

DETROIT



A HISTORY OF STRUGGLE,
A VISION OF THE FUTURE

BY WAISTLINE

A PUBLICATION OF THE PEOPLE'S TRIBUNE

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People's Tribune

www.PeoplesTribune.org

P.O. Box 3524
Chicago, IL 60654

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WHAT IS DETROIT?

Frontier Fort. British Outpost. Small town. French Town. Last stop of the underground railroad carrying escaping slaves to freedom just across the river.

Detroiters volunteered to fight during the American Civil War, including the 24th Michigan Infantry Regiment (part of the legendary “Iron Brigade”) suffering 82 percent casualties at Gettysburg in 1863.

Detroit has been the home of Stroh beer, Vernor ginger ale and Faygo Cola. Jazz center, shark skin pants and Mohair sweater contrasted with the elegance of Hudson’s department store and the Ford Auditorium. Paradise Valley on one end of town, Fox Theater in the middle and the old Olympia Theater at the opposite end. The famed labor leader John L. Lewis made his great speech urging “iron men” of all hue to shatter the color barrier and create one gigantic union. Paul Robeson sung here.

Detroit became premier builders of war armaments in the battle against the fascist axis, earning the title of “arsenal of democracy.” Wheels, weapons and wages make a strange mix of music.

Exactly what is Detroit? Detroit is the rise and fall of the heavy metal – the industrial working class. Our rise was as spectacular as our fall. Our rebirth will change human history.



FORD ROUGE COMPLEX, COMPLETED IN 1928, EMPLOYED OVER 100,000 WORKERS DURING WORLD WAR II

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning human beings create instruments, tools and machines in the drama to sustain and improve human life. Since people organize society around the instruments of production, types of social organization and types of family life ultimately depend upon the type of tools and energy sources which exist and define one's life activity.

The industrial revolution grew out of the long history of development of tools and machines, and is a certain kind of society. People created industrial tools, machines and means setting into play stages of growth of the industrial revolution.

Then, on the Sixth Day the industrial revolution recreated man in its image.

In this beginning there was the word. The word became flesh with mind, heart and soul. The voice spoke:

“Which way is Detroit and how can I get there?”

Forget what you heard about the “roaring twenties.” We know it ended in the 1929 depression. In 1920 the American people were not having fun. Millions were unemployed and faced starvation. The economy was in the toilet. The First World Imperialist War had ended and troops returned home looking for jobs.

“Can I get a job?”

“I served my country and will it serve me?”

Wartime production had given a boost to domestic production, war time profits and government price controls to hold down the cost of goods. When gov'mint abandoned price controls, prices jumped 15 percent in 1919 and 1920. Capitalism returned to business as usual.

Between 1920 and 1921 production dipped 10 percent; 100,000 businesses went bankrupt; 453,000 farmers lost their land and nearly 5 million workers lost their jobs. War had required national unity to pit workers on one side of a border against those on the other side of town so government pressured many employers to recognize some unions. The ending of world war allowed the employers on both sides of the border to wage war on their own working class and unions, and they did.

The year 1919 was a strike wave – more than 3,600 strikes in all, involving more than 4 million workers. It got so bad the Boston police department went on strike demanding union recognition to fight layoffs. The great steel strike of 1919 was launched in September with 350,000

steelworkers demanding union recognition and the eight-hour day, rather than the typical 12-hour day. The strike was long and bitter climaxing in street fighting in Gary, Indiana where eighteen strikers were murdered. By January the strike collapsed.

1920 was the year of the Red Scare, leading to the arrest of 6,000 people and the trial of two Italian immigrants, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, charged with the murder of a paymaster. Both men would die in the electric chair claiming their innocence. Finally on August 26, 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution was passed granting women the right to vote. America was in the death grip of all kinds of social movements, social protest and social upset.

The economy began to expand again in 1924 for many reasons but one of the most important causes was technology advancement. Greater productivity, less cost per product allows more people to be hired at lower wages. The market expanded.



THE MODEL T AUTOMOTIVE COMPLEX LOCATED IN DETROIT'S MILWAUKEE JUNCTION, IN THE EARLY 1900'S

The automobile industry, now driven by assembly line methods of production, became the most important industry in the nation. American industrial capitalism would be built and shaped based on automotive production. Auto production requires purchasing products of steel, rubber, glass, fabrics, tool companies and inspires growth of a machine industry dedicated to producing the machines that make other machines. Auto

calls forth road construction in response to automobiles on the roads, which in turn expands the gasoline and oil corporations. The increased mobility made possible by auto begins the break up of the company town, created the first suburbs, which in turn causes growth of the housing construction industry.

Other new technologies contributed to the expansion of the economy like radio and development of commercial broadcasting. In 1925 over two million families had radios. By the end of the 1920's everyone that could afford one had one. Commercial air travel developed, beginning with the use of planes to deliver mail. The advancing industrial revolution affected every industry creating new products and synthetics; the first early computers and the telephone. As during the period of ancient Rome's high-point, all commercial routes and roads, direct and indirect, one way or another led to Rome. All roads during this phase of the industrial revolution led to Detroit.

PRELUDE

The period between 1901 and 1914 or from the administration of Teddy Roosevelt to America's entry into the First World Imperialist War, has been referred to as "the Progressive Era," as capitalists and their political heads sought to adjust relations between the classes as the unity needed to establish the American century. America had become the most productive country in the world and was eager to establish its peculiar form of imperialism around the earth. Roosevelt would establish the policy of military intervention into Latin America that lasts to this very day.

