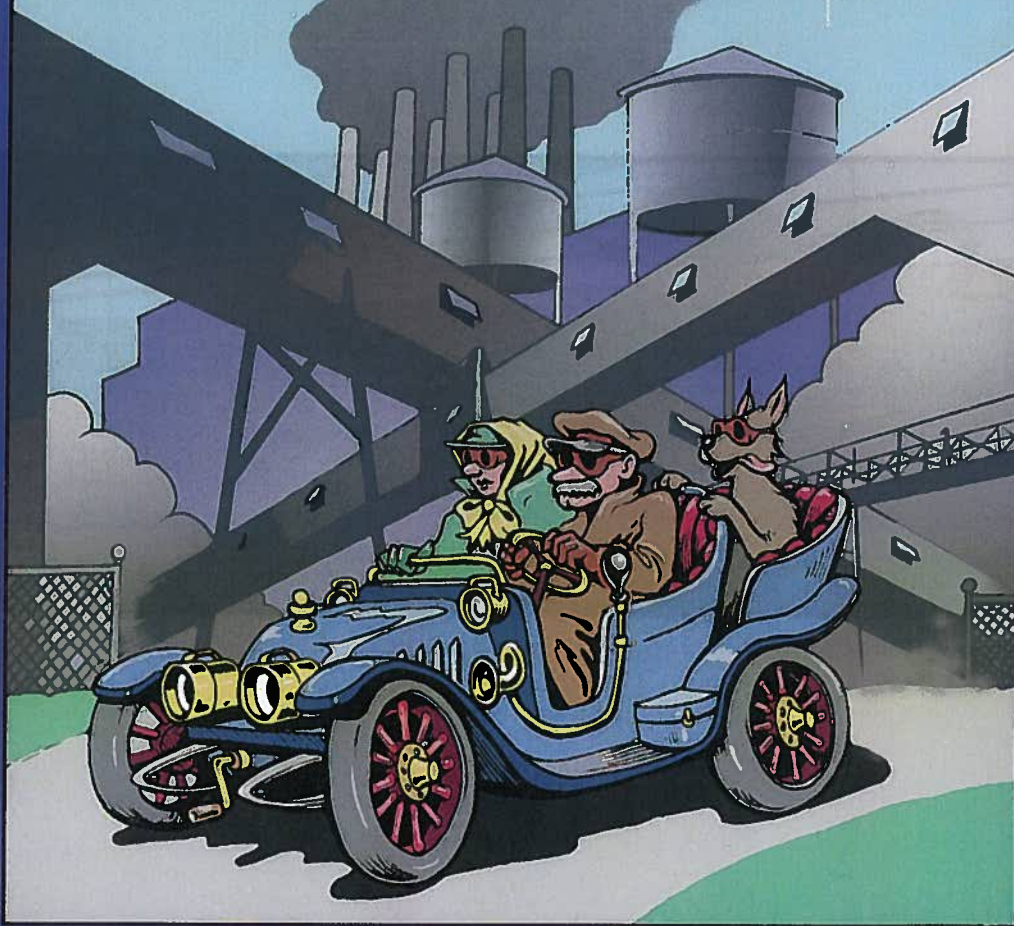


# AUTOWORKS







AutoWorks was written by Bill Morgan and Bill Yund. Artwork by Bill Yund. Copyright, 2003, 2006 by Bill Morgan and the Labor in the Schools Committee of CFT. Special thanks to Alice Audie-Figueroa and the Diane Middleton Foundation. Edited by Sylvia Ramirez.

Some of the books used in the writing of AutoWorks are:

We Make Our Own History, published by the UAW Education committee.

The Reckoning, by David Halberstam.

Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW, by August Meier and Elliot Rudwick.

Rivthead: Tales from the Assembly Line, by Ben Hamper.

The Ford Dynasty: An American Story, by James Brough.



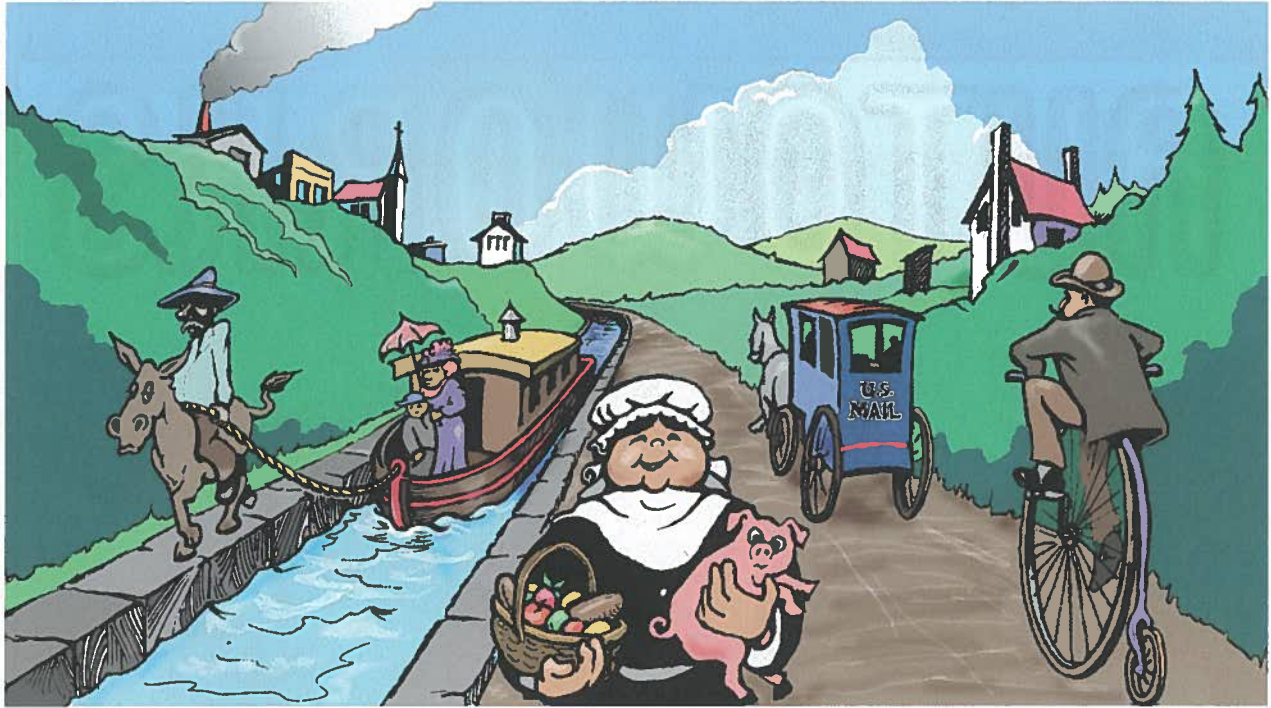
# AUTOWORKS





# PART 1

## *B.C...BEFORE CARS*

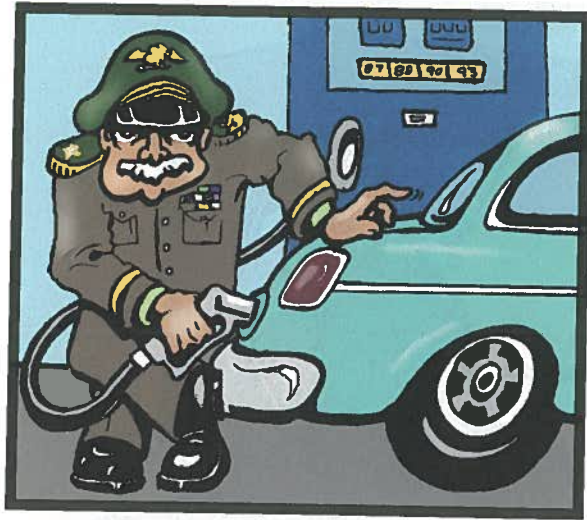


Before there were cars, it took much longer to get around. You had to live close to where you worked. It also took longer for people and goods to go from one place to another. It took longer for the news to get around, too.



What would life be like without cars? Just think about it. There would be no gas stations, highways, or parking meters. Life would be very different.





Cars affect all kinds of things. Take oil, for instance. The United States has gone to war more than once to make sure there would be lots of oil available - for what? To have gas for cars and trucks...

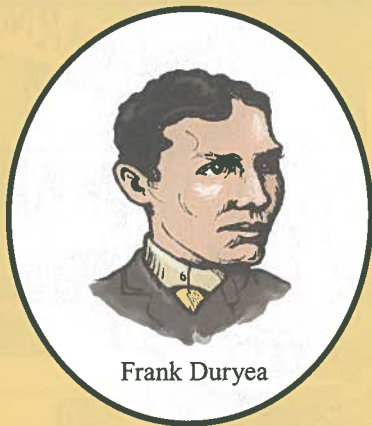


The price of gasoline affects everyone, because it's very hard to live and work nowadays without a car. When the price goes up, people have to spend more of their money to run their cars.



