

Oct 27 1968

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# **Solidarity**

**FOR WORKERS' POWER**

**1945 : THE SAIGON  
INSURRECTION**

**Revolt at Brentford Nylons**

**The Lucas Empire Takes a  
Bashing**

**VOLUME 5 NUMBER 5**

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# VIETNAM

The October Vietnam demo marks the highest point which the new revolutionary movement has yet reached. It looks like being the biggest and most militant demo for many years.

It marks an advance over past movements in several ways:

1. People now protest in a militant and forceful way. They are tired of the old, respectable, CND-type processions which adorned by left-wing MPs, vicars and trade union leaders, respectfully delivered petitions to Parliament.

2. The demonstration is the creation of the participants themselves. Nothing is more comical than the press hunt for non-existent leaders.

3. Most of the participants will have seen through the parliamentary mystification. We are not demonstrating to make a moral impression on the government. We are marching to demonstrate our own strength and to affirm our collective determination to change society, not just to complain about it.

The movement's strength is demonstrated by the people who are belatedly jumping on the band-wagon. The CP has for years tried to build a 'broad' movement which called for negotiations and refused to take sides on Vietnam. Now they announce they will support the October demo.

The effect of the Vietnam movement in Britain cannot be over-estimated. Many thousands of young people have abandoned reformist, parliamentary politics. For the first time for more than a generation the revolutionary left has the opportunity to break out of its isolation and become a real force.

It is no accident that it is the Vietnam war which evokes this response from today's youth. Vietnam highlights the barbarity and lunacy of our society. It also demonstrates that resistance to this barbarity is possible. The fact that the world's greatest military power cannot defeat the people of a small, poor country is the best illustration we have of humanity's ability to transcend this barbarism.

But although the Vietnamese are exposing the lunacy of the capitalist system, they cannot finally end it. This can only be done by the mass of people in the advanced capitalist countries. If the main centres of the system remain passive the system itself will survive.

An awareness of the limitations of this demonstration is also important. It will not precipitate another France. Whilst this cannot be blamed on the demonstrators, the seeming lack of relevance of the demonstration to ordinary workers' lives can be. The tendency to regard a demonstration such as this as the major political work of activists

shows a lack of perspective. Action of this kind should form a part of a campaign to challenge capitalist institutions at different levels. And in this year of massive industrial militancy an effort should be made to link up the fragmented struggles. Vietnam is relevant to the worker. The demand for short-term loans by America to finance the war caused a rise in interest rates and 'added considerably to the pressures on sterling' (The Banker, November 1967). The lack of short term loans was one of the major reasons for devaluation. But how many workers did this information reach? Systematic leafletting of the factories, particularly with the Engineering strike in the air, could have produced a good response. It is through links like this that sympathy for the demonstrators against the police could be built up.

The demonstration calls for victory to the Vietnamese people. Its message will encourage all those struggling against American capitalism: the Vietnamese themselves, the guerillas in South America, the black militants attacking US racialism. This fight by the Vietnamese people is necessarily progressive whatever reservations we may have concerning the North Vietnam regime. Since America is the leading capitalist power, a blow against it rocks the whole system. America cannot win in Vietnam. The country is now feeling the strain on her economy and there is pressure at home to end the war. American imperialism preys off the colonial and semi-colonial countries but its economy could easily survive the loss of Vietnam. The only way to deal capitalism a crippling blow is from inside its power centre: the advanced industrial countries. The main enemy is in our own country. Although Vietnam is of concern to British socialists we should concentrate our efforts where we can have most effect.

Some people say that if the choice is between Stalinism (NLF) and capitalism, we can only say 'a curse on both your houses'. To say this only is mystifying, for it reduces the real elements in the struggle to a stereotype of stale ideologies. Although the anti-imperialist movement in Vietnam is essentially progressive, nevertheless every agent of history must be critically examined. Socialist consciousness can only progress when based on a careful analysis. Ho chi Minh's policies over the last 30 years do not stand up to such scrutiny. In this issue we publish an article describing the Viet-minh's actions in Saigon, in 1945. These must be made known and our attitude to this regime must be informed by such knowledge. Those who fail to learn from history will be doomed to repeat it.

RECENTLY REPRINTED : HUNGARY '56 by Andy Anderson  
(4/3, post free)

The first mass uprising against the bureaucracy. Its twin demands of workers' management of production and a government of workers' councils showed that neither the nationalisation of industry nor the rule of the Party had solved the basic problem confronting the working class: freedom in production as the basis of total political and social freedom.

# 1945: THE SAIGON INSURRECTION

This article describes the attempt of the workers and peasants of the Saigon area to seize control of their city, in September 1945, between the collapse of the Japanese and the return of the French (militarily assisted by the Labour Government).

Written by a Vietnamese militant who participated in the events, the article was first published in the March 1968 issue of the French rank-and-file paper Informations, Correspondance Ouvrières. In Solidarity Pamphlet No.25 (The Rape of Vietnam) we gave some of the information essential to an understanding of this period. The present text corroborates some of the views we then expressed.

With the present struggle in Vietnam drawing to a climax, renewed discussions on the social nature of the North Vietnam regime are bound to break out. Ho chi Minh's recent endorsement of the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia will have come as a cold shower to many who naively equated the Northern regime with 'socialism'. There were earlier harbingers, however, some of which are described in this text.

The publication of this article at the present time may appear to some to reflect a preoccupation with the esoteric. Our motives are quite different. Just as the degeneration of the Russian Revolution cannot be fully understood without reference to the 1918-1921 oppositions in Russia (or without reference to the Kronstadt events), so the real nature of the 'state capitalist' regime now being built in North Vietnam cannot really be grasped without a study of its historic roots. Demystification may be a painful process but in the long run 'only the truth is revolutionary'.

One of the main concerns of the Vietminh Committee was to ensure its 'recognition' by the British authorities as a de facto government. To this end the Committee did everything it could to show its strength and to demonstrate its ability to 'maintain order'.

Through its press it ordered the dissolution of all the partisan groups that had played an active role in the struggle against Japanese imperialism. All weapons were to be handed over to the Vietminh's own police force. The Vietminh's militia, known as the 'Republican Guard' (Cong hoa-ve-binh) and their police thus had a legal monopoly in the carrying of weapons. The groups aimed at by this decision were not only certain religious sects (the Cao-dai and Hoa-hao) but also the workers' committees, several of which were armed. Also aimed at were the Vanguard Youth Organization and a number of 'self-defence groups', many based on factories or plantations. These stood on a very radical social programme but were not prepared to accept complete control by the Viet-minh.

