

## The Great Labor Uprising of



## The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938



# Never Forget Where Your Union Came From



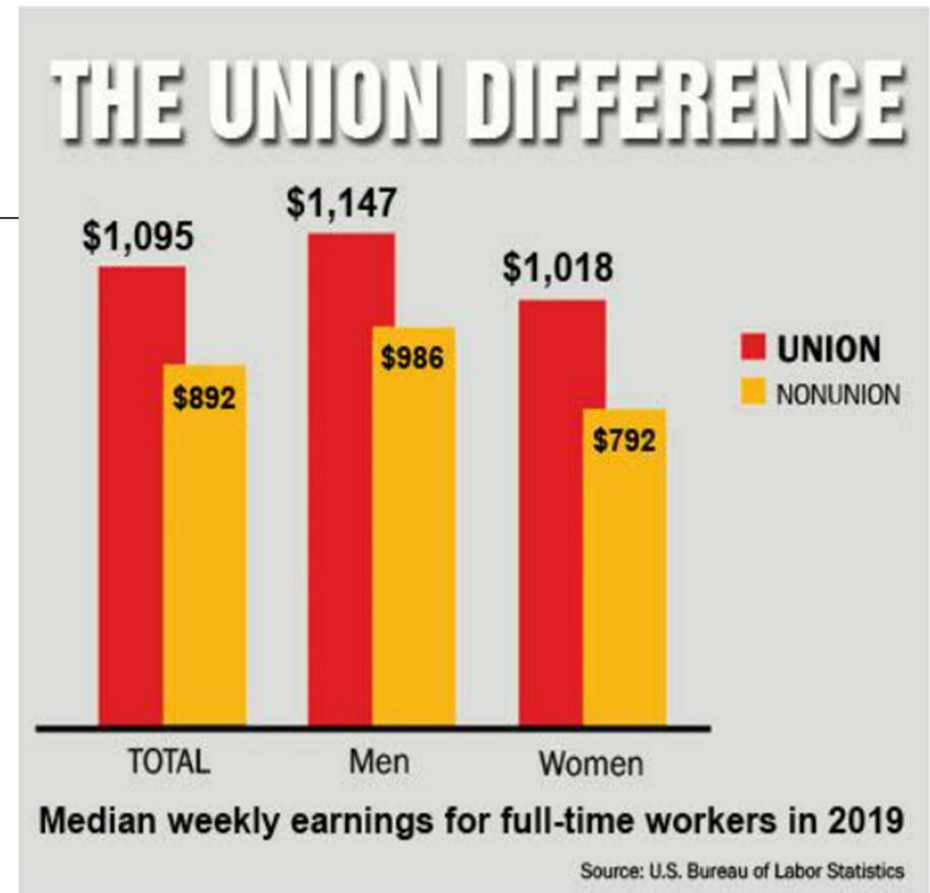
YVONNE FLORES,

PRESIDENT, AFSCME 1624,  
AUSTIN, TEXAS



# Unions

A labor union is an organization of workers dedicated to protecting their work interests. Whether it's improving wages, work hours, safety conditions or health insurance benefits; an effective union gives their members a voice at the table. The goal is to participate in a collaborative effort and in solidarity, on refining job rights and work interests.



# History Always Repeats Itself



AFL-CIO



United Auto  
Workers



International  
Brotherhood  
of Teamst...



Australian  
Workers'  
Union



American  
Federation of  
State, C...



United Food  
and  
Commerci...

I was fortunate enough to attend the Harvard Trade Union Program in 2014, and the main thing I took away from that experience is that labor union issues are very similar within each union organization. It is always interesting to hear their mission and goals that their union made a success for their members. It was empowering to hear from union leaders from Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, and even Texas!

# IMPORTANT UNION HISTORY MOMENTS

---

1. Emma Tenayuca and the San Antonio Pecan Shellers Strike 1938
2. AFSCME, Martin Luther King, Jr and the Memphis Sanitation Strike of 1968
3. National Solidarity: First Labor Movement in 1877
4. Wagner Act 1935
5. The Fair Labor Standards Act 1938
6. The Postal Strike of 1970
7. PATCO, Unions Fallback, 1981

# San Antonio Labor History Moment

If there was ever a time to be a proud Texan, specifically of Mexican heritage, the great Pecan-Shellers' Strike led by the young labor activist, Emma Tenayuca would be the one to acknowledge for that proud moment. At age 16 she began to organize workers for the national Workers Alliance and the [International Ladies' Garment Workers Union](#). By 1934 she was 18-years-old, and was arrested for her leadership role in the organization of Mexican women in the Finck Cigar Strike.

