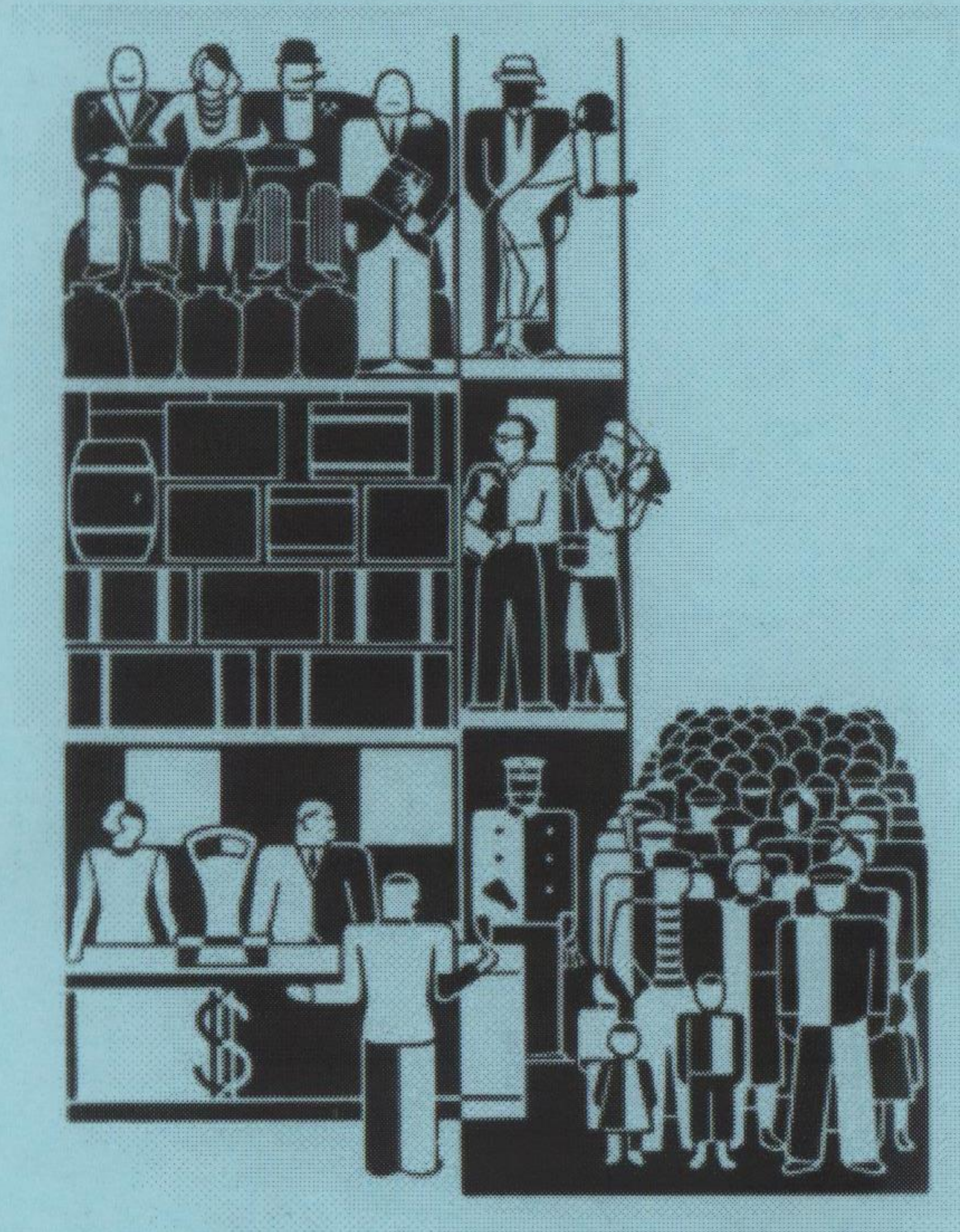


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Ford Visteon Enfield Workers Occupation



Gert Arntz ; Krise, 1931

**an eyewitness account and first thoughts
by Alan Woodward**

**£ 3-00,
any revenue above costs goes to the dispute fund**

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*Over 100 Pictures - taken with my mobile phone during the dispute
 ~ are being processed onto a cd disc and is available from the shop
 stewards*

*The management had now reneged on its own arrangement to let
 people in at 10 am to collect tools and personal possessions .Very*

Note to readers

In this report workers and supporters are referred to by initial or first name on the "no names, no pack drill" basis unless they have specifically given permission to be named in full. The complete story of the occupation would be a long book, which will have to be written up later, as it would include, much more on the background, all the documents and the actual details of my diary kept from minute one, and the ongoing future for the car industry. This interim summary can be produced and circulated immediately to those members of the occupation who indicated they would like one, and so on. A booklet based on this document can be published soon by myself.

That said the document is obviously based on factual information from the factory. Another source is from my experience from a lifetime of industrial experience. That does not mean this can be considered an "independent" or "true" or "complete" or "impartial" account. Personally I do not believe such documents exist. All writing is a personal selection and the writer's own belief and views will influence what she or he selects. People that make these claims of "impartiality" usually believe they own the "truth" like they own the rest of the planet.

So this is an account based on my own beliefs in libertarian socialism. I make no other claim - events interpreted by a belief in the capacity of workers to organise their own fate without external intervention, and despite the odds.

People not used to organisations and abbreviations may want to consult Appendix E for guidance

With thanks to P and K for help.

Introduction

The Ford Visteon Occupation was the first large scale action of this sort in this country since the Brighton refuse workers in June 2001, The FV occupation hit right at the heart of one of the largest and most powerful enterprises in the world and put occupation actions right back on the agenda. The recent Waterford and Dundee events had prepared the way and now the nine days in Ponders End, Enfield, was front page news, after the G20 that was. My account is written straight afterwards, and probably has numerous mistakes that can be corrected. It stands as a current account, of my experience and views.

To begin at the beginning

I received a forwarded email from the National Shop Stewards Network, hereafter NSSN, originally from John Maguire, convenor, about the Belfast workers who were refusing to leave their car park and were appealing for help from other Visteon workers, see appendix C. I got this at 9.30 am on Weds 1 April and drove to Ponders End, Enfield, I arrived and spoke to some workers, B. and others, who introduced me to the convenor Kevin Nolan.

I quickly learnt the facts. Stephen Parenti union Chair at Visteon Enfield takes up the story "In June 2000, Ford Motor Co created a subsidiary Company called Visteon. Ford employees at these plants were given 'mirrored' contracts, i.e., Ford Motor Company terms and conditions for life. On March 31st 2009 at 2.30 pm all employees at the three plants were informed with 6 minutes notice to leave the premises, as Visteon UK Ltd had ceased trading and was in receivership. Most of the employees averaged 20 years of service, Some with 30 - 40 years service. In all, 600 employees now face extreme financial difficulties, the lose of their homes and a uncertain future. Why? Because Ford will not honour our contracts or agreements that Visteon originally signed".

The management had now reneged on its own arrangement to let people in at 10 am to collect tools and personal possessions. Very

soon afterwards somebody shouted from the corner of the factory and waved people down. We all rushed down and found a fire door that had been left open. We piled in. We went to the cafeteria and after discussions, up to the roof, from where we waved down to those who had not come in. The occupation had begun - in the same informal manner and autonomous way it was to continue.

The main objective of the occupiers was to get some reward for all the time they had invested in the factory over the years. At the time, the company used the "Administration" scam, see appendix A, and they were left with nothing. The state provision for pension wages owed, holiday pay etc was their source to correct these anomalies, said the Company and people knew how they would be delayed, reduced and minimised before they got their money. They occupied to get their legitimate rights.

This was made clear in the meeting at the top of the stairs on the first day. A small deputation of the Administrator and a police escort was allowed to the floor below the roof. A distance was kept between the two sides. The Administrator wanted assurances of no damage or violence and a complete list of the occupiers. I advised against this having seen the way such lists were used in legal documents. Kevin stated briefly our aims, said there would be no damage or violence, and that we were here for the duration, no matter how long it took. The senior police man said he understood the reasons. At a roof top meeting afterwards, the convenor repeated that if it took three weeks, we would stay that long, to cheers from the occupiers.

My handwritten diary of 46 pages was kept from that moment of occupation. It has been used in the drawing up of the Events list and the text that follows. I was accepted by the occupiers as a local union supporter - from NSSN and the Haringey Trade Union Council as well - since I had been there from the beginning as was able to use my experience in these matters to assist the occupation. As a libertarian socialist, I have my own views on things, as we all do, and I used these, working with others of the same philosophy, in

service to the occupation without explicitly attempting to impose them.

The leaflet

From very early on it was realised that there should be some statement of the position of the workers. I wrote out a draft and this was approved by PW on behalf of the occupiers; the draft was taken away and printed by Dave Morris of Haringey Solidarity Group, HSG, of which I am a supporter, though not a member.. A second version with minor changes, and including the call for support for the action day on Saturday was later printed in 4,000 copies. Another reprint called for support for the Monday solidarity meeting. The text is reproduced below.

"Statement from some Ford Visteon workers and supporters (from the occupied factory):

We have occupied our factory

Ford Visteon workers have occupied the Ponders End factory since Wednesday 1st April. The previous day in a meeting lasting just 6 minutes we were told that the European company, with plants in Belfast, Basildon and Ponders End, Enfield, was going into administration and that we were to leave - without our wages being paid. Personal possessions could be collected the next day, but at 10 o'clock the factory was locked closed. Workers had already occupied the Belfast factory.

We demand what is due to us

The 200 workers who are part of the Ford subsidiary want the same conditions they have always had via "mirror contracts" with the parent company. Up to now they don't know when they will get wages due, and their pensions are to be controlled by the government Pensions Protection Fund. This means a maximum payout of £9,000 and much reduced conditions! Some of the women and men have 40 years service!

The whole situation has been created for news management - announce it during the G20 and it will get buried in the media. And this is largely

what's happened. The move is to save Visteon USA money at the workers expense.

But unexpectedly Unite union members have taken determined action that bosses thought they had eliminated years ago. The workers want their existing terms respected. Ford Visteon can't be allowed to avoid their responsibility. So far they have tried legal intimidation but have even managed to mess this up.

As well as proper redundancy payments, some are suggesting that the skills of the workers who can make anything in plastic, should be used to make increasingly needed parts for green products - bike and trailer parts, solar panels, turbines, etc. Government investment in this rather than throwing money away to bankers could be profitable and save jobs in the long term.

All support welcome

Ford Visteon workers have been pleased at the support received from other Ford plants as well, such as Southampton, who are blacking Visteon products.

