

**TITLE:** END OF THE LINE

**FORMAT:** Feature | 1930s Period | Dramatic Historical Thriller | Inspired by True Events

**LOGLINE:** *A charismatic yet explosive fixer confronts his own morality as he navigates the treacherous world of industrial politics and personal loyalties to protect the Ford empire when a tragic assembly line accident ignites union tensions in Depression-era Detroit.*

**COMPS:** It's the conflicted fixer of MICHAEL CLAYTON in the world of THE IRISHMAN.

**WORLD:** Henry Ford forever changed the world when his implementation of the moving assembly line made personal mobility affordable to the masses. During the Great Depression, the United Auto Workers' union (UAW) began its effort to unionize Henry Ford's River Rouge manufacturing complex, the largest factory ever built. The Ford Motor Company was the most powerful family-held company the world had ever seen... but that doesn't mean Ford's workers believed they were fairly compensated for the rigorous work they repeatedly performed in the dangerous factories.

**ABOUT ME:** I grew up in Ann Arbor, a university town outside Detroit. My relatives who worked in the auto factories have many stories to tell. I fell in love with this story when I heard that a *gangster* ran the Ford Motor Company in the '30s—he lived in a castle and had lions and tigers to scare away the union organizers he was tasked with keeping out of Ford's factories. I wondered what these jobs do to a man's soul—and are union actions like the recent SAG & WGA strikes or the tense organization efforts at Starbucks, Amazon and Tesla the answer to today's struggle between capital and labor?

### **In the industrial labyrinth of Depression-era Detroit...**

Hardened WWI veteran **HARRY BENNETT** (40s) serves as the iron-fisted head of the Ford Motor Company's notorious Service Department (Ford's Gestapo-like internal security force of hundreds of men who kept the workers in line). Feared by the workers, Bennett is revered by **HENRY FORD** (70s; worth about \$200 billion in today's dollars). Beneath Bennett's ruthless exterior, however, is a father desperate to save his young daughter **GERTIE** (8), who suffers from polio. His relentless pursuit of power is fueled not just by ambition, but by the urgent need to secure an iron lung—Gertie's only chance at survival.

### ***The largest factory the world has ever seen...***

Ford's **Rouge Factory**, a massive, ceaseless machine that grinds both metal and men. Bennett and his Service Department maintain control through fear, but the factory workers, led by rising labor leader **WALTER REUTHER** (40s), are beginning to push back.

The tension between capital and labor comes to a head when a factory worker loses an arm as Mr. Ford speeds up the pace of his moving assembly line. Mr. Ford realizes that the passing of the **National Labor Relations Act**, which legalized the right of factory workers to form a union, means the organizers could use this "accident" to gain control of the factory. Fearing a labor strike, Mr. Ford tasks Bennett with keeping the unions out. *Ensure the factory remains productive—at any cost.* This pulls Bennett in two directions as he struggles to find an extremely rare iron lung for Gertie.

Seeing an opportunity, Reuther begins rallying the workers and behind closed doors forms an uneasy alliance with **EDSEL FORD** (40s), President of the Ford Motor Company (in name only) and Henry Ford's only son, who quietly sympathizes with the workers' plight—plus he thinks unionization is good for business. Edsel proposes a scheme for Reuther and his men to stage an

organizing campaign on the **Miller Road Overpass**, hoping to bring attention to the workers' cause and force his father's hand.

### ***The Battle of the Overpass...***

But Bennett and his spies are always watching. Through his network of informants, Bennett learns of the plan and resolves to exploit it for his own gain. While Reuther and Edsel believe they're orchestrating a peaceful protest, Bennett sets in motion a brutal ambush. The resulting clash (known as the **Battle of the Overpass**) turns into a bloodbath as Bennett's goons descend on Reuther and his union men, beating them savagely. The violence is captured by a newspaper photographer, but Bennett's men confiscate the photos before they can be released, ensuring Ford's public image remains untarnished—for now.

During the unveiling of **Diego Rivera's** (50s) mural, **Detroit Industry**, at the Detroit Institute of Arts, Ford publicly favors Bennett over Edsel and gifts Bennett a family heirloom pocket watch as a token of his great work. This sends Edsel into a spiraling descent.

Privately, Mr. Ford gives Bennett a bespoke iron lung that he designed himself (with the help of the world's foremost experts)—if he keeps up the great work, he'll usurp Edsel to become President. Bennett is relieved, even though he now realizes that the reason he couldn't get an iron lung earlier is because Mr. Ford had all the experts tied up on his own designs.

As Reuther and his men recover from the beatings, Edsel storms into their headquarters, pleading with them to kill Bennett. This leads to Reuther's brother planting a bomb on Bennett's yacht.

With the promise of recovery offered by the iron lung, Bennett takes Gertie for a trip on his yacht. The bomb explodes, injuring Bennett and tragically killing Gertie.

The loss of innocent Gertie is a crushing blow to Bennett, who's devastated by these unintended consequences of his actions. It's a turning point in his life, a moment of reckoning that forces him to confront the violent legacy he's built. Haunted by guilt and seeking redemption...

### ***Bennett undergoes a profound transformation...***

No longer the loyal enforcer, Bennett begins to question his allegiance to Mr. Ford and makes a bold decision: he releases the confiscated photos from the Battle of the Overpass to the media, ensuring the world sees the brutal oppression at Ford's factory.

Bennett confronts Ford at **Greenfield Village**, where Ford builds a monument to *simpler times* and obsessively reconstructs **Thomas Edison's Lab**, brick by brick. Bennett pulls a gun and threatens Ford, demanding he sign a contract with the unions. Ford dismisses him, nostalgic for a world *before automobiles*. Bennett returns the pocket watch and walks away, his loyalty finally severed.

In a rousing speech, Reuther, now a hero of the working man, declares *the labor movement will remake the world*, ensuring that workers benefit from their labor and setting the future course of American manufacturing for the next century.

Bennett visits Gertie's grave, a man forever changed by the destruction he helped create. We end on the transform of Detroit from a thriving metropolis to the desolate ghost town it becomes at the end of the twentieth century, a testament to the consequences of the battle between capital and labor.

**END OF THE LINE** asks what role unions should play in the struggle between capital and labor, and how our contemporary conflict in American industry affects families beyond the factory gates.