New labor laws came into existence with over twenty states passing laws regulating the work day and bringing into effect the eight-hour day for a small section of workers. Labor unrest reached a peak, with the great labor leader Eugene Debs being sentenced to ten years in prison for refusing to support the war. Big Bill Haywood would be forced to flee to the Soviet Union to escape a long jail sentence for refusing to agree with the custodians of capital. The Espionage Act of 1917 (an early "Patriot Act") was passed; the Sabotage Act of April 1918 and the Sedition Act of May. These laws were used to fight labor organizers, the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World. In all, more than 11,500 people were arrested in 1918 for the crime of criticizing the government or the war.

Detroit was the industrial heart beat of the country. In Highland Park, Michigan, a city that is inside Detroit, Henry Ford's modern plant would

turn out cars in the millions. It is here that Henry Ford unveiled the moving assembly line, child of the industrial revolution and the benchmark for the electro-mechanical method of production. This was a process by which, instead of human labor moving from station to station, the product moved past a mass of human labor at a stationary post.

That was in 1913. The moving production line grew all over the globe, becoming the underpinning of the auto industry in Detroit, Flint, and Lansing, and of the appliance industry in Benton Harbor and the furniture industry in Grand Rapids. The industrial revolution was in full swing.



PART OF THE MILWAUKEE JUNCTION AUTO COMPLEX IN THE EARLY 1900S

\$5 A DAY: THE REAL STORY

In Henry Ford's factory, workers' dissatisfaction was dangerously high. Absenteeism in the Ford plant in 1913 had reached 10.5 percent. Turnover at the Ford plant had soared to 370 percent by 1913. The company had to hire 50,448 men just to maintain an average labor force of 13,623. Company surveys at Ford revealed that more than 7,300 workers left in March 1913 alone. On each day, it was necessary to make use of 1300 to 1400 replacement workers without any experience.

Hiring new workers, even unskilled workers, and offering them a minimum of training turned out to be an expensive proposition. Ford spent \$35 to break in each new worker. With 52,000 workers entering the

Ford factory in 1913, the company spent \$1,820,000 because of turnover. Then the Industrial Workers of the World was threatening to organize Ford's factory. These conditions prompted Ford's introduction of the \$5 a day wage to stabilize the workforce.

REVOLUTION AND THE UNIONS

Ideas of revolution go back in our history before 1776 and resulted in our first Revolution against the British Empire. Revolution plus socialist ideas go back to the 1870's, with the formation of the Socialist Labor Party in 1876. The SLP would later split under the radical view of Daniel De Leon, who coined the term "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class" to describe how the trade unions were forced to function within the system of capitalist production.

Before the war (1914) socialist ideas were pretty popular amongst the fighting leaders of the working class and the Socialist Party had a thriving branch of 6,000 members in Michigan. Sections of the American people were won to the idea that poverty and starvation wages could be overcome by changing the system.

The years between 1920 and 1935 were of major economic expansion, economic disruption, and transition of the population from primarily agriculture to a modern urban nation. The "horseless carriage industry" would become the great American auto industry. Economic expansion and crises of unemployment went hand in hand producing feast for a year or so, with wages of starvation following: the bitter paychecks.

During the decade of the 1920's the country's manufacturing output rose by more than 60 percent and paychecks for many lucky enough to find employment rose by one third . . . when you were working and not caught in one of the recession years. Every couple of years during the 1920's the system would partially crash. It was as if every 24 months the country went from feast to famine as automotive production changed America. For instance road construction became an important industry in response to the automobile. Without question steel, rubber, glass and tool companies boomed. At this time almost half of the country's autoworkers lived in Michigan with the state accounting for 75 percent of automobiles built in the country.

Entering the 1920's there was a deeply underlying tension between those seeking a new form of industrial organization and those socialists stuck in the old craft type of union mentality. Craft unions were based

on skill and job classification. Industrial unions organized the unskilled based on industry rather than craft. With the growth of the industrial process, made possible by improving technology and the assembly line method, a new form of the working class and middle class was being built.

Michigan nurtured the seeds of the early industrial unions with thirty-five locals in Detroit, Toledo, Cincinnati, Flint, Pontiac, Buffalo, Chicago, and New York City. The strongest and largest local unions were in Detroit.

The early 1920's were hard times on the autoworkers union. The Fisher Body strike of February 1921 dragged out to April, ending in defeat for the union. Although strikes are always the last resort for a union, striking in the face of a recession is most difficult because the capitalists are already seeking means to layoff and fire the workforce. By 1922 the union had maybe 500 members with thousands laid off.

Events leading to the 1929 "market crash" – the Great Depression – were a series of violent seizures and convulsions of capitalism, with corporations one moment hiring labor and the next moment vomiting labor out of the production process as the market reached its limit of consumption. Insanity gripped the economy. It was if the devil himself had the people by the throat. Unemployment was rising because there were too many products that could not be sold for a profit. People were cold because there was too much coal available. People went hungry because there was too much food available. People became homeless because there were too many empty houses. The Roaring 20's was over, with capitalism in a ditch.

In the fall of 1931 General Motors and Ford led the battle, cutting wages by 10 percent. Between 1930 and 1932 wages were cut between 5 and 20 percent depending on job classifications. This meant wages between \$8.00 to \$9.60 a day dropped to \$6.00 and \$6.40.

It would only be when the employed workers threw in their lot with the unemployed that headway could be made in fighting starvation. This took shape as the formation of Unemployed Councils and marching on the corporations and government demanding wages or income.

A new form of the working class was being built with each car cranked out by Detroit's assembly line. A new industrial middle class was formed world-wide with its center of gravity Detroit.

THE 1932 HUNGER MARCH

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVE MOORE

Political Affairs: Can you talk about the Hunger March? How did you come to be part of it?

Dave Moore: I became part of it because of a guy by the name of Chris Alston. I was living on Leland Street, right off of Hastings. The Hunger March grew out of many trials and tribulations, and agony. After the Depression started, people were meeting and discussing ways of remedying the situation, about what should be done. Especially during the summer months, you could go up and down Hastings Street or Woodward Avenue and see people on ladders or soapboxes making speeches on how things should be corrected.