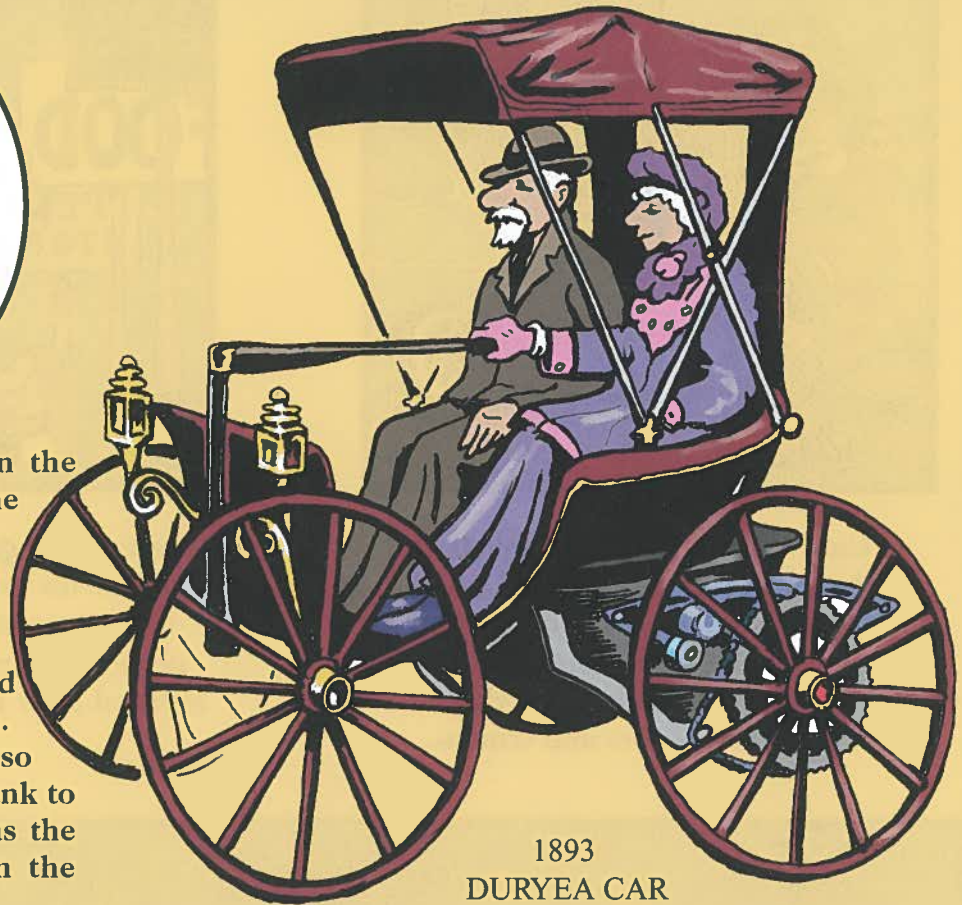
There are people who would have no work if there were no cars, like mechanics, salespeople, gas station attendants, and Autoworkers. Autoworkers build the cars we drive. They work in big factories all over the country, and in many other places around the world.





Frank Duryea

Autoworkers and cars in the United States began in the 1890's. Two brothers, Charles and Frank Duryea, saw an ad for a "horseless carriage" from Europe, and decided to build one of their own. Charles had to go away, so for \$3 a day, he hired Frank to finish the car. Frank was the first paid autoworker in the United States.

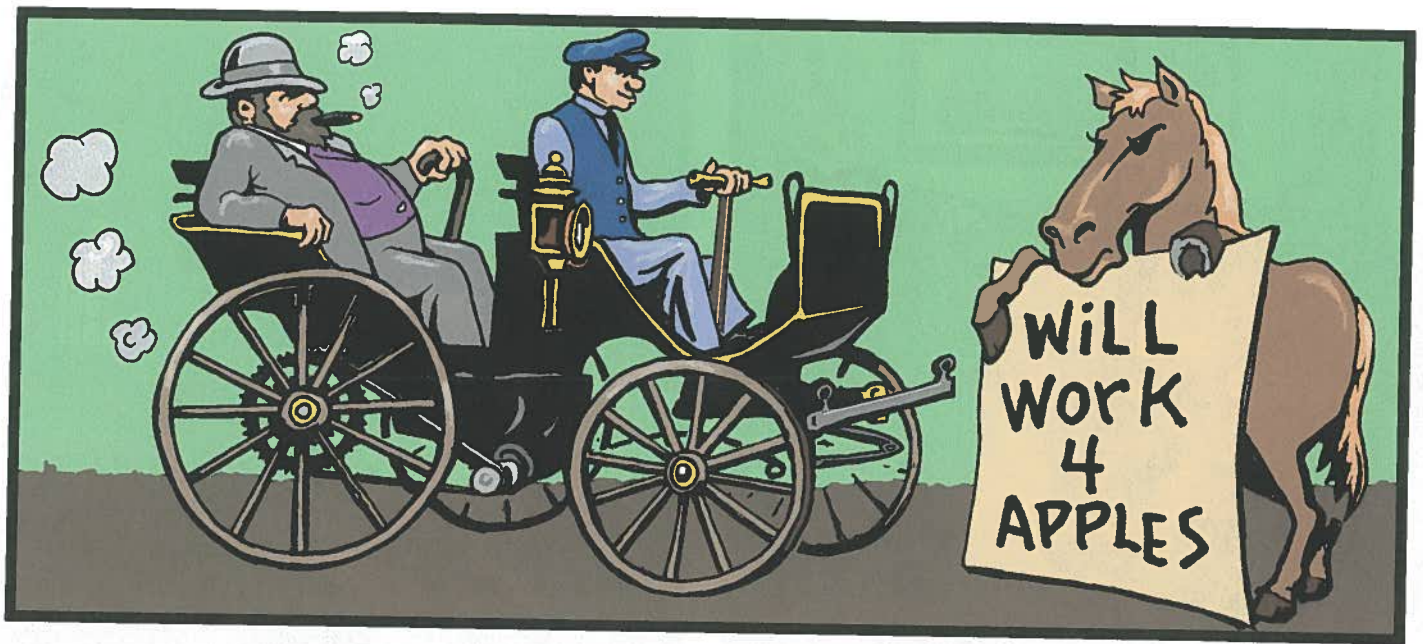


1893  
DURYEA CAR

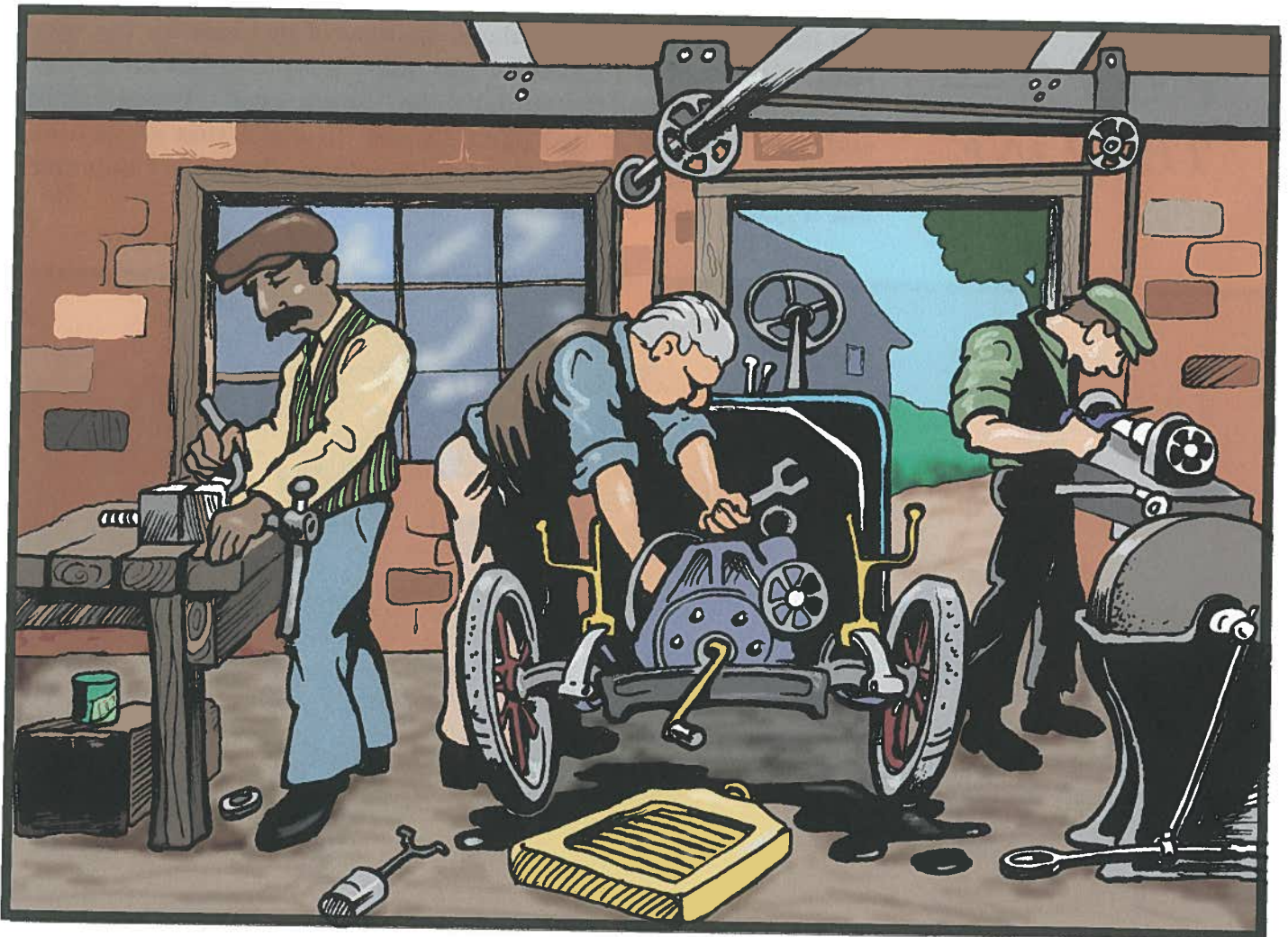


In those days, many people knew how to work on mechanical things. Henry Ford, for example, could take apart his father's watch and put it back together when he was still a little boy.