The Trotskyists of the Spark (Tia Sang) group, anticipating an imminent and inevitable confrontation with the military forces of Britain and France, started to distribute leaflets calling for the formation of Popular Action Committees (to-chuc-uy-ban hanh-dong) and for the arming of the people. They advocated the creation of a popular assembly, to be the organ of struggle for national independence. Workers of the big Tramway Depot of Go-vap (about 8km from Saigon), helped by Tia-sang militants organize a workers' militia. The militia issues an appeal to the workers of the Saigon-Cholon area to arm themselves and to prepare for the inevitable struggle against the forces of British and French imperialism.

By now General Gracy has proclaimed martial law. Before it abandons the centre of Saigon the Vietminh Committee plasters the walls with posters, inviting the population to 'disperse into the countryside', to 'avoid confrontation' and to 'remain calm, because the Committee hopes to open negotiations'. A sense of insecurity hovers over the town, which slowly drains itself of part of its Vietnamese population. During the night of September 22-23, 1945 French troops, supported by Gurkhas (commanded by British officers) re-occupy various police stations, the Post Office, the Central Bank and the Town Hall. They meet no immediate resistance.

The news spreads like a trail of gunpowder and triggers off a veritable insurrection in the working class districts of the town. Explosions are heard in widely separate areas. The movement has broken out without anyone giving any kind of directive. The Vietminh has certainly not called for insurrection. Their one preoccupation is 'law and order' and their own accession to power - following 'negotiations'. In all the outlying suburbs, trees are cut down, cars and lorries turned over, primitive furniture piled up in the streets. Elementary barricades are set up to prevent the passage of French and Gurkha patrols and the taking up of strategic positions by the imperialist forces.

The centre of the town rapidly falls under the control of French and Japanese troops, supported by Gurkhas. But the poorer suburbs (Khanh-hoi, Cau-kho, Ban-co, Phu-nhuan, Tan-dinh and Thi-nghe) are firmly in the hands of the rebels. The rebels themselves are not a homogeneous lot. Among them are members of the Popular Committees, of the Vanguard Youth, Cao-daists, and even 'off the line' groups of stalinist 'Republican Guards'.

In areas where the popular forces are in control Frenchmen are shot: the cruellest functionaries of the old regime, the hated policemen (known by the population to have participated in tortures) are sought out, killed and thrown into the arroyos (canals). Racialism, fed by 80 years of imperialist domination and by the contempt of the white men for the yellow men, leaves its imprint on the violence of the masses, which erupts at moments like these. The massacre of a hundred French civilians in the Heraud Estate, at Tan-dinh, is a painful remainder of this fact. The threats of certain French colons to 'skin the Annamites alive to make leather sandals' is boomeranging back against all whites.

The occupation forces feverishly search the whole centre of the town. This doesn't prevent the insurgents from setting fire to various important buildings (such as the Manufactured Rubber Company) and to warehouses. During the night of September 23-24, guerillas attack the port without respite. The following day revolutionary groups openly parade in the rue de Verdun and march up the boulevard de la Somme, converging on the Market Place, which they later burn down. In Saigon there is neither water nor electricity. Supplies are breaking down. Each day the French seek to extend the area under their control, while various armed groups organize themselves as guerrillas in the periphery of the city.

The Vietminh Committee produces a leaflet : 'The French ... seem to take pleasure in murdering our people. There is only one answer: a food blockade'. While seeking to 'starve out' the French (a futile hope as British ships control the access to the harbour) the Vietminh clings to its hope of starting negotiations with the British. Talks with Gracy do in fact start ... and a truce is announced on October 1st. On October 5 General Leclerc, head of the French expeditionary force, arrives. His mission is to 'restore order', to 'build a strong Indochina within the French Union'. He lands his troops. The commandos of the battleship 'Triomphant' parade down the rue Catinat. The hated tricolor again flutters from various windows.

The 'negotiations' between the Viet-minh and the British continue. The only result is that British and Japanese troops are allowed 'free and unmolested passage' through zones occupied by the insurgents. The Vietminh Committee, continuing its policy of appeasement towards the imperialist allies, has consciously taken this decision. The Gurkhas and the Japanese move out further detachments and occupy more strategic points in the periphery of Saigon. On October 12 French troops, supported by Gurkhas, launch a general attack towards the north-east. The miserable peasant huts burn from Thi-nghe to Tan-binh. The encirclement of the town by the rebels is gradually being broken, in desperate fighting.

The leader of the Bay Vien group of guerrillas refuses to undertake underhand police work against other tendencies not affiliated to the Vietminh. He proclaims his independence in relation to the latter. His is not the only armed band to refuse the authority of the Stalinists. The biggest of such 'dissident' groups is known as the Third Division (de-tam-su-doan). It is led by an erstwhile nationalist who had for a while placed his faith in Japan. A few hundred armed men organize sustained resistance to the French, in the Plaine des Joncs, but they surrender a few months later, and the group disbands.

The Viet-minh will not tolerate any tendency that dares formulate the least criticism of it. It deals with such tendencies by physically liquidating them. The militants of the Trotskyist group 'La Lutte' (The Struggle) are the first victims of the stalinist terror, despite their proclamations of 'critical support to the Viet-minh government'. Gathered in a temple in the Thu-duc area, and while preparing the armed struggle

against the French on the Gia-dinh front, they are surrounded one morning by the Viet-minh, arrested and interned shortly afterwards at Ben-suc, in the province of Thu-dau-mot. There, they are all shot - together with some 30 other prisoners - at the approach of the French troops. Among those murdered was Tran van Thach, onetime municipal councillor for Saigon, elected in 1933 on a stalino-trotskyist list (sic) and released a few weeks earlier from the penal settlement at Poulo Condor. Ta-thu-Thau also released from Poulo Condor had gone to Tonkin province to help organize assistance to the famine-stricken areas. He was murdered by supporters of Ho-chi-Minh, on his way back, in Central Annam.

In this atmosphere of Viet-minh terror, the workers' militia of the Go-vap tramway depot, some 60 strong, participated in the insurrection, on its own initiative. The 400 workers and employees of the Tramway Company were well known for their militancy and independent frame of mind. Under French imperialist rule there had been no trade union rights. After March 9 (1945), when the Japanese had replaced the French at the head of this particular enterprise, the workers had immediately constituted their own workers' committee and put forward a series of demands. Japanese soldiery, led by Colonel Kirino, had come to threaten them, but confronted by their militant and united stand had eventually been obliged to grant them a wage increase and even to recognize eleven delegates elected by the eleven categories of workers: electricians, carpenters, metal workers, etc. In August 1945, when foreign technicians had momentarily abandoned the enterprise, the depot had been taken over and managed by the workers themselves, until the time of the insurrection.

