

# UAW LOCAL 72:



## THE FIRST 50 YEARS



# UAW LOCAL 72: THE FIRST 50 YEARS

by John Drew  
May 1, 1985



Local 72's Executive Board — Seated, left to right, John Stencil, Financial Secretary; Ed Steagall, Vice President; Rudy Kuzel, President; Curt Wilson, Recording Secretary; Peter Pfaff, Treasurer. Standing, left to right, Willie Foxie, Trustee; Joe Green, Board Member; Mike Molinaro, Board Member; Tod Ohnstad, Trustee; Robert Rosinski, Sergeant - at - Arms; Jon Melrod, Guide; John Drew, Board Member; Sandy Rommel, Board Member; Arnie Nye, Trustee. Inset, Jim Del Conte, Board Member.

## 50 YEARS IN THE UAW

For a worker at the Nash Motors plant in Kenosha in early 1933, life was full of uncertainties. Just because you punched your timecard and reported to your job on the line did not mean you were getting paid. On any given day you might sit and wait for a few hours for the line to start up while a breakdown or parts shortage was cleared up. While you waited for the line to start up, you received no pay. Your earnings under the piecework system only started when you completed your operations on the first car that passed your work station.

In the summertime you would be laid off for four to six weeks while the plant changed over for the new model. All the while you collected no vacation pay, no unemployment compensation and no SUB pay. When the plant started up again after changeover, there was no guarantee that you would be called back, regardless of how long you had worked for Nash. The foreman could just as easily call back a lower seniority man who was younger and stronger than you and did more favors for him. If you were not called back, there was no one to complain to, no one to file a grievance with. You were out of a job with no union to fight for you.

Today injustices such as those described above are un-

believable. They are unbelievable because we have a union to protect us from such unfair treatment. In 1985 the membership and retirees of our union, UAW Local 72, can be proud to celebrate our 50th anniversary. We have truly had 50 years of progress starting with the early days of our history when a brave group of workers at the Kenosha Nash plant, the forerunner of AMC, banded together to form a union. Today Local 72 members enjoy wages, benefits and working conditions that those early pioneers could not even have dreamed of.

This booklet is written in honor of the 50th anniversary of Local 72. By looking back and remembering the past we can more fully understand and appreciate the present and our future.

**Fraternally,  
Local 72's Executive Board**

**COVER PHOTOS:** Top right, workers on the line at Nash Motors in the early '30s. Middle left, mass swearing in ceremony for new members of Local 72 in the '50s. Bottom right, "Save Our Jobs" demonstration on 52nd Street in March, 1982.

## BEFORE THE UNION

In 1916 a rising young automobile executive named Charles Nash bought the Jeffrey Company of Kenosha, Wisconsin. For the \$15 million purchase price, Nash acquired the Jeffrey plant with about 1,000 workers on the payroll and the facilities to produce 4 wheel drive trucks and automobiles.

The work force that Nash inherited was made up mostly of southern and eastern European immigrants who spoke as many as 21 different languages. Nash was an ambitious man who expanded his business quickly in the 1920's. By 1928 the Kenosha plant was turning out 138,000 cars a year and Nash was raking in profits. But in 1929 the Great Depression began and production at Kenosha dropped dramatically to less than 15,000 cars for the entire year. Thousands of Nash workers were laid off while those still working rarely got a full week in. It was in this desperate setting that Nash workers began to organize their union.

In fact, the conditions in the plant were such that the workers had little choice but to organize. The foreman held absolute power over each worker's job, having full authority to hire and fire. Seniority counted for nothing within the Nash plant, or in any other auto plant for that matter. If the foreman did not like you or was upset with your work, he could fire you on the spot for any reason or no reason at all. Once fired there was no union to file a grievance with, no seniority restoration committee to go before, no one who would even listen to your complaint.

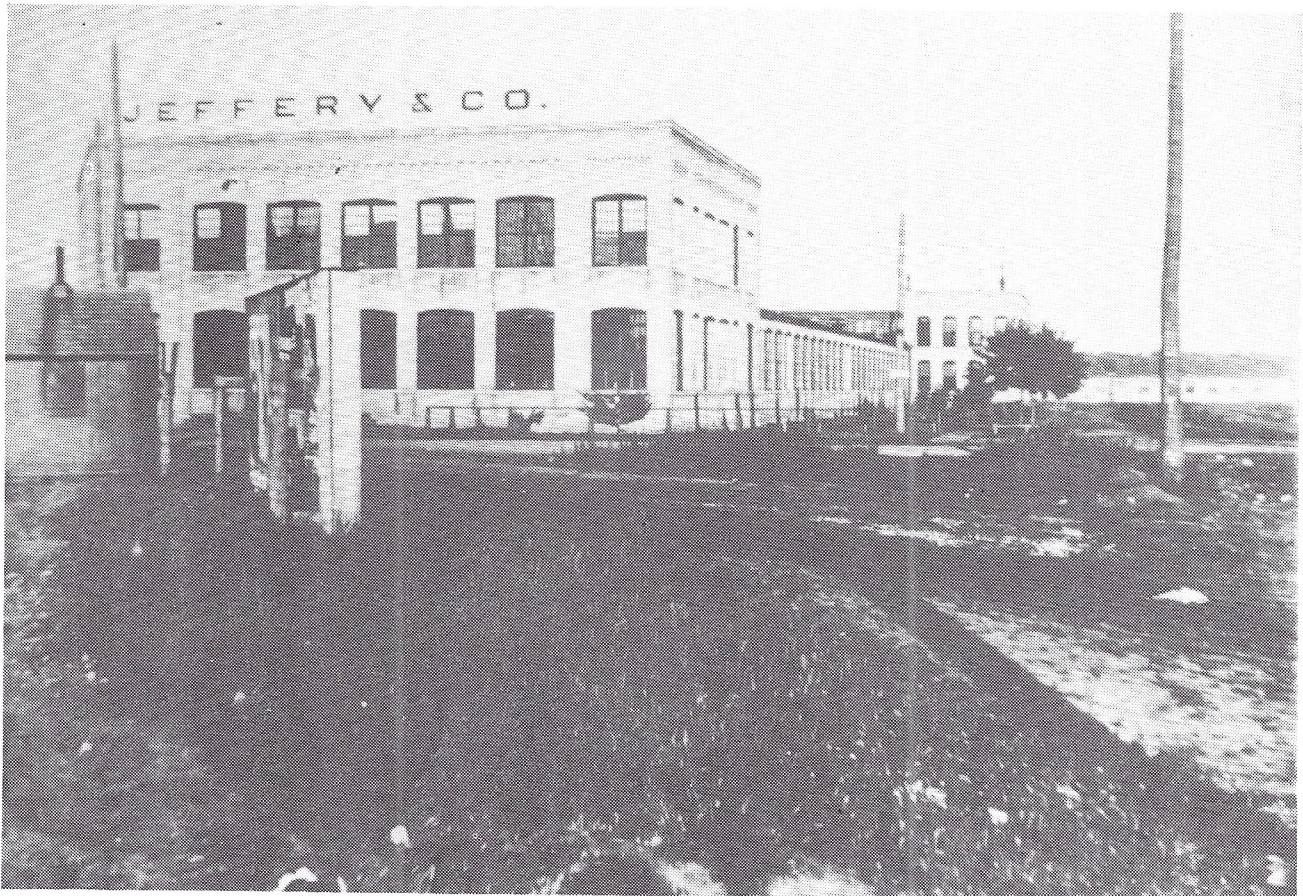
There was nowhere for the worker to turn for justice.

By the time a worker reached 40 years of age he was often burned out by the pace of the work in the plant. After a model change older workers were simply not called back while the younger and quicker men were kept on. During those Depression years there was no shortage of young men desperate for a job. In fact, every day crowds of jobless workers would congregate outside of Nash's and other auto plants looking for work.

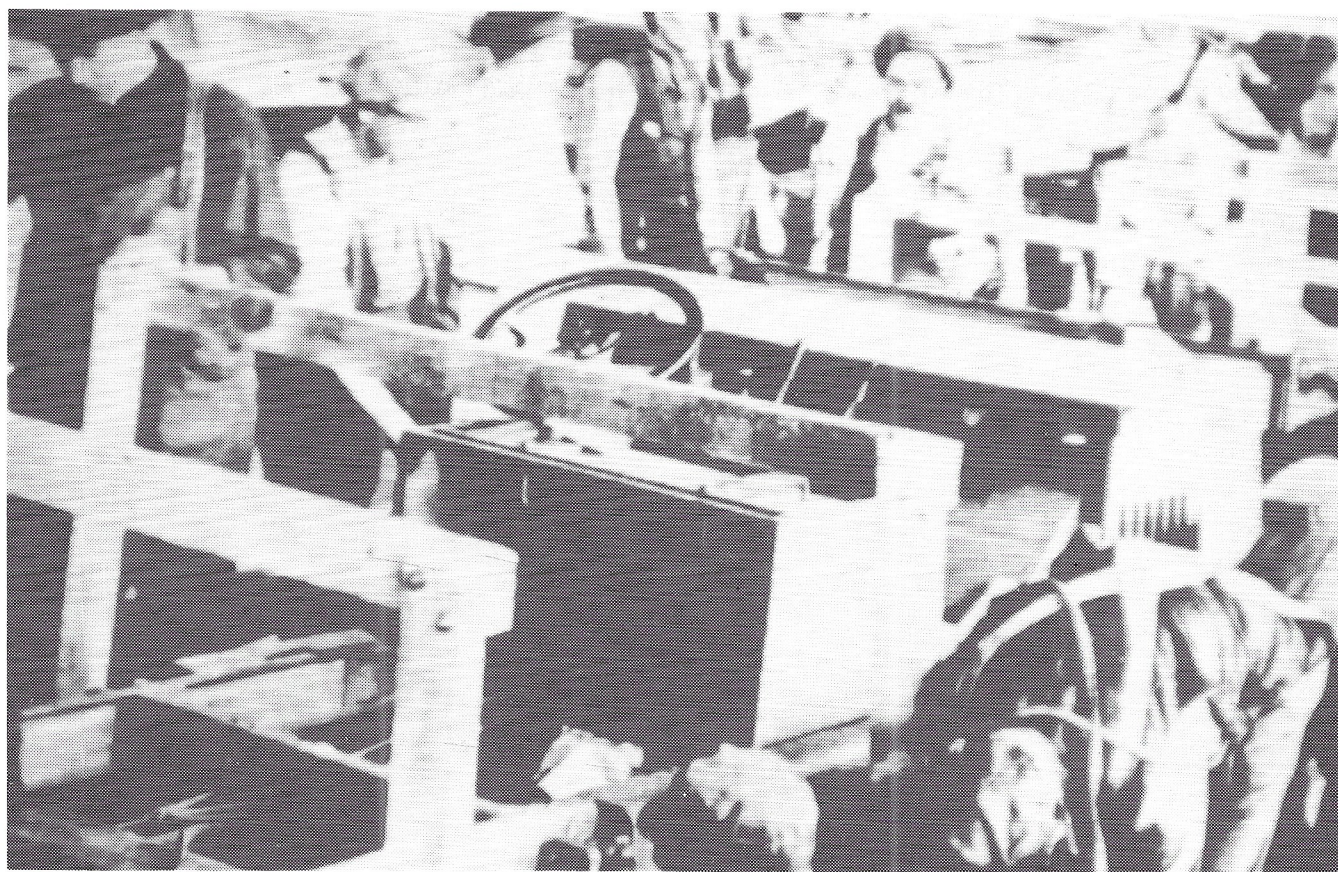
In order to keep their jobs many Nash workers had to resort to bribing the all - powerful foreman. It was quite common for workers to bring their foremen gifts such as baskets of fruit and vegetables or perhaps a bottle of bootleg whiskey during Prohibition.

For those able to keep their jobs the deck was totally stacked in favor of the company. Wages averaged from 40¢ to 48¢ an hour and could be as low as 35¢ an hour in the early 1930's. Wages on the assembly line were based on a group piecework system that only paid for cars that went past your work station. There was no pay for down time cause by any reason. There was also no such thing as paid vacation, paid holidays, health insurance or pensions.

