

Major Work Stoppage Activity Moves up in 1996

BY MICHAEL H. CIMINI

After dropping to a record low in 1995, the number of major work stoppages rose in 1996, as did the number of workers idled by stoppages.¹ Notwithstanding these increases, strike measures were still relatively low by historical standards. Most of the other measures of strike activity were also at relatively low levels in 1996.

The 1996 experience

Thirty-seven major stoppages began during 1996, idling 273,000 workers and resulting in about 4.9 million days of idleness (about 2 out of every 10,000 available work days). Comparable figures for 1995 were 31 stoppages, 192,000 workers idled, and 5.8 million days of idleness. (See table 1 and charts 1-3.) Although the number of stoppages and workers idled rose over the year, all measures of strike activity in 1996 were relatively low by historical standards.

Industries affected

Of the 37 major work stoppages beginning in 1996, 31 were in the private sector—including 15 in manufacturing and three each in construction and health services—idling some 254,000 workers and accounting for almost 4.8 million days of idleness. Of the 15 stoppages in manufacturing, 10 occurred in transportation equipment manufacturing.

In the public sector, the six disputes involved local government employees in education—mostly teachers. These stoppages involved some 18,000 workers, who accounted for almost 134,000 days of idleness.

Individual industries. The most days of idleness during the year due to work stoppages occurred in:

¹ Major work stoppages are those strikes and lockouts that idle 1,000 or more workers for at least 8 hours or one shift. The Bureau of Labor Statistics does not attempt to distinguish between strikes and lockouts in this series, which dates back to 1947.

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- Transportation equipment manufacturing (2.1 million days);
- Real estate services (630,000 days);
- Printing and publishing (630,000 days);
- Food stores (391,000 days); and
- Primary metals manufacturing (298,000 days).

Large and long stoppages

By far the largest stoppage in 1996 involved General Motors Corp. and 136,000 GM employees represented by the United Automobile Workers, some of whom were out 18 days. The only other large stoppage involved the Commercial Building Realty Board and the Service Employees International Union (30,000 workers out 31 days). (See table 2.)

About one half of the year's work stoppage idleness—2.5 million days—stemmed from three disputes. The first two were the previously mentioned General Motors—Automobile Workers dispute and the Commercial Building Realty Board—Service Employees stoppage. The third involved about 2,500 workers represented by various unions at the Detroit Free Press and Detroit News. These workers were out all year, making it the longest work stoppage in effect during the year. That stoppage continued into 1997.

The longest stoppage beginning in the year was at Trailmobile, where 1,100 workers represented by the United Paperworkers were out for 165 days. Another long stoppage beginning in the year was at Pemco Aeroplex, where some 1,100 workers represented by the Automobile Workers were on strike for 163 days, a stoppage that continued into 1997. Almost two-thirds of all stoppages lasted a week or longer.

Chart 1. Number of major work stoppages, 1947-96

Number

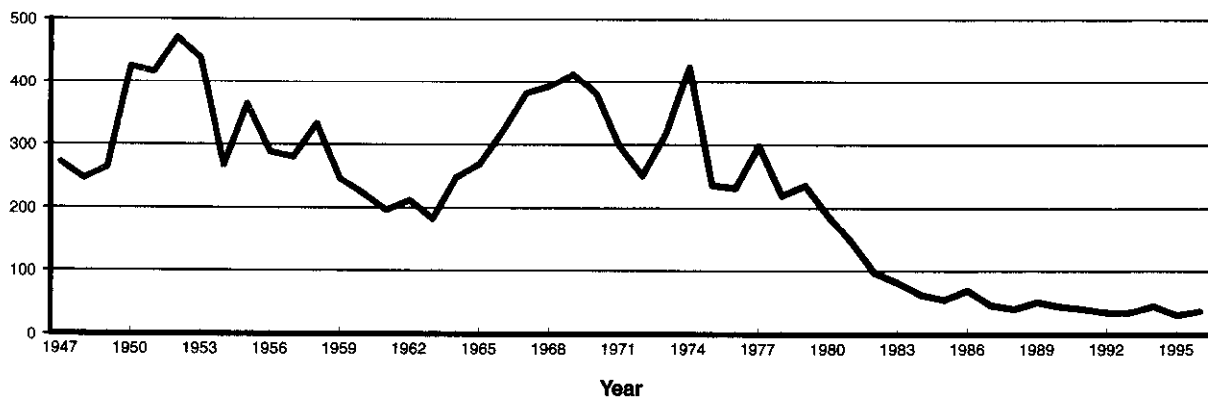


Chart 2. Workers involved in major work stoppages, 1947-96

Workers involved (thousands)