All those insurgents who do not rally immediately to the Viet-minh flag are denounced by the Viet-minh as traitors (Viet-gian). Workers who don't identify with the 'patriotic cause' are called 'saboteurs' and 'reactionaries'. The Southern CGT is presided over by the arch-stalinist Hoaang-don Van. Its function is to control the workers of the Saigon-Cholon area, by nominating their 'representatives' for them, from above. In this atmosphere of violent ideological totalitarianism the workers of the Go-vap Tramway depot, although affiliated to the Southern CGT, refuse the label of Cong-nhan cuu-quoc (Workers Saviours of the Fatherland). They want to remain a proletarian militia. They reject the Viet-minh flag (yellow star on red background), saying they will continue their fight under the red flag, the flag of their own class emancipation. The tramwaymen organize themselves in combat groups of 11 men under elected leaders - and under the overall command of Tran dinh Minh, a young Trotskyist from the North who had published a social novel in Hanoi (under the pseudonym of Nguyen hai Au) and who had come South to participate in the struggle.

At this stage the local Stalinists, under the command of Nguyen dinh Thau, seem far more concerned at arresting and shooting their left critics - and in fact all whom they see as potential rivals for the leadership of the movement - than at prosecuting the struggle against the French. Terrorist acts become the rule. They leave a deep imprint on the 'state-in-embryo' which the maquis was soon to become. The emergence

# THE REVOLT AT BRENTFORD NYLONS

Women workers in a Stratford (East London) sweat-shop erupt against nineteenth century conditions, discover their collective strength and learn a thing or two about their union officials...

There are roughly 500 people employed in this sweat shop. They are mainly women machinists and packers and a few male labourers. Most of them were shanghai'd in to the job by the promise of high wages and a congenial atmosphere. The Stratford Express has carried an almost continuous advert: 'Machinists wanted; £30 per week; 12 months guaranteed work'. The result has been that many women have left good jobs to go to this factory. Some of them have in fact earned £30, but at what price?

The wage is earned on an individual piecework system and depends not only on the skill and speed of the machinists, but also on the management supplying a continuous flow of work. All too often machinists will maintain their average earnings for a number of days. Then there will be a hold-up in materials, and average earnings will fall drastically.

## CONDITIONS

The work consists of manufacturing sheets, pillow cases and blankets and preparing them for the market. Some of the main clients are Marks and Spencers, Woolworths and the British Government - for its forces in the Far East. The factory is on hire at £30,000 per year.

Nothing has been done to adapt the place to the requirements for which it is now in use. The management have simply brought in what machinery was necessary, covered every inch of floor space, hired labour and that's it. They don't seem to have heard of the Factory Acts, or of safety regulations, let alone of human dignity. Gangways are blocked with every sort of obstruction. Giant metal spindles, over the benches, swing without warning over the gangway, as the material is being drawn up to the cutters. Women have been hit in the face by them as they walk down the gangways. Two months ago a woman had to have eight stitches near her eye as a result. Another woman saw a spindle coming and in an attempt to avoid it was hit by a passing barrow.

The stairs have been broken ever since the firm moved into the premises. At least two women have tripped and fallen down them, resulting in them being laid off work without pay. The management refuse to do anything about it. The union (the Tailors and Garment Workers Union) ignores this kind of problem.

There is no canteen. Instead, a board on trestles is set up for sandwiches and rolls. This is directly outside the ladies toilets. Two women attempt to serve tea to about 300 people, while other women attempt to squeeze in and out of the toilets. The break is a strict ten minutes.

There are very few seats to sit on during the break. Most people have to be content with a bench or a box. There is nowhere to hang one's personal belongings. No one keeps the toilets or floor space properly clean. There is no hot water and only rarely a clean towel.

The stock room is directly inside the men's toilets. Women and young girls have to use the stock room while the toilets are in use. Complaints to the forelady, Mrs Turnbull, have been answered with: 'What are your worried about, we don't take any notice of that sort of thing in my country. (France)!'.

Although accidents are a regular occurrence there are no proper first aid facilities. A dirty old box marked 'First Aid' stands in the office, but there is no one qualified or responsible for giving treatment.

## T H E U N I O N

The workers are disorganised in the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers. All that the union has done is to appoint a collecting steward (rat-faced Renee) to ensure that dues are paid. Occasionally rumour has it that an official has paid another flying visit to the factory. Nothing has been done: the union hasn't even pushed the minimum demand that the firm comply with the Factory Acts or with safety regulations. An individual piecework system tends to divide the workers rather than unite them. People are sacked without consultation of either the union or of the workers on the job, and without notice.

## P A Y D A Y

Every Friday workers line up outside the office to collect their pay. They are never sure it will be there, or how much will be there. Every week there are shortages and mistakes. Sometimes, for some of the workers, there is no pay at all. They are told they'll have to wait until next week as head office has forgotten to send it. The manager, Mr. Tremayne, will lend £5 out of his own pocket to those girls who demand it. It's not difficult to imagine how he got rich!

Some people have been waiting for as long as eight weeks for back pay and still haven't got it. One woman who was owed over £20 demanded it immediately and was told it had been posted two weeks previously. She said she had not received it. The manager replied that he didn't know what had happened and that it must have got lost in the post and that she'd had it. Even those who do get paid are likely to find that a week later there's a mistake.

### S A C K E D

On Friday, October 4, the workers stood in line outside the office waiting as usual for their pay. Some were told to form a separate line and to wait until the others had been paid. About 75-100 were eventually left: they were ushered into the office six at a time and told by the Manager not to report for work on Monday - their services were no longer required. They were picked out completely indiscriminately. There was no 'first in, last out' principle. For those who demanded to know the reason the Manager replied that he didn't know himself - he was just acting on orders from Head Office. They asked him if in fact they were sacked. Or were they redundant? He repeated that he did not know, but that their money and cards would be sent on to them and they would find out then.

Shocked and angry workers met in small groups to discuss what action to take. The forelady was accused of knowing all about it the week before. She denied it, saying that it was all a mistake and that she thought they would all be back at work on Monday. Some of the more desperate girls telephoned their union official. As usual he was 'on holiday'. But another official was there who said he didn't know anything about their job, but he would try to get there on Monday. He thought the least they were entitled to was to be allowed to work a week's notice. Other girls stormed into the office of the local paper, the Stratford Express, and attempted to enlist the aid of the Editor in exposing the conditions in their factory. He said he was amazed and could hardly believe it. He allowed them to phone the union again from his office. Much the same answer was received as before.

### T H E   W O R K E R S '   R E A C T I O N

On Saturday evening (October 5) a number of the women approached members of 'Solidarity' and the East London Libertarian Group for help and advice on what they could do. After discussing details of the conditions and what they hoped to achieve, a leaflet was drafted. It was decided to call on all workers who had not been sacked to form a Factory Committee which would demand reinstatement of those sacked, and immediate improvement of conditions. This would require some of us to help distribute the leaflet and form a picket line if necessary. Attempts were made to contact local International Socialist branches in the hope that they might be willing to help. Despite repeated phone calls and promises, nothing materialized.

