

ORAL HISTORY  
of the  
FIRST STRIKE  
of  
USWA, LOCAL 8378

Senior Project,  
Submitted by:  
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## SECTION A: INTRODUCTION

Was the strike in 1975 the birth of my local union, United Steelworkers of America (8378), or was it just another event that has confronted workers at Cascade Steel?

The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of my local union's first strike. My hope is that it will enrich me with the facts and folklore of this truly amazing event. This story should be an inspiration for my brothers and sisters who came to work at Cascade Steel after this strike. It should be a good organizing tool for new members' orientation. Lastly, this study should give the 'old-timers' retired or not, a way to reflect on their efforts to sustain and instill union beliefs which are present at Cascade Steel today. I hope this kind of a study can be used by other U.S.W.A. local unions to help them open wide the eyes of fellow workers of the fact that in the struggle of trade unionism there are real benefits.

The 1970's was a period of great decline for the United Steelworkers of America. By 1981 they were down from over a million steelworkers to 750 thousand.<sup>1</sup> The mills that operated with a fully integrated operation were referred to as 'Big Steel'. The 'Big Steel' mills started with iron ore and melted it to a finished product (thus the term, fully integrated). They were hit with the decline first. This decline was caused by many factors: imports, mini-mills, recession, lack of modernization, poor labor relations, and any combination of the above.

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<sup>1</sup> John P. Hoerr, *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa., 1988, p.369.

'Mini-mills' are small mills using an electric arc furnace to melt, not iron ore, but scrap steel. These mills were usually in small rural areas and usually operated non-union. They were part of 'Big Steel's' problems because of their running with cheap labor (non-union) and their use of cheap scrap which kept the man-hours (wages) per ton lower.

Well, I was working in a 'Big Steel' mill in the 70's. I had 32hr work weeks and lay-offs for seven years. It took me six years to complete a four year apprenticeship because of it. When the opportunity came my way in 1979 to work in a 'Mini-mill' in Oregon, I grabbed it. The work was steady. My future was looking good. However, I didn't know the history of this mini-mill called Cascade Steel.

My research of personal and oral interviews, conversations, newspaper articles, union documents and photos lead me to realize that this was a story that everyone should know and learn from.

## SECTION B: METHODOLOGY

In order to complete an oral history, I needed to know where to begin and what steps to take. So, I contacted Lee Sayrs, Archivist at the George Meany Memorial Archives. She was very helpful in guiding me through the steps to take to achieve my goal.

Step One: I needed to find all newspaper and magazine articles pertaining to the subject dating from November, 1973 through November, 1976. Each article I copied, read and reviewed. The retrieval process included:

- I telephoned the Oregonian Newspaper (Portland, Oregon) requesting photos. They suggested I try the Oregon Historical Society.
- I visited the Oregon Historical Society (Portland, Oregon). Here I was able to retrieve articles and pictures; one from the Pacific Northwest Labor Press (Portland, Oregon), two from the Oregonian Newspaper (Portland, Oregon), many from the Statesman Newspaper (Salem, Oregon), and many from the NewsRegister Newspaper (McMinnville, Oregon).
- I telephoned Mr. Johnson, Director of Communications, at the United Steelworkers of America International office in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I asked for copies of the 1975 Steel Labor magazine. He referred me to the Historical Collection & Labor Archives at Pennsylvania State University.
- I telephoned Denise Conklin, Labor Archivist, at Pennsylvania State University's Historical Collections & Labor Archives. She referred me to the Interlibrary Loan Department at the University of Oregon. She was able to fax me a standard oral history release form to use for interviews I would be conducting. She also gave me more information in reference to the steps to take to achieve my goal.
- I telephoned Marcus Widenor, Associate Professor, at the Labor Education Research Center at the University of Oregon (Eugene, Oregon). Through the Interlibrary Loan Department at the University of Oregon, he was able to locate the 1975 Steel Labor in microfilm.

- I contacted my son, Chad Sullivan, a student at the University of Oregon, and asked that he retrieve this microfilm. After multiple e-mails between himself, Marcus Widenor, and Denise Conklin, he was able to retrieve the Western Edition of the 1975 Steel Labor magazine.
- I visited the McMinnville Public Library (McMinnville, Oregon) to retrieve articles not found at the Oregon Historical Society.

Step Two: All newspaper articles were put into chronological order by newspaper and then again by date.

Step Three: I had multiple personal and telephone conversations with people directly involved in the subject matter. They included union members, union officials, a union attorney, and the federal mediator.

Step Four: I contacted the local union's secretary in order to locate union documents in reference to the subject. I was able to retrieve documents, photos, and the minutes dating from September, 1975 through March, 1983.

Step Five: I read the book Doing Oral History, Ritchie, Donald A.; Twayne Publishers, New York, New York; 1995.

Step Six: I then wrote the rough draft.

Step Seven: I conducted audio taped oral interviews. Preceding each interview, the person signed a release form (enclosed) and received copies of all the articles for review.

Step Eight: I made revisions to my paper in order to include information received in the oral interviews.

Step Nine: The final draft follows:

### SECTION C: RESULTS

December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1974, four years and nine months before I had arrived on the scene, the contract had expired. The union members were already laid-off. The union members were not happy with their present Union. The Teamsters were the bargaining unit representatives since Cascade Steel opened in 1969. The unhappy, laid-off steelworkers voted 147 to 14 (91%) for a new union affiliate, namely the United Steelworkers of America.<sup>2</sup>

Why did Cascade Steel settle in McMinnville, Oregon? Why was the community's investors looking for industry? The investors were looking for increased employment within the community and profit. Cascade Steel was looking for a home. This marriage was set in McMinnville!

