

BY BILLY KELLY

FERENKA Ltd., the steelcord manufacturing factory at Anna-  
way, has been plagued  
by industrial unrest  
since it opened about  
seven years ago. This  
week workers, who were  
once again picketing the  
plant, outlined their com-  
plaints and the back-  
ground to the present  
dispute. They also ex-  
plained why there had  
been such unrest in the  
factory over the past  
number of years.

Put very simply, the work-  
ers claimed that the working  
conditions at Ferenka were  
far from good and the former  
union of many of the men—  
the ITGWU—did not seem wil-  
ling to fight for the workers,  
but rather acted with the  
management in keeping the  
workers quiet.

As a result the vast ma-  
jority of the production work-  
ers at the factory have left  
the ITGWU and are now mem-  
bers of the Marine Port and  
General Workers' Union.

This week a spokesman for  
the MPOWU said that about  
10 workers at Ferenka had  
become members of that un-  
ion.

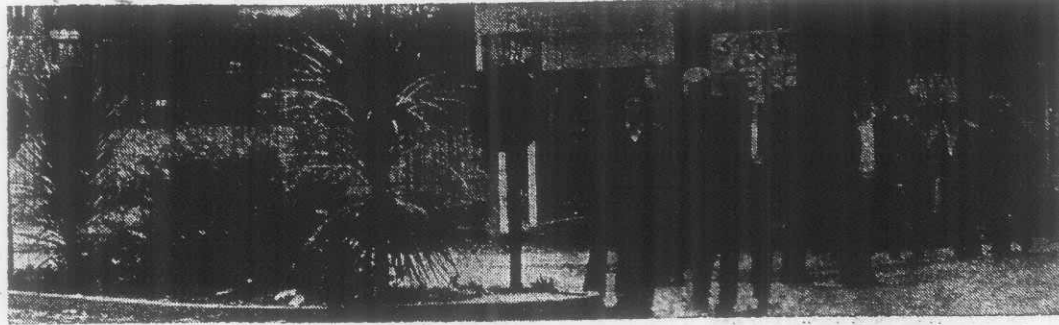
At the moment there are  
two aspects to the Ferenka  
dispute:

FIRSTLY, there are the  
reasons for this week's stop-  
page.

SECONDLY, there are  
the reasons for the continu-  
ing unrest at the plant.

The present dispute is over  
the company's suspension of  
shop stewards who were  
involved in picketing the fac-  
tory two weeks ago.

A workers' spokesman, Mr.  
Phillip Byrnes, said the shop  
stewards were taken into al-  
liance by company officials and  
were suspended for a week  
and were given a final warn-  
ing. He claimed that he had



Picketing Ferenka this week.

Picture: DERMOT LYNCH.

# What's going on at Ferenka?

GIANT LIMERICK FACTORY STRIKEBOUND YET AGAIN

been fired.

This was because of the  
men's unofficial picketing of  
the plant during the recent  
dispute over workers refusing  
to do work which was not  
part of their normal work.

Mr. Byrnes said they were  
fully entitled to strike, and  
added that factory would be  
closed until the company real-  
ised that the men could join  
a union of their choice.

The company operates a  
closed shop agreement with  
the ITGWU.

Last Tuesday officials of the  
Marine Port & General Work-  
ers' Union came to Limerick  
to view the position at the  
factory.

On Monday a company  
spokesman said that the com-  
pany operated a closed shop  
agreement with the ITGWU  
and therefore there was no  
possibility of the company  
dealing with any other union.

The workers pointed out  
that there were no ITGWU  
members left in the plant now.

The company spokesman  
was doubtful about the num-  
bers of workers who had left  
the ITGWU to join to the  
MPOWU.

Referring to Mr. Byrnes, the  
spokesman said that he had  
not been fired but that he had  
been suspended pending an  
investigation by the Labour  
Court into the matter. The  
spokesman said that Mr.  
Byrnes had been suspended by  
the Labour Court before be-  
cause of his involvement in  
disputes. The recent strike  
action had been referred back  
to the Labour Court.

