



# FORD

## SHOP STEWARDS ON INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

Bernie Passingham and Danny Connor

Price 30p

## About the Authors

**Bernie Passingham** was born in 1925 and has been employed at Briggs Bodies and Fords throughout his working life. He is Convenor of the River Plant, Dagenham, and secretary of the Ford Convenors' National Committee. Within the TGWU, he is a member of the General Executive Council (as the nominee of the Automotive Trade Group).

**Danny Connor**, born in 1924, has worked at Fords for 22 years and is Convenor of the Metal Stamping and Body Plant, Dagenham. He is on the Ford National Joint Negotiating Committee and is minutes secretary of the Convenors' National Committee. He is also a member of the TGWU Region No. 1 Committee.

# Introduction

Bernie Passingham and Danny Connor are senior shop stewards at Fords, Dagenham, and they are also prominent lay officials in their union, the TGWU. In setting out their views on industrial democracy, they raise many issues of central relevance to the trade union and labour movement.

Managerial prerogative is the hallmark of Ford of Britain, and their American masters. Basic trade union rights at Fords had to be fought for every inch of the way, especially in respect of shop stewards. Prior to the great "penalty clause" dispute of 1969, the Company's strike record confirmed its "... image of a thrustful, competitive-minded management which ... resisted the implications of workplace labour organisation ..."\*

That organisation nevertheless developed, and now senior stewards such as Danny Connor are full members of the Ford National Joint Negotiating Committee for the hourly-rated, and the union negotiating objectives are effectively determined by the multi-union convenors' combine committee, of which Bernie Passingham is the secretary. This advance has crystallised the problems of the various relationships discussed in this pamphlet: between the shopfloor and their stewards, stewards and stewards, stewards and unions, unions and unions, the hourly-rated and staff, the different Ford plants, and between British workers and their foreign colleagues. Ultimately, there is the further problem of the interface between the State, the managerial function and decentralised trade unionism within the present context of Fords, and in the possible future context of a nationalised automotive industry.

The recent Fiesta investment decision is also discussed in order to illustrate the limitations of existing collective bargaining: "We got very little response from the Company, their view was that we were paid to go there and wield a hammer, and they were paid to sit up in an office somewhere and do the thinking" (Danny Connor). "You can talk and argue as much as you like. Detroit does not believe in the finesse of negotiations. They only believe in one thing, that's if you stop their plants and their source of profit" (Bernie Passingham). In this instance, however, industrial muscle could not be mobilised and the stewards relied mainly on political pressure group tactics. Using the Fiesta affair as an example, the final major theme of the pamphlet is an analysis of the various dangers and opportunities arising from the Bullock Report.

This Report has undoubtedly stimulated debate within the movement, and we were asked by the Dagenham stewards to assist in their discussions on Bullock and its implications for Fords. By way of a return match, we prevailed on Bernie and

\* H.A. Turner, G. Clack and G. Roberts, *Labour Relations in the Motor Industry*, Allen and Unwin, 1967, p.243.

Danny to come to the Industrial Relations Department of the London School of Economics and give a seminar and answer questions, which we taped, transcribed and edited. Various sections were extended by additional interviews with the authors, who then had ultimate control over the final version of the text. The result is this pamphlet on shop stewards and industrial democracy.

Roy Lewis and Jon Clark,  
Department of Industrial Relations,  
London School of Economics,  
June 1977.

# Ford Shop Stewards on Industrial Democracy

## 1. The Shop Stewards' Struggle.

'Repetitive labour – the doing of one thing over and over again and always in the same way – is a terrifying prospect to a certain kind of mind. It is terrifying to me. I could not possibly do the same thing day in and day out, but to other minds, perhaps I might say to the majority of minds, repetitive operations hold no terrors. In fact, to some types of mind thought is absolutely appalling. To them the ideal job is one where the creative instinct need not be expressed. The jobs where it is necessary to put in mind as well as muscle have very few takers – we always need men who like a job because it is difficult. The average worker, I am sorry to say, wants a job in which he does not have to put forth much physical exertion – above all, he wants a job in which he does not have to think'. (Henry Ford, *My Life and Work*, Heinemann, 1923, p. 103).

*B.P.* By way of introduction, I am going to outline the background of industrial relations at Fords, and then Danny will talk about the Fiesta investment decision as a practical example of industrial democracy, or the lack of it. Then we will be in a position to discuss the issues raised for Ford stewards by the Bullock Report and the broader question of industrial democracy.

Relations between the Ford Motor Company and the unions didn't come about just by the Company saying "we'd like the trade unions to come in". It's been a long, hard slog of a battle. The Company has got plants all over the world with the main base at Detroit. That is the centre, that is where the main decisions arrive from. In the early '30s, they developed the Dagenham Estate, which is still the biggest Ford plant in the UK. Within Dagenham you had the Ford Motor Company, you had Briggs Bodies which made car bodies, and you had Kelsey Hayes which made the wheels for the cars. These were three distinct, separate, companies at that point of time. At Briggs Bodies, which had far more shopfloor activity by the stewards movement, you had recognition of the toolmakers by 1941. It wasn't until 1944 that the Ford Motor Company recognised the trade unions. This was done at the level of the TUC; they wouldn't negotiate locally with shop stewards or trade union officials, they would only go to the supreme body, and that was the TUC.

Then we move to the period when the Ford Motor Company bought out Kelsey Hayes Wheels, and in 1952 they acquired the shares and bought out Briggs Bodies. That time was very interesting because Fords negotiated with the unions at national level (and when they meant national level, it was general secretaries and national officials), whereas within the Briggs side where I was a steward, this was done by local officials connected with the Confed. (Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions).

When Ford bought Briggs Bodies out they decided that, for some reason best

known to themselves, they would also give notice and terminate the agreement. Which they did. And hence we had a situation where we had no agreement, but the Company put forward a set of proposals, which we called "standardisation", which basically would have given the workers more money — some of the workers — but it meant the Company would have taken away the rights which had been won over the years, the right to have meetings within the plant premises, the question of washing-up time, preparation time — all these rights were to be taken away for a bit more money and standardisation. Now the Briggs workers felt that they would stick to their principles, and as a matter of fact it took over five years before the unions signed the agreement Fords wanted. And therefore you could say that in 1958 Briggs came under the broad structure of Fords in one agreement. Consequently, all negotiations of pay and conditions were done at national level, and stewards and local officials couldn't talk rates or pay or anything of that nature. They could only negotiate on disputes and things which come in their province at local level.