An effort came about to unify all these individuals and the groups they were speaking for. I joined the Leland Street Unemployed Council. There were many Unemployed Councils scattered across the city of Detroit. Hamtramck, Inkster, and River Rouge – all the suburbs had them. There was a guy named Bill McKie who said, “Let’s call a meeting of all those who speak for these different councils in the various parts of the city. Let’s have a meeting here in Detroit and combine our forces.” Bill, I would say, was the father of the Unemployed Councils here in Detroit. I know damn well he was the father of the Hunger March which was soon to take place.

We then agreed that all of us from the different Unemployed Councils would meet at a place called Yemans Hall and try to decide exactly what our objectives were. We were meeting to raise hell about the conditions we had to live under. But what were we going to do about it other than to complain among ourselves about how our government was doing nothing for us? It was agreed that this meeting had to happen; so we met at Yemans Hall.

All kinds of proposals were put forth, but the one that stuck in the minds of most people was a march or demonstration by the Unemployed Councils to put the fat cats on notice so they would know what we stood for. It was agreed that we should march on one of the Big Three.

But I am getting a little ahead of myself. The Unemployed Councils did do some things prior to the march. For instance, landlords used to send people to evict people and move their furniture out onto the street, but wherever there was an Unemployed Council, we would go and move the furniture back in. I have some pictures of myself, Chris Alston, Jimmy

Neoff (a Bulgarian), Nate Koffman (a Jew), Gabe Zukoff (an Eastern European), and Max Rodriguez (a Mexican), all of us together putting people back in their homes. I don't think you have ever seen, and I hope you never will see, people being evicted in December and January in Detroit. It was snowing like hell. I remember one time it was snowing hard, and an evicted woman was actually having a baby on the sidewalk with other women around her, wondering if they had enough blankets to cover up the woman having a baby! I don't think you ever saw something like that. That happened here in Detroit, but not only in Detroit – all across the land.

The conditions were so bad and working people had suffered so much that they had reached a point where anything could happen. This helped speed up the momentum of the Unemployed Councils. A display of unity between all the people – Black, white, religious, and political, just about everyone – was shown. Because all of us were suffering the same fate: hunger, poverty, unemployment, needing medical care etc. It still makes me mad as hell when I remember the conditions working people had to go through during the Depression before the Unemployed Councils and the Hunger March took place.

I hope you never will witness what people went through. People would go down to the old Eastern Market and pick up half-rotten white potatoes or sweet potatoes, lettuce and cabbage, whatever the farmers were throwing away. That was the source of food for many people, picking up a half-rotten banana or a half-rotten potato, any kind of half-rotten vegetables, to bring home so your mama could make a meal out of it. I came from a family of seven boys and two girls, and the older boys had to leave home. Whatever food there was, was left for the younger ones. David Moore, and a lot of other David Moore's went very hungry at that time. But we tried to make it possible for our moms and dads and brothers and sisters to eat. We'd go out and try to salvage whatever we could from the stores and street corners, wherever different kinds of food – discarded vegetables and meat – had been thrown out because they couldn't sell it. That's how we got together a meal for ourselves.

But to get back to the Unemployed Councils. They grew out of this desperation: the hunger, the poverty, the suffering, the death, the untold misery that working people were going through, especially Black people. The Blacks were always at the bottom of the economic ladder, but when the Depression hit we were pushed off the bottom of that ladder, and the white working people came down to where we had been. We were down on the ground. As [Black labor union leader of the National Labor Union in the 1860s and 1870s] Isaac Myers told us: The same chains that bound

Black people in physical slavery bind white folks in economic slavery. That means that when economic slavery came to get the white folks as well as the Black, the working white folks dropped down to where we Blacks had always been, and the Black folks got pushed right down to the ground. Now we were all suffering the same economic plight. But out of the desperation and trials that we all had to go through – and when I say all of us, I am talking about white people as well – a rebellious attitude began to develop.



1932 DETROIT HUNGER MARCH

That rebellious attitude went into the Unemployed Councils. Not only did it go into the Unemployed Councils, but that rebellious attitude began to solidify into a demand for action by the Unemployed Councils. It was therefore decided by the leaders of every Unemployed Council that there should be a march on the fat cats. The question was should we march on their homes out in Grosse Point and North Detroit, on Chicago and Boston Boulevard? Or should we march on their manufacturing sites? Some said, “Let’s march on GM, it’s the biggest one.” Others said that GM had plants scattered all over Detroit, Hamtramck and Flint. Some said Chrysler was the same situation. Then there were those who said, “Let’s march on Ford, because Ford has one location, the Rouge – it’s the smaller plant. But the biggest majority of Ford workers and those who were suffering the most worked at the Rouge. So let’s have a march on Ford.” After much

discussion and differences of opinion, it was finally decided that we would march on Ford. This resulted in what we now call the Hunger March.

On the day of the march itself, March 7, 1932, all of the Detroit Unemployed Councils gathered on Russell and Ferry Street, here on the East Side. All of the Unemployed Councils in Hamtramck gathered at Yemans Hall. We had an agreement with all the outlying Councils that Detroit would lead off from Ferry and Russell and march over to Woodward, and that Hamtramck and Highland Park could join us when we hit Woodward Avenue. When those of us on Russell and Ferry marched west to Woodward and then south on Woodward, the momentum began to swell. Highland Park showed up. Hamtramck showed up. And there were also a lot of other individuals standing on the sidewalks who began to join in. We had three guys beating drums, four saxophones, two trumpets, and some guys with guitars up in front. It was a sight never before seen in Detroit and one that has never been seen since. We went all the way down Woodward Avenue until we got to the old City Hall.

