

*History has been  
our heritage.  
It was given to us  
by our forefathers.  
It always will be.*

# **UNITED STEELWORKERS**

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR UNION, ITS STRUGGLES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

*Nothing we have  
was given to  
us without a  
struggle.  
It never will be.*

*Some of you may already know our proud history, but a lot of you will be reading the dates and events for the first time. Feel free to use the Internet or whatever source you may have to learn more about the following events.*

### **1892—Homestead Steel Works—Pittsburgh, PA**

The Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers ( formed in 1876) were locked out of Andrew Carnegie's Homestead Steel Works.

Carnegie brought in 300 Pinkerton guards to protect his facility and the replacement workers he was attempting to bring into his plant. A vicious battle between the Union workers and the Pinkerton guards ensued on the banks of the Monongahela River leaving 10 men dead and the river running red with blood.

The State Militia was brought in also and eventually, Carnegie broke the union and removed it from the mills.

Carnegie was infamous for praising and supporting his employees when he was in the public eye, while the actual working conditions in his steel plants were horrid and inhumane. The mainstream press criticized Carnegie's hypocrisy. In widely quoted magazine articles published in 1886, Carnegie had defended workers' rights to organize into unions and had declared, "Thou shalt not take thy neighbor's job." The St. Louis Post-Dispatch summed up the public's recoil from Carnegie's failure, "A single word from him might have saved the bloodshed—but the word was never spoken ... Ten thousand Carnegie Public Libraries will not compensate the country for the direct and indirect evils resulting from the Homestead lockout ..."

*The battle left 10  
men dead and  
the river running  
red with blood.*

### **1919**

In 1919 the average wage was 46.2 cents-an-hour for an average seventy-four (74) hour work week.

In September of that year, steelworkers across the country again went on strike to gain Union recognition and abolish the twelve (12) hour shift. The strike was again broken.

### **1935**

Congress approved the National Labor Relations Act in 1935 to encourage a healthy relationship between private-sector workers and their employers, which policy makers viewed as vital to the national interest. The NLRA extends many rights to workers who already were members of unions and to those who wished to form, join or support unions. The NLRA also extends rights to employers, protecting commercial interests against unfair actions committed by labor organizations. It also extends rights to labor organizations, protecting organizational and collective bargaining representative interests against unfair actions committed by employers.

### **1936**

The Steelworkers Organizing Committee was created with help from the United Mine Workers. The UMW took \$1,000,000 from their treasury to fund the SWOC. Organizers spread into steel towns across the nation and workers flooded into the union.

### **1937**

In March of 1937, U. S. Steel recognized the Steelworkers Organizing Committee without a strike and signs the first contract with the Union:

- \* 10- cent wage increase and \$5/day minimum wage.
- \* 8-hour day/40 hour week with time and-one-half after 8 hours.
- \* 1 week paid vacation after 5 years of service.
- \* Seniority for bidding on jobs or decreasing the workforce.
- \* July 4th , Labor Day, Christmas holidays gained.

In May of 1937 the "Little Steel" strike was called to organize workers at Bethlehem, Jones & Laughlin, National and other companies. The strike resulted in police riots, attacks on workers by company guards and other hardship for steelworkers—yet it ultimately lead to the successful organization of these companies.

*"U.S. Steel recognized the Steelworkers Organizing Committee without a strike and signs the first contract..."*

### **1938**

The U.S. Steel contract expires and U. S. Steel proposed wage cuts. The USWA avoided wage reductions and secured a new contract.

### **1941**

A new U. S. Steel contract was established:

- \* 10-cent wage increase.
- \* Time and-one-half for holidays worked.
- \* Paid vacations gained—  
1 week after 3 years, 2 weeks after 15 years.

### 1942

Delegates to the Steelworkers Organizing Committee convention in Cleveland create the United Steelworkers of America and elect Phillip Murray as the first USWA President in May of 1942. Time and-one-half for the 6th and 7th consecutive day across the work week was adopted as policy for all future negotiations.

In June, the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel & Tin Workers merged with the USWA.

### 1943-45

Due to World War II, the contract dispute with U.S. Steel over wages landed in front of the National War Labor Board. The Board was established in 1942 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as an arbitration tribunal in management-labor dispute cases, thereby preventing work stoppages which might hinder the war effort.

