



Gavin Laird: How green is his silicon glen?

## Blue Book, Green Site

Ford's 22 UK plants are covered by a document called the Blue Book, a national agreement which provides for multi-union recognition. Under the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers deal, this will not apply at Dundee. There, only the AEU will have negotiating rights.

AEU leaders, and the company, justify this by asserting that the Dundee plant will not be a part of Ford UK, but of Ford's Electrical and Electronics Division (EED), reporting direct to Detroit. Moreover, says the AEU, the company would not have chosen Dundee without a single-union deal. To this is added (relevantly) that most 'silicon glen' developments have entertained no unions at all; and (less relevantly) that Dundee has in any case long been an AEU town.

It cuts little ice with the other Ford unions, particularly the TGWU, which has a long-running rivalry with the AEU in

Ford. They regard the distinction between the EED and Ford UK as cynical and cosmetic. They point out that there are already EED plants at Treforest, Enfield and Basildon, and that they are multi-union. They recall previous Ford attempts to bypass the national framework at new plants, notably at Halewood in the 1960s.

The Dundee deal is different from the standard electricians' package. It is not strike-free, though the formula of resolving disputes by calling in the AEU executive might be expected to make strikes unlikely. But it is a problem for the TUC. Three Ford unions have lodged formal complaints under Principle I(e) of the TUC Bridlington rules, alleging that the AEU has unilaterally annexed their existing rights within Ford. Whether or not the rights were existing, of course, is the nub of the Dundee argument.

Before that process starts to grind, however, Norman Willis has intervened, a sure sign that the row has set nerves jangling at Congress House. Few, it must be said, rate his chances of conciliation highly, but his discussions may help contain the public hostilities.

The issue is also certain to drop into the lap of the Special Review Body (SRB), set up at the TUC leadership's request by a reluctant Congress in September to rethink the movement's strategy in general, and attitude to single-union deals in particular. The SRB already faces awesome problems, caught between the electricians' perpetual threat to leave the TUC if their tails are pulled, and the desire of a clear majority to outlaw the soliciting of 'sweetheart' sole recognition deals. Dundee adds yet one more complication.

The Bridlington rules, as currently defined, restrict such deals to 'green field' developments. It is surely a fine judgement whether the Dundee project is as green as Ford and the AEU would paint it. How green was my silicon glen? That is the question which the TUC, through its disputes committee, will have to decide in the (relatively) short term. But the SRB, unenviably, will now face the problem of trying to resolve it permanently. •

*Keith Aitken*