At that time, the old City Hall in Detroit was located on Michigan and Woodward Avenues. We had a mayor then by the name of Frank Murphy. He was kind of a liberal guy. Mayor Murphy came out and waved at us and said, "I'm with you all the way," and raised his hand like that. That sent up a big yell. He said, "I'm going to have an escort for you guys." He assigned two motorcycle policemen to escort us down Michigan Avenue to Vernor Highway, where the old Detroit train station is today, and from there all the way down to Dix Avenue, which led us into Dearborn.

When we got to Baby Creek Park in Dearborn, that's where the Dearborn police stopped us. By the way, as the march got underway, a lot of people joined in to march with us. Whether they were members of the Unemployed Councils or not I don't know. Detroit, Hamtramck, and Highland Park alone had 4,000 people. By the time we got to the outskirts of Dearborn, the Detroit police said, "We wish you luck," and turned and came back to Detroit. On the other side of the Rouge River, there on Miller Road and Dix, the down-river delegations, Inkster, River Rouge, and Romulus, had all gathered to join the march. When we got to Miller Road and Dix Avenue, about 30 policemen on motorcycles and horses and in cars arrived. They asked a guy by the name of Al Goetz and Bill McKie, who were leaders of the march, if they had a permit to demonstrate in Dearborn, and they said, "Hell no!" The police said, "You'd better go and apply for one because you can't go any further. We advise you to go back to Detroit or whatever community you come from."

Goetz then got up on a milk crate, along with Bill McKie and a guy named Nelson Davis (a Black guy), and a fellow by the name of Veal Clough (a Black guy). Goetz led it off by saying, “For all of those who did not hear what the police have just told us, I’m going to speak as loud as I can.” There were thousands of people there at that time. The streets were completely blocked, and I know all of them could not hear, because they didn’t have any loudspeakers or anything. Goetz told them that we had been informed that we couldn’t go any farther, and that we had been told to go back to our own communities until we got a permit. Now we had already applied for a permit three weeks ago, and the city of Dearborn had said that we could not have one.

So here we are on Miller Road within three minutes of the Rouge plant itself. Do we go forward or do we go back? That was the question Goetz asked. There was a big outcry: “Forward! Forward! Forward!” Goetz turned to the police and said, “You heard the answer. I’m not going to turn my back on these people who have suffered so much to get here.” So we decided to march on.

They turned the water hose on us first. That didn’t stop us. We kept going. Then they had about eight mounted policemen come through to break our ranks. That didn’t stop us. We got within about 40 or 50 yards of the Ford employment office on Miller Road when three cars came roaring out the gate. One guy had a machine gun over his shoulder, riding on the running board of the car. I don’t know what the other guy had on the passenger side, but this guy was standing on the driver’s side. There were three or four other cars that followed them. All of a sudden gunshots were heard. People began to scream and scatter. There were five guys who got killed – four of them were white and one of them Black.

One thing that absolutely showed the true nature of the horrible scene that occurred that day was when a Black woman in the March by the name of Mattie Woodson tore off a piece of her dress and leaned down to wipe the blood off the neck of one of the white guys who had been shot. They only published that picture one time. From that day on, the Ford Motor Company would not let that picture be published.

You have to understand the power of Henry Ford and the Ford Motor Company. He owned the city of Dearborn. All of the policemen in the police department of Dearborn had sworn an oath to uphold and protect the Ford Motor Company. All the firemen they hired had sworn an oath to do all they could to protect the Ford Motor Company. All the politicians on the city council and the elected officials in Dearborn got elected by means

of the money and the approval of the Ford Motor Company. You've got to understand the awesome power that the Ford Motor Company wielded over the city of Dearborn. The city of Dearborn at that time was completely controlled financially, politically, and by whatever means there were by the Ford Motor Company.

Five young people in the bloom of life, in their teens and early twenties, just beginning to see life, were lying dead on Miller Road. To this day, no charges have been brought against Ford Motor Company or anyone else. I ask why those five people down there on Miller Road – that's what the word is – murdered; they weren't shot; they were murdered by machine gun and pistol fire. To this day, while you and I are talking, the Ford Motor Company has never been investigated. The Ford Motor Company has never been charged. The Ford Motor Company has never had to answer why they killed those five people. Can you imagine? Nobody among the marchers had guns to kill them with. They were killed by company agents at the orders of the Ford Motor Company. And to this day, no one has ever officially accused the Ford Motor Company of any wrongdoing.



THE DAILY VIOLENCE FACED BY WORKERS AND ORGANIZERS
DURING UNION ORGANIZING CAMPAIGNS, 1937

Out of that mass murder, and after all the injuries people suffered – people died later on from bullet wounds – there came a day of reckoning that nobody ever believed would happen. Instead of saddening us and

making us feel that there was no hope, it only intensified the spirit in those souls who braved not only the power of the Ford Motor Company, but braved the wintry weather, and to take that long march from Detroit all the way to the city of Dearborn, to try to bring to the attention of the people of this country the conditions which the working people were suffering under, and who was to blame for it. The murders on Miller Road only intensified our efforts to continue to struggle, to gain some recognition of our rights from the fat cats of the auto industry and other industries, not only here in the city of Detroit, but throughout the country.

Did we succeed? Did we pay a price? Most certainly we paid a price to the Ford Motor Company in Dearborn. And yes, all over this land people were murdered, shot, injured, deprived, denied, and crucified during the Depression of the 1930's.

Let's go back to the Hunger March, and see what happened in the city of Detroit. The determination not only of those who were in the Hunger March, but also of those who were not there but had read or heard about it was doubly intensified among the people of Detroit and in outlying towns and suburbs like Hamtramck, Highland Park, and Inkster. The momentum kept building and building. From 1932 on up until 1937, for five years in a row, the momentum, the anger, and the resentment of working people from all these areas, but especially in Detroit, began to show itself on street corners, in churches, in the fraternal lodges, in poolrooms. Wherever people gathered, you were certain to hear a conversation against the status quo and about how working people were being mistreated.



