OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Author: Unknown
Title: United Shoe Workers of America-Local 117
Date: 1914 and 1947-1949
Abstract: Newspaper clippings and bound volumes
Quantity: .3 cu. ft. and 4 bound volumes

BIOGRAPHY OF

The United Shoe Workers of America-Local 117 is based in Portsmouth, Ohio. In 1914, the shoe industry in Portsmouth had been in operation for more than 25 years. The annual business had grown from $\frac{1}{2}$ million to 8 million dollars and the output was sold in nearly every state. The shoe industry employed nearly 4,000 people, approximately one-seventh of the population of Portsmouth. It was estimated that their earnings supported 10,000-12,000 people. In 1949 there was a strike.

The strike began when three companies, Selby, Excelsior, and Irving Drew, dropped their contracts and requested the employees to sign permanent wage and no-strike agreement or forfeit their jobs. The employees had recently returned to work after a strike, December 5-January 16, but when the USWA District Council #9 called out the workers on March 20, 1914, they went. Estimated 3,000-4,000 workers walked out and since many were not members of any union, applications were passed out immediately. From about the third day on the strike there was continual violence and an injunction was filed against the strikers on April 4th. Later that month the company began to import shoe workers from Cincinnati and other towns. By May the newspapers reported more than 2,000 people were at work, many from out of town. On June 9th, the strike was called off and in early December, Joint Council #9 returned its charter to the International. There had been only one attempt at negotiation, on April 24th, and that
meeting broke up after half an hour of talk.

When contract negotiations with the Selby Company broke down on May 16, 1949, more than 2,400 workers went out in Portsmouth and another 100 workers from the Ashland, Kentucky branch. The conflict centered on five major points: escalator clause, additional paid holiday, minimum rates of pay, length of contract, and cost of living bonus. Although negotiating committees repeatedly failed to agree, the company refused to arbitrate in matters concerning the wage scale. Instead they called for a secret ballot among the Union members. They maintained this vote would prove a willingness to return to work was prevalent among strikers. The strike was prolonged when the Boot and Shoe Workers, AFL, claimed the right to represent the workers. Negotiations came to a halt while an election decided between AFL and CIO representation. As in previous years, 1937 and 1945, CIO defeated the AFL. The strike was settled almost immediately and the plant was ready to begin producing soon after July 29, 1949.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION

The records of the USWA Local 117 center on two strikes, March 20-June 9, 1914 and May 16-July 28, 1949. In 1914, the workers fought for recognition and the right to strike and in 1949 they clashed with Selby Company over wages.

Most material is newspaper clippings. Mainly from the New Daily Blade, Portsmouth and the Portsmouth Daily Times, there are also clippings from The Labor Review, Portsmouth, The Cincinnati Enquirer, and The Cincinnati Times-Star.

The journalism of 1914 was more descriptive than today so the twice daily reports accurately portray the tension during a strike marked by violence: riots, knifings, shootings, and beatings. The articles include statements by the major, announcements of benefits for the strikers, editorials, and reports of injunction suits and other trials. A fair picture of the strikers’ position is presented in announcements of those leaving the city or engaged in other employment in Portsmouth.

The newspaper file for 1949 is much smaller. It includes reports of the injunction suit and the results of the election between AFL and CIO representation. The printed matter from this strike is of great interest because it yields a more personal view from individual members of the company officials and the Union. It contains statements and radio speeches. A controversial figure in the strike is George Martin, an International Representative of USWA. This file includes accusations by the AFL that he was a communist and by the company that he was the cause of the prolonged strike.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION
Restrictions: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Ohio University Libraries.

Preferred Citation: Researchers are requested to cite the collection name, collection number, and the Ohio University Libraries, in all footnotes and bibliographical references.

Accession Number: #78-25, 79-28

Provenance: The Ohio University Archives received the records of 1914 along with two bound volumes were donated by Jack Wallace, Vice-President of Local 117, in April 1978. In May 1979, the other materials were transferred from the Ohio Historical Society. The collection was acquired as part of the Ohio Labor History Project.

Property Rights: Ohio University retains all property rights to the collection.

Copyrights: Ohio University retains all copyrights unless retained by the donor, other correspondents, or other artists.

Photoduplication: Ohio University will entertain requests to photocopy reasonable amounts of material from the collection for the convenience of individual researchers.

Processing: Pamela Kircher processed the collection in July 1979.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

Note to Researchers: To request materials, please note both the location and box numbers shown below.

ONTAINER LIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box/Folder</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| 1          | 1914 Strike, March 20-June 9  
-Newspaper clippings, March 17-June 9, November 17-December 5  |
| 2          | 1949 Strike, May 16-July 28  
-Newspaper clippings, May 21, June 2, July 1-   |
3  -Printed matter, May 12-June 23
4  -Printed matter, June 23-July 16
5  -Oversize Election Advertisements for AFL and CIO

Volumes
-Ohio Valley District Council #2 Shoe Workers’ Champion, March 1947-February 1948, 2 copies
-Ohio Valley District Council #2 Shoe Workers’ Champion, March 1948-February 1949, 2 copies