In peak periods, such as just after model change, the work day was 9 hours a day with a half day on Saturday. There was no such thing as time and one - half after 8 hours



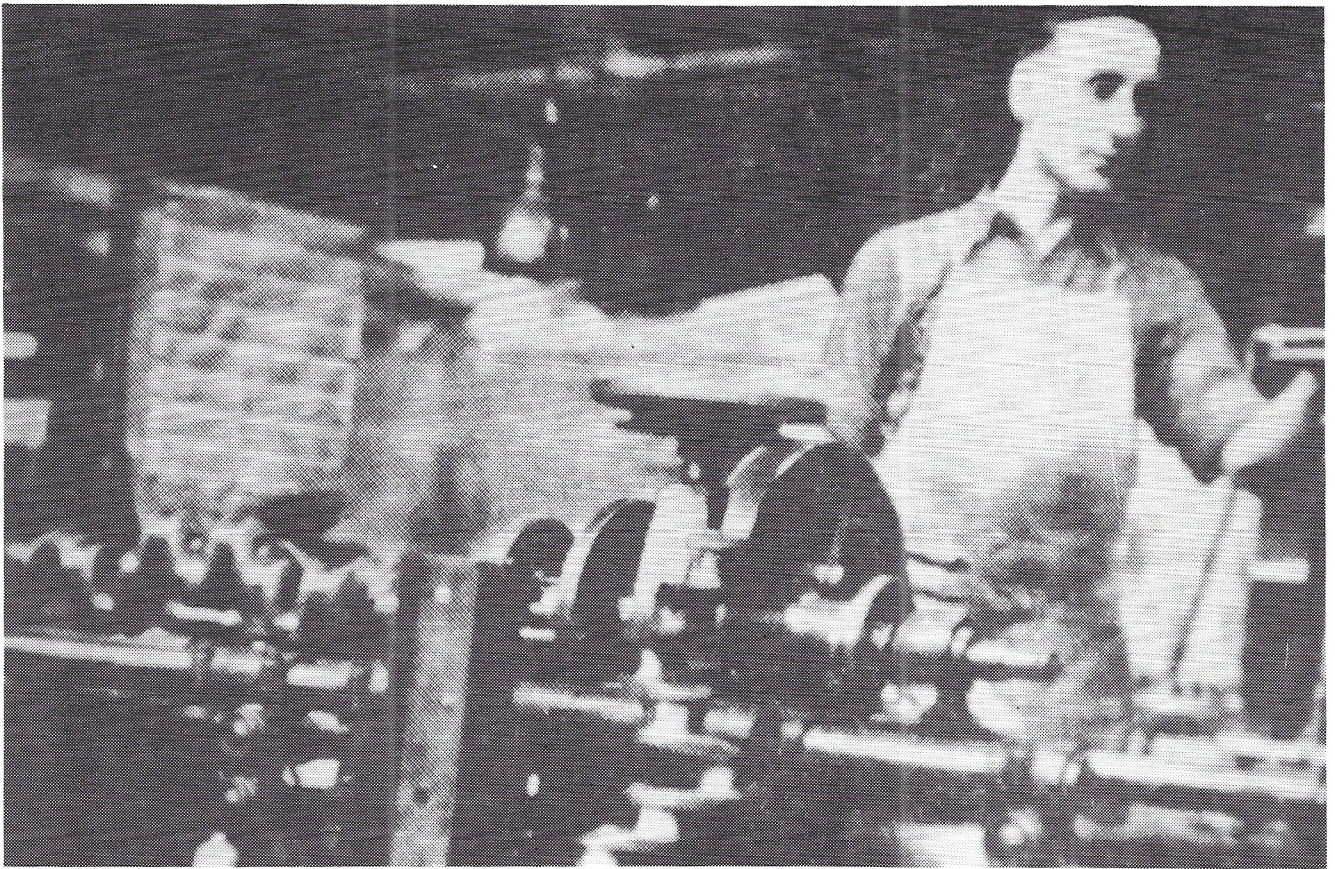
Original Jeffrey company building still in use today as AMC's training room.



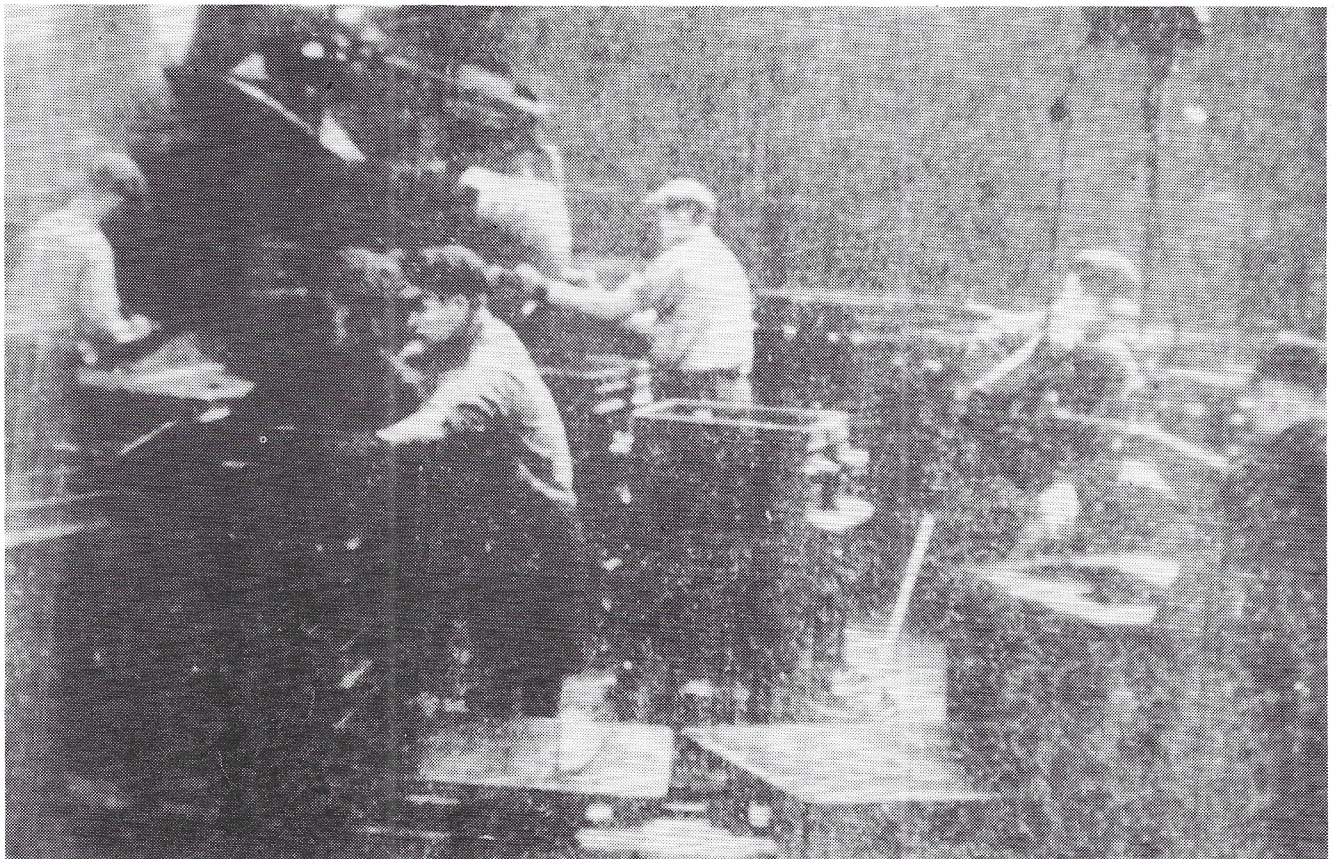
**Nash workers boxing up military trucks for shipment to Europe during World War I.**



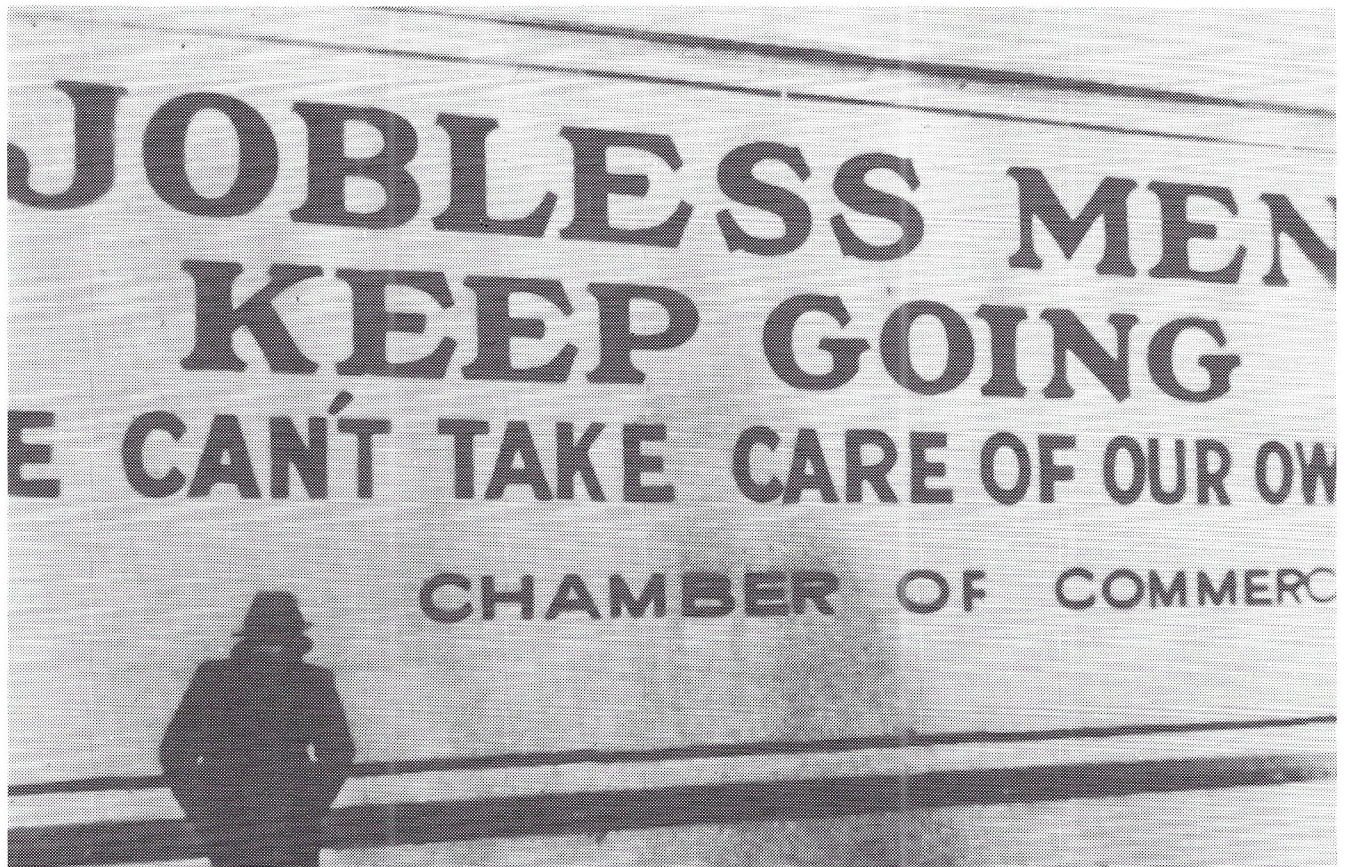
**The early Nash workforce consisted of immigrants of many different nationalities.**



**The individual worker was powerless before the union.**



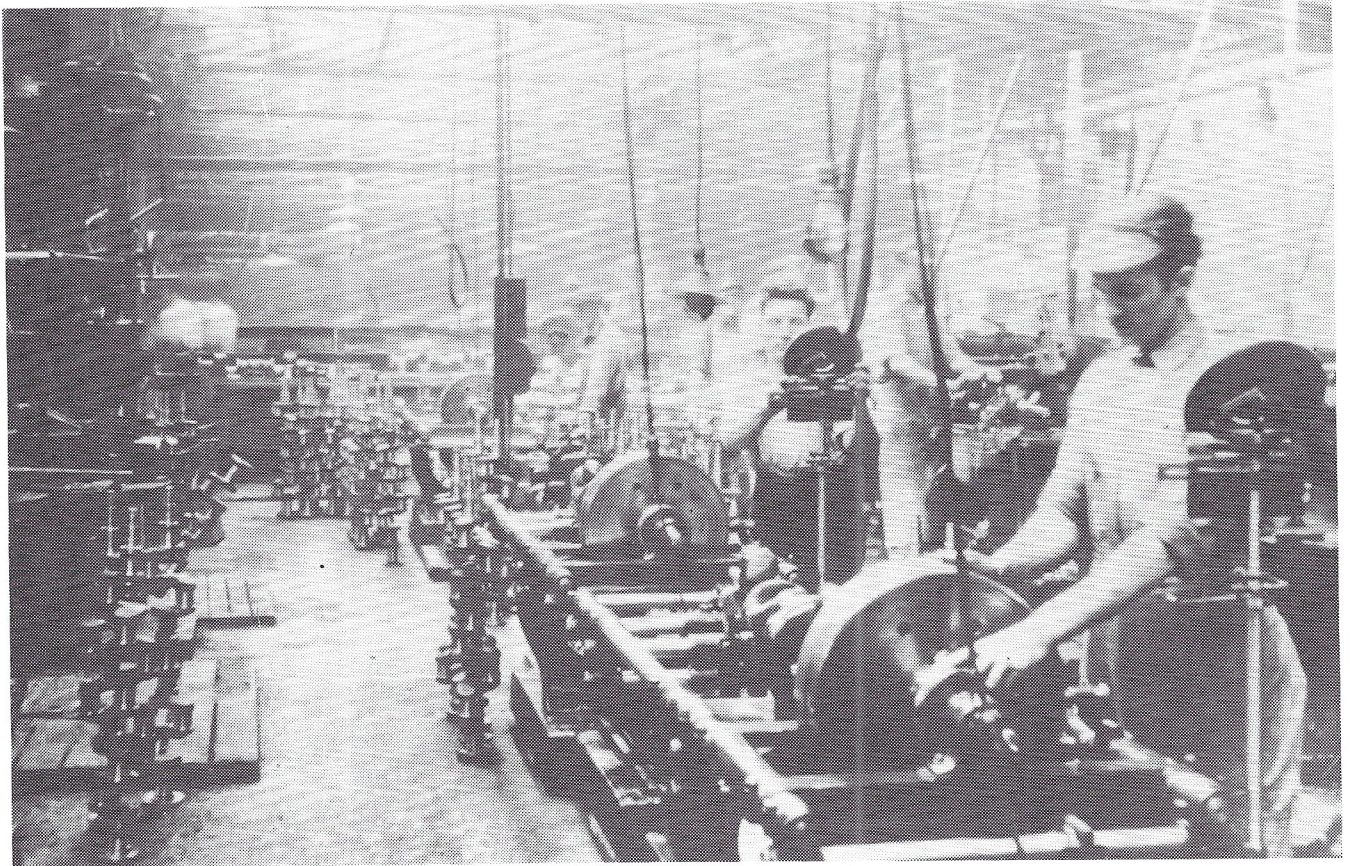
**The foreman held all power in the plant.**



**Organizing was difficult during the Depression with so many workers unemployed.**



**Felix Olkives spoke to crowds of workers at plant gates in efforts to organize unions.**



All work was on a piece rate basis.