It was the first time in San Antonio's labor history when a group of skilled minority women workers challenged the owner of a manufacturing plant on pay violations, unfair production quotas and unsanitary working conditions, including no toilets or washing stations. The Pecan Shellers Strike involved 12,000 workers in San Antonio, mostly women, who walked away from their job of shelling pecan nuts by hand. The exhausting work was gruesome, unsafe and one of the lowest paid industries in the United States. The strike was ignited when it was announced to the workers that they would receive a pay cut in wages.

Emma Tenayuca and many of the other workers were arrested and harassed during the strike. Law enforcement hit them with clubs and even beat them.

[Mexican-American Emma Tenayuca fought for women workers - People's World \(peoplesworld.org\)](#)

[What can Texas learn from the great Pecan Strike? \(houstonchronicle.com\)](#)



*“I never thought in terms of fear. I thought in terms of justice.”*

*- Emma Tenayuca*

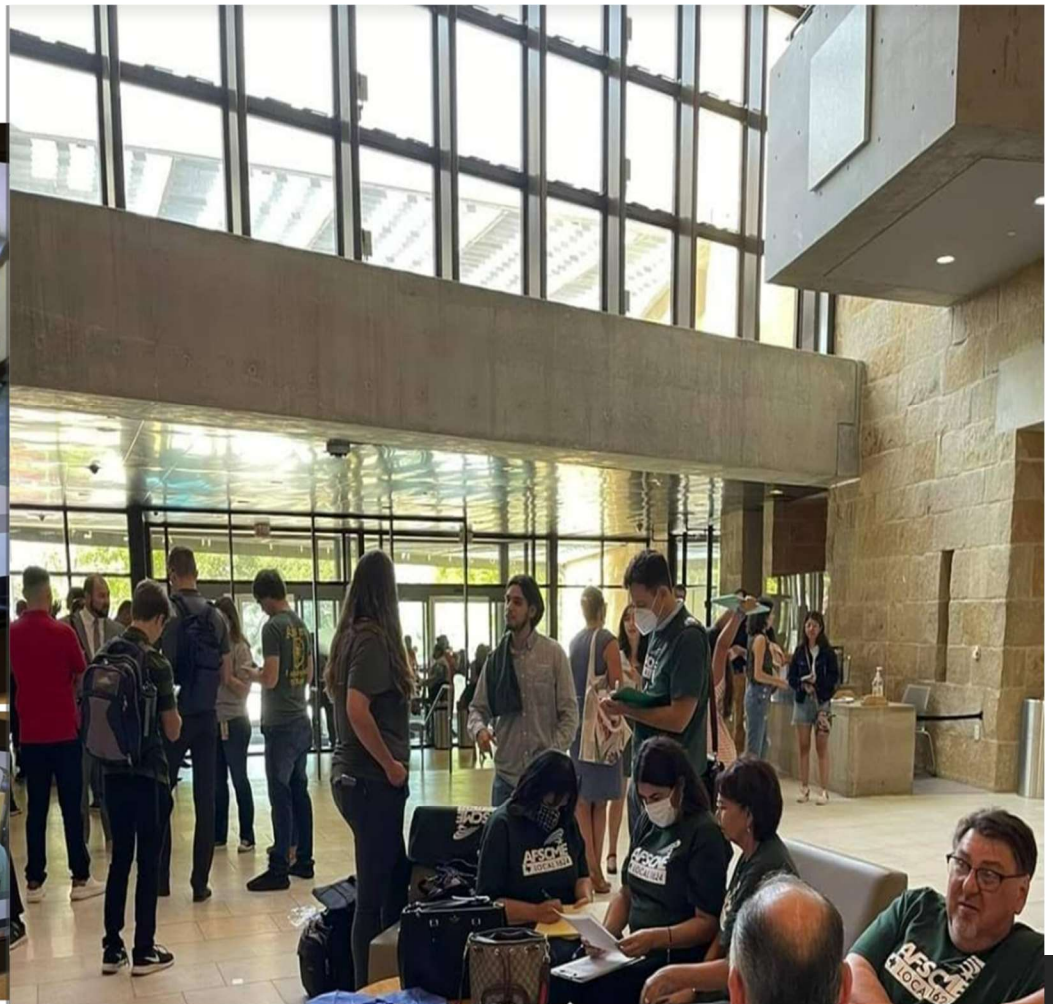
I am a Proud AFSCME Union Member

---



# AFSCME 1624 FOUGHT FOR \$22 IN 22'

AFSCME 1624 in the house  
\$22 in 2022 ! Stop on by or watch on line !





