

# A black worker punctures the torment

DETROIT (LNS) — A hot afternoon in the middle of July. Two foremen and a jobsetter lie dead. James Johnson, conveyor loader, Dept. 78, the Brake Shoe Dept., Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle Plant, Chrysler Corporation, tosses his M-1 carbine aside saying, "I'm satisfied," and walks down the aisles of the plant to the company guard shack where the Detroit police take him prisoner, charged with murder.

Hundreds of workers stood in the aisles in' surrounding departments, thinking about the shootings they had just witnessed. Company officials ordered all lines immediately started, but the workers did not move. Orders came down for several departments to go home early. The workers left.

Groups of worried and shaken foremen gathered on Lynch Road. ELRUM (Eldon Revolutionary Union Movement, a division of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers) leafleted the plant the next day approving of Johnson's action. Black workers dug the leaflet, an ELRUM member reported. Many workers were saying things like "This even things up," "Everyone has to die sometime," and "They won't be so fast to write people up now."

FLASHBACK: April 16. The second shift, Johnson's shift, wildcats when Chrysler fires a black worker who argued with his foreman, and refuses to discipline the white supervisor who had picked up a pinion gear and told the worker: "I'll bash your brains out." After two days, the United Auto Workers Local 961, which serves the workers at Eldon, gets cold feet and orders everybody back to work.

FLASHBACK: May 1. The plant is shut down by another wildcat, protesting Chrysler's summary firing of 14 stewards for organizing the first wildcat. Stewards are the foot-soldiers of the union, directly responsible to small groups of workers, serving as their first line of defense against the company.

Chrysler obtains a quick and easy injunction against the second wildcat with only token opposition from a UAW attorney, who at one point is heard to say to the judge: "I only vaguely

represent Local 961." \*\*\*

The UAW always opposes wildcat strikes because they threaten its control over the workers in the plants, and therefore threaten the UAW leadership's tacit pact with the auto companies to trade uninterrupted production for dollar benefits. This leaves working conditions up to the corporations and toothless union locals.

FLASHBACK: May 3. Armed with the injunction, Local 961 officers and high-level UAW representatives order Eldon workers back to work without insisting the fired stewards first be



reinstated. A second strike has failed. The workers have seen their strongest, most aggressive stewards tossed into the street. Without their stewards, they are completely at the mercy of their foremen and Chrysler. Morale is low. Chrysler is beaming.

FLASHBACK: Th-early weeks of June. Some of the stewards get their jobs back by signing an agreement to be fired if there's ever another walkout on the second shift. One of the stewards refuses at first, but agrees after he's told that he'd never get back into the plant without signing. The stewards have many years of seniority to protect, and some would be hard-pressed to get another job at that age. Chrysler knows that.

Eldon Ave. Gear and Axle Plant is so unsafe that all of its 4500 employees are risking their lives

each day they walk through the gates. In Dept. 72 there is an inch and a half of oil covering the floor and slopping up over the soles of the workers' shoes.

Eldon's entire ventilation system is inoperative. The jitney trucks have no brakes, lop-sided tires, no horns and no lights. The aiseways are blocked by skid boxes, axles and scrap iron. Drill presses, cutters and grinders have no safety guards. Working conditions are so bad at Eldon that Chrysler has taken the unusual step of appointing a number of black foremen for the slight cooling effect that produces.

Eldon is far closer to a medieval sweatshop than one could ever imagine after taking in the standard dosage of tidy, clean-cut Chrysler ads over the tube. But Eldon, not the ads, is the reality of Chrysler.

FLASHBACK: May 13. Mamie Williams, a black woman with 26 years seniority, dies after being carried out of the plant on a stretcher. Her own doctors had ordered her to bed, but Chrysler's medics, although they noted her high blood pressure, gave her notice to return to work or be fired. A few days later she is dead.

FLASHBACK: May 25. Three tons of scrap steel fall off a fork-lift truck so unsafe it should have been scrapped long ago. Gary Thompson, a 22-year-old Vietnam vet, is crushed beneath. Local 961 and Chrysler both send their boys to the funeral, but Local 961 is as unwilling to fight for the safety rules that would have prevented Gary Thompson's death as Chrysler is to implement them.

The pattern is clear. Intimidate the union until the stewards are afraid to aggressively represent workers on the floor of the plant. Lay off workers and speed up the lines to save profits in a time of inflation. Step up the threats, suspensions and firings of all workers who object to being pushed around. Eventually, high union officials will blink whatever the abuses. By this time, the plushness of their own offices will rival management's own.

## TIMES, They ARE

by mike mcculley **A'Changing**

...once upon a time He came for a brief visit that lingered afterwards.

— starlight, in search of the lost planet. . .

He brought with Him several nice sayings that can yet be seen or heard or read on certain days usually.

— standing, on the threshold of a dream, an invisible native sonless Adam swims the deep blue clear wet sea without touching the water. . .

That day is remembered with material unthoughtfulness with unfulfilling feasting with manunkind

patting his own hunched back unbrotherhood on the back.

— Godlessly, a potential angel molds waxen wings to lift himself heavenward : the Icarian odyssey begun in past first-mornings begins the fireball failure of plummeting into the stick-surrounded sea of blind sight. . .

Winter wonderworld waltz

He orchestrated

is daily performed on the dim-lit stage without benefit of a drummer.

— A tonedead listener in coat and tails

attending an opera like a phantom

hearing the silent symphony

in a foreign language of his nativeless land.



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## Dorm students are the power

(continued from page 3)

concerted. They come in constant contact with the problems of the university and are able to hear students' complaints and suggestions and understand the issues.

The inevitable confrontation between the dorm students and

the commuter, which Abernathy warns against, is from the dorm student's viewpoint, a fantasy....Any commuter that cares enough about the politics and social activity of the school can make the extra effort to become involved and in all probability there will be no power collection of dorm students blocking his admittance or refusing his help. But the force of power should remain where it does the most good, and that is with the dorm student. The

average commuter comes to class, maybe eats a meal in the Union, goes to a couple of ballgames during the year, and this becomes the extent of his involvement with the school.

For all practical purposes the dorm student is the University. They provide the lifeblood of UNCC....Without them the campus would become another Central Piedmont Community College lacking a real identity and just another learning factory....  
Bill Holder