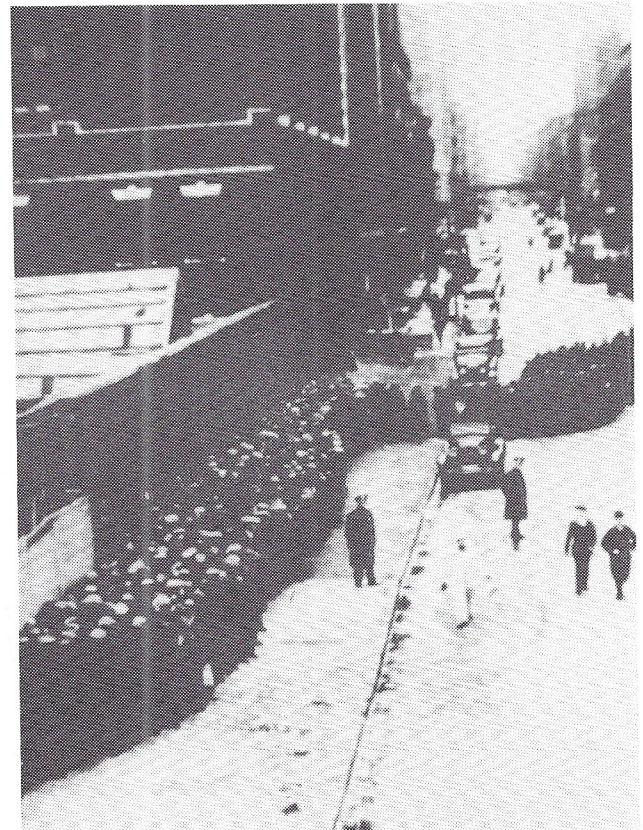
and it was not uncommon for a man to work 18 hours a day at straight time. Of course overtime was not distributed equally. The foreman gave the overtime to his favorites and others got none at all.

In slack periods the work week could be cut to as little as 18 hours. In those days there was no SUB or call in pay, nor was there any unemployment compensation. The W - 2 form of Lawrence Michel of Department 833, Final Assembly, showed total earnings of \$282.31 for the year 1932.

In the Nash plant there were no sweepers to clean up. The production workers were supposed to get out their day's work and sweep up before they went home. Not only was there no paid up wash up period at the end of the day, there was also nowhere to wash up. Old paint buckets filled with water were used by the workers to clean up.

The workers at Nash had no right to transfer to another department and there was no upgrade or job bidding procedure. The foreman decided what job to put the worker on and if the employee was too old or slow for the job, the street was the next stop.

It was this total lack of control over their jobs and their lives that drove workers at Nash to organize a union. To those pioneers who began to band together, the union was the only way they could obtain fair treatment and a living wage.



Crowds of jobless workers lined up outside auto plants daily during the Depression looking for work.

## EARLY ORGANIZING ATTEMPTS

As early as 1920 Nash workers attempted to act together to improve their lot. In that year trimmers in the body finishing department walked off their jobs demanding a 10% raise. When the assembly line stopped, a red light bulb lit up Charley Nash's office. He personally came out to the finishing department and responded to the workers' demands by telling the men that they were on piecework and the only way they would get a 10% raise was to work 10% harder. Again in the summer of 1928, just after model change, workers in the rubbing department walked out in protest 4 times in 3 weeks.

The first serious attempt to organize the workers at Nash into a union started in 1929. Felix Olkives, the President of the Kenosha Trades and Labor Council, started a drive amongst Nash workers to sign up with the American Federation of Labor. According to a story on the drive in the Kenosha Labor:

*"Progress was slow due to the need for secrecy. Felix went house to house talking to workers. He held small meetings. Key men were selected in each department to feel out the workers and to secure names and addresses of others to be contacted."*

At the time of the stock market crash in the fall of 1929 Olkives had signed up about 100 workers with many of them paying all or part of the \$2.00 initiation fee. After the market crashed the union drive died out as many of those interested in the union were laid off as production at Nash came almost to a standstill. Olkives refunded the initiation fees to the laid off workers who needed every cent to make ends meet.

## 1933 — THE BIRTH OF A UNION

In 1933 another drive began to organize the workers at Nash. This time the drive met with great enthusiasm amongst the workers at Nash, especially in the foundry and on the final assembly line. The drive started soon after the National Recovery Act was passed as part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal legislation. Roosevelt's program was designed to bring America out of the Depression. Section 7 of the NRA gave labor the right to "organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing." Charles Nash denounced the New Deal as socialistic and un-American.

It was in this setting that Felix Olkives and his fellow unionists on the Kenosha Trades and Labor Council once again targeted the 3,000 workers at Nash for unionization in the summer of 1933. The summer and early fall of 1933 was an exciting time for workers in Kenosha. Felix Olkives and others gave soapbox speeches to workers at shift change and handed out leaflets and union authorization cards to those who crowded around to listen. Harold "Red" Newton, a former editor of the Kenosha Labor describes those organizing efforts this way:

*"I recall vividly the union ferment in Kenosha in 1933 and 1934 and the hectic days that ensued. All of us officers of the Trades Council were on an exciting*



**Labor march up 60th Street in 1933 calling for unionization.**

*merry-go-round shuttling from the Nash plant to the Simmons plant, to the American Brass, to Vincent McCall, Frost, Specialty Brass, Snap-on Tools . . ."*

As part of the drive a big labor march up 60th Street, calling for unionization, was attended by workers from many plants in Kenosha, including a contingent from Nash.

The union drive found tremendous support within the Nash plant. Workers in the foundry and in final assembly, along with those in other areas of the plant, signed union cards and began to pay their initiation fees. By September of 1933 enough workers had signed up with the union that the American Federation of Labor issued a charter to the Nash group which then became known as AFL-Federal Labor Union 19008. Temporary officers were appointed to head the new union with Eugene Stauder chosen the first President and Lawrence Michel appointed as Vice President.

Membership in the new union increased gradually until November of 1933 when two events started a chain reaction that led to the unionization of the entire Nash plant.

Charles Nash and the rest of management were bitterly opposed to the union movement within the plant. Nash called union organizers such as Felix Olkives "communist" and said he would never recognize a union in his plant. In an attempt to hold off the growing support for Local 19008, Nash management proceeded to set up a company union on November 7, 1933. GM, Ford and Chrysler all had company unions at that time as the corporations tried to circumvent Section 7 of the NRA which gave workers the right to organize. The Nash company union or "department representation plan" as it was called, was to include both hourly and salaried workers in its ranks. Local 19008 publicly attacked the company union concept and there was little enthusiasm for it amongst the hourly work force.





**Crowds of Nash workers greeted the sitdown strikers as they left the plant on November 9, 1933.**



**Local 19008 set up pickets around the plant in 1933 strike.**

## NASH WORKERS SITDOWN

At the same time that Nash was trying to organize the company union, management attempted to institute a new group piecework system in Department 833, Final Assembly. The average wage in 833 was about 35¢ an hour at that time. After a one day trial of the new piecework system, workers found it no better than the old system. The following day, November 9, 1933, the 100 or so workers in 833 sat down in protest. This was one of the first, if not the first, use of the sitdown strike in the auto industry. It would be almost four years later that the sitdown would be used by workers at General Motors to gain union recognition.

The sitdown strike in Final Assembly brought Charles Nash himself out to the department. Nash promised the workers he would look at adjusting their rates if they would give the new system a longer trial period. The workers refused to give in to Nash and he responded by locking out all 3,000 workers at the plant.

When the sitdown strikers left the plant that afternoon, they were met in the parking lot by hundreds of Nash workers from other departments who had heard about the sitdown. Felix Olkives called a mass meeting of all Nash workers for that night. Over 1,500 jammed the Italian American hall to hear reports from the strike leaders and

to sign membership cards in Local 19008. According to Paul Russo, a leader of the sitdown strikers, that day, November 9, 1933 was "the birth of Wisconsin's largest labor union, Local 72."

The members of the union elected a committee of three workers from the Final Assembly department to deal with management. The three elected in that first vote ever held were Paul Russo, George Nordstrom and W.G. "Bill" Kult. The committee demanded that Nash recognize the union and grant a wage increase.

On the second day of the strike the very active pickets turned away two train carloads of sand destined for the foundry. According to the Milwaukee Journal of November 11, 1933:

*"The trainmen, being union members, held the cars outside the factory gates for an hour at the request of the pickets and then returned them to the Northwestern yards."*

After the plant was shut down for a week Charles Nash finally agreed to meet with the committee. Nash chose a plant storage room as the site for the first meeting between



Local 19008 leaders drafting demands in 1933 strike.

# THE NASH MOTORS COMPANY

KENOSHA, WISCONSIN

CABLE ADDRESS  
NASHMOTORS KENOSHA

April 11, 1934.

To The Committee,  
Kenosha,  
Wisconsin.

Gentlemen:

The Nash Motors Company has accepted in its entirety the statement of the Automobile Labor Board for settlement of the strike, and also guarantees that every factory worker in the Kenosha plant will receive not less than a 5% increase in wages.

Yours very truly,

THE NASH MOTORS COMPANY



President.

E.H. McCarty  
LL

The first signed agreement between the union and Nash Motors.

elected representatives of the workers and management. No chairs were provided for the committee so they presented their demands to Nash standing up. Nash responded to their demands by dangling the keys to the plant in front of them and threatening to close the plant and "throw the keys in Lake Michigan" before he would recognize a union.

But, one week later, after the Chicago office of the Regional Labor Board had gotten involved, Nash relented and came to an agreement. He verbally agreed to recognize collective bargaining, bargain with the committee elected by the workers and to not discriminate against any of the strikers. When the plant reopened, Local 19008 was much stronger than ever and the company union was never heard from again.

In the following months Local 19008 got down to the business of functioning as a union. Felix Olkives provided much assistance in setting up the new union. Members of Local 19008 who had been members of other unions in coal mining and railroading before coming to Nash were also a great help in getting the union started.

Elections of officers were held quickly, with Eugene Stauder becoming the first elected President on December 30, 1933. Less than one month later he resigned and John Milkent was elected President without opposition. Milkent was to hold that post for 5 consecutive terms until 1939.

As of January 1, 1934 the Local had a paid up membership of 970 with about the same number partially paid up. There was, of course, no dues checkoff so it was up to the officers of the new union to collect the dues from the members. Local 19008 also began to set up other operating procedures, such as the requirement that all grievances submitted to the bargaining committee be in writing.

## FIRST UNION-BUILT CAR IN AMERICA

During this period the union tried to negotiate a fair seniority system with Nash, but the company still refused to honor plantwide seniority. In February of 1934, the workers at the Seaman Body plant in Milwaukee, which shipped bodies to Kenosha and also those at the Nash plant in Racine went on strike for increased wages and a seniority system. On March 1, 1934 the Kenosha local, with 1,866 paid up members, joined the other two locals on strike.

In a show of solidarity the three locals agreed to remain on strike until an agreement acceptable to all three was reached. On March 9, the Grand Executive Council made up of representatives from the three locals presented six demands to Nash management. The demands included a call for Nash and Seaman to recognize a plantwide bargaining committee in each plant, adhere to seniority in layoff and recall and to increase wages.

For seven weeks the strikers held out for their demands. In Kenosha, local merchants who were themselves just getting by in that Depression year, donated fuel and food to the strikers.

Once again the Regional Labor Board entered into the negotiations between the unions and Nash. Finally an agreement was reached and all three locals ratified it. The final settlement as proposed by the Regional Labor Board and approved by all parties was a great victory for the unions. Nash agreed to collective bargaining, the principle of seniority in layoff and recall and wages were raised. The agreement was formalized on April 11, 1934 when Nash President, E.H. McCarty signed a one paragraph statement summarizing the settlement. That single paragraph represents the first written contract for auto workers in the Kenosha plant. Local 19008 members celebrated their victory with a huge party at the Eagles ballroom.

In June of 1934 the three locals at Kenosha, Racine and Milwaukee could claim with justifiable pride that the 1934 Nash Lafayette was the first automobile built entirely with union labor in the United States.

After the successful 1934 strike the union became ever more powerful in the shop. President John Milkent reported that by the end of April, 1934, nearly 100% of the workers had joined Local 19008. The elected bargaining committee met each Monday with management to take up the workers' complaints. The union also created a post known as the Director of Employment. During periods of layoff and recall one of the Board Members would be appointed to that position. His job was to make sure that seniority was followed and no new men were hired while those with seniority were laid off.



Kenosha Nash workers joined workers at Seaman Body in Milwaukee on picketline during 1934 strike.

PATRONS ARE REQUESTED TO FAVOR THE COMPANY BY CRITICISM AND SUGGESTION CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

12208

**CLASS. SERVICE**  
 This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable sign above or preceding the address.

# WESTERN UNION

NEWCOMB CARLTON, PRESIDENT

J. C. WILLEVER, FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

RJGT+S
DL = Day Letter
NM = Night Message
NL = Night Letter
LCO = Deferred Cable
NLT = Cable Letter
WLT = Week-End Letter

The filing time as shown in the date line on full-rate telegrams and day letters, and the time of receipt at destination as shown on all messages, is STANDARD TIME.

