massive campaign against unemployment. Such a campaign must use the occupations as an inspiration that will stir the imagination of workers everywhere. The call to spread the occupation must be made. Alone the workers at Fisher-Bendix cannot win: their success can only be guaranteed by your active support.

INSIDE STORY BY HAROLD MARKS A.U.E.W.

'It's far better to occupy, to control from within rather than stand out in the rain and cold, the fog and the wind, trying to stop scab vehicles.'

This was the message that Jack Spriggs, A.U.E.W. convener of Fisher-Bendix, gave a mass meeting of nearly 800 workers last week when they voted unanimously to take over the factory, rejecting management's plans to close the plant and throw them on the dole. The workers are now occupying the works 24 hours a day on a four-shift basis.

Decision-day, 5 January, began with 50 workers, led by Jack Spriggs, meeting management representatives led by Sydney Carne. Jack Spriggs gave the management 15 minutes to withdraw the notice of closure and their orders to start dismantling machines. When management refused and said their closure decision must go ahead, the workers gave them 10 minutes to leave the factory.

Jack Spriggs was given a tumultuous reception in the works canteen. He introduced Ian Levin, the Deputy Mayor of Liverpool, who had written to Sir Jules Thorn, head of the Thorn Group that owns Fisher-Bendix, asking him to keep the factory open.

REJECTED

Councillor Levin had arrived at the factory gates just as the management were leaving. He persuaded them to come back for further talks. But all they would offer was a 'stay of execution' for 28 days when the closure would go ahead. The mass meeting rejected this offer, along with a promise of a 'parliamentary inquiry' into the whole affair. Jack Spriggs told the workers:

'We cannot be sure who will get the advantage if we accept this offer. But if you continue with the occupation we will win.'

He added:

'We have a golden opportunity to lead Merseyside in a fight against big business. Their whole aim is to make money at the expense of the working class.'

The convener said that if Thorn were prepared to maintain them on full wages until every worker retired at 65 then they would willingly leave the factory. But if not, the millions of pounds' worth of stores and equipment in the plant would be held by the workers.

'Merseyside is waiting for a lead. We have got to have the responsibility to take it.'

He called on trade unionists and housewives everywhere to black Thorn products.

He stressed the need for unity inside the factory and called on the massive support already promised by Merseyside trade unionists.

After the unanimous vote taken - with hands held up long enough for even the most doubting TV camera - the workers streamed back into the factory to start organising the occupation.

'Brothers and sisters, we are on our way to victory,' were the parting words from Jack Spriggs.

JACK SPRIGGS TALKS TO JOHN DEASON

Serious trouble started some six months ago when Thorn Electrical took over the factory from Parkinson-Gowan. Thorn wanted to shift the washing machine business to Spain.

This meant 500 redundancies. We opposed the plans by withdrawing labour. After nine-weeks' strike we won completely. The management withdrew their plans for redundancy. But most of us knew that the matter would not end there. We had to look for new ways of fighting redundancy. The strike, however, made all the difference. The men and women in the factory could see that redundancies were not inevitable and could be fought, and fought successfully. The management soon made it clear that they intended closing the whole factory by May 1972. We organised a shop stewards' combine committee throughout the Thorn group, ensured no plant left the factory, maintained contact with local factories and building sites, planned future blacking operations and raised a fighting fund by collecting 50p weekly from each member of the workforce.

TOOK POSSESSION

The management issued 60 redundancy notices for the end of January. On Monday 3 January they announced plans for the removal of plant. We simply reiterated our intention not to accept any redundancies, any closure, any removal of plant. On Wednesday management offered a 28 day 'stay of execution', but would not withdraw the 60 redundancy notices. A mass meeting rejected this so-called offer and unanimously voted for an occupation strike.

We immediately detailed men to the gatehouse and administration block. We also took possession of the spares and service depot a mile from the main factory. The workforce, or rather the occupiers, were divided into four six-hour shifts to ensure 24-hour control of the premises. On Thursday the shop stewards' committee, with representatives of the staff workers

and co-opted workers where necessary, formed committees for safety, security, propaganda, discipline, welfare, finances and press.