Near the beginning of 1968, a group of community minded citizens founded a corporation called McMinnville Industrial Promotions Incorporated (MIP).<sup>3</sup> They invested in the land and buildings to get Cascade Steel started. They thought that Cascade Steel would provide a stable labor market with good wages that would translate into a substantial tax base that would benefit all area tax payers. Cascade Steel was pleased with such a welcome since it had failed to settle in Cascade Locks, Oregon. Their golden egg came with the low electrical rates and cheap labor. The electrical rates were one of

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<sup>2</sup> *Steel Labor Magazine*, January 1975, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> *NewsRegister*, "Steelworkers Statement", March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1975.  
*NewsRegister*, "The Forgotten Investor", April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1975.

the lowest in the nation without a raise since 1941. Although, rates would rise 20% to \$10.20 per 1000 kilowatt hours by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1975.<sup>4</sup> Compared to New York City's \$77.40 per 1000 kilowatt hours and Boston's \$53.76 per 1000 kilowatt hours McMinnville's rate was quite a bargain. The reason that low electric rates were so important was because of the amount of electrical power needed to melt down scrap steel into molten metal. The cheap electrical power gives the company an advantage on the competition.

The period of time between 1968 and mid 1974 saw peaks and valleys within the relationships of USWA (8378), Cascade Steel, mill production and the economy. Although there were minor labor disputes and layoffs, no one could have forecasted what was to come not only in labor relations but the economy as well.<sup>5</sup>

Newspaper articles explained that by November 1974, the Willamette Valley, where Cascade Steel is located, was hard hit by a combination of inflation and recession.<sup>6</sup> By December 1974, six and a half million people nation wide were looking for work, the highest in thirteen years.<sup>7</sup> It was being forecasted that the economy would be the worst yet since World War II.<sup>8</sup> Yamhill County, home to Cascade Steel, was hit the hardest in the state of Oregon. Over 10% were unemployed in the timber industry. The

<sup>4</sup> NewsRegister, "Mac Electricity Rates Up Since 1940s", December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1974.

<sup>5</sup> Sid Halsey (audio taped interview, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

John Devorss (audio taped interview, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

Jimmy Elliott (audio taped interview, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

Leonard Sexton (audio taped interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> The Statesman, "Mid Valley in '74 Hard Hit by Inflation Recession", January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1975.

<sup>7</sup> The Statesman, "Jobless Rate 7.1% Highest in 13 Years", January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>8</sup> The Statesman, "Decline May Be Worst Since WWII", January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

steel industry was not fairing well either. By the end of March 1975, the unemployment in Yamhill County alone jumped to 14.9%.<sup>9</sup>

Harvey Osborn, Vice-president and General Manager of Cascade Steel, was reported as saying on December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1974 in the local paper, that the reason for lay-offs at the mill was due to lack of activity in the construction industry.<sup>10</sup> The same paper reported on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1975 that he stated the reason for lay-offs was foreign steel coming into the Northwest market.<sup>11</sup>

By March of 1975 the newspapers were full of bad news. When the company offered the 215 steelworkers a return to full operation, the local union held a 41/2 hr meeting on March 9th and voted to turn down a contract by secret ballot 105 to 37.<sup>12</sup> These same steelworkers had been laid-off for more than two months. The company said it had maintained 40% capacity with 40 supervisory personnel since the lay-off started December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1974 and would continue to operate that way even if there was a picket line put up. Annually, Cascade Steel had produced 100 thousand tons of steel bar.<sup>13</sup>

The Company stated that their last offer included a fifty cents per hour cost of living allowance and increases in fringe benefits. The Union Representative, Lee Caldwell, said it's too lean and contract language was also a problem for the union. Both sides had negotiated since the first of the year however, no new meeting dates had been set.

<sup>9</sup> The Statesman, "Oregon Jobless Inches Up, Yamhill County 14.9%", March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>10</sup> NewsRegister, "Cascade Shut Down Due December 31<sup>st</sup>", December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1974.

<sup>11</sup> NewsRegister, "Return to full operation is 'very cloudy' issue for Cascade management", January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1975.

<sup>12</sup> The Statesman, "Steelworkers Vote to Strike", March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>13</sup> The Statesman, "Steelworkers Vote to Strike", March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1975.



By the 11<sup>th</sup> of March a few strikers scabbed across the picket line. However, the vast majority remained faithful to the strike.<sup>14</sup>

Sid Halsey, President of USWA, Local 8378, said the negotiating team for the union voted 6-0 not to recommend the company's contract offer.<sup>15</sup> This could help explain the vote being 105-37. Although wages were the biggest issue for the union, Lee Caldwell, International Representative, said there were at least seventeen other items that needed to be addressed.

Robert E. Hartley, Director of Personnel and Labor Relations, stated that the last offer was all there was to give to Cascade's 'old' employees.<sup>16</sup> Hartley said the company would advertise locally for new hires to fill jobs and that in about ten days strikers would be terminated. Further, he pointed out that those who remained on strike would not be able to collect unemployment benefits because of the recall to work.

As the deadline date of March 24<sup>th</sup> came upon the strikers, reports of violence started coming in: a lead pipe was thrown at a scab's house, hitting the screen door; a brick was thrown through a picture window of another scab's home; a broken car window of yet another.<sup>17</sup> The last report was the most sensational. A man named Earl Douglas Vanderbeck was beaten up in front of a convenience store by three men in a town named Dundee, ten miles away.<sup>18</sup> He had just gotten paid on his way out of work. Allegedly, he flashed a fistful of money at the strikers on the picket line. They followed him to Dundee.

