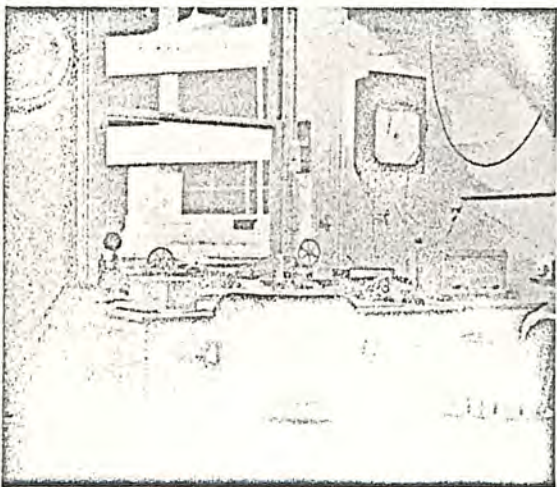


LABOR WEEK

WHAT DOES A CITY DO WHEN FIREMEN GO ON STRIKE?

Atlanta officials moved fast when 500 firemen struck.

Strikers were suspended without pay. Shifts were lengthened for firemen who stayed on their jobs. Policemen helped man fire stations. And the city began hiring replacements for strikers.



—“Atlanta Journal” Photo

Fire communications desk—unmanned

ATLANTA

Two thirds of the firemen in this major Southern city walked off their jobs on September 2 in a strike for immediate pay raises. They went out in violation of a Georgia State law, and they stayed out in defiance of a court order to return to work.

All of the nearly 500 striking firemen were suspended without pay. Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr., refused to negotiate with the strikers. Instead, he ordered a recruiting drive for new firemen to fill the vacant jobs.

The suspended firemen were given 10 days to show why they should not be fired.

Mayor Allen says that most of the strikers will be fired. Thus, a major city is left with its defense against fires seriously

weakened. So what happens now? Is Atlanta burning?

Fire Chief C. H. Hildebrand, Jr., supplies the answers. By regrouping the more than 250 firefighters who stayed on the job, Chief Hildebrand was able to get 19 of the city's 32 fire stations in full operation within four days after the strike began.

All available firemen were put on long shifts, and 89 policemen were assigned to the fire department—most of them to fill nonfirefighting jobs.

As a final step, the city of Atlanta called into effect a mutual-assistance pact with the fire departments of surrounding municipalities.

Atlanta's fire chief says that this opens the "possibility" of calling in 10 firefighting units "reasonably quickly" in the event of a major fire, and an additional half dozen or more from more-distant points.

Chief is confident. The 19 stations reopened in Atlanta operate 27 firefighting units. Adding to these the 16 additional units that might be called in for an extreme emergency would bring Atlanta's fire defenses back up to more than three quarters

of normal strength, Mr. Hildebrand estimates. That, he believes, should be enough to handle anything.

Fire insurance underwriters appear to agree. Jason Woodall, manager of the Southeastern Underwriters Association, says there are no plans to boost Atlanta's fire insurance rates.

Mr. Woodall says the association "feels that protection for ordinary homes is reasonable."

"Our concern," he adds, "lies in the possibility of fires in the congested downtown areas."

Mr. Woodall notes that the fire underwriters "prefer to give the city an opportunity to work this thing out." Whether or not there are to be increases in fire-insurance rates, he indicates, depends on how long it takes to get the fire department back to normal.

The trouble began last spring. At that time the only union representing Atlanta firemen was the International Association of Fire Fighters, affiliated with the AFL-CIO. This union has a no-strike clause in its constitution. The union asked the city to reduce the firemen's workweek from 60 to 56 hours.

City officials rejected that request on the ground that such a move would amount to a pay boost that would be illegal at that time of year under the city charter.

The Atlanta charter prohibits pay raises after March 31 of each year, until the beginning of the next year. City officials, however, promised to consider the shorter workweek at the end of the year.

A change of unions. Dissident firemen then broke away from the AFL-CIO union and organized an independent local called the Atlanta Fire Fighters Union. Its constitution does not contain a no-strike clause.

In June the independent union went on strike to enforce the firemen's demands. The striking firemen agreed to mediation without binding themselves to the findings and went back to work. The mediator recommended an increase in firemen's wages or a reduction in working hours.

