



**TALBOT — A NEW NAME IN ANTI-COMMUNISM**

Since the takeover by PSA Peugeot-Citroen in August 1978 of Chrysler's European operations, including Chrysler UK, there has been relatively little publicity in the British media about the plans of Europe's new top motor multinational. While all eyes have been on British Leyland, what has George Turnbull, the ex-Leyland manager appointed by PSA to run its British operation, been planning for the newly-named Talbot UK?

Talbot management's attitude to trade unionism shows significant similarities to BL's. Undoubtedly their aim has been to undermine the shop-steward system. Their first step was to offer a mere 5% across-the-board pay increase in 1979, combined with a new company-wide grading scheme, this was sweetened by the offer of parity with Coventry wages for the Scottish workers at Linwood, plus increased overtime and shift premia, which also benefitted Linwood. This effectively split the Combine, with the Coventry workers at Ryton and Stoke bravely going into a difficult strike (half the Stoke workers had not worked more than a couple of full weeks in the first 6 months of 1979). After 14 weeks they were forced to go back on a minor productivity concession. Almost immediately the Company cynically announced the closure of Linwoods's second shift, involving 1200 redundancies and higher targets for the remaining shift. This brought home the lesson of the need for unity at combine level, and the Stoke stewards quickly rejoined the combine they had left a

few months before. However, it is undoubtedly management that has been setting the pace in proposals for a new corporate bargaining structure, which must follow from the move to parity. It will take a real organisational effort for the trade unions to overcome the sectional and inter-plant rivalries, and to develop a system of company-wide representation that is accountable and responsive to workers across the company.

It was during the 1979 strike that Turnbull laid the foundations of a new Company Briefing system. Two thousand managers and supervisors were put through courses in communication and hundreds of thousands of pounds spent in developing a company-wide propaganda system. The intention is to pass information down a military-style chain of command, by-passing the shop-steward structure. The assembly tracks are even stopped for a full half-hour so that all workers can attend the briefings. Stoke shop stewards felt that this involved an indirect attack on stewards and advised members that attendance was voluntary; but the company docked non-attenders half-hour's pay; the issue is not yet resolved.

While Turnbull may be getting his advice on 'communications' from friends at the Industrial Society, he is getting his perspectives and a lot of encouragement from the French managers he meets regularly each week. Peugeot's industrial relations methods have received a lot of publicity in France recently, following the suicide of a young CGT delegate to the giant Sochaux plant's Works Council. Evidence of constant

management harassment was raised in the French parliament. Peugeot maintains an individual file on each employee, based on interviews and other information. Marks are given on a one to five scale under ten headings: adaptability, punctuality and reliability, respect for equipment and materials, state of mind and general attitude, security, availability, initiative, sociability, quality of work and rapidity of work. For instance, under 'availability' a person who refuses changes in working hours scores only 1 out of 5, while a person willing to volunteer for anything including being called from home gets 5. Transfers and promotion are based on your points score. Peugeot and Citroen are both hostile to independent trade unionism, and Citroen management in particular has a long history of backing the neofascist Yellow union, renamed the CSL after the murder of a CGT militant in Reims in 1977.

Management's aim in undermining the unions is clearly to enforce that the workforce accept whatever plans are put forward as part of the group's restructuring. PSA likes to talk grandly of their 10-year 'rationalisation' plan, while keeping the details quiet, supposedly not to alert their competitors. In fact, in common with most car firms, they have been forming a network of inter-company finks, hedging as many bets as they can in the face of the uncertainties of the continuing world capitalist crisis. Should US finance capital decide to go through with the Chrysler rescue, PSA is ready to go into some joint projects with Chrysler, and thereby will be linked also to Mitsubishi, Chrysler's

Japanese ally. PSA are also negotiating a technical and licensing deal with Nissan to help their exports to Japan. In Europe they are linked even to their arch-rivals Renault, as well as Volvo, in the jointly-owned Douvrin engine plant. They have strong links with Matra, and arrangements for production of speciality cars and vans with Matra, Chausson, Pininfarina and Lotus. On the commercial vehicle side they are establishing joint production plans with DAF Truck, which is 33.3 owned by the giant International Harvester, which itself owns Seddon-Atkinson in the UK.

What will actually survive of all these castles in the sand will depend largely on the effects of this year's expected downward lurch of the car market, as part of the general depression, and on whether the hoped-for revival takes place in 1981-4. PSA's plan is to use the scope for rationalisation offered by the possibilities for integration resulting from their takeover of Talbot. PSA bosses have stated in newspaper interviews that of the 45 plants in the group 20 might be expected to close in the next few years.

They intend to do this by integrating the model range within the whole group and developing the standardisation of components across Peugeot-Citroen-Talbot models. For instance, different types and capacities of

engine will be developed for the group as a whole, so that each model can be offered in a range of variants. Production of such common components will be pumped, while others can be closed down. Some of this investment is being supplied by the French government, as part of the scheme to create jobs in northern and eastern France, following the steel closures and subsequent riots. But the French unions are well aware that these subsidies are being given under false pretences: as this investment programme proceeds, PSA will be reducing not increasing employment overall, even in France, by closing down other plants, mainly in the Paris region.


The effect on Talbot UK would be to reduce it to a disposable module in the PSA structure. Inevitably, the UK assembly plants will be duplicating models produced in France and Spain, with a sharply reduced local content. The successful Alpine and Horizon models were designed in Coventry but produced almost entirely on the Continent. The 'notchback' variant of the Alpine, launched in May as the Solara, was originally intended to be produced only at Ryton for the whole European market, but PSA decided last year to produce it also at Poissy. A new 2-litre designed in Coventry was delayed by PSA for redesigning to take

Peugeot engines, and will be launched on that basis. This trend must mean the rundown or shutdown of independent production capacity for engine, gearbox, foundry and mechanical parts production at the Stoke and Lin wood plants, as well as related suppliers, with the consequent loss of thousands of jobs.

PSA's refusal to put any new investment into the UK operation has merely continued Chrysler's policy of milking dry the assets acquired from Rootes. The company's financial position is still crucially dependent on the Iran contract originally negotiated by Rootes, under which the aged Hunter is exported in kit form. Even this is now threatened by the Thatcher government's blind and servile backing of US sanctions against Iran. This would mean 2,000 immediate layoffs in Coventry, with a spread effect in related suppliers of maybe twice that number. Should Iran retaliate by cutting off all links with Talbot and buying car kits or a model for local production on the increasingly cut-throat world car market, this could prove the death-knell for Talbot UK. It could become a mere assembler of cars with less local content than is permitted by many developing countries.

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