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<sup>14</sup> The Statesman, "Strikers Picket Cascade Mill at McMinnville", March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1975.  
NewsRegister, "Steelworkers, Cascade Officials Stand by Latest Contract Offer", March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1975.  
 John Devorss (audio taped interview, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2000).  
 Leonard Sexton (audio taped interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> NewsRegister, "Steelworkers, Cascade Officials Stand by Latest Contract Offer", March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> NewsRegister, "Cascade Strike Still Underway", March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

These types of stories always come with a labor dispute. Usually they are tied to the strikers but rarely proven. If Mr. Vanderbeck did such an act of defiance, perhaps it was too much for people to tolerate having been out of work and having watched other people going into their workplace to do their jobs. It is not above employers in their quest to discredit a legal strike or bust a union to utilize “finks”, “rats”, or “goons”, not to mention “scabs” which Cascade Steel had done. Employers have used biased courts, unscrupulous politicians and even the government to do seemingly “legal” dirty tricks for them. Anyway, nothing was ever proven in the above cases.

March 24<sup>th</sup> arrived and so did the scabs that Cascade Steel had advertised for in three Oregon newspapers; The NewsRegister (McMinnville), The Statesman Journal (Salem), The Oregonian (Portland).<sup>19</sup> Meeting the sixty scabs when they arrived were over one hundred strikers, the strikers’ families, and sympathizers from within and out of state. Sid Halsey, President USWA, LU 8378, said his men talked at least half of the applicants out of crossing the picket line.<sup>20</sup> Sid was quoted in one of the newspapers as stating ‘People don’t like it at all’ in reference to the ads for scabs.<sup>21</sup> In the course of events, two strikers were hit by cars. One, Dan DeReave, was injured enough to require an ambulance transport to the local hospital.<sup>22</sup> There was some shoving and pushing. Surprisingly, no violence was noted by the McMinnville police.

There was some good news, the National Labor Board (NLRB), called for a meeting between the United Steelworkers and Cascade Steel, to be held on Wednesday,

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<sup>19</sup> The Statesman, “Strikers Confront Job Seekers”, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Oregon Labor Press, “Cascade Steel Recruits Scabs”, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1975. Sid Halsey, President of LU 8378, said the union would be there. There was no commitment from the company at that point.<sup>23</sup>

The NLRB is an independent federal agency initiated by congress in 1935 to oversee and enforce the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). The NLRB for all practical purposes is a court of appeals.<sup>24</sup> In this case an unfair labor practice was filed by Lee Caldwell, USWA International Representative, with complaint that on or near March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1975 the company had refused to bargain with the union on wages and other benefits.<sup>25</sup> In this case, the NLRB sent the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) to help this situation due to the impasse between the company and the union. The mediator tries to get both parties together and voluntarily reach an agreement. The mediator unlike an arbitrator, can only recommend a solution.<sup>26</sup> Although FMCS helps as a third party, it has no magic wand or smoke and mirrors. Strikers and laymen usually don't understand this. In fact, most people aren't aware that there are no records kept by the mediator in these matters.<sup>27</sup> The mediator is there only to listen and advise.

More bad news had hit the papers. Cascade Steel said that the strikers had quit their jobs.<sup>28</sup> A company official said that if the NLRB rules against the company, the status of the new hires would change and they were ready to appeal that decision all the way to Washington, DC. The Director of Labor Relations for Cascade Steel, Robert Hartley, further inflamed things by stating 'in regards to seniority rights of permanent

<sup>23</sup> The Statesman, "NLRB Calls Cascade Steel, Striking Union to Mediation Talks", March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>24</sup> R. Emmett Murray, *The Lexicon of Labor*, The New Press, New York, 1998, p. 125.

<sup>25</sup> The Statesman, "Cascade Steel Considers Strikers Quit Jobs", March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>26</sup> R. Emmett Murray, *The Lexicon of Labor*, The New Press, New York, 1998, p. 116.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Stuckenschneider, Commissioner, Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, Portland, Oregon, (personal communication, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> The Statesman, "Cascade Steel Considers Strikers Quit Jobs", March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

employees just hired over strikers, I certainly have no obligation to take them (strikers) back'.<sup>29</sup> He also said that the actions of the strikers on the picket line would be looked at if the company were to hire any of them back.

Lee Caldwell countered by saying 'Cascade's decision to hire "strike breakers" (scabs) will make a settlement harder because it makes the strikers mad'. Caldwell further said that what Cascade was doing was a classic example of why there was a need for labor law reform.<sup>30</sup> He said there was a measure passed by the House of Representatives to have an "Anti-strikebreaker Law". Such statements by Lee Caldwell, USWA Sub-director, were echoed by Frank McGee, USWA Director, District 38. McGee pointed out, 'It's been forty years since the passage of the Wagner Act. The only changes in this important law are regressive and actually hurt labor-management stability by tipping the balance away from labor into the hands of business'. McGee suggested that the following reforms be made to the Labor Law: include farm workers in the NLRA; assurances that when workers democratically vote to have a union, the employer must agree to guarantee basic union security provisions and an accepted grievance procedure (collective bargaining); repeal that section of the law that allows states to prohibit union security clauses even when the union and management agree to them; elimination of the Landrum Griffin Amendments to the NLRA; lastly and still important today, some form of national healthcare.<sup>31</sup> It is worth noting that we are still awaiting all of the above!