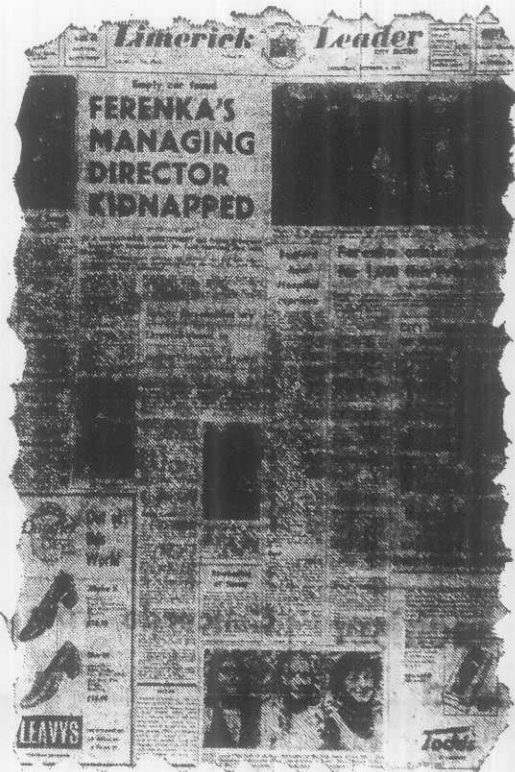
Speaking of the men who  
were suspended for a week  
and were given a final warn-  
ing, the spokesman said that  
this action was taken because  
they had been unofficially  
picketing the plant, and in the  
past such action by the com-  
pany had been upheld by the  
Labour Court.

The reasons given to me  
this week by workers for the  
continuing unrest at the fac-  
tory were poor working con-  
ditions and poor union repre-  
sentation.

A number of specific mat-  
ters which resulted from the  
above situation were mentioned  
as illustrating the workers'  
dissatisfaction.

These allegations included:

Workers receiving letters



Flashback: page one of the Limerick Leader two years ago this week.

from the ITGWU on Ferenka  
notepaper in Ferenka en-  
velopes; management being  
able to tell workers to do any  
sort of job under the "inter-  
changeability" agreement; the  
union working with the com-  
pany in "policing" the work-  
ers; agreements being made  
by the union (ITGWU) with  
management without the work-  
ers being consulted; poor wages—

e.g., a basic of £49 a week and  
about £65 a week for four-  
cycle shift workers with only  
12 week-ends off each year.

Workers said that the  
closed shop agreement denied  
workers their right to belong  
to any union or no union.

Workers claimed that they  
tried to leave the number 2  
branch of the ITGWU about  
two and a half years ago be-  
cause of their dissatisfaction.

They claimed that the  
ITGWU made all sorts of off-  
ers to the men if they would  
go back to work but when  
they went back they got noth-  
ing.

One man alleged that if a  
worker was sick for one day  
he was not paid for that day.

"In there you are not sup-  
posed to get sick. You are  
not supposed to be human.  
You are supposed to switch  
on and switch off like the  
machines," he declared.

Strikers said that about 500  
people a year left the factory  
and they added that this sort  
of turnover in a time of high  
unemployment must say some-  
thing about the conditions in  
the factory.

They said that if conditions  
were all right why should the  
factory be advertising for op-  
erators when there isn't a job  
in the country available.

Mr. Phillip Byrnes declared:  
"At times we are treated like  
the blacks are treated in  
South Africa."

He said the company could  
not treat them like migrant  
workers.

The Ferenka spokesman did  
not think that the ITGWU had  
made agreements with the  
management without consult-  
ing the workers, adding that  
decisions were usually taken  
after a ballot.

He said that the company  
did expect interchangeability  
but added that workers were  
not expected to do any un-  
reasonable task or to do two  
jobs at the one time.

In regard to the recent prob-  
lem when someone refused to  
clean out toilets, the  
spokesman said that this was  
the first time that anyone re-  
fused to do this. He explained  
that machine operators were  
only asked to do this sort of  
thing in an emergency situa-  
tion and for the benefit of  
other workers.

The spokesman said that fol-  
lowing meetings with the  
ITGWU the men would not  
now be asked to do this any-  
more.

Men on picket duty this  
week pointed out that the  
majority of the 820 production  
workers had decided at a

## Navan show in Limerick

NAVAN CARPETS are  
staging a contract trade show  
at Limerick's Royal George  
Hotel on Thursday next.

"Never before has there  
been such a service available  
to hoteliers, bar and restau-  
rant owners, shops and offices  
as the service now available  
to them from Navan Carpets,"  
said a spokesman.

Apart from the domestic  
carpet market, there exists  
what is termed the contract  
market which involves the  
categories of customers out-  
lined above. People in these  
areas have special needs when  
it comes to installing or re-  
newing their carpets. For ex-  
ample, an hotelier will require  
a scale of qualities which can  
be co-ordinated with colour  
schemes to provide multi-pur-  
pose applications. He often  
requires special designs and  
colours which can be made  
available to him in realistic  
minimum yardages. And he  
needs quick delivery on such  
non-stock designs.

"The fact is that Navan  
can supply an array of truly  
magnificent designs and col-  
ours on such a scale that any  
customer should have little  
difficulty in choosing a carpet  
that harmonises fully with  
his particular interior," said  
the spokesman.

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years in the manufacturing of  
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and Miss Marie Bermingham  
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