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TRANSPORT
WORKERS
UNION

PASS & STOW
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DECLINE

LOCAL 234

50 YEARS TODAY
A VISION OF
TOMORROW

ANNIVERSARY

Greetings from International President George E. Leitz

MIKE QUILL, the legendary founding President of our great Transport Workers Union, loved Philadelphia and its transit workers. They were like him — in-your-face tough, independent and fierce trade unionists to the core. Quill hardly, if ever, missed an important meeting or negotiations in Philadelphia in all the years he served as International President right up until the day he died in January 1966.

But to be absolutely honest about it, one would have to pardon Mike if he took a pass now and then when Local 234 found itself in crisis. Because on many occasions the Local 234 membership would heckle and boo Mike mercilessly — not because they didn't like him. They did. It was very hard not to like Mike. It was probably more that the membership of those days just wanted to show Mike that Philadelphia was quite capable of taking care of itself; that they didn't need a bunch of New Yorkers, by way of County Kerry, Ireland telling them how to do their job.

There's a true story of those times that has never been told in print. But, however altered by time and legend it may have become, it is appropriate to tell for this occasion.

Mike had come to Philadelphia for a pre-strike standing-room-only mass membership meeting. As Quill took the podium to rally the crowd for a strike vote, a chorus of boos and an egg rained down on Mike from the crowd.

Never flustered no matter the situation, Quill blurted out loudly in his signature Irish brogue: "Things are getting better in Philadelphia. They used to throw rotten eggs. That was a fresh one."

Needless to say, the crowd roared laughing and Mike was cheered wildly. And more importantly, everyone in TWU was united for the job at hand — winning a better life for transit workers.

That's what it's really all about. A better life for transit

workers. Our goals have never changed from the days when TWU first came to Philadelphia after breaking the grip of the powerful transit companies in New York. From day one, we have faced people who didn't want to pay us the wages we felt we needed and deserved. We have faced people who would have loved to wring the last bead of sweat out of our bodies before we dropped dead at the very end of a shift.

But today's problems are far more complex than they were 50 years ago. Back then, conditions were so bad and pay was so low that the target was always clear.

Today, thanks to the sacrifices of those great leaders and members, we enjoy a good standard of living and we are assured a pension with dignity.

But, because of many factors beyond our control, we must fight constantly to preserve what we have; to protect our health benefits; to stop

profiteers from grabbing our jobs in privatization schemes; to be constantly alert to keep our job sites safe; to contend with intrusions into our private lives in the form of mandatory drug and alcohol testing; and to fight to help management secure its funding base so they can afford to pay our union-won wages and benefits and preserve service for the riding public.

These, and many other obstacles, are formidable tasks. And it takes strong leadership willing to put in the hours and the work to get the job done. I have great confidence in the leaders here in Philadelphia. And I have great confidence in the people at the International Union. Together, we are a winning team that will continue to produce dividends for Local 234 members.

Happy 50th. The best is still yet to come.



GEORGE E. LEITZ
INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT

FORWARD

Most Local 234 members, including myself, weren't born or were small children when our union was permanently established by democratic action 50 years ago. The victory was achieved after several generations of broken strikes and failed attempts to form a strong and lasting labor organization for Philadelphia's transit workers.

A chronicle of our original victory five decades ago and of the many battles our union and its members have fought and won over the years — complete with photos of the dedicated people involved — are contained in this retrospective of our union.

I hope Local 234 members enjoy this book as much as we enjoyed putting it together in honor of this, our Golden Anniversary.

I don't like to dwell on the past. The battles we are fighting today and the crises we will encounter tomorrow are foremost on my mind.

But after working on this history of our union, my admiration and respect for the TWU leaders and members of years past has deepened.

Surely, the tremendous amount of blood, sweat and tears that went into the formation of our union in 1943 was only the beginning of the struggle for economic and personal dignity for transit workers both on and off the job.