Monday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1975, brought more negatives to the steelworkers when President, Sid Halsey was served with a circuit court injunction by Yamhill County Civil

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> *Oregon Labor Press*, "Union Explains its Position", March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>31</sup> *Steel Labor Magazine*, January 1975, p. 13.

Deputy, James Wagner, on the picket line.<sup>32</sup> The defendants named in the injunction were officers of USWA (8378); Sid Halsey, Bob Fortune, Boyd Cooke, Richard Jack, Kenneth Kidder and Lynn Ruggles.<sup>33</sup> Other union members were served with an injunction in the form of a “John Doe” (anonymous citizen at the scene), they included Larry Shipley, Ralph Lynch, Milt Castimore and Leonard Sexton.<sup>34</sup> If any of the officers were proven guilty of initiating or encouraging acts of violence on the picket line, they could be held liable along with the local and the international unions. Under cross examination none of these men said they had knowledge of such acts.

There were two days of testimony with huge crowds (mainly union members) in the gallery listening to both union and company witnesses. Seven company witnesses, including Earl Douglas Vanderbeck, testified to such actions as an assault by a group, twelve shots taken at a house (six hitting it), rocks thrown at private vehicles, tires flattened by nails in the company parking lot, and verbal abuse as replacements crossed the picket line.<sup>35</sup> Law enforcement told the court of their concerns that even with help from the State Police, the County Sheriff and the McMinnville Police Department, they would not be able to put down a full scale riot. Their intelligence report put the crowd on that Monday at 200 to 250. They figured 20% were from outside the area.

After two days of hearings, Yamhill County Circuit Court Judge, Kurt Rossman, granted Cascade Steel’s request for a preliminary injunction to control the amount of

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<sup>32</sup> NewsRegister, “Cascade Steel Officials Continue with Plans to Terminate Strikers”, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1975. Photo Enclosed.

<sup>33</sup> NewsRegister, “Cascade Workers Testify on Strike Incidents, Hearing on Injunction Continued into Friday”, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>34</sup> Leonard Sexton (audio taped interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

<sup>35</sup> NewsRegister, “Cascade Strike Still Under Way”, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

NewsRegister, “Cascade Workers Testify on Strike Incidents, Hearing on Injunction Continued into Friday”, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

picketers. The limit was 5 picketers and/or sympathizers per gate. Judge Rossman agreed with law enforcement that ‘law enforcement would be unable to furnish adequate protection in the event of an immediate and serious confrontation between the parties’. The lawyers for both sides said they understood the order and would obey it. The judge said if there was no violence over the fourteen day injunction, he would lift the order and place a ten day moratorium suspending the provision of his order. The judge cautioned Cascade Steel that their employees must drive at safe speeds entering or leaving the plant. He did not want anyone struck by a car again. He said he thought both sides wanted safety and he didn’t want to over extend his authority to prejudice either side. The judge also said his order dealt with picketing. Complaints of trespassing or criminal acts would be dealt with by law enforcement.<sup>36</sup>

March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1975 was a full media day. Six different articles appeared in three local newspapers. The most disturbing article was on the front page of the Statesman Journal.<sup>37</sup> That article reported that Yamhill County’s unemployment was at 14.9%. These were bad economic times which can bring out the worst in human beings. The “scab tree” would bare its horrible fruit ‘the scab’, scum to some but chum to unsavory management during a labor dispute.<sup>38</sup>

Legendary football coach, Vince Lombardi, once said ‘fatigue makes cowards of us all’. Applied to labor union disputes, it means the internal scab (a union member) has lost faith whether in the cause, the union, or his ability to make the almighty dollar. For the external scab it’s opportunity, ignorance, and economic gain. Strikers can’t allow

<sup>36</sup> The Statesman, “Cascade Steel Receives Injunction for Control of Pickets’ Activities”, March 29<sup>th</sup>.1975.

<sup>37</sup> The Statesman, “Oregon Jobless Inches Up”, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>38</sup> Oregon Labor Press, “Cascade Steel Recruits Scabs”, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

themselves to be tricked into the pursuit of the dollar. They don't have that option. While Joseph Odorcich, International Vice-President USWA and original member of the Steelworkers Organizing Committee (S.W.O.C.), negotiated in the 1970's for big steel, he darkly recalled how in the 1920's even the staunchest of unionists were so weary and hungry that they crawled back into the plant. He was afraid of seeing the same in the 1970's. He thought maybe the men had had enough.<sup>39</sup> Would the steelworkers at this mini-mill in McMinnville crawl back? Would they tire?

By April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1975 negotiations saw some progress. After three days of meetings, the major stumbling blocks were wages and termination of strikers. Lee Caldwell, negotiator for the USWA, said, "I don't think the employees will accept a contract in which they come in as new hires".<sup>40</sup> Eugene O'Neil, federal mediator, who has sat in on negotiations the last three days said, "As long as bargaining continues, I shall be hopeful of a settlement".<sup>41</sup> The union voluntarily dropped nine of the twelve items they had brought to the table. Those items dropped included vacation bonus, pensions, accident & sickness insurance, supplemental unemployment benefits, and jury duty. Wages were still an issue. The union said the company's first year wage offer is 52.3 cents below average. The company stated it's first year wage offer is 50cents to one dollar more than comparable rebar workers on the West Coast.<sup>42</sup> Other items of contention are an 'A' & 'B' rate for craft jobs, cost of living increase (COLA), severance pay, time and a half for

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<sup>39</sup> John P. Hoerr, *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa., 1988.

<sup>40</sup> *The Statesman*, "Progress Reported in Steelworkers Strike", April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1975.