PAUL ROBESON, INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED PERFORMER, LAWYER, ATHLETE, AND SOCIAL ACTIVIST, HELPED TO RECRUIT BLACK WORKERS TO THE UNION IN DETROIT

The makings of a revolution were at hand. It seemed as if a revolution was going to take place, and there was no power that could stop it. Adding to the possibility of a revolution was what was taking place down in Anaconda, Maryland where World War I veterans from all parts of the country, of all nationalities and all races, were gathered. The federal government had promised to pay them a bonus in 1918 under Woodrow Wilson. They had come up with all kind of excuses for why they would not. It wasn't that they could not, but that they would not pay.

I had an uncle who served in the 93rd Infantry Division in France during World War I. He along with others in the Detroit delegation had marched all the way to Anaconda. There you had ex-soldiers who had fought World War I, who had willingly put up their lives to defend their country and to defend those fat cats who were now saying, "Hell no, you can go hungry for all we care. We don't give a damn whether your starve or live, you're not getting any bonus." From all parts of the country, World War I veterans converged right outside of Washington, DC in Anaconda, Maryland to get their bonus, protesting a promise that had not been kept.

At that time, the president was Herbert Hoover. His position was that prosperity was just around the corner. Pretty soon you were going to have two cars in every garage, and there'd be a chicken in every pot. Those were the words he spoke. But there weren't any cars, because the auto factories were all shut down, and the chickens were just as hungry as we were. You couldn't find a chicken, and you damn sure couldn't buy a car.

Let's get back to the possibility of a revolution. An order was given by Herbert Hoover to the federal troops to take action to evict the World War I veterans from the area of Washington, DC. Here you had father against son and brother against brother, going into battle against veterans of World War I with orders from the President of the United States to kill if necessary those who resisted. It was a situation similar to what we had faced during the Hunger March. That was the seed that had been unknowingly planted by the fat cats and was providing fertile ground for a revolution to take place. At that time, after events like the hunger march and the bonus march had happened, you had individuals and a wide variety of organizations all preaching the same gospel: We must have, and we will have, a better government than the one we have today.

Now I know that some people aren't going to believe me when I say that a revolution was about to take place. But those who disagree with me never lived through the times that I am talking about. They don't have any idea of the suffering and the trials and tribulations that working

people, Black and white, had to go through for so many years under the rule of those who owned the mines, the mills, and the factories. In other words, the fat cats had everything and the working people had nothing. The banks had closed, so those people who had a few bucks in the bank couldn't get it.

Through all of this, I must say, those of the socialist and communist movements really made an important contribution. Not only did they make their contribution but they gave their lives. Because those who gave everything they had, including life itself, sacrificing it to the Ford Motor Company on the Hunger March. Most of those who died were Young Communists. Not all of the people who participated in the March were communists, but I would certainly say that the Communist Party provided some very important leadership, and they were accepted as leaders. At that time it wasn't about what party you belonged to, what religion you had, or what your beliefs were, it was about how we could do what we needed to do to help each other out from the bondage and deprivation, caused by the elected leaders of this country and those who owned them, the bosses.

It would take me two days to give you the complete story of what happened with the Unemployed Councils and the Hunger March, as well as what happened after the Hunger March. It was those bodies and souls on the Hunger March who helped open the door for better working conditions for the working men and women, and who later brought in the trade union movement in 1937 and on through the early forties. It couldn't have happened without the help and sacrifice of those bodies and souls who took part in the Hunger March and the Unemployed Councils. Because the trade union movement here in Detroit grew out of the Unemployed Councils and the Hunger March. The ideas and actions of all those souls on the Hunger March and in the Unemployed Councils spread not only to the leadership but also in the rank and file during the Big Three organizing drive. Many of those who were active in the Unemployed Councils and the Hunger March were also active in organizing the unions at Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler.

I would say that without the help of these people and their ideas it would have taken much longer to organize the Big Three. I'll give you a couple of examples: Bill McKie, Nelson Davis, Veal Clough, Roy Narochik, Nat Ganley, John Gallo, Mattie Woodson, all those men and women, Black and white. Not only were they among those who took part in the Unemployed Councils and the march on Ford, but they were instrumental in starting the trade union movement here in the city of Detroit when the

push was made to organize the Big Three. All of those I've just mentioned and many more – like Dorothy Knight and Charlotte Neal, she's still living, and many others: Tom Colbert, he's gone; Coleman Young is gone; Bill McKie and Nelson Davis are gone. Ed Lock is gone. Johnny Gallo is gone. But what they did lives on.



LEON BATES HANDING OUT UAW LITERATURE DURING THE 1941 ORGANIZING DRIVE AT FORD'S RIVER ROUGE PLANT

The list goes on and on. Those few of us who are still here will never forget and never apologize. We will never get on our knees or beg for forgiveness for what we said or did. If we had to do it again, I for one – and I know the few of us who are left agree with me – we would do it again and with even more intensity. Because what we did so many years ago opened the door that made it possible for working people to demand and receive better treatment than they had prior to the Unemployed Councils, the march on Ford, and the organizing of the unions here at the Big Three in Detroit, along with all the other marches and organizing efforts throughout the country. You know, I could go on preaching this sermon for three days!