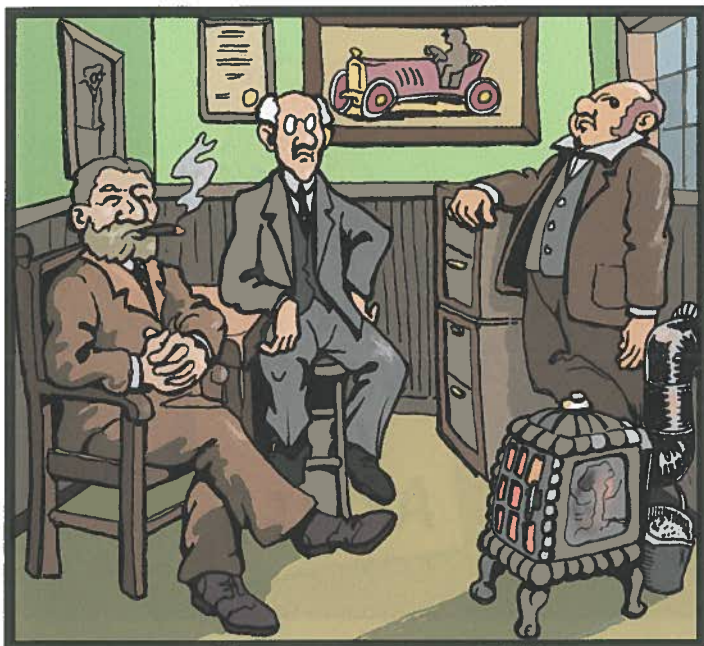




Some of these people had the idea of putting motors on carriages to see how that would work, so many of the first autoworkers were people who knew how to work on carriages. In those early days, autoworkers were craftsmen who did their work carefully and took their time. Cars were made by hand, by a few people working together. They made one car at a time. Cars were very expensive.





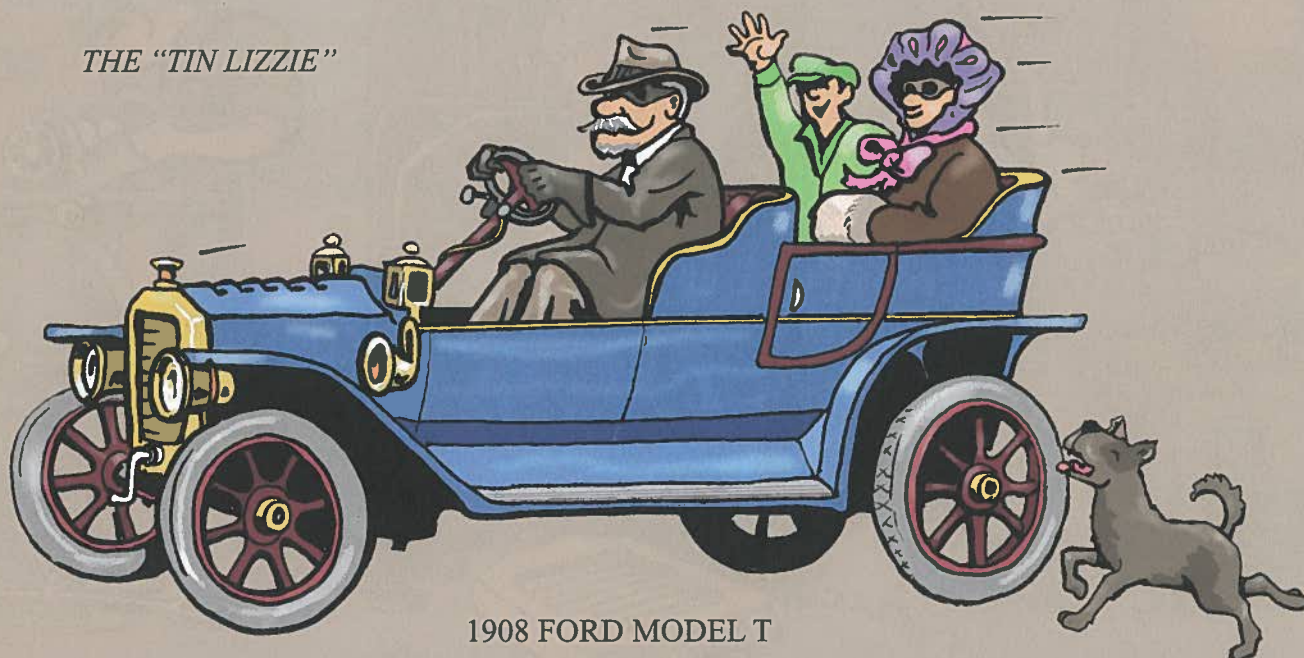


Some people saw a future in automobiles. They formed companies to start making cars and selling them. Early autoworkers worked long hours every day in poorly lighted shops and garages. It took a team of 6 workers about 10 days to make a car. Most cars they made cost from \$2000 to \$4700, at a time when people made \$2 a day.

## PART 2 — THE LINE

But Henry Ford had other ideas. Instead of just cars for the very rich, Ford wanted to make a car many people could afford. In 1908, Ford designed the Model T, the “people’s car”. It was simple and easy to make. It had parts so easy to make that a machine could make them. There were fewer of them. It was put together like a giant, easy, puzzle.

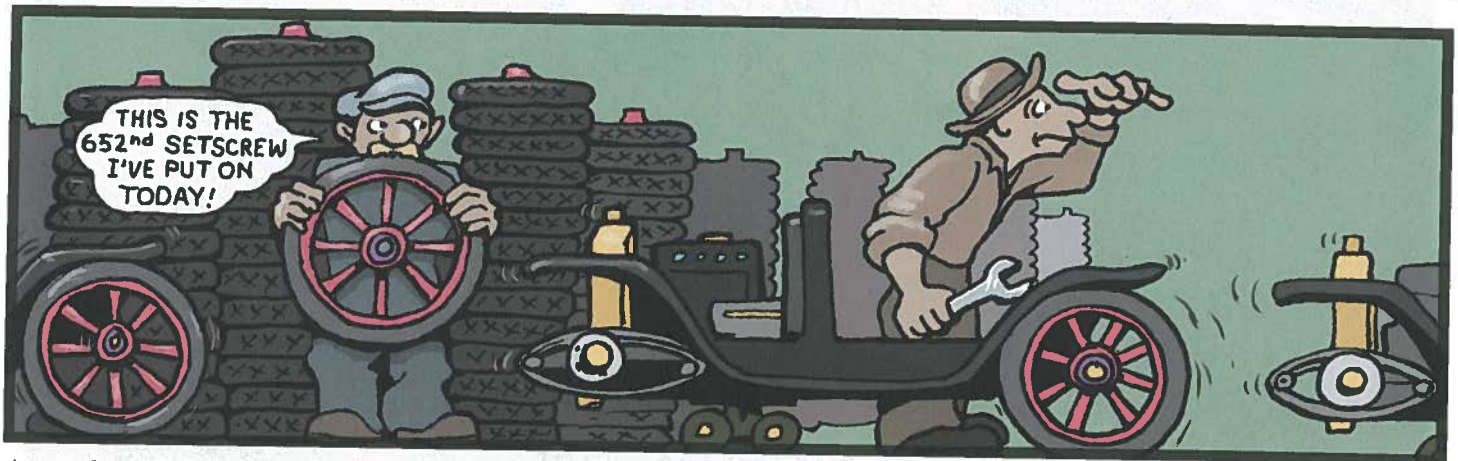
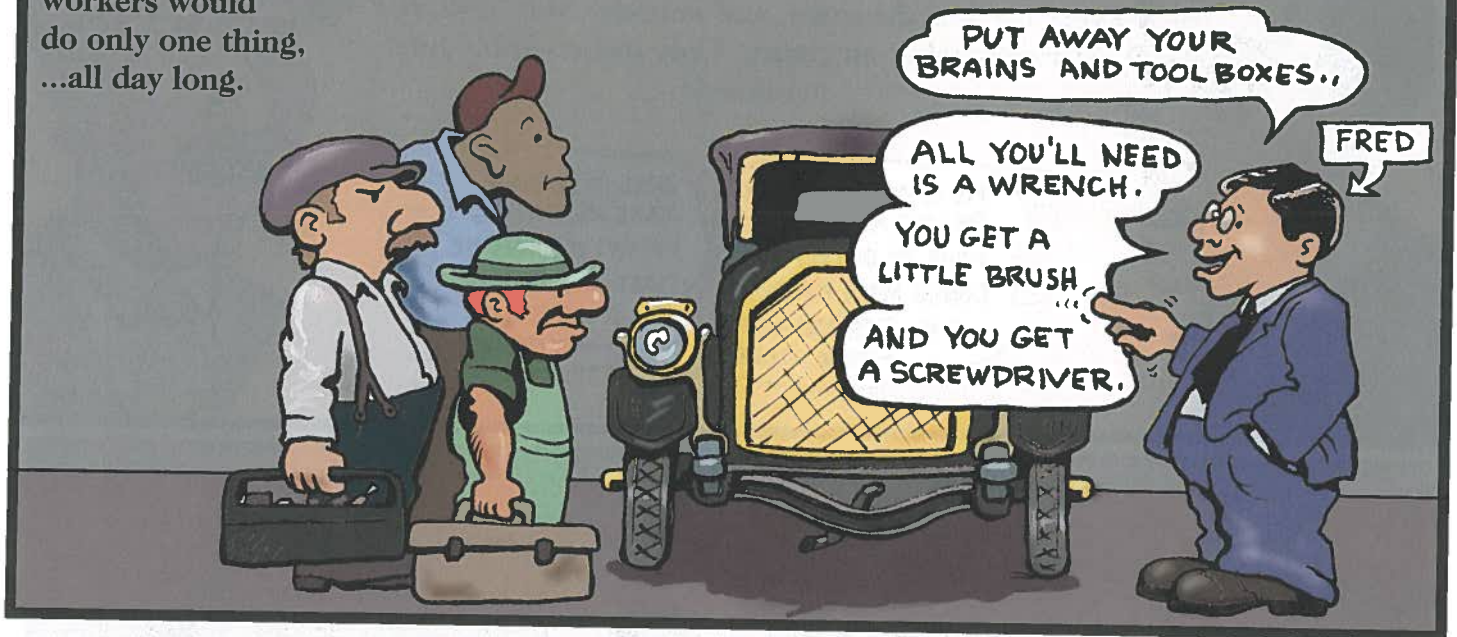
THE “TIN LIZZIE”