In the fifties and sixties the stewards' movement struggled to survive at all. In 1957 you had the dismissal of Johnny McLoughlin, the "bellringer". In 1963 the management effectively achieved a break-up of the stewards' committee with the dismissal of seventeen stewards.<sup>1</sup>

Moving on, then, you come to an important phase within this history of Fords, when we had at last got a fairly strong and active shop stewards' movement, and, on the other hand, you had the official trade unions and their situation. And it seemed to be that there were two opposing forces. The stewards had no rights at that point in time; the officials would go in, they would negotiate and agree to whatever it was, a wage increase, or sometimes to do away with our tea-break and give us a penny in exchange, and you would get a notice on the board. Obviously we reacted and we had to fight a constant internal battle within our unions, as well as with the Company, to try and get this altered.

The big change really came about in 1969 when the unions on the Ford National Joint Negotiating Committee (FNJNC) and the Company had come to an agreement on penalty clauses to restrict the shopfloor movement. We had all opposed that agreement, some of the major unions opposed it, but nevertheless they still went ahead. We came out on strike, they still met, and still endorsed the agreement. The Company took the unions to court,<sup>2</sup> they lost it, and from that point of time, 1969, we had a real fundamental change in relation to negotiating machinery and recognition of the shop-floor. For up to that time, a Company member at that level wouldn't be seen talking to a shop steward, he would only be seen talking to an official. After the 1969 court case, the fundamental change in industrial relations was that at last they realised that the set-up had to change, that no longer could they talk to a bunch of officials and come to an agreement at some office in London and expect it to apply on the shopfloor, but that the shopfloor had to be taken note of.

## 2. The Collective Bargaining Structure at Fords

*B.P.* Therefore, we then changed the NJNC by introducing lay members for the first time. We agreed that there should be seven representing the TGWU,<sup>3</sup> because we had the largest membership and previously we had been out-voted by some of the unions with far fewer members. The AEU also agreed, and they had five seats, although they didn't take all the seats up as lay members. That basically is the set-up we have today. It's improved greatly because we have a convenors' committee which is also very important. We have 23 Ford plants in the United Kingdom, of various sizes and producing various parts. If one looks at British Leyland and their arguments on differentials and the "Coventry rate". and the outlying plants trying to get up to that rate, we had the opposite in Fords.

When they built the Halewood plant, it was we in Dagenham who stopped work to make sure that the Halewood plant received the same rates of pay as we got. We felt that as people contributing to making a car, they should have the same rate. On the other hand, maybe we were being rather selfish in our point of view in saying "We're not going to have cheap labour up in the North in case the Company decides to shove more and more work up there". So we had our point of view in relation to that. But nevertheless we felt that basically we were on the right lines — that anybody working for Fords in the United Kingdom should be on the same rate of pay for the same kind of work.

Arising from that we developed, and we're still developing today, a convenors' combine.<sup>4</sup> We meet regularly, we decide what our claim's going to be, we decide what issues are going to be taken up with the negotiating committee, and these are then put to the negotiating committee, that is, the union side of the NJNC. Invariably, these are taken up as we put them, with very little alteration. To cover that, the trade unions also have the right to meet JWCs (Joint Works Committees) twice a year. Each plant has a JWC, and this varies in size according to the plant. Twice a year the national officials, those that care to come along, they meet us, and we can at least put what we decide as convenors to that body, and therefore it becomes binding on all the trade unions to take it through. The convenors therefore set the seal on negotiations.

At this point in time the convenors' committee has never been better organised in its history. We have a set-up which is recognised by the officials, correspondence is sent out to the chairman of the convenors and circulated then to all other convenors, i.e. all information goes directly back to the plants. Also, if we oppose anything in relation to the FNJNC they won't arbitrarily push it through. This has to have the consent of the convenors, and by that I mean the convenors, then works committee right back to the stewards. The Company know clearly that they're not going to go back to pre-1969, where you had a bunch of national officials agreeing to something; if we don't agree to it, they're in a right mix.

All the experiences of negotiation in the last 30 years have brought us to the point where we're poised to take over negotiations ourselves. In other words, we're trying to move to a situation where we as convenors do our own negotiations. We

don't need the trade union national officials at that level at all. We only need them or the Executives of the different unions for support when we go into dispute or something like that. That's where we seem to be poised at this point in time. We're not that too far away. It is also true to say that within Fords we too have our toolmakers seeking their own negotiations, we've been having that for the last 18 months or so. But I think steadfastly that we've kept solid, and I think that, in finality, they would see the good sense in the point of having one set of negotiations, and I think you can only have one set of negotiations for the hourly-paid. I don't think you can split them up.

I've already said that historically, in the 1950s and 1960s we used to battle on two fronts, against the Company and against the official organs of the union concerned, whether it was TGWU or AEU. Our first loyalties are basically to the shop stewards' committee. You don't think in every case of what union you belong to, because you're an amalgamation of unions, you become a stewards' committee representing a plant. In companies like British Leyland they have what they call the senior steward of individual unions, but we don't have that. We have the one shop stewards' committee, and they elect a works committee and they elect their convenor, regardless of what union. They don't look and see the percentage of union members and vote for the biggest union. Obviously, you do develop a union allegiance. But when you are down in the plant, when you're a convenor of the plant you conduct yourself in relation to that job, no matter what union you belong to.