**Fight for \$22 in 2022**  
Living Wage Campaign for City  
Employees

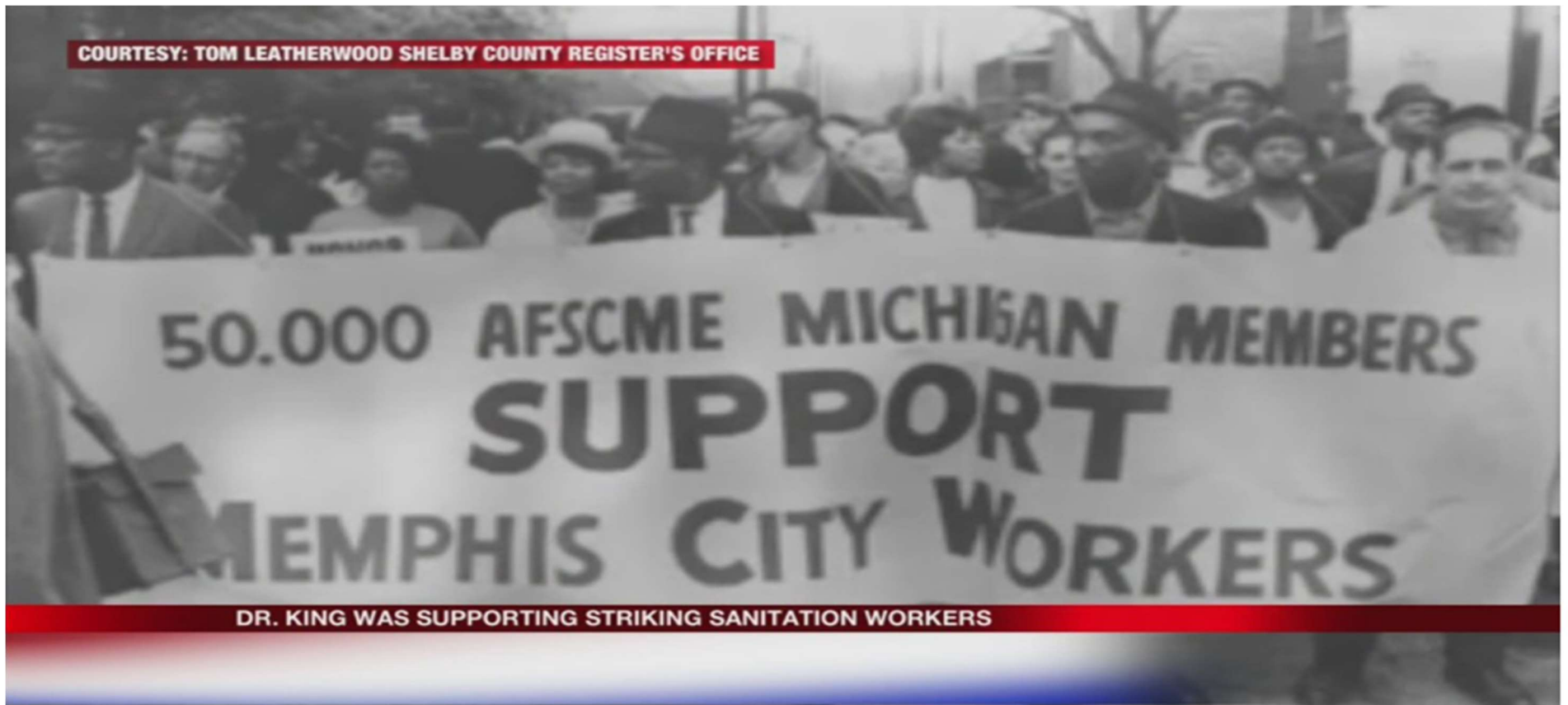


**One**  
**JOB**  
**Should be**  
**ENOUGH**

AFSCME 1624 led the charge in advocating to pass the living wage to \$22 an hour for City of Austin Employees. City Council passed the resolution on June 16, 2022.

