

ONZIEME RENCONTRE INTERNATIONALE DU GERPISA
ELEVENTH GERPISA INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM

Les acteurs de l'entreprise à la recherche de nouveaux compromis ?
Construire le schéma d'analyse du GERPISA

Company Actors on the Look Out for New Compromises
Developing GERPISA's New Analytical Schema

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**THE TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSION OF INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES AT FORD IN
GERMANY AND BRITAIN (1970S/1980S)**

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A substantial amount of research has already been published about industrial relations and trade union politics at Ford after the Second World War. Developments in Britain have received most attention, due to the particularly turbulent labour situation in the 1970s¹. Much less has been written on labour issues at Ford Germany².

From a conceptual point of view all the authors share a basically "domestic" perspective: Their interest is focused upon bargaining and strikes in the respective plants, and the corresponding strategies of local management and labour, seen in the context of overall political developments at national level, e.g. the crisis of the British car industry since the late 1960s. Somewhat less present, it seems, is the transnational dimension of the issue. To be sure, references are frequently made to Ford's global strategy and the corresponding implications for labour relations. For instance, comparisons of work standards between German and British plants, have been described as one of the most contentious issues between management and shop stewards in Dagenham already in the 1960s³. On the other hand, plant visits of Halewood shop stewards to Genk and Saarlouis in the early 1980s are seen as having contributed to a more accommodating stance of labour in the British plants⁴. Huw Beynon, in the second edition of "Working for Ford", provides a rather detailed account of some of the transnational issues involved in the late 1970s and early 1980s, e.g. the investment at Bridgend and the "AJ" campaign by Ford of Europe⁵. However, no attempt has been made yet to extend such a perspective in a systematic way to the whole post-war period. For this

¹ Cf. Steven Tolliday, „Ford and 'Fordism' in postwar Britain. Enterprise management and the control of labour 1937-1987”, in: id./Jonathan Zeitlin, *The Power to Manage? Employers and industrial relations in comparative historical perspective*, Routledge London/New York 1991, pp. 81-114; Huw Beynon, *Working for Ford*, Harmondsworth 1973, 2nd edn, 1984; Henry Friedman and Sander Meredeen, *The Dynamics of Industrial Conflict: Lessons from Ford*, London 1980.

² Most importantly: Klaus-Peter Wittemann, *Ford-Aktion. Zum Verhältnis von Industriesoziologie und IG Metall in den sechziger Jahren*, Schüren Verlag Marburg 1994.

³ Beynon, *Working for Ford*, p. 64.

⁴ Tolliday, *Ford and Fordism*, p. 105.

⁵ Beynon, *Working for Ford*, chapter 12.

purpose, in turn, a proper conceptual framework seems to be required that allows approaching different aspects of industrial relations from a transnational angle.

In the following such a conceptual framework will be outlined, and – by taking the example of industrial action – it will be applied to a number of case studies at Ford Germany and Britain.