

[Unlock] AFD Ep 345 Links and Notes - 1948 United Financial Employees Wall Street Strike [Bill/Rachel] - Recording Jan 26

- Recently on the show we have talked about the postwar strike wave that rattled so many American elites in both parties, even if they had previously said they were supportive of unions. While this led to the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 (<http://arsenalfordemocracy.com/2021/01/10/jan-10-2021-taft-hartley-arsenal-for-democracy-ep-340/>), which had a profoundly negative effect on unions, we've noted that this did not immediately kill the union movement. In the spring of 1948, the union movement tried to press into the very heart of the capitalist system with a month-long strike of financial sector support staff and clerical workers on Wall St, who had been organizing since August 1946 during the nationwide wave of labor action in 1946. (An earlier effort launched in 1941 was put on hold when the US entered the war.)
- The stock markets had always depended on white collar workers to keep track of all the papers and numbers and records. Listeners might remember the 1853 Herman Melville short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" about a hand-copyist (scrivener) who drives a Wall Street attorney to distraction by politely refusing to do any work or to vacate the premises. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartleby,_the_Scrivener) This marks a key distinction of the pre-Civil War and post-Civil War era of American business. Clerks, typists, and secretaries had been an especially prominent feature of the stock exchanges on Wall Street since the late 1860s, which saw the proliferation of commercial typewriters and the creation of a telegraph-based stock ticker. In 1875, stenography was patented, creating another clerical occupation. Most of the people killed in the 1920 Wall Street bombing were clerks and stenographers at JP Morgan. Women were allowed onto the trading floor as workers starting in the 1940s, presumably due to the war reducing the male labor force.
<https://www.history.com/topics/us-states/wall-street-timeline>
 - Also an interesting side note is that Thomas Edison's first power plant was built in 1892 on nearby Pearl St to support more than 7,000 electric lamps on Wall St
 - The New York Stock Exchange built in 1903 was the first US building to have air conditioning
- <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-wall-street-clerks-sleeping-in-office-due-to-excessive-work-caused-50025435.html> Wall Street clerks sleeping in office due to excessive work caused by heavy stock trading. New York City, October 23, 1915.
- Conditions were often not very good for the exchange employees. If there was a big rally or a bad crash day, they would be expected to stay late after work to get all the paperwork handled before the next day of trading. If they made a mistake with all the hand-written figures, even if someone else had written illegibly, their pay could be docked heavily for the error.
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/crash-stock-exchange-clerks/>
- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2011/10/28/other-wall-street-protests-you-never-heard-of/?sh=37c2c43a1f06> *In March 1948, the United Financial Employees Union went on strike against the New York Stock Exchange and the Curb Exchange (now known as the American Stock Exchange). The union, which represented many of the back office workers on Wall Street, was asking for higher wages for its members. The strike was also backed by the American Federation of Labor, which sent members of other unions to Wall Street to support. The demonstrators attempted to block the entrance to the exchanges and some other offices in the Wall Street area, and the protest soon turned violent with dozens arrested by the police.*
- <https://search.proquest.com/openview/6dae3eb6945928daf73a04875c74b443/1.pdf?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=1946335> "The Battle of Wall Street" by Poole, Sarah. *Financial History*; New York Iss. 129, (Spring 2019): p. 8

- Pay for the clerical financial workers and support staff was relatively slow to grow during the Depression
- *After the war, Keefe and the UFE went back to work with the ultimate goal of organizing the employees of all of the Wall Street exchanges, brokerage houses and banks. Wall Street's first (and only) union drive began in August 1946. On August 14 [1946], 700 NYSE employees (98% of the workers) staged a two-hour walk out to show support for the drive in an unexpected display of strength from the union. The UFE grew to 5,000 and held majority membership at the NYSE, New York Curb Exchange, New York Cotton Exchange and Wall Street's five largest brokerage houses.*
- [If you can analogize physical trade goods to financial trading, there are some similarities here between the seaports and the financial exchanges in their setup, strengths, and weaknesses and the similarities seem to extend to the how the unions tried to work with short strikes and seeking to unionize exchanges simultaneously to avoid re-routing.] *In March 1947, the UFE organized a day-long strike at the Cotton Exchange, raising tensions. However, the union's biggest struggle was with the brokerage houses, who could simply reroute their trades through other firms and render an employee strike ineffective. This led to the idea of attempting to shut down trading at the source—the NYSE.*
- *On March 29, 1948, 1,100 unionized employees of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) and the New York Curb Exchange (later the American Stock Exchange), joined in solidarity by 500 members of the Seafarers Union, walked out of their jobs. This marked the beginning of the first and only multi-day strike in the histories of both exchanges.*
- *The NYSE strike began on March 29, 1948, and the first day of protesting was peaceful. Shortly before 9:00 am on March 30, police approached picketers near the main entrance of the exchange and asked them to move due to a court order that limited picketing in that area. Claire Johnson, a 19-year-old secretary, refused and was arrested. Her arrest sparked outrage, and picketers swarmed the police. The violent scuffle lasted only [???] 35 minutes, but resulted in 12 picketer injuries (including two hospitalizations), two police injuries (one of which was hit by another officer who mistook him for a picketer) and 45 arrests. The fight became known as the "Battle of Wall Street."*
- *The New York Stock Exchange refused to budge from its pre-strike offer of a \$3–5 raise and would not return to arbitration. The union did not see success with any of the other exchanges, either. The exchanges had far greater financial resources than the UFE and chose to wait out the strike, which officially ended on April 30, 1948 [just over a month after it began]. **The NYSE workers ultimately accepted the terms of the pre-strike offer, but 100 workers' positions were eliminated during the strike. The strike had failed, and Wall Street would not see another.***
- <http://seafarerslog.org/archives/collections/show/5>
 - *1,100 United Financial Employees members marched on Wall Street to protest working conditions at the New York Stock Exchange throughout the spring of 1948. The SIU [Seafarers International Union] provided around 500 of its own members as security. Many of the UFE employees were office workers and women who needed protection from police violence.*
 - This link has over 30 photos from the SIU's collection on the strike and their support role in it **[We should be able to describe some of these.]**
 - Earlier this week on the show we talked about how the 1934 West Coast waterfront strike

(<http://arsenalfordemocracy.com/2021/01/25/jan-24-2021-the-1934-west-coast-ports-strike-arsenal-for-democracy-ep-344/>) involved both dockworkers and actual sailors. Unionized sailors is something we should talk about at some point in more depth, but the Seafarers International Union launched in 1938 is another example of this. They represent (to present day), US and Canadian ship workers on the Great Lakes and inland waterways of that region of North America.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seafarers_International_Union_of_North_America

Their focus is on safe working conditions and skills training for mariners working on US and Canadian flagged vessels. (International ocean shipping is now dominated by flags of convenience, which I assume doesn't lend itself to unionization.) The SIU was the AFL's non-communist alternative to the CIO's communist-heavy National Maritime Union, although they merged in 2001. In 1948, the SIU was experiencing surging membership along the US East Coast & Gulf Coast, while the NMU had begun to flounder after purging its communists.

- (It has been alleged in a Canadian parliamentary inquiry in the 90s on wartime shipping and the unwinding of the wartime merchant navy that the Canadian government promoted the SIU around 1946 or 1947 as an alternative to a homegrown left-leaning maritime union in Canada, with a "heavy-duty gangster" from Brooklyn being brought in to apply pressure, as part of a Canadian anti-communist "paranoia." Mariners who refused to switch unions were allegedly blacklisted for jobs.

https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Archives/Committee/352/default/evidence/06_96-06-18/default_blk-e.html)