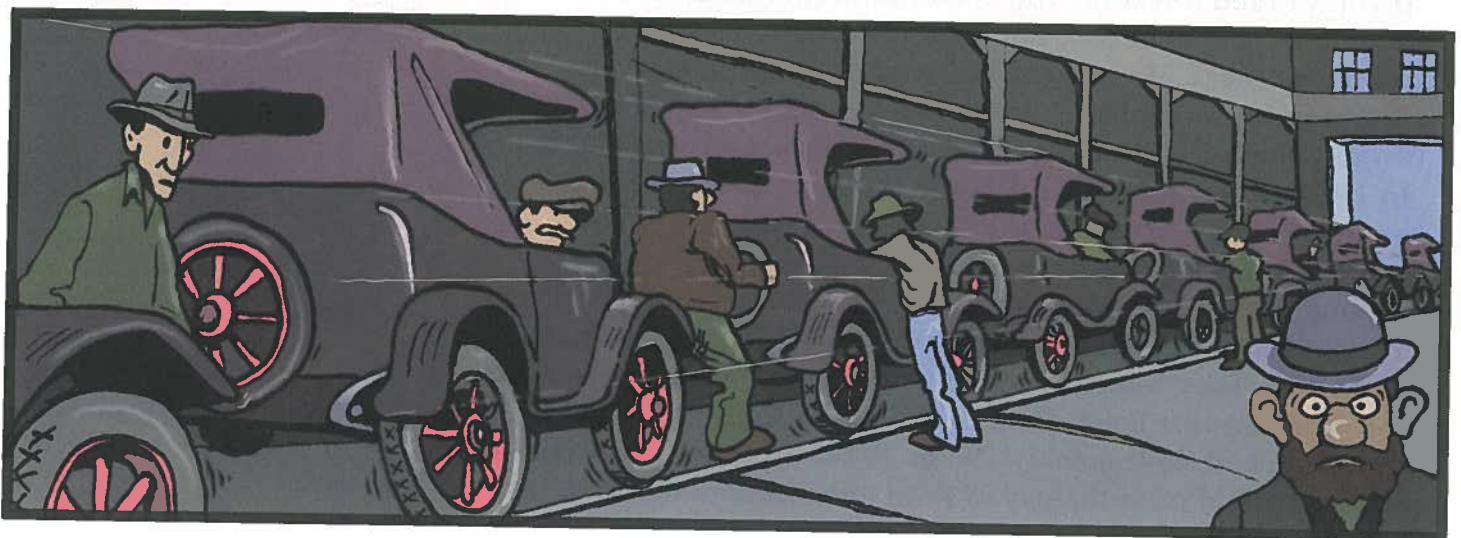
1908 FORD MODEL T



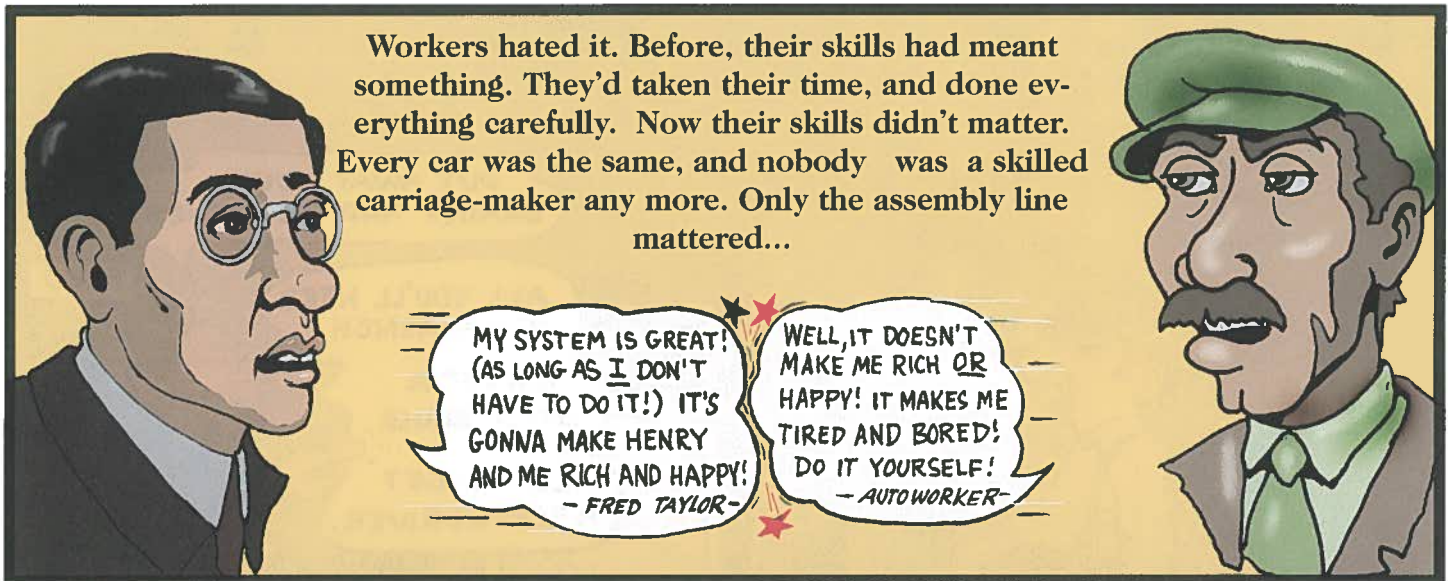
If his workers could make these cars faster and cheaper, Ford could sell more of them for less money. So he changed his factory around and used the ideas of a man named Frederick Taylor. Instead of building one car at a time and working on the entire car, workers would do only one thing, ...all day long.



A worker did the same thing to each car as they came by: one after another and another and another and another. Using Taylor's ideas, Ford expected his men and women to work faster and faster. This is called an assembly line. With these new methods, it took about one and a half hours to make a car.







If you worked too slow, You could be fired. Someone else would be hired to take your job. But Ford also had a hard time keeping workers. Many quit, and went to other jobs.

Unions were formed by autoworkers in many companies. Workers wanted some control over their lives at work.

In 1913, a worker named Matilda Rabinowitz led the first autoworkers' strike against the Studebaker Auto Company. (A strike is an agreement by workers to stop working until the company makes a deal with them.)

The Industrial Workers of the World, (I.W.W.) were called the "Wobblies". They wanted one big world-wide Union. They called for a strike against Ford. Henry Ford didn't want this at all. He had to do something, and do it quickly! So in 1914, he announced that his company would raise the pay of Ford autoworkers to \$5 per day.





