

*Union***POLITICISING NURSES***Scene*

the press, ranging from technological change to global corporate strategy.

Ford management have tried to introduce Japanese production techniques through a variety of means. Most prominently they have attempted to involve all their 383,000 employees in a programme which mimics quality circles. The plan came from Detroit, filtered through the empire, but with only patchy success.

So Ford have turned to an increasingly important collaboration with Mazda to introduce Japanese techniques, Trojan horse-style. Mazda will start producing cars at a new factory outside Detroit in 1987. This showcase, highly automated factory is the future staring in the face of unions elsewhere.

The European unions are overwhelmingly worried by the possibility of an over-capacity crisis in the European market. Last year the then head of Ford Europe, Bob Lutz, talked of the need to close a European plant.

British unions desperately want to establish a European union forum to develop joint policy, but they are constantly thwarted by the Germans. 'The German industry is the good part of the European industry', said an IMF official. 'And the Germans know this and are keen to maintain pole position.'

The German union IG Metall is an example of a European version of the Japanese option. It is a strong industrial union, which last year won a major strike. But is also productivist. 'We welcome new machines and technology,' said a Ford works council member. 'That is the only way to get a grip on the company.'

The stabilisation of the market, productivity growth, sourcing of component manufacture in developing countries, have made international solidarity harder and harder to engineer.

In the end the message of the conference despite the glowing communique was not solidarity but competition. All the leaders know they are effectively salesmen who have to be able to offer Ford as much of the kind of workforce that it needs and wants, without endangering union goals. At the moment Japan, is leading that race followed by Germany and Spain.

'But looming behind even Mr Ichihara is a new threat: South Korea', said an IMF official. 'The South Korean view of Japan is: pretty good products, but such lazy workers'!

FORD - MADE IN JAPAN

When Hayato Ichihara rose to speak, his audience of Ford union leaders from around the world, looked on transfixed somewhere between awe and horror.

Ichihara is president of the Mazda Workers' Union, which represents the non-managerial employees in the company's 27,000 workforce. He was in Geneva addressing the second World Auto Council of unions that represent Ford workers, organised by the International Metal Workers Federation.

And there is no doubt that Ichihara is a successful union leader. Employment at Mazda is stable and secure despite massive investments in new technology, and the associated productivity gains. He meets with management to discuss issues which most union chiefs only hear about through

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