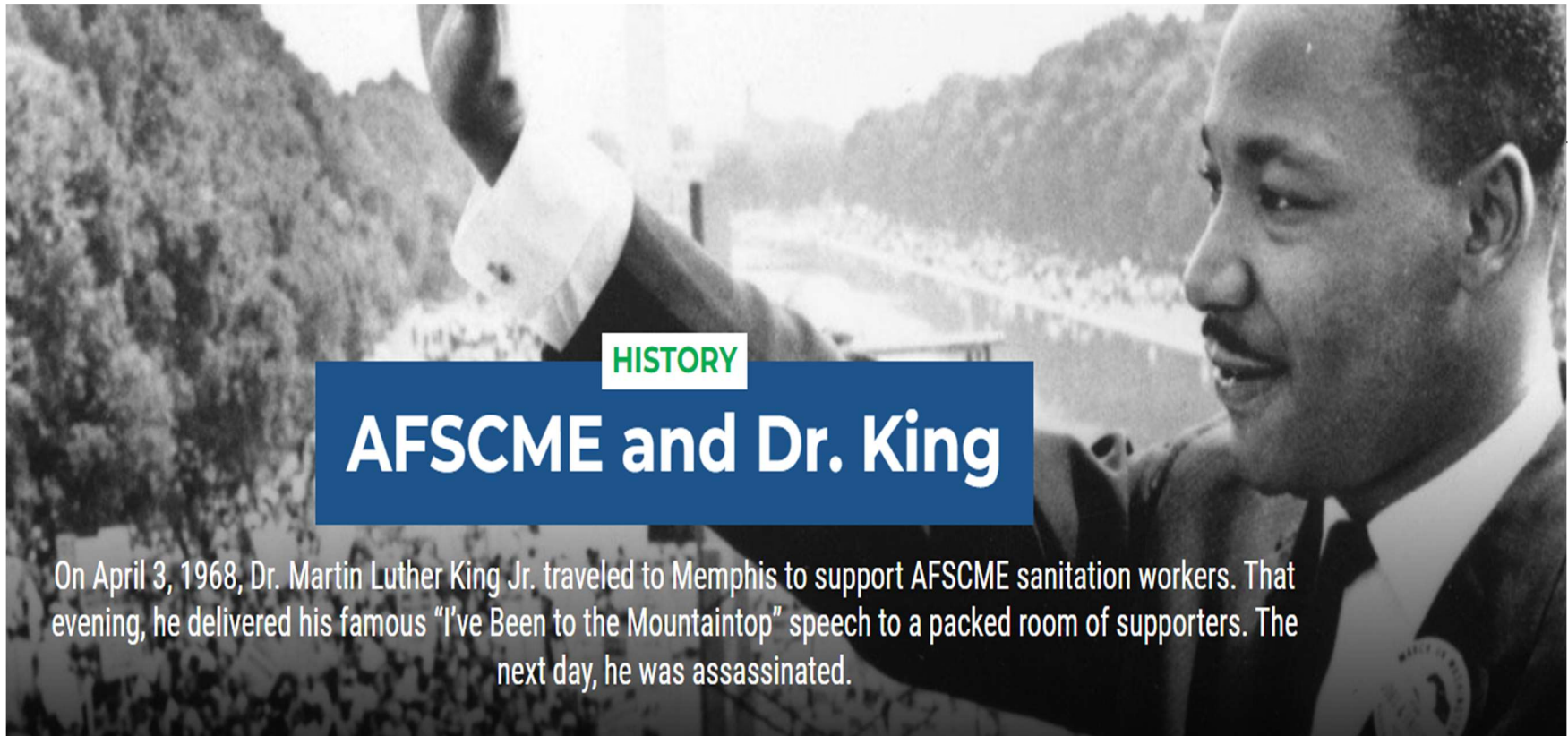
Thank you AFSCME 1624!

# Why Did You Join A Union?



MLK50: The 1968 Sanitation Workers' Strike

# AFSCME HISTORY & DR. MLK, JR



HISTORY

## AFSCME and Dr. King

On April 3, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. traveled to Memphis to support AFSCME sanitation workers. That evening, he delivered his famous "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech to a packed room of supporters. The next day, he was assassinated.