Even in 1914, \$5 a day wasn't a lot of money. It would provide a family of four with food, clothing and rent, but not much else. Even so, it was twice as much as most workers made back then. So more than 10,000 people showed up to apply for jobs. When the crowd became too big, Ford had police turn fire hoses on them to keep them under control..

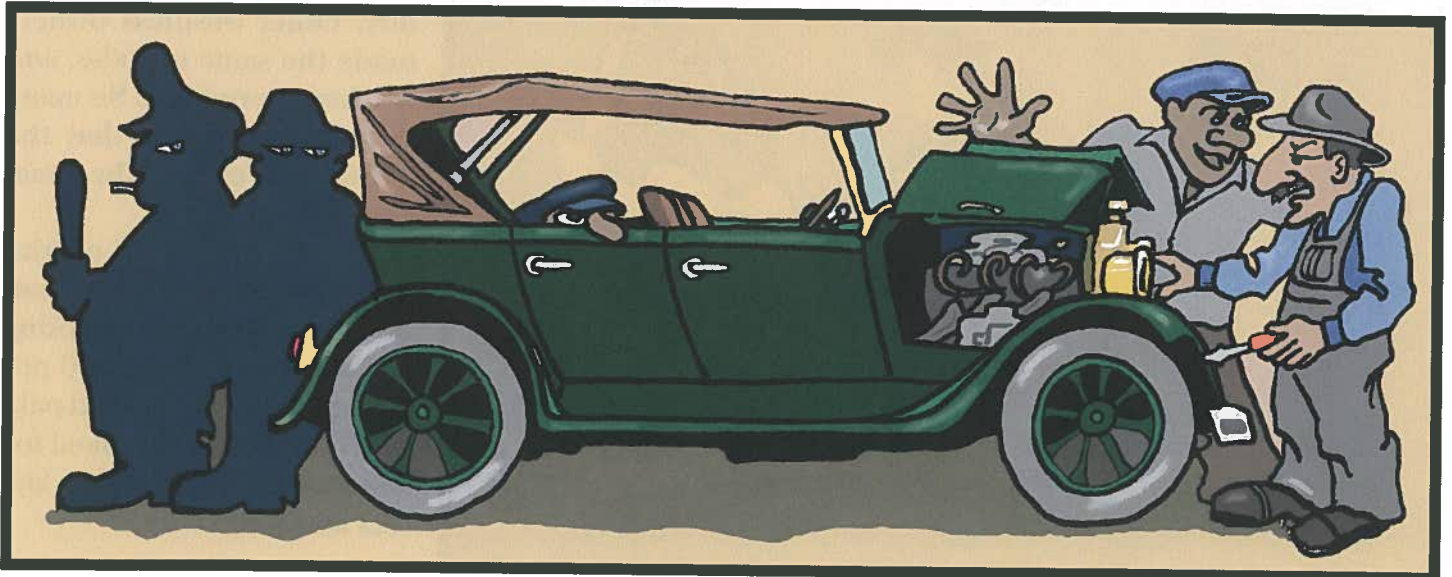


Henry Ford became very rich. Cars became a part of everyday life. The Model T was a good car, and it was affordable. Most cars in the United States were made by the Ford Motor Company. Henry lived and worked in Detroit, Michigan, so he built his factory there...



Detroit became the center of the automobile Industry. Automobile makers all over the world copied his methods. When Ford quit building the Model T in 1927, his company had \$690 million dollars, and Henry Ford was a billionaire!

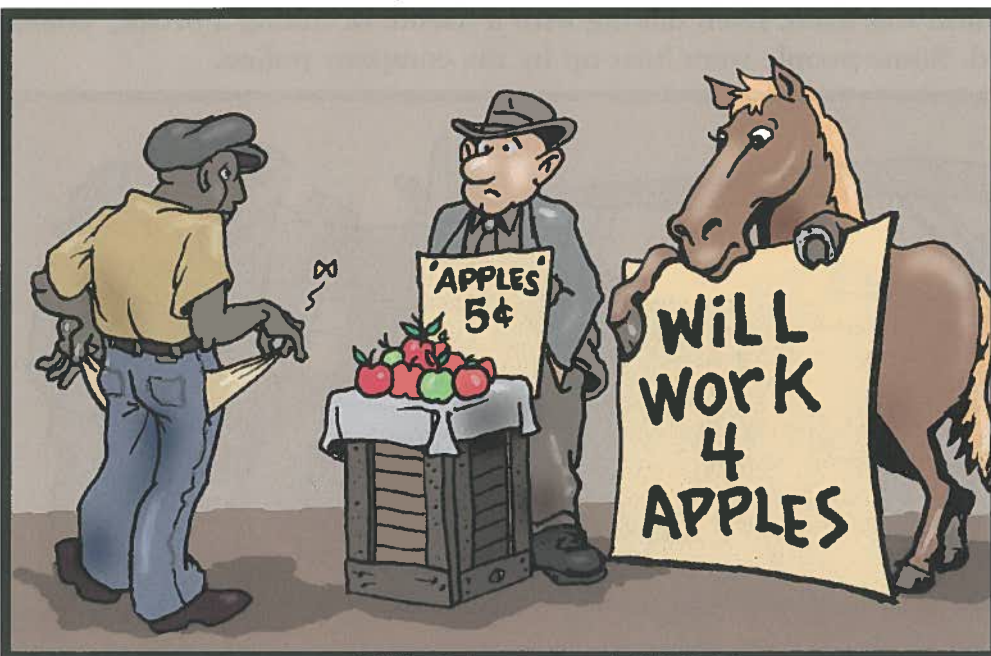
But the 1920's were not good years for autoworkers. Not only did Henry Ford think he could control how his workers worked, but how they lived and thought as well! Anyone who talked about a union was fired. Even talking with a friend, or taking a break, could get a worker fired. Some people were beat up by the company police.





Henry Ford got so carried away with controlling everything that he even sent detectives to spy on his autoworkers in their homes.

Meanwhile, at work there was the "Speedup". This was one of the worst things about the assembly line. Instead of setting the speed of the line to allow the workers to do their jobs, bosses would speed up the line to make them work faster and faster. It was very dangerous.



Soon, Ford produced more cars than people could buy. Other business owners made the same mistake, and workers were fired. So many people lost jobs that the 1930s were called "The Great Depression".

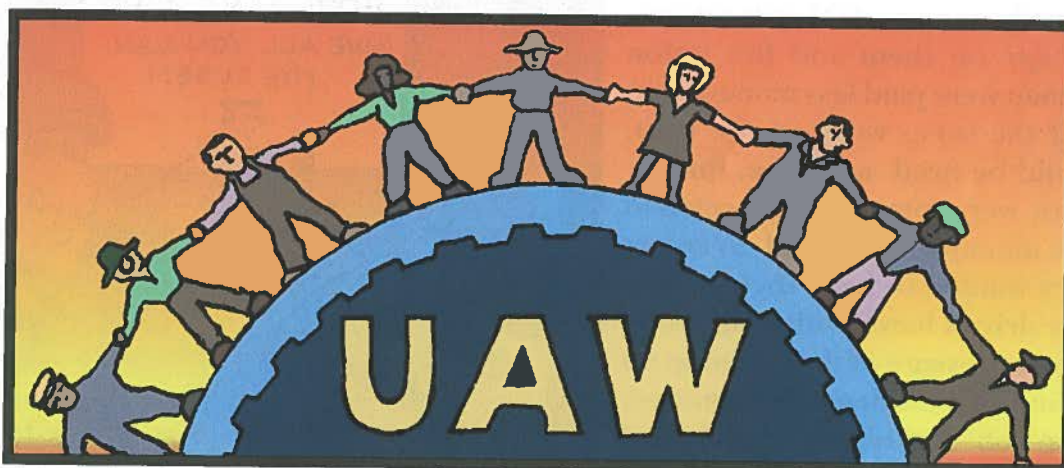
About one-half of the autoworkers in the U.S. had no work. Those still working at Ford made about \$20 per week; less than Ford had paid in 1914. Workers looked for ways to fight back against layoffs and wage cuts.





The biggest workers' union—the American Federation of Labor—wasn't much help. Unlike the old I.W.W., it didn't want one big union. The A.F. of L. only helped people working in the same skill, like metal workers, or electricians, or machinists. The companies didn't like any unions, but they could play small unions against each other to keep workers divided. The workers weren't getting anywhere.

## PART 3 — THE UNITED AUTO WORKERS



In 1935, the small autoworker unions met in Detroit. They joined together as the UNITED AUTO WORKERS UNION. It would be one big union for everyone who did any kind of work making cars. Now, if there was a problem at work, all autoworkers would act together.