Eventual Contract gains:

- \* Vacations— 1 week after 1 year, 2 weeks after 5 years.
- \* Establish a Board of Arbitration to resolve grievances.

### 1946

Wage re-opener:

\* Industry wide month-long strike ends with the Union winning its demand of an 18 ½ cent general wage increase.

Vacations were: 1 week after 1 year; 2 weeks after 5 years

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### 1947-48

Contract settlement includes:

- \* 12½ cent wage increase.
- \* 3 weeks vacation after 25 years service.
- \* Severance pay.

### 1948

The historic NLRB case out of USWA Local 1010, Inland Steel in Chicago, IL was decided. The National Labor Relations Board upheld the union's right to force companies to negotiate over pensions. The Board ruled that Congress intended pensions to be a part of wages and that pensions fell under "conditions of employment" mentioned in the National Labor Relations Act. *The USWA won the right to bargain over pensions.*

### 1949

USWA demands pensions! 500,000 Steelworkers go on strike against 37 companies. The first pension agreement was reached with Bethlehem Steel. By November 11th of 1949 all of the companies had settled.

The contract was effective March of 1950 and contained:

- \* \$100 minimum at 25 years and age 65.
- \* A 5 cent-an-hour pension contribution split 50/50 between company and employee.
- \* Life insurance to continue after retirement.
- \* S&A benefits were established at a rate of \$26 per week for up to 26 weeks.

### 1951

USWA wins its first victory in the contracting out arena from the arbitration of U.S. Steel case N-159. Arbitrator Sylvester Garrett stated that, *"The contract creates an obligation on the company to refrain from arbitrarily or unreasonably reducing the scope of the bargaining unit."*

### 1952

The United States had been drawn into the Korean War. Due to the war, the Office of Defense Mobilization had announced earlier that there would be no increase in the price of steel. The steelmakers refused to engage in good-faith collective bargaining until the Office of Defense Mobilization guaranteed a price increase for steel. Their tactics were designed to force the ODM to change its policy.

The Steelworkers authorized a strike to begin on January 1, 1952. But after President Truman pleaded with the Union for a delay, USWA President Phillip Murray agreed to postpone the strike for 60 days.

***"The United States had been drawn into the Korean War."***

The ODM's Wage Stabilization Board recommended a 16.5 cent-an-hour wage increase. The steelmakers lobbied Congress and the Department of Defense for an accompanying price increase. The pressure led Congress to overturn the wage increase and Republicans demanded that the President invoke the Taft-Hartley Act and force the Steelworkers back to work.

Truman declined to do so, as he was labor friendly and needed their support in the 1952 presidential campaign.

With no wage increase forthcoming, the Union gave notice on April 4, 1952 that it would strike at 12:01 AM on April 9th.

A few hours before the strike was to begin, President Truman finally did issue an executive order for the Secretary of Commerce to take possession of and operate all of the steel mills in the country.

Youngstown Sheet and Tube filed suit for the steelmakers and the case eventually landed in the Supreme Court. On June 2nd, the Court handed down its decision. It ruled that the President lacked the authority to seize the steel mills. There had not been a declaration of war, and because of that, the President needed Congressional authorization to seize the mills. That same day, the steel mills were returned to the owners.

The USWA struck on June 4, 1952 and the strike lasted 51 days and ended on July 24th with:

- \* 16 cents wage increase.
- \* 6 cents/hour fringe benefits increase.

- \* 6 holidays with double-time when worked.
- \* 3 weeks vacation after 15 years.
- \* Established incentive earnings.
- \* Union prevailed on all shop floor issues.

### 1954

Major new benefit improvements:

- \* Minimum pension raised from \$100/month to \$140.
- \* Better insurance agreement – employees pay 50%.
- \* Life insurance from \$1,000 to \$3,000.
- \* S&A to \$40 per week.
- \* Surgical coverage negotiated.

### 1956

Steel companies bargain through a Multi-Employer Association for the first time. The Union then bargained a single agreement, which applied to each and every individual company.

1956 negotiations:

- \* 3 year contract with 45.6 cent/wage increase over three years.
- \* Shift premium increased.
- \* Sub pay established at 52 weeks with two years service.
- \* Sunday premium established at 1¼ time.
- \* Jury Pay established.
- \* 8 hours pay for a holiday off.
- \* Good Friday added as holiday.
- \* Unemployment benefits.
- \* Lay-off rights.
- \* Improved pensions.