<sup>41</sup> *The Oregonian*, "Negotiations to Resume at Cascade", April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1975.

<sup>42</sup> John Devorss (audio taped interview, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2000).  
Leonard Sexton (audio taped interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

Sundays (when it is a scheduled day of work), and jobs out of line of progression to each other (job upgrade did not always increase the person's wage).

April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1975, a company spokesman said, "The company, after giving in excess of ten days notice, has the right under labor law to hire replacements for employees who have not yet returned to work. The status of strikers is subject to negotiations".<sup>43</sup> As many as twenty five strikers had crossed the picket line and more than eighty replacement workers had been hired. The strikers were concerned. Was the company bluffing? Do these labor laws allow this to happen as the company spokesman claimed? It is times like this that allow for second guessing and doubt. It is time to which true grit of strikers and real leadership of the union leaders is severely tested.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, Judge Kurt Rossman denied Cascade Steel's request of an immediate extension of the preliminary injunction. The moratorium of ten days was to run out on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April. The judge said he would listen to the request on that day. Union attorney, Mike Dye, wanted a permanent end to the preliminary injunction. Judge Rossman said he would listen to that argument as well on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April.<sup>44</sup>

April 22<sup>nd</sup> arrived and both the company and union had their day in court. The company testified that roofing nails flattened sixty tires in parking lots and driveways since March. The company testified that they had to get a large magnet to pick up nails, which worked well until aluminum nails were used. The company said they also had to buy a big sweeper to remove the nails. Robert Klinger, Cascade Steel President, and Robert Hartley, Cascade Steel Labor Relations Officer, testified that strikers were

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<sup>43</sup> NewsRegister, "Cascade and Union Disagree on Economic Data", April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1975.

<sup>44</sup> The Statesman, "Court Denies Mill's Bid on Picketing", April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1975.



spitting on cars, yelling and screaming at strikebreakers, and caused minor damage by rock throwing.<sup>45</sup>

Union officers Lee Caldwell, USWA Sub-district Director, Sid Halsey, President LU 8378, and Lynn Ruggles made testimony that except for the first day of unlimited pickets they knew of no unlawful acts on the picket line. Further, they said that all the local union members were instructed not to engage in any act that would break the law and to be sure to follow the court order of only five pickets per gate.<sup>46</sup>

A McMinnville police officer, Robert Morgan, testified that on his night beat taking in the area around the mill's gates, the picket lines appeared orderly. Officer Morgan also stated that the union officials were cooperative.<sup>47</sup> Judge Rossman did not rule on the company's request.<sup>48</sup>

May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1975, the injunction had long run out and no offer to extend was made. The next night at 11:00pm a fight broke out between strikers and scabs. The local newspaper reported that one of Cascade Steel's employees (a scab) was taken to the local hospital for emergency treatment.<sup>49</sup> It's truly amazing that the company didn't pursue the injunction. This probably is due to the fact that the injured person was a striker, Leonard Sexton.<sup>50</sup> However, a company spokesman talking on the resumed negotiations said, "We are at a very sensitive point right now". Tim Leigh, attorney for Cascade Steel, indicated that both sides were close to an agreement and a joint statement would be made

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<sup>45</sup> The Statesman, "Mill, Union Tell Case in Court", April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1975.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> The Statesman, "Employee Hurt in Labor Dispute", May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

NewsRegister, "Strikers to Consider New Offer", May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>50</sup> Leonard Sexton (audio taped interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

if an agreement was reached. Perhaps the company didn't want to jeopardize progress since negotiations had stalemated in mid April.<sup>51</sup> Things must be getting close now because the local newspaper was leaking reports of private meetings held earlier in the month. These private meetings were held between Lee Caldwell, USWA Sub-district Director, and Robert Klinger, President of Cascade Steel. Reports stated the meetings ended with the union promising to drop its unfair labor practices complaint filed with the National Labor Relations Board if the membership accepts the company's contract offer.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of May the union membership met. The vote to accept the company's offer was tight but passed 69 to 60. The noon meeting did not go without incident. Eight union scabs wanting to vote, came to the meeting. They had been given assurance that they would have safe passage. The other seventeen scabs declined to come to vote. When the vote was stated, the eight scabs attempted to leave. As they approached the door, the Inside-guard, Bob Morey, instructed them that no one could leave the meeting unless the Chair (officer in charge) says it's OK or the members vote to adjourn the meeting. That's when all hell broke loose. A fight broke out between the union members and the scabs. Of the eight scabs, six were treated at the local hospital for injuries and released. A seventh, Gerald Smith, was hospitalized. Union members today remain convinced that the company purposely sent these scabs to that meeting just to stir it up.<sup>52</sup>

The contract offer to the members was for \$1.00 over three years. However, the strike breakers who worked in the plant during the strike would retain employment. That

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<sup>51</sup> The Statesman, "Cascade Steel Talk Stalemated", April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>52</sup> The Statesman, "McMinnville Fights Leave 7 Injured", May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1975.  
NewsRegister, "Fight Injures 7 after Cascade Union Vote", May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1975.  
Jimmy Elliott (audio taped interview, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2000).  
Leonard Sexton (audio taped interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

undoubtedly explains part of the reason for such a close vote. Surely the aggravation of the scabs in the meeting itself did not help matters either.