Come to the factory in Morson Road, near Ponders End train station, to > show your support. Join a support protest on Saturday 4th April 10 am to 11 am. Get your Union branch or organisation to pass a resolution in support, and help raise money by workplace or community collections and drop in to us.

This is a fight we can win.

We're off our knees and fighting fit! "

Although there were many leaflets published in support of the occupation, this was the sole document by, and on behalf of, the occupying workers, until the press release on Tuesday. The former was mass produced while the latter was sent to the media but not used. The leaflet has been amended and so on, translated into several languages, and reprinted several times on the back of variations of the original for advertising successive events.

Events and Diary Notes

My notebook was kept during the nine days and while some of the notes were subsequently made redundant by events, other remain. Some are included in this outline chronology, others may be in the text and others are not important enough to warrant mention.

Day 1, Wednesday 1 April 09, 10 30 am onwards

Events - Occupation of the roof and the paint shop area, with around 70 people sleeping in.

6 15 pm food arrives, rice and vegetables. Good quality.

Incident - 6.30 pm KPMG capture 40/50 union members in Paint Shop and addresses them, out of order. KN comes down to intervene but told no free movement. Goes down anyway.

Event - Roof mass meeting, "we are here for as long as it takes", and rope installed from roof to ground, goods start arriving.

Additional - workers tell what it used to be like - 2,800 manual workers, 7 lines of sparks plug manufacture, plenty of tea or coffee, but FV stopped the routine., no longer pleasure to come in, also - "Hang the suits", tape picture made on roof structure.

Day 2 Thursday

Event - Bailiffs come in repeatedly with an injunction, 2.10 am. come back for decision 2.35 am, plus police who are "here to prevent a breach of the peace"

Injunction was incorrect in many ways. The errors were spotted regarding address, post code, signature, etc, and the two bailiffs went off. A few of the occupiers had left when they first presented the document,

Publicity - Leaflet prepared with the workers statement, text in the main account.

Incident - of Security employees holding a fire door shut but mass action taken to release it. No violence.

Incident - fire doors locked but thr padlock removed.

Additional - details revealed of recent sectional meeting to demand pay cuts of £3 ref redundancy threat,

Additional - discussion with R; to do law course after all this ?

Day 3 Friday

Events – 11.45 am , Kurt Barling interviews, but little actually shown on BBC tv.

- KN appeals to workers outside to come and help occupation. KN reported to

meeting that he had been told to stay in at all costs by he national union .

- Reel News reporter on site, interviews many occupiers ,

4 15 pm Unite union full time officials address street meeting ,

“treat as Fords, etc “ good reception etc

Organisation - Vast amounts of food, canteen re-organised .

Security - Ways in, fence unbolted to gain access.

Support - visit of teachers with workplace collection cash.

Anti bailiff advice by squatters organisation who get in touch and are put onto shop stewards .

Publicity - BBC reporters films roof meeting

Communications - Email address finalised , thanks to SB

Discussion - with PW ref his dad 20 years and himself 17 years here

, with Ron C who says Tony Woodley, union general secretary ,

very happy with situation and mentions his own family problem and

union resignation, and S. who has 40 yrs service in the factory.

Day 4 Saturday

Events - Support day and rally .

- Sleeping bags and tents sent in by Unite

- Supporters sit down on the grass in a big circle and decide to set

up support group, Meanwhile HSG supporters draw up a document

which outlines a series of support moves including email base ,

share of a HSG bank account but suggest their own arrangements

would be preferable. This issue was finally settled on Tuesday after

Unite sent out an appeal with cheques to T&GWU. Meanwhile cash

keeps flowing in It goes into L's collection bucket.

- Many supporters attend and see the wording of the placards,

banners and flags left pinned up , which are listed in the

appendix. I.

Organisation - Literature table for newspapers, leaflets , etc, for comparison. This was used increasingly as the dispute continued

Visitor - Sheila Cohen, from the National Shop Stewards Network taken around the plant .

Additional - T and T talk about flexibility of workers to meet management requests , They did everything asked of them . They have more than 30 years service each

Day 5 Sunday

Event - meeting at 8 pm with vote on if ordered do we leave = yes; D.'s outburst and apology

Personal - Left at 7.30 am , went home had shower – no washing facilities and one toilet for men and one for women in factory.

Sorted out emails . Went to Denham for grand daughters Under 13 football match - lost 3-0 - wrote up report and sent it in. Relaxed , watched tv and came back next morning , 8.30 am.

Day 6 Monday

Events – at 7.20 pm , while many were at an outside meeting , full

time union officer Brian Harris , Amicus, came in and addressed a

meeting in the Paint Shop. Some very hostile questions about why

union had apparently encouraged the occupation but was now

saying it was illegal.. Ron C announces family day, copying Belfast

on Wednesday , and on Tuesday the Belfast delegation will

address us . Also, he finds someone to celebrate his happy

birthday !

- info on Sherbond security contractor obtained from Company

computer.

- High Court case at Strand. KN & PH appear and return to address

meeting from ground level ; KN explains the situation. Afterwards

the Union committee retreat to behind cars for meeting

Support - HTUC solidarity meeting in the evening , SWP run. in

effect

The future - AW and co write handwritten leaflet about staying in

or going out on Thurs .

Additional - discussion with R; to do law course after all this ?

More on T and T , Dave Barnett and back pay, award after several years underpayment .

Day 7 Tuesday

Events - Visit from John Maguire and 6 stewards from Belfast . Spoke in Paint shop, called for all Ford strikes and pickets. Also, later, Rob Williams, Convener of Swansea Ford, now hived off as "Linama Canada" spoke to the assembled company He gave details of past unity and called for same again, He is a members of the Socialist Party. Later an ill judged attempt was made to sack RW which had it succeeded would have raised the stakes in the whole struggle. This issue remains. As we go to print

- Document ref Automotive Products Share Deal put on Literature table , the significance of which was not clear
- and others documents also added too.

Support - "Il Manifesto" interview and article later

Eating - Fine quality of food maintained

Day 8 Wednesday

Events - 9 pm meeting Ron C says money on table, and 9. 30 pm another meeting , he confirms a FTO will speak tomorrow.

- Picketing list also started for picketing rota.
- D. also speaks and uses "We don't need bosses, etc " poster .

Communications - We finally get email sorted with borrowed laptop from SB who makes connections ; printer/copier also provided

Day 9 Thursday

Events - cleaning of site starts from 7 am, and personal possessions moved out to cars . Machinery, valuables and perishables moved to PH caravan .

- 10. 30 am , final mass meeting with many camera crews. Union officers speak. See text for account.

- Workers march out of occupation to rally in the street below.

Picketing begins , see text at the end

A series of mistakes

Some history of the devious practices of Ford , like other motor companies, and where to find out more , is looked at in appendix B . Ford makes cars and the factory was part of the complex web of production centres around the country and the world. Visteon was hived off by Ford at the turn of the century in their own interests. Workers were explicitly promised the same terms and conditions as in the parent company for life [original underlining] . Indeed the practice was that this happened in reality.

Here we are looking directly at the developing situation. Perhaps the easiest way to look at the whole scene is to examine the mistakes of the major players and their responsibility for its beginning and development .

Mistakes - the Ford Visteon company, hereafter FV :

One - financial secrecy - in the hidden world of financial goings on , including the secret deal earlier this year . Automotive Products Ltd, Leamington Ford plant of same name , etc, which according to documents appears to have taken over , by share deal, the responsibility of at least part of FV. This sowed suspicion in the minds of the workers . No doubt other deals will also be uncovered

Two - bad faith , by keeping some employees working right up to the last minute literally, 2 pm, knowing that they would not be paid was a display of gross incompetence and one that made the workers extremely angry. They were steamed up about the FV contempt of their lives , rights and respect..

Three - authoritarianism , after the six minutes meeting when people were ordered off the premises, and told to come back the following day between 10 and 12 am, the management did not have the plant open at that time, which forced the workers to take things into their own hands and seek entry into the plant. This was an act of incredible stupidity and arrogance. They deserve all they got for this error alone.

Four – simple incompetence . By giving incorrect information to the court and/or bailiffs as evidenced in the interim injunction: address wrong, postcode wrong, and having the injunctions signed only on behalf of Justice Lewison , not the judge himself, FV committed quite unforced errors. The assumption appears to have been a level of passivity and naive ness by workers that is again arrogant and typical of “get off my land type “values. There is some evidence that the Administrators , KPMG , are at least partly to blame and hence liable to compensation,

Five – Astonishingly poor communications by an allegedly 21st century company.

By not informing other Ford workers and those in dealerships forecourts all around the country, which meant that when supporters turned up on the Saturday to leaflet them , the staff were at first mystified and secondly furious about being in the dark.

Six – Tactical inadequacy. By accepting the court hearing that the defendants were not bound by the undertaking to vacate by Thursday 12 noon, ONLY THE UNION, Fv can be regarded as guilty of gross tactical failure. It could be said that this only reflected reality that force alone , already tried by Securitas, was unworkable. It would take several hundred SAS type raiders to get in ,past the barricades. But see also Security ,Sera agency, below.

Mistakes by the union , Unite

One – neglect. By virtually ignoring the occupiers and leaving them on their own to discover the errors on the first injunctions, the union can be criticised. Also it did not have full time officers , FTO, inside the plant , only speaking outside, which looks strongly like dereliction of duty . Not delivering when help was needed seems a small return for 20 or 30 years are paying subs

Two –gross timidity . By their reluctance to give legal representation, for the Enfield and later the Belfast occupiers, the union was ignoring the reality of possession

Three - political misjudgement . Accepting the company arguments that at least two named stewards could be imprisoned, was gross stupidity. The last time stewards were imprisoned for union action was in 1972 with the six dockers in Pentonville prison. This caused a major outcry. The writer was at Keith Blackman’s at the time and helped organised a mass meeting outside the Tottenham factory where it was decided to walk out and go to the Islington prison . Around the country, hundreds of other workplaces did the same .

The TUC - never ever in the vanguard of anything except how to claim expenses, were forced to call a general strike. Eventually two obscure officials were found in a wardrobe in Whitehall who decided that the men had purged their contempt and should be released, [They were out back in the cupboard afterwards]. Even with today’s weakened movement , this was after all a possibility. Some questions - Was Ford really ready to risk a repeat, especially while they seek public bail outs ? Was Gordon Brown, the hope of the Labour left , TUC, etc, ready for this possible consequence ? Why did Unite accept this blunt threat and not laugh it off as the crass intimidation ?