If one talks about the question of staff, over the years they have also got organised. The foremen are organised in ASTMS and they also have a fair degree of communication between plants. When an issue affects foremen in one plant they can usually exercise pressure in other plants. Also the technicians are organised in the AUEW (TASS) and the clerical staff are organised in the Association of Clerical, Technical and Supervisory Staffs of the T & GWU. We have a situation today where basically management meets these three unions together. Usually, the Company tries to get settlements with the hourly-rated, then they meet and get agreements with the staff side. This basically is the set-up which is now going forward. I can't see any moves at present for getting the hourly paid and the staff closer together. In relation to ASTMS we're drifting further apart, especially on discipline. Every time one of their members gets hit, they want the man immediately dismissed, which we don't think is right. This is the sort of friction. The ASTMS members are our immediate foremen and supervisors, but this isn't true for the ACTSS and the TASS. We get on fairly well with them, they give us information, especially the TASS members because they are in a position to get important information, for example, future product plans and the sourcing of parts, etc. on the European level. At this point in time we've never really moved together, although we've often thought about it.

To broaden the picture, we have had contact with our friends in West Germany, France and Belgium in relation to the Ford plants. Now Spain is also coming into this picture. We have had regular meetings for some period, now, and we talk about, and exchange, our points of view. We had a slight difference when we first started meeting, because some of the people sitting on the German works councils didn't even belong to a trade union. We belonged to a trade union and we felt that they



should also belong to a trade union if they were going to meet us. If you look now at most of the plants over there you will find that nearly all the works council members at least do belong to a trade union. We still have our problems, because their works councils consist of staff and hourly-rated. We have not come to that stage where we sit down with our staff, but they have: that's their law and their works council. When we meet the Europeans we insist that we meet the hourly-rated people separately, and the staff side go and meet the staff side. The only tangible result of the European links is that we can get up-to-date information in relation to wages and movement of jobs from plant to plant. There's no moves yet to stimulate joint action. We are trying (and I say trying) to bring our bargaining dates nearer, so that we may be in a position, as regards bargaining in Germany, Belgium and France, to bargain at the same time. As far as possible we have regular meetings, although you must bear in mind that the British workers are the poor relations and we have to rely on the Germans for the cash. This is a fact of life. When they come over here, they pay for their own bed and board. We buy them a drink, but when we go over there we expect them to pay for our bed, board and drink!

### 3. Corporate Strategy and the Fiesta

*D.C.* One of the fundamental points raised by the AUEW is the enlarging of negotiating powers via collective bargaining machinery: would this not bring in industrial democracy in a more positive way than sitting in the boardroom as part of the management of the company? The Fiesta is an example of possible enlarging of spheres of negotiation.

Britain, for a number of very complex reasons (tax policy, cost of petrol, etc.) always manufactured light cars in the pre-war years, and the taxation policy of various governments went against the high-powered motor. If you look up some of the old manuals you will see that they all refer to seven horse-power, eight horse-power, i.e. to engines of less than 1,000 cc. That needs to be emphasised, because traditionally that has always been the role of British industry, it's always manufactured that sort of car. Ford was no exception to that. During the 1930s and after the War, they manufactured a range of cars which were broadly speaking what they termed eight to ten horse-power. It was basically on those sorts of models that Ford of Britain had a very successful record, building light-weight cars and exporting them, exporting a ready-made model to overseas markets, much as the Japanese are doing now incidentally: there's a lesson in that as well. There wasn't a great deal of knock-down work (KD), they actually manufactured a car and sold it complete abroad and it was generally speaking a small-engined car. With the full take-over by Detroit they went into the larger-engine cars, the nature of the Ford manufacturing techniques changed and a lot of KD work began, (they stamped the panels out in the United Kingdom and sent them abroad for assembly). That has been the way Fords have expanded, generally speaking, successful or not: if you can relate it to

what's happened at Volkswagen, Renault, Fiat and the Japanese, then I think you'll see it's been unsuccessful.

Because of this, when we learned about Ford having to get into the small car market with the Fiesta, about two years ago, the information we had was that they were going to do it in Saarluis, which is one of their newer German factories. We don't know the total investment, but it was very heavy, though. On top of that they built a totally new plant in Valencia because of all the attractions of Spain. It was an expanding market and they have a very efficient labour relations system: it consists of a guard with a carbine! I'm making this point because I can't doubt for one minute that that's the way they saw the thing operating. In Valencia, again, there was very heavy investment indeed; we're talking in terms of very modern equipment, new plant, capable of turing out a totally new model. The intention was to import them to the United Kingdom. I'm not a financial wizard but I would imagine that a large number of small cars coming into the country must add to the balance of payments crisis, that's the first consideration. And if we weren't worried about that, we would certainly be worried about the loss of jobs in the UK plants, because lately people are turning towards the lighter cars because of the energy crisis.

And therefore we became involved in it as shop stewards. Our initial attack on the Company was: why don't you produce the Fiesta in this country? — and they gave us a very short answer, something like, "It's none of your business where we spend our money", which wasn't very encouraging and I suppose that might be one of the justifications for Bullock. The fact is there was no consultation at all. They were quite willing on a national scale to import what they thought was at that stage so many thousands of units a year, but I would imagine that the current sale of the model would have seen it well over that figure. They were quite prepared, you see, to hazard the position of the British balance of payments. They were prepared to do that as a company, for obvious financial reasons. But in addition to that, of course, every light car which is imported is a light car less made in this country, and therefore it brings a loss of jobs. It means a loss to the tooling industry, as well, as it's a very profound thing when you're tooling a car, the sort of equipment that's needed.

As shop stewards, we therefore took the decision as to whether we should limit ourselves to arguing about whether there's enough paper in the toilets, or whether the roof is leaking — the usual sort of shop stewards run-about. We had a discussion about it and decided that certainly we should tackle this question and argue that it was a part of a trade union function to get involved in the question of investment. Naturally, we got very little response from the Company, their view was that we were paid to go there and wield a hammer, and they were paid to sit up in an office somewhere and do the thinking.

We launched a petition and had meetings in the plant, gathered several thousand signatures to a piece of paper and we then met a number of MPs at the House of Commons, local MPs and those who had worked in the machine-tool industry. From that there were a number of exchanges between the government and the MPs about the question of the Fiesta. Ford had begun at the same time to realise that the market was larger than even they anticipated. They decided to launch the Fiesta

into the USA as well, with a larger engine, and therefore there came a point where the interests of the workforce and the Company started coinciding and dictating that they had to go down the same road as we did. I don't know whether it's to our credit or discredit. I do know that as a result of all these meetings with the MPs, we ultimately met up with Wedgwood Benn, when he was Minister of Industry, and the intention was to form a tri-partite meeting between the Ford Motor Company, the trade union movement and various Ministers. Within a fortnight of that, Tony Benn was fired! But by raising the level of the trade union movement by getting involved in investment, we were able, in some measure, to bring pressure to bear on the Company to produce this model in this country. This helps employment in Dagenham.