The company's lawyers however wanted time to look at the legalities of the vote because of the fight that ensued and because seventeen scabs fearing for their safety did not get to vote.<sup>53</sup>

The good news was that all picketing ceased immediately after the union membership voted. The other good news was that strikers not called back to work were now eligible for unemployment and a hearing with the State Employment Division was scheduled. The bad news was that one hundred and twenty men would have to wait to reclaim their jobs while fifty other strikers returned to their jobs. Waiting for the company to make up their minds was hard on the strikers.

It seems that in a labor dispute there is always a death or serious injury to a scab or scabs. Late on Friday night, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1975, a scab named Charles E. Walker, 29 years old, was burnt by molten steel. He was underneath a ladle when it tipped bringing the ash and debris upon him setting his clothes on fire. To make matters worse, he ran, falling twice for a total of fourteen feet into a ditch full of water.<sup>54</sup> The man running the crane at the time of this tragic accident was a supervisor by the name of Smith.<sup>55</sup> Was he a qualified crane man? Was production necessary while the company did its legal review? Was this the price the company said they would pay this individual? I'm told Charles Walker is still undergoing skin grafting to this day. Safety is always an issue in a union steel mill. Scab run facilities are usually without regard for this matter. Colorado Fuel

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<sup>53</sup> NewsRegister, "Cascade Labor Tensions Ease, Contract Offer Still Being Studied", May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1975.

<sup>54</sup> The Statesman, "Molten Slag Burns Worker at Cascade", May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>55</sup> Leonard Sexton (audio taped interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

and Iron (CF&I) now called Rocky Mountain Steel, is a prime example of that today with two fatalities of scab workers in a time span of less than ten months.

This wait for Cascade Steel to decide on the union contract offer was the “watched pot that never boils” for the members of local union 8378. Yet for others this pending news was a mere bleep on their radar screen.

It was almost a side note in the newspapers on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1975, when Cascade Steel announced that they were accepting the Steelworkers contract as voted on May 15<sup>th</sup>. Company officials and the union negotiating committee were to meet at 3:30pm that very day to sign the agreement. The Statesman Journal covered this story on page 14 of Section I.<sup>56</sup> This not being a Salem issue, I can understand. At least they reported it. On the other hand, the NewsRegister, McMinnville’s paper, I missed the article three times in my research. It was an article taking up 2”X 3” space under a story that covered a tax levy, after months of full blown front page coverage on the labor dispute.<sup>57</sup>

Not a month to the day with the ink barely dry on the contract, the NewsRegister reported on July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1975 that Cascade Steel had come upon a pot of gold. They had three articles on Cascade Steel’s 1974 profit of 4.24 million. Back on March 28<sup>th</sup> of 1975, during negotiations, the USWA had claimed that the company’s profit had been greater than three million the first nine months of ’74.<sup>58</sup> Apparently the union was right on the money. The newspaper’s article on the front page stated that Cascade Steel was hit hard by a depressed market and a labor controversy early in 1975. Turning to the editorial page, it is a little differently stated. This article states ‘bitter labor disputes early this year

<sup>56</sup> The Statesman, “Cascade Steelworkers Meet, Ready to Sign Pact”, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>57</sup> NewsRegister, “Cascade Ends Conflict”, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>58</sup> NewsRegister, “Steelworkers Statement”, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

along with a depressed market caused a sharp curtailment of the mill's production and sales'. The last article appearing in the paper gave details on the mill's expansion and an officer's report. How amazing is it to find three contradicting articles in the same edition of one newspaper? The third and last article which was about the officer's report of Cascade Steel included the list of re-elected officers and directors of Cascade Steel. Low and behold, included in the list appeared the name of Philip N. Bladine, owner and publisher of the NewsRegister. He had been re-elected secretary and director of Cascade Steel.<sup>59</sup> Now, Mr. P. N. Bladine did not write all of the articles in regards to the strike of 1975. However, it is beyond doubt that he did have control of statements made in behalf of the NewsRegister, including his son's column which appeared on the editorial page through out this labor dispute.<sup>60</sup> This is his right as owner of the newspaper but as editor he did not meet his obligation for fair and unbiased journalism. Mr. Bladine did not meet this fairness test in the minds of the strikers, nor in anyone's expanded imagination.

So, was the pot of gold used by Cascade Steel to hedge off a labor dispute in attempts to bust the union, wait for the market to improve, and then announce expansion? You bet your bippy and the NewsRegister's owner had a vested interest in reporting negatively in the union effort. This is so if you look at Cascade Steel's profit while crying foul. This is so if you analyze the difference in reports amongst the newspapers. You make the call.

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<sup>59</sup> NewsRegister, "Cascade Stockholders Told of Profits, Expansion", July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1975.

NewsRegister, "Expansion Program Continues Toward Completion of \$8 Million in Improvements", July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1975.

NewsRegister, p. 4., July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1975.

NewsRegister, "Mill Growth Told", July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1975.

<sup>60</sup> NewsRegister, "Watchamacolumn, Cascade Steel Strike Involves Conflicting Data", March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

## SECTION D: CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I feel the courage and commitment of these unionists in 1975 has allowed me the opportunity for long term employment. Had they not endured this labor dispute, I would not have come to Oregon. My career at US Steel South Works in Chicago, Illinois would have ended in the early 1980's. US Steel was phasing out it's workforce. The union membership had dropped from 6000 in 1979 when I had left to 1000 early in the 1980's. That mill was shut down completely by 1990. The land is now being considered for housing development.

I was not alone in benefiting from the strike of 1975. Children, cousins, brothers and friends of these unionists now work at Cascade Steel. The union membership has more than doubled in the last twenty years. One of the biggest reasons for this expansion is the intelligence and foresight of the local union leaders and members not to fight the progress of technology. That in itself is an achievement. Those unions who choose to fight modernization tend to lose jobs rather than gain. The steel industry is full of many a sad story on the battle of jobs vs technology.