Four - by agreeing in the court hearing to abide by the repossession order and allowing the defendants - convenor Kevin Nolan, his deputy Piers Hood and thirdly the 150 or so “persons unknown” to be NOT BOUND BY THE UNDERTAKING, they assumed responsibility arguably beyond their terms of reference. They had themselves assumed responsibility instead of the original defendants. Again it could be argued that this is reality but that’s a matter of opinion. In the event the Union’s belief in the sanctity of the law over rode their commitment to the members interests , despite the fact that their salary is paid by weekly contributions. Tom Mann

would be turning in his grave ! See appendix about the Union leader's lifestyle and below about the Union's approach to present-day society.

Five – good old fashioned betrayal . By presenting the case to workers at the meetings in the Paint Shop, just prior to the evacuation , as an inevitable one, the union showed its priority .. The fact that this was headed by an alleged “left” wing full time official , Steve Hart, makes this an even more interesting example of the unions' degeneration in the economy dominated by the World Bank , etc, and the “free” market.

Mistakes – the media

By accepting the news management agenda of FV and allowing the G20 events to almost entirely submerge the breaking news of the occupation , the “independent “ media again revealed their true commitment . Later coverage was sporadic, simplistic and overwhelmingly brief. Politicians are widely held in popular contempt and the media is also likely to be similarly held.

Running an occupation

Workplace organisation

The model of workplace union organisation over the world has been the Joint Shop Stewards Committee , JSSC, under various names This is composed of stewards or representatives for different sections or job groups, and sometimes include staff representatives where unionised. The JSSC usually elects its own officers – convenor and deputy , a treasurer to manage any workplace fund, a secretary to deal with paperwork like Minutes of the meeting , a Chair for meetings, and sometimes sub groups where needed for specific jobs. A negotiating team to meet management, or the attendant meetings, and report back ; people to handle canteen problems . etc The JSSC usually meets at a fixed time every week, fortnight or month - and place like the union room , to hear reports and make decisions, etc, see appendix D.

The occupation

This was an entirely new situation and nobody knew exactly what to do. Even with my considerable experience , I had never taken part in an occupation. So the procedures, and practices were made up as we went along . In previous occupations the historic accounts tell of a systematic structure, see appendix D, but here most work was undertaken voluntarily and informally. Shop stewards and committee people met as and when necessarily and usually in private. For example I spoke to one member D who spent a lot of time on food ,clearing up, etc I suggested a rota would be more fair. The reply was that no, people volunteered to do jobs and that this informal way was the best.

It did seem to work OK at the time. Another example was the charging of mobile phones. A, monitored a makeshift rota because there were more phones than chargers.

Perhaps such informality did function well overall. There are clearly strengths and weaknesses to informal organisation. The advantages of the more formal standard committee and sub groups

structure is that people know their responsibility - so do others - there is a degree of accountability and if things go wrong or are not up to the job, this can be identified quickly and corrected. It is by no means clear that the informal method was better than the standard one in the hectic conditions of the occupation and picketing. This is not for me to say, certainly some of the FVW supporters were keen on the sub committee method and were applying it to the Support group to meet the need there.

On the picket line there was some evidence of a lack of communication, and the usual problems about strike funds that frequently occur. The internal relationship of the occupation could not be re-created outside and the argument for formal structures was becoming sharper. The problem referred to was soon sorted.

Below I summarise some of the main aspects of the routine.

□ Health

Conditions - 70 or so people sleeping in a paint shop, on work benches or the floor, or in chairs, is clearly a difficult position. Some were even without sleeping bags. People kipped down anywhere, though many of the women used a cubby hole that was both warmer and darker than outside. The lights were always on, as some people were awake to ensure the barricaded entrances were safe. I slept on a work bench. Many people went home for washes or showers, and a soft mattress. Others stayed put, making do with baby-wipes for the time being.

There was just one toilet for men and one for women, though in an emergency, either were used. The women's toilet predictably was tidier and cleaner. The occupiers had no basic items like toothbrushes or soap until a quick trip as made to the shops. I still have my Visteon toothbrush.

Food. At first we were overwhelmed with food, specially bread and milk. S and D who ran the "canteen" area, kept everything in its place. The toaster and two microwaves were in frequent use. The

area was very crowded especially in the evening when those on the roof came down.

On the Friday it was suggested that the food stock were moved out from the corner which accesses the fire escape stairs. This was done by S and D, with two large tables being used. The food was soon systematically organised.

Steven Parenti, chair of the Shop Stewards Committee, who had been in a family catering concern, would start early at home and cook up breakfasts for the 70 or so people who were here on average. This was home cooked food and high quality too. The same was even more true of the evening meal. T. would go home and cook up two or three delicious chefs bowls of curry, rice, pasta or what ever. This was really high quality. Selected contents, without the strong tasting ingredients of restaurants, was eagerly eaten and many had second helpings as well. It was excellent compensation for the hardship.

There was a wide choice of cereals and a mountain of hot cross buns at other times - we could have made world records for buns eaten and then we could not manage all of them. Packets of chicken and chips were also popular. Miraculously, cups were somehow washed up, though there was universal use of paper plates and cups, and plastic cutlery.

On a personal note, I am 70 years old and since I had cancer 20 years ago, have considered my diet as important. So I tried to maintain the pattern of what I eat. High fibre bread was always available, so was fruit. Few vegetables and a preference for fish rather than meat was not possible. My daily intake of pills, for under active thyroid and statins from heart and cholesterol, was kept to fairly regularly. Medical herbs like echinacea, garlic, dandelion, etc, obviously had to be taken in.

Drink, there was a permanent boiling water machine on the wall by the tv. This was a very well used facility. Instant coffee, including decaffeinated and Fair trade, was probably more popular than tea, I guess.

Alcohol has in many previous occupations especially in the numerous American ones, been formally banned. Here the large number of cans of lager, bought as a result of a £5 whip round, were responsible for keeping up morale and bringing people out with the others especially the quiet ones. Its also good for the bowels, they say. Personally I did not drink except a small glass of wine, once, for social purposes.

□ Security

The safety of the two occupiers areas - Roof and Paint Shop - was carefully maintained. When the bailiffs sought entry to deliver their faulty injunctions they had to seek permission. After the mistakes were spotted, mainly by P, they left empty handed. Someone attempted once to break down the main entry door and a fire escape door, without success. At night, when all retired from the freezing roof, the Paint shop was heavily barricaded. It would take half an Army to get in and evict us.

So far as FV Security was concerned, at first we had trouble with the company Securitas over two issues. One was the fire door to the roof which despite an agreement was locked and chained. We got someone to ring up the Fire Inspectorate, informing them of this breach of the Fire Regulations. They promised to come and inspect the situation. After that the padlocked door was left alone and we had instant access to occupied areas.

The second problem was the door at the base of the spiral fire escape stairs. This was padlocked shut restricting our entry and exit. This lock was removed and replaced by one of our own and it took Securitas staff a day or two to realise the switch. They then replaced the lock and we again made the switch. After this the yellow jackets gave up and retired to their huts.

Subsequently FV replaced Securitas with a security company called Sherbond. We looked them up on the internet, headquarters at Braintree. The new group did cause a bit of a scare with their military approach and rumours of a violent mass entry had people worried for an hour or two on the Saturday. Such a venture would have really alienated opinion especially as they were rumoured to employ South African mercenaries.

The new security staff from Sherbond, which promises "specialist enforcement" and pays a reported £250 a day but were just as miserable as the others. It seems clear that a forced entry was abandoned as a tactic from this point, though the union Unite still agreed to the repossession on the Monday in the High Court

□ Communications

This covers three aspects. Reports in the main media as well as the minority ones, access to the internet through computers and long term projects for video or film production.

Main media the news programmes on the tv were scrutinised every day to see if the statements made to reporters were going to be on. For example, a long interview with BBC reporter Kurt Barling which lasted for at least 20 minutes did appear but only in a very short item on BBC news. Of the dozens of photos taken, the most common was of the occupiers on the roof above the "Ford Terms" banner. This was in newspapers and on leaflets. The platform at the top of the fire escape stairs, outside the Paint Shop, was frequently snapped usually with some smiling and identifiable occupiers. Interviews with the convenor, his deputy, ex officers and senior committee members for radio, newspapers and miscellaneous video makers, were too numerous to list.

Other reports, where reporters were allowed inside, showed some activity by some workers but were always heavily edited. There were longer articles especially in the *Financial Times* and *Guardian*

at one time or other which were quite informative. Small paragraphs and an occasional headline were featured in the big circulation daily papers. The small presses of the political groups gave the occupation more consistent and longer coverage, with the Newline probably most lengthy.

I had set up a "literature table" on some metal bins for the mainstream and political groups press. This also had copies of the leaflets, like our one and those of the groups, for people to read and compare. I also put out a few books on the struggle with Ford which were taken away and presumably read. Several groups contributed substantial documents to the table including the website Libcom.org's "Oh, sit down" a history of occupations.

Steve Parenti, as well as chair of Shop Stewards Committee, FV Enfield and auxiliary chef, was the media man. How much he organised is difficult to say but there were constant interviews with reporters personally or through mobile phones. Just one example; a team of press people came up and spoke to P. for an article in *Il Manifesto*. Two other workers also joined in and the article did appear after two days. This was typical of the international coverage.

Internet communications. with a variety of computers we did get contact with the internet websites, though the internal company ones on site barred "social" sites. We were able to read through the various messages of support sent to our own email site, though we had trouble printing them out.

Later on the picket line, the link was again established with the help of two or three supporters after the FV offer was rejected by the increasingly angry picketers. The whole question and labour and community networking is one that is becoming more and more of a priority.

Film and video projects. A reporter from *Reel News*, who had been to other recent occupations spent a day or so on site. He carried out extended interviews with workers all over the occupied area. He also attended the picket line for the barricading to add to the footage. The results of his work, edited down inevitably, were published on a cd at the end of the month, part of the regular publication process. This turned out to be useful short film covering the basic facts, the dubious nature of the national union and some picketing shots, but along very much the conventional "left" lines. I was left wishing for a longer production, perhaps an hour which examined issues from a more libertarian standpoint.

I took photos on my mobile phone which are available on a CD from the shop stewards. Several other teams from unknown projects also made video recordings. Some were put up on You Tube. This was the visible effect of the new means of communication, like those exposing police violence at the G20 events which occurred at the same time as the occupation.

Labour Party Politicians

A third party politician, who had been to the occupation, was contacted by the shop stewards and asked to write an article for the Newline. He was contacted by the shop stewards and asked to write an article for the Newline. He was contacted by the shop stewards and asked to write an article for the Newline.

