

PU-1, "Steel Industry, 1970's Strikes and Transitions"

Transcript: pp. 5-11

Text portion for pop-up/audio alternative:

Time-line location: Decade VIII, Local and National, 1972, "October 15, the manufacturing industry, chief source of jobs in Bridgeport..."

Strikes in the Steel Industry

PU Well, that was seeking for more money, better pay, better jobs and I went into the steel business, ironworks...it was a company there called Leake Nelson, ...erection company, fabricating steel...And then I became a welder...Twenty one years...I started there about 1950, no, 1960, I believe... That was a small shop, about fifty...First started was grinding small jobs, then until I learned to weld...We fabricate steel, for like a school buildings, banks, we had big jobs...pay was about \$3 an hour then...

We had strikes, we had rough times (laughter)...The longest we had was about a month...1970's...There was never, most of the times there were wage problems, not conditions, more holidays, better working conditions, safety.

I Safety was an issue there?

PU Oh! Safety you can go way back to strikes on safety...When equipments don't work right, they break down, they'd refuse to repair them, I'd refuse to operate.

I So the company management would be asking you, at times, to operate what you thought was unsafe equipment?

PU Exactly right. You'd be threatened of "you don't work now, there's the door."

I But because there was a union they couldn't throw you out?

PU Most of the time they back you off, most cases.

I Tell us about that 1970 strike, when you were out for a month?

PU Well, the company just wouldn't give in. Membership wasn't that strong, maybe three hundred, four hundred members.

I There were that many people working there by then?

PU No, in the whole state of Connecticut.

I Oh, okay, so it was all the iron workers went out?

PU When we go out on strike, they all go out at the same time, yeah.

I So it wasn't just your Local?

PU No, no, statewide. They called it national. Things would get rough sometimes, they'd be cuttin' up tires and (chuckle)...

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Reflecting on "old timers" in the Steel Industry

PU I used to tell it about old timers, they had a rougher time than when we came in, long before I came...In the Bridgeport area. Between the labor and the management and they had seven days a week, ten hours a day, no holidays...

I When was this like back in the 40's?

PU About, 40's maybe.

I 30's

PU Yeah, this was an old company that I worked for. It's, even back in 1900 and these men, they were hard working men. They had skills, skills today you don't see this anymore...No. Skills are gone, gone caputs, you know.

I But they were still there when you started work?

PU Oh, yes. Yeah, no, some but not all, just the young fellas beginning and learning.

I So these are the guys that broke you in, on the job?

PU Right, yeah. You know you learn from the best.

Getting Layed Off

I How long were you there now?

PU Total of twenty-five years.

I Okay, so that brings us what, to the early 80s?

PU Yeah.

I Okay, tell us, is that plant still in existence?

PU No, that closed up also.

I Okay, is that why you left? 'Cause it closed or did you go....?

PU Well, I had no choice.

I Yeah, see, but you were there right? 'til the end?

PU Yeah.

I Okay, tell us about what happened?

PU Well, the younger generation takes over. Computers start coming in, business got slower, just no work (chuckle).

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I And what, were there layoffs, eventually?

PU Layoffs, yes, and all of a sudden you get a letter saying we don't need ya no more. That's it.

I So is that why you eventually had to leave?

PU Yeah, making you forced to retire...

I So they just shut down?

PU Shut down, closed up, that's it. Closed the door. So many other shops in Bridgeport, they closed up.