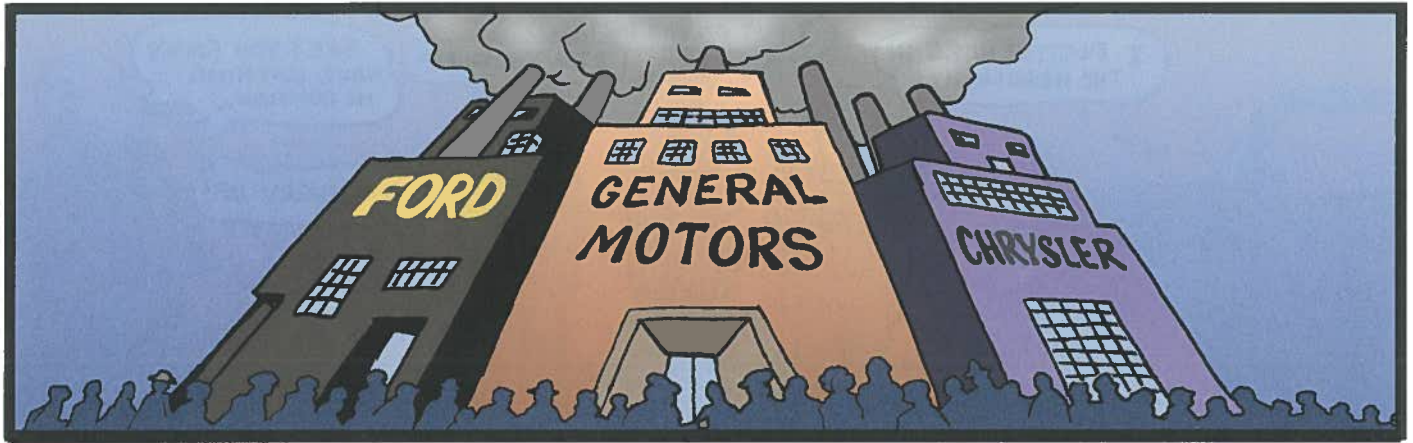
At the same time, the country was in a huge depression. Money was hard to come by, and one out of every three workers were out of a job.

The government made changes to help people get back on their feet and get the country rolling again. One of the changes was the National Labor Relations Act, or NLRA, passed by Congress and signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. It gave workers the Right to join a union.

The big corporations didn't like this at all. They immediately went to court to get the NLRA declared unconstitutional. As far as they were concerned, the unions had no right to exist.



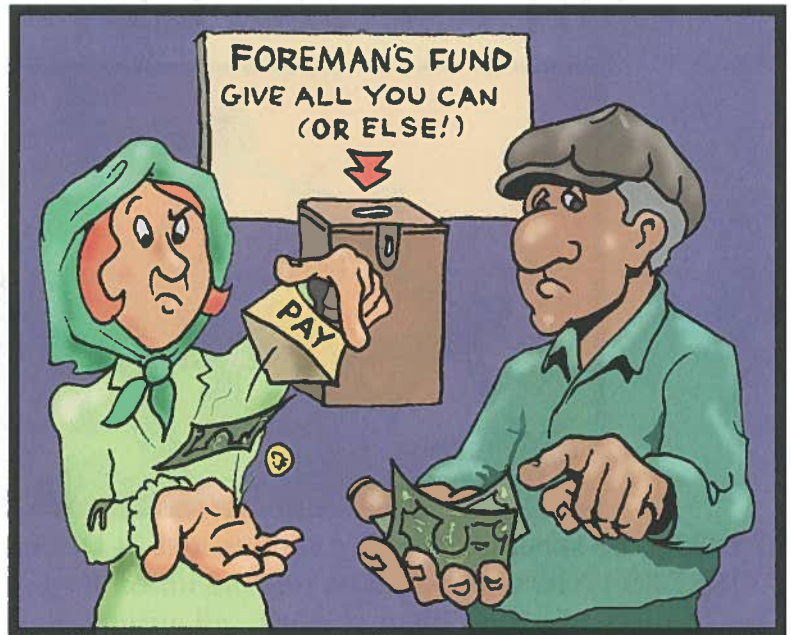




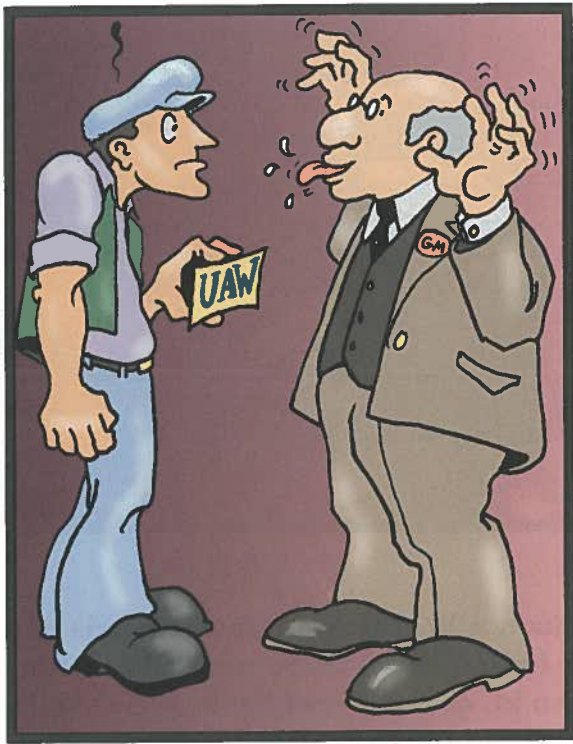
Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors were the biggest automobile companies in the world. They were called "The Big Three". The United Auto Workers tried to talk to the Big Three, but the companies refused to talk to the new union. They definitely did not want this union in their factories. By now, General Motors (GM) was the biggest and richest auto company anywhere. In 1936, GM made almost \$1.5 billion and had 69 factories.

But GM workers only made \$30 a week. Rather than pay them more, GM spent nearly \$1 million to spy on them and fire union members. Women were paid less money, even when they did the same work as the men. Employees could be fired any time, for any reason. Workers were sometimes expected to give the bosses money or gifts, and do favors for them if they wanted to keep their jobs.

Workers were driven hard, with long hours and the relentless pressure of the Speedup on the assembly line. A U.S. Senate committee, led by "Fighting Bob" La Follette, investigated and reported on what they found....



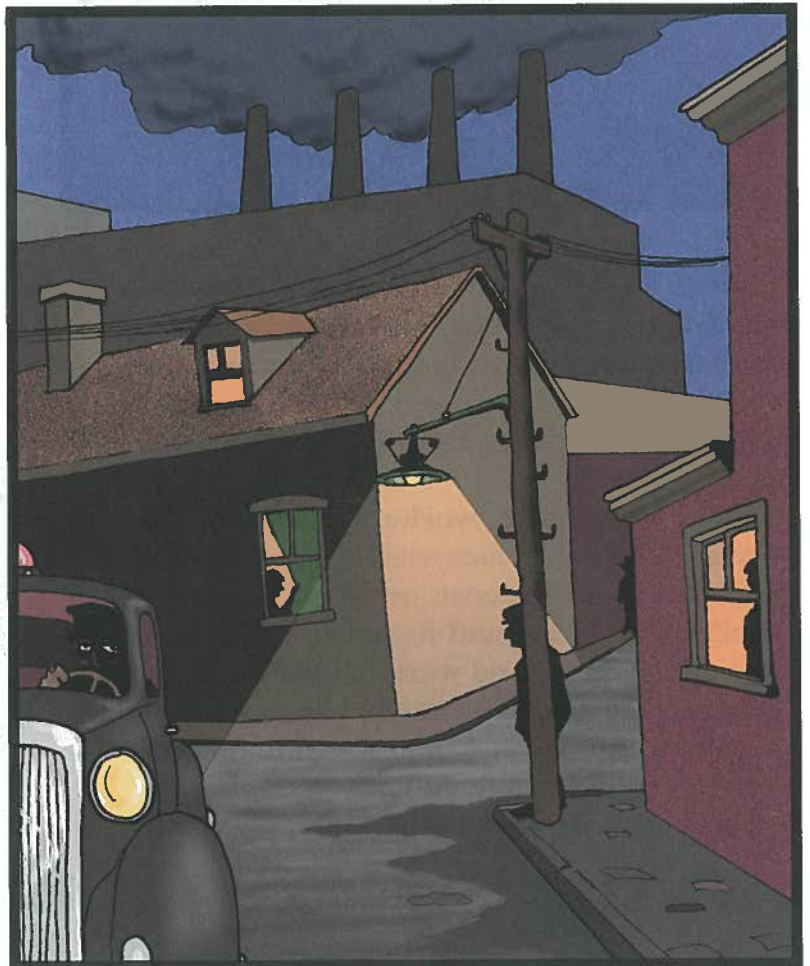




Finally, some workers in South Bend, Indiana had enough. On November 17, 1936, they went on strike. But they did it in a new way. Instead of leaving the factory, they simply SAT DOWN and refused to work. They took over the factory and locked the company managers out. After a week, management recognized the union and agreed to make a deal with the UAW. The Sit-down strike had worked!

Workers realized they had a new way to fight for a better workplace. "Sit-down" strikes spread all over the mid-west, where most cars and parts were made. In Akron, Detroit, Cleveland, and Kansas City, workers sat down— and won contracts. One of the first contracts guaranteed women equal pay with men.

