

# LESSON 6



## MODERN TIMES

This is a graphic and entertaining illustration of the two previous lessons. **Paper Airplane** demonstrated the transition to increased management control and the lessened skill levels and less meaningful work that followed. **Free to Think, Talk, Listen, or Sing** gave the historical background. Here students see the workplace consequences. Although the movie is a caricature, it highlights people's real experiences. Notice the absence of black workers, who will shortly become an important force in unionizing heavy industry.

### Goals/Objectives

1. Students will explore a range of ways working people were affected by industrialization.
2. Students will reflect on the role of management in an industrial enterprise.
3. Students will enjoy watching part of a Charlie Chaplin film.

### Materials Needed

- Reel one of *Modern Times*. Public libraries often have copies of this film. It is also widely available for rent in video stores. The film is also available for purchase on videotape from:

Zenger Video  
10,000 Culver Blvd., Dept. 9A  
P.O. Box 802  
Culver City, CA 90232-0802

### Time Required

- One class period.



### Procedure

1. Prepare students for viewing the film by providing a little background:

*Modern Times* was filmed in 1935, during the Depression, and released in 1936. It was the last major movie of the silent film era. This film was also the last appearance of the Little Tramp, the character Charlie Chaplin played in a number of his movies. The Little Tramp always stood almost outside society, making his own individual way down the road. Chaplin reportedly got the idea for the film when he was told about automobile assembly-line workers in De-

troit who were going crazy on their jobs. *Modern Times* was banned in fascist Germany and Italy.

2. Show the film. The running time for part one is 19 minutes. If video format is used, stop the film as the Little Tramp is carted off to the mental hospital.
3. After the showing, ask students to list all the effects of factory work on the workers in the film.

**4.** Have students use their lists as a basis for discussing the following questions:

- What are the conditions of work for the men in Chaplin's factory?
- What do you think it would be like to work in Chaplin's factory?
- What does the boss in the factory do?
- What are his main concerns?
- How does he treat the workers?
- Do you think the boss has studied the techniques of scientific management? (You might briefly review the stages of scientific management: (1) Managers observe and record the process of work. (2) The process is redesigned by management to facilitate control. (3) Workers' tasks are reassigned based on management's new designs.)
- Can you cite some examples? (Possible answers include: use of TV cameras, of the assembly line—management's ability to control its speed, willingness to try out automatic eating machine.)
- Why does the boss bring in the eating machine? Why does he decide to get rid of it? Is it because the machine might have a negative effect on the workers?

- How does the boss relate to the foreman?
- What does the foreman do?
- What is the foreman's attitude toward the workers in the factory?
- How do you think the assembly line affects the workers? How does it affect Chaplin?
- What makes you realize the other men, as well as Chaplin, are affected psychologically? (Remember how Chaplin stopped the men from chasing him when he was squirting them with oil.)
- Why does Chaplin go crazy?
- What goal do you think Chaplin had in mind when he made this film?
- Based on your knowledge of Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy, do you have any idea why they would have banned this movie?

**5.** Homework: after the film discussion, have students write an "interior monologue" from Chaplin's point of view after he is taken to the mental hospital. Students should write in a first-person format: What is Chaplin thinking? Is he worried? Is he angry? Does he have an understanding of what caused his problems?