Solidarity from other working class bodies and individuals

Support from the outside was quickly recognised as being crucial and the shop stewards responded enthusiastically to proposals for example by HSG. Dave Morris talked through a list of proposals with Kevin after T. had drawn up in writing a document of these for the stewards, *An Offer of Support*. This said that HSG would not be offended if any or all ideas were rejected, indeed the document

argued that an account in the name of the workers would be the best place to put donations.

In view of the time taken to open a new account, using one of the HSG ones would be an interim solution until some more permanent arrangements was set up. This was done and details given to the treasurer LB who was putting all cash donations into a bucket.. A second option had been included in the document, that of using the HTUC account of which I was treasurer, but as the HTUC is a derelict body in fact, this was presumably not considered. Subsequently there was a long meeting where T. discussed the arrangement with LB, BB and IT. Telephone numbers were exchanged. A decision was left to later, assuming the existing arrangement would continue. T took money up to the picket line as it arrived, until LB had an account for that purpose. The original arrangement lasted for some time in practice.

A second proposal concerned emails from supporters. An email address was opened by T.& J for supporters to contact. This replaced the original phone number which had been put on the Libcom website, and was – visteonoccupation@googlemail.com.

A third paragraph gave details of a successful leafleting of a Ford dealer where the public response had been good and the staff a little confused. Subsequently a list of Ford dealers in London was circulated by HSG to extend this action. Kevin Nolan confirmed on Monday 13 April that the FV workers were taking that action. Around 15 workers went to the A10 premises and gave out leaflets. The response from passing motorists was described as “marvellous”

T. also brought in a printer/copier, as at least one worker, Mc, wanted photocopying facility – in his case to copy a letter he got back from his local Conservative parliamentary candidate

Meetings

There were many meeting being held, or specially called, about the loss of jobs or to support the occupation. One was called by University and Collegeworkers Union about education job losses. BB addressed this as one of the speakers and reported he was overwhelmed with the 10 minute standing ovation and £300 collection

“Rocket” was asked to address a meeting of un-unionised call centre workers at a pub in East London. I discussed with him the history of unions at workplaces and all that. He reported on the day it all went very well and he was rung back the following morning with promises of support.

There was talk of deputations going round factories – a traditional activity – but the record of these is not known. One group did go to the picket at Chase Farm hospital on the Wednesday to protest the closure of two wards. A card was sent from Haringey Unison Local Government, the only one apparently. A small bunch of flowers were handed in, reminding many of us the Lawrence [USA] women textile workers’ strike and their demand for *Bread and Roses*

Labour Party Politicians

From the start, lots of people came to the factory to show support. Even the local MEP Joan Ryan turned up on day 1, but as the convener confirms “I didn’t see her after that”. Edmonton Labour MP Andy Love was unavailable according to one worker who announced angrily he had been trying for days to contact him. Mr Love was that same week, defending his very high expense account claims in the local *Tottenham, Wood Green and Edmonton Journal*. People were contrasting these absences with Gerry Adams in Belfast and the prominent role he played there.

Few people seriously expected anything else from a government so committed to an economic system run by international financial bodies like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, using the “free” market mechanism. And people will not forget in a hurry

that it was the Labour government last year that introduced the very law that FV used by going into Administration ! The predicted re-birth of Labour after an election defeat next year, will this time be difficult to build , unlike 1931. Their promises will sound too hollow to be believable .

Political Support

Haringey Trades Union council , or rather the Socialist Workers Party, held a meeting on the Monday, I say "SWP" because unlike previous solidarity meetings in other disputes , it was called on the sole initiative of the President, KF, without consulting others, and the one named speaker was another SWP union activist. It was also called in the name of a non existent body, the Enfield and Haringey TUC. There is no ETUC and the HTUC is run as a SWP front organisation by the President .

While encouraging occupiers to go to the meeting , and drawing maps , I did make clear to people I spoke to inside the factory, the political nature of the meeting. From the occupation, ex deputy convenor PW, LB., D. and R and others attended and the two women spoke , very well according to accounts.

On the Friday 3 April, the SWP sent 3 cars of occupiers, complete with the familiar red Unite flag to the Dagenham plant . Lots of leaflets were given out and the women especially were please with the turnout.

Other element of the overall role of the SWP was to arise later . Inside the plant on the Wednesday, all non FV employees were asked to leave except me, as Kevin had said my assistance justified my staying . One senior member explained, in addition, " we are getting the SWP people out because they do nothing , they read their papers , make telephone calls and attempt to preach to the workers – and they don't like it ". My differences with the SWP are well known and one concerned the sectarian nature of "interventions" such as this and the incident appears to prove the point

On the Thursday when we came out, the number of SWP members in attendance which had been sparse to that point, comprising mainly their FTOs and a member who worked locally, grew to huge proportions for the well attended final rally . A cynic might conclude that this seen as a good chance to build The Party by selling the newspaper *Socialist Worker*.

Two days later a rally called for Saturday midday by the fictitious Enfield and Haringey TUC, was attended by no one from that body. It was cancelled by the 30 or so people who did turn up and held their own meeting. We can only assume that the commitment to the FV struggle of those who had attended on the Thursday, was outweighed by the chance to sell the SWP newspaper at the weekend rallies over the death of a G20 demonstrator..

The following Thursday 16 April, two meetings were called . One was for the FVWSG who had held their initial meeting on this day the previous week. The other was by the Haringey branch of the SWP who apparently also meet on that night. I spoke to their FTO about the clash of dates but the idea of changing the routine of A Branch of the SWP , in favour of a mere workers organisation, struggling to save their 200 jobs, seemed unthinkable to him, In the event, both meetings went ahead but the FVWSG changed their venue for the next week.

It saddens me to see the SWP, still a large and significant group, remaining obsessed with its central priority to build the Revolutionary Party – over all other considerations. People on the libertarian left have tended to see the SWP as a parasite living off others struggles and adopted a policy of ignoring them . How long will this diversion of the aims of workers struggle go on ?

More support

Also on that same day, BB attended a meeting called in Hackney where he spoke about the occupation and the role of the national Union.

A support committee

A united Ford Visteon Workers Support Group held a sit down meeting just opposite the bottom of the fire escape stairs on the action day on Saturday. The activities of this are becoming known and here I just record details of the informal gathering and the first meeting.

The FVWSG Minutes report that a loose support network had been set up at an open meeting of about 50 people at a rally outside the Enfield Visteon plant on Saturday 4th April. Various people and groups active in organising ongoing practical support for the workers had proposed that we set up better co-ordination and collaboration for this work. 200 leaflets proposing this were printed by Haringey Solidarity Group and handed out to those present. After the workers ended the occupation and started the picket on Thursday 9th, about 40 supporters then took part in an on-site support meeting, where it was agreed to go ahead with the proposed public launch meeting in the evening. Ron Clarke, ex convener, addressed the meeting at some length

The FVWSG report continues :

- The following principles were agreed -*
- It was agreed to launch the Ford Visteon Workers Support Group
 - Support Group meetings are open to all groups, Visteon workers and families, and any other supporters
 - The group will work in collaboration with Visteon workers
 - Visteon workers, and only Visteon workers, can speak for themselves
 - The weekly open meetings will discuss practical support and solidarity activities, and make decisions
 - It is vital to emphasise the link with Ford

Some key administrative issues

- All monies raised to go directly to the Visteon workers' own treasurer. As agreed with the workers, cheques can continue to be sent via 'Haringey Solidarity Group', PO Box 2474, N8 until the

workers have set up their own account.

- If the Support Group needs some of the money raised we will request it

- All messages of support to the workers to go directly to the email address.

Groups of people began activity immediately. Leaflets were given out on surrounding estates and one group went to the nearest Ford dealers on the A10. This direct action took the staff and potential customers by surprise but was approved by several workers in informal discussions on site.

A meeting was called and held, with all supporters welcome, on Thursday 9th April, 7.30 pm at the Millennium Centre, 386 West Green Rd, N15 [10 mins walk south-east from Turnpike Lane tube - entrance in Vincent Rd]

The FVWSG Draft Report of Launch Meeting reads -

" Attendance: T(Imperial College Unite +Action East End); A (Socialist Workers Party); M (from Germany);N (Solidarity Federation); D (London Coalition Against Poverty);E & D (Camden Anarchists); N, M, A, S, T and D (Haringey Solidarity Group) Apologies: included G (Hackney Unison + Hackney Solidarity Network); J (London Climate Camp + SWP); Alan (Unison retired, occupier , NSSN, Haringey HSG supporter and HTUC)

Some admin/practicalities decided , website www.visteonoccupation.org to be moved to an independent space.

Action: S

- Everyone to make use of and publicise the email list for all supporters
- Emergency phone tree in case support needed at the factory etc. Z has started

one, and is the trigger. Phone 07787 747607 to be added to it.

- Banner to read: "SUPPORT FORD VISTEON WORKERS FIGHT FOR JUSTICE"

- Pickets may need a generator - anyone know of one spare? Action: G to ask shop stewards what else may be needed there

Some key activities

- Support for the 24 hr picketing at the plant. The workers are currently splitting it up into three 8 hr shifts (6.30 am - 2.30 pm - 10.30 pm - 6.30 am], on 3 entrances.

Supporters are encouraged to go down anytime for as little or as long as they wish.

Action: S. contact LibCom to see if its possible to set up a rota 'doodle' on the website.

- Visteon workers need to be actively supported to attend and speak at a wide range of workplace and public meetings. Everyone needs to bear in mind that they will already be over-stretched with their picketing.

- People need to support the workers' fundraising efforts at events etc, plus of

course call for fundraising generally

There's a particular need to focus on calling for support from Ford plants (e.g Dagenham). It was noted that the recent national meeting of Ford union convenors had agreed to back the dispute. People encouraged to leaflet any of the 30 entrances anytime.

Action: A. to find out the shift change times, and to update the special

Car workers appeal leaflet agreed with the Visteon shop stewards (and send it to the support e-list).

- All supporters urged to leaflet widely outside Ford dealerships everywhere.

Action: Tony to circulate the list of Ford dealers again. D. to forward the revised general leaflet.

Some specific activities

- Rally on Saturday 11 April, 11 am at the factory, called by the Enfield and Haringey TUCs. We agreed to support and help publicise. But see below ref outcome. - We will help collect money at Spurs vs. West Ham on Saturday, 1 pm - 3 pm. Meet 1 pm at the Spurs Shop, corner of Tottenham High Rd and Park Lane N17.

Action: D. to contact the pickets to see how many can come, and will help call for/co-ordinate other volunteers.