But the heart of the auto industry was FLINT, MICHIGAN, where GM had it's main plants . Flint was a gray, drab industrial town. Everything was owned or controlled by GM and a business group called the "Flint Alliance." Spies were everywhere. It was hard to talk about unions without being fired. It was vital for the UAW to win a contract here. They wanted better pay, a voice in hiring and firing, and the end of the murderous "Speedup." They wanted a 30 hour week, so more people could have jobs with money and time for their families.





On December 30, 1936, GM began to move vital equipment out of Fisher Plant #1 at Flint, the biggest auto body factory in the world. If there was a strike, they intended to make cars somewhere else.

For the workers, that was it. They began a sit-down strike immediately. Workers at nearby Body Plant #2 did the same.

Then a big plant in Cleveland, Ohio went on strike. The strikes spread quickly.



Soon 100,000 workers in Canada and the United States were on strike, sitting down in, or outside of the factories. Even plants not on strike had to close because they could not get parts.

At Flint, the strike went on. Inside the plant, people found ways to keep from being bored. They played music and had card games. They held classes to teach each other things. They put on plays, and had volleyball and ping-pong games. Some people even went roller-skating through the factory.

But it wasn't all fun and games. Outside, their families and friends set up supply lines, sending in food and blankets. Fund-raising events were held. In early 1937, 200,000 people held a rally in Detroit to support the strike.

Inside the plants, workers shared guard duty and kept the factories clean. Because they wanted no violence or vandalism, they prohibited drinking and firearms. They kept the equipment in good working condition.

One striker sneaked out of a plant to go see his wife in the hospital. She was due to have a baby. She told him to go back to the factory and stay until the strike was won.







General Motors did everything to break the strike. They tried to freeze the strikers by turning off the heat. They went to court. They even started a fight by arresting people and trying to stop food from getting in to the strikers. But the strikers won the battle.



Finally, on February 19, 1937 - after 44 days- GM agreed to sign a contract with the UAW. The strikers had won! They had a huge parade to celebrate their victory. On February 19th, the first car made under the new agreement rolled off the line.





## PART 4 — *HARD TIMES AT FORD*



The UAW was part of a new organization called The CONGRESS OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS. The CIO, as it was called, opened its doors to workers the AF of L had ignored. It organized immigrants, African-Americans, Mexicans, so-called “unskilled” workers, and other groups who had not been allowed to join unions.

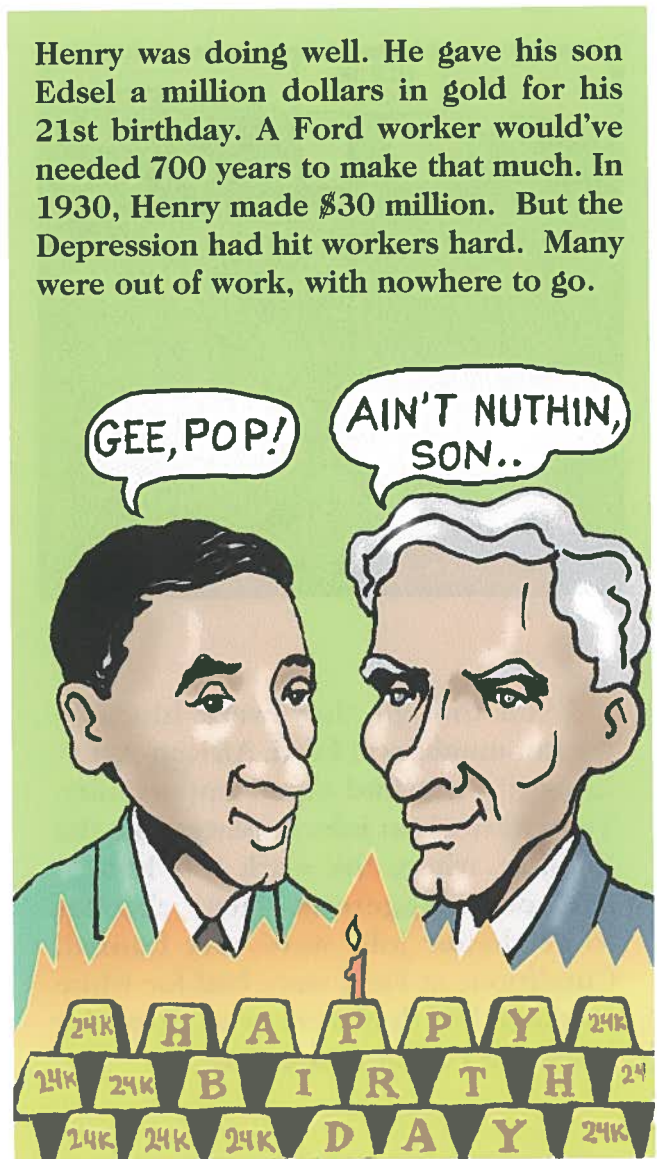
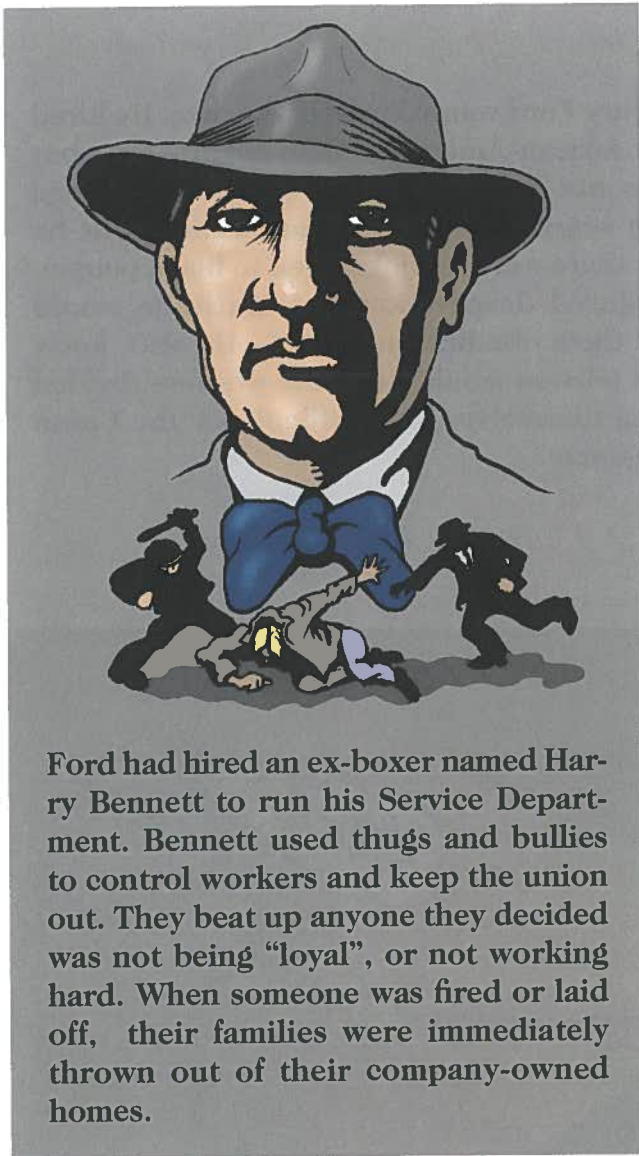


The Ford factory at the Rouge River, Dearborn, Michigan.

Now the United Auto Workers turned to its toughest challenge: organizing workers at the Ford Motor Company. Henry Ford had seemed to be a friend of working people at first, but as he became rich, he had turned into a dictator. In fact, Adolph Hitler studied and admired Ford's philosophy!

Henry Ford ruled his factories with an iron hand, and he hated unions. One tenth of all workers were paid by Ford to spy on the rest. People were not allowed to talk, or even go to the bathroom. Anyone who talked about a union would be fired and very likely beaten up by Ford's private police force, called “the Service Department”.









Henry Ford wanted total obedience. He hired more African-Americans than anyone else, but it was not because he was fair-minded. Ford was a segregationist and anti-semitic, but he knew there were few jobs open to black people. He figured desperation and gratitude would make them obedient and loyal. He also knew racial tension would keep the workers divided among themselves, and difficult for the Union to organize.