THE FACTORY OCCUPIED (MONDAY, OCTOBER 7)

At 7.30 am about 100 workers and friends stood outside the factory gates, distributing leaflets to workers reporting for work. Mr M.W. Juniper, the union official, arrived and demanded to know what was going on. Who was running this strike? (If there was to be a strike - he hadn't called it yet!) He immediately launched into an attack on the friends, demanding to know what they were doing there and what business it was of theirs.

He was told by workers and friends alike that they were there to help the workers do the job that he, as an official of the Tailors and Garment Workers Union, had failed to do. At this he got really upset. He started shouting: 'Is the union going to organize this or everyone else?'. The workers replied: 'You've never organized anything. You've never been available when there's trouble'. He replied: 'I got there at 8.15, what more do you want?'. He then rounded on another friend and said: 'You don't work here. Everybody seems to be organizing this strike except the union'. He turned back to the workers and said: 'Are you going to do as I tell you? Who is going to organize this - me or you? Don't listen to them (the friends). I don't know who they are. They're probably a bunch of communists'. Just then a car drew up. Another official of the Tailors and Garment Workers Union stepped out: Mr Alex Smith, a member of the Communist Party.

At 8.30 am about 100 workers who had been sacked (together with the others who had refused to work) walked into the factory. No work had been done that morning. The union officials held a hurried meeting with the management who refused to negotiate. A mass meeting was called inside the factory. Mr Juniper reported that the local management were refusing to negotiate and that all they could do was to elect shop stewards and a factory committee. The union would phone Head Office and demand that Top Management be sent down to Stratford to negotiate.

After the elections Mr Juniper announced that those who had produced the leaflet didn't work in the factory and 'could only harm the workers'. However, in the opinion of some of the workers nothing would have been done if the leaflet had not been produced.

The News Editor and two reporters from the Stratford Express arrived and entered the factory. Some girls took them round and showed them the working conditions. They recognized that these were as had been described to them on the Friday. One worker pointed out that the Stratford Express had a responsibility in making the facts public, as the paper had for months been carrying continuous advertisements on behalf of Brentford Nylons.

At 9.50 am the management invited the Works Committee to go to Head Office and talk it over. They were getting worried because the the workers were occupying the factory. The workers were of the opinion that they should wait for the management to come to them, but were persuaded by the union officials to go up to Head Office. Cars were arranged.

At 10.30 am the Factory Committee and union officials began to leave the building. On the way out Mr Alex Smith, NUTGW, approached the friends and said the conditions were not really as bad as they thought. 'In fact they are quite good, really'. We asked him if the conditions complied with the Factory Acts and safety regulations. He admitted that there were a number of infringements. We pointed out that Mr Juniper had been to the factory on a number of occasions and had even walked up the broken stairs. Mr Juniper had been told about the women's stores in the men's toilets. He had been told about some of the accidents that had occurred. But nothing had been done. Mr Smith said: 'Well, we've only been here a couple of months. We get very little response from either the workers or the management'. Mr Juniper came up and apologised for 'blowing his top'. He said that they 'had a very difficult situation'. When asked what he intended to do about it, he blew his top again and yelled 'What do you expect me to do?'.

It was agreed that the workers would refuse to work, but would occupy the factory until their Committee reported back from the meeting at Head Office.

At 11.45 am the Factory Committee and union officials left in four cars. Mr Juniper got lost on the way and arrived late as usual at the Head Office of Brentford Nylons at 1, Harlequin Avenue, Great West Road, Brentford, Middlesex. Two directors, Mr Bunting and Mr O'Hanian agreed to meet them and discuss their complaints.

After listening to the complaints of the workers about the indiscriminate sackings, the bad conditions and the pay hold-ups, Mr Bunting said he couldn't understand it. If conditions were as bad as described neither the local manager (Mr Tremayne) nor the union had informed Head Office. He claimed that no one had been sacked, but that due to a hold-up in textiles and a shortage of machinery the company could not maintain its present staff. He could not understand why local management did not know exactly who had been put off, and in what order. When asked if Head Office had the lists he said 'yes' - but failed to produce them.

He finally agreed to reinstate everyone for the week, but said that there would have to be a redundancy next Friday, but not on the same scale as before. It would be on a 'first in, last out' basis. The workers agreed. They hoped that Mrs Turnbull's (the forelady) daughter, who had only started work the week before, would top the list of those to go.

In order to minimise redundancy Mr Bunting agreed to a  $3\frac{1}{2}$  day week for those who were left. The management tried to make the point that the machinists would perhaps prefer this to take place on the basis of their profitability to the firm. The workers resisted this and insisted on the 'first in, last out' basis.

As regards the hold-up in wages, Mr O'Hanian said that he was aware that the system was 'not as efficient as he would like it', but he didn't think it was as bad as described. He had just brought over a new method from Ireland and hoped to introduce it in the near future.

Mr Juniper then opened his mouth again and made another tremendous contribution to the afternoon's proceedings. He said: 'As members of the Tailors and Garment Workers Union we are not unreasonable people'. The workers ignored him and got back to direct discussion with the management. One Committee member said that she herself was owed £20 back pay. She demanded it right away. Mr. O'Hanian told her to go over to the Wages Office where she would be paid immediately. The Wages Office complained that they had no records of all this and could only give her a £10 sub and another promise. Mr O'Hanian couldn't understand the loss of earnings through the hold-ups in machinery. Head Office had been sending all the new machinery available to Stratford and he had given no orders to Mr Tremayne to send the machinery away. If Mr O'Hanian is to be believed, we advise him to keep a very close watch on Mr Tremayne.

The management also agreed to direct discussion concerning the canteen and about the availability of machinery. The problems of the canteen would have to be put right. And by a strange coincidence Mr O'Hanian had also got all the equipment on order. He promised that it would be installed as soon as possible. He warned that it might take some time as it would be necessary to bring in heating and ventilation engineers to adapt the building to canteen requirements (another promise!) Head office also agreed to take the necessary steps to remove the women's stores from the men's toilets and to remove the accident hazards.

T U E S D A Y, O C T O B E R 8

A meeting was held. Mr Juniper reported back, putting the proposal of a  $3\frac{1}{2}$  day week to offset redundancy. The workers accepted this and agreed to continue work while the officials and Committee members went back into the office to sort out other problems.

W E D N E S D A Y, O C T O B E R 9

Mr Juniper reported that he had been informed by the management that no more sheets were being made at Stratford. The work would now be mainly frilly pillow cases. There would be a five day week. None of the workers at Stratford were familiar with this work, and it would mean a serious drop in earnings. Mr Juniper said he expected a lot of people would leave as a result.