# AFSCME'S, "I AM A MAN"

---

[I AM 2018 | I Was There | AFSCME Video - YouTube](#)



# Jerry Wurf: The Man Who Put Public Employee Unions ‘On The Map’

[Go Back](#) | [Print Story](#) | [Share](#)

Published Monday, June 3, 2019 10:00 am  
by Peter Dreier/The Prospect



**The Prospect Editor’s Note:** In May, Organized Labor celebrated what would have been the 100th birthday of Jerry Wurf, who turned the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) *into a powerhouse and a champion of equal rights.*

Pictured above: then AFSCME President Jerry Wurf sitting next to the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. (AFSCME Photo)

## My Union is AFSCME

The Labor Union I have been so proud of has stood with the great Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Sanitation Strike of 1968, along with AFSCME President at that time, Jerry Wurf. The sanitation workers won their fight, but sadly we lost Martin Luther King, Jr., who was assassinated April 4, 1968. We have lost many fighting for labor union rights.

“

In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against being fooled by false slogans, such as 'right-to-work.'



It provides no 'rights' and no 'work.' Its purpose is to destroy labor unions and the freedom of collective bargaining by which unions have improved the wages and working conditions of everyone...

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



## **Memphis Sanitation Strike, April 3, 1968**

---

“You are demanding that this city will respect the dignity of labor. So often we overlook the work and the significance of those who are not in professional jobs, of those who are not in the so-called big jobs. But let me say to you tonight that whenever you are engaged in work that serves humanity and is for the building of humanity, it has dignity and it has worth.”

~Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

# Memphis Sanitation Workers of 1968 won with AFSCME

---

AFSCME union members won their fight for a wage increase above the city's amount proposal.

The workers also got double-time pay, working on Sundays.

As well, it was approved to give the workers a 2.5 percent increase in the city's contribution to their pension funds.

Simply, it was a **victory for dignity and respect for the sanitation workers and for labor solidarity across the US**, but there was a cost with the tragic loss of Martin Luther King, Jr. You will see today that there were many who lost their lives fighting for decent wages and simply wanted a life of dignity and respect.



# National Solidarity: Labor Movement 1877



Shows burning of Union Depot, Pittsburgh, PA during [Great railroad strike of 1877](#).

# Earliest Labor Solidarity

The year was 1877, during the summer, as workers began to uprising over wages across the states. The railroad workers started one of the first modern labor movements in the United States, in West Virginia on July 16th.

Another uprising began for workers in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania over wage cuts. Protests took to the streets. It is documented that over 50 people were shot by Pennsylvania's National Guard, 20 were killed including 3 children on, July 21, 1877. Across the nation, unrest took to the streets because of low wages, cutting wages and poverty living conditions.

States dealing with these protests were in Illinois, Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Missouri, California, Tennessee and even Texas.

[Labor Day history: 100 people were killed during the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 - The Washington Post](#)

## Labor Day's roots: How a rail worker revolt almost became a revolution



The cover of "Harper's Weekly" for Aug. 11, 1877, from a photograph by D. Bendann, depicts the 6th Maryland Regiment fighting its way through Baltimore en route to suppress the rail workers' strike. Library of Congress

## Earliest Labor Solidarity, 1877

These protests caused massive disruption. And the total number of activists was about 100,000 protesters, which at least 100 of them died. Because of these US events, it led to Labor Day becoming a federal holiday in 1894. More so, May 1<sup>st</sup>, known as May Day is a day recognizing workers internationally. It is known as International Labor Day.

The irony is that even as the origins of May Day stemmed from America's fight for labor rights and its workers, the U.S. does not officially distinguish International Labor Day like the rest of the world does on May 1<sup>st</sup>.

# MAY DAY

International Day of the Worker



Together We Stand!

**“The 1877 strike disrupted the B&O, the Erie and the Pennsylvania railroads, swept up miners, iron workers, longshoremen and canal boatmen, and touched places as far apart as Worcester, Mass., and San Francisco, as far south as Nashville and Galveston, Texas. In some places, the strike erased the color line between white and black workers, at least for a while.**

**By the time the strike was put down, an estimated 100,000 workers took part and about 100 people died. It was the closest this young nation had come to a nationwide general strike and pointed to the need for a more progressive future.”**

[Labor Day's roots: \(concordmonitor.com\)](http://concordmonitor.com)

# WAGNER ACT

(National Labor Relations Act)

---

On **July 5, 1935**, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Wagner Act. This gave employees the right, under Section 7, to form and join unions, and obligated employers to bargain collectively with the union selected by a majority of the employees.