Dave. will print 5,000 of the updated general leaflets for that.

- Leaflets - the general leaflet and the car workers appeal leaflet will

both be updated, translated for distribution abroad, and uploaded to website.

Action: E (Turkish); N (Spanish); N (French); M (German); T (Polish).

Any volunteers for other languages?

- Research into Visteon links with other companies. To be discussed next meeting.

- Statement to the National Shop Stewards Network. S spoke with Kevin Nolan

about this and drafted a statement (summary/update) based on his views.

Action: S to check final draft with Kevin.

Publicity: we will try to generate publicity, but also refer all media to the

workers for their own views about their dispute.

Next meeting - all supporters welcome Thursday 16th April, 7.30 pm Millennium Centre, 386 West Green Rd, N15 [10 mins walk south-east from Turnpike Lane tube - entrance in Vincent Rd]"

After the occupation was ended, FVWSG continued with support for the pickets. Weekly meetings followed up the actions discussed at this initial meeting with attendance by FV workers, and even calling their meetings at the picketed factory to maximise attendance. I think the FVWSG is a big success and creates a new model of support/solidarity groups for the future. It had a wide representation to all who wanted to attend, used modern methods of communication and had the leaflet translated and available in several languages in a number of days. It was keen on leafleting both residential areas and Ford workplaces/dealers. It is thoroughly internationalist in outlook and tried to organise activity in a number of countries. It offered a high degree of assistance, did not attempt to sell any newspaper or programme to workers, or try to recruit them for its own gain. There were some practical problems at first but the SG persevered. A full history will perhaps be written up later.

The dispute progresses

By the middle of the 8 days, the main issue was becoming clear. Would the workers in the factory who had occupied in a rage after their dismissal, be satisfied with minimum monetary settlement - or even the promise of this - or would they hold out for a definite offer. Kevin had said several times that we were there "for as long as it takes". Morale was high, though the stress was also considerable.

The factory which was virtually the last manufacturing base in the Lee Valley and where the employees had done everything the management required of them in terms of flexibility. Talking to workers, members of the FVWSG soon learnt of the hidden history of lots of small struggles over production methods for example. While this is probably no more than in other workplaces, it could provide a source for further investigation.

However the factory was also not one with a record of militant action like other Ford sites. The arguments of supporters about an imaginative proposal for alternative green products was still being made but without a great response. The dominant position of the national union seemed likely to be decisive. I look at these issues below.

The High Court

After the failure of attempts by force to break in, FV then used the legal route relying on the law abiding Unite union leadership. Unite had assumed responsibility for the re-possession Order, letting the defendants - Kevin Nolan and deputy Piers Hood and thirdly "persons unknown" who were occupying the factory - off the hook. Negotiations were to take place in the USA on Wednesday before the union was due to deliver possession on Thursday 12 noon. This clearly left practically no time for serious negotiations and it looked like we would be leaving "on promises" alone.

The union were heavily criticised for giving an assurance to the High Court to enforce the Order by Thursday. Full time official Brian Harris who spoke at a mass meeting in the paint shop on the

Monday evening had a hard time after "Rocket" and others went on the offensive.

Chair of the meeting, Ron Clarke, ex convenor, stood aside. Several others asked why the union was now saying the action was illegal, when they, and their officer's, had previously supported us? The FTO began to stutter as the hostility increased.

I normally did not speak at these meetings but this time, with the permission of the meeting, I did criticise the Unions acceptance of the possibility of imprisonment of Kevin and Piers. I pointed out that the last time trade union members were behind bars, the Pentonville dockers in 1972, thousands walked out of workplace and the TUC were forced to call a general strike. Previously miners from Bettsanger in Kent put away for striking against war time Regulations in 1943, were released with the fines unpaid. Mr Harris seemed unfamiliar with these examples. Workers were also asking if it was true that it had taken a phone call from Gerry Adams to get the national union to provide proper union representation in the court on Monday at all?

A contribution

PW, ex-deputy convenor, was worried by the complacency after Kevin and Piers were let off. So GH [HkSG] and I sat down and drew up a series of questions for occupiers to ask themselves. Phil signed this as did many other occupiers and it was printed out as a hand written, one page, document. It was taken in some numbers from the Literature Table that I had set up by the canteen area, and presumably read. The points came up in conversations anyway.

The text was:

- 10 QUESTIONS/REASONS TO THINK ABOUT STAYING.
 1 HOW CAN WE LEAVE WITHOUT GETTING THE DEAL WE WANT AND NEED AND ARE FIGHTING FOR?
 2 WHY ARE THEY NOT ATTACKING THE BELFAST OCCUPATION?

- 3 DO FORDS WANT MORE BAD PUBLICITY [FROM A FORCIBLE EVICTION] WHEN THEY WANT BAIL OUTS FROM THE GOVERNMENT ?
- 4 ARE THE UNION GETTING THE BEST ADVICE FROM THOMPSON'S FOR WHO THIS IS NOT THEIR LEGAL AREA ?
- 5 HOW COULD BAILIFFS /POLICE / KPMG [ADMINISTRATORS] BREAK IN IF THE OCCUPATION IS PROPERLY BARRICADED ?
- 6 HOW CAN THEY EVICT/ARREST 150 PEOPLE ?
- 7 WHEN WERE UNION MEMBERS LAST IMPRISONED FOR FIGHTING FOR THEIR CONTRACTS ? (PROBABLY EARLY 1970S , RICKY TOMLINSON + CAUSED A GENERAL STRIKE)
- 8 ARE WE MORE LIKELY TO GET ARRESTED PICKETING OR STAYING IN ?
- 9 THERE WILL BE LITTLE CHANCE OF VIOLENCE FROM BAILIFFS POLICE AS THERE ARE SO MANY CAMERAS.
- 10 IS IT NOT TRUE THAT OCCUPYING THE FACTORY IS OUR TRUMP CARD ?

Some of the questions were answered , 4, for example but the rest were not. For further facts on the national union, see below and appendix I.

Another issue

One aspect, which was expressly included in the original leaflet to create jobs long term, was the possible promotion of alternative products , in this case those concerned with the protection of the environment , green products .

The precedents were by now quite well known . In the 1970s the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards Combine Committee, faced with redundancy due to falling demand for aero parts, had undertaken a detailed survey . They examined the machinery in the various factories, chiefly in the Midlands, then the skill of the workers and the availability of raw materials, and drew up 14 volumes of possible

alternative products. Other factories did the same.. The Lucas Plan was in the end sunk by corporate intransigence , the Labour government's opposition and internal Union splits. Since then the idea of Alternative Production to save jobs has been a constant theme.

Today the government is committed, it says , to taking action to defend the environment . Here is a chance to invest some money and in the process save jobs, but again the Labour government was not listening, and nothing is likely to be done .

Dave Morris, from Sustainable Haringey and HSG, outlined the case for green alternative production He said –

“Being shown round the Enfield factory during the 8 day occupation by the workers, its clear that the workers anger at their bosses, is matched by their pride in their manufacturing work. For over 15 years the factory has been making primarily plastic mouldings for Ford, Jaguar and Land Rover cars and vans dashboards, gearbox casings and the like, often quite intricately assembled as well as cast. But, they could make just about anything out of plastic, given the right moulds. Changing the moulds to allow the workers to cast different products would take as little as half an hour.

Apparently the workers have been suggesting to their bosses for several years that they should diversify into making different products. They saw how the car market was going, and they have the same environmental concerns as everyone else, too. Garden furniture was one suggestion which was put forward maybe not an especially ‘green’ product itself, but a lot greener to have it manufactured in the UK, than made in China and shipped halfway across the world.

Another idea originating from the workers was to make recycling bins. In the surrounding areas they live in, there is currently a shortage of recycling bins (something to do with Germany soaking up all the spare capacity!) so why can't they make them here, they suggest?

Many of the workers had 20 years or more of manufacturing

experience. The factory used to employ 1500 workers now there are only 200 left. It used to make electronic parts like the dials for dashboards some of those workers were still working at Visteon this year and could have easily turned their skills to making parts for the growing industry of energy monitoring, for example.

They are open to suggestions. Plastic parts for bike trailers, for bus interiors? "Definitely. We don't work here because we love cars!" one says.

But the bosses had refused to listen to any suggestions that had been put forward by workers over the last few years. Workers said the bosses' response had been that if they turned to making different products 'we'd be a laughing stock at the automotive shows'. One worker said when he started he'd been told 'you're just a pair of hands'. The bosses fail to see that in fact these workers had more ideas and vision than the bosses whose only concern seems to be to save their own faces and arses!

These ideas that workers should be able to take control of what they do - are ideas whose time has come again. Meanwhile the government claims it plans to create hundreds of thousands of 'green jobs', but then allows its manufacturing base to crumble away, throwing countless people onto the dole, rather than step in to convert these factories to green production.

Whilst the Enfield Ford Visteon workers hope their union negotiations will bear fruit - and get them (at the very least) the redundancy and pension protection that Ford has tried to cheat them out of - they face an uncertain future without the manufacturing jobs that they depended on for their livelihoods.

It seems like if we want a 'just transition' to a greener, fairer society, and green jobs, we'll have to make it happen ourselves - working together as workers, activists, trade unionists, and academics.

Hopefully, the vacuum left by a total absence of effective government action, might be filled by the kind of spirited fightbacks and developing understanding and connections that we've seen at the Enfield factory, over the last 8 days."

The final outcome

The beginning of the end

On Wednesday evening, the announced meeting due 7.30 pm did not take place. Ron Clarke just announced from the floor in a few sentences that the union officials would speak the following day. A later, equally brief, meeting confirmed this. There as plenty of discussion but no one came down firmly in support of our document about not vacating at that time, and holding out for a definite deal with FV .

D. made an speech from the floor referring to the "No need for bosses" poster which won some applause.

The end

Everything, sleeping bags and clothing, etc was moved down to cars outside on Thursday. The food and other common stuff went to Piers' caravan which had been there for two days or so.. The place had been cleaned up on the Monday but the un-barricading of the defences had been cosmetic only, no one seemed to have the heart to disarm completely.

Shortly after ten on the Thursday morning, Ron chaired the final meeting in the Paint Shop. First to speak was Steve Hart, Unite Regional Secretary, who seemed uncomfortable with his role, and ummed and arred at length. " This had been a great victory. We had changed history, WE have to vacate, the use of mass force would otherwise be used against us, etc, If you don't fight , you can't win," and so on. Brian Harris was next and spelt out the facts - We had to go, the union gave an assurance. The union would handle the tribunal cases .. We must leave united , he would get the front gate unlocked .