The preceding was an excerpt from an interview originally published in Political Affairs. View it online at <http://www.politicalaffairs.net/article/articleview/4952/1/246>

REFORM: ROOSEVELT STYLE

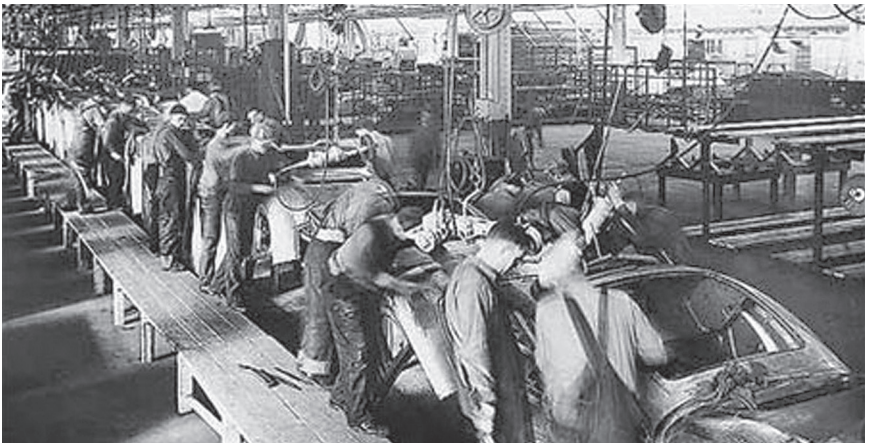
Franklin Delano Roosevelt won his first of four presidential elections in 1932. When Roosevelt took office March 4, 1933, the Nazi Party had been in power 32 days. A full quarter – 25 percent – of the workforce were unemployed. Farmers were in deep trouble as prices fell by 60 percent. Industrial production had fallen by more than half since 1929. Two million were flat out homeless. Sensing their interests as a class, tens of thousands of workers joined the Communist Party of America.

Roosevelt’s political grouping understood clearly America could not enter a world war and produce the steel, planes, tanks and trains if the factory floors continued to be war zones. They also realized if the state violently suppressed the strike wave sweeping the industrial work force, this would not only lead to a blood bath, it would make national unity impossible.

Roosevelt’s polices were designed to meet the major demands of the working class and stabilize the country. Roosevelt’s reform of the system was genuine and made a difference.

The “New Deal administration,” among other things, established General Assistance, work programs, pushed through the Social Security Act, and later, in most states, set up single welfare programs for individuals to sustain themselves during economic downturns. The New Deal programs were later consolidated during the tremendous expansion of capitalism after World War II.

Of particular importance was the National Labor Relations Act, signed by President Roosevelt into law on July 5, 1935. The NLRA, or Wagner Act, was designed not just to tolerate unions, but to encourage them. The Wagner Act protected workers’ rights to bargain collectively.



AUTOWORKERS ON THE ASSEMBLY LINE IN THE 1930'S

Before the Wagner Act, a right to join a union in the workplace without reprisal did not exist in the United States. By making unions legal, the Wagner Act unleashed the union movement. Four months after FDR signed the Wagner Act, the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) was formed. Seven months after the NLRA became law, the first sit-down strike took place – at Firestone Plant One in Akron. Between 1936 and 1939, American workers engaged in 583 sit-down strikes of at least one day’s duration. The most notable was the 1936-37 sit-down strike in Flint, Michigan, which resulted in the recognition of the United Auto Workers as the sole bargaining agent and led to a wave of other such recognitions across the country. However, while the Wagner Act unleashed unionization, it also corralled the very unions whose existence it guaranteed. This singular legal document relegated labor unrest to the legal arena. The Roosevelt administration exacted an agreement from the unions to cease all wildcat strikes and go to the National Labor Relations Board to resolve disputes. In this period, some workers continued to wildcat.

Increasingly, their workplace power was undermined by the very trade union leaders who had previously fought side by side with them against the brutality of the corporations and the state, but who had accepted this compromise, one that reflected an orientation to fight for a section of the working class, but not for the working class as a whole.

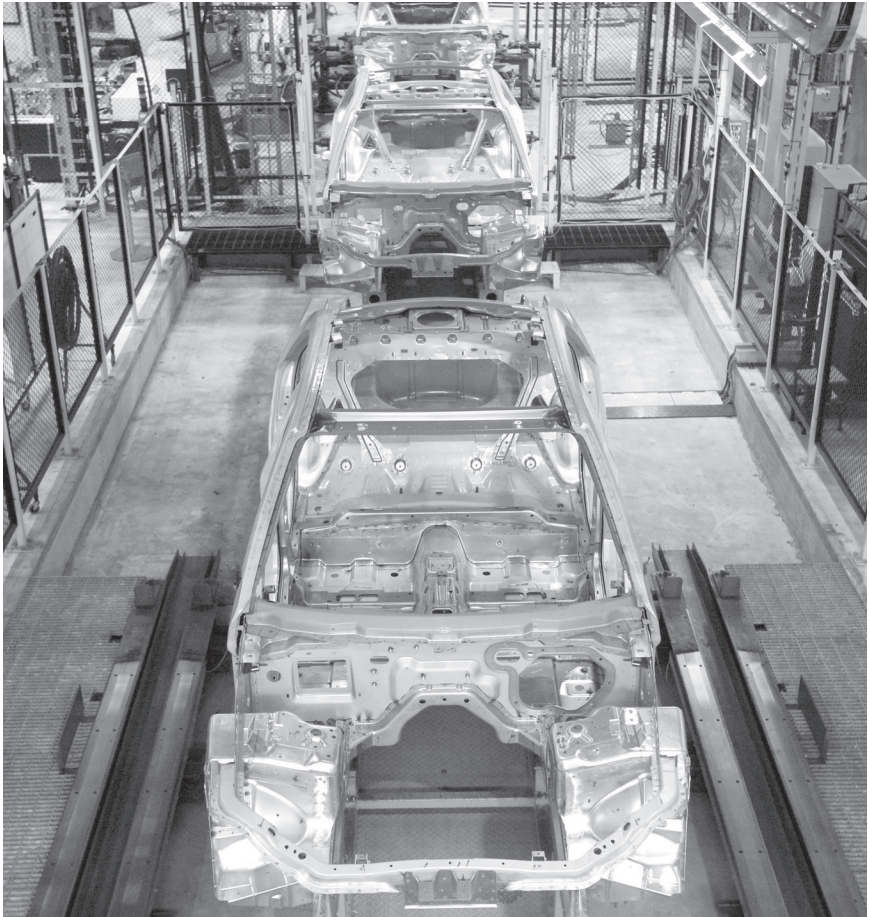
BLACK POWER MOVEMENT GROWS OUT OF CIVIL RIGHTS

