

Protectors of Fruehauf

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"Watch out, he's a bad one," said one of the women in the picket line at Gate 2. The man to whom she referred was trying to drive his white Mustang through the moving pickets. Two pigs assisted him by clearing a path through the line. Three days before the man had run his car into the woman who shouted the warning.

Similar scenes were played at four other gates as Fruehauf executives and scabs drove in to report for the morning shift. At Gate 4 in the rear of the plant, some of the more militant strikers, assisted by a dozen students, bumped on fenders of the cars of scabs until Detroit police reinforcements arrived. Altogether, 40 young people from Ann Arbor and Detroit last Friday began walking picket lines with some of the 290 members of UAW Local 889 who are on strike against Fruehauf.

Fruehauf principally is known for making truck-trailers. In recent years it has expanded to building shipping containers and army truck beds. It currently has a rich war contract to develop an air conditioner for army trucks, presumably to make them easier to use in tropical climates like Vietnam or Thailand. Recently Fruehauf has been looking for a piece of the action in ghetto redevelopment: in its Detroit yards stand several prototypes of low cost housing, each consisting of two semi-trailers welded together and selling for \$17,000.

In May 1969 the office and technical workers at Fruehauf began to organize a UAW local which would bargain for them. Petitions were circulated and an election was called which the union won.

Eighty percent of the workers are women. As secretaries, clerks and comptometer operators, they appear to have held spiffy white-collar jobs. In reality they had serious gripes.

Georgia Pope, a 22-year old secretary, was promised three pay increases. She got one. After six months without one of the promised raises, she went to her boss. "He answered that he didn't like my attitude."

Another woman asked her boss what pension she would get after 37 years with the company. He replied that she would get \$16 a month. There is no hospital or life insurance for Fruehauf retirees. Without grievances like these, the union would never have won the election.

Throughout the summer and fall, Fruehauf refused to bargain. The company didn't invoke any of the "individuals have a right to work" bullshit which characterized company excuses in the thirties and forties. Fruehauf has said repeatedly that it just doesn't want a union, period. The workers struck last November 19. The company's strategy has been to wear down and starve the union by engaging it in a proliferation of court actions which couldn't be settled before 1981. The National Labor Relations Board, supposedly a neutral mediator to the dispute, has sent several staff members who have recorded the names of pickets and prevented them from talking to scabs.

Violence began November 24 when a company executive gunned his car through a picketline. Three workers were seriously injured. The police, who witnessed the incident, have never arrested the executive.

On the rear of every blue-and-white Detroit Police Tactical Mobile Unit car is the inscription: "Protectors of Liberty."

"Protectors of Fruehauf," said a woman picket.

The pigs never have been neutral. Symbolically, they use the Fruehauf guard shack as a warming station, a place to drink coffee and have a smoke. Really, they enforce liberty by ushering scabs into the plant. The pigs have beaten pickets several times in the strike. On December 5 during a peaceful solidarity march of 400 people, 200 pigs came armed with clubs, gas and shotguns. The police haven't brought shotguns to picket lines since the thirties. "Police brutality" is an easy phrase among the strikers.

Perhaps one might examine what kind of liberty it is which the pigs protect. The government's laws, of course, are 'supposed to uphold liberty. As invoked by Fruehauf in the courts and enforced by the pigs, those laws uphold the right to scab and break a union.

Further, examine the chief enforcers of those laws. Raymond H. Lyons is a Fruehauf vice-president; he is currently in charge of breaking the strike. Lyons also sits on the governing board of the Michigan Employment Security Commission, which has as one of its paper functions the duty to uphold the right of workers to organize. During the strike, Lyons has held on to his positions.

So the young people came last Friday. At the rear gate a young woman picket began things by throwing a rock through a company window. Later, as the pickets tried to stop Fruehauf executives from driving in, they smashed car doors, ripped off antennas, smashed headlights, and banged on car bodies.

In front, glass doors were, mysteriously chipped by thrown ball bearings. Edward Grace, the bald-headed president of Fruehauf, later came out to pick up a few bearings and rolled them in his hands to the accompaniment of cries of "Mr. Grace, you've lost your balls." Each time a scab or executive tried to drive his car through one of the gates, the pickets tightened and slowed, and the pigs had to clear a way.

For 80 days before Friday the strikers have fought similar battles. They have not yet won; they probably will not win until hundreds of people can outmaneuver the pigs and block the gates to the plant.

A striker in the union hall said, "We won't go back to work until no one else can get in."

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