A number of workers did decide to leave and demanded their money and cards immediately. As usual they were offered another promise of... next week. Much to the embarrassment of the union officials and the management they staged a sit-down strike in the management's office. In sheer desperation Mr Juniper went down to the local Labour Exchange and got some of them jobs. (Another example of unions acting as the middle man in the sale of organized labour?) The management finally caved in and sent all the cards and money by mini-car for those leaving

Brentford. On opening their wage packet everyone found they were short. They continued their sit-down. Most of the shortages were made good by 6 pm that evening.

Directors Bunting and O'Hanian arrived at the factory, walked straight upstairs and into the workshop. Needless to say, all floors had been swept. So had some of the gangways - at least the ones they walked up had been. On the way back they looked at the accident hazards, but passed without comment.

#### T H U R S D A Y, O C T O B E R 10

Mr Juniper arrived at 2.15 pm and called a meeting with the stewards and Committee. While they were waiting, Rat-faced Renee took him aside to have a short whispering session. Mr Juniper said: 'There are still a lot of things to be done. This could take a long time. Let's elect a chairman. I suggest Mr Bunting, the director would make a good chairman'. On entering the office Mr Juniper opened the meeting by saying: 'I want everyone to understand we are starting from scratch. I have a long list of items here. It is going to take a long time. What we want is a joint statement which is legal and binding on both sides. If necessary I am prepared to take the case to the TUC and call in Barbara Castle'!

We do not intend to go into the boring details of Mr Juniper's failings as a negotiator, or to discuss the problems posed by the inexperience of the workers attempting to represent themselves in the office. It is sufficient to say that very little has been done to solve the immediate problems. While making a lot of promises, the management have reorganized the work and split up and separated the militants. The union has cooperated in this - by doing nothing about it. The most important thing to come out of this dispute is that the workers themselves saw the need to elect their own Factory Committee. Now this must be made to work.

#### C O N C L U S I O N S A N D S U G G E S T I O N S

Following the sackings some of the girls were angry. They invaded the Stratford Express offices. A few contacted us and agreed to distribute leaflets outside the factory on the Monday. These were well received by most workers - although one was violently against it: Rat-faced Renee, the union collector (coincidence?). We have already described the (expected) reaction of the union officials - they just cannot stomach workers acting on their own initiative.

The workers then went into the factory, but refused to work. Up to this point the initiative was with the workers. By their own actions they had put the management on the defensive. They had exposed the conditions. They had forced the union officials to do something at last!

All this the workers achieved through their own action. But as workers in this factory will readily admit, they have had no experience of either union or shop floor activity or organization. In the light of this, what they actually did do was even more praiseworthy. In the end, however, this lack of experience told. The workers, having seen through the bosses, were not able to see through the union officials. These, posing as being on the side of the workers, were able to take control of the situation and wrest the initiative from the workers themselves.

At all meetings with the management (in the days following the strike) Mr Juniper and Rat-faced Renee did most of the talking. The Factory Committee members were, in the main, lookers on. Even when they did speak, it was without clear and united objectives. All meetings on the shop floor were called by Mr Juniper and addressed by him. He told the workers what had been decided. No votes were ever taken. There was no report-back by the Factory Committee. No mass decisions were taken by the workers about future plans.

Not much has yet been achieved. Mr Jennifer Juniper says 'it will take management some time to put things right' as 'we cannot expect everything to be done at once'. The workers have accepted this. Rat-faced Renee, when in the manager's office, spends more time running down fellow workers than putting their demands - e.g. she blamed the girls for the filthy conditions in the toilets, and for getting ready to clock out before 5.15. She said she did not know the stores were in the men's toilet. She even proposed that, in order to stop pilfering - which she told the management was going on - girls should have their bags searched. Unfortunately as yet the workers have not seen through these two and taken further action themselves.

Let us put it quite clearly. This dispute can be won quickly and easily. Any experienced shop steward would not walk out of the management's offices without getting all the demands met immediately, or as immediately as physically possible. And any self-respecting union official (yes, that means you, Jennifer Juniper!) would not have the cheek to say that 'we cannot have everything done at once'.

The conditions in this factory, and the behaviour of the management, are illegal. They are against the Factory Acts, safety regulations and public health requirements. We put here some suggestions as to how we think the workers should go about getting them put right.

1. If Jennifer Juniper and Rat-faced Renee continue to act as they have done, they should be ignored.

2. The workers should have regular shop floor meetings themselves, without Jennifer always calling them.

3. They must then give the Works Committee a mandate to go to the bosses and demand action on clearly laid-out points.

4. The Committee must then report back on the bosses' reply.

5. If this is unsatisfactory, then further action should be considered. This does not necessarily mean strikes or even loss of pay. It could mean, for instance, all the time workers going slow or working to rule. It could mean distributing leaflets outside Marks and Spencers or Woolworths all over London (or anywhere locally for that matter) describing the conditions under which their products are manufactured. It could mean contacting other branches of the firm and calling for similar action from them. If the National Press were contacted they might well take this matter up. The conditions would make a good story. There are enough members of 'Solidarity' and the East London Libertarian Group to help out with all this.

6. These plans should be put to the bosses. If they still refuse to act then the workers and friends should start doing some of these things. We think the bosses will soon give in.

7. Court action and calling in the Factory Inspectors could also be threatened.

8. The stewards and Works Committee should take the names and addresses of any workers involved in accidents, documenting the cases carefully, with a view to possible legal action against the firm.

9. Regular meetings should be held on the shop floor, in the bosses' time. If he complains then the workers should threaten the action suggested.

10. Shop stewards should reject the tendency and temptation to go into the office and there bring up their own personal grievances. They must put the demands of the workers they represent, as laid down by these workers. They must be held responsible for doing this and seeing that these demands are met.

We emphasize that these are only suggestions. The workers on the job will probably think of better methods of struggle, but we have put these as a guide along which we think they might work so as to defeat the bosses. Above all the workers should not be fooled by the bosses' friendliness (if they are) or firmness (if they are). These attitudes are both tools the bosses use - what actually gets done depends on the action and solidarity of the workers themselves.

ERNIE STANTON.