Mechanized agriculture drove 11 million people off the land and into the city searching for work. This new concentration of Blacks became the base of a new mass movement against legal segregation enforcing the second-class citizenship status of Blacks. Segregation forced the Blacks into the lower rung of the industrial social order. The shattering and destruction of legal segregation meant Blacks’ entry into the political system. Black Power was the fight for political control of the “city machine” in the North and the local political jurisdictions in the South. Beneath the color form of the struggle was the fight to control the city machine or the system of spoils and payoffs in every American city. Jobs in the police force and all levels of governments and city services are at stake. Awarding contracts for city services involves more than the actual workers hired, and requires the system of lawyers, accountants and land speculators every time a new road is built or a new housing development is proposed. In Detroit the Civil Rights Movement and then its Black Power phase, expressed the drive of the city’s industrial proletariat.

FROM INDUSTRIAL TO ELECTRONIC PRODUCTION

The post-World War II years saw a boom in the auto, appliance, and furniture industries which grew along with the housing boom which had been made possible by the G.I. Bill. With every cyclical crisis of overproduction in the 1960s and 1970s, new labor-replacing devices were introduced into production.

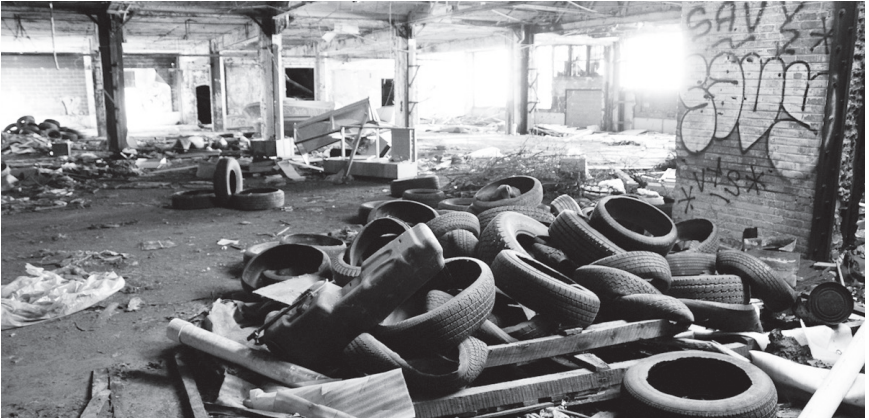
The 1980s marked a rapid increase in the use of labor-replacing devices, with devastating social effects. There were massive plant closures across Michigan. Housing, neighborhoods, hospitals, clinics, and local grocery stores were destroyed. There was a wholesale rise of homelessness, and a flight of employees from the state of Michigan which further lowered the standard of living of the workers.



AUTOMATED AUTO PLANT IN LANSING, MICHIGAN

As the crisis deepened in the 1990s, due to more automation and the use of robotics, and as a globalized labor market developed, it became clear that the government would not provide social programs for workers when the capitalists no longer needed them.

The government of Michigan responded to the growing poverty with the elimination of the General Assistance program, throwing thousands of people into the streets, and closing mental health facilities and other state-sponsored services. This destroyed entire cities.



ABANDONED PACKARD AUTO FACTORY STANDS IN RUINS IN DETROIT

The welfare reform program of Michigan acted as a model for passing the national welfare reform program under President Bill Clinton. This signaled the beginning of the end of government responsibility to the poor. The reason there was not massive resistance and protest – there was some – was that most workers believed the system would recover. Such had been the case in the past and many thought recovery of decent wages would return. This has not been the case.



PROTEST AGAINST WATER SHUTOFFS. UP TO 45,000 HOMES HAVE HAD THEIR WATER CUT OFF IN THE DETROIT AREA

2010: AMERICA AT THE FORK IN THE ROAD

Today, as Detroit struggles with a deepening economic crisis, it is more clear than ever that the whole world is undergoing a profound economic revolution. While electronics-based production makes possible abundance for all, under capitalism it creates massive permanent unemployment and underemployment. It results in the widespread growth of poverty for the many and unheard of wealth for the few.

More than this, applying electronics to production fractures the very foundation of the capitalist system. Electronics (the computer and the robot) creates a new class of people who no longer have ties to the capitalist system. They range from employed workers who are barely surviving at part-time, contingency and below-minimum wage jobs to the permanently unemployed, millions of whom are utterly destitute and homeless. This new class created by electronics cannot solve its problems without the public ownership of the socially necessary means of production and the distribution of the social product according to need. Their problems can only be solved by the creation of a cooperative society.

Electronic production sets the stage for the death of capitalism. Yet capitalism won't die without a fight. The fight is over which class will wield the political power to shape society in its image. The new class created by electronics needs political power to achieve its goals.



THOUSANDS OF DETROIT RESIDENTS WAIT TO APPLY FOR HOUSING AND UTILITY PAYMENT ASSISTANCE FROM THE CITY OF DETROIT (ABOVE AND RIGHT)

The American people are approaching the fork in the road where they must decide what kind of country they want and how they intend to achieve it. We cannot for long continue the path we are on. Five major banks practically control the economy, racking up billions in profit every month while tens of millions of workers are unemployed or underemployed. Industrial production is declining around the world as millions find themselves unable to buy more than bare necessities. Electronic technology in the hands of those interested only in profit is accelerating the polarization of wealth and poverty. Today, America's richest 1 percent holds more wealth – over \$2 trillion more – than America's entire bottom 90 percent.