# Don't forget about the Wagner Act of 1935

## The National Labor Relations Act of 1935

- Also called the Wagner Act
- Set national labor policy for labor
- Encouraged the use of collective bargaining
- Protected employees' rights to organization and representation
- Established the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)
- Defined the unfair labor practices of employers

## Labor Relations Administrative Agencies

- National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)
- Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS)
- U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL)
- National Mediation Board (NMB)
- National Railroad Adjustment Board (NRAB)
- State and local administrative agencies



# The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938

was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on June 25, 1938.



A message from the 1.6 million members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-00

AFSCME

## FDR's New Deal Era – Fair Labor Standards Act

- The first official US minimum wage in 1938 was 25 cents per hour and reminder that today, it is a mere \$7.25 per hour
- Enacted Overtime pay
- Child Labor
- 44 hour work week (later revised to 40 hour week)
- FLSA applied to the private sector, as well as federal, state and local governments



# Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938

- Before FLSA, a typical work week consisted of 61 hours
- Children as young as seven years old, were denied a basic education because of their long hours working in mines, mills and factories
- FLSA set the age of employment at 16 years of age
- FLSA raised wages for over 700,000 employees across the nation

**\$25 for 26 WEEKS and  
JOBS AT UNION WAGES**  
St. Louis Industrial Union Council-CIO



# Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938

President Roosevelt's labor secretary, Frances Perkins was hailed as one of the creators of FLSA. She was in Manhattan's Greenwich Village in 1911 on the day of the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire.

Almost 150 garment workers, mostly women and immigrants, were trapped and killed when the building they were working at caught fire. The exits had been blocked — a common practice at the time. Some say this was the moment, Labor Secretary Perkins began her mission to fight for the safety of workers and the start of the FLSA of 1938.

# FLSA of 1938 had some delays and bumps.....

The bill was rejected many times, causing some frustration for President FDR. The most bitter controversy raged over labor standards in the South, specifically the minimum wage being considered 40 cents per hour in the bill.

Because of these issues, provisions of the act were altered so that the minimum wage was reduced from 40 to 25 cents an hour but with the intention that it would change after that first year.

The bill provided a minimum wage, set work hours within a week, and a working age of 16. The bill also proposed a five-member labor standards board which could authorize still higher wages and shorter hours upon

# The US Postal Strike of 1970



**1970 Great Postal Strike, Detroit**



# The US Postal Strike of 1970

Historically, the US Postal Office has its share of controversy (like our current postal leadership).

The US Postal Strike of 1970 stretched to more than 8 cities when Federal workers fought for increased wages that were being denied of at least the requested 5.4% increase.

Prior to that agreement, President Nixon tried to end the strike by force, calling in the Army and National Guard.



Source: Leslie Leon / Keystone / Getty Images

# Work stoppage in Government: the postal strike of 1970

*Eight years ago, the first nationwide strike by Federal employees disrupted postal service for nearly a week; the walkout was ended by a combination of court injunctions, mediation, and congressional action*

STEPHEN C. SHANNON

On March 18, 1970, the flow of U.S. mail slowed. First in New York City, then across the country—more than 150,000 (1 of 5) postal employees participated in an unprecedented work stoppage. The walkouts prompted the passage of the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970, which established the Postal Service as an autonomous mail agency, prohibited strikes, and provided for compulsory arbitration. Once again attention is focused on the Postal Service where negotiations are underway to replace the current contract which expires in late July.

In retrospect, there was ample warning that postal workers were unhappy over pay and working conditions and that a strike was in the making. The 1968 conventions of the United Federation of Postal Clerks and the National Postal Union removed the no-strike clauses from their constitutions. The Letter Carriers local in New York City spearheaded a "right-to-strike" resolution at their union's convention but was thwarted by a resolution instructing national officers not to seek the right to strike.<sup>1</sup>

Stephen C. Shannon is a doctoral student in the History Department, University of Maryland. This article was adapted from his 1970 Master of Arts thesis entitled "The 1970 Postal Strike."

