

Foreman killing

Chrysler is Guilty

anon.

1972

The inhuman conditions of the assembly line claimed two more victims at Chrysler's Jefferson Assembly Plant in Detroit on December 7. On that day a worker, bitter over his recent lay-off, shot and killed a general foreman in the plant's paint shop.

The worker, 33-year-old Tilden Engle, had been laid off from his production job at Jefferson on December 4. Tilden had been in ill health, and had been certified by the plant medical staff as capable of performing "light work" only.

Engle was laid off, however by plant officials who claimed no "light work" was available—a claim disputed by Engle's coworkers.

On December 7, the day before the layoff became effective, Engle allegedly left his job during the afternoon shift, and went looking for Superintendent Baker, the official responsible for his lay-off.

Engle entered the second-floor production office in search of Baker, but found general foreman Regis Lantzy instead.

Witnesses said Engle began arguing with Lantzy over his lay-off. Lantzy protested that he had nothing to do with the decision.

"IT'S ALL OVER NOW..."

Then, according to witnesses, Engle pulled out a revolver, and shot Lantzy three times in the head.

Engle then walked out of the office, turned to a co-worker, handed him the gun, and said, "It's all over now. He won't cause anyone any more trouble a in."

Engle then walked back to his job, and attempted to resume work. Plant guards stopped him, and eventually turned him over to Detroit Police.

Lantzy, 51 years of age, was dead on arrival at the hospital. Engle is now being held in custody by police for Lantzy's murder.

The Jefferson incident is the third occurrence of a worker killing a foreman in Detroit-area auto plants in the last two years. Earlier this year, a foreman was killed by a worker at the General Motors Ypsilanti plant.

Two years ago, a worker named James Johnson shot and killed two foremen and a co-worker at the Chrysler Eldon Avenue plant in Detroit.

Johnson was subsequently acquitted on a verdict of temporary insanity, after a brilliant defense conducted by attorney Ken Cockrel. Cockrel demonstrated to the jury's satisfaction the inhumane and alienating conditions of the auto plants, which were capable of driving workers to acts of desperation. There has also been a series of physical assaults on foremen by workers in Detroit and elsewhere in the past few years.

And it is these same mind-blowing conditions—monotony, speed-up, physical and mental exhaustion—which must be held accountable for the recent killing at Chrysler Jefferson. These conditions cause a brutalization of human lives which lead directly to such violent outbursts.

It is worth remembering that the same corporate officials who are so outraged by the killing of a foreman are very silent about the thousands of workers every year killed or seriously injured in industrial “accidents.” These deaths do not make headlines. They appear only as statistics in insurance reports.

KILLING NOT CONDONED

This is not to condone the killing of a bystander, either innocent or guilty. Despite the oppressive role that foremen play in factories, their relative position on the corporate ladder makes them almost as great a victim of this system as the workers they ride herd over.

Nor can it be suggested that acts of violence against such foremen represent an acceptable model of struggle against the oppressive conditions in the factories. The nature of the capitalist system is such that individual acts of angry defiance lead nowhere—except to the penitentiary.

But when viewed in its proper context, this most recent foreman-killing can be seen in its true light: an act born of frustration and, indeed, desperation; committed by a man who knew he was being screwed, but could see no positive way to resist his oppression.

The forces of law and order will now attempt to convict Tilden Engle for murder, and sentence him to prison, as they did to James Johnson.

This must not be permitted to happen. A man driven to an act of insanity, even “criminal” insanity, by the basic conditions of his life, does not deserve jail. He deserves “professional help” if such a thing exists; more important, he and all of us deserve a just and humane society to live in.

And the real murderers, corporate monsters like Chrysler, deserve liquidation—as well as the capitalist system which inherently produces them.

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