

WE MAKE OUR OWN HISTORY



A PORTRAIT OF THE UAW

A FAIR SHARE FOR WORKERS

For four years during World War II, UAW members had worked under a no-strike pledge with few economic improvements. Now, with profits up and the war over, they demanded a wage increase from GM. When the company balked, the workers struck for 113 days. Returning veterans, like these in Linden, New Jersey, often marched on the picket lines in unHonn, (opposite page).



**Kaiser
Ford
Chrysler
and now GM!**



Across America, workers and returning veterans danced in the streets and marched in ticker-tape parades to celebrate the end of World War II and the triumph over fascism. But for the thousands of UAW members who had fought on the battlefields and worked in the factories, the end of the war raised new questions.

What could be done to provide work for the soldiers coming home after four years of war? How would America maintain employment for the thousands of women - the Rosies the Riveters and others - who had come to count on their jobs financially and psychologically? When could workers see increases in their paychecks to make up for the wartime wage curbs they'd endured?

Solutions had to be found quickly. Falling defense production had created four million layoffs within 30 days of V-J day. At a UAW-represented Ford bomber plant in Willow Run, Michigan alone, 10,000 UAW members suddenly lost their jobs.

For the UAW, some answers were found in a bold proposal to create a million jobs in the auto industry by reconvert defense plants back to peacetime production. Just as the country had swiftly converted auto plants into production of tanks and airplanes at the beginning of the war against Germany, Italy, and Japan, so now, the UAW reasoned, conversion could be used to wage war on unemployment.

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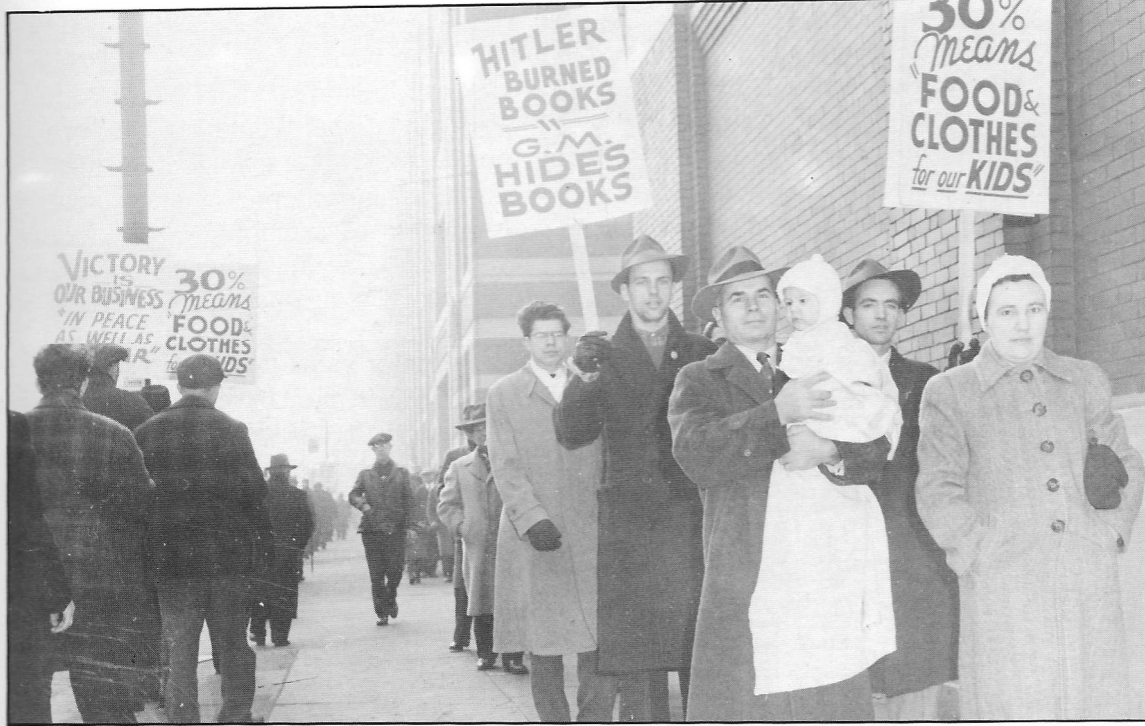


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From November 21 1945 until March 13, 1946, UAW members across country struck GM, battling the world's most powerful corporation in a fight for economic justice. On picket signs, in the press, and on the radio, they pointed out that GM's enormous profits could pennit it to increase wages without increasing prices, and challenged the company to open its books. They won strong support from other unionists, like the New Yorkers (center) who donated food. At bottom, strikers, some of them returning veterans, get coffee and refreshments at a Local 157 strike kitchen on Detroit's west side.



1945

UAW strikes Ford of Canada for 99 days, winning Rand Ponnula for union security.

1945-46

Union strikes General Motors for 113 days demanding postwar wage increase. Contract provides 18 cents an hour in wage increases, dues check-off, other gains.

1946

Walter Reuther elected fourth UAW President.

1946

UAW establishes Agricultural-Implement Dept.

