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## Ford: Expansion and Challenge 1915-1933. By Allan Newins and Frank Hill.

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FORD: EXPANSION AND CHALLENGE 1915-1933. Allan Nevins and Frank Ernest Hill. New York, N. Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957. Pp. 620.

Nevins and Hill, in their second volume on the Ford Motor Company, present persuasive evidence that objective historical reporting does not require a fifty or hundred year lapse in time.

In this chronicle of the activities of the Ford Company and family, living recollection and documentation serve rather than distort able scholarship.

The starting point is 1915, the dawn of the mass production era. The infant auto industry had in the preceding five years multiplied tenfold its production rate. The significance of this lay not in the numbers of automobiles alone, but in the fact that the industry had devised and put into operation a co-ordinated, systematic scheme for the manufacture in a continuous progression of a great number of identical items. In this process, the product itself had evolved from the awkward "horseless carriage" of a few years before into a new and separate object, self-contained and with a form of its own.

Ford was the leader, and the book follows its progress through the years of World War I to the age of its great Model T, the "universal car," and later to the Model A. The conclusion is, of course, the story of the onslaught of the depression and its early years.

Although the authors describe the book as a history of the Ford Motor Company, it is dominated, as was the Company, by the figure of Henry Ford. The record of Ford's many and varied involvements outside the Company will be familiar to the reader. The story of the Peace Crusade to Europe during World War I, his race for Michigan senatorship after the war, the presidential boom of the early twenties, the publication of the *Dearborn Independent*, the soy bean experiments, the development of Greenfield Village and the bid to purchase the dam at Muscle Shoals are among those related.

Of greater interest and significance is the portrait of Ford, the great innovator of the age of integrated manufacturing and the apostle of mass consumption.

His first contribution, the moving assembly line, had already been made at Highland Park. Still to come was the mighty Rouge Plant; a vast industrial complex encompassing not merely the motion of factory production, but the complete flow of manufacturing from raw materials to finished product. Ultimately involved was an organization which literally encircled the globe.

Concomitant with his vision of mass production was Ford's view of mass

consumption. From the beginning, his aim was to manufacture a vehicle which would be the tool of the laboring class rather than the toy of the rich. The development of the Fordson tractor was, in large part, a reflection of Ford's determination to raise the standard of farm living. There were continued efforts to improve quality and performance of the Model T, without price increase, which can in some part, at least, be attributed, beyond competitive motives, to a desire to make the car a more useful and available product. The inauguration of the five-dollar day, and later the seven-dollar day, were expressions of a well-intended (though sometimes fitfully executed) program to increase the general purchasing power of industrial workers.

Unfortunately, this was not the whole man. There were other less inviting facets. His decisions on important corporate matters were frequently capricious and arbitrary. His relations with Edsel Ford can be described only as tragic. He knowingly permitted his sales department to impose tremendous pressure and harassment on Ford dealers when it served his immediate purposes. He was never able in the period covered to organize a competent research and development program. Time and again worthwhile projects were dropped or completely forbidden because of the owner's captiousness.

Because of his belief in the everlasting practicability and salability of the Model T, he delayed for years too long the development of a new model to meet changing consumer preferences. As he grew older and attained world-wide renown, he began to believe in his own infallibility, not only in the automotive field, but in various unrelated fields of public affairs of which he often lacked even rudimentary knowledge.

Nor were Ford's relations with his employees, workers and executives alike, a fulfillment of the promise of the five-dollar day and the early profit-sharing programs. Competition among managerial personnel, especially among those seeking to curry favor with the throne, was fierce and unending and wholesale turnover on these levels was often almost disastrous.

The Company's labor policy suffered alternately from excesses of paternalism and harshness. In many ways, Ford workers fared better than their contemporaries. Wages were generally comparable to or better than those paid elsewhere. For many years, a generous employee savings plan was conducted. Safety and cleanliness were almost a fetish and the Ford plants were, in those respects, far ahead of their times. Employment policies and training programs were for long periods liberally administered. However, even during the early days the whole lives of Ford employees were regulated and directed by Company rules and policies. During the twenties, under a change of personnel supervision, plant discipline became harsh and arbitrary. There was no job security or seniority

system and employees with years of service were subject to suspension or dismissal for the most minor infractions of Company rules. The hateful espionage and reporting system which had been conducted from almost the beginning grew in scope and power culminating ultimately in the turbulent regime of Harry Bennett.

Much has been written of the plight of industrial workers during this era. The inexorable pressure and strain of the ever-moving assembly line, the overwhelming monotony of repetitious operations, and the constant drive for greater production have been vividly described and decried. Without in any way attempting to understate these problems as they relate to Ford's operations, the authors have succeeded in placing them in reasonable perspective in terms of industry as a whole and of the growth of the science of labor relations. While Nevins and Hill offer no final judgment on Ford's labor policies, they provide more than sufficient material for the reader to reach his own judgment. It is one of the attributes of this book that the authors have throughout documented the more controversial aspect of Ford's activities and those of his corporation and yet have succeeded in refraining from overjudging their subjects.

Few persons interested in the history of our industrial community will resist being fascinated by the story of the Ford Motor Company as it is related here. This is particularly true, it is submitted, of lawyers for whom this review is published.

That a lawyer, if he is to serve properly, must understand the background of our social, economic, and industrial systems is self-evident. Beyond this, however, the lawyer whose practice or interests encompass the business community will find here knowledgeable reporting and interpretation of a portion of recent history which has greatly influenced present day business and industrial law. The Dodge Brother's stockholders' suit is one of the great cases of modern corporation law. The system of franchised dealerships, in the development of which the Ford Company played an important part, has given rise to a whole body of law in the fields of contracts and financing. It is difficult to understand the present corpus of labor law without an appreciation of the factors in the automobile industry which gave such impetus to industrial unionization. Instalment finance law has been greatly affected by the tremendous growth of the retail automobile finance business.

This is no law book; it is a book for lawyers.

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