City officials accepted both suggestions—not just one—but said both would have to wait until January 1, in keeping with the law.

The city's offer amounted to an 8.66 per cent pay increase in cash, plus the equivalent of a 7.14 per cent raise in the form of a shorter workweek—in all, a total of 15.8 per cent.

Under existing pay scales, beginning firemen get \$403 a month. On January 1, the starting rate is to rise to \$438 a month. The top pay for privates is to go to \$638 a month on January 1, from the present \$563.

Still not enough. The independent union again struck on September 2, demanding that the pay raises be granted immediately.

Within hours after the strike began, Judge Luther Alverson of the Fulton County Superior Court ordered the strikers back to work.

(continued on next news page)

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... Wives of firemen picketed city hall

State law provides that "no person holding a position by appointment or employment in the government of the State of Georgia or any agency, authority, board, commission or public institution thereof, shall promote, encourage or participate in any strike."

The Georgia State government grants charters to cities, and this is interpreted as making the cities political institutions of the State, and their employees subject to State law.

Immediately after the order was issued, Fire Chief Hildebrand served notice that all firemen absent without authorization should report at their next regular shift or be suspended. A few firemen returned.

Mayor calls strike illegal. Mayor Allen refused to negotiate with the strikers on the ground that they were using illegal means in an effort to force the city to grant an illegal pay raise.

Firemen's wives began sporadic picketing of city hall and of the operating fire stations. Firemen kept their children out of school, on the ground that the schools were not safe because of inadequate fire protection.

The hiring of new men to replace the strikers went steadily ahead. By September 8, the city had applications from 117 men. Of these, 51—32 whites and 19 Negroes—had passed written examinations and were eligible to be hired if they passed physical examinations.

A handful of the strikers sought to go back to work, saying they would like to forget the whole thing. Officials refused to take them back.

The replacements must undergo rigorous training for three weeks before being assigned to active duty. Fire officials estimate that it will take at least a year to rebuild the Atlanta fire department to full strength.

City officials and officials of the AFL-CIO Fire Fighters Union, meanwhile, claim that it is the Teamsters Union that is really behind the fire department's troubles. They note that the striking firemen have their headquarters in the Atlanta Teamsters Union hall.

"This is a power grab." Officials note, too, that Tony Zivalich, a Teamsters organizer, sits in on all of the strikers' strategy meetings, and that Robert L. Mitchell, attorney for the local Teamsters, is the striking firemen's lawyer.

"This is a power grab," snaps an official of the AFL-CIO Firemen's Union. "The reasons they give for striking don't make sense. They say they've got to have their

... Some fires started by Molotov cocktails

pay raise right now instead of four months from now, when the city has agreed to give it to them. And for that they are jeopardizing the safety of this whole city.

"They want to put the AFL-CIO out of business here and take over the whole fire department. Then the Teamsters will take them over and the Teamsters will run the fire department."

Since the strike started, at least two fires have been started by Molotov cocktails. Whether these were thrown by strikers, rioters or others has not been established.

A large warehouse and a sales office of a tire company were destroyed by one of the Molotov-cocktail fires. Damage was estimated at several hundred thousand dollars.

Another Molotov cocktail was tossed onto the roof of a one-story home, but the blaze did little damage. False alarms have been numerous.

A Pay Raise That Averted a Strike

Western Electric Company and the Communications Workers of America have signed a three-year contract that:

- Averts a strike that had been threatening for weeks against the manufacturing arm of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company.
- Provides pay raises averaging 17½ cents an hour for 23,000 installers of central-station equipment, retroactive to July 28. The company estimated the increases at 5.5 to 6 per cent, or about 4 per cent on an annual basis.
- Permits reopening of the contract on wages after 18 months.
- Increases fringe benefits by more than 1 per cent over three years.


Under the new contract, hourly wage rates for beginning installers will range from \$1.87 to \$2.03 an hour. Top rates will range from \$3.70 to \$4 an hour.

The union hopes the new contract with Western Electric will set a pattern for other subsidiaries of AT&T in negotiations in coming months.

The pay raise for Western Electric's workers was well above the Johnson Administration's wage guideposts of 3.2 per cent a year. But Joseph A. Beirne, president of the union, contended that the settlement was not inflationary. He said the guideposts "were never designed to be strait jackets."

(Another Labor Week article, p. 90)

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