1947

Six paid holidays established in GM contract, setting pattern for other companies.

1948

UAW wins first Annual Improvement Factor (AIF) raise, recognizing workers' contribution to regular productivity increases, and Cost-of-Living-Allowance (COLA) at General Motors.

1948

First contract negotiated with Caterpillar Tractor.

1949

First employer-paid and jointly administered pension program won by UAW at Ford Motor Co.

1949

UAW urges auto industry to design and build "A Motor Car Named Desire," a new small car to open up market to more working people.

1950

Chrysler workers win pensions, following 104-day strike under slogan, "Too Old To Work, Too Young To Die..."

1950

UAW wins union shop at GM.

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had won a 99-day strike against Ford for union security rights.

The GM strike and other events propelled Walter Reuther, a young UAW vice-president and director of the union's GM Dept, toward increasing prominence in the union. At the beginning of the war, it had been Reuther who had developed the plan to convert the auto industry into defense production. Reuther and his brother Victor also had helped develop the post-war reconversion plan. A tool-and-die worker whose union organizing activities led back to 1932 when he was fired from Ford, Reuther had been an early member of UAW Local 174 on Detroit's West Side, had helped organize Kelsey-Hayes Wheel Co. during the 1936 sitdown there, and was elected to the union's executive board that same year. In 1939, he had played a key role in developing the "strategy strike" of tool-and-die workers against GM.

Now, as the 1946 convention opened, just days after the GM victory, Reuther successfully challenged R. J. Thomas for the presidency, winning the election by a narrow margin. A year later, he was overwhelmingly reelected and Emil Mazey joined him as Secretary-Treasurer. Both of them were leaders with strong social vision. Reuther and Mazey made sure the UAW would be more than a simple "bread-and-butter" organization. For years to come, the two worked to strengthen the UAW's social conscience as they spoke out on issues of war and peace, freedom, and justice.

Walter Reuther rides on the shoulders of supporters at the 1946 UAW convention, after defeating incumbent R. J. Thomas to become the union's fourth president. Reuther, one admirer declared, was the only person he knew who could "reminisce about the future."



In 1948, the union again faced GM across the bargaining table. This time, without a strike, workers won two historic "firsts" that would set a pattern for years to come: a wage agreement providing an annual improvement factor based on increased technological productivity, and a cost-of-living allowance (COLA) to protect workers against runaway inflation.

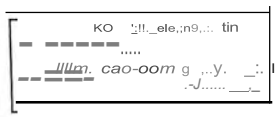
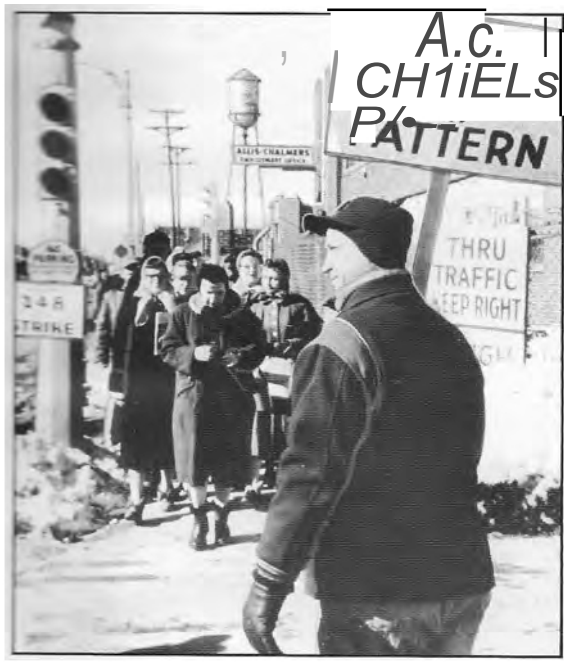
Years of major gains for union workers followed. In 1949, the UAW, under the slogan "Too Old To Work, Too Young To Die," and with public opinion behind its demands, won the first employer-paid pension program in a mass-production industry, at Ford Motor Co., and later, following a 104-day strike, the same at Chrysler. In 1950, GM agreed to the pension pattern, and employers in aircraft, and parts and supplier plants followed.

The new decade also brought a major challenge to the union: a bitter strike at the Kohler Co., a Wisconsin manufacturer of plumbing fixtures. For over seven years, union members walked the picketline and fought in the courts as Kohler steadfastly refused to negotiate a new contract. Finally, after losing before the U.S. Supreme Court, the company returned to the bargaining table and a contract was ratified in 1962. Three years later, the union won a total of \$4.5 million in back pay and pension credits that meant settlements of \$1,000 to \$10,000 for each eligible Kohler striker.

In 1955, the union took a major step to-



In 1949, UAW-Ford members struck and won a fully-funded pension program, setting a pattern for the industry. Pickets at Ford's River Rouge plant (top left) get dippers of ice-water on a sweltering, 90-degree day May 7, 1949. Strikes also occurred at Allis-Chalmers (center left) and elsewhere; meanwhile the union helped thousands organize, like the new Albion members, center right. At Kohler Co. in Wisconsin, UAW members began a seven-year-long strike. UAW Secretary-Treasurer Emil Mazey (bottom photo, left foreground) visits the Kohler UAW strike kitchen. After losing in the courts, Kohler sent a \$3 million check (below) in partial settlement of its back-pay obligations to strikers.





