

Blacks, Women: Scapegoats For Auto Industry Slump

By Bayard Rustin

Now that the automobile industry has all but collapsed because of the uncontrollable flood of foreign cars, and the catastrophic drop in consumer demand, business leaders and economists are frantically rounding up suspects, the people who will be blamed for the decline — more precisely, the murder, of what was once America's premier industrial sector.

Not surprisingly, many management people are

pointing their fingers at workers, specifically women and minorities. Several weeks ago, for instance, the lead story in the WALL STREET JOURNAL, the business community's most prestigious mouthpiece, blamed the

closing of Ford's Mahwah, New Jersey plant on the workers. The Journal's headlines were an indictment: "Mahwah, N.J. Site Was Hurt By Absences, Vandalism," the paper declared. To add a little more spice to the

story, the editors added "Marijuana On The Night Shift."

"Built in 1955," the Journal's reporter noted, "Ford's Mahwah plant quickly developed a history of labor and quality problems. Some blamed them partly on a high proportion of black and Hispanic workers who hadn't had experience on assembly lines."

As if blacks and Hispanics weren't enough of a headache, the Journal pointed out that "ad-

ditional problems" arose in 1976 and 1977, when "there was a major influx of women as Ford tried to comply with federal mandates for equal opportunity."

The women, according to the Journal's sources at Mahwah, "weren't up to assembly line work." Indeed, they were supposedly so clumsy that they kept cracking windshields on trucks because they couldn't handle the heavy equipment. (See Setting, page 19)



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Does America Need So Much?

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catch-up.

That assumption can be questioned, and it ought to be before the nation commits itself to such a radical change in priorities.

Some defense experts have pointed out that the U.S. and its NATO allies outspend the Russians and their parents in the Warsaw Pact. They also say that a large part of Russia's strength is pinned down by China, while whatever increase is necessary for Western defense could be supplied by our allies. Their current spending levels are relatively low and their dependence on Mideast oil is greater than ours.

The real question isn't whether we should match the Russians in military spending. It is whether our defense posture is commensurate with our national security needs.

Looked at that way, it is debatable whether security is enhanced by over-reliance on highly sophisticated weapons systems that incorporate costly advanced technology of questionable reliability.

Such systems regularly result in astronomical cost overruns and use resources that might otherwise buy items that would enhance our defense capabilities more effectively.

Recently, Secretary of Defense Harold R. Brown told a Congressional Committee: "We've paid too much for the last ten percent of performance, not only in investment but also in maintenance and operating costs." And he admitted that "there is a tendency in the military services and in my own office for people to be entranced by technology."

So there's ample reason to take a hard-fisted approach to the military's \$40 billion wastlist of new weapons systems and to the overall jump in defense spending.

Few have pointed out the inevitable inflationary effect the spending rise will have. Prices of scarce materials and manpower will escalate. More money will be chasing fewer consumer goods as resources are funneled into things people can't buy — such as missiles, planes and tanks.

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