Do the fights that the labor movement gets in pay off? It did for all of us at USWA local 8378. But on the whole? Yes. Before this strike there were others. There were people who actually laid down their lives for what they believed in. There will always be casualties in any endeavor when people unite against a common foe. Not to stand up would be a true genocide for those who toil.

Was this some kind of miracle or some sort of enlightenment? No not really. It was the dedication and leadership of those few who were able to shed light on issues for the many who could not. These people are as Walter Reuther and his brothers (founders of the United Auto Workers, U.A.W.) were called “spark plugs”.<sup>61</sup> Cascade Steel ignited these spark plugs to the point where the body of the local union was willing to follow. There are too many of these spark plugs to mention in this paper. So, I’ll leave it to just two, Lee Caldwell and Sid Halsey.

Sid Halsey was a 48 year old millwright from California. He was the type of leader who’s quiet, calm manner breeds stability upon others. His style could confuse people into thinking that he just didn’t quite get it, he didn’t understand. To the contrary, Sid was a believer in the phrase, ‘I have one mouth and two ears, so I should listen twice before I speak’. Sid was cool under fire. Being the first president of a new local union involved in a major labor dispute, this was a good attribute to have. There were other leadership tactics that Sid used. He grew his hair long and vowed not to cut it until there was a contract. He thought this would help develop a working relationship with the very young and very green unionists. It worked. This cause was so important to him that he wouldn’t allow his pride to interfere with the goal, the contract. Sid also opened up his home where his wife, Frances, and daughters lived to become the local union’s office. Not many would do that. Not many wives or children would have put up with it.

Lee Caldwell was the USWA International Representative and Sub-district Director --- ‘The Hired Gun’. He was the fountain of information, the go to guy. Lee was the one who stood with the local while dealing with his superiors in Pittsburgh. Lee had

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<sup>61</sup> R. Emmett Murray, *The Lexicon of Labor*, The New Press, New York, 1998, p. 156.

to be legal in every way to avoid unfair labor practices and negotiate with Cascade Steel. Most importantly, he couldn't lie to his fellow unionists. To do so would have broken the faith they had in him. A cause that doesn't have a feeling of good faith is destined for failure. The company could lie to the men, and they did. They said they were running the mill at 40% capacity with 40 foremen.<sup>62</sup> They lied when they said they were running the mill safely when a scab was horridly burnt.<sup>63</sup> Workers take this lying as business and management will do such, but the Staff Rep. doesn't have such an option.<sup>64</sup> He had to write the charge of unfair labor practices, contract language, and be on his toes to react to the latest development. He had to come with strategy and style that would fit the strikers and the strikers needs. He had to wear many hats. They seemed to all fit and he wore them all well.

What does this strike mean to the youth and general population? Why should they care? How does this strike of a small local union affect them?

This strike is an illustration of how a concerted effort can bring results. This is the essence of collective bargaining. Actually, if you think about it, our United States of America was a strike against King George of Britain. It is this stubborn refusal to succumb to all odds that joined 13 colonies into one nation. Fight! Resist!<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Jimmy Elliott (audio taped interview, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

Leonard Sexton (audio taped interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

<sup>63</sup> *The Statesman*, "Molten Slag Burns Worker at Cascade", May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>64</sup> Sid Halsey (audio taped interview, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

Leonard Sexton (audio taped interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

Mike Dye, Union Lawyer, (telephone conversation, February 2000).

<sup>65</sup> Jay-Livermore Falls Working Class History Project, *Pain on Their Faces: Testimonies on the Paper Mill Strike Jay, Maine, 1987-1988*, The Apex Press, New York, 1998, p. 40.



This local union's strike assured the strikers that once the contract between the company and union was signed, there would be a set of rules that both sides would have to adhere to for the length of that contract. A type of 'Bill of Rights', if you will.

It is important to those people who were not personally involved or even knew of this strike or any other strike, that strikes re-establish our love for the democracy that we have come to cherish in this country of ours.

As the NewsRegister reported at the start of 1975, the biggest story in Yamhill County was the same as through out the country, the economy. They reported among other things, the lay-off of 200 steelworkers at Cascade Steel. They reported that bad economic times is a story that came early to stay late.<sup>66</sup>

This could be said as well for the 1975 strike. April 1976, nearly a year after the contract was signed, an earlier filed unfair labor charge was won by the union. It was then that the strikers regained their seniority and the scabs went to the bottom of the list.<sup>67</sup> So was this strike just another event that confronted the workers at Cascade Steel? No! This was the **birth** of a steelworkers union in McMinnville. As Sid Halsey said, 'You have to suffer to gain anything in the labor movement'. Suffer and gain these men, wives and families did and they ultimately won!

To the many wives who supported their husbands while worrying all along; to the children who went without all the material things that kids enjoy; to the strikers who did picket duty, who supported this strike and its leaders, who tried to stop a potential scab

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<sup>66</sup> NewsRegister, "Come Early and Stayed Late", January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1975.

<sup>67</sup> Jimmy Elliot (audio taped interview, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2000).  
Leonard Sexton (audio taped interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000).  
John Devorss (telephone conversation, February 2000).  
Fred Menke (telephone conversation, February 2000).

from crossing the picket line; to those of the folklore who some say chased a scab, threw an object, or played 'welcome wagon' in Dundee----Thank-you! You fulfilled the American dream in your lifetime. The dream of collective effort won out in favor of you, your own and those to come. There was a price to pay. It's what some in labor ranks call "The Price Paid". I think it was worth it. I'm sure you do too.