Still recovering from wounds suffered during an assassination attempt, UAW President Walter Reuther shakes hands with Ford executive John Bugas after an all-night bargaining session led to agreement on a contract in 1948.

ward a guaranteed wage by winning, first at Ford and later at GM and Chrysler, the first supplemental unemployment benefit (SUB) program, keyed to boosting workers' incomes during layoff. In the years since, SUB became a major guarantor of income security for hundreds of thousands of workers as the principle spread throughout many industries and benefited workers in many different unions. Barely twenty years after its founding, the UAW had brought the promise of a more secure income to its members, had made giant strides toward a fairer distribution of wealth, and had expanded the voice of

organized workers in local, state, and national political forums.

Parallel with bargaining gains, the UAW's organizing efforts grew. More workers in agricultural implement plants, aircraft, and parts and supplier shops joined the UAW, and white-collar membership in the union multiplied. On the political front, the UAW joined other CIO and AFL unions to support President Truman's vigorous opposition to the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Law, passed over Truman's veto by a Republican Congress in 1947. A year later, the UAW gave its backing to Truman's successful re-election campaign, which opened to a crowd of thousands in Detroit's Cadillac Square.

Meanwhile, the UAW strengthened internal democracy by creating, in 1957, a Public Review Board, an independent agency empowered to act on complaints of unjust treatment brought by rank-and-file members against the union or its officers.

As the union celebrated its first quarter century in 1960, it had brought economic justice to millions of workers and their families, set new standards for worker democracy, and become a forceful voice for social progress.

'A MOTOR CAR NAMED DESIRE'

UAW President Walter Reuther believed that workers had a right to help shape the nation's economic destiny. He frequently called for joint labor, management, government, consumer and farmer input into national economic planning. Neither the scorn of Big Business nor the opposition of conservative politicians dimmed his enthusiasm for contributing to national economic debates.

In 1949, as the big auto firms kept churning out huge, luxury cars that many workers couldn't afford, the UAW called on management to create a new, lighter, less expensive car. It would open up auto ownership to more people, cost less to maintain, and generate more sales and jobs. The companies ignored the union's suggestion — and two decades later, when the oil crisis erupted, many wished they had followed Reuther's advice. Here are excerpts from the

UAW's 1949 call for "A Motor Car Named Desire:"

A light car can be made cheaply; it would cost less and conserve national resources. but with auto monopolists, profits come before peoples' needs.

Do Americans want a small car? Can low-cost light cars be built in the U.S.A.?

The technical people, the car-hungry people, even the bankers see the light, but GM doesn't. *GM Folks* (December, 1948) says, "folks in the U.S. are inclined to like flash and dash. Because of that, the popular American cars are big, fast, high-powered, advanced in styling, and sparkle with chrome."

Out in the plant parking lot — those jalopies are un-American. But GM overlooked this fact: The Average American Car is a 1940 model with 40,000 miles on it. GM and the other auto manufacturers are guilty of diverting scarce steel into larger super cylinder and luxury cars in the face of

the need and desire of most people for smaller, lighter cars.

More expensive super models for the rich mean fewer cars for most people. The refusal of auto industrialists to produce cars for use instead of for profit is reflected in Federal Reserve Board car purchasing statistics. From year to year, fewer and fewer cars, new or old, are being purchased by the rank-and-file American.

While the auto companies build bigger, flashier, more expensive cars for people making over \$5,000 a year, wage earners are rationed fewer and fewer cars, and most of them jalopies.

The suggested price to dealers of the Motor Car Named Desire would be \$1,000 (compared to \$2,782 for a Buick Roadmaster, or \$1,560 for a Ford 89-A or \$1,492 for a Chevrolet Fleetline). Obviously the lower down payment, the lower monthly payments, and the lower maintenance costs would expand the market

for new cars by hundreds of thousands of families . . .

(But) an analysis of the light car leads to the same answer you get when you analyze any other major economic problem: preventing the flow of adequate goods and services to the people, are the Boys in the Backroom at the Waldorf, the Masterminds of Monopoly:

They have decided to keep electric power production profitable and high cost and insufficient; to keep house costly; to keep automobiles luxurious; and to plan steel production so there is just enough steel to fabricate another depression.

You can file the facts about the low-cost light car under the People's Needs.

Monopolies are organized economic power without social responsibility.

On the agenda for monopolies, People's Needs are not listed.

Monopolies are organized to increase profits, not to meet human needs.

Walter Reuther generates a spirited reaction during this 1951 strike meeting at the Fairchild aircraft plant in Maryland. Below, Chrysler employees picket during a 104-day strike which won them a pension program. The strike's slogan was "Too Old To Work, Too Young To Die."