Over the course of these years, Local 234 officers and members have put their jobs and futures on the line in strikes and other job actions possibly more often than any transit union in the country. These early leaders fought and won campaigns for decent wages, an initial pension, job security and seniority protection, racial equality, the five-day work-week and many more.

In the middle years, our leaders and members built upon the early gains and successfully confronted challenges to our security in the transition from private to public ownership of the transportation system.

During the past decade we have increased our pension benefits fourfold, achieved significant improvement in wages, overcome systematic management harassment of our members, secured picking rights for maintenance



workers and developed an extensive safety program to improve working conditions in SEPTA's shops, garages and depots. For the first time in years, Local 234 added new members with two successful organizing drives.

And still, the job is far from done. For the problems we face today -- privatization, the health care crisis, an adequate funding base for transit operations and more -- are as difficult and complex as at any time in our history.

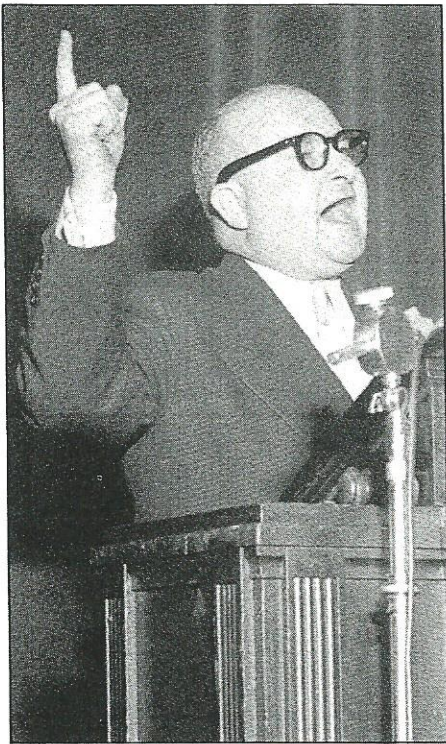
We are prepared to go forward. In the past few years, I am proud to say we have worked creatively and ceaselessly to expand our political clout in the region and in Harrisburg, to protect and expand our membership base, and to improve the job security and economic well being of our members in all our bargaining units. Most important we are united and our record of accomplishments has gained the Local the respect and support of the entire labor movement.

If anything, this 50th Anniversary has instilled in me greater energy and determination to move our programs for the future forward at a more urgent speed.

I believe that our 50th Anniversary also gives our members a new sense of continuity; that we are part of something special -- a great organization rich in history and achievement -- a vibrant labor union with a proud past and a bright future.

Harry Lombardo

President, TWU Local 234



ABOVE: Michael J. Quill, the legendary founder of the Transport Workers Union of America addresses 1943 rally of Local 234 members.

BELOW: Supporters of TWU exchange literature outside the Frankfort Depot as the crucial election in March 1943 rapidly approached.



TWU United, Invincible

1993 marks the 50th Anniversary of the Transport Workers Union, Local 234. The successful organization of Local 234 was the first major victory for TWU outside of New York City, where the union had been founded 10 years earlier. It didn't come easy.

Labor relations in Philadelphia were never conventional and rarely peaceful. In 1910, for example, the trolley carmen's union called a six-week strike against the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company (PRT), which soon turned into a general strike when 100,000 working Philadelphians walked off their jobs in sympathy.

In the 1920s, the PRT came under the control of Mitten Management. Mitten was a paternalistic employer which tried to buy the good will of its employees through what they called "cooperative

labor relations." Mitten gained employee loyalty through the carrot and stick method. The company promised worker-ownership through an elaborate company-controlled committee system and stock plan. But to insure loyalty, Mitten employed a large network of spies to make sure that no independent union would organize on its property.

By 1929, the truth began to spill out. Criticized for its poor level of service, Mitten was sued by the City of Philadelphia for manipulation of funds, excessive fees, and secret diversion of PRT money. With the economic depression of the same year, employee-held PRT stock nose-dived.