Strike threats and right-to-strike demands were a consistent tactic used by union spokesmen during 1969 legislative maneuverings.<sup>2</sup> These warnings became more explicit in 1970, when the Letter Carriers locals, upset at the probable postponement of their July comparability pay increase,<sup>3</sup> began to barrage national headquarters with strike demands. Letter Carriers President James Rademacher announced his intention of leading a nationwide strike if the pay matter was not settled by April 15. More than 400 locals responded favorably when asked if they would support such action.

#### Strike vote set

The March 12 vote of the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee for a postal reform-pay package pleased Rademacher, who had pushed hard for this plan against the opposition of all the other postal unions. But, it did not please all of his membership. On the same day the biggest local, New York City's Number 36, demanded that its members be polled on the question of an immediate strike. March 12 was the regular monthly meeting of the 6,700-member, Bronx-Manhattan local. The 600 members present, after hearing a report on the House Committee action from local president Gustave (Gus) Johnson, over his opposi-

# Did you know? The US Postal Strike of 1970

- The 52 year anniversary was this past March 18, 2022
- The postal workers in New York voted 1,555 to 1,055 to go out on strike
- The strike began because the US House committee voted to limit postal workers' wage increases that year, while on the heels of a 41 percent increase in Congress's own pay
- The strike shut down postal operations in New York and that quickly spread to 30 other cities
- Between 152,000 to 210,000 workers in 671 locations went on strike.
- It was illegal for federal workers to strike, or even support a strike (Wildcat Strike)

# US Postal Strike of 1970

- The strike basically shut down New York's financial industry
- At least 9,000 young men refrained from receiving their draft notices
- There were delays when it came to receiving census forms and tax refunds
- Injunctions and heavy fines were levied on union leaders, union leaders were not the ones who agreed to the strike, it came directly from the postal workers
- President Nixon called out 24,000 military personnel to distribute the mail, but they were unsuccessful.

“It was illegal for federal workers to strike, or even to advocate a strike, but union officials said they had no control over the action.”

---



Hailed as one of the most successful union wins, on April 16, 1970, agreement was reached.

It not only provided the 8 percent pay raise, but also allowed postal workers to reach the top of the pay scale in only 8 years — in contrast to the 21 years previously in effect.

Although the agreement directed the large increase towards high-cost areas like New York, where the strike began, it was effective across the nation, even in low-cost areas where compensation was even lower.

The practice of uniform wages continues today at the Postal Service because of the US Postal Strike of 1970.

# PATCO, When Unions Fell Back....



# Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO)

---

- A significant union moment that involved PATCO, FAA and Ronald Reagan
- This event is known as the union collective bargaining outcome that was debauched historically between the PATCO union and the Federal Aviation Administration as well as the decision making of soon to be President, Ronald Reagan.
- The union demanded to be more involved with safer imitatives in the workplace system including working hours that were high in demand, as well as have more say in decision making of air traffic control policies.
- Read the book, *Collision Course: Ronald Reagan, the Air Traffic Controllers and the Strike that Changed America*, Joseph McCartin

LABOR

# The PATCO Strike, Reagan and the Roots of Labor's Decline

JOE BURNS

NOVEMBER 1, 2011





# Sums up PATCO vs. Ronald Reagan

---

*“If you ask any union activist what went wrong with the labor movement in the last several decades, there’s a good chance you’ll hear about the 1981 PATCO strike.*

*And for good reason: President Ronald Reagan’s harsh response to an illegal strike by federal government employees, members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization, was interpreted by many as a green light from the federal government for unionbusting, and ushered in the vicious employer attacks of the 1980s.”*

