

# Black VW Workers Describe Firings

By JERRY BYRD

The routine at Volkswagen's New Stanton assembly plant, according to six former and laid-off employees, is almost always the same:

A tap on the shoulder, followed by, "We're going to see the I.R. (industrial relations representative.) Get your hat, get your coat, bring your lunch."

It is a trip taken by scores of blacks at supervisory whim, and each trip ends outside the gate for a day or two, or forever, said the former employees, who gathered yesterday to voice their outrage over the United Auto Workers' hands-off attitude in a racial discrimination suit brought Jan. 4 against VW.

Just three days after the suit was filed, William Brock, a black assistant personnel manager at the New Stanton plant, committed suicide. Brock, who had made lengthy efforts to settle the grievances through internal channels, shot himself just hours after joining the lawsuit.

On Monday, a delegation from the UAW International union discussed the implications of the federal lawsuit with Local 2055 representatives in Greensburg. Afterward, the international said its hands were clean. No one had complained to its fair employment practices division. Its grievance system was intact.

"When you go to the I.R.," says Ken White, fired in December 1981, "your supervisor goes up with you. When you walk through that plant



with your coat, your hat, your lunch, that's embarrassing as hell. Everybody in that plant automatically knows that you're going out on the street today."

The meeting is brief. The I.R. explains the punishment to the supervisor, the worker and the worker's defender, a UAW Local 2055 committeeman.

The employee tells his story, and then two security guards escort him outside the plant. The committeeman rarely objects, the men said.

"You ain't coming back, not that day. I've never seen one come back," said Richard Arnold, fired in November 1981 for allegedly harassing a guard.

The suspensions or firings are the result of breaking the rules. An employee accused of careless work, tardiness, unexcused or improperly excused absences, insubordination or other wrongs is arbitrarily sent home, the workers said.

The former employees said last

night that if they had known they could have appealed their grievances to the union's fair employment practices division, they would have done so.

When the UAW officers departed Monday, they apparently were satisfied that hourly workers are being represented fairly.

But for six hours yesterday, the former workers told of VW careers pocked with what they said were arbitrary suspensions and failed attempts at mediation.

Their stories were nearly identical to those told a month ago by a dozen current employees.

"After watching Joe Davis (head of the fair employment practices division) and the other UAW officials on TV, and reading about what they had to say, I think it is very important that all employees know what's actually happening in that plant.

"This is not something we just dreamed up, something that's vindictive or revengeful because we're upset. VW and the UAW are not fighting for our rights. They're stepping on our rights."

"I never heard of a fair employment practices committee before (Monday)," said George Pettiford, laid off in February 1982. "When-

ever we went to them about the stuff going on at the plant — the racist literature, the harassment — the union always backed off.

"The UAW never referred to a fair practices committee. They never told us anything about who to see."

Leon Broadus injured his arm at the plant. He said the company stopped paying him disability benefits in December 1980, and switched his coverage instead to sick and accident benefits.

"Sick and accident only lasts for a year, and I was getting \$57 less a week."

He lost his apartment and his car and is now on public assistance, he said. "The union did nothing for me."

John McWilliams, who moved to Youngwood from the Hill District to be closer to New Stanton, said he was on sick leave when he learned of his firing.

A loan office informed him after checking his employment.

"(VW) didn't bother to tell me that I was terminated," said McWilliams, a three-year veteran of the chassis department.

VW officials have repeatedly declined to comment on the matter.