For those of you who don't know the area, it's a very depressed piece of marshland on the east side of London, it's the only serious industrial base now in the whole of East London. I'm not a lover of smoke, but in the past you could see all sorts of things going on to the West of us. Nowadays the East End of London is getting derelict, including the docks; really you need to come down to Barking and Dagenham before you find any manufacturing base at all.

In the Dagenham environs to that degree we've now found that there will be about 3,000 additional jobs established in manufacturing the Fiesta. Certainly it's had a profound effect on the Balance of Payments, and we've taken it one stage further by challenging the Company now by saying, "Where do you intend to export these cars?" and they said "We don't intend to do that. That isn't the name of the game at all. We're not exporting them, we're only building for the United Kingdom. The question of whether and where we export them, that will be decided by the big fellers over in Detroit, and we certainly don't intend to have you making motor cars in Dagenham and knocking out the German or Spanish production". Nonetheless, we went through a similar exercise and we wrote to our MPs, we got questions asked here and there — and again I think there might be some political embarrassment on the Company itself — and we now find that the Fiesta is being exported from Dagenham. We are doing the Finnish market, the market in Denmark and the market in Holland, not necessarily the mass markets of the world, I would agree, but nonetheless some would say it shows you that it can be done without sitting on boards of directors.

Against that, of course, I don't know the exact sums of money invested in Dagenham, but I would say they were infinitesimal compared with what's gone into Spain. We have a plant in Dagenham, I won't say it's derelict, but we have presses laying around there which I think South Kensington would be proud to own in their engineering section, and that's the truth! If anyone points to this as a success story of trade union involvement in getting jobs one has to say that in finality we have very little control over where the jobs go or how they're manufactured.

## 4. Attitudes Towards Bullock

*B.P.* When our members look at their *Sun* or *Mirror* and they see something about the Bullock Report, they're not going to dance with joy or anything like that. Normally, they look at page three and that's about it. The average worker does not absorb the question of the Bullock Report, people sitting on boards of directors, and they don't see what it means. I'll give you a for instance. I've taken three meetings of rank and file members specifically to get reaction to the Report, I've spoken and told them what it's all about; and I've not yet had one question – all I've had is blank faces looking up! It's one of the customs, they leave it to the active people in the shop stewards' movement. Now, we've also had discussions with our stewards and that's where we get contrary opinions. We're the ones that normally look into these things, hold meetings and invite people, like Roy and Jon, to come down and give us seminars in relation to how they see the Bullock Report, and that's how its normally done.

My point of view is this, that if there's any changes in the Bullock Report while it goes through Parliament, if it goes through Parliament, then it's out, make no mistake about that, because I think it's on the limits of what is acceptable now. And if there's going to be any amendments, like they've done on the Docks Bill, then I don't think one could go down that road at all.

I think that fundamentally there might be a case for Bullock, as a sort of Trojan Horse (I'm talking purely Fords, because that's where I see we've got an organisation, that's where I see that we can protect ourselves, because we have the set-up to do that, and therefore I'm being quite specific in relation to what I'm saying). One of the main points as I see it is that we have enough experience, stewards and convenors, to go in there and maybe put a point of view without being bought over. It's going to be a very tricky position for somebody to sit down, representing workers, representing maybe a shop stewards' committee, maybe representing a plant, to be able to go and sit in a boardroom and listen to the Gov'nor saying how hard up he is because he can't pay this and pay that, and come back and try and spill that story to the stewards. Frankly at this point in time I just can't see that. I could see a good wise convenor going into the boardroom and getting a lot of information which would be useful to us, which we don't get now: that point I do see. But to me, at this point in time, it's still open to a lot of debate as to whether the workers or stewards are safe when they go down that road. There is the fear that you could start landing up like the works councils in Germany. We don't want to be in a position where we start divorcing ourselves from the shop-floor. The works council has no allegiance to anybody, no allegiance to the stewards or the people they represent on the floor. Once they're there they can more or less do what they want.

The other fear which has been expressed to me is that, if you start moving on to the board of directors, where does the role of the union come in? Will it mean that the union has got to alter its whole way of life? How can that operate? Will it be destroying the union as such if one was to go down that road too far? In other words, you'd land up with people sitting on the boards of directors, and there they are at the same time supposed to be representing the trade unions on the shop

floor. It would be interesting, if it happened, to hear what they would be saying at various committees and branch meetings. You know, whether they'd be talking about what's going on inside the board or whether they'd be talking about the shopfloor aspirations, and what the workers really want. Let's be clear, each shop stewards committee would want that guy sitting on the board reporting back precisely what's going on in that boardroom, — we wouldn't take anything like "that's secret".

*D.C.* There are two reasons unions are arguing against Bullock. There are those unions who wish to preserve the status quo in the social set-up of this country, in other words those who wish to preserve capitalism, e.g. the EETPU. They argue from this Right-wing position that there doesn't need to be any involvement in the making of decisions. On the Left, a number of unions feel that Bullock doesn't go anywhere near far enough, and the very fact that Bullock has come out at this moment is precisely to head the unions off from what their true function should be.