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PRESIDENT WILLIAM GREEN=

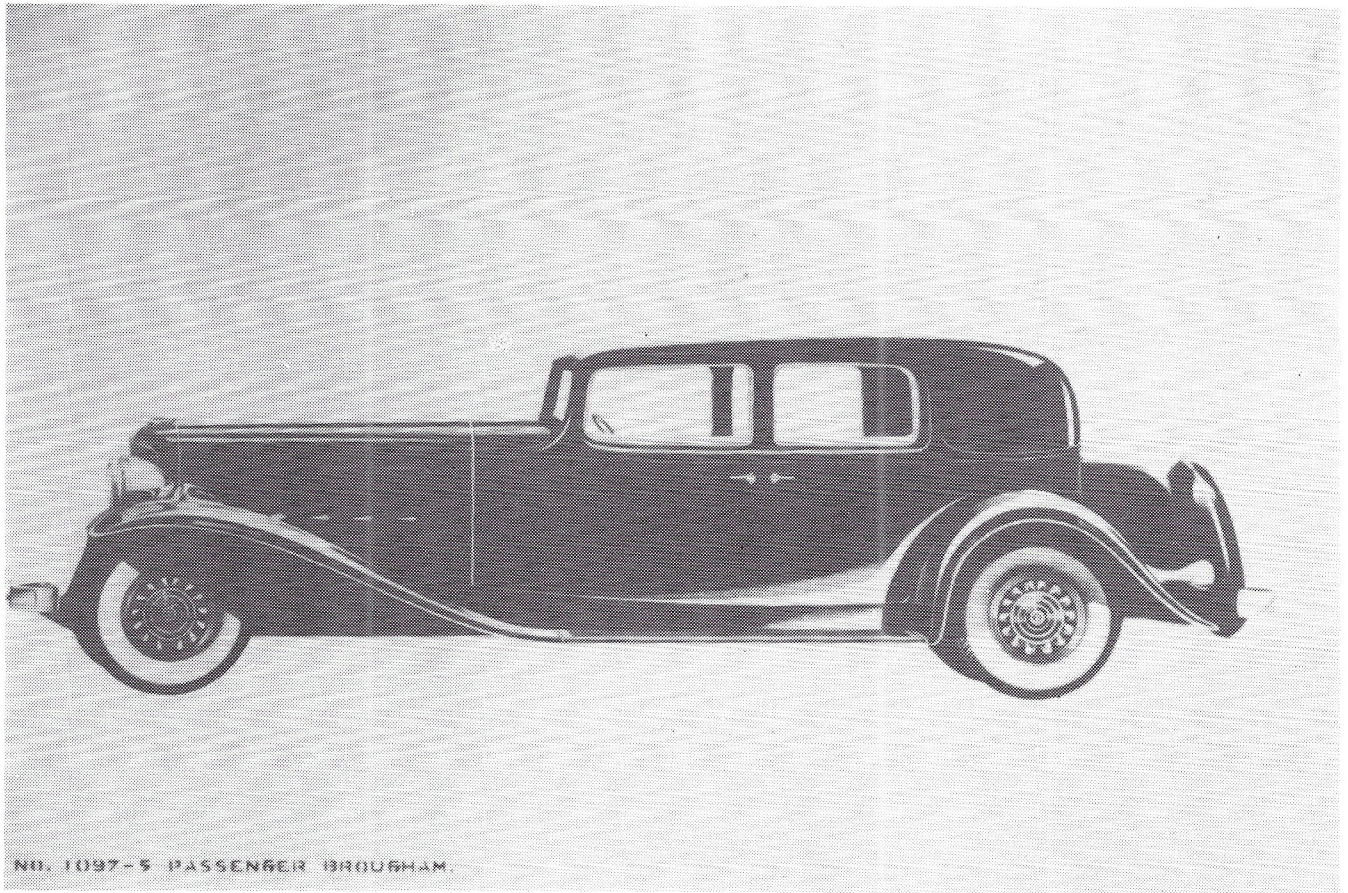
A F L BUILDING WASHINGTON DC=

ALTHOUGH WE HAVE ELECTED A COLLECTIVE BARGAINING COMMITTEE ELECTED BY A MAJORITY OF EMPLOYEES AT NASH MOTORS CO KENOSHA WISCONSIN FOREMAN AND BOSSES ARE GOING TO HOMES OF WORKERS INDIVIDUALLY ASKING MEN TO COME BACK TO WORK MONDAY REPRESENTATIVES ARE NOT CONSULTED THIS VIOLATES SEC 7A MEN WILL NOT RETURN TO WORK WITHOUT CONSENT OF THEIR REPRESENTATIVES BRING THIS MATTER BEFORE PRESIDENT NOTIFY OUR LOCAL PRESIDENT JOHN MILKENT=

UNITED AUTO WORKERS UNION LOCAL 19008 GEORGE S NORDSTROM SECRETARY.

THE QUICKEST, SUREST AND SAFEST WAY TO SEND MONEY IS BY TELEGRAPH OR CABLE

Telegram sent by Local 19008 to protest Nash's actions during strike.



The 1934 Nash Lafayette was the first 100% union - built car in America.

## KENOSHA LOCAL CALLS FOR A NATIONAL UNION

Not only was the young Kenosha local active in the shop, but it was also a strong force in the efforts to form a national auto workers union. Workers at Nash knew from their own experience that industrial type unions covering all the workers in a plant were more effective than separate unions made up of many different crafts. For this reason they were very much in favor of a national auto workers union made up of industrial unions like Local 19008. The leaders and members of the Kenosha local realized that there was only so much that could be obtained from Nash in wages and working conditions while the rest of the auto industry, including the giants like GM and Ford, were not organized.

Pursuing their goal of an auto workers union, representatives of Local 19008 went to Detroit in June of 1934 to participate in the first nationwide Auto Council. The meeting was made up of representatives of AFL Federal Labor Unions like Local 19008. Attending besides the Kenosha delegates were only 6 other locals: Milwaukee - Seaman, Racine Nash, and one local each from Studebaker, Packard, Hudson and Willis - Overland of Toledo. These "independents" as they were called, were sharply critical of the AFL leadership for their inactivity in organizing the auto industry and they called on the AFL Executive Council to form a national auto workers union.

## UAW FORMED

Again in 1935 Local 19008 sent delegates to Detroit, this time for the first national convention of auto workers called by the AFL. The 21 delegates from Kenosha joined representatives of 65 other local unions at the convention. Finally, at this convention, the AFL granted a charter for the new United Autoworkers Union. Delegates from Kenosha helped lead the fight on the convention floor for an elected leadership for the new union. Local 19008 submitted a farsighted 11 point resolution to the Convention that called for a union that organized all workers in the auto industry "regardless of kind of work, race, creed or color." The Local 19008 resolution also asked that:


*"... all officers be elected from actual workers in the industry by the delegates at the Convention, salaries to be comparable with auto workers' wages, but not to exceed \$2,500 per year."*

AFL President William Green ignored the desires of the majority of the delegates who agreed with Local 19008's position on elected officers and he appointed the President and top officers of the new organization.

Disappointed in the AFL leadership as they were, Local 19008 leaders realized that the convention was a huge step forward for auto workers. Shortly after the convention, on November 8, 1935, Federal Labor Union 19008 was rechartered as AFL-UAW Local 72.

— CHARTER —

# International Union United Automobile Workers of America



To All Whom These Presents Shall Come:

Know Ye, That the International Union, United Automobile Workers of America, affiliated with The Congress of Industrial Organizations, established for the purpose of effecting thorough organization of the automobile industry, and composed of Local Unions and members in different sections of the country, doth, upon proper application and under conditions herein provided hereby grant unto

<u>Jess Nichols</u>	<u>Edward Bergson</u>	<u>Paul Weiss</u>
<u>William Dinsdill</u>	<u>Koy Stewart</u>	<u>George Ahlstrom</u>
<u>George Nordstrom</u>	<u>Eugene Stander</u>	<u>Henry Wuerburger</u>
<u>Peter Jacobson</u>	<u>Lewis Berkley</u>	<u>William Foster</u>
<u>Mike Matine</u>	<u>Frank Brumby</u>	<u>Storgi Melnars</u>

and to their successors, this Charter, for the establishment and future maintenance of a Local Union at Kenosha, Wisconsin to be known as Local Union No. 72 of the International Union, United Automobile Workers of America.

Now, the conditions of this Charter are such: That said Union forever and under any and all circumstances shall be subordinate to and comply with all the requirements of the constitution, by-laws and general laws or other laws of the International Union, United Automobile Workers of America as they may from time to time be altered or amended; That said Union shall, for all time, be guided and controlled by all acts and decisions of the International Union, United Automobile Workers of America, as they may from time to time be enacted; That should the Local Union above chartered take advantage of any powers, privileges or rights conferred under the laws as they may exist at any time, said action shall not prevent the International Union, United Automobile Workers of America, from recalling, amending, changing or abolishing any such powers, privileges or rights.

So long as the said Union adheres to these conditions, this Charter to remain in full force; but upon infraction thereof, the International Union, United Automobile Workers of America may revoke this Charter, thereby annulling all privileges secured hereunder.

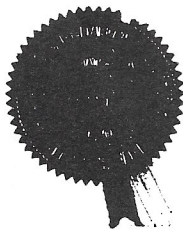
In Witness Whereof, We have hereunto set our hands and affixed the seal of the International Union, United Automobile Workers of America, this First day of October One Thousand Nine Hundred and Forty-five

International Executive Board:

R. Thomas  
International President  
Richard A. Brambation  
Detmond Gert  
Ellsworth Kramer  
Leo Lamotte  
Paul E. Miles  
Richard E. Rossignol  
John P. Smith  
William H. Brady

P. T. Board

George Burt  
Arthur L. Case  
L. N. Michener  
Wm. W. Culy  
Benjamin Peters  
Le Roy L. Roberts  
H. R. Smith  
Geo. J. Adkins  
International Secretary-Treasurer





Local 72 delegates attended this 1936 UAW convention.

In the following year, 1936, Local 72 sent 22 delegates to South Bend, Indiana for the second UAW Convention. It was at this convention that the AFL ended the probationary status of the UAW and delegates were allowed to elect their own officers with Homer Martin becoming the first President of the UAW.

## HELP FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

The 1930's were difficult years for Local 72 members, even with their newly won union protection. Jack Beni who was later to become a Local 72 President, recalled that he usually worked only three or four months per year and was laid off the rest of the time. The winter of 1937-38 was an especially rough one, with Nash running the plant on only an 18 hour week. At a membership meeting in February of 1938 it was pointed out that working an 18 hour week paid less than the weekly unemployment compensation rate. That winter Local 72 set up an Unemployment Committee that counseled unemployed members on "how to get prompt attention when applying for relief or unemployment compensation." The Unemployment Committee also worked with other unions in the city in trying to provide for adequate relief and other aid for the unemployed.

## LOCAL 72, A CENTER FOR THE MEMBERSHIP

During the difficult years of the 30's Local 72 began to establish itself as a center for the membership, both on and

off their jobs at the Nash plant. The Friday night membership meetings held twice a month at the Moose Hall and later the IA Hall or Union Club regularly drew 1,000 to 1,200 out of a membership of 3,000.

In 1936 Local 72 formed a baseball team to play other industrial teams such as Simmons and the Ke-Nash-a Club 9. The Local 72 team was consistently one of the top teams in the area and members flocked to the Nash Stadium, which was located where Building 40 now sits, to see their team play. Local 72 also established a bowling team and began to hold the popular union picnics in the summer and the Children's Christmas parties in the winter.

Local 72 members marched as a group in the big Labor Day parades in Kenosha. In 1938 the membership voted a \$1.00 fine for anyone not marching in the parade. The Kenosha Labor reported that Local 72 members marched "7 abreast in a line stretching 1/2 mile long" in the 1938 parade.

The Local also put a strong emphasis on education, holding frequent classes on such topics as effective speaking and parliamentary procedure. In 1937 the membership voted to send the first students to the University of Wisconsin - School for Workers summer school in Madison.

## SOLIDARITY LOCAL 72 STYLE

In its early years Local 72 established its reputation for generosity and union solidarity that lives to this day. The



1937 Local 72 bowling team.



Local 72 members participated in early Labor Day marches.



recent Local 72 contributions to the MacWhyte strikers was just the latest example of this tradition which started almost as soon as the union was formed.

In a membership meeting at the Moose Hall on May 25, 1934, just a few weeks after coming off their own seven week strike, the membership approved a donation to the sitdown strikers at the Autolite plant in Toledo. In July of 1936 Local 72 members raised \$2,200 to aid the UAW's national organizing campaign that had targeted GM. Within a period of a few months in early 1937 Local 72 donated \$1,000 to strikers at J. I. Case in Racine and another \$1,164 to the popular "dime store girls" who were striking Kenosha's 5¢ and 10¢ stores for union recognition. In May of 1938 the International Executive Board of the UAW presented a plaque to Local 72 to honor the 100% participation of the membership in a fund drive to assist the organizing drive at Ford.

Local 72 members knew that they could only advance so far in wages and working conditions while the rest of the auto industry was non-union. It was not uncommon for Nash management to respond to Local 72 demands by pointing out that Nash, with only 2% of the auto market, could not afford to raise wages or benefits while the industry giants, Ford and GM, did not even have unions. So it was welcome news to Local 72 members when the Kenosha Labor announced on February 12, 1937 that General Motors had agreed to recognize the UAW after a 44 day sitdown strike at Flint, Michigan.

## PAST PRACTICE

In the shop, Local 72 operated with no written contract up until 1939. Dues were not deducted automatically from the paychecks, but the Kenosha plant was well known as a 100% union shop.

In the absence of a written contract, a system of past practices built up which governed conditions in the plant. One of these practices, which came under fire in 1937, was the right of a union representative to be off his job to represent his people. In 1937 Nash hired a new Personnel Director by the name of Harry Beutlich. He was determined to curb the power of the union and end some of the past practices that were objectionable to the company.

Beutlich started by telling department supervision that the Chief Steward was no longer allowed of his job. When Final Assembly Chief Steward Paul Russo walked off his job to take up a collection for a brother whose house had burned down, he was promptly fired. The department sat down and demanded that Russo be reinstated. When the company refused to put him back on the payroll, the plant walked out and not long after the locals at Racine and Milwaukee also walked out. According to Russo, "for three days not a wheel turned in the Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha plants." Russo was put back on the payroll after the three days and that particular past practice was continued.



Attendance was high at early membership meetings.

