

History of ATU 757:

1960-1965 Highlights

This decade is one of many changes. In October, the Union members voted to authorize a strike against Rose City Transit if arbitration failed. The problem focused on the company violating a long-established policy of promotion on the basis of seniority. The company took its case to the employees, bypassing the Union by sending a letter to all of the employees.

1961...

The year ushered in many changes for both the company and the Union. The **Streetcar Men's Local 757** changed its name to the **City Transit employees Local 757**. Buses replaced streetcars on Portland streets and interurban lines. Gene Watson, the Union's business representative, pointed out that "streetcar men" was never more than a nickname—but a nickname that was universally used, even in official directories published by state and local labor councils. The union's official name was **Division 757, Amalgamated Association of Street, Electric Railway and Motor Coach Employees of America, AFL-CIO**. The Local was the second largest stockholder in the Portland Labor Temple Association.

Contract negotiations again brought problems, with the Union asking for a 25-cent hourly wage increase for drivers. The drivers then received \$2.42 an hour. Tacoma bus drivers earned \$2.40 an hour. In San Francisco the rate was \$2.70; Los Angeles, \$2.55; and in San Diego, \$2.52.

A lawsuit was filed in Multnomah County Circuit Court aimed at protecting the retirement and disability payments of about 300 Union members. The suit was brought by two retired members and one disabled member against the Portland Traction Company and three corporations wholly owned by the company. The suit alleged that pension and disability payments were threatened by the company's proposed sale of its 100-percent stock interest in the interurban railroad to the Southern Pacific and the Union Pacific Railroads.

In October, the Union voted unanimously to reject the company's request to extend the current wage agreement for 2 months beyond the expiration date. Agreement was reached on only a few minor issues. The company said it would not operate without a contract and a permit from the city.

By November, the Union agreed to give a 14-day extension of the contract to allow time for the Union and the company to reach a new agreement. The company agreed to reinstate, with full rights, all the drivers fired earlier in the day. A federal mediator was brought in to help. By the middle of the month, the Union voted to accept a new 2-year agreement. Mayor Terry Schruck and the City Council agreed to submit a proposal to the voters for municipal operation of the transit system. The issue went before Portland voters during the May 1962 primary. The new contract provided wage increases of 8 cents an hour in the first year and 7 cents the second year for drivers. Journeyman mechanics received an additional 1 cent and hour.

1962...

A Portland city charter amendment to authorize a city owned mass transit system—gained support from the Union. Members were now employed by Rose City Transit. Gene Watson, business representative, said the Union would work for state legislation to continue pensions under city ownership and to provide for collective bargaining. Retired employees now received pensions of \$60 a month in addition to the Social Security benefits.

An initiative measure guarding pensions was launched. The initiative was filed with the Secretary of State on behalf of the Union. It sought a state constitutional amendment to permit municipalities to assume the pension obligation of private companies in the event a city took over the operation of mass transportation facilities. Voters in Portland were asked to decide in May whether or not to give the City standby authority to operate the transit system. Because retired employee pensions would be cut off, they could be left high and dry. Portland voters also decided on Ballot Measure #55. The measure was supported by the Local and would give the City power to go into the mass transit business when and if the City council felt it necessary to provide reasonable mass transit service. The measure did not automatically place the city in the bus business but would allow the Rose City Transit Company to continue to make a profit and stay in business. If the company announced plans to quit, the City council would then appoint a transit commission with powers to sell \$6.5 million in general obligation bonds to purchase new and used equipment. The Union would have no bargaining rights in the city bus system. The Union withdrew the initiative petition. Mel Schoppert was elected as business representative of the Local.

1963...

A new Women's Auxiliary was formed and a Stanley housewares party followed the first meeting. Meanwhile, the Union turned down a 7-cent-an-hour wage increase offer by the company and continued to press for a 27-cent raise. Two hundred fifty drivers and mechanics attended two Union meetings. The current journeyman wage scale was now at \$2.57 an hour. The 27-cent hike would bring Portland drivers about even with those in other major West Coast cities. Rose City offered a 13-cent raise over 2 years. The Union voted to consider only the first year offer of 7 cents. Negotiations resumed. The Union now was comprised of 529 members.

The Union voted on a new offer on October 11th. Members had to vote again to accept the contract because of a technicality raised by the company. The 2-year agreement included the company's plan to make the Union agree to a new clause. The contract would automatically be terminated if the City of Portland canceled its operating franchise. A special meeting was called. A new contract was described as a package, average about 30 cents an hour in wages and fringe benefits with gains spread over an 18-month period.

The contract would raise the rate for bus drivers to \$2.80 an hour. Mechanics would be paid \$3.19 an hour. The cost to the transit company was an additional \$300,000 annually beginning in the second year of the contract.

1964...

The Union's official name was changed to the Amalgamated Transit Union by act of convention delegates at the International Convention.