

Worker's Letter to Wayne Strikers

Fifth Estate Collective

1970

One morning last week I was approached at the plant gate after my shift by a student passing out your hand-outs. I spoke to him briefly, and noting the peace symbol painted on my lunchbox, he asked me to pass out your sheets in the plant on my lunch break. How can you expect workers to relate to your programs when your people are so uninformed about conditions in the plants they don't even know a worker can be automatically fired for "distribution of unauthorized literature?"

Yet this punk blandly asked me to buy your program without question and to support it at the risk of losing my livelihood. What do you call that—naive? arrogant?

It's difficult for me to realize that anyone could actually believe Chrysler, GM or Ford allow freedom of speech in their plants. Do you people live in a vacuum?

Students show up at our gates once or twice a year and ask for student-worker solidarity. Where are you the rest of the year? Is "worker-student" solidarity a sometimes thing—at your convenience?

Students who've worked in factories for short periods keep telling me the same thing. Workers won't get behind radical student programs because their heads are into fast cars, color TVs, split-level homes, etc. And then they tell me how they got hassled by some workers because of their long hair. Sure, but you're going to college. You have a ticket out of the plant. You aren't going to spend 20–30 years of your lives in these industrial cesspools.

Long hair symbolizes all this to a worker. How can we relate to your long hair and radical projects when we know god-damned well you'll graduate, get a white collar job, and start accumulating all the material things you're putting us down for getting now. Fuck you!

We don't particularly relate to "peaceful" and non-violent projects either. When we're on strike we're usually fighting for our jobs; we're always fighting for dignity and equity while we're earning a living for our families. If you want to go through the gates while we're striking you have to climb over us. So we're not necessarily in a non-violent bag.

You expect us to accept catch phrases like "higher taxes," "increased inflation," and "higher unemployment" with no other effort at explanation or communication. Fuck that shit. Don't you think we recognize shuck and jive language when we see it? We have to live with it in the contract every day for most of our lives. Stop insulting us with your cryptic, simplistic messages. Explain your programs in depth or stay away.

We've been in the business of running strikes a hell of a lot longer than you have, and we have well organized, well disciplined structures for running them so they get results. We call our organizations unions, motherfuckers, and they're run out of union halls near the plants.

The way I feel right now, I'll personally whip the ass of the next bush league campus rebel who leaflets our people at our plant gates without first having the common courtesy to visit our union hall and let our Executive Board know about your program. You'd bitch and moan if someone started running programs to your people without working through your organizational structure. But you're perfectly willing to bypass our organizations and still expect us to support your projects. Fuck that shit too.

A question—did anyone from the Wayne Strike Committee contact any union officer anywhere in the city for help and advice on how to shut down a plant from people who've been running strikes for years?

A suggestion—right now start contacting all the locals in the area and find out when they hold their membership and Executive—Board meetings. Get your people into these meetings to explain and interpret what you're trying to do. And ask for help in doing it. You might be surprised at the results.

We need all the help we can get in the plants, but we want serious people who'll be on the set for a while: 2, 3, 5 years. The rest of you liberals should go shopping at Northland in your Mustangs—and stay away from our plants.

Fraternally,

John Taylor

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