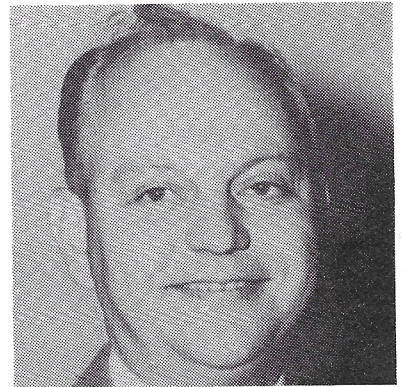
# UAW LOCAL 72



**Eugene Stauder, Deceased**  
1933-34



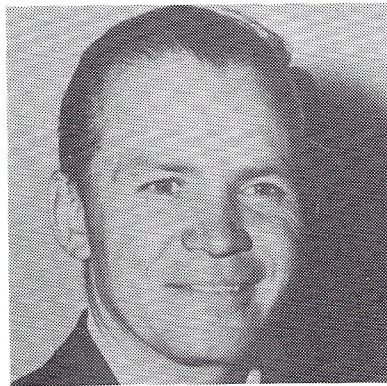
**John Milkent, Deceased**  
1934-39



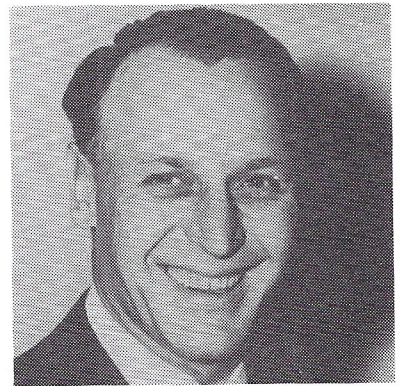
**George Nordstrom, Deceased**  
1939-40



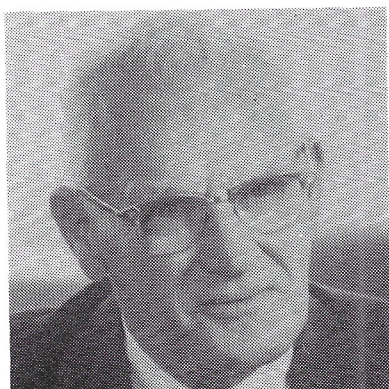
**Joseph Lourigan, Deceased**  
1945-47



**Richard Lindgren**  
1947-49



**Jess Nichols, Deceased**  
1949-50



**Leo Downing, Deceased**  
1959-61



**T.L. Russo**  
1963-65



**Richard Thiel**  
1965-67

# PRESIDENTS



**Paul Russo**  
1940-43



**Winand Kult, Deceased**  
1943-44



**Michael Maxin, Deceased**  
1944-45, 1950-51



**Jack Milward**  
1951-53



**Jack Beni, Deceased**  
1953-55, 1957-59, 1961-63



**Ray Neu**  
1955-57



**Ralph Daum**  
1967-78



**Gene R. Sylvester**  
1978-81, 1981-84



**Rudy Kuzel**  
1984

## NASH-KELVINATOR MERGER

In 1936 Nash merged with Kelvinator to form the Nash - Kelvinator Company. This was a time of uncertainty for Local 72 members, as the future of the Kenosha plant came into question. The Kenosha Labor reported on October 23, 1936 that Charles Nash in commenting on the merger had stated:

*"We have no desire to see our plants moved out of Wisconsin. Of course, if conditions in Wisconsin make it impossible to compete with conditions in Michigan, that is another question."*

The merger did not have any ill effects on the Kenosha plant but two years later in 1938, Nash - Kelvinator announced the closing of the Racine plant. In an impressive show of union principles, Local 72 members voted to accept a proposal by the UAW International that allowed Racine workers to bump into Kenosha on the basis of an integrated seniority list. A representative of Local 72 along with someone from the Racine local and a member of management reviewed all seniority dates to make sure the agreement was carried out properly.

## 1939 — ON THE MARCH WITH LOCAL 72

In the hotly contested 1939 election, candidates who favored the newly - formed National Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) opposed those sympathetic to the old line AFL. The pro - CIO candidates won out. George Nordstrom was elected President, Jess Nichols was chosen Vice President and Paul Russo succeeded Nordstrom as Recording Secretary. This was the first election after the By - law change of January 1939 which did away with the separate bargaining committee and Executive Board system which had been in effect. Local 72 is unique in the UAW with the bargaining committee and the Executive Board being one and the same. Paul Russo recalled that the change was made to eliminate the friction that inevitably arose between a separate bargaining committee and Executive Board.

Immediately upon taking office the new leaders were faced with serious problems. Nash - Kelvinator was more determined than ever to curb the power of the union. At a meeting between the Executive Board and management in May, the Kenosha Labor reported that Personnel Director Harry Buetlich had shook his finger at the Board and said:

*"We are going to take back the property of Nash - Kelvinator Corporation. You fellows have run it long enough."*

Buetlich gave orders that Board Members and stewards were no longer allowed off their jobs to handle grievances. Jobs all over the plant were reclassified resulting in wage cuts. The membership quickly gave power to the Board to declare a "Labor Holiday" if necessary and directed the Board to begin negotiating a written contract.

The Executive Board met with management for five weeks straight in August and September of 1939 and negotiations were "getting nowhere fast" according to an unidentified Board Member quoted in the Kenosha Labor. On September 20, the Executive Board cut off overtime in

the Kenosha plant and on October 1, 1939, Local 72 went on strike. The plant was shut down tight during the strike as "Strike General" Bill Kult had as many as 3,000 pickets on the gates at one time.

After a three week strike, Nash - Kelvinator gave in and signed a contract which Paul Russo considered, "one of the best ever signed in the automobile industry." The new contract which covered two sides of a 10 x 17 inch sheet of paper was a great advance for Local 72. The new pact recognized the union as the exclusive bargaining agent, set up a grievance procedure and strengthened seniority rights for layoff and recall. The new contract also established one and one half hours call in pay. The company had agreed to all major items in the new contract after two weeks of the strike. It took an additional week on strike to get Nash - Kelvinator to agree to the final union demand which was that overtime be divided equally, not given solely to the foremen's pets or withheld from union supporters.

## NORDSTROM ELECTED REGION 4 DIRECTOR

As the Local 72 membership entered the 1940's their bright young President, George Nordstrom, earned the distinction of being the first and only 72 member to serve on the International Executive Board of the UAW. At the annual UAW convention in August of 1940, the 28 year old Nordstrom was elected Director of Region 4, which at that time included Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. By virtue of being elected Regional Director, Nordstrom also automatically became a member of the International Executive Board, serving under the second President of the UAW, R. J. Thomas.

Nordstrom established a fine record as Director of Region 4. In the two years that he served as Director, the Region grew from 19,000 members to 125,000. Aided by Local 72 members who served on the International staff such as Art Larsen, Jess Nichols and Paul Russo, Nordstrom did a tremendous job of organizing plants into the UAW, especially in the Chicago area.

## PAUL RUSSO ELECTED PRESIDENT

When George Nordstrom resigned as President of Local 72, Paul Russo was elected to fill his spot. In 1940, under Russo's leadership Local 72 settled a new contract without a strike. That agreement provided for the first ever paid vacation. Anyone with over 2 years seniority became eligible for 1 week's vacation with pay. The right to transfer from one department to another was also won in 1940.

In 1941 Paul Russo for President and Bill Kult for Recording Secretary were re - elected without any opposition. That same year Local 72 purchased the building at 2717 - 60th Street which served as the first permanent headquarters for the union. That building now is occupied by the Tic-Toc Tavern.

International Union  
**United Automobile Workers of America**

Local No. 72

AFFILIATED WITH THE COMMITTEE FOR INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATION  
KENOSHA, WISCONSIN



Official

Memorandum

COPIES TO All Head Stewards

DATE Sept. 20, 1939

SUBJECT: Over-time work

No overtime work will be allowed other than that which is necessary to maintain production for an eight-hour day.

By order of the Executive Board

Paul M. Russo, Secretary

Local 72, UAWA-CIO

ab

Overtime was cut off when 1939 contract negotiations broke down.



Nash management and Local 72 signed 1939 contract — "best in the industry."

As World War II approached Local 72 members became very concerned about the inactivity of Nash - Kelvinator in seeking defense work. Just before Christmas of 1941, 1,000 were laid off due to a government mandated reduction in auto production that was designed to conserve raw material for the war effort. Local 72 threatened the company with "economic pressure" if no effort was made to secure defense work for the Kenosha plant. The union sent a letter to President Roosevelt pointing out that the work force would be cut in half and nothing would be done for the war effort "if Nash does not drop their business as usual posture and pursue defense work." Finally after the combined efforts of Local 72 and the CIO in Washington, D.C., Nash was awarded a contract for Navy aircraft engines and all members were back on the job by Christmas of 1942.

In September of 1942 Paul Russo resigned to take a position under George Nordstrom as Assistant Director of Region 4. Working with Nordstrom, Russo and the Region 4 staff were able to win an incredible 14 out of 14 representation elections in the Chicago area in early 1943, adding tens of thousands of members to the UAW.

Recording Secretary W.G. "Bill" Kult succeeded Russo as Local 72 President. Kult presided over the union's 10th anniversary celebration in 1943 which featured UAW President R.J. Thomas and a young UAW Vice President, Walter Reuther, as the main speakers. Thomas praised Local 72 as one of the strongest locals in the International. He reminisced that 10 years prior, when the union was being formed in Kenosha, he was a welder in an unorganized Detroit auto plant making 43¢ an hour.



The first Local 72 Headquarters on 60th Street. The building is now occupied by the Tic-Toc Tavern.

## LOCAL 72 SUPPORTS THE WAR EFFORT

During the war years Local 72 members contributed greatly to the defense effort. The union accepted a system of cash bonuses instead of vacations to keep up the production level. During the war years, the standard work week was 48 hours. At a membership meeting on August 19, 1943, it was announced that the plant would operate on Labor Day "to produce for the continued attack on the Axis." The Kenosha Labor noted that Local 72 members with their distinctive blue and gold caps were conspicuously missing from the Labor Day parade that year.

Local 72 went along with the no - strike pledge made by the national CIO during the war years so as not to jeopardize the war effort.

The union also helped out by buying \$50,000 worth of War Bonds by the end of 1944. One thousand Local 72 members aided the national effort by participating in the Red Cross Blood Drive in 1943. All in all, Local 72 members were a strong link in America's "arsenal of democracy" during the war.

The war years also saw a major advance for Local 72 members with the end of the piece rate system in the plant. In 1943 all jobs went on hourly rates and in the years to come, Local 72 successfully resisted any attempts by the company to go back to the hated piece - rate system.

The 40's were also a time of tremendous participation by the membership in the affairs of the union as the 30's were. In June of 1944, 2,000 Local 72 members jammed two floors of the Union Club for a membership meeting that featured CIO Leader Leo Kryzycki speaking on behalf of President Roosevelt's campaign for re-election.

The Friday night membership meetings were often the starting off point for an evening's entertainment. For example, the August 25, 1944 meeting was adjourned early so the 1,000 or so members in attendance could march as a body from the Union Club to the Lakefront Stadium to watch the Local 72 baseball team take on the powerful Great Lakes Bluejackets.

## WOMEN IN LOCAL 72 DURING THE WAR YEARS

The war years were also a time when there was a tremendous increase in the number of women workers in the plant. In years prior there had been some women in the plant working on "female jobs" that paid 10¢ an hour less than male jobs, according to the 1940 contract.

Article 7, Section 10 of the 1940 Agreement also provided that "NO MARRIED WOMAN SHALL BE HIRED WHO HAS VISIBLE MEANS OF SUPPORT." The contract also provided that any single female hired after February 12, 1937 who got married would be laid off permanently within 30 days. This discrimination against women which seems so shocking to us today, reflected the prevailing thinking in society at that time.

The shortage of workers during the war opened up things somewhat for women while the war was going on. In 1943 Janet Paulsen was elected to the Constitution and By-Laws

Committee, which was at that time part of the Board. A few years later, in 1945, Alice Canfield was elected Financial Secretary. On March 29, 1946, Alice Canfield became the first woman to chair a membership meeting in the 12 year history of Local 72. A member leaving that meeting remarked to the Kenosha Labor that Ms. Canfield was "cool and efficient" in her handling of the meeting.

In 1944 the manpower shortage was so great that the company and Local 72 agreed to set aside the contract and hire married women "with visible means of support." Married women so hired only accumulated seniority by department and were the first laid off in a cutback. As men came back from the service, the women were laid off.

A "Supplemental Agreement on Female Employment" was attached to the 1947 contract. The agreement reaffirmed preferential hiring for men over women, but it did finally provide for equal pay for equal work and protected the seniority rights of laid off women. In 1951, the non-discrimination clause which was originally negotiated in 1947 was changed to include no discrimination on the basis of sex. A group of women members led by Grace Starks put pressure on Local 72 to force Nash to live up to that clause in regards to women.

## BACK ON THE OFFENSIVE

When World War II ended, Local 72 went back on the offensive to secure better conditions for the membership. One of the first victories won was an improvement in the

vacation schedule to provide for 48 hours with pay for workers with 5 or less years and 96 hours with pay for workers with over 5 years. The union also struck briefly in 1945 to gain a 12¢ an hour raise for maintenance workers.

The pre-union days were still fresh in the minds of many Local 72 members at the end of World War II and they were determined never to return to those days. The Kenosha Labor reported that Vice President George Molinaro was warmly applauded at a December 1944 membership meeting for his reply to a request from a few employees for permission to collect funds to buy a Christmas present for their foreman. Molinaro told a large crowd at the membership meeting that times had changed.

*"A request like this recalls the old basket brigade of 10 years ago before the union was formed. Those were the days when you had to bring a gallon of wine, a goose, a turkey or a quart of whiskey to your boss in order to hold your job. Those days are gone forever."*

Another charter member of the union was elected president in 1944 when Bill Kult declined to run and Mike Maxin was chosen by the membership. Maxin was followed by Joe Lourigan in 1945 and 46 and by Richard Lindgren in 1947 and 48. Maxin, Lourigan and Lindgren were typical of the high quality of leadership of Local 72. Lourigan and Lindgren went on to serve the community in other elected offices after their days as Presidents of Local 72.

Local 72 members continued their tradition of assisting other unions who were on strike in the post war years. In



Many women entered the workforce during World War II as the plant produced aircraft engines for the Navy.



Walter Reuther with Local 72 leaders promoting his campaign for UAW President.