The ensuing scandal went all the way to the top. Prior to the stock market crash, PRT chief Thomas Mitten was found drowned in a mysterious boating accident.

Faced with bankruptcy, the PRT was reorganized in 1937. That same year, TWU chartered the Philadelphia local and opened an office on North Broad Street. Confident of victory, one TWU organizer predicted; "We'll enter an election any time and win"

7-YEAR BATTLE

But there would be no victory that year or for seven more years. Despite pouring organizers and committing the limited financial resources of the union into the organizing drive, TWU could not defeat the company union.

With the connivance of the Mayor of Philadelphia, the company held its own representation election with predictable

RIGHT: One of the many TWU organizational meetings held at Car barns and depots throughout the system.

BELOW: Transit workers shown ready to cast their ballots for TWU in election on March 14, 1943.

results. TWU fought the outcome in court but was unsuccessful. Soon afterwards, the company was reorganized again under the name of the Philadelphia Transportation Company (PTC).

NEW CAMPAIGN BEGINS

On February 22, 1943, TWU rechartered the group as Local 234. TWU International President Michael J. Quill sent organizer, J. J. Fitzsimon to run the campaign. He arrived on the property with only three days to gain resignations from the company union. Working night and day, the TWU organizing committee got 1,000 company union members to resign and join TWU.

By June, almost 4,000 PTC employees had signed up with the TWU. Local 234 members packed Philadelphia's Town Hall on July 1-2, 1943 to hear leaders of organized labor endorse the TWU organizing drive.

TWU also filed for a union election that month. But the PTC held up the procedure through court litigation until



March of the following year. Much happened in between.

UNION BUTTON WILDCAT

On November 1, 1943, the company called in a number of workers in the Haverford, Woodlands, Jackson, and Cumberland depots, and threatened to fire anyone wearing a union button on company premises.

The next morning, every member reported for work wearing the TWU-CIO button. The PTC allowed a few runs to go out and then the superintendent of the depot demanded that all employees remove their union pins or they would not be allowed to work. The company

demand was rejected and the stoppage spread throughout the Philadelphia system.

Because of the threat to the war effort, the city and federal government pressured both sides to sit down and talk. At the discussion it was agreed that the button issue be decided by an arbitrator.

Now it was the TWU who was standing up to the company and gaining recognition all over the PTC property.

The union election was finally scheduled for March 14, 1944. In the meantime, the company union with the support of the PTC tried to incite a racist backlash by raising the issue of the government-ordered promotions of black workers to



TWU WINS VOTE OVERWHELMINGLY

TWU won the March 14, 1943 election decisively in all areas. Below is the final vote count:

TWU 4,410
AFL 1,637
Company
Union 1,815
No Union 146

RIGHT: TWU members celebrate ratification of first TWU contract outside Town Hall in July 1944. BELOW: Transit workers look over contract details in one of the depots.



operating jobs on the trolley lines. The company union hired sound trucks whose message accused TWU of forcing "Negro supremacy on the company."

SUBVERSIVE, RADICAL

The AFL union also attacked TWU calling it subversive and radical. TWU stood by its record and its strong commitment to racial equality.

Answering both the company union and the AFL rival, TWU President Mike Quill commented: "When we first came to Philadelphia, it was the red issue . . . Now it's the black issue. From red to black, no matter what the issue, our only issue is wages, hours, pay, and working conditions.

Like Mike Quill, the PTC employees also rejected both criticisms and they voted overwhelmingly for TWU representation, including a 2 to 1 margin in the maintenance shops.

But the trouble had just begun. TWU started to negotiate a contract with the PTC in early April. It took about three months to win that first agreement, which was then sent on to the wartime federal labor agency for approval. During that

period, the government-ordered promotion of Black workers to trolley operators at PTC was scheduled to begin.

The lack of a contract in hand and the promotions provided an opportunity for the losers in the union representation election and the PTC to declare war on TWU. What they couldn't achieve through the democratic process, they tried to win through illegal means.