Ron went round collecting names for the picketing - it was to be 24/7 on three gates. A few were angry but did not challenge the decision directly and suggest an alternative . Many seemed relieved it was soon to end.

After several questions, many about the tribunal cases and other small issues, it all wound up. Rocket said we would leave by our known route, the fire escape stairs. The meeting closed, hands were shaken. Many adjourned to the roof for a last defiant demonstration for the cameras. The chant was "The fight goes on". Flags were waved energetically.

In whose interest?

Here I must look in some detail at the role of the national union, Unite. Like the rest of the union leadership and the Labour government, it accepted the dominance of the idea of the free market and the new capitalist economy. Unlike the attitude of the rank and file members from a previous generation, it placed the National Interest above workers interest, and this meant total obedience to the law, at whatever price.

FVE supporter, P, who was in court, criticises Unite – "the union may claim that the undertaking they gave in court on Monday - that the occupation would end by noon on Thursday - left them open to legal penalties; but even the judge queried if they could guarantee the obedience of the occupiers. One would think that all the union would've needed to do to protect themselves is to say that they had made an effort to persuade the occupiers to leave. The agreed undertaking with Visteon was that they would not seek possession while negotiations continued. Visteon - and the union - made that conveniently obsolete by agreeing to postpone revealing any details of the deal until Tuesday ...Further it could have later been argued that the undertaking was to give time for negotiations to occur - but as the company did not meet this condition and announce the offer at the previously agreed deadline, Unite were then freed from their agreement to vacate

Another straw in the wind a pointer occurred the previous year. Prison officers are legally banned from industrial action but their patience running out with government neglect. had actually resorted to this. The union leaders agreed. What's more the general

secretary of the Prison Officers Association, Brian Caton, summarised the union's attitude when speaking at the Trades Council's Annual Conference in Sheffield "The right to strike is the only defence of our freedom. If this means breaking the law, we are prepared for this". And that's from a union many do not even accept as a proper union.

The same week as the FV occupation, another two unions showed their contempt for "the law". The National Unions of Teachers, NUT, and of Head Teachers, NAHT, were preparing to boycott the SATS test for children aged 11 from next year. They planned to get votes at their Conferences.

This was clearly illegal as Ministers like Ed Balls proclaimed on television. This would appear to be not just an unlawful act but also more seriously "conspiracy" to breach the law, an criminal offence punishable by prison, etc. And that from professional workers, not real trade unionists according to some.

The insubordination does not stop there. Bobby Kiff, well respected but not militant FV convenor, now retired, is quoted as saying "The struggle has gone reasonably well but I am not impressed with union leaders Simpson and Woodley. Today's the last day of the occupation. They sent two junior officials who wouldn't answer questions. The government has a lot to answer for, and so have local politicians. They're good at fleecing us with taxes and claiming expenses, but don't look after their constituents" (Newsline 10 April 09).

Of course, many will say that this is the inevitable role of the union leadership, the General Strike of 1926 and all that, but this is a bitter reminder of a harsh fact.

In addition

A word on the role of the factory shop stewards and other leaders. Or rather two questions - were they too trusting of the National union, Unite? Were they too loyal to Unite? I cannot answer

these questions now , the reader must make up their own mind. The events are too close in time , and I am too close to people I know and respect. Perhaps time itself will come up with some answers .

Note In brief

Occupations are an expression of economic crisis. There are usually resolved by the activity or passivity of the occupiers and the commitment of the usually full union leaders to either the members interests or the values of existing society. In more political circumstances occupations have a different role , see appendix D, but in a single isolated event , these two factors prevail. At Enfield, the commitment of the leaders to " law and order " overcame the activity of the occupiers.

Some extracts from a recent article by G . Gall looking at a history of occupations , their advantages over strikes and perspectives in the modern world, are in Appendix K. The Libcom document is also relevant .

The final exit and rally

Anyway after this brief digression, back to events at Ponders End . At just after 12 o'clock, we came down the stairs, single file , led by Rocket, to loud cheers. Kevin was by the door and shook everyone's hand. There were about 200 present and speeches were about the historic nature of the occupation , as it was , and continuing the struggle by the picket.

Picketing was started right away. The stalwarts sat down in front of the three gates Some ex occupiers drove away in cars and so history moves on.

Afterwards , the picketing, etc

I attended the picket most days , at various times except the nightshift. The rota was carefully drawn up and most people, but not all, attended. On the Tuesday the 14th April, when FV was attempting to get people into the factory with a view to beginning the movement of machinery , a large number turned up and the gate in Wharf Road was also picketed. Four employees were turned away , while the rest did not try. The mass picket began at 6 am and lasted till well after 10 o'clock.

On the Wednesday, there were again well over 50 pickets . It was reported one employee went into the factory. The Plant Manager was spotted nosing around the site but was followed and quickly left. The KPMG man , plus a presumed contactor, were also seen on site .

On Thursday, news of the FV offer 90 days pay , max £8000 filtered through. A tribunal was likely to make that award anyway. The pickets decided to strengthen their resistance campaign and barricade relevant exit doors . It was also decided use a laptop computer, with a dongle for outside reception, to use the internet more . This was provided by SB. Finally Unite and Ford contacts in the Union were to be used more. The occupiers ordered 5.000 more leaflets which were printed and delivered that day.

Finally Strikes and suchlike are known to be events which have a strong and lasting effect on those taking part. In this case, it seems to have had the strongest effect on the women workers who have emerged in roles such as speaking and organising.

Stoppess - as we go to print Fords have given in and announced a rather generous package to meet most of the workers demands. Only pensions are excluded. This result, of which more will be written later, means a considerable victory for the FV workers in the three factories. It pays to fight back is the obvious conclusion that will be drawn

Appendixes

Appendix :A

Administration and the dark side of KPMG :

Before the Enterprise Act 2002 a court involvement was required. As part of the Labour Government's business friendly approach, this was lifted and companies could go into administration at will. Effectively this meant their responsibilities were legally removed.

Back to Enfield, KPMG is a Big Four auditor alongside PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst & Young and Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu. It is one of the largest professional firms in the world. KPMG employs over 136,500 people in a global network of professional services firms spanning over 140 countries. Composite revenues of KPMG member firms in 2008 were \$22.7 billion USD (14.5% growth from 2007).

In 2003, KPMG agreed to pay \$125 million to settle a lawsuit stemming from the firm's audits of the drug chain Rite Aid. In 2004, KPMG agreed to pay \$115 million to settle lawsuits stemming from the collapse of software company Lernout & Hauspie Speech Products NV.

In early 2005, the United States member firm, KPMG LLP, was accused by the United States Dept of Justice of fraud in marketing abusive tax shelters. KPMG LLP admitted criminal wrongdoing in creating fraudulent tax shelters to help wealthy clients avoid \$2.5 billion in taxes and agreed to pay \$456 million in penalties in exchange for a deferred prosecution agreement. KPMG LLP would not face criminal prosecution if it complied with the terms of its agreement with the government. On January 3, 2007, the criminal conspiracy charges against KPMG were dropped. However, Federal Attorney Michael J. Garcia stated that the charges could be reinstated if KPMG does not continue to submit to continued monitorship through September 2008.

Before the settlement, the firm, on the advice of its counsel, removed several tax partners and admitted "unlawful conduct" by those

partners. The firm agreed to cooperate with DOJ's investigation and help prosecute former partners who had devised and sold the tax shelters. Additionally, the firm hired former U.S. district judge Sven Erik Holmes to monitor its legal and regulatory affairs.

In February 2007 KPMG Germany was investigated for ignoring questionable payments in the Siemens bribery case. (Siemens agreed to pay a record \$1.34 billion in fines to settle the case in December, 2008.) In November 2008 the Siemens Supervisory Board recommended changing auditors from KPMG to Ernst & Young.

In 2006, Fannie Mae sued KPMG for malpractice for approving years of erroneous financial statements. In March 2008, KPMG was accused of enabling "improper and imprudent practices" at New Century Financial, a failed mortgage company, and KPMG agreed to pay \$80 million to settle suits from Xerox shareholders over manipulated earnings reports.

Facts from Wikipedia

Appendix : B

Ford Motor Company – brief highlights of the devious history and some sources for the international history of the struggle.

Henry Ford's great invention was the production line, previously individual workers combined in production. He revolutionised mass production and soon assumed a leading position in US industry. Unions struggle for years to get recognition [see Sinclair] but it took occupations and long bitterly fought strike with armed police in opposition before the United Auto Workers got into the car industry. [Linder]. Soon after, production switched to war time needs with many women in the factories.

In Britain the fight was just as long and difficult [Frow]. In the long post war economic boom, following war time gains, the battle for wages conditions continued. A long strike at Fords Dagenham was written up by two union members [Weller] in the 60s. A university teacher went to all meetings at the Halewood Liverpool factory

before writing his book which became an Open University text [Beynon] Finally a look at the Ford Blue Book, and opposition to layoffs, was produced in an informative booklet [Red Notes].

More recently as ownership was concentrated into fewer companies Ford have taken over various national motor manufacturers to maintain their place in the American big three. The rest is history.

The following publications can be bought on second hand on the internet via abebooks or bookfinder.com , or borrowed and photocopied as and when possible :

Sinclair , Upton : *The Flivver King - a story of Ford – America* [1937 & 84, USA, 119 pp] ; short readable novel , all backed by fact, that traces the contrasting story of the families of Henry Ford and Abner Shutt, a Ford Worker . Used by the UAW in their recruiting and organising campaign in 1937 .

Linder , Walter : *The Great Flint Sit-Down Strike against GM 1936-37* [1967 USA & 1969, 38 pp] ; account of the heroic occupation at Flint , Ohio, published here as “Solidarity for workers power” pamphlet 31 . on which numerous films have been made

Frow, Eddie and Ruth : *Engineering Struggles - episodes in the story of the shop stewards movement* [1982, 496 pp] ; includes factual accounts of UK struggle in Fords as well as other factories , plus details of workers own rank and file journal “Ford Worker “.

Weller, Ken and Ernie Stanton : *What happened at Fords* [1967, 28 pp] ; AEU and NUVB members give eye witness versions of the strike including the dubious tactics of Communist Party convener . Published as Solidarity fwp pamphlet no 26 .

Beynon , Huw : *Working for Ford* [1973, 336 pp] , another paperback which has extensive pen portraits of shop stewards and their beliefs in Liverpool.