We have had telegrams of support from UCS, Allis-Chalmers and Plessey Alexandria. Within 24 hours local factories had offered assistance with picketing.

We need financial support and telegrams of support to keep our morale up. We have also called for a boycott on all Thorn goods. Support for solidarity actions will certainly be forthcoming on Merseyside. But it is not just a case of helping us. Any other factory, building site or workplace faced with redundancy should seriously consider occupation. The trade union movement as a whole must start fighting back against redundancies.

We have much greater control in the factory by occupying rather than staging a work-in. We have use of all management facilities, and we have the tremendous bargaining power of the stock. There are £200,000 worth of finished radiators in the factory, £50,000 in storage heaters, an dozen new articulated waggons and stacker trucks as well as £2 million in plant.

The occupation has clearly demonstrated the responsibility of the workers and their ability to control the factory. We can see quite clearly that we ourselves are capable of running the place. Workers can control things themselves. I am not being Utopian about this. I do not think that we could run this factory in isolation without other developments elsewhere - but it has shown us the possibilities.

Think for instance what would happen if the miners occupied instead of going on strike. A rash of occupation strikes against redundancy would be a direct challenge to the Tories and their friends like Julian Thorn. Workers would become aware of their potential power and their ability to run industry.

LETTER FROM A WIFE

As a wife of one of the workers myself, I feel it is important to express my views at a time when these men have had to make a decision between joining the dole queues or the only alternative - OCCUPATION

The redundancy payment offered may have seemed tempting, to say the least, to the men - and even more so to the wives. To us it may have seemed a short-term answer to the over increasing cost of living. But as a mother with three children I consider it wiser to look further ahead, to see whether my husband, and all other Fisher-Bondix workers would find another job before the 'proverbial-wolf' was knocking on the door again -

and the redundancy money ran out!

When you consider that there are nearly a million in the ever growing dole queues, I find it hard to believe that there is any hope of 'alternative employment'. THERE COULD BE NO OTHER DECISION BUT TO OCCUPY!!!

The occupation is the last resort, after all other attempts have been made AND IGNORED BY OWNER SIR JULIUS THORN, whose aim is to accumulate profit for himself and his kind. They obviously do not understand the distress and discomfort their action brings, no matter how 'human' the 'public relations man' try to make them out to be. The question is, HOW LONG CAN MEN AND WOMEN WITH A FAMILY TO SUPPORT, REMAIN PAWNS IN THE POWER GAME, DESIGNED TO BENEFIT ONLY THE FEW.

If other wives are as committed as I am to ensuring that our husbands will win this fight for the right to work, then WE MUST FIGHT WITH THEM. The workers of Fisher-Bendix are determined to challenge 'The Industrial Assassin' but they need OUR support. We must protect our families from a demoralising existence on the dole.

When the stresses arise from strikes or redundancies, it is so easy to take it out on those nearest to us. It is important that wives understand the whole situation, know who the true aggressors are, and make sure our attack is on them.

It is essential that we attend as many meetings as we can and know what is going on. I know this is often difficult - having to take the youngest with you and getting back for school etc. - but it is well worth the effort - to see the fight in action and know that you are involved. If it is impossible for you to take an active part, you can encourage other wives to boycott Thom's products (list of which are available).

Apart from the occupation serving as a practical demonstration - if full support is given they cannot fail in their aim - that is to regain THE RIGHT TO WORK

Signed

Ann Marks.

WOMEN

It is necessary in the present situation for the wives of Fisher-Bendix workers to organise together and take an active part in the struggle - rather than remain isolated in their homes - where it is so easy to become disillusioned and demoralised.

Up to now the workers that have come forward with support have been mostly men - yet many of the big factories such as Krafts, Dickensons and Delco employ largely women. Why is this so? It is because women have traditionally been discouraged from taking an active part in the factory and in the union.

Women workers - wives of Fisher Bendix workers, could set about raising support by picketing these Kirkby factories and addressing meetings. In doing so they would not only be raising support for the workers at Fisher-Bendix but encouraging women to play a fuller part - especially over unemployment where women are particularly vulnerable. The bosses think they have a free hand in the hiring and firing of women workers and treat them as a source of cheap reserve labour. Women must be encouraged to fight alongside men - a divided labour force means easier victory for the employers.