The polarization of wealth and poverty forces polarization in society and its political life. This concentration of wealth has to come from somewhere. Part comes from taking more from the defenseless poor in the form of cutting services. Most of it comes from the ongoing destruction of the broad economic middle class. This middle class has played an important role in the shaping of America. They owned small businesses or worked at stable, well paying jobs. They purchased property and dabbled in the stock market. With one foot in the capitalist class and the other in the working class, they held the nation together, making democracy both possible and necessary.

This concentration of wealth creates privilege and privilege is hostile to democracy. Each stage of polarization chipped away at what democracy there was until today it threatens to completely destroy it.

The destruction of democracy comes through the merger of the corporations and the government. This merger isn't someone's idea. As wealth concentrates it has to buy up the government as it buys up the nation. It is the only way the capitalist system and private property can continue.



MICHIGAN AUTO WORKERS PROTEST GENERAL MOTORS AND DELPHI

Economic polarization is expressed politically. The ruling class would like us to think that the deepening political polarization is between the two major parties. It is not. It is between the whole political establishment and the growing, discontented mass of people who are beginning to understand they are threatened by an economic system that has turned against them.

The American people are awakening. As with all awakenings there is confusion. The people are used to listening to and following their enemy. This time, their actual conditions – losing their jobs and homes – makes them open to other views. This is the moment for revolutionaries to boldly step forward and explain to the people where each of these forks in the road will lead. One fork – the fascist road advocated by the spokespersons of the corporations – leads to the destruction of democracy, to political repression, to the destruction of the ecology and to unending war. The other fork, the road to socialism, leads to co-operation instead of competition, to peace and an orderly world where humanity can finally separate itself from the animal kingdom.

This is the moment of decision. Will the corporations take over society and run it in their interest, or will the people take over the corporations and run them in the interest of society? The future is up to us.



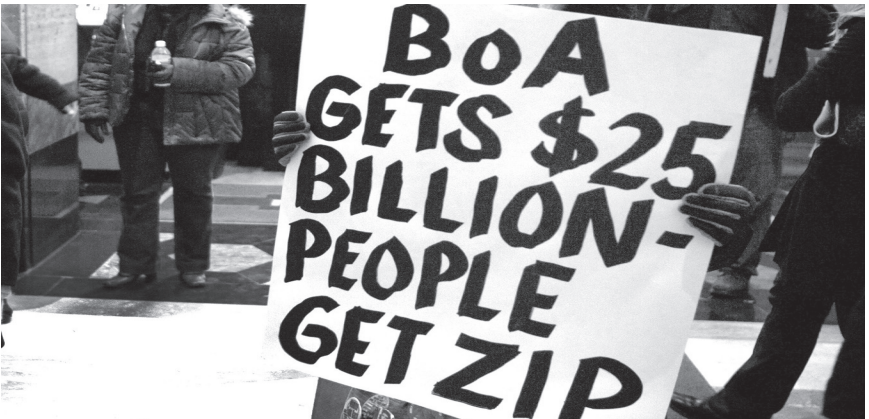
MICHIGAN AUTOWORKERS PROTEST LAYOFFS



PROTEST AT DTE ENERGY IN DETROIT. ORGANIZERS ESTIMATE THAT 27,000 DETROIT HOMES HAD LIGHTS AND GAS CUT OFF



AUTOMATED FACTORIES HAVE LED TO MASSIVE LAYOFFS (ABOVE)
PROTESTERS FROM MORATORIUM NOW! COALITION TO STOP FORCLOSURES AND EVICTIONS IN DETROIT (BELOW)



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Waistline is a retired Chrysler worker, former union activist and union representative, and grandfather dedicated to educating about how and why the system of capitalism must pass over to a new system of production. He advocates for a “Third Edition of the American Revolution: Proletarian Revolution.”

FROM THE EDITORS:

ABOUT THE PEOPLE’S TRIBUNE

The People’s Tribune is devoted to the proposition that an economic system that can’t or won’t feed, clothe and house its people ought to be and will be changed. To that end, the paper is a tribune of the people. It is the voice of millions struggling for survival. It strives to educate politically those millions on the basis of their own experience. It is a tribune to bring them together, to create a vision of a better world, and a strategy to achieve it.

We find ourselves at a historic moment as labor-replacing technology leads us on a path toward the decisive reconstruction of society. Who will win – the capitalists or the growing mass of poor – will depend on winning the hearts and minds of the people to create a society whose fruits benefit all.

We offer our pages as a vehicle for the new ideas rooted in our reality, and to be the voice of those who seek to raise the consciousness of society. Let us gather our collective experience, intelligence and commitment to bring forth a vision that changes America into a society “by the people, of the people, for the people.”

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P.O. Box 3524

Chicago, Illinois 60654

e-mail: info@peoplestribune.org

Phone: 773-486-3551

Toll Free: 800-691-6888

Fax: 773-486-3552

www.PeoplesTribune.org

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The Tribuno del Pueblo, sister publication to the People's Tribune, is a bilingual publication that addresses both the English-speaking and the Spanish-speaking revolutionaries. It is devoted to the proposition that an economic system that can't or won't feed, clothe, and house its people ought to be and will be changed. It is the voice of millions struggling for survival. It is a tribune to bring people together, to create a vision of a better world, and a strategy to achieve it.

Tribuno del Pueblo

P. O. Box 3524

Chicago, Illinois 60654

Email: tribunodelpueblo@tribunodelpueblo.org

Phone: 773-486-3551

Toll Free: 800-691-6888

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