December of 1946, Local 72 came to the assistance of the Allis Chalmers strikers who had been out for 8 months. Local 72 member Jess Nichols was a representative of the International Union at that time and he asked for help from his home local. Local 72 responded by making plans to attend a mass picket demonstration at the Allis Chalmers plant. Upon the union's request, the Nash plant shut down at 11 A. M. on the day scheduled for the mass picketing. Five thousand Local 72 members left work and marched to the Lakefront Stadium for a rally in support of the strike. More than 1,500 members then boarded buses and piled into private cars to drive to West Allis to join the demonstration. Four Local 72 members were arrested in the picketing which drew thousands of union members to Allis Chalmers. Those arrested were given one day's pay by Local 72 for lost time spent in the Milwaukee County Jail.

Paid holidays were a new benefit won by the membership in 1947. In coordinated bargaining with Local 75 and Local 206 from Kelvinator in Grand Rapids, Local 72 was able to win 6 paid holidays in a special agreement. Later that same year, the local negotiated a new contract under President Richard Lindgren with assistance from International Representative Paul Russo. The new contract provided for the first dues checkoff in Local 72 history. Another first for Local 72 was a clause which bound Nash to no discrimination due to race, religion, national origin, or political affiliation. The '47 contract also doubled call in pay from 1 - 1/2 hours to 3 hours and gave seniority employees the right to shift preference for the first time. In addition the new contract formalized the ratio of one steward for every 25 workers. This stewards system of representation was superior to anything that was in effect at any of the Big Three automakers represented by

the UAW. It is no wonder that Paul Russo praised the 1947 contract as "the best agreement cover to cover in the industry."

Local 72 continued to make advances in the late '40's. More improvements were made in the vacation schedule in 1948 giving workers at Nash - Kelvinator more paid time off than workers at General Motors. Upon ratification of that agreement, the membership of Local 72 voted that all eligible employees must take their vacations. A Vacation Excuse Committee was set up to look at hardship cases such as employees who were off sick for 30 or more consecutive days. Such employees were to be excused from taking their vacations.

Jess Nichols, who was dropped from the International staff in 1947 when a new Region 4 Director was elected, was voted in as Local 72 President in 1949. He served in that office for one year before being chosen to go back on with the International. Nichols was to die tragically a few years later in an auto accident.

## UAW OPPOSES DISCRIMINATION

Large numbers of black workers began to be hired at Nash - Kelvinator and initiated into Local 72 during the 40's. The UAW under the leadership of President R. J. Thomas took a strong stand against discrimination. In 1944 Thomas announced that the UAW Convention was being



moved from St. Louis to Buffalo because there were no integrated restaurants and hotels in St. Louis. As far back as 1946, Local 72 had a functioning Fair Employment Practices Committee to safeguard the rights of minorities. However, in the plant, almost all blacks worked in the old foundry along 60th Street. It was not until the late 1950's when the foundry closed that blacks bumped into the rest of the plant.

## PENSIONS & INSURANCE WON

The year 1950 was an important one for all Local 72 members because that was when the first pension and insurance plans were won by the union. Nash - Kelvinator agreed to provide a pension plan shortly after the UAW won pensions at GM and Ford. The special agreement on pensions and insurance negotiated in March of 1950 under President Mike Maxin was ratified by the membership by a margin of 2,700 to 100. The agreement also included a voluntary insurance plan with joint company / employee contributions. For an average employee contribution of 61¢ a week the company agreed to provide a weekly Accident and Sickness benefit of \$28.80 and life insurance benefits of \$3,200. On July 6, 1950 the Kenosha Labor announced that 13 Local 72 members were retiring as the first to do so under the new pension plan.

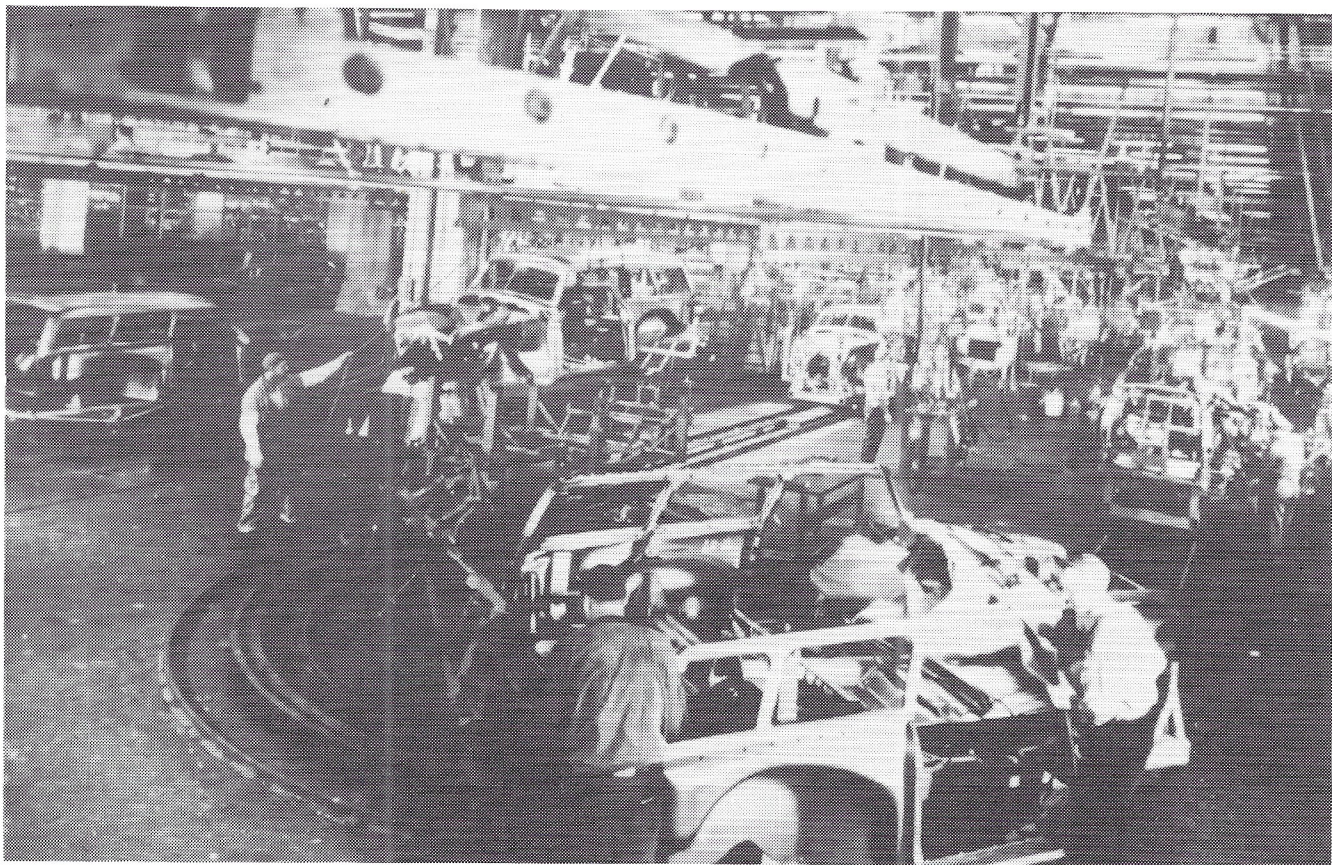
Under the leadership of Mike Maxin Local 72 also negotiated a new contract in 1950 that raised the average wage in the shop to \$1.73 an hour. A Cost of Living clause was also added that year, amongst much suspicion that

wages would drop because of it. There actually were a few times during the 50's when there was no inflation and the COLA clause subtracted a few pennies from the hourly rate.

Local 72 members did not confine their activities to the bargaining table in the early 50's. Past President Joe Lourigan and past Vice President George Molinaro were elected to represent the 1st and 2nd Districts in the State Assembly several times. Molinaro rose to become Speaker of the State House in 1959. Another former Local 72 President, Richard Lindgren, served the city of Kenosha as City Clerk. These three were just a few of the many Local 72 members who have distinguished themselves in service to the community.

Molinaro and Lourigan fought ceaselessly to improve the state Unemployment Compensation laws. Over the years, the waiting period for U. C. benefits was especially galling to Local 72 members. Through the efforts of Local 72 and labor politicians such as Molinaro and Lourigan, the waiting period was reduced from two weeks to one week and finally eliminated altogether.

In 1954 Local 72 was again called to aid fellow workers in a strike. Six representatives of Local 72 were present on the picket line on April 5, 1954 for the first day of the Kohler strike. Local 72 members regularly went up to Sheboygan during the coming years to assist the Kohler strikers in what was to become the longest strike in UAW history. Along with their presence on the picket lines, Local 72 members also donated many thousands of dollars to aid the strikers and their families.



The '50s saw many gains for the membership such as pensions and SUB.



Local 72 was always concerned with working conditions as well as wages.

## AMERICAN MOTORS FORMED

The modern day American Motors Corporation emerged in 1954 when Nash - Kelvinator merged with the Hudson Company. The newly created Corporation quickly moved to open negotiations on a new contract. In September of that year, AMC presented Local 72 with 119 pages of proposed changes in the Working Agreement. Local 72 successfully resisted AMC's takeaway proposals and a new contract was ratified in January of 1955. The biggest change in the new contract was the addition of a union security clause that provided for union membership as a condition of employment in the Kenosha plant. The Wisconsin Employee Relations Board set up an election one month later to make the union shop legal. The membership responded with a 98% vote in favor of the union security clause. Jack Beni, who succeeded Jack Milward as President in 1953, thus presided over the first mandatory 100% union shop in Local 72 history.

The merger of Nash and Hudson also created another situation where Local 72 members opened up their doors to seniority UAW members who lost their jobs. A special agreement was reached in early 1955 that gave full seniority to all Hudson workers who transferred to Kenosha when their plant in Detroit closed.

A young man by the name of Ray Neu was installed as Local 72 President in 1955 as another change took place in leadership in the yearly election. Neu presided over the 1955 negotiations which were noteworthy for the agreement that the 3,000 Hudson workers affected by the merger would receive pensions at American Motors' expense. Local 72 was able to accomplish this for the Hudson

UAW members by accepting a one year delay on the SUB program which had been won in the Big Three that year.

## LOCAL 72 — PART OF CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE

Another milestone was passed in the early 50's when Walter Vaughn became the first black member of the Local 72 Executive Board. Vaughn's election signaled the beginning of an era of fuller participation in Local 72 for black members. As the years went on, numerous black members held positions as stewards, Chief stewards, committee members and Board Members. Besides Vaughn, J.T. White, James Robenson, Willie Foxie, Frank Pope and Jack Cole were distinguished black members who served on the Executive Board in the '50's, '60's and '70's. Other minority members such as Emil Garcia also served Local 72 ably during those years.

Local 72 took an active part in the civil rights revolution that began to sweep the United States in the 1950's. At the September 12, 1957 membership meeting, Local 72 went on record in vigorous support of racial integration as the school integration drama unfolded in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1959, the Fair Employment Practices Committee passed petitions amongst the 10,000 Local 72 members calling on President Eisenhower to oppose segregation in public schools. Once again in 1960 the membership went on record opposing racial injustice by adopting a 3 point program on civil rights proposed by the FEPC. The program included a provision that a committee

of 3 Local 72 members meet with the manager of the Kenosha Woolworth's to inform him of the union's disapproval of Woolworth's segregationist policies in the South. The committee was directed to ask the manager to communicate Local 72's feelings to Woolworth's national headquarters. Again, in 1965, Local 72 members were amongst the 250 Kenoshans who marched in support of black voting rights in the South.

Women members of Local 72 began to receive more respect during the '50's. In 1956 the always active Education Committee offered a special Institute for the thousands of women in the membership. The Women's Institute featured speakers on unionism and labor history. In 1958 discrimination against both single and married women in regard to seniority finally came to an end.

The last few years of the decade saw Local 72 continue to make gains for the membership. A 7 day strike over grievances in 1957 firmly established the member's right to have a steward present when being notified of overtime or layoff. Jack Beni was returned to the Presidency in 1957 and he led the union into the 1958 contract talks. Those talks resulted in a new 3 year contract without a strike. The new contract raised the average wage in the shop to \$2.47 per hour for the 8300 working members. 8000 members and their families attended the Local's 25th anniversary celebration of that year.

In 1960 Local 72 was successful in persuading AMC management to give preference to former Simmons Company employees when the newly leased Lakefront plant was opened up for AMC production. The opening of the Lakefront brought Local 72's active membership to an

all time high of 14,300 in November of 1960. Local 72 was thus the largest non-amalgamated local in the entire UAW.

On the political front in 1960, Local 72 worked hard for the candidacy of John F. Kennedy for President. Jack Milward and T.L. Russo attended the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles as Kennedy delegates. In November, JFK was elected President, sweeping Kenosha County with plenty of help from Local 72 members.

The largest union hall in the state of Wisconsin became the home of Local 72 when the union moved into the present headquarters. Trustees T.L. Russo, Ray Neu and Art Dimeo directed the project to construct the hall under President Leo Downing. The new hall was dedicated on April 15, 1961 in a ceremony that included an open house for the public. Over the years the Local 72 hall has been used extensively by the membership and the community for worthwhile events.

## AMC SETS PATTERN

Jack Beni again took the reins of Local 72 defeating T.L. Russo in a runoff election in June of 1961. That year for the first and only time ever, the UAW chose AMC to set the pattern for the auto industry in contract talks. On the second vote a record turnout of almost 10,000 members ratified the controversial 1961 contract which contained "Progress Sharing," a form of profit sharing. The new contract also provided for full company payment of



Local 72 took an active part in the Civil Rights struggle.

# Local 72 To Dedicate Hall

## Local 72 Lauded For Its Hall

Many, many letters have been received by UAW Local 72 on invitations it had extended to union and city dignitaries to attend the dedication of its new union headquarters.

Below are given excerpts of some of these:

Sen. William Proxmire—Congratulations on the opening of your wonderful new headquarters building. I was certainly impressed by the picture on your letterhead. . . . You and the rest of the members of Local 72 must be very proud of this building.

Sen. Alexander Wiley — I am presently in the midst of completing arrangements for a trip for the weekend of April 3. Whether or not I can extend my visit over April 15 depends on the legislative program here. Just as soon as this can be determined, I shall reply. . . .