Unions like my own have got a very clearly written rule: the aim of the union is not simply to look after the wages, welfare and hours of work of our members, but also to control the industries in which they work. It's my contention that Bullock, far from doing that, takes us away from that particular sphere, of enabling us to control the industry. And, therefore, I believe that the union should carry out its own democratic rules on industrial democracy. The decisions of the Biennial Delegate Conference of the T & G are quite clear and explicit: my industry, for instance, the motor industry, should be nationalised. No compromise about that, no sitting on boards, no sharing of ownership, it is a question of taking over. There was the aircraft industry as well, which is now a subject of legislation. The point I'm making is that the union has a number of industries which it wants to see totally nationalised, for reasons which are not necessarily just those of Bullock. Bullock concentrates a lot on industrial democracy in the abstract. I don't think democracy is an abstract subject. It's not whether I can put my hand up or raise my voice, but it's whether I can change something. That is democracy for me, whether I have the right to do that or not. In my opinion the terms of reference of the committee precluded them from raising certain questions; in fact Bullock himself mentions that in the course of the Report.<sup>o</sup>

I am not saying that the Report should be totally ignored. If you get through the first 20 pages, it's well worth it for the charts that are in there. It's many, many years since that sort of information was brought together under one set of covers — very valuable information indeed. It poses some fundamental problems as to whether multi-national companies can be controlled by people sitting on the board. It raises all sorts of questions as to how these people sit on boards of directors. But above everything I believe that the argument is not just one of industrial democracy, it is whether you have the power to direct our economy in such a way that it benefits the people of this country.

We had a discussion soon after Bullock appeared; I said at that stage I thought the thing was an abortion, and the passage of time has only confirmed that in my mind. It isn't going anywhere, it's going to remain a document which is going to be stored away somewhere, and people will periodically refer to it. I think that is the nature of the thing. If you have read the papers over the last few weeks, we had

Callaghan one day saying "Yes! We certainly intend to pass legislation this summer", and a couple of days later one of his ministers said "I don't think he really meant *this* summer". Nonetheless it's going to remain there. Whether it will become a part of another Labour government programme I don't know, that might be where the danger lies. My view is that the trade unions should press for far more involvement all round. I mean basic nationalisation of the industries.

Having said that, certainly I want to support the point Bernard made earlier. There are some positive merits in Bullock if the thing does get through. It's true that people can be corrupted and are bought off, but on the other hand, I've sat down with the Ford Motor Company and they've bought me a dinner once in a while, and they still haven't corrupted me, and I don't think they're likely to. I think my price is a bit higher than that! My view is that in this country the strong socialist traditions we have would be sufficient to prevent people being bought off in that manner. But we do need the power of recall. They say you can't be on the board as a delegate, and quite frankly I wouldn't go anywhere if I wasn't a delegate of my trade union. No man's perfect in this world and without constant consultation there's inevitably going to be serious difficulties. Nevertheless had we been in a different political situation I believe we would have had to sit down and see what we could get out of Bullock. Quite frankly, in the current political position I don't think it's going very far.

## 5. Questions and Answers

(i) *Why have shop stewards and workers recently become more interested in influencing corporate policy decisions?*

*D.C.* Lucas Aerospace contributed to trade union thinking to move beyond the limits of wages and hours. In Ford we saw a situation where jobs and models were being taken away from the United Kingdom. The classic case was the Granada. We no longer make the Granada in this country. And when you look up the next lot of import/export figures of motor cars, don't believe those figures — they're hopelessly wrong and distorted. Fords import far more cars than that. The point I'm making is that Fords were able to take the Granada from the UK and establish it in Germany. They did it also with the Capri and we are now importing them as completed models. These are contributory factors as to why shop stewards' committees are becoming more involved in these questions, where multi-nationals because of their size and resources can switch production around. Also the fact that we are barred from certain markets. If you look at the figures for the last ten years there has been a dramatic decline in the number of models exported from the UK. If you look at the North American market, that was totally handed over to Germany. Fords obviously had their reasons, such as favourable exchange rates and they had the power, despite the balance of payments crisis we've had in this country and the need for hard currency.

*B.P.* The shopfloor worker is interested in this, because he actually sees the parts shipped in from abroad, and he doesn't see the parts he used to make which were

shipped out for export. Detroit decide where they're going to sell our cars, it's not a free market; we cannot sell British-made Ford cars in Western Germany, because that market is barred from us. This goes on quite a bit; Australia took quite a lot from us as we used to have a market on knock-down stuff which we sent to Australia. Only part of it is still there. The worker sees in this the danger of finding himself out of a job.

Bear in mind, he's told twice a year<sup>7</sup> — this is one of the company's answers to Bullock — how hard the Japanese are working, how hard the Germans are working, and how hard the Belgians are working in relation to how hard we're working. They ask themselves, is the company going to shift it all abroad and import the car? So they get interested and this stimulates stewards and we're able to apply pressure, because we can apply pressure, as Danny's just said, because we can either make the stuff or stop it going to different countries if we wish. The worker on the shopfloor sees it at that level, he sees that his job in finality can go.

*(ii) Would not worker representation on the board of Ford Britain bring British workers into conflict with the interests of European Ford workers?*

*B.P.* When we took KD work off Germany (I don't know whether we're cheap labour, but we can produce the knock down parts and ship them abroad cheaper than Germany) the Germans bombarded us with leaflets. The same happened when they wanted a meeting with us because they felt there shouldn't be a plant built in Spain. They said they had the capacity to produce the Fiesta. We said, "We're prepared to go along with you and apply pressure". We can do this because once again the tooling is in this country and Germany and not in Spain, and therefore if we didn't tool up for Spain they could only build the shell of a plant but they would never get anything from there. In fact the Germans did not have the power to apply the pressure, and therefore there was no joint action.

There is little co-operation with Germany when British and German workers are interested in the same work. They're not happy now because they're saddled with the Granada which doesn't sell too well in Germany, and they're also saddled with the Capri which left Halewood, and is another very low seller. And therefore Cologne has got two low-selling cars. There again, the Halewood lads want the Capri back in Halewood, but as regards meeting together and coming to some decisions, that's not there.

