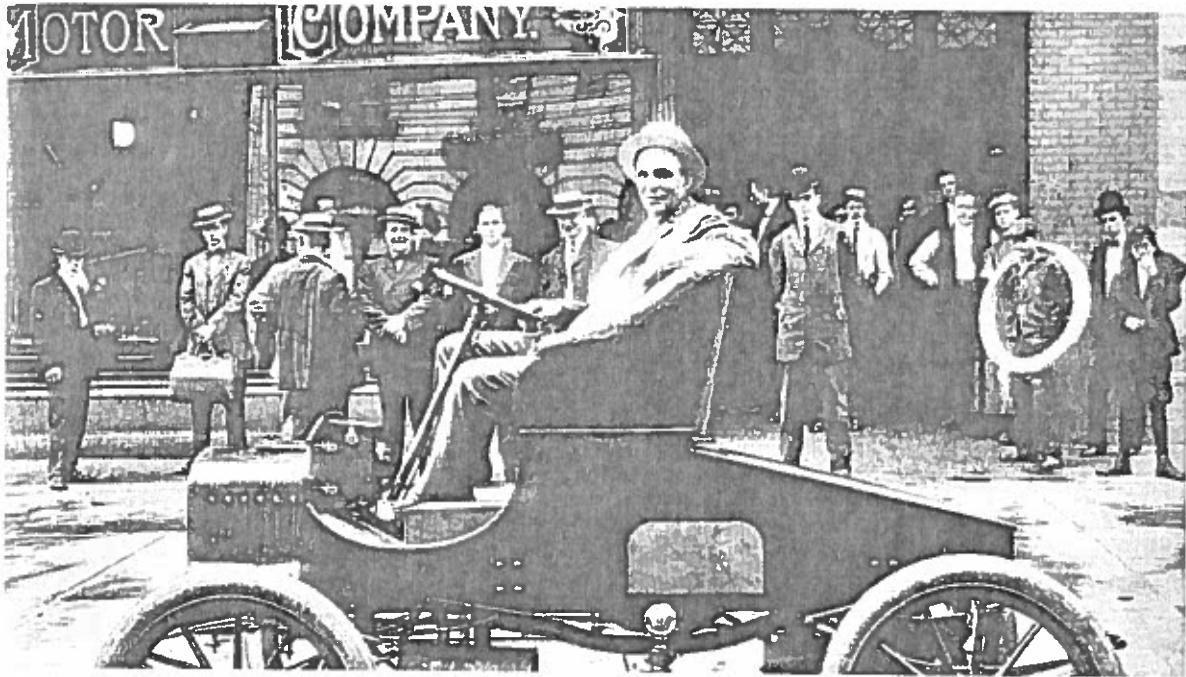


Primary Sources: Henry Ford's "Fear of Change"

By Henry Ford, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.19.16

Word Count **954**



U.S. automaker Henry Ford poses for a photographer in his new Ford Model T in front of his car plant in Detroit, Michigan, in 1907. He was 37 years old at the time. (Photo: AFP/Getty Images)

Editor's Note: Henry Ford (1863–1947) is most famous for founding the Ford Motor Company and developing the assembly line in factories, which is essential to manufacturing products quickly and on a large scale. "Fear of Change" is a section of a longer work of his titled "Ford Ideals" (1922). In it, Ford examines why change is necessary and why some people respond to it negatively.

"The World Is Changing Beneath And Around Us"

Voices on every side are counseling us to fill ourselves with fear. Wherever you go, whatever you read, disaster is predicted. Though a most terrible war has ended in victory, the nation does not seem to have a hopeful view of the future. Our loudest voices are full of dread over what lies ahead.

Well, what does the mysterious future hold in store for us?

While much of what it will bring is unknowable, there is one element we may expect with certainty: the element of Change.

Of course, Change is nothing new and has occurred throughout history, if not always so suddenly and completely as now. We are continually changing and life is always changing for us and the world is changing beneath and around us — so why fear Change?

And yet, there are people who really do fear it and who are falling victims to the spreaders of fear today.

Men fear Change for different reasons. Some are afraid of anything new or unexpected simply because it is out of their ordinary routine. For such men, fear of Change is a sign of weakness and proof that they have lost their passion for life.

"An Improvement To A System That Is Right And Just"

But aside from that fear, there is another fear which is a sign of selfishness. It is that second sort of fear which has clutched a whole class in America today.

World War I brought an end to the world as we knew it, and that old world can never come back. In Europe, the old order of noblemen and kings has been toppled. Some of the formerly idle nobility must now work in order to support themselves, while others fear the same may soon be true for them.

Here in the United States we have never had a king, yet we do have a privileged aristocracy. They are the wealthy privileged elite who live off the productive thought and labor of others — and it is they who now fear Change.

We have been pretty easygoing in America, and shrewd men have taken advantage of this spirit. They have enriched themselves at the expense of others and have lived off the labor of others.

It is the get-rich-quick thieves and those who fatten on the labor of others who fear Change.

In their case, the coming Change will seem a blow — but what can be changed to anyone's hurt is wrong to begin with. An improvement to a system that is right and just injures no one, but helps all. If Change harms the idle rich class, it is a proof that their system is wrong and harmful to others.

"Change Can Only Hit Those Matters Which Ought To Be Changed"

Anyone who has been living by his productive thought and labor, who has never thought in terms of his own wealth and glory but always in terms of the general good, such a one has nothing to fear from Change. It is his friend and ally.

Why should it be so hard to get this thought into men's mind, that Change can only hit those matters which ought to be changed for the better?

Suppose our rich idlers are made to work for their bread — will that be such a terrible change?

Suppose the dishonest, shrewd, scheming, gambling, double-crossing tribe of work shirkers are put out of their feathered nests and made to labor for their living. Will such a thing bring "the end of civilization" as some of the fear-peddlers tell us?

Instead of causing "the end of civilization," it would mark a promising new beginning, for us and for them.

"In The Long Term, Change Works Good All Around"

The two great evils we must banish from our world are Poverty and Privilege. Now, how can we end Poverty? The best way to accomplish it is to destroy the causes of Poverty.

Then how can we get rid of Privilege? You accomplish it by abolishing the causes of Privilege, for Privilege has just as definite causes as Poverty, and they are just as easily controlled.

No one will be hurt in the good Changes that may be in store for this world.

Even the idle and useless rich who may lose their luxury are not going to be hurt. They will be better off without their idleness and expensive vices, and in time they will thank the influences that made them get to work and become of some use.

If the poor will thank you for abolishing Poverty, the useless rich will thank you for abolishing Privilege.

In the long term, Change works good all around.

"Nothing Will Ever Happen That Will Dethrone The Worker"

That is why a man with a clear conscience need never fear Change. If he is a worker now, he will be needed in the world whatever happens.

Nothing will ever happen that will dethrone the worker, and his place is secure throughout all time. The man who produces by his thought or his labor will always be in request and in favor.

If a moral were needed, this might do: to escape fear and a guilty conscience, become a worker. And this applies very directly to the wealthy idler whose fears are very lively just now.