Harvey Kitzman, UAW region 10 director — Mrs. Kitzman and I appreciate this very greatly and wish to take this means of letting you know that we are



## President Downing Praises Membership

By LEO DOWNING, President, UAW Local 72 | 12 acres was purchased before my term in office.

## Another Milestone In Union's Progress; Open House Sunday

Dedication ceremonies to be held at the new UAW Local 72 headquarters will mark another milestone in the progress of the Kenosha auto workers from the time they organized up to the present when they have a total membership of 11,000 plus, making it the largest union in the state.

For the benefit of the public and its new members

this is a good time to review a little of Local 72's history which goes back to 1933 when the nation was still in the grip of the depression.

Kenosha was no exception. Relief loads were large and many workers worked short hours and received pitifully small wages.

However, 1933 was the first year of the national Democratic administration under Franklin D. Roosevelt, the greatest friend workers and their families ever had in the White House.

National Recovery Act Yes, and 1933 was the fateful year of the National Reconstruction act, Section 7-A, and other truly great pieces of social legislation.

A surge of unionism spread

The program of the two days' activity involving the dedication and the open house can be found on the front page of the second section.

ployees were held at Dana hall (now the Norwegian-American club.)

At this time the hourly rate of pay in the plant ranged from 40 cents per hour to 48 cents. However, due to a group or gang system then in vogue employees did not know what their hourly scale was until they received their pay check.

Under this system their hourly rate varied from week to week.

Short work days and

In 1961, Local 72 moved into the new union headquarters.

hospital and surgical insurance for the first time and other economic gains.

The first woman Board Member in nearly 20 years was elected in 1963 in the person of Maggie Smith. Smith was chosen as Financial Secretary that year and T.L. Russo, brother of an earlier President, Paul Russo, was elected President.

The membership and the entire country received a shock in November of 1963 when the young President, John F. Kennedy, was shot and killed in Dallas. The Kenosha Labor noted that there was much sorrow among Local 72 members when JFK was killed. President T.L. Russo attended the funeral in Washington, D.C. to pay Local 72's last respects.

## PROBLEMS IN THE 60's

The two biggest problems that Local 72 members faced in the shop in the early 60's were automation and the retiming of jobs by AMC's new Industrial Engineers, (I.E.) In 1962 an Automation Committee was set up to study the effects of new machinery and new production processes. Especially hard hit was the motor division which lost many jobs due to the introduction of automated machinery.

A sharp battle also ensued on job standards problems. In January of 1964 President Russo reported to the membership that "swarms of time study men have descended on some departments to check on standards that have been in existence a long time." The 1964 contract brought some

improvements in the standards language in the contract but the hatred IE men continued to tighten up on jobs.

Almost an entire new Executive Board was elected in 1965, as the thousands of members hired in 1958 and 1959 flexed their muscles and voiced a protest against AMC's Industrial Engineering department. Dick Thiel, a 30 year old newcomer to Local 72 politics was elected President over incumbent T.L. Russo. The present President of Local 72, Rudy Kuzel, made his first run for the Board that year and was elected Trustee. An indication of just how volatile the membership was at that time was the fact that a sit-down strike against IE took place on the same day as the Board election.

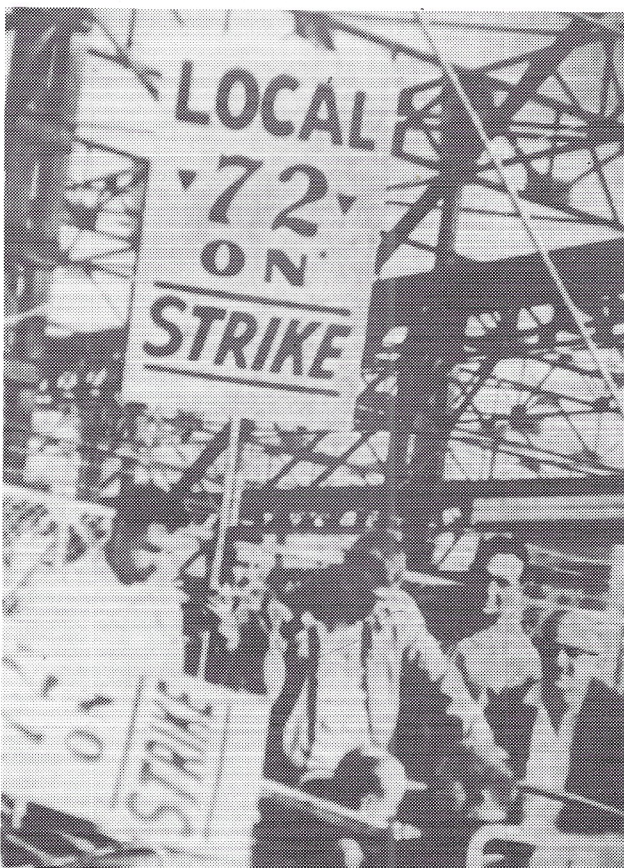
Less than two months after the election, the membership gave the new Board a 93% strike authorization vote over unresolved grievances. A strike was called that lasted for three weeks. Perhaps the most significant outcome of the 1965 strike was a new sick leave policy that did away with weekly forms that had to be submitted to the company while on leave. AMC had fired many workers who had inadvertently failed to get the weekly forms in on time. The 1965 settlement established the present sick leave procedures.

## RALPH DAUM — LONGEST TERM OF OFFICE

In 1965 Local 72 again elected a new President, as Dick Thiel declined to seek another term. Ralph Daum, a for-



**Committees have always played an important role in the functioning of Local 72.**



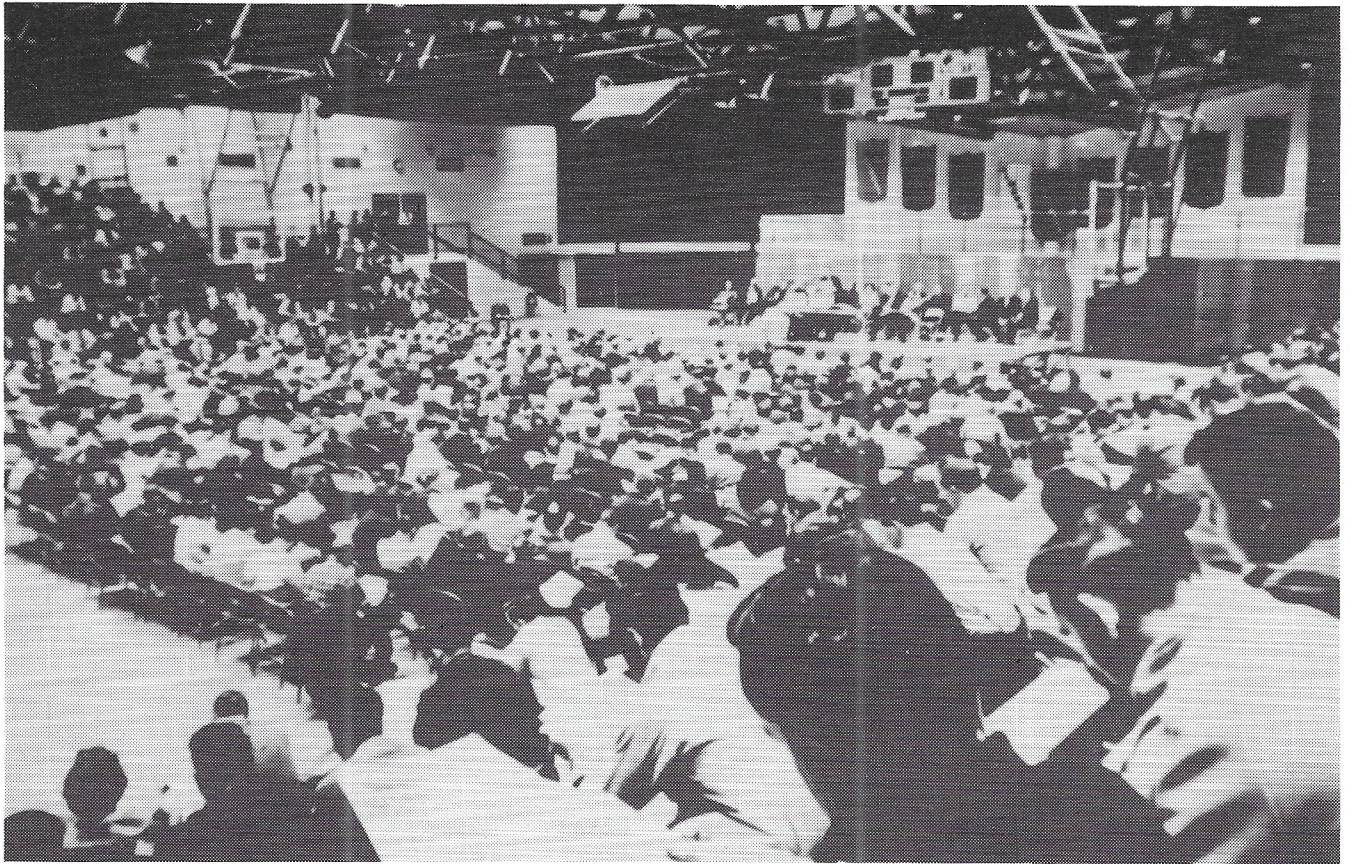
**In 1965 and 1969 Local 72 struck for better conditions.**

mer Chief Steward in the Press Room, took office on July 1, 1967. Daum was to have the distinction of serving as President for more years than anyone else, finally being defeated by Gene Sylvester in 1978.

Shortly after Daum took office, Local 72 members were again saddened to learn of the assassination of a public figure. On April 4, 1968 a sniper's bullet cut down Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis where he had gone to lend support to striking city employees. Black Local 72 members left work in honor of Dr. King, shutting the plant down. Many members participated in a silent march from the Second Baptist church to the Kenosha Municipal building to conduct a memorial service. President Ralph Daum and Harold Mack of the FEPC traveled to Atlanta to attend funeral services for King.

The late 60's and early 70's were also a sad time for Local 72 members and their families as members and relatives of members fought and died in the Vietnam War. UAW President Walter Reuther called for a ceasefire and an immediate end to the bombing in 1968 in an effort to bring peace to America and Vietnam. The membership of Local 72 today includes many veterans of the Vietnam War. Many Vietnam vets have served Local 72 as committee persons and elected representatives in the years following their discharge from service.

Back at the bargaining table, Local 72 took on AMC in a strike that lasted 26 working days in the fall of 1969. The membership reacted bitterly to AMC's purchase of Kaiser Jeep for \$85 million which was announced during the first week of the strike. The strike successfully beat back AMC's takeaway proposals and made solid gains for the



**Members jammed the Carthage Fieldhouse to discuss the 1969 contract settlement.**

membership. The 1969 strike, which was second only to the '39 strike in length, produced the present 100% voluntary overtime provision enjoyed by the membership.

In 1970, with the assistance of Pat Greathouse of the International Union, Local 72 negotiated the first Joint Alcohol and Drug program in the auto industry. The program recognized alcohol and drug addiction as a disease and pledged joint action by the company and union to offer treatment to those willing to accept it.

Once again in 1974 President Daum led Local 72 out on strike against a profitable AMC to keep the working agreement intact. After two weeks on strike a new contract was ratified with no major changes.

In 1976, the transfer of Gremlin production back to Kenosha brought 300 Local 75 members into the Kenosha plant with their seniority. That transfer of operations was the first step in the eventual shutdown of auto production in Milwaukee. The next step took place in 1978 when the Matador was phased out. At that time another group of Local 75 members came to work in the Kenosha plant and became part of Local 12.

## **CHANGING OF THE GUARD**

There was a changing of the guard in leadership in 1978 when Recording Secretary Gene Sylvester defeated Ralph Daum for President. During Sylvester's 6 years as President, Local 72 negotiated two contracts and several

supplemental agreements aimed at enhancing job security.


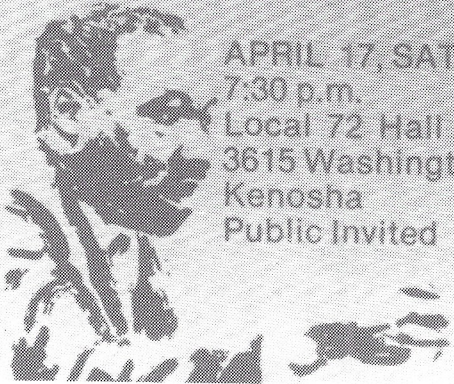
Sylvester and the new board took office in a difficult period with Local 72 under the Administration of the International Union. The 1978 contract which was negotiated in that uncertain atmosphere was notable for bringing in the present vacation agreement which is considered the best in the industry.

Under Sylvester's administration, the union negotiated full time representatives for the Alcohol and Drug program, Unemployment Compensation and Workers Compensation, and Insurance. Rudy Kuzel was appointed as the first Alcohol and Drug rep in 1981. The Alcohol and Drug Program became known for its firm but fair treatment of members with problems. Jack Ward, who was appointed as U.C. and Workers Comp rep by Sylvester, assisted thousands of members in cutting through red tape to obtain the benefits they were entitled to. In 1984, Jack Cole became the Local's first full time Insurance Representative and Ken Johnson was appointed as Pension Representative.

In 1980, the Executive Board and President Sylvester were able to negotiate a paid day off in honor of the slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King. Local 72 thus became the first local in the auto industry to win such a day off. Starting in 1981 and each year thereafter Local 72 has held an annual program to honor Dr. King. In 1984 close to 1000 members and friends attended a program in honor of Dr. King that featured the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Dr. Joseph Lowery.

The late 70's and early 80's were a time of much unemployment for Local 72 members as AMC's aging

UAW Local 72 FEPC presents  
**THE 'DREAM LIVES ON'**  
 2nd annual program to honor  
**MARTIN LUTHER KING**  
 guest speakers  
 Congressman  
 Harold Washington  
 Myrtle Lacy  
 Gene Sylvester

APRIL 17, SAT.  
 7:30 p.m.  
 Local 72 Hall  
 3615 Washington Rd.  
 Kenosha  
 Public Invited

Local 72 became the first local in the UAW to negotiate a paid day off in honor of Martin Luther King.

product line took a beating in the marketplace. The winter of 1982 was a low point with close to 4500 members laid off indefinitely.