*D.C.* Apart from the ideological basis of trade unionism being different in Germany at the moment, what we're getting at is this: if we've to sit down with German workers we would be talking about problems that the Ford Motor Company had created for all of us, the Germans, the Spaniards and us. In other words, we are always as trade unionists trying to catch up on something that someone's plotted against us. Industrial democracy, if it means anything at all, would stop those problems being created at that stage and we should know what is going on. The German Ford workers have recently had more than a raw deal; they had big redundancies and short-time two or three years ago, when Ford made a most massive loss in Germany, and they never boasted about that in the papers. In the manufacture of any commodity, whether it's a motor car or a light bulb, it doesn't matter how hard a man works, it depends what equipment he has available. From the recent

official reports<sup>8</sup> we understand that the average British worker in the car industry has got far less investment per man in his hands, as compared with the Germans or Japanese. A multi-national company has the power to direct investment here or there, and totally destroy the economic basis of a country. They've got these tremendous powers, a multi-national can do that. If we had a greater say in running the industry we wouldn't see ourselves in competition with foreign workers. We'd want to say, "We intend to do this or that, how do you see it going?" Instead, we haven't got the information, we're really fighting against something all the time, we never have the opportunity of galvanising a more positive approach to the economy.

(iii) *Will it be possible under Bullock to get full information about Ford?*

B.P. We might get more information, but we won't get full information. In the first instance I don't believe the British Ford management can at present make decisions as to where cars are going to be built. That's still in the hands of Detroit, they're the ones who decide. No, I don't think under Bullock we will get all the information in relation to transfer pricing, profits on different models, etc; nobody else has yet been able to crack that nut, not even the IMF (International Metalworkers Federation) or the American unions.

(iv) *Why do you believe that nationalisation will bring greater industrial democracy than the Bullock proposals?*

D.C. It's possible that through Bullock there might be more access to certain information, but we will only be able to get full information under nationalisation. Instead of campaigning for Bullock, which some people might do, I think the active campaign should be for nationalisation of specific industries. I think that's very realistic, I don't think anyone's really campaigned on it yet. I agree that nationalised industries are also at present not very democratic, in the sense of trade unionists getting involved in decision-making. I don't think nationalisation by itself is a solution to anything, but it's a step in the right direction, that's the point, the profit motive is taken away. Unfortunately, in the past, some unions in the nationalised sector have stood aside and said "we're trade unionists pure and simple, all we want to do is have our hammers, tap the wheels of the locomotives as they go along or dig a piece of coal up"; they didn't get enough involved in the investment programmes and where they were going. So nationalisation doesn't answer the problems of industrial democracy, but it does give us a better framework to operate in if the unions are prepared to take it up. Today the mineworkers and railwaymen are beginning to move in to those fields of broader participation, investment programmes, etc., and that is a most important development.

Investment is another aspect. Detroit has made big profits from Britain, profits assisted by regional aid from the State, but the investment record is still poor. For example, we haven't got the presses to make the Fiesta. Without going into detail, they're going to stamp the whole body side out in one piece, it comes out in one bloody great press, they hit it once and that's it. We've got a press but the thing's falling apart. Again we've agitated, our shop stewards have argued. Having been to our MPs and various ministers about it after a real run-around (I've got a whole



wad of correspondence), they tell us that no-one makes this sort of press in this country. No-one in Britain makes a 1,000 ton press, and this has very serious implications. Why don't they make that press? Very simply because Vauxhall motors bring their panels from the Continent now, Chrysler does the same, and Ford imports a very large percentage of their panels. The thing I'm talking about is therefore not only to do with motors but with the whole development of the machine-tool industry. And I believe that in a nationalised set-up, you could see a rational development for the whole industry. In the long run, we really need a British Motor Corporation in the genuine sense of the word.

(v) *Shouldn't the major priority of Ford unions be focussed on extending industrial democracy at shop floor level rather than board-level?*

D.C. It's true at shop floor level we still have a long way to go. We should have brought you up our book of instructions. We've got what we call the Ford Bible, the Blue Book. We're not even allowed to hold meetings on the premises, but we've defied Fords for years, and we ask all of our shop stewards to hold regular meetings with their members on a weekly basis. If you were talking genuinely about workshop democracy, then our view is that we should have at least an hour a week to be able to sit down with our blokes without their pay being stopped. Our lads give up half of their dinner time in order to be able to take part in some sort of discussion. In my view genuine industrial democracy should start on the shop floor and we should have some sort of facility for meeting lads on a regular basis during working hours.

But the more profound problem is that decisions made on high, maybe in Detroit, affect every minute of our members' lives on the shopfloor. Let's take the recent doorhangers' dispute as an example. Anyone who read the *Daily Mirror* in September last year would have seen some very lurid photographs, the body plant in Dagenham knee-deep in broken glass. A number of men were sent home in the middle of the night for the second time in a fortnight, many of them without transport. The press gave quite a lot of publicity about these "hooligans" down at Dagenham, they turned over a couple of post office vans, it wasn't the sort of thing you'd gloat over.

The dispute didn't start with being sent home at all, it started in relation to the problem of job content. The doorhangers got all the stick for that one. Basically, if you want to put a door on a motor car, it's a most tedious thing. After you've done a dozen you get used to it, after you've done your first 100 you think, Christ, there must be something more in life; when you're doing that on night and day-work, at four o'clock in the morning that line still goes along at the same speed, and you've done it for three or four years, you really are choked with it, you see, and that was the thing about the doorhangers' job. It was always boring even when it consisted of a bloke picking a door up, making it up to the body, putting a couple of washers on, and a nut or two, tightening them all up and getting the door around till it fitted. The Company then had the brilliant idea of saying to these workers, you pick the door up, you put the washers on, and a nut, you tighten it up, etc. Well, if the job was bad in the first place, you imagine what it was like doing just the one thing, like putting the washers on. And that was the root of the doorhangers' dispute, which led to all the lay-offs.

There's also the question of the quality of the product, and that is important. I'd like to say something about manufacture in general and the profit motive. At the end of the road we're still turning out motor cars which everyone knows are going to fall apart. You know you're going to replace a silencer in a year or two, you know the paint is going to lift, don't you? We could tell you a couple of secrets about which part of your engine's going to go at what time! The Company know it, we know it, and Bernie knows it 'cause he's got one of those cars!

What is manufacturing about, is it just profit, or is it to provide a decent product for people? It's my belief that if a bloke's got a long job to do, a number of operations, he's less bored with the thing and more concerned with what he's doing, and I believe that at the end of the road he turns out a better product.