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THE SAIGON INSURRECTION (continued from p.6)

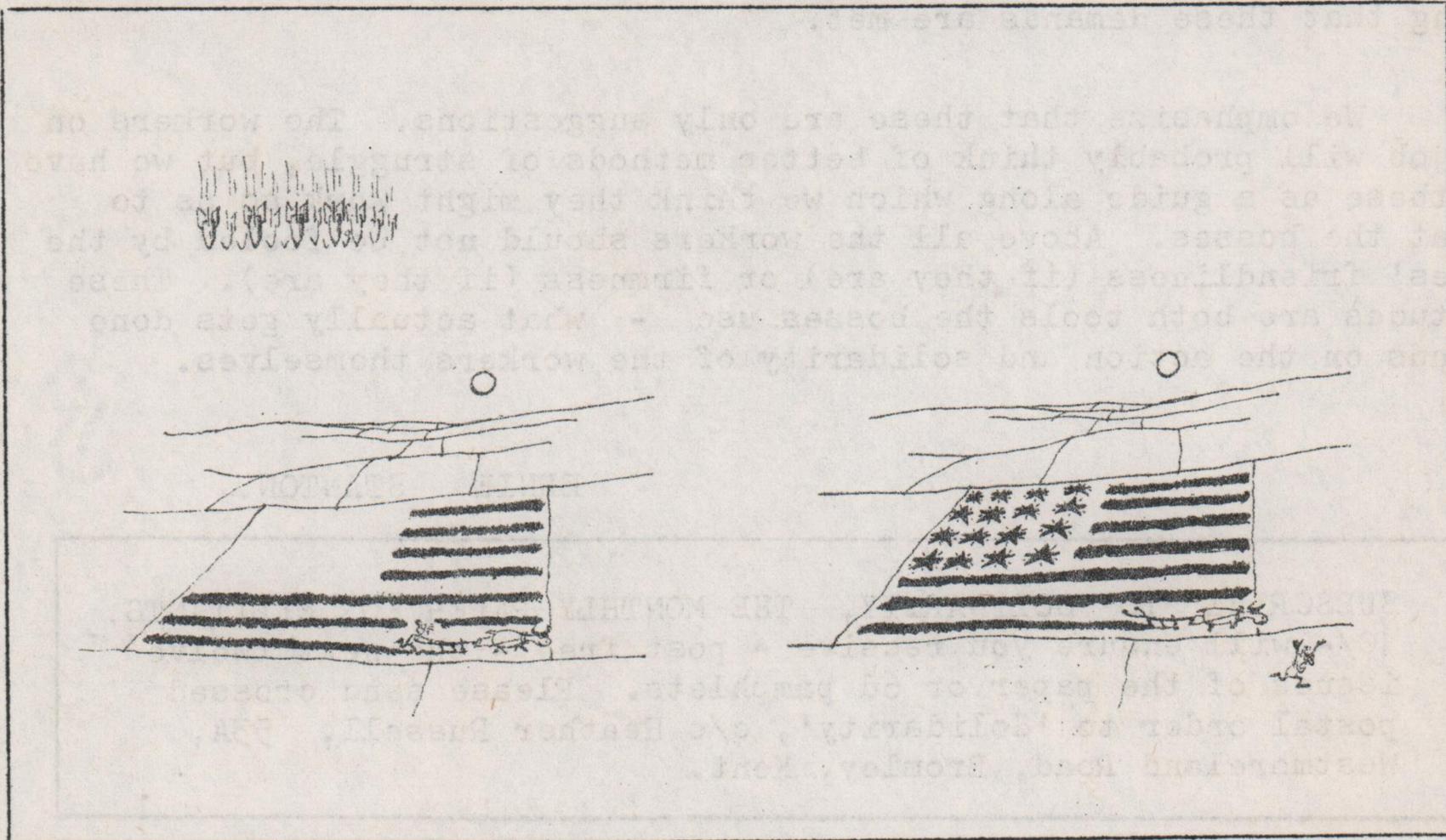
of the Viet-minh as the dominant force, in the years to come, was only possible after a lot of peasant and working class blood had been shed.

Refusing to accept the authority of Nguyen dinh Thau, the tramwaymen's militia seeks to regroup in the Plaine des Joncs, towards which it has opened a way, fighting meanwhile against the Gurkhas and the French at Loc-giang, Thot-not and My-hanh. In the Plaine des Joncs the tramwaymen establish contact with the poor peasants. And it is here that in a fight against the imperialist forces that Tran dinh Minh gets killed, on January 13, 1946. Some 20 other tramway workers had already lost their lives in the course of battles waged on the way.

The intolerance of the Viet-minh in relation to all independent tendencies, the accusations of treachery combined with threats of murder and the numerical weakness of the Tramwaymen's militia eventually forced its members to disperse. Three of them, Le Ngoc, Ky, and Huong, a young worker of 14, were stabbed to death by Viet-minh bands .

The Saigon explosion reverberated into the countryside and into the more distant provinces. The peasants seized the local officials who had most distinguished themselves by their cruelty or their extorsions, and many were put to death. But in the countryside as in the towns the pretext of popular anger against their exploiters was everywhere used by the Viet-minh to settle accounts with potential dissenters...

VAN.



# THE LUCAS EMPIRE TAKES A BASHING

by our Industrial Correspondent.

Joseph Lucas is a giant enterprise which holds a virtual monopoly in the manufacture and distribution of vital components and accessories to the Car and Commercial Vehicle Industry.

The firm is based on Birmingham where it has 26 factories producing starters, dynamos, alternators, switches, lamps and hosts of other important products. It controls subsidiaries like Rotax (aircraft instruments and equipment), Bryce-Berger (diesel equipment), Bradley's (medical instruments, etc.), Butler's (lamps), Rist's Wires and Cables, and C.A.V. (diesel, mechanical and electrical engineers) which is concerned with the production of heavy commercial vehicle equipment and has factories in Acton (London), Rochester (Kent), Sudbury (Suffolk), Fazakerley (Liverpool) and has interests abroad too: there are Lucas factories and subsidiaries in every major country in the world.

The important decisions are made in Birmingham. This partially explains the bad industrial relations in the firm's factories (the shop stewards know that they are dealing with men who have no real power). Lucas is now attempting to introduce productivity deals (surveys - measured day work - profiles) but is meeting with unprecedented militancy from its employees, many of whom believe that they are badly underpaid for what they're doing and are not at all interested in working a lot harder for a few bob more a week!

## RECENT TROUBLES

The press has recently been paying a lot of attention to Joseph Lucas. Strikes at the various Lucas plants throughout the country have caused thousands of car workers to be laid off and have resulted in lost orders and delay. The critics of 'government interference in industry' have been clamouring for intervention from Whitehall. The yellow press has talked of 'wild cats' and of greedy men disrupting production'. Workers in the car factories kicked back at the bosses who laid them off; they banned overtime. Others worked 45 minutes of an hour and stopped for the remaining 15. These

were defensive methods to make the jobs last and to avoid being laid off. But they were also being used to put pressure on the car employers to give guaranteed wages.

Yet the disputes in the Lucas group which triggered all this off are different from the so-called wildcats which take place in well organised car factories. The latter disrupt the production of cars in the particular group to which the factory belongs (Ford, Vauxhall, Leyland-B M C, etc.). These strikes are probably welcomed by the unaffected groups - after all they are competitors! But a dispute that affects such an important supplier as Lucas is welcomed by nobody in the car and commercial vehicle industry. The reason is that the Lucas group has an almost 100% monopoly in lamps, starters, dynamos, wind-screen wipers, and a host of other vital components. Show me a British vehicle of any description and I'll show you the Lucas parts on it.