Red Notes : *The Little Red Blue Book – fighting layoffs at Fords* [1978, 55 pp] a well illustrated booklet which included a diary of June 77 strike , story of part occupation, maps and What Needs To Be Done . Relates to wide world outside , like Grunwicks, social security, etc

Appendix : C

John Maguire's email from Belfast , circulated by National Shop Stewards Network on Wednesday 1 April which can be said to have initiated the actions ?

For immediate and urgent release

Support Visteon workers!

200 Visteon car plant workers in Belfast are blockading their factory after the Company went into administration today. If they get away with it, over 600 workers in ex-Ford factories in Belfast, Enfield and Basildon will be sacked and left to claim statutory redundancy from the state. Even workers with over 30 years service will only get about 9 grand and most workers a lot less. Also, their pensions plus those of ex-Visteon workers in Swansea and retirees will go into the Pension Protection Fund, which will result in reduced payments. This is the brutal side of capitalism - no bailouts or bonuses like the bankrupt fat cats but bare minimum pay outs and the dole. Visteon UK executives have jumped ship are now employed by their own spin-off 'Visteon Engineering Services'. A life raft for rats escaping the sinking ship!

Visteon was spun-off by Ford in 2000 as a device to slash costs at the expense of the workforce. Two and then three-tier contracts then followed as well as outsourcing of 'indirect' jobs. However, for Visteon bosses this wasn't enough.

They've spent the last 3 1/2 years demanding that Visteon workers

break their Ford 'mirrored' contracts. No doubt there will be some in the unions who will agree with management that if only the workforce had agreed cuts in their pay, pensions, terms & conditions, insolvency could have been avoided. The reality is however, that Visteon like General Motors' spin-off Delphi was never viable. Visteon workers were correct to resist and have had at least more income by doing so. It was that successful battle that has given the Belfast workers the confidence to resist now.

These workers want to put pressure on Ford to intervene to stop the sackings. They are appealing to the unions in Ford to support them by not using parts shipped in to replace those from Belfast. If that fails, the occupation can be built to involve the trade union movement and working-class community to force the government to intervene to nationalise Visteon to save these jobs.

*Messages of support / offers of help to
John Maguire, Belfast Unite Convenor, 078 1659 0380*

Appendix D

Occupations, workers councils and all that
- a One Page Guide

Occupations are an expression of economic crisis ; they remove or reduce, the automatic advantages that the employer usual has , of possession and access to State enforcement by police. They mark a step up from the usual ritual of negotiations, and take the power right back to the union member at the factory. There are usually resolved by the activity or passivity of the occupiers and the commitment of the usually full union leaders to either the members interests or the values of existing society. In a single isolated event , these two factors prevail. At Ford Visteon Enfield, the commitment of the leaders overcame the activity of the occupiers. It was still a substantial achievement in political terms

But where there is a general political and social crisis, and there is a movement towards mass resistance , occupations have a different role. They are often the start of people taking control of their lives .

First the workplace , then society. Occupations , or rather assemblies or meetings elect a workers committee of representatives, usually termed a council. The council divides up responsibility – one sub group to keep up production hence links with suppliers and customers councils [Russia 1917] , another to cover the local area , a neighbourhood committee. This comprises workers who are residents and tenants and usually controls the geographic area [Argentina 2001], prices in shops and markets [Portugal 1974] and transport with only permits issued at road blocks to allow traffic.[France '68 and Bolivia currently]

If state repression is anticipated , a defence squad is set up and can combine with others for a militia. In Germany after 1918, the peoples' Red Army of the Rhine held off the Regular trained and well armed State troops for weeks. In Hungary 1956, the occupied factories held out long after the streets were cleared by Russian tanks but finally dissolved themselves to prevent take over. Poland and Czechoslovakia similarly.

Liaison within an industrial complex is made [Chile 1972] Whole industries can be taken over [Ireland 1920] and cities [China 1926-7] Other examples are Algeria in 1963 and the puppet councils set up by Tito in his dispute with Stalin but which gradually exercised some control. Parallels with Chavez's Venezuela have been made in this last case. Italy holds the world record , with councils in the "two red years" in Turin , Milan and Genoa, after the WW2 and in the 1970s strike waves,

The watchwords are collectivity, consensus, federal structure , direct action and creativity. The longest surviving workers councils was set up with bodies in half of Spain after the fascist invasion by Franco in 1936 and managed to hold out until 1939.

Many councils have been crushed by force as well as Spain , and others hi-jacked by religious interests Iran's shoras [1979]. Russia 1917 was taken over by the leninists in the name of the Party, and

ignored workers proposals for a new society . Kronstadt and the crushed strike wave of 1921 was the last word. No wonder people repeatedly complained “our revolution has been stolen”. “ Actually existing socialism “, aka state capitalism, terrorised independent workers movements for another 70 years before collapsing in 1989. The Russian experience , with the crushing the Ukrainian communes in 1921, have made people reject State solutions to the problem. Federal structures not centralised ones are the Rule !

This brief account of the central role of councils for those seeking a new alternative world to capitalism - libertarian, anarchists , syndicalists – holds out hope for winning the most important battle of all : for a sustainable society with a maintainable environment. No axis powers of parliament, centralists , revolutionary Party-ists, nationalists or reformed capitalists should be allowed to stop us .

Appendix : E

Organisations and abbreviations

Unions Previously there were numerous trade unions in motor workplaces, either craft based like the Amalgamated Engineering Union, or general, like the Transport and General Workers Union In many car plants, these were the major unions with some smaller ones The AEU, later Amicus, and T&GWU are now merged into Unite. In workplaces , many are union members concerned with defending their interests against predatory employers but take little part in the national role of their union with its full time officers, whose wages they pay. People have traditionally separated out the members or “rank and file, “ and the full time officer’s national union structure .

Political organisations The Labour Party , which many now regard as similar to the Tories , has been the party of the national unions, and individuals can pay a political levy. The Trade Union Congress, which has local organisations in each area, has been the united body for Labour Support . The LP and TUC are “Labour” but have little or no influence on the government.

Marxist organisations are divided into those of the orthodox

Communist Party, breakaway trotskyists and miscellaneous groups who owe allegiance to Lenin , founder of Russian Communism [now called state capitalism by large numbers]. Their solutions to the problems of capitalism , are based on State run programmes , parties or institutions, and they progress by parliamentary activity in general, and capturing over national trade unions . Rather like the old CPGB in effect.

Libertarians, sometimes called anarchists, workers councilists or syndicalists, rely on workers own activity without a political revolutionary party to supervise things . They are very active over the environment and progress by direct action outside the parliamentary method. My own sympathies lie in this movement . There is some hostility between them and marxists over past events . Interchange between the two movements is rare but does happen .

Appendix : F

I planned to list key people in the dispute but so many people fit this role in numerous ways that I abandoned the idea.

Appendix : G

The author – a brief biography
Alan Woodward was born in 1939 into a London working class family, failed the 11+ exam, had a successful secondary modern education nonetheless and did national service in RAF. After training and working for a while as a teacher , he began a heroic career as an agitator in North London factories. He was staff convenor at the Enfield Rolling Mills and worked in Keith Blackman’s during the Pentonville dockers imprisonment [before being victimised] in 1972. He also worked in Moerke, Sharpe and Dohme plant [Morsons] , labouring to build tank farms, and at a steel stockholders in Ponders End as a storekeeper [made redundant].

Victimised out 5 years later , he resumed education at the age of 33 and then spent three decades in running and taking shop stewards courses. He worked in the Midlands, and London, in colleges and

universities and WEA, for several union organisations and rank and file bodies. He was always active personally in workplace and union.

Politically he was at first active in the Labour Party Young Socialists, against the bomb in CND, and then in the newly formed International Socialists. Events move on and after two decades battling against a now increasingly authoritarian marxist organisation, renamed Socialist Workers Party, he is now active in the libertarian socialist movement. This is much pleasanter and more rewarding.

He believes workers councils, developed from Shop Stewards Committees, and similar bodies in social organisations should run society. Their structure would be federal not centralised and any parliament would function through referendums in an advisory capacity.

He attends demos and marches - from the rather grand Aldermaston to the lowly patients pickets against insurance-run polyclinics, instead of doctors' independent surgeries.

At 70, he has retired technically but still reads widely, thinks in a hurry and writes obsessively. A new career, encouraging girls football for grandchildren, takes much of his time, as does the Radical History Network. He hopes to live long enough to see the workers, here and in the West, East and the South, resuming successfully the struggle against capitalism.

Publications include Party Over Class - how Leninism subverted workers councils organisation ; A Short Guide to Workers Council Socialism ; Readers Guide to Workers Council Socialism ; A Political Economy of Workers Socialism ; A Guide to the Health, Safety and Welfare at Work ; Going to Meetings ; several booklets on strikes ; also as editor of Fragments - episodes in local

workers history, vols 1,2 and 3 ; and The NHS is 60 [RaHN]. Unpublished texts include Red Reading for Socialists.

Appendix : H

Thumbnail history of industrial Lee Valley

The Lee Valley Industrial area can be roughly said to start in the north with the Royal Small Arms factory, and coming south, to have included the BT Factory in Brimsdown, Enfield Rolling Mills and Cables, Brimsdown Power station, Johnson Matthey, the Angel / N. Circular Road factories including MK Electric, Mains, Belling, Belling and Lee, BOC, Nathan's and the other furniture factories, JAP Motors, the Tottenham Hale complex including Harris Lebus, Keith Blackman's, Gestetners plus many others nearby

Serious history of these is in short supply. Ken Weller's anti war book gives some details of the gas workers in Mains, R M Fox mentions the JAP factory in *Smokey Crusade* and the furniture factories including Lebus are in the history of the furniture workers union by Hew Reid. The story of the BT factory has recently been published from a management view. There are accounts of union activity in MK by Alan Watts, and the *London Furniture Workers Shop Stewards Council*, based in Tottenham, by Jack Moss in Alan Woodward's local history book.

Weller, Ken : Don't be a Soldier - the radical anti war movement in North London 1914-1918 [1985, 96 pp]

Reid, Huw : The Furniture Makers - a history of trade unionism in the furniture trade 1868-1972 [1986, 193 pp],

Woodward, Alan editor, : Fragments - episodes in local labour history, vols 1, 2 & 3 [1998, 120 pp : 2000, 54 pp: 2001, 47 pp]

Appendix : I

Union leaders lifestyle, unlike members
Two reports, albeit from capitalist newspapers, about the lifestyle of the Unite union leader. Members may well be asking where his interests lie, with them or elsewhere?

