

THE BIG STRIKE,

Pickets throng the gates of the giant Austin works at Longbridge, Birmingham - the largest of the British-Motor-Corporation Factories. Half the 6,000 workers whose dismissal caused the big strike came from this plant, and it is here that pickets have been working hardest to persuade non-strikers to change their minds.

Applause greets a driver who decides to turn back. But the liveliest incidents occur when the Pickets concentrate more and more on keeping lorries from moving goods in or out of the gates. A Press photographer finds himself in a dispute of his own.

Pickets form a human barrier in the gates as lorries arrive. At first passive resistance is tried; but hour by hour, tempers are getting more frayed. Police and strikers clash before the advancing lorries, and once or twice a nasty accident seems inevitable. Not for many years have there been scenes like this in a British industrial dispute - and every day underlines the urgency of finding a solution before something happens to turn grievance into bitter anger.

Only foot police are on duty today; the mounted police who were outside the factory earlier in the week have been withdrawn - perhaps to avoid any unnecessary provocation which is already quite explosive enough.

While the struggle continues outside the gates, with pickets doing everything they can to hold up the lorries, some work goes on in the half-empty factory, keeping the assembly line slowly on the move. A slogan overhead, reminds us of what the dispute is costing the nation.

Fascist orators arrive on the scene - and get a very sharp reception. For their own reasons, they are urging a return to work; but fascist interference is one thing on which strikers and non-strikers are complete agreed. They just don't want it.

Scenes like this may blind some people to the important issues - but fortunately a breathing-space is at hand. The B.M.C. factories are closing down for their annual holiday - so for two weeks the strike, though not called off, will be in cold storage. A breathing-space for the two sides to get together - as the Government has now invited them to do.

Both the union leaders and the Corporation have given a cautious welcome to the Government move. Public opinion demands that they reach some agreement before the gates are due to open again.