We've argued about this in a big way, about job enlargement, that's the phrase we've used (there's a limit to it, I believe, in mass production work, I think that's got to be understood). It's been done successfully by Volvo, but Volvo is not a mass producer. What they don't quote is the Japanese. All these hard-working Japanese who do their exercises in the morning and pray to the company, the fact is they don't work as fast as our lads. In the Toyota factory, there is no line running at more than 25 jobs an hour, that is the maximum line-speed they run. I've got lads in my factory running at 55 jobs an hour, every minute a job is pulling off that line. We're working more than twice as fast as the Japanese. What they do, you see, is they give their lads, on slower lines, more jobs to do. If they want 25 jobs an hour they run one line, if they want 50 jobs, then they put another line down, and if they want 75 an hour they put three lines down. Fords have got this concept, that if you want 25 an hour you put ten men on it, if you want 50 an hour you put twice that number, etc. In the end the line doesn't get any longer, you understand, it's still the same length of line. But instead of having two or three lads working at a leisurely pace, you've got a hundred of them dashing around frantically trying to do their job. It leads to bad quality work, it leads to boredom, and at the end of the road I don't know what sort of people it leads to. It leads to morons in the worst sense of the word. The guy who goes in, all he wants to do is wield a hammer.

*B.P.* You can now understand why you get a lot of disputes on lines. People say, you never get disputes in that plant, or that plant, which is true. In the motor car industry, you very seldom hear of a dispute where they are making gear-boxes, or the engines. It nearly always comes down to where the actual mass production's being done. Normally that's the assembly, the body and the finish of a car, that is basically where you have the tempo. Fords don't invest the money to put another line down, they tend to put more people on the job and therefore you gradually condense a man's working space. A few years ago, when I was on the line, you could move up the line, you could then go back, sit down and wait for the line to catch up. As you put more people on the line, you can't move. The car's there, you're doing the operation, if you turn round, you're doing that again, because you've got no movement, no flexibility. The only way you could improve this is by investment. I've seen in the States where you don't need operators at all to hang doors, they're put on automatically, by machines. All the guy does is feed the machine with the door. When you ask Fords why they don't put the same operation in here, they say that our lines aren't fast enough. They're only prepared to invest

money to make the lines quicker, but they won't lay down separate lines like they do in Volvo, which is not a mass-produced car anyway. Therefore, the operations get smaller and there's no interest. It's only top level investment decisions that can put an end to this.

(vi) *Do you see planning agreements as a possible way in which workers can influence investment?*

*D.C.* I'd like to see it myself, partly as an encroachment on the rights of management, it would limit them. And we've got the right to know what the future investment plans are. I think the union should agitate on it. Our negotiating committee has tried to move along that line, but there seems to be a certain reluctance among our union leadership to even think that far ahead. It's of very fundamental concern to us, the cost of capital equipment. To put a power press in, a heavy 1,000 ton press, is nearly £1m. and there's obviously a lot of forward planning required on that one, and we think we've got a right to know what they intend to do with our stamping operations. In our toolrooms, I've seen shaping machines where our lads have got weights on the end to keep the bloody thing level! It's a scandalous thing making press tools on that sort of basis. When you speak to the plant managers they say they haven't got the power to release that sort of money, it has to go to top level. I think a planning agreement would be an excellent way forward, at least it would make them disclose their problems and we could have some argument about what the long-term prospects are.

*B.P.* We find planning agreements from the shop floor upwards, where the worker and the steward can get involved, in new equipment, very important. We've been pushing for this, we can get involved and the workers can get involved. We don't believe that all the brains are on one side, we believe there's plenty of brains on the shop floor.

## 6. Concluding Thoughts on the Future of Industrial Democracy at Fords

*B.P.* In finality, the worker sees it from his point of view. Whoever goes on the board of directors, he'll still be slogging his guts out on the line. If somewhere in the Bullock Report — it doesn't matter how deeply hidden it was — there was a hint that at the end of the week he'd get a couple of pounds, you'd find him very interested. As it is, what the stewards may decide, one way or the other, he would tend to accept and follow that, because that's the normal practice of a lad working on the shop floor. He puts his trust and his faith, believe it or not, in the shop steward. You might not believe that when you read the papers, but that basically is it. If we think it's a good thing, then he would tend to accept it. If we think it's a bad thing, he would tend to accept that as well. Really, to ask the lad on the shop floor to read Bullock and come up with the answer, well, he just wouldn't read it in the first place.

*D.C.* I don't think people are indifferent, I just think it's too big for them, it's too

remote from them, and that's tied up with large-scale industry. In a smaller factory or workshop there's a better relationship between the foreman and the people working under him. Our foremen and lads snarl at each other, it's like being in a zoo really, it is a terrible atmosphere, and I don't think human beings should have that relationship with each other. That's what mass production means.

A chap working shifts, it's a very paralysing thing, mentally. This problem of democracy, it's no good putting the Bullock Report in the hands of workers, what we've got to do as a union is to make sure that extracts are available for our people. I don't think that people are indifferent. When we raise issues with them we do get a response. We certainly got a response when we raised this Fiesta issue, and we did it in a popular sort of language about the future of their jobs and families. My view is that anyone who works on the moving track, sooner or later someone's got to say to him, like the coalminer, we're not going to allow you to go into that factory five days a week, because it makes less of a man of you, that's the point of it. I don't know whether you'll get legislation about it, or whether the trade unions will do something about it one day. But somewhere down the road it seems to me that you've got to open up their minds to all sorts of things. Bernie's made the point about workshop ingenuity, and it's surprising, you know. They've got the most sophisticated techniques, Fords, for timing a bloke with a watch, and they know where he can go, and how long it takes him to get from that point down to there, and they time it to the last iota. But it doesn't matter how well they do it, the bloke will always make himself two or three minutes. It doesn't matter how clever they are, he'll always try and find something to beat them on. I believe we should be releasing all that. That's why the discussion about industrial democracy is so stimulating to me, that's something we ought to get involved in.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. For the "establishment" version of these disputes, see Report of the Cameron Inquiry, Cmnd. 131, 1957 and Report of the Jack Inquiry, Cmnd. 1999, 1963. These Reports condemned the development of a stewards' movement independent of the official trade union structure. For an outline of the development of Industrial Relations at Fords see Appendix.
2. *Ford Motor Company Ltd. v AUEFW and TGWU* [1969] 2 QB 303. The legal action was based on the Company's claim, which could only have been inspired by Detroit, that the collectively agreed procedural arrangements, including the no-strike clause, constituted a legally enforceable contract. The case had wide ramifications for the development of labour law as well as for the particular dispute, see K.W. Wedderburn, *The Worker and the Law*, Penguin, 2nd Edition, 1971, chapter 4; Roy Lewis, "The Legal Enforceability of Collective Agreements", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, November 1970.
3. Including the representation of the National Union of Vehicle Builders (NUVB), which merged into the TGWU. Prior to this reform, every union with membership at Fords had one officer and one vote each on the NJNC.
4. Cf. Henry Friedman, "Multi-Plant Working and Trade Union Organisation", *W.E.A. Studies for Trade Unionists*, Vol. 2, No. 8, 1976. This author, a former Ford convenor, analyses several combines including that at Fords.
5. *Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Industrial Democracy*, Cmnd. 6706, 1977. See Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *The Shop Steward's Guide to the Bullock Report*,