#### SECTION E: ENCLOSURES

- Oral History Release Form
- Copy of photo of Sid Halsey, President USWA (Local 8378) receiving Circuit Court Injunction
- Copy of photo of Certificate of Charter of Affiliation
- Copy of NLRB Charge Against Employer



**LEGAL ACTION.** The Cascade Steel Rolling Mill strike (story, page 1) has brought about considerable action from the courts, federal government and local law enforcement officers. Pictured above is Yamhill County Civil Deputy James Wagner serving a Circuit Court injunction on Cascade local union president Sidney Halsey and fellow members of the union bargaining team. Below are a pair of strikers, or possibly wives of strikers, who were at the union's makeshift coffee stand at the plant entrance. Both sides of the

disagreement have been called back to the mediation table for a 2 p.m. session Wednesday with federal mediator in Portland, according to Lee Caldwell, spokesman for the United Steel Workers. On Tuesday the union filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board, charging Cascade with refusing to bargain. At press time the picketing continued, and local law enforcement officers continued to be on duty at the plant to keep any possible violence under control.

Photos by Jeb Bladine

# Certificate of Charter of Affiliation

## United Steelworkers of America

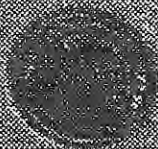
(U. S. D. C. 11)

BEFORE ME, NOTARY PUBLIC, do hereby certify that this charter of affiliation with such rights and privileges as may be from time to time determined is hereby granted to United Steelworkers of America Local Union, No. **8878**.

<u>Sid Halsey</u>	<u>Kenny Kieder</u>
<u>Bob Fortune</u>	<u>Koran Beck</u>
<u>Rayd Cooke</u>	<u>Eym Angales</u>
<u>Richard Jack</u>	<u>Bob Moren</u>

This charter of affiliation with all of the rights and privileges appurtenant thereto is granted upon the condition that the United Steelworkers of America Local Union shall at all times comply with the rules, regulations and laws for Local Unions duly adopted by the United Steelworkers of America. In doing so this condition shall be duly performed in all respects the United Steelworkers of America shall hereby agree to promote and cause the said Local Union in the exercise of all rights and privileges herein.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF we have hereunto attached our signatures and caused the seal of the United Steelworkers of America to be affixed.



Witness my hand and seal this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_.

Notary Public

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD

CHARGE AGAINST EMPLOYER

INSTRUCTIONS: File an original and 4 copies of this charge with NLRB regional director for the region in which the alleged unfair labor practice occurred or is occurring.

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

Case No.

35-CA-2817

Date Filed

1-14-76

1. EMPLOYER AGAINST WHOM CHARGE IS BROUGHT

a. Name of Employer

Cascade Steel Rolling Mills, Inc.

b. Number of Workers Employed

200

c. Address of Establishment (Street and number, city, State, and ZIP code)

P. O. Box 687, McMinnville, Oregon 97128

d. Employer Representative to Contact

Bob Hartly

e. Phone No.

472-4131

f. Type of Establishment (Factory, mine, wholesaler, etc.)

Mill

g. Identify Principal Product or Service

Re-bar

h. The above-named employer has engaged in and is engaging in unfair labor practices within the meaning of section 8 (a), subsections (1) and (3) and (5) (List subsections) of the National Labor Relations Act, and these unfair labor practices are unfair labor practices affecting commerce within the meaning of the Act.

2. Basis of the Charge (Be specific as to facts, names, addresses, plants involved, dates, places, etc.)

Beginning in about November 1975, and continuing to date, the above-named employer has unilaterally changed the seniority provisions of the collective bargaining agreement between said employer and the below-named labor organization.

Beginning in about November 1975, and continuing to date, the above-named employer has applied the seniority provisions of the referred-to collective bargaining agreement in a manner inconsistent with the intent of the parties in order to discriminate against employees who had engaged in a strike against said employer; and has in fact discriminated against former strikers by laying them off and failing to recall them because of their status as former strikers.

By the above and other acts, the above-named employer has interfered with, restrained, and coerced employees in the exercise of the rights guaranteed in Section 7 of the Act.

3. Full Name of Party Filing Charge (If labor organization, give full name, including local name and number)

United Steelworkers of America, AFL-CIO

4a. Address (Street and number, city, State, and ZIP code)

3661 S. E. 34th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97202

4b. Telephone No.

633-5094

5. Full Name of National or International Labor Organization of Which It Is an Affiliate or Constituent Unit (To be filled in when charge is filed by a labor organization)

United Steelworkers of America, AFL-CIO

6. DECLARATION

I declare that I have read the above charge and that the statements therein are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

By Lee E. Caldwell  
(Signature of representative or person filing charge)

Subdistrict Director  
(Title, if any)

Lee E. Caldwell

Address 3661 S. E. 34th Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97202

633-5094  
(Telephone number)

1-14-76  
(Date)

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**United  
Steelworkers of  
America**  
District 11

LOCAL 8378  
P.O. Box 42  
McMinnville, OR 97128-0042  
(503) 472-0108 FAX (503) 435-0393

THE FIRST STRIKE OF LOCAL UNION 8378, USWA,  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

I agree to participate in the First Strike of Local Union 8378, USWA, Oral History Project under the direction of Mike Sullivan, member of USWA, LU 8378.

I also agree that the oral history can be used for research, publication, and other educational purposes; and be deposited in appropriate libraries for this purpose.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_