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Britain

Renewed interest in class struggle?

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There had been a remarkably strong response in the BMW car plant in Oxford to my new book *Militant Years*. A book launch held in Oxford on Wednesday was chaired, by the convenor of shop stewards from the BMW plant (who is also an executive member of the BMW European Works Council), acting in a personal capacity, who had already read the book and who spoke enthusiastically about it.

There were 60 people at the meeting and the delegation from the plant included not just the convenor but his deputy and 10 shop stewards. Also present were workers from the plant, past and present, and other activists from the Oxford labour movement. 30 copies of *Militant Years* were sold at the meeting despite the fact that quite a few people present had bought them in advance.

In fact the BMW Unite branch (the plant is organised by Unite Britain which is biggest union) had already bought copies of the book and are making them available from the union office in the plant. The book has been promoted at meetings of shop stewards and at Unite branch meetings.

What is remarkable about all this is that the book, which is on the struggles of car workers in Britain in the 1960s, 70, and 80's, and centers on the car plants in Oxford, is heavily critical of the leaders of the unions of the day, which were forerunners of Unite, for attacking militant trade unionism and opening the door to the Thatcher onslaught and contributing to the defeats imposed on the unions in Britain in the 1980's and from which we continue to suffer.

I was not just surprised at this response but astounded by it. The only explanation I can offer is that there appears to be a renewed interest in the recent history of the unions in Britain as people grapple with the problem of mobilising the unions against the cuts onslaught which has been launched by today's coalition government.

In fact the comrades in Oxford who organised the book launch deliberately arranged it in the run-up to the TUC demonstration of 26th March and it seems to have worked very well.

The book can be ordered from Resistance Books at Â£12.00 (postage free in Britain but Â£4.00 outside Britain). Either send a cheque to 'Resistance Books', PO box 62732, London SW2 9GQ, or visit paypal.com and send to resistance@sent.com