In October of 1981 a bus load of Local 72 members joined 500,000 other unionists in Washington D.C. in the Solidarity Day demonstration. That protest against the Reagan Administration's economic and social policies that were causing so much hardship for working people, was the largest ever held in the nation's capital.

## RENAULT-AMC MERGER

AMC was rescued from almost certain collapse in 1980 when the government owned French automaker, Renault, bought 46% of the company. The Renault / American Motors partnership produced the first joint venture production of autos in America. Local 72 negotiated a special agreement to bring the Renault work into the plant. The Renault Agreement, which made some minor changes in manpower language was a far cry from the demands future joint ventures were to put on the UAW at other locations.

The Renault merger presented Local 72 with new challenges to be met. In the years since the merger, Local 72 has established a working relationship with the French unions at Renault in order to gain a better understanding of the AMC / Renault partnership. Three times delegations from Local 72 traveled to France and were cordially received by the French unions. Representatives of the



Local 72 members joined in the massive Solidarity Day demonstrations in 1981.

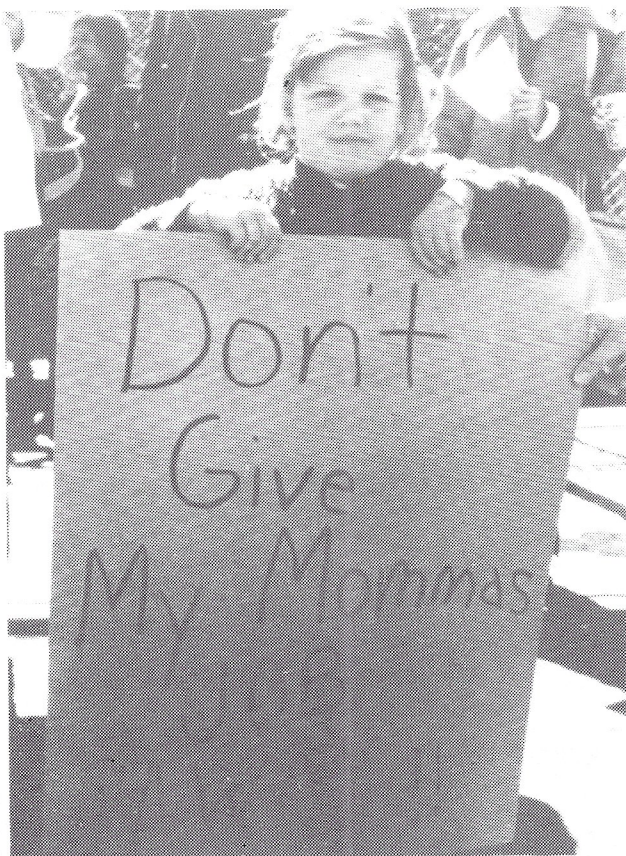
various French unions have also been welcomed by Local 72 in Kenosha.

In April of 1982 the Renault/AMC partnership bore fruit as Local 72 members began building French designed Renault Alliance in Kenosha. The fine workmanship of Local 72 members helped the Alliance to win the Car of the Year Award for the 1983 model year. But sales of the Alliance and its derivative, the Encore, began to slump in mid-1984 as competition from overseas and the larger American automakers intensified.

In the early 80's a group of AMC foremen with financial backing from the company, sued three Local 72 members, Jon Melrod, John Drew and Tod Ohnstad, who published a plant newsletter. The resulting multimillion dollar libel suit ended in a victory for union members' right to free speech, as the three editors were upheld by a jury and no damages were awarded to the foremen.

## ROCKY ROAD AHEAD

In 1984 long time Local 72 Leader Rudy Kuzel was elected President without any opposition. Sandy Rommel was elected Board Member at Large to become the local's 4th female Board Member. Former President Gene Sylvester and Sgt. at Arms Jack Cole took positions on the staff of UAW Region 10. President Kuzel took office at perhaps the most difficult time in Local 72's history. The question of job security at the Kenosha plant in the face of worldwide competition in the auto industry was the



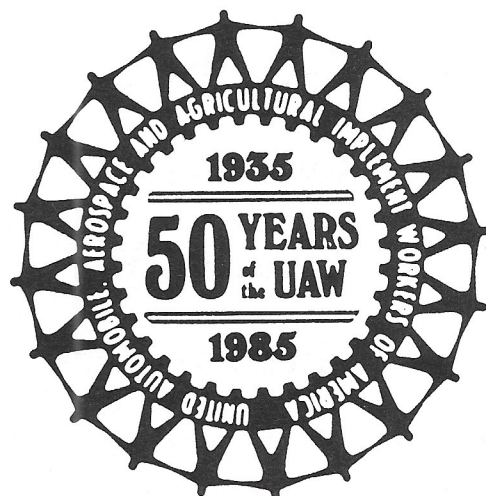
Job security became the #1 priority in the '80s.

thorniest problem ever faced by the union and there were no easy answers in sight. As Local 72 marks its 50th anniversary in 1985, the continued existence of Local 72 is in jeopardy.

## 50 YEARS OF PROGRESS

In summing up the first 50 years of Local 72, it is helpful to look at an outside view of our union. At the conclusion of her fine history of Local 72 in the book *Kenosha Retrospective*, Angela Howard Zophy looks at the first half century of our union this way:

*"Thus did the members of Local 72 directly face the challenge of the 1980's to American auto worker unions. The union earned a reputation as the "Black Sheep of the UAW" for pursuing its fiercely independent course during its first 50 years. The maverick quality of Local 72 pervaded all its major confrontations with Nash and American Motors. Union leaders staunchly defended the rights of voluntary overtime and a smaller steward - worker ratio, both of which were unique among old AMC plants. Union leaders produced from the ranks of Kenosha auto workers proved capable, determined and resourceful in pursuing the goals of decent pay and working conditions, of job security and of adequate pensions for its retired members. There was continuity of both policy and leadership as each new generation served apprenticeship in the union's committee and board structure before assuming negotiating functions. The union negotiators exercised initiative and measured restraint in seeking these goals from a smaller auto company. The union adapted to changed circumstances, moving from a personal relationship with plant owners to one with salaried company management personnel, and finally to working with officials and representatives of an impersonal absentee ownership. Frequently union leaders employed great skill in obtaining more benefits from AMC than the Big 3 UAW unions could boast. The officers and committee members of Local 72 served with a diligence, honor and competence that has secured for its members both prosperity and security in the past half - century. Armed with resolute leadership and reverence for its past, Local 72 completed its first 50 years in the eighties."*







**Local 72 Board Members Tod Ohnstad, Bob Rosinski and Jon Melrod with French unionists in front of Renault's Cleon plant, where engines for the Alliance are produced.**

## **Members of Local 72 Who Served on the UAW International**

**George Nordstrom**

**Winand Kult**

**Paul Russo**

**Jack Rice**

**Jess Nichols**

**Glen Harris**

**Kenneth McNeil**

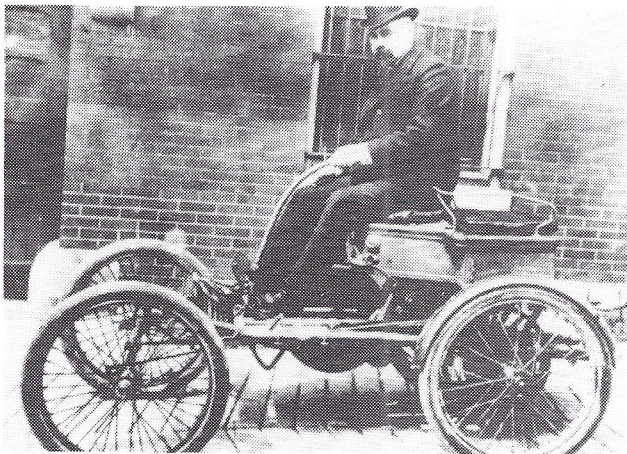
**T.L. Russo**

**Christ Gerber**

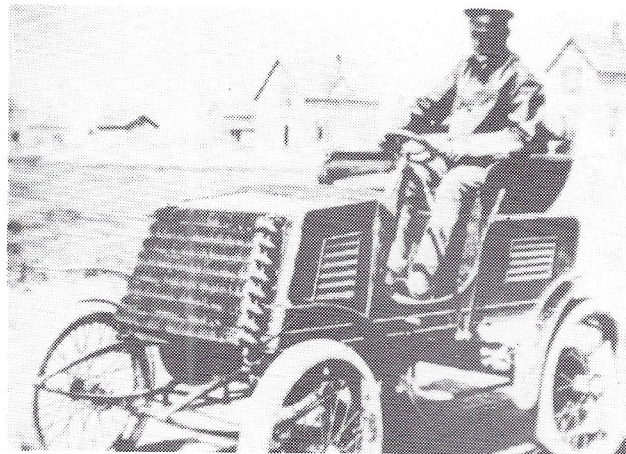
**Gene Sylvester**

**Jack Cole**

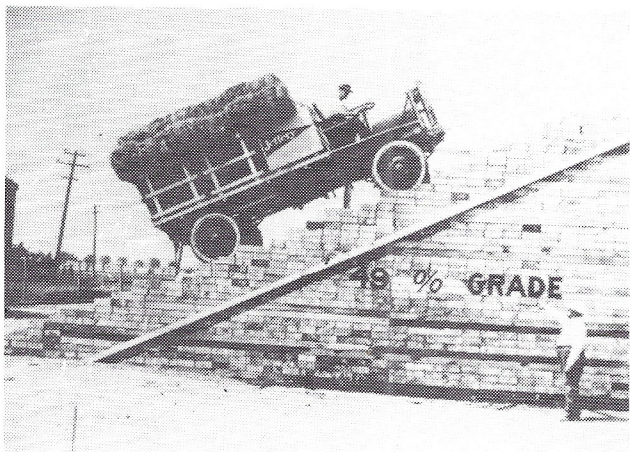
# SOME OF THE CARS BUILT IN KENOSHA OVER THE YEARS



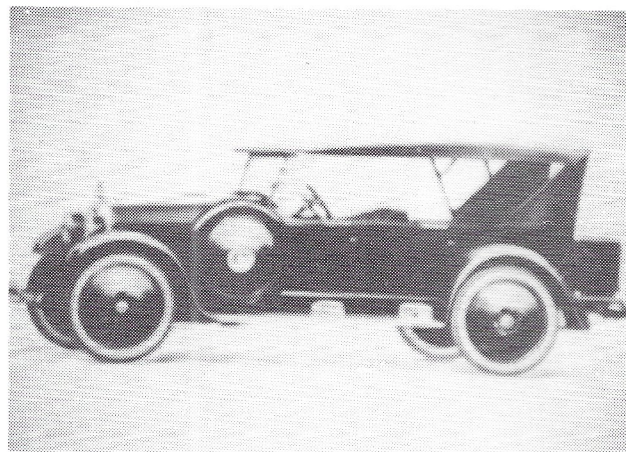
1st experimental Rambler car



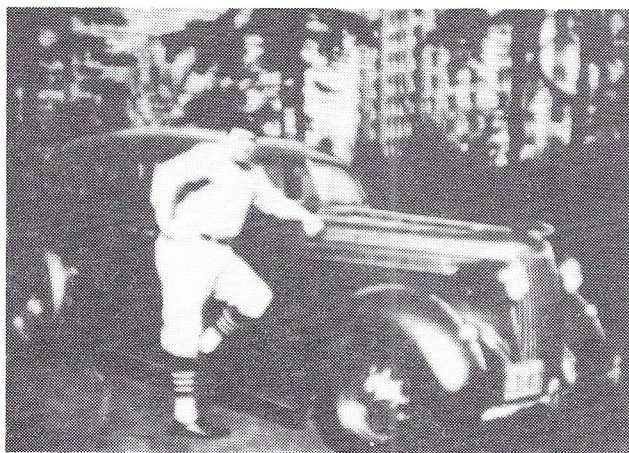
1901 Rambler



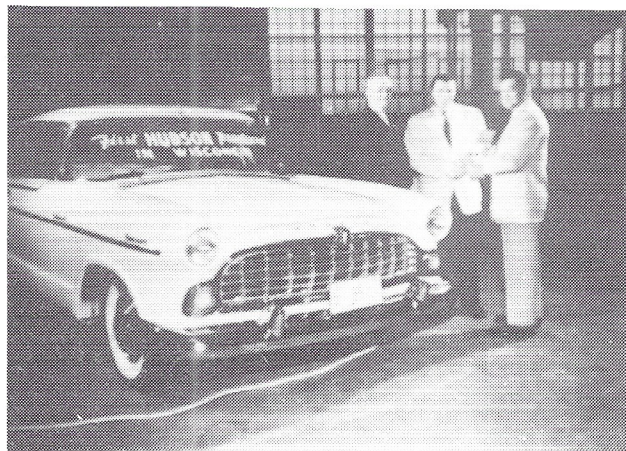
Jeffrey Quad 4 - wheel - drive truck



1924 Nash Sport Model



1937 Nash with proud new owner Babe Ruth



1955 Hudson Hornet being presented to football star Alan Ameche

## **SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

A project such as this requires the help of many people. First of all I would like to thank Rudy Kuzel and the rest of my fellow members of the Local 72 Executive Board for allowing me to undertake this project. Thanks also to UAW Education Director Art Shy for his help in getting this project started. I would also like to extend a special thanks to Paul Russo for his invaluable assistance as a living link with the early days of the union. Thanks also to Jon Melrod and Bob Rosinski for assistance in selecting pictures, to Tod Ohnstad for research done at Wayne State University in Detroit, and to the staff at Simmons Library in Kenosha. Finally, thanks to everyone associated with the Kenosha Labor from 1935 to the present for their diligence in reporting on Local 72 and the union movement in general.

**John Drew**