

## History of ATU 757:

### 1950-1955 Highlights

The Union completed 6 weeks of negotiations in October with an hourly rate increase of 4 cents effective October 1. Another increase of 5 cents became effective April 1, 1951. The new scale and supplemental agreement was not subject for reopening the following spring. Harvey Thomas was the business agent for Local 757.

A special election was held in February to fill a vacancy left by the resignation of L. M. Becker and for a secretary to fill the vacancy left by the death of Sid Wilson. Brother Alex Bain, Sr. was appointed to fill the post until the regular election. In February, the AFL Streetcar Men's Union sought a 30-cent-an-hour wage increase for the 1,065 bus operators, shopmen and other employees. In October, the Union negotiated an increase.

An election for local officers was held. M. E. Leinard was elected president; Eugene Watson, secretary/treasurer; and Harvey Thomas, business agent.

The Union scheduled a strike vote. Union members were disgruntled because of the company's refusal to make good on an agreement that was negotiated and accepted by the Union in the previous fall. A federal mediator was brought into work out the disagreement.

The rerouting of traction lines added much confusion. The chair of the Central Labor Council scheduled a meeting with officers of the traction company in their plan to make a study of the entire mass transportation system in Portland.

In April, issues went to arbitration. Those issues included a request for a wage increase of 30 cents per hour, an increase in retirement benefits from \$100 to \$125 monthly, an escalator clause, an improvement factor in the agreement and various so-called fringe benefits.

The Union received a 16-cent increase following arbitration. The Portland City Council voted to extend the company's temporary permit to reroute downtown bus lines in December.

On February 28, 1950, the cars of the Council Crest, Willamette Heights, and Twenty-Third Street lines made their final trips to the barn. Before much longer the trolley buses followed suit. Only the large fleet of well-worn gasoline buses remained, augmented by a few newer diesel buses.

### 1952...

Brother Dave Wright was featured in the *Labor Press* in January, talking about his organization of a one-man senior citizen employment league. He had a hobby finding part-time work for retired people. The Local created a new office in honor of a charter member, recently retired. Eleven Local members formed the retiree club in 1952 and elected Harley Sturgeon president. Members included J. S. Babb, John Bennett, Harry Bloom, Henry Kibbey, Wes Kincaid, Oscar Sidler, Austin Stonebraker, Harry Strugatz, Harvey Thomas A. David (Deacon) Wright. The club was formed to help its members with procedures on pensions and other problems, and tracing members in nursing homes.

Portland's cost of living rose 10 points. The cost of living in February was nearly double what it was in the period 1935 to 1939. The Union discussed the possibility of going on strike.

In March, the negotiations remained deadlocked and a strike deadline was set for April 1. The company and Portland officials discussed the situation. Mayor Dorothy McCullough Lee requested a 15-day postponement from a special traction committee appointed by the City Council. If the council approved a fare increase before April 1, the company would, they say, make every effort to adjust the wage controversy.

Mel Schoppert began working for Rose City Transit as a bus operator.

The Women's Auxiliary, made up of wives and daughters of Union members, met with Mrs. Mona Elder of Seattle, the third vice-president of the International Union Auxiliary, to form a Portland chapter. Membership applications were signed by the 29 ladies who attended. The next meeting was set for August 26. Elected officers, to serve until October 1953, included Johannah Ishmael, president; Arlene Olenslager, financial secretary; Marian James, recording secretary; and Lucy Swagenaar, chaplain.

### 1953...

A second hearing was scheduled in March regarding four anti-union bills sponsored by the Automobile Dealers Association. A so-called "right to work" bill became ammunition for the "open shop" campaign in Oregon and throughout the entire country. It was supported by movie magnate Cecil B. DeMille and his Political Freedom Foundation. The campaign was for open shops through the passage of the miscalled "right to work" bills.

The Union looked for a 12-1/2-cent-an-hour increase, plus a boost of \$20 a month in retirement pension benefits and an improvement in vacation benefits and working conditions.

Bill Cooper was killed in May. The 67-year-old was the fourth ATU International vice president and former president of the Oregon State Federation of Labor. He was driving alone when his car left the highway. He died in the ambulance on his way to Bend. Cooper had been a charter member of Portland's Division 757 in 1917. He was recovering from a long illness and was driving to Idaho on a vacation when the incident occurred.

The cost of living in Portland was at an all time high. Prices were double the average level of the years 1935 to 1939. Food prices had gone up 3 percent. The State Federation of Labor met. The big issues included three resolutions that condemned the Hells Canyon damsite giveaway, which gained unanimous approval. The big issue was a state law that was anti-picketing in nature.

Orville Rae and Robert Dillard were welcomed into Local membership. They were the first "non-white" bus drivers employed by the Portland Traction Company. The *Labor Press* included a story and picture of the two men.