

Occupations at UK Visteon plants continue despite legal threats

Daniel O'Flynn
8 April 2009

Sacked workers from the car parts firm Visteon have been occupying three factories across the UK since April 1. The occupations were mounted in response to the announcement that 565 staff will be laid off. The Belfast factory has been placed in administration by KPMG. The remaining jobs are to go at plants in Basildon and Enfield, England.

Ford promised workers at Visteon lifetime protection of their pay and conditions when the car parts company was spun off from its parent nine years ago. According to the *Belfast Telegraph*, the agreement states that "Accrued seniority and all existing terms and conditions, in particular pension entitlements, will be transferred to the new employment contracts."

It continues: "For the duration of their employment, terms and conditions will mirror Ford conditions (including discretionary pension in payment increases) in the respective countries (lifetime protection)."

Workers are demanding that Ford honour its redundancy contract and make up for the large shortfall in Visteon's pension scheme. They have been told they will be entitled only to minimal severance payoffs.

The *Belfast Telegraph* also reports that the agreement said that "before the full spin-off, Ford employees working in Visteon activities were eligible to volunteer to be reassigned to Ford and that all collective agreements, including investment and employment security agreements, would be fully adopted by the new company."

Derek Simpson, joint general secretary of the trade union Unite, met last week with Ford's European chairman, John Fleming, and made a meek appeal to Ford to honour its "moral obligation to these workers, who have been laid off with only a few minutes' notice."

"We hope that Visteon will do the right thing," Simpson said, to which Ford has replied that it is under no "legal or moral" obligation to help Visteon's employees. A spokesman for KPMG said that it "continues to believe that Visteon and Ford were separate entities from 2000."

Simpson is meeting with officials from Visteon and Ford in Detroit today.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to some of the more than 100 workers involved in the occupation of Visteon's Enfield plant in north London after an occupation committee meeting held Monday night.

One worker said, "The meeting tonight was a report back from the court case in central London where Kevin Nolan, the union convenor, was in court and, if convicted, would have been in jail over the 'illegal' occupation of the plant. He was acquitted with union legal representation.

"Nolan is to go to the United States, as there is a meeting with the Visteon US parent company. We hope something will come out of this, as the parts that Visteon makes will dry up for Fords. We still have all the tooling and plant. This is our gold card, which the company tried to pick up yesterday but could not because we are here."

On the role of the union leadership, he said, "There was no union there when we were told that we lost our jobs. It was us that took the decision to occupy, not the union.

"We have occupied the factory since April 1. But now they [the union] are trying to take the limelight and all the credit for the occupation.

"I have worked here now for 20 years. I've worked in quality control and worked with other suppliers and companies, so it was an important position. I can remember the day it happened. I saw the manager walk

past me. He was shaking. I asked him what was wrong.

“He said in a stuttering voice that he would tell me later. However, he was with two others in suits who had a car that was like a military vehicle, with reinforced bars and so on. They turned out to be from the receivers. It was as if they expected some trouble. The union must have known something was up. I do not believe that they did not.”

Another worker explained, “We were given just five minutes’ notice. We were called to a meeting at 2 o’clock after our shift had finished. They made sure that we worked our shift before they told us we were sacked. I worked there for 17 years along with my husband. We had to do this as we have no other work to go to.

“We had been told that we had a contract that was no different from Fords when Visteon took over in 2000. They refused to give us the same pay rise that Fords had won two years ago, but we challenged them, and after a battle we won and got the same pay rise.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact