

History of ATU 757:

1920-1930 highlights

In April 1920, the company notified the Union regarding negotiations that it was now looking into a reduction of wages in conformity with the existing agreement: "The matter of wages may be taken up at certain periods." The current schedule was due to expire May 1, 1920. Either party could ask for revision under the agreement. The Union asked for a revision that would give an advance to the lowest paid men. The company, however, was looking for a general reduction of wages for all employees. The Union didn't look for across-the-board increases but rather pushed for increases for certain classes of unskilled labor. It hoped to increase the minimum pay to 55 cents per hour.

The financial condition of the company was uncertain. Union leaders discussed the possibility of prolonged negotiations. The membership, however, did not stand alone in the fight for better wages. Voters of Portland had the opportunity to vote May 21, 1920, on certain measures that were calculated to give the company some financial relief.

In late April, a settlement was reached with a 1-year agreement providing for collective bargaining and a union shop. The wage schedule could be opened on special dates, and the lowest paid wage would be 55 cents an hour. Platform men continued to receive 62 cents an hour for an 8-hour day and time-and-a-half for overtime.

In August, the War Labor Board, just before dissolution of the body, awarded the Union a wage increase approximating 12 percent. The Union had asked for a 20-percent increase. Platform men had been receiving 46 and 50 cents an hour. The minimum was now 52 cents an hour. During the war, the Union had agreed to leave all wage difficulties to the War Labor Board until the end of the war. The company, meanwhile, said they needed additional revenue to meet the new payroll. It looked to the Public Service Commission for approval on a rate increase in order to gain the additional revenue need to meet payroll.

Later than month, a coroner's jury declared that the operation of one-man streetcars was a menace to the public safety. The decision was made following the death of John Boltz, who died from injuries received when the wood saw on which he was riding was struck by a one-man car.

In Denver, the daily newspaper blamed the riots in the city on car men. A political upheaval was expected in Denver's next city election. The Portland Central Labor Council recommended to all local unions that they contribute as "liberally as possible" to the support of the Denver streetcar men's union.

The International's general executive board visited the region and all Pacific Coast locals and found Local 757 to be "best." J. H. Reardon said he was astonished to find Portland so large a city. He was not prepared to see a city of more than a quarter of a million people.

In October, the Union demanded 75 cents an hour for platform men. The goal was to advance the wage to the point where it would be possible to observe an 8-hour day. It was necessary to work 10 hours a day. For every four men so employed, one man in need of employment was denied work. The issue was headed for arbitration. In November, wage increases were approved through arbitration, with the new contract to continue through May.

[Put in a box: Broadway Bank advertises a 4-percent return on savings accounts.]

In December, Local 757 began its election process with the final ballot set for the 21st.

1921...

New officers were installed at the beginning of the year. C. U. Taylor was chosen president, W. H. Doyle business agent, and R. W. Crane financial secretary.

The July picnic was a huge success. Seventy gallons of ice cream, 200 pounds of peanuts, 90 pounds of candy, 3 boxes of apples, 100 dozen donuts, 2,000 sugar wafers and all the lemonade, punch and coffee that the crowd could consume was, indeed, consumed. Picnic organizers boasted of a turnout exceeding 700 members and their families.

In October, President Taylor attended the ATU national convention and was chosen one of the vice presidents of the International. Convention delegates went on the record in support of an 8-hour, 6-day-a-week job. A movement began to name a legislative agent in the nation's capital and to create a legislative committee in each state.

In November, the Union opened negotiations to amend the current agreement to provide for a 6-day week for all employees. There was no discussion regarding wages. Members were being paid what was generally paid in other cities with the same population as Portland.

1937...

On April 26, the company was reorganized and emerged as the Portland Electric Power Company, better known as PEPCO. Under the new name an extensive rehabilitation program began, and a serious effort was made to reverse the decline in business. For the first time gasoline buses were purchased, allowing expansion of the service area without the need and cost of laying tracks. At the same time measures were taken to update and improve the existing tracks and equipment. The changes brought about by the buses made it possible to try out new routes while altering others.

1927...

In February, the Central Labor Council invited PEPCO to send a representative to explain the company's position in regard to the increased use of one-man cars on the city's traction lines. Two weeks earlier, the council had condemned the use of the cars.

The vice president of PEPCO went to the council stating the case for the company, saying that either an increase in revenue was needed or a decrease in operating expense was necessary for the company to pay a fair dividend on the capital invested in the operation. The company said that although fewer men were now employed than in the past the decrease had been absorbed by the normal turnover in employment. No employee had been discharged because of the change.

In order to better acquaint new members with the workings of Local 757, initiation began.

In August, the Union and the company negotiated, and a supplemental agreement was ratified that established the basic 6-day week for all motormen, conductors, operators, bus operators, and loaders. All of the employees worked a 6-hour day on Sunday, in addition to the regular 8 hours during the rest of the week. Employees usually had only 1 day off during the month. The contract included no change in the hourly wage schedule. The contract was a big move forward for all employees. Portland car men were the first in the nation's large cities to establish the 8-hour day.

The supplemental agreement made a lot of changes. Shortening work hours meant extending employment to more men. Union leaders said the changes made under the agreement meant employment of several additional men and the opportunity for many current employees to keep their job rather than face a layoff.

By the end of the year, elections were held regarding Local 757 leadership. Wm. Cooper was chosen to lead the Local membership as president.

1928...

The duties of business representative fell on the shoulders of R. (Dad) Walker, and Jim Bvarrick was chosen as secretary. By March, Dad Walker was on the sick list, quarantined in his home with an attack of smallpox. By the end of the month he was

able to return to work.

A Local man made good. C. A. Swarts developed a patent for a “changer harness.” Swarts said the harness was a great improvement over anything on the market for holding the money changes used by streetcar operators.

A full delegation was expected to attend the State Federation of Labor. Under a new law of the International, Local 757 would now hold only one election for officers. There would no longer be a primary election. That election process brought the reelection of Brother Cooper in December, who would then become president of the Oregon State Federation of Labor.

1929...

By the end of the decade, the company began to look for an increase in fares with a proposal to charge 10 cents per ride. The Union hoped the move would increase wages, but there were problems at the Central Labor Council over the referendum petition. The council was on record favoring the raise in May. The company, meanwhile, complained over the loss of revenue due to the delay. Car men dealt with the fact they had not had an adjustment of wages in the past 10 years, and the changes in working conditions, which had occurred, meant a reduction of hours and 1 day off in 7.

[Put in a box: In Pittsburgh, 18,000 organized building trade workers won a 5-day week.]

The International annual convention was held in Seattle, and many of the delegates decided to travel south to Portland to be entertained following the meeting. Later in the year, the Central Labor Council Committee was appointed to assist the Local in securing an increase in wages. The Union was looking for an increase of 10 cents per hour for platform men and mechanics, along with a 6-cent increase for track men.

[Put in a box: Highlights of the decade included the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. The Oregon population in 1920 numbered 783,289. The first baseball game was broadcast, pitting the Yankees against the Giants in the World Series. KGW became the first Portland radio station. Yankee Stadium opened in 1923, and Schick patented the electric razor. Fred Meyer opened its first store. The first winter Olympics were held in 1924. In 1925, the first television was sold, and Nellie Ross of Wyoming became the first U.S. woman governor. In 1926, the Ross Island and Burnside Bridges were opened. In 1928, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly the Atlantic. The U.S. stock exchange collapsed in 1929.]