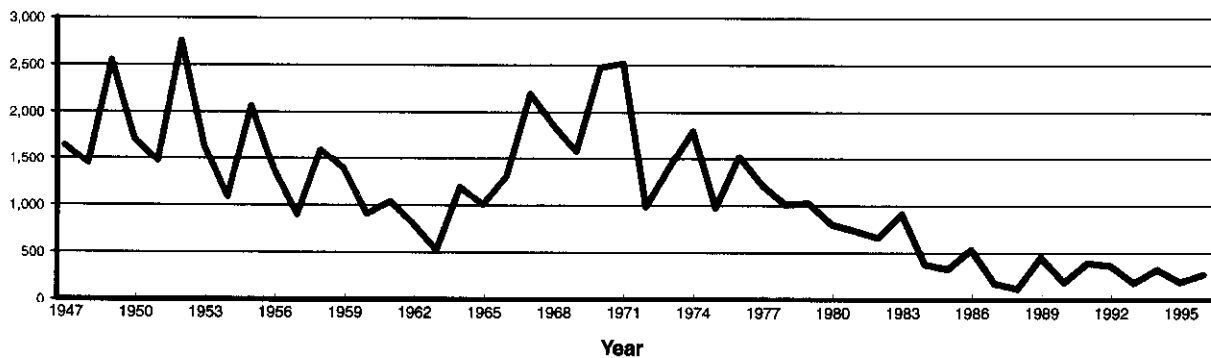


Chart 3. Days of idleness from major work stoppages, 1947-96

Days of idleness (thousands)

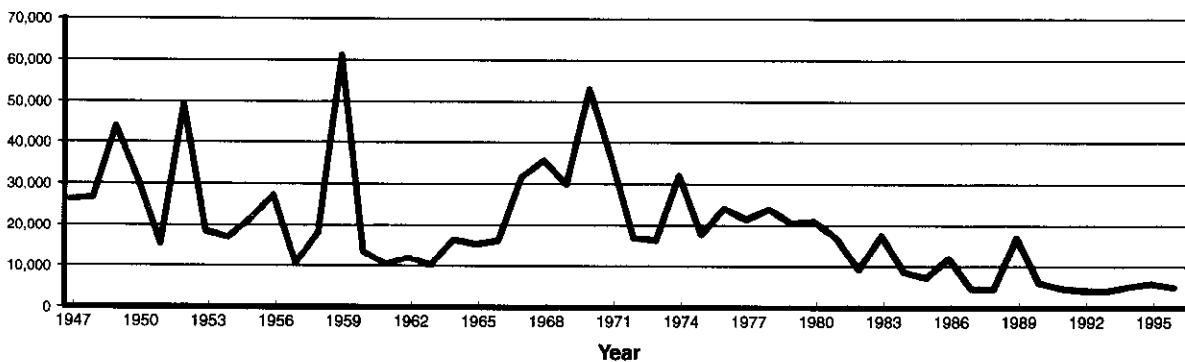


Table 1. Work stoppages involving 1,000 workers or more, 1947-96

Year	Stoppages ¹		Days idle ¹	
	Number	Workers involved (thousands)	Number (thousands)	Percent of estimated working time ²
1947	270	1,629	25,720	(³)
1948	245	1,435	26,127	0.22
1949	262	2,537	43,420	.38
1950	424	1,698	30,390	.26
1951	415	1,462	15,070	.12
1952	470	2,746	48,820	.38
1953	437	1,623	18,130	.14
1954	265	1,075	16,630	.13
1955	363	2,055	21,180	.16
1956	287	1,370	26,840	.20
1957	279	887	10,340	.07
1958	332	1,587	17,900	.13
1959	245	1,381	60,850	.43
1960	222	896	13,260	.09
1961	195	1,031	10,140	.07
1962	211	793	11,760	.08
1963	181	512	10,020	.07
1964	246	1,183	16,220	.11
1965	268	999	15,140	.10
1966	321	1,300	16,000	.10
1967	381	2,192	31,320	.18
1968	392	1,855	35,367	.20
1969	412	1,576	29,397	.16
1970	381	2,468	52,761	.29
1971	298	2,516	35,538	.19
1972	250	975	16,764	.09
1973	317	1,400	16,260	.08
1974	424	1,796	31,809	.16
1975	235	965	17,563	.09
1976	231	1,519	23,962	.12
1977	298	1,212	21,258	.10
1978	219	1,006	23,774	.11
1979	235	1,021	20,409	.09
1980	187	795	20,844	.09
1981	145	729	16,908	.07
1982	96	656	9,061	.04
1983	81	909	17,461	.08
1984	62	376	8,499	.04
1985	54	324	7,079	.03
1986	69	533	11,861	.05
1987	46	174	4,481	.02
1988	40	118	4,381	.02
1989	51	452	16,996	.07
1990	44	185	5,926	.02
1991	40	392	4,584	.02
1992	35	364	3,989	.01
1993	35	182	3,981	.01
1994	45	322	5,020	.02
1995	31	192	5,771	.02
1996	37	273	4,887	.02