- Spokesman, 1977. For the editors' analysis of Bullock, including the trade union evidence, see Roy Lewis and Jon Clark, "The Bullock Report", *Modern Law Review*, May 1977.
6. The Bullock Committee was given no brief to evaluate Britain's economic and industrial difficulties, or to discuss the "strongly ideological" (Bullock Report, op.cit., p.34) issues surrounding the nature of ownership: "Nor are we called upon to express any view on arguments that the private sector should be diminished by an extension of public ownership". (Ibid., p.41).
  7. This refers to a twice yearly consultative session – the Managing Director's Review – between top management and representatives of all grades of Ford employees. C.f. B.P.'s comment: "It just doesn't work, it's too big, too unwieldy, you're not able to get back at the person that's doing the preaching".
  8. There are four recent major documents on the British motor industry and its chronic deficiencies: *The Motor Vehicle Industry – 14th. Report from the Expenditure Committee*, House of Commons Paper 617, Session 1974-5; *The Future of the British Car Industry*, Report by the Central Policy Review Staff, HMSO, 1975; *British Leyland – The Next Decade*, HMSO, 1975, (The Ryder Report); and *The British Motor Vehicle Industry*, HMSO, Cmnd. 6377, 1976. For assessments of the situation of the industry from a trade union perspective, see *The Future of British Leyland and the Motor Industry*, Labour Research, 1975, and *A Policy for the British Motor Vehicle Industry*, AUEW (TASS), 1976.

## Appendix:

# The Ford Motor Company

The Ford Motor Company Ltd. in the UK is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Ford Motor Company of the USA. Ford of Britain also has a relationship with Ford of Europe (established in 1966), which is the senior policy-making body and co-ordinator of all Ford activities in Europe. It is incorporated in the USA and is also a wholly-owned subsidiary of Ford of America. The American parent company has many other subsidiaries in different parts of the world.

In 1976 within Britain Fords employed around 66,000 people in 23 locations. Of these some 51,000 were hourly-paid manual workers. The following is an outline chronology of industrial relations at Fords, with particular reference to the hourly-rated employees. See footnote 1.

- 1903 Ford Motor Company formed in the USA.
- 1911 First British plant bought in Manchester.
- 1931 Opening of assembly line at Dagenham.
- 1941 Union recognition at Ford USA conceded by the Company.
- 1944 Union recognition at Ford Dagenham achieved after TUC pressure. Procedure agreement to channel grievances; National Joint Negotiating Committee established consisting of leading national trade union officials and management.
- 1946 Shop stewards recognised as members of plant-level Joint Works Committees, which dealt only with minor issues.
- 1952 Ford Motor Company takes over Briggs Motor Bodies Ltd., (situated on the Dagenham estate). Briggs' toolmakers had had union recognition since 1941, and were also paid on piece-work, unlike the rest of Ford.
- 1955 Procedure agreement signed by 22 unions and management nationally, for central negotiations for all Ford plants away from shop-floor.
- 1957 Report of the Cameron Committee of Inquiry.
- 1958 After protracted conflict the NJNC came to a *Standardization Agreement* which "standardized" all major Briggs' concessions in line with the rest of Ford.
- 1962 Ford Halewood plant (Liverpool) established. Strike at Dagenham over victimisation.
- 1963 After protracted conflict and a Court of Inquiry under Professor D.T. Jack, Dagenham shop stewards' committee were defeated on major issues of victimisation and line speed. Wage parity of Halewood with Dagenham workers established after unofficial overtime bans.
- 1965 Joint talks co-ordinated by the Ministry of Labour since 1961 to discuss labour relations in the British motor industry formalised into the Motor Industry Joint Labour Council under the chairmanship of Jack Scamp.
- 1967 Wage Structure Agreement after negotiation between Company and NJNC: review based on detailed job evaluation by stewards and management.

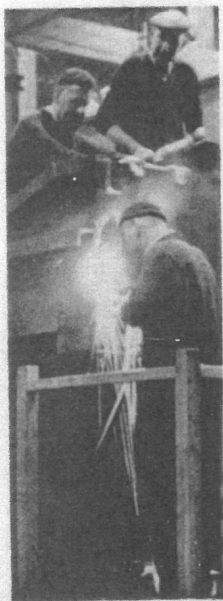
- 1968 Scamp Inquiry into the sewing machinists' dispute.
- 1969 NJNC "package" rejected by major unions and stewards, and major dispute follows. The Ford Motor Company takes the TGWU and the AEF to court, loses the case, and the NJNC is restructured to give unions with sufficient membership a stronger presence and give shop stewards (lay representatives) representation on the union side.
- 1971 "Parity" strike.
- 1975 NJNC agrees a new Procedure Agreement and Works Standards Agreement.
- 1976 NJNC agreement on exclusive bargaining rights at Fords for the NJNC unions. One hundred per cent post-entry closed shop plus check-off agreement.
- 1977 First direct consultations between management and the Ford Convenors' National Committee.

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