No definite pattern emerges as to the form of the Lucas disputes. The only common feature is of a centralised management playing one section off against another (high rates here, low rates there), management prepared to go to incredible lengths to maintain its authority in relation to wage rates and norms.

The recent troubles involved assembly workers disputing production norms considered impossible to achieve. Piece work rates have been disputed. Pay claims have been put in by inspectors. Security men have demanded more for weekend work. Tool makers have become tired of procedure. Many other sectors have also taken the new militant line.

## BRAKE FACTORIES WORKERS REACH 'BRAKING' POINT

The Girling\*Brake and Hydraulic Equipment factories supply Vauxhall, Ford's, Rootes and Jaguar, etc. The only other brake manufacturer of major importance is Lockheed (a poor second). There are Girling factories in Cwmbran (South Wales), Bromborough and Broad Green (Merseyside). The first dispute of any importance this year was that of 27 inspectors who indulged in a "revolutionary auction", demanding rises of £5 to £6 per week.

The next one with a humane content was that which affected the assembly line at Cymbran. Quite simply a young woman "blew her top". She was employed in the brake unit final assembly shop with 99 other workers. Her particular job involved picking up a unit which was moving along the conveyor belt and inserting a pin. This had to be done 280 times an hour. After a while she threw the pin in the air! The line suddenly stopped. Her gesture expressed the frustration felt by all her workmates: she had just come to the end of her tether.

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\* Another member of the Lucas Empire.

This was the climax to nearly six months of tension which began when the "time and motion experts" introduced a new type of assembly line. The pace demanded 2,600 units per 7½ hour shift. The workers (not being experts) tried to achieve this but were unable to do so. They claimed that 1,940 units per shift was the absolute limit. Despite the bait of more bonus the norm was never reached. Girling bosses, no doubt disappointed at the poor results of the new unit and accepting without question their 'experts' opinions insisted that 2,600 was the figure.

One woman (Mrs Kathleen May) described the de-humanising conditions: "It's a zombie type job, you have to turn yourself into a machine just to work the machine" - "You're doing the same job 2,000 times a shift, day in, day out". She went on to describe how the supervisors pushed the conveyor belts along with their hands in order to increase the speed of the line, while the time and motion men were clocking the job.

T G W U and A E F stewards complained to the foreman and to the union officials. The bosses still insisted that 2,600 units per shift was the norm. The workers continued to produce 1,940 units, as before. Bro. Golightly (the A E F district organiser) checked up for himself. He claimed that in order to produce 1,940 units per shift the assemblers had "to work like the clappers". Golightly saw the time and motion men who gave a concession: They reduced the target by 200 units to 2,400 units per shift. Golightly was pleased with himself, thinking he'd achieved something great. The workers still maintained that the target was unattainable.

Next day, day and nightshift assemblers met and decided to walk out. Other Girling workers were sent home and soon many car workers were laid off. Ford's at Dagenham were without brake units for their Escort and Cortina models. Girlings claim that the car industry lost between £750,000 and £1,000,000 per day due to this dispute. Union officials and management contrived to find a formula for a resumption of work.

On September 9th a meeting was called at which the Bosses offered to drop their target by 100 units (maintaining the right to demand 2,400 when the new target had been reached). "We knew we couldn't make it", said Mrs May. The new offer was turned down. On September 16th the management declared that no more company time studies would take place and that new piece work rates would be negotiated. A vote 44 to 41 for a return to work indicated the mood of the workers. They gave the Bosses exactly eight days "to come to terms".

As the deadline grew near the Department of Employment and Productivity (no doubt alarmed at the threat to the car industry and yet realizing that only a breach in the P.I.B. policy would settle it) poked their noses in.

September 24th came and, true to their word, the workers walked out.

## WORKERS' NORM ACCEPTED

The Bosses dropped their target altogether. The workers were offered full piecework rates based on the 2,600 units which had never once been produced. The rate amounted to 16/- to 24/- depending on whether it was dayshift or nightshift. The strikers met on the 27th and discussed the proposals. Obviously aware of their strength, they agreed to return - three days hence!

The whole wage structure at Girling's has been hammered. And the lesson hasn't been missed by other sectors.

A day after the return of the victorious assembly workers, the labourers walked out, demanding a £1 per week rise. The bosses (no doubt nervous wrecks by now) offered them 11/6d. The labourers gave them exactly 15 minutes to make it 15/-. The firm gave in.

## THE SECURITY MESS

The Gate-keepers or security men are a mixed bunch and aren't exactly popular with most workers. Their job as the company's policemen doesn't exactly breed popularity. Yet their pay and conditions are bad. Despite their uniforms, they are in need of working class solidarity.

Merseyside is a poorly paid area by any standard but Joseph Lucas's factories are notorious for their low rates. The Fazakerley site situated in Long Lane, Liverpool was formerly a naval ordnance works. It contains the Lucas and C A V factories, where security men worked 50 hours per week at 6/2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d per hour.

A remarkable overtime system was in use. A typical effect was that in a three-week cycle (2 weeks dayshift, 1 week nightshift) a man got only 20 of his 150 hours of work paid at time-and-a-third - and only 10 hours paid at time-and-a-half.

The basic rate is £12 10 0d while the nearby Courtauld factory pays its guards £19 a week. The men claimed that in 1963 they submitted a claim for time-and-a-half for Saturday work and double time for Sunday. This is normal throughout engineering.

Sick of getting nowhere they left their union (the N U G M W) and joined the T G W U\*. The Bromborough lads across the Mersey remained in the N U G M W as did the Broadgreen men. The claim was re-submitted and was refused by the Engineering Employers' Federation who met at Liverpool. The claim went to York and was returned as being too trivial to be dealt with at other than local level.

## COPPERS FOR THE COPPERS

Before the claim reached York - the personnel officer (in an unusually friendly manner) approached Ron Laycock, the security men's steward. A 1d an hour was offered to get the claim dropped. Despite Laycock's refusal the coppers found their way into the men's pay packets - in fact each man had a penny three farthings extra! It turned out that Birmingham had a revised rate and this amount brought parity. Laycock resigned.

A new shop steward, Jack Berwick, took up the reins - a bonus of 5d an hour was offered but could not be used to calculate even the meagre overtime. The men did their nuts. A meeting took place between the Fazakerly men and the other lads from Bromborough and Broadgreen.

On July 22nd the men came out on a strike which lasted 3 days. The industrial strength of security men is small, but despite their position they received support from an unexpected quarter. If anyone falls foul of a security man at the gates it's the drivers. Yet it was the 20 drivers who came out with the security men who made the struggle effective. Perhaps the fact that they were in the same union helped, but the evidence shows that this help was offered and not solicited.