From "The Times" 17 January 2009

"One of Britain's most powerful union leaders has a secret house-for-life guarantee and enjoys pay and benefits worth nearly £200,000. Derek Simpson, joint general secretary of Unite, has a deal to remain in his £800,000 grace-and-favour house in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, until he dies, according to confidential documents obtained by The Times. His pay package also went up by 17 per cent. Under the terms of the agreement Mr Simpson's partner can stay in the home at a heavily subsidised rate even after the death of the 64-year-old union leader.

And although Mr Simpson, a close ally of Gordon Brown, has always claimed that he pays tax on the accommodation, for which he pays a nominal rent, the document shows that it is union members who cover the cost of the perk. The disclosure is the latest twist in a long-running controversy over the spending and entitlements of Mr Simpson, who is currently fighting an election to stay in office beyond retirement age. Internal papers show that Mr Simpson, who has said "executive pay and bonuses would make Midas blush", demanded that the union cover his tax bill for his home "to make it affordable". The perk was worth almost £40,000 in 2007, boosting to £194,252 the total value of the general secretary's remuneration.

A spokesman for Unite said. "These arrangements were approved by the executive committee at the time and have been a matter of public record ever since. His remuneration is published every year and is properly approved every year."

Unite represents a large number of workers earning less than the national average wage. Many reacted angrily to the latest disclosure. Steve Kelly, a construction worker in Romford, said: "When we are all living in fear of losing our jobs and maybe homes; it is an outrage that our general secretary lives in a mansion with no threat of losing it ever. No wonder he sucks up to Gordon Brown and big business." Mark Adams, a safety rep at Marshall Aerospace in Cambridge, said: "It is an embarrassment when we are trying to

recruit new members. We have our key figure living in the lap of luxury."

Unite, which has 2.1 million members, has been riven by infighting since it was formed from the merger of Amicus and the T&GWU"

from "The Guardian", Monday 2 March 2009

"Derek Simpson, joint general secretary of the country's biggest union, Unite, yesterday defended his stay in a £399-a-night suite at the Waldorf, one of London's most luxurious hotels, for a four-day union executive meeting. Simpson is well known for attacking bankers for their "gold-plated pensions, golden handshakes and huge rewards for failure". The union leader was accused by the Mail on Sunday of staying at the hotel when he was within a 35-minute commute of his £800,000 home in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, provided by Unite.

A spokesman for Simpson said: "He stayed at the Waldorf because he could not get a room at the nearby Radisson hotel and anyway it was not the most expensive suite in the hotel. Normally when he stays in hotels he does have a suite because he needs a room to work in. "This particular occasion was a union executive and there were various late-night meetings which meant he could hardly be expected to go home late every night and turn up early the next morning. Obviously if it was a one-day meeting he would have gone home."

The room where Simpson stayed is described in the hotel brochure as a King Hilton suite with a king-size bed and a bath with "body massage jets".

Thanks to DD.

Appendix : J

Wording of banners and placards displayed on the factory or nearby, or chants from the occupation.

"Bankers rewarded, workers cheated ,
 Barnet TUC,
 Betrayed by Ford,
 Bosses get Richer , workers get sacked ,
 chant - Get back, Fight back,
 chant – The fight goes on,
 chant – the workers, united, will never be defeated,
 chant -What do we want ? Justice,
 chant – sack the bosses not the workers
 Chelsea FC,
 Climate Camp
 Don't need politicians , Don't need bosses, Take Control,
 Enfield Socialist Workers Party - one solution , revolution
 Ford , Pay up , stick to your word
 Ford sell out ,
 Ford Terms
 Ford terms and Conditions 4 Life ,
 Ford Visteon , out with nothing - Us today , You tomorrow,
 Fraud [on Ford logo]
 Give my Daddies Money,
 Hackney Unison ,
 Hang the suits - tape figure on roof
 Industrial Workers of the World , IWW, London,
 Red and black, simple diagonal flags , x 3,
 Refugee Workers Cultural Ass,
 Scottish flag , white diagonal cross on blue,
 Sell out
 Socialist Party, Support Visteon Workers ,
 Solidarity with Ford/Visteon occupiers
 Squat Empty Homes, Occupy the factories,
 Students Workers United in the fight back,
 Support Ford Visteon workers fight for justice,
 Support Visteon Workers , x3 ,
 Toot if you support the Ford Visteon Folk [displayed on the main
 Meridian Way]
 Union jack

Unison flags ,
 Unite - Resist - Occupy - solidarity with workers,
 Unite ! x3
 Unshackle the Unions - RMT x 4
 Viste-gone
 Visteon Support Group Notice Board,
 Visteon workers sacked in 6 minutes ,
 Visteon workers united forever,
 We support the Visteon workers, We are the workers ,We are right ,
 We will win –
 People's F**n* [Front ?] ,
 We Support Your Legitimate Resistance,
 We've been V.UK.D. by Fords,
 Workers Centre Action,
 Workers of the World Unite , Turkish Kurdistan Workers centre
 Youth Fight for Jobs x 2, “

Appendix K

Occupations – some history , advantages and perspectives . Extracts
 from Occupations: the way to win? by Professor Gregor Gall,
 University of Hertfordshire

*”Day-after-day, week-after-week, redundancies continue to come
 thick and fast. And it's not just a case of job cuts, but closures of
 entire workplaces and whole companies.*

*But still there seems to be no obvious resistance from workers or
 their unions. From their leaderships, we have words of
 condemnation in the media but no instances of tangible action to roll
 back the employers' offensive.*

*Twenty to thirty years ago, the tactic of occupation was used by
 workers in a relatively widespread manner as the most effective way
 of resisting factory closures and mass redundancies.*

*The most obvious and successful version of this was the Upper Clyde
 Shipbuilders (UCS) work-in in Scotland in 1971-1972. It represented*

an attempt to not only stop the closures of the yards by seizing the assets and making a political hot potato out of doing so but also to show that the workers could run the yards more efficiently themselves than conventional management. But there have been other more conventional examples in Scotland like that at Caterpillar in Uddingston in 1987 and Lee Jeans in Greenock and Plessey in Bathgate in 1981.

Of course, such occupations were not confined to Scotland alone. Manchester's engineering industry, for example, witnessed a series of occupation in the early 1970s. And over the years since there have been one or two occupations per year in Britain until the late 1990s.

Looking around and surveying the outcomes of the experience of other workers' resistance, these workers deploying the tool of occupation have deduced that strikes are not the best way to respond to the mass job cuts and closure. The destruction of capital is clearly a particular situation, requiring a more specific response from workers for a strike (as a tool of collective bargaining) is premised on the resumption of work taking place after the strike. The destruction of capital, represented by closure, retrenchment and so on, means that this is not on the agenda.

Striking has traditionally been defined as not just a withdrawal of labour but also walking off the job – which in turn means leaving the workplace. Sit-down strikes, strikes as canteen occupations and the like are not - and have not been - common tools in the armoury of workers in Britain.

Thus, striking puts workers on the outside of the workplace and this means putting themselves in a weaker position. Striking means standing outside the premises, trying to stop goods, machinery, plant and so on leaving the premises. Restricted by what is lawful for picketing, and the practical difficulty of sustaining mass pickets, the employer is likely to be able to vacate the premises with their property without too much trouble. Striking allows the initiative to

stay with the employer.

Alternatively, the workplace occupation offers the possibility of maintaining control of the employers' assets from the inside. The leverage created revolves around seizing the assets which may include i) stocks of goods because orders may still have to be delivered upon or because this stock still has a marketable value, ii) plant and machinery which can be either transferred to another part of the employer's business or sold, and iii) realising the value of the land and buildings by selling them on. Occupation allows the initiative to stay with the employer, requiring him or her to break into his or her own workplace.

Being able to stop machinery being dismantled and then being taken away by locking it inside the building, and providing security to stop any removal, is a far better strategy than trying to stop it leaving by mounting a picket outside the gates. Any picket would have to be a mass and continuous one – a huge feat to achieve as the industrial battles of the 1980s graphically highlighted. By contrast, doors, gates and exit points can be locked and barricaded shut by relatively few workers so long as there is a support network outside (see later).

Indeed, striking often plays straight into the employers' hands because striking is a civil breach of contract. This means employers can effectively let workers sack themselves and do so without receiving any pay off. And now, because of changes in the law on unfair dismissal, employers can simply afford to wait out the time until workers have no statutory protection from striking lawfully.

That is why the recent examples of Simclar electronics workers in Ayrshire in early 2007 and those at motor parts manufacturer, Calcast, in Derry in late 2008 are so important as DIY lessons in resistance to other workers. They stand out as beacons compared to the alternatives of short-time working and/or pay cuts. Take the example of JCB, manufacturer of earth moving machines. Last year, workers there agreed to short-time working (and reduced wages) to

lessen the number of redundancies but within weeks more redundancies were announced by the company.

Both Simclar and Calcast occupations were short and did not stop the redundancies but they did make sure that the terms for redundancy were improved. The anger of workers was sparked not just by the redundancies themselves but also by the way in which they were announced and carried out.

But before we begin thinking that occupations represent some kind of magic bullet for workers, we need to have an appreciation of what they require to be effective as well as their limitations.

Occupations need to be both planned and spontaneous. Planning is required in order to establish the supplies and their supply lines to keep the occupiers in food, electricity, (market) intelligence, entertainment and so on as well as how to organise the protection of the employers' assets from the employer and police. The spontaneity is needed in order to have the element of surprise over the employer by starting the occupation which is also the point at which management – the agent of the employer – need to be expelled from the premises.

The recent example of the occupation by workers at the Republic Windows and Doors company in Chicago indicated that it is possible to quickly establish widespread networks to support such occupations.

But being able to sustain occupation for a considerable length of time is not guarantee of success for most individual occupations do not record much success above and beyond gaining some better severance terms.

The possibility of successfully preventing job losses hinges upon the tactic of occupation becoming sufficiently widespread as to force a recalculation on the costs and benefits of employers facing them

down.

Workers are facing a recession having experienced both a sustained period of the falling back of their class conscious to very low levels and this has been accompanied by (and part of) a some of the lowest levels of working class struggles (strikes, extra-workplace struggles) on record.

By virtue of this alone, examples of occupation are not only gold dust but there is an even greater role for socialists to carefully and sensitively proselytise for the use of such tactics within a wider framework of helping to create grassroots community political campaigns to both support the physical maintenance of the occupiers and make their occupation into campaigns which put political heat on the company and government”

Further reading - Libcom.org : “*Oh Sit Down – accounts of sit down strikes and workplace occupations in the UK and around the world*” [2009, 109 pp] this included details of Brighton refuse workers, 2001, mentioned above . Libcom.org is an online organising resource , and archive of news and information on workers struggles.