

History of ATU 757:

1940-1950 Highlights

After considerable debate and discussion, a decision was finally reached regarding pensions for members of Local 757. Former employees of the Portland Traction Company were now covered by provisions of the agreement.

In August, AFL President William Green told labor in Canada that the AFL favored all aid to Britain, short of war, and was behind the United States' preparedness drive. In 1940, there were 4.5 million members of the AFL. The weekly maximum unemployment allotment was only \$15.

1941...

In May, an agreement was reached with the Portland Traction Company that included 2 weeks' paid vacation, and wage increases of 3.1 percent to 8.4 percent. The agreement was retroactive to the 1st of April. No arbitration was needed. Paul Gurske was the business agent of Local 757.

1942...

In February, the Union voted to open its contract with the Portland Traction Company seeking wage schedule revisions. Current top scale for operators was 88 cents an hour. The Union voted in March to ask for wage increases of 13.5 percent in the next agreement boosting pay for operators to \$1 an hour.

American living costs rose about 13 percent over the pre-war period. Income taxes also increased, and most trade union leaders agreed that the new tax program puts the heaviest burden on the least able to pay.]

Hugh Roberts began with the company sweeping streetcars three nights a week.

Union members pledged themselves to equal and surpass the 10 percent of the payroll quota figure set for every worker. The company, meanwhile, became involved in the War Savings Bond drive. The main ballroom of the Masonic temple was the scene of a banquet and show for the 25th anniversary of the **Portland Division of the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees.**

1943...

Paul Gurske was named to the Industrial Accident Commission and the Unemployment Compensation Commission. Gurske had been active in the Streetcar Men's Union since becoming a charter member of the organization in 1917.

In September, the Union voted unanimously to ask the Northwest Regional War Labor Board to rehear the case involving the wage increases sought for employees of the traction system in Portland. The National Board confirmed the decision of the Regional Board granting an 8-cent-per-hour increase to the non-operating members of the Streetcar Men's Union and reversing the Regional Board ruling denying any increase to operators and giving them a 5-cent-per-hour raise. The Union began the negotiations with the company in March, and the decision came in December.

1944...

Harry Bloom became Local 7547's new president and Alex Bain, Sr. was the new business agent. In June, Brother Gurske was given a gold watch for his work with the Union. In July, an agreement was reached covering the Portland Electric Power Company properties and the Streetcar Men's Union, providing substantial improvements and pay raises. The agreement provided for a straight across-the-board wage increase of 9 cents per hour for all employees.

Talk surrounded an Oregon sales tax measure—the idea was for a 3-percent tax on gross income in addition to a sales tax.

The company decided to submit a plan for reorganization, but problems arose when the Chase National Bank attempted to collect an alleged debt of nearly \$6 million from the company. An amended plan was filed in 1945. Finally, on April 27, 1946, the court approved the sale of both the Portland Traction Company and the Portland Electric Power Company to a new California company called the Portland Traction Company.

A new agreement was reached. Both parties decided on a five-part bonus to be paid to employees with a provision. A 5-cent bonus would be paid every month except during a month any accident occurred. The company agreed to pay the premiums on the group life insurance and the health and occupations disease coverage for workers.

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With billions of dollars worth of war contracts canceled by the government overnight, postwar unemployment leapt within 10 days from 1 million to over 3 million.]

Mel Leinhard was chosen as Local 757's president, replacing Harry Bloom. Harvey Thomas was named business agent succeeding Alex Bain, Sr.

1947...

The Central Labor Council of Portland voted in March to petition the Portland City Council to grant rate increases to the Portland Traction Company in an amount that would enable the firm to grant the wage increases sought by the employees who were members of the Streetcar Men's Union Local and the Electrical Workers Local. In April, negotiations between the representatives of Local 757, Electrical Workers Local 125 and the company continued. The Portland City Council refused to grant increases to satisfy the traction company. The company published advertisements, seven in fact, regarding the push for no increases in fares. A settlement of the negotiations between the unions and the company was completed. Both locals signed renewal agreements.

The pension plan was increased from \$20 a month to \$30 a month for retirees.

1948...

Union members were given a 12-cent-an-hour wage increase retroactive to April 1. The Arbitration Board raised the pay of bus and streetcar operators to \$1.52 an hour after 1 year. Portland operators were now the second highest paid in the nation exceeded only by Chicago.

In June, a flood hit the Vanport housing community, and Union members whose homes and belongings were wiped out in the flood sought relief. Thirty-one Union families were affected, and each family received a check for \$100 from the Union. In addition, individual Union members gave voluntary contributions. The traction company also gave employees checks to assist them in reestablishing their homes.

In May, the Union and the company reached an impasse, and the issues went to arbitration. The major issues involved wages with several fringe benefits remaining unsettled. The Union demanded an increase of 25 cents per hour. The company offered 20 cents per hour.

1949...

A checkoff system of dues collection was worked out between the company and the Union. The arrangement was simply voluntary. Members could still bring their dues directly to the office. On October 25, the dues collectors had authorization cards for members to sign. The checkoff plan went into effect on November 25th.

The company, earlier in the year, looked for a wage decrease that would approximate 16 cents per hour. The Union won a 4-cent wage increase. A walkout was delayed prior to the agreement.

The Union now included about 1,300 members. The *Labor Press* identified Local 757 as one of the most loyal and efficient group of employees who “render service of an essential character to the public of Portland.”

Howard Wilson went to work as a bus operator.

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Highlights of the decade included the use of penicillin as an antibiotic. The Portland Airport moved from Swan Island to its present site. The first computer made in the United States appeared in 1942. Italy surrendered to the allies, and the government rationed coffee, sugar, meats, cheese, canned goods and shoes in 1943. 1944 included D-Day. In 1945, a Japanese bomb exploded in Klamath county, and Germany surrendered. It was also the year of the first atomic bomb explosion. India proclaimed its independence from England in 1947. Flying saucers were seen throughout the country, and baseball player Jackie Robinson became the first black in the majors.