Lucas's top man in the Merseyside area - Mr James Peel - offered the men 5½d an hour backdated, but asked for a month's grace to 'clear it with Birmingham'. Surprisingly, the men agreed. When the time was up, the reply came "Birmingham won't allow it". The men felt they'd been taken for a ride. They stormed out and the battle began in earnest. (September 2nd.)

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\* The strike that followed wasn't only 'unofficial'. It also crossed union lines.

As the strike was 'unofficial', the union bureaucrats couldn't control it. The 9 man strike committee was led by Nick Shute, a lorry driver and T G W U steward. Despite pleas from the management - and vicious attacks on them in the local and national papers - the men stood firm. Their posters claimed that £75 per week was all that it would cost to pay the men their claim. "It wasn't the men who were ruining the economy, it was Lucas". Apart from the 20 Fazakerley lorry drivers, the security men at Bromborough and Broadgreen were also outsolid.

On September 13th telegrams were sent to each of the 70 strikers instructing them to appear the following Sunday at 11 a.m. at the local T G W U headquarters. The men were puzzled and offended as no reason had been given. The majority reported to the strike headquarters at Fazakerley, and decided to send the strike committee to the T G W U offices!

The angry officials, frustrated in their attempts to divide the security men from the drivers, had prepared a peace plan designed to be read by only the security men. As this formula omitted any reference to time-and-a-half, the thing was dropped.

Meanwhile, Government officials were becoming increasingly alarmed at the delay in settling the dispute. Heavy pressure from the car employers were undoubtedly having an effect on Lucas. The final agreement allowing payment of time-and-a-half for Saturday and Sunday work was accepted. The negotiations took place in London and were quickly concluded.

## LUCAS - BIRMINGHAM

1,200 toolmakers in the 26 Lucas factories in Birmingham recently won a 30/- a week rise by taking strike action. Six years ago varying rates were introduced when new methods were brought in. Since that time an earnings gap of £3 12 6d to £4 a week has developed between the lieu rate men and the lads on piecework. The men 'went through the official procedure' and the claim for parity 'went up to York' - only to be returned for settlement at district level. The breakdown of talks led to the men taking strike action. Their action was endorsed by District Office and declared official by the Executive. Lucas coughed up the 30/-.

As in Cwmbran, the disease spread. The next group to become militant were the maintenance men. They too wanted 30/- and have so far been offered 25/-. They didn't bother about official channels, and are refusing to listen to appeals from

the A E F officials to 'put their claims through procedure? They know that an offer of 25/- wouldn't have been made to them if they'd 'gone through the proper channels'. They also know Lucas can't afford any further delays in getting components to the big car manufacturers, especially so near to the opening of the Motor Show.

## LUCAS & C.A.V. (ACTON)

Although no major strike has taken place since last year, running battles are taking place throughout different sections. Recently the swarfhouse men walked out and won an 8d an hour rise. Setters, storekeepers and inspectors have worked to rule. Tool makers have successfully defended an attack on their shop steward. Operators who lost money due to the setters' "work to rule" didn't fall for the old divide-and-rule lark. Instead of arguing with the setters, they stormed upstairs, 50 strong, and confronted the production manager. Labourers, whose pay is diabolically low, won a 4½d an hour interim award recently. Drill operators in the switchgear factory have successfully fought certain piecework rates.

Lucas (Spares) and the Service Depot at Dardrecht Road, Acton are not noted for militancy. Yet on Friday, October 11th, the manager's office was surrounded by angry drivers. Apparently a fork lift driver had been ordered to drive a lorry. He'd refused, saying it wasn't his job. The manager sacked him on the spot. At the moment nothing is coming in or going out of the depot.

Taken all round, Lucas has had quite a bashing.

## CONCLUSION

These struggles, although mainly economic, are nevertheless important. They are making a mockery of the Incomes Policy. They are exposing the futility of union procedure, now seen as a delaying tactic by more and more militants. The issue at stake on the Cwmbran assembly line was an extremely important one, in that it highlighted how people were being turned into mere appendages of the machine. The Fazakerley dispute showed that 'unofficial' action, cutting across union lines, and assisted by other sections not only achieved its objective, but, in the process, broke the management-imposed barriers between "different" sections of workers. Above all these disputes show that direct action pays off - and that it is possible to control the situation without the union bureaucrats.

On the debit side one must realize that these struggles which promptly achieve their immediate short-term objectives do not fundamentally alter the existing positions of power in decision making. They are mainly defensive struggles without any real socialist content.

The role of a socialist organisation in industry is both to generalise the experiences of workers in their day-to-day struggles and to show them that industry is an important area but not the only area in which they come up against capitalist society. The posing of an alternative (Socialism and Workers' Management) must always be seen as one of our main tasks, to be undertaken at the same time as we unhesitatingly expose reformism in the Trade Unions - and point the cold finger of truth at Stalinist betrayals and mystifications. Only in this way will we contribute to the consciousness necessary to tackle the enormous tasks that lie ahead.

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### FRANCE : THE THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

In our last issue we published a long critical review of the pamphlet: 'France: The Struggle Continues' by Tony Cliff and Ian Birchall. (2/6 from Socialist Review Publishing Co., 36 Gilden Rd., London NW5). The review has provoked a number of written comments - both critical and otherwise - which we feel should be published. Rather than devote space in several successive issues of the paper to this controversy we intend shortly to publish a pamphlet on the theoretical implications of the French events in which various viewpoints will be aired. Orders welcome from now, 10d, post free, from H. Russell, 53A Westmoreland Rd., Bromley, Kent.

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## ABOUT OURSELVES

Over the last few months the circulation of SOLIDARITY has slowly but steadily been rising and we are now printing some 1400 copies of each issue. The production of pamphlets is considerably higher. Over 5000 copies of 'PARIS: MAY 1968' are now in circulation. Our individual subscribers now number well over 200 and an increasing number of comrades are taking bulk orders. The idea of workers' self-management which we have been advocating for a number of years, is beginning to evoke an echo.

In response to increasing demand we have had to reprint several of our earlier pamphlets. We would like to draw readers' attention to the new edition of Kollontai's 'The Workers Opposition' (3/6, post free). We have also recently produced an 'Open Letter to International Socialism Comrades' dealing with the questions of self-management and 'democratic centralism'. Copies are available on request.

A series of regular public meetings is being planned with a view to explaining our ideas to a wider public. Details will be announced in our next issue.

More 'Solidarity' material has been translated. There is now a Swedish edition of Ida Mett's 'The Kronstadt Commune'. 'The Workers Opposition' by Alexandra Kollontai and our pamphlet 'Socialism or Barbarism' are being translated into German and a Spanish edition of Cardan's 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution' is being prepared.

Finally an appeal for help. Slave labour of all kinds (writers, translators, cartoonists, perfectionist typists and duplicator operators, and of course, sellers) are urgently needed.

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