Those women who are not part of the struggle on the shop-floor i.e. the housewives of Kirkby, must also be brought into the fight. It takes only a handful of women to organise a meeting in the market place to bring the issue home to other housewives, and ensure growing support for the occupation.

There's have subsidaries in Kirkby - Radio Rentals, DER, and housewives could bring attention to the occupation by having a picket outside these shops.

One problem may of course be the children. But if wives cooperate together, play groups can be organised - why not in the factory!

Women are already involved in the Fisher Bendix struggle. A large percentage of the workers are women. The canteen is being run by the women. Food from Kirkby housewives would surely be welcome.

Last Wednesday a meeting was called, to which all wives and children of Fisher Bendix workers were invited and on Saturday night wives will be in Fisher's again - for a social.

Women must be involved fully in any struggle. Their active support will be a decisive factor in the eventual victory of the Fisher Bendix workers.

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS

When the Tories go on the attack against the working class, it's not done in a half-hearted fashion. They attack on all fronts. It comes in the work-place, as an attack on working conditions and wages. In the home, - the 'Fair-deal' (the Tory proposals for council rents), is only a front for putting the rents up. The Press know whose side they are on - remember what they did to the Power Workers last time round. Prescription charges are up. Even the kids aren't spared - free school milk is abolished, and the quality of their education is steadily sinking.

In Kirkby the situation is bad. Unemployment is reaching the 20% mark, and cutbacks in the social services hit particularly hard. So what do we do? How do we fight it?

One "answer" is to get the Labour Party back into power and make them put through socialist policies - let's make the leopard change its spots. But remember, it was the Labour Government that gave the Tories the go-ahead with such policies as 'In Place of Strife'. It was Kirkby's own Harold Wilson who first put the prescription charges on, and cut the kids' milk. It was the Labour Government who, only two years ago, confronted the miners - just as the Tory Government is doing today. When Labour returns none of these cuts will be restored unless we can force them.

Another answer to the Tory offensive comes from many militants in industry - work to improve wages and conditions, if necessary by taking unofficial action. O.K., as far as it goes. But it's not enough.

What we need is an organisation that can fight for democracy in the unions; one that will bring all the militants throughout the country together. We need an organisation that can mount a political fight, which will show that Tweedledum Wilson and Tweedledee Heath for what they really are: both committed to preserving a system where profit comes before people and a small minority owns most of the wealth produced by the working class.

The International Socialists are attempting to build such an organisation throughout the country, including Merseyside. Although we are still small, our membership is just over 2,500, we can see no alternative to the difficult task of building a workers' party that will represent the interests of the people who produce all the wealth. Already our weekly paper, the SOCIALIST WORKER, has become the leading paper on the Left with sales of over 25,000 each week, and growing fast.

If you think as we do, then join us. Get in touch with us at:

Kirkby International Socialists,
A.12 Ravenscroft, Tower Hill,
Kirkby. tel.: 546-7828.

Merseyside International Socialists
1 Windermere Terrace, Princes Park,
Liverpool 8.

The building of a group like I.S. will not be easy, but it is vital if we are to successfully attack the policies of Heath & Co., and defend working class organisations.

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"WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE."

The firm in Spain - Constructores de Aparatos Refrigeradores SA (CAPSA) - which now produces several of the Bendix products, is no less ruthless in exploiting its workers than Thorn.

Its factory of 1,500 workers is at Getafe, a small town on the outskirts of Madrid, and has an annual turnover of over 800 million pesetas, or £4,800,000.

Because their wages are so low - from £36 to £48 per month - the workers must work overtime. But the poor market for electrical domestic equipment at present is causing grave problems.

At present CAPSA workers are discussing the collective agreement for the factory. The workers are demanding: 950 pesetas per day - just over £2; a 44-hour week; 4 weeks holiday; the right to hold meetings in the factory; and to have negotiations direct with the management instead of through the Government-controlled unions.

FACTS ABOUT THE THORN EMPIRE

The Fisher-Bendix factory is just one small part of the mighty Thorn empire - a huge combine built up by Sir Jules Thorn over 33 years. Here are a few interesting facts about the man who claims that he cannot afford to keep the 800 men at Fisher-Bendix in work.