¹ The number of stoppages and workers relate to stoppages that began in the year. Days of idleness include all stoppages in effect. Workers are counted more than once if they are involved in more than one stoppage during the year.

² Total working time is for all employees, except those in private households, forestry, and fisheries.

³ Not available.

Table 2. Work stoppages involving 5,000 workers or more beginning in 1996

Employer, location, and union	Began	Ended	Workers involved ¹	Estimated days idle in 1996 ¹
Commercial Building Realty Advisory Board New York, NY Service Employees (SEIU)	1/4/96	2/4/96	30,000	630,000
San Diego public schools San Diego, CA San Diego Education Association (Ind.)	2/1/96	2/8/96	5,000	30,000
Ingalls Shipbuilding, Inc. Pascagoula, MS Metal Trades Council (MTC)	2/14/96	2/15/96	7,600	14,200
General Motors Corp. Dayton, OH Automobile Workers (UAW)	3/5/96	3/22/96	136,000 ²	1,260,000
Retail grocery chains—Safeway and King Sooper Denver, CO, area Food and Commercial Workers(UFCW)	5/14/96	6/26/96	12,000	372,000
Northern Illinois Mason Employers Association Chicago, IL Bricklayers (BAC)	6/1/96	6/12/96	6,500	52,000
McDonnell Douglas Aerospace St. Louis, MO Machinists (IAM)	6/5/96	9/16/96	6,700	482,400
League of Voluntary Hospitals New York, NY Service Employees (SEIU)	6/24/96	8/28/96	5,800	272,600
General Motors Corp. Janesville, WI Automobile Workers (UAW)	10/30/96	11/6/96	5,100	30,600

¹ Workers and days idle are rounded to the nearest 100.² Includes workers idled because of material shortages.

Table D-3. Work stoppages involving 1,000 workers or more, December, 1996

Organizations involved and location ¹	Beginning date	Ending date	Number of workers ²	Days of idleness during December
Detroit Free Press and Detroit News Detroit, MI Metropolitan Council of Newspaper Unions and Teamsters	7/13/95		2,500	52,500
Pemco Aeroplex, Inc. Birmingham, AL Automobile Workers	7/22/96		1,100	23,100
Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel Corp. Interstate Machinists	10/1/96		4,800	100,800
Elevator Industry Flushing, NY Electrical Workers (IBEW)	11/1/96		1,500	31,500
Giant Food Inc. Landover, MD Teamsters (IBT)	12/18/96		2,100	18,900
Stoppages beginning in December 1			2,100	
Stoppages in effect in December 5			12,000	226,800

¹ Labor organizations are affiliated with the AFL-CIO except where noted as independent (Ind.).

² The number of workers involved is rounded to the nearest hundred.

^p = preliminary.

Table D-4. Work stoppages involving 1,000 workers or more, January, 1997^a

Organizations involved and location ¹	Beginning date	Ending date	Number of workers ²	Days of idleness during January
Detroit Free Press and Detroit News Detroit, MI Metropolitan Council of Newspaper Unions and Teamsters	7/13/95		2,500	52,500
Pemco Aeroplex, Inc. Birmingham, AL Automobile Workers	7/22/96		1,100	23,100
Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel Corp. Interstate Machinists	10/1/96		4,800	100,800
Elevator Industry Flushing, NY Electrical Workers (IBEW)	11/1/96		1,500	31,500
Giant Food Inc. Landover, MD Teamsters (IBT)	12/18/96	1/19/97	2,100	22,200
General Motors Morain, OH Electrical Workers (IUE)	1/26/97	1/28/97	4,300	8,600
Stoppages beginning in January 1			4,300	
Stoppages in effect in January 6			16,300	238,700

¹ Labor organizations are affiliated with the AFL-CIO except where noted as independent (Ind.).

² The number of workers involved is rounded to the nearest hundred.

^a = preliminary.