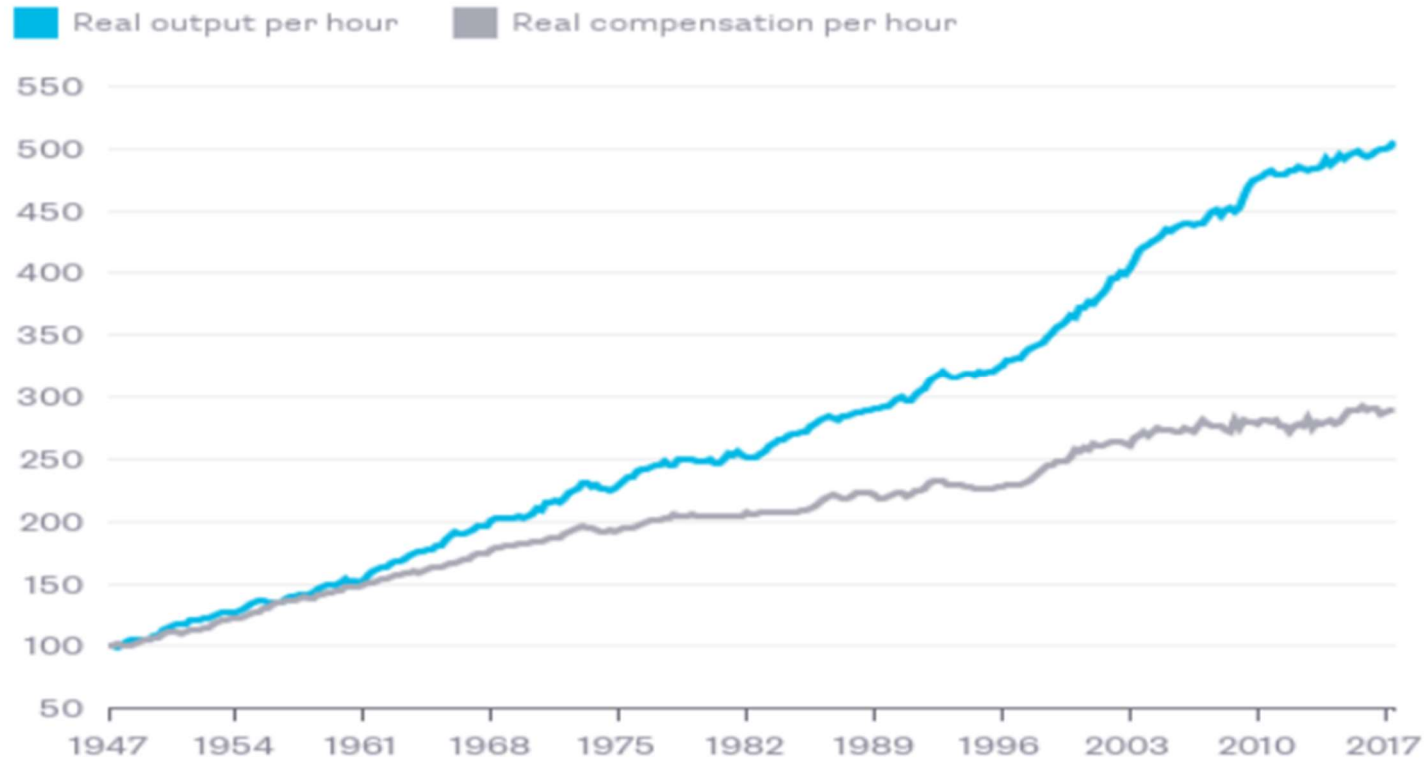
# PATCO was a horrible loss for Unions

---

- Aggressive union-busting came from the Republican Party, attacking public employee strikes in the late 1970's
- PATCO would end up endorsing Ronald Reagan for president of the United States, after the failure of President Jimmy Carter with reforming federal bargaining laws failed
- Air traffic controller employees, somewhere between 11,000 thru 13,000 employees went on strike, and President Ronald Reagan fired them all on August 5, 1981. PATCO was officially a busted union
- After PATCO's loss, union membership started to decline at an alarming rate. Not only that, but the unemployment rate reached almost 10% after the air traffic controllers were without jobs.
- Unlike Nixon when he brought in military personnel to handle the mail and failed, Reagan brought in military pilots to fill positions and it was a success in continuing the air traffic control duties.
- This began the demise of collective bargaining and continued stagnation of incomes and low employee morale, despite rising corporate profits and worker productivity in the corporate world.

## These Two Were Supposed to Be Inseparable

Labor productivity versus pay\*



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis  
\* 1947 = 100

BloombergView

# Takeaway from this Workshop

---

Teach younger generations or your children well, on the values of being a Labor Union Member!

Always discuss, share and remember the history of Union events that helped shape the working class and their struggles in our country and that we still have work to do.

Educate, Engage and Empower with Union Events!

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING!

---

Yvonne Flores,  
Labor Union President,  
AFSCME 1624,  
Austin, Texas