Together with other individuals and on his own account Sir Jules Thorn owns 5,684,444 shares in his firm. On 19th June, 1971, the value of one share in Thorn industries was £3.42. Today they are worth £4.93. Thorn's holding in this company works out at £28 millions.

Last June it was worth £19,494,000 so that in 7 months it increased in value by £8,707,000; an average of £300,000 per week. The wage bill at its highest in Fisher-Bendix is £100,000 month!!!

Thorn is one of the wealthiest men in Britain. His riches are increasing at a phenomenal rate - yet he is prepared to deprive 800 workers of their livelihood.

Other major shareholders are:

Prudential Assurance	-	2,099,990	shares
Peart Assurance	-	1,331,669	"
E.R. Frigland	-	783,252	"
BP Trust	-	237,000	"
World Star Assurance	-	232,732	"
Esso Pension Fund	-	205,000	"

LIES UPON LIES

The Workers at the Fisher-Bendix factory on South Boundary Road, Kirkby are now well established in their occupation. The 'UNLDER NEW M.A.N.GEMENT' sign on the front fence clearly displays their determination to keep the plant open.

But what of the owner of the factory, Sir Jules Thorn, head of the mighty Thorn Industrial empire. Jack Spriggs, AUEW convenor told a mass meeting at the factory:

'We are dealing with a factory of which the chairman, (Sir Jules Thorn), alone has over £30 million in share values'.

A man whose combine made £37.21 million profit last year and £19 million for the first six months of this year, yet who can callously order the closure of one of his factories and the throwing of 800 workers onto the dole.

GOVERNMENT GRANTS

But even before Thorn bought the factory, a long history of deceit, corruption and mismanagement had gone on. BMC, the motor company were the first owners in 1964. They received some £3½ million in development grants, handed to them on a plate by the last Labour Government as their major policy for tackling unemployment. There can be little doubt that much of this money went straight into the pockets of the BMC shareholders, for the Fisher-Bendix management have admitted that they cannot account for it. Even Eric Heffer, Labour MP for Walton, told the workers in the factory that because of the way in which public money had been spent:

'in future when we give money we will also exercise control over the firms we give money to'.

Let's hope that he keeps his word when the Labour Party are returned at the next election. How many other firms in development areas throughout the country have been given tax-payers' money in this way?

Yet despite the fact that BMC had been given so much public money, those Kirkby workers who managed to get jobs in Fisher Bendix started off on only £11 per week. In 1966 the first sign of the present dispute came to light when BMC sold the factory to Parkinson Cowen the cooker manufacturers. At first this was looked upon as just another take-over, until someone discovered that Parkinson-Cowan was an associate company of BMC. No doubt the complex methods of tax evasion and profiteering that lay behind this move will never be completely uncovered but what is certain is that something far more sinister was going on, than just one firm buying up another.

PRODUCTS CHANGED - WORKER FORCE CUT

Time and time again production of successful products such as stainless steel sinks, considered to be the best in the world, were taken away from Fisher-Bendix. Eighteen months ago the management announced that they were stopping production of the

tumblerdryer. This machine is now produced under licence by the Spanish firm of CARSA where the wages are even lower, and the profits higher than in Kirkby.

Coupled with a vicious productivity deal, the policy slashed the work force from 2,200 in 1966 to the present 600. Because of the productivity deal, 'workers in this factory pushed up their personal production by 50%' said Jack Spriggs. 'Productivity deals up and down the country have created unemployment' he continued.

FACTORY CLOSURE ANNOUNCED - VICTORIOUS 9 WEEK STRIKE

Then in February 1971, management announced that the factory was losing £1 million a year. This seemed just another blatant lie by the shop stewards who challenged them to give proof. 'You've got to take our word for it', was the only proof that management could give. Finally, on 1st June, one week after the factory had been sold to its present owner, the Thorn group, all the stewards were called to a meeting with management, while they were away from the shop floor, superintendents raced through the factory giving out notices of redundancy for over half the workforce. Management declared that the workers' trade unions would have no say in the matter at all, as it was simply a case of 550 workers going out of the factory gates, and not coming back. In retaliation, the entire workforce came out on strike against this attempt to all but shut down the factory. After three weeks, the T & GWU and the AUEW made the strike official, but only when dock workers agreed to 'black' all Thorn goods did the workers gain the upper hand.