### 1959

A July 15th strike began nation-wide. The strike occurred over management's demand that the union give up a contract clause which limited management's ability to change the number of workers assigned to a task or introducing new work rules or machinery which would result in reduced hours or numbers of employees. After 116 days, the strike's effects persuaded President Dwight D. Eisenhower to invoke the back-to-work provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act. The Union sued to have the Act declared unconstitutional, but the Supreme Court upheld the law. USWA President David McDonald reluctantly ordered his members back to work. Negotiations then continued and:

**Eight hours pay for a holiday off and Good Friday was added as a holiday.**

On January 15, 1960 an agreement was reached. The settlement retained the language limiting management's ability to change workers assigned to jobs, introducing new work rules or machinery that eliminate jobs.

It also included:

- \* An automatic cost-of-living adjustment.
- \* 13 week vacation established.
- \* Employers pay 100% for insurance.
- \* Greatly improved pension benefits.

### 1960—The Steelworkers Trilogy

In 1960 the USWA took three cases to the Supreme Court concerning the Collective Bargaining Agreement. The cases were critical to collective bargaining and:

1. Two of the cases involved employer's decisions to deny arbitration of grievances by claiming it fell within management's right.
2. The other dealt with management's refusal to comply with an arbitrator's decision.

All three cases had been previously decided in the lower courts with the decisions favoring the above employer's positions.

When the cases came before the Supreme Court, all three cases were heard in the same day and all three lower court decisions were reversed.

Simply put, the Supreme Court said that if a Collective Bargaining Agreement has provisions for arbitration the employer cannot refuse to arbitrate a grievance. They also said that the employer must comply with an arbitrator's decision.

These cases became famously known as *The Steelworkers Trilogy* and set the standards for "binding arbitration" in collective Bargaining Agreements.

**"The Steelworker's Trilogy set the standard for binding arbitration."**

### 1962

Wage freeze negotiated:

- \* First provision prohibiting discrimination on the basis of color, religion or national origin.
- \* Limitations on supervisors working.
- \* Protections on the scope of bargaining unit.
- \* Restricted overtime while members were laid off.
- \* Contracting Out Committee established.

### 1963

New experimental agreement:

- \* Limitations on Contracting Out.

### 1965

- \* 28½ cent wage increase.
- \* 2 point Job Class addition established for Trade-and-Craft jobs.
- \* Military leave established.
- \* Employees' right to union representation when called to meet with management.

### 1968

- \* 1968 – 20 cent wage increase.
  - \* 1969 – 12 cent wage increase.
  - \* 1970 – 12 cent wage increase.
  - \* Surviving Spouse benefit added.
  - \* \$30/week vacation bonus.
  - \* 5 week junior group added to the extended vacation plan.
- In 1968 the USWA also established a Strike and Defense Fund at \$25,000,000.

### 1971

Companies ran full production and began stockpiling for an anticipated labor dispute. A last minute 24 hour extension agreement averted a strike and a settlement was reached the next day with:

- \* 1971 – 50 cent wage increase.
- \* 1972 – 12 ½ cent wage increase.
- \* 1973 – 12 ½ cent wage increase.
- \* \$1.00 per hour increase at Job Class 2.
- \* 50 cent increase in the Incentive Calculation Rate.
- \* Sunday premium increased to 1½ time.
- \* Huge pension increase.

### 1974

- \* International union made plant seniority a matter of policy.
- \* Wage increases:
  - 1974 -28 cents.
  - 1975 -16 cents.
  - 1976 -16 cents
- \* 39 cent cost-of-living allowance rolled into base rates.
- \* Pensions increased.
- \* Early retirement reduced to age 62.
- \* New holiday – Washington's birthday.
- \* Penalty for supervisors working – 4 hours pay.
- \* Grandparents and grandchildren added to Funeral Leave.

### 1977

- \* Wages increased 70 cents over 3 years.
- \* Employment security established for those with 20 years of service.
- \* Earnings protection increased to 90%.

Washington's Birthday was included as a Holiday and the penalty for supervisors working was four hours pay.

*This newsletter is a condensed history of the United Steelworkers on a nation-wide basis from its beginning through the 1970's. We will distribute another newsletter describing our history from 1980 to the present. However, that newsletter will focus on the history of our struggles and gains at a local level.*