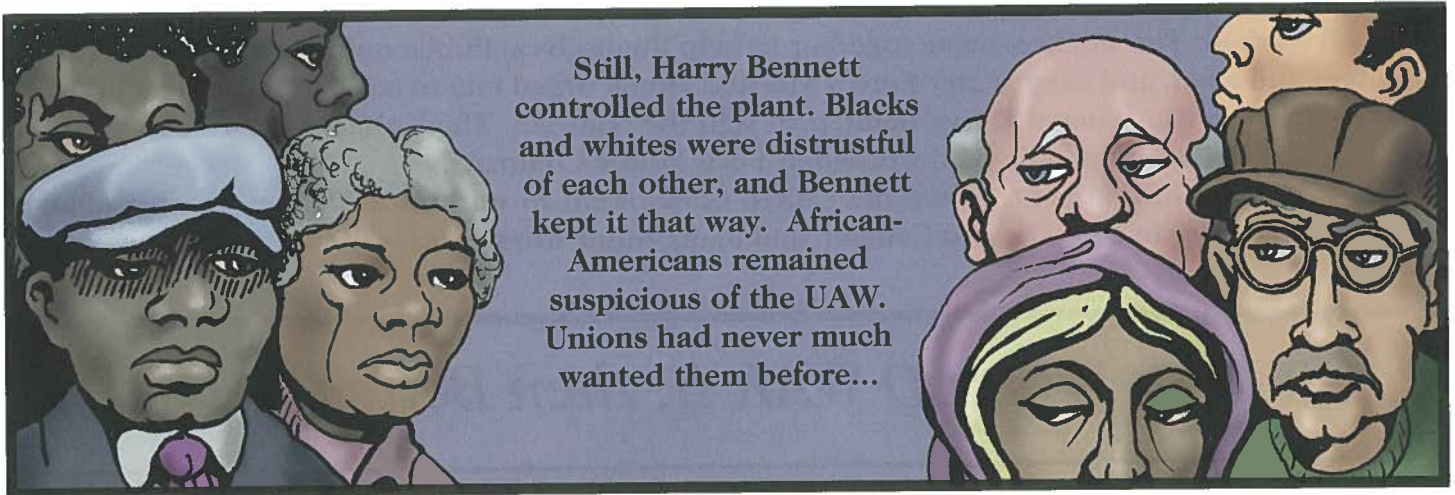
Even though they were hired in greater numbers at Ford, African-Americans did not find equal opportunity. They were given jobs in places like the foundry, where the work was hottest and most dangerous. Their chances to get better jobs were very limited. Conditions at Ford were bad for white workers, but they were even worse for blacks and other minorities.



In 1936, Charlie Chaplin-the famous comedian and movie-maker- toured one of the Ford factories. He then made a movie called "Modern Times". It was about a man who goes crazy from working on the assembly line, and about families who had no work or money. It was funny, but it was also sad.



On May 26, 1937, the UAW began its campaign to organize Ford workers at the giant Rouge factory. Women passed out leaflets to people going in or out of the plant. Some Union leaders met with news reporters and photographers. Suddenly, Harry Bennett's thugs attacked. They beat up the Union men and threw them down the steps. Then they tried to smash all the cameras so no one would see what they had done. But a reporter named James Fitzgerald got away with his camera. His photos were published all over the country. The truth was bad news for Ford.



The UAW had to try something new. They found pro-union members of the Black community, and hired young African-American organizers. They opened up leadership positions for minorities, and they started educational programs to deal with racial prejudice among white workers.

The Strike at the Rouge Factory finally began on April 1, 1941. Ford hired more African-Americans as strikebreakers, and there were battles between them and the mostly white strikers. But some of the hard feelings between Whites and Blacks had been softened.



On April 2, the UAW organized a huge parade of cars driven by black and white strikers...

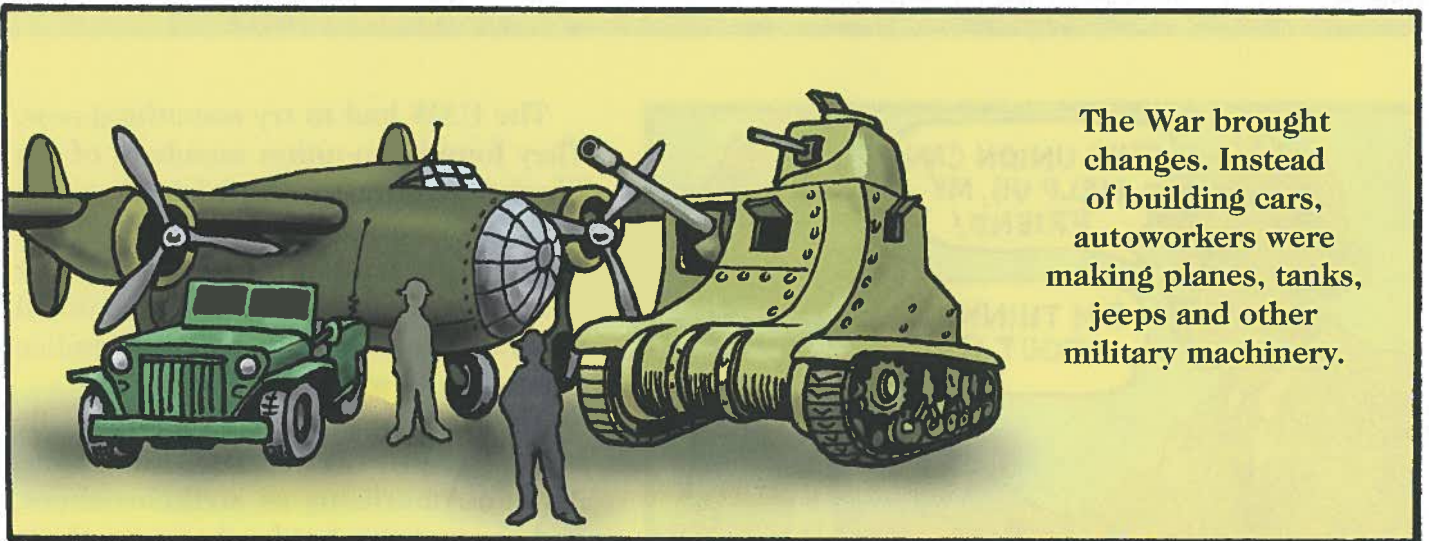


It stretched for miles, all around the factory, and blocked all the entrances. As the strikebreakers inside the plant saw the racial unity in the parade, more and more began to join the picket lines. The blockade lasted eight days.

It all worked. The workers came together to help themselves. Public opinion was against Harry Bennett and Ford, and even Henry Ford's wife and family urged him to accept the Union. On April 10, 1941, Henry instructed Harry Bennett to sign the contract. The United Auto Workers would represent all 100,000 people who worked at Ford Motor Company.

By December of that year, when the United States went to war, the UAW represented almost every autoworker in the U.S. and Canada, and many other workers as well.

## PART 5 — WORLD WAR II, then Better Times..



The War brought changes. Instead of building cars, autoworkers were making planes, tanks, jeeps and other military machinery.

Like most unions, the UAW agreed not to stop work or go on strike until the war was won. And, as happened in other industries, some big companies took advantage of the no-strike agreement to use the Speed-up on the assembly line again, and to ignore safety procedures. At one point in 1944, more people had died at work than in the war!





Another change happened as the men went over overseas to fight. Women took their places in the workplace. More women worked in the factories than ever before. They did the same work the men had done, sometimes better than the men, but usually for lower pay.



After the war, the UAW went to work again to build better lives for its members. In 1949, the strike ban was lifted, and a 104 day strike at Ford and Chrysler got autoworkers something they'd never had before--a PENSION. A pension puts money aside for an employee while he or she is working so they will be able to live comfortably in their old age. It also helps workers live with dignity if they get hurt.



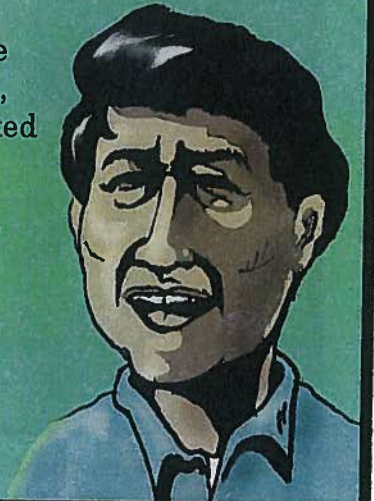




In the 1950's and 60's, the United Auto Workers became involved in the struggles for social justice and equality for all working people. Until then, the union had kept to the problems of its own members in their workplaces. But now the Autoworkers supported the causes of people like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as he fought to end racism, discrimination and "Jim Crow" laws.



The UAW raised money and support for the United Farmworkers Union and its leaders, Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez. They backed nationwide boycotts that pressured big agricultural companies to improve the pay and working conditions of farmworkers.



Walter Reuther had been one of the young UAW leaders beaten up by thugs of the Ford Service Department back in 1937. He later became President of the United Autoworkers Union. He spoke for a lot of union members when he said:

*"I will be dissatisfied as long as one American child is denied the right to education,... as long as one American is denied his or her rights."*





Through much of labor's history, working people and many unions lost struggles because of their own racist policies and other prejudice. The United Autoworkers were among the first and largest labor organizations to find success by effectively countering racism.

A packinghouse worker in Chicago summed up his feelings as he described the brotherhood he felt with the whites and immigrants in his CIO-sponsored local....



## NOT THE END...



This is not the end of the story of the Autoworkers. But it is the story of how they formed a strong union that won important rights for themselves, and for other Americans as well!



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Children! Learn everything you can!  
With every step you take,  
your people will be watching.  
The school is there for you - use it!  
Learn your ABCs, it's only the beginning -  
there is so much to learn,  
but don't be disappointed, begin.  
You will have to know everything,  
you will be the leaders.

So learn! Don't be afraid to ask.  
Make them tell you why,  
and if your teachers will not tell you,  
find it out for yourself.  
Look at the world around you  
and ask, How did this get here?  
With every step you take,  
your people will be watching,  
all their hopes are with you.