"What a change came over Sir Jules Thorn"

said Jack Spriggs.

"He was prepared to reinstate all the work people immediately."

The 9 week strike had been a victory, but this was only to be the first battle.

OCCUPATION

Proof had now come to light that the tumbler dryer previously made at Fisher-Bendix was now being produced in Spain, and that Thorn had every intention of transferring the production of washing machines to the same firm. Workers at the factory took a stand, and refused to allow any tools or machinery to be moved. On December 8th a Mr. Sibley arrived from Thorn to say that production was not going to be moved to Spain, but to Newcastle, because this was a 'depressed area!!!'

"The reason you are moving this factory to Newcastle, Mr. Sibley, is because you want to make more profit for your employer, Sir Jules Thorn", replied Jack Spriggs.

Finally on January 3rd 1972, Mr. M. Brayshaw, the new manager of Fisher-Bendix, and the thirteenth since the factory was opened, stated that the procedure to dismantle the machinery and close the factory would be carried out. On Tuesday 4th he instructed his chief engineer to sack every man who did not carry out his 'lawful' instructions. On Wednesday 5th, Mr. Sidney Carne, one of Thorn's top managers arrived at the factory to personally supervise the closure. At a meeting in the board-room, Jack Spriggs told him:

"I suggest you get your coat and leave these premises because if you're out of the way you can do no harm." He did not believe us until 100 people invaded the board room".

Two hours later the entire work force voted unanimously to occupy the factory.

APPEAL TO ALL WORKERS

If the Fisher-Bendix workers, who are occupying their factory on South Boundary Road, are to win, they must be supported by the whole labour movement. Yet a victory for these workers will not simply mean that a few hundred jobs have been saved - a victory will represent much more. With unemployment running so high, workers, not just on Merseyside are looking for a lead in opposing the Tory Government policies.

Therefore, it is vital that the workers occupying can be assured of your active support.

1. If your factory is in the Thorn combine then contact Fisher Bendix and support the combine committee which has been set up.
2. A boycott of all Thorn Electrical goods has been called for. Already docks throughout the country have launched a total ban on the movement of all Thorn products - SUPPORT IT.
3. If faced with redundancies or closures then OCCUPY; only in this way can working class people protect their jobs - the likes of Wilson and Heath certainly won't!!
4. Support all solidarity action called for by the shop stewards.
5. Letters of support are needed; send these to Fisher Bendix, South Boundary Road, Kirkby, Lancs.
6. Finally, and just as important, cash is needed urgently. If possible a weekly levy should be taken through shop steward's committees to ensure a steady supply of cash to the occupiers.

All money to:

Bro. Tommy Staples
42 Kennelwood Avenue,
Northwood,
Kirkby,
Lancs.

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SKELMERSDALE PLANT CAN PLAY A CRUCIAL PART IN THE FIGHT

Just seven days after Jack Spriggs led the workers at Fisher-Bendix and occupied the Kirkby plant, the chairman of Thorn Electrical Industries - Sir Jules Thorn - gave his half-yearly report. He declared that the group had made a record profit of £19,621,000 in 6 months up to September 30 1971. This represents an increase of over 30%.

Whilst much of the increase comes from the colour TV side, it was stated that the engineering side has done well.... lighting is ahead, while white goods have been strong overall.

The Financial Times raved about Thorn's prospects.

"Colour TV demand is racing ahead Thorn has another big production increase in hand and now makes nearly all its colour tubes at the Skelmersdale plant ..."

Here lies the key to the Thorn empire. The workers at the Skem plant have the power to defend the jobs of thousands of their fellow trade unionists in the combine. It seems obvious from the half-yearly reports, that if production at that plant was threatened, Jules Thorn would come running.

The task of winning the support of the workers in Sk. this plant, must be a crucial part of the strategy in the campaign to save the jobs.