On the morning of August 1, the leaders of the losing union went to all the PTC car barns and called a wildcat strike. The renegades raised the issue of Black worker promotions in the vilest and racist of terms. They hoped to split the Local 234 membership over the race issue and

throw the TWU out at the same time.

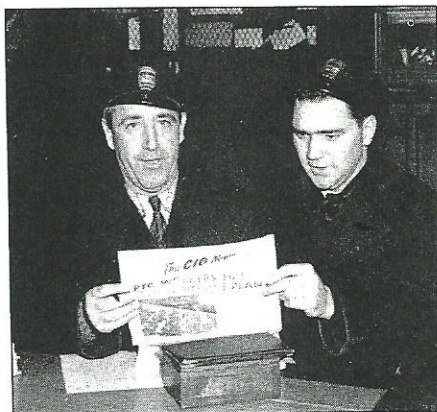
KKK STICKERS ON VEHICLES

Ku Klux Klan stickers appeared on vehicles and one notice on the official company bulletin board called for a "white supremacy movement for the protection of our jobs." The PTC allowed these racists to use company property for their meetings.

The wildcat strikers tied up PTC service for five days. The race issue, though prominent, was not the only one.

The nation was at war and Philadelphia was a center for America's war production. The CIO had taken a no-strike pledge for the duration of World War II, and the wildcat strike both violated the pledge and jeopardized the war effort.

TWU officers went from car barn to car barn to get the PTC employees back to work. They knew that the wildcat stoppage, even though called by a few renegades, could endanger the newly-negotiated contract with the employer. It became apparent that the disruption was part of the company strategy to destroy that agreement and with it, TWU.



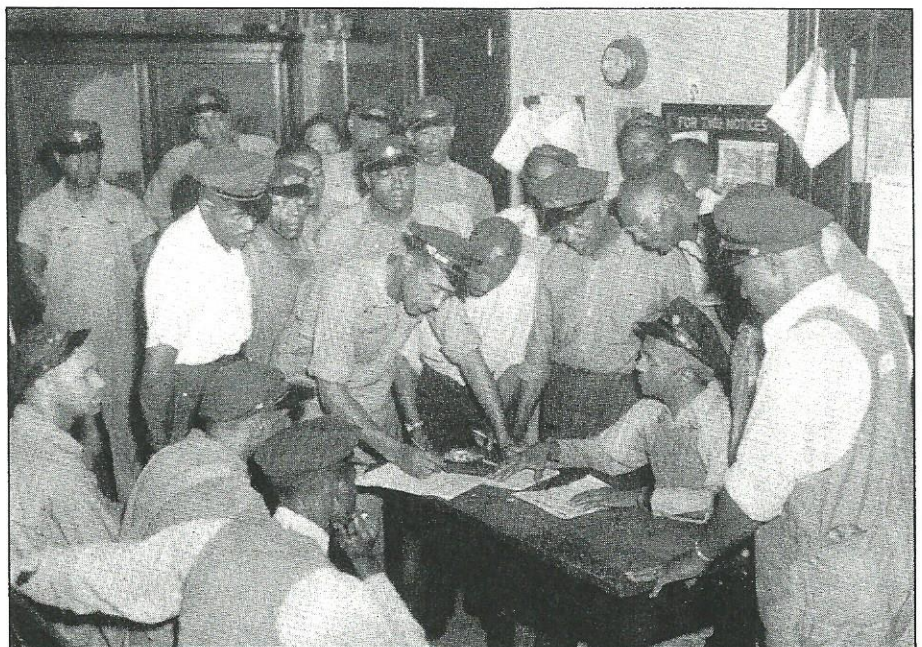
Fighting Racism

President Franklin Roosevelt sent in federal troops and with the help of TWU, full service was restored to Philadelphia on August 6. A federal grand jury indicted 30 of the phony strike leaders and condemned the company for its connivance in the wildcat.

The PTC President Ralph Senter resigned his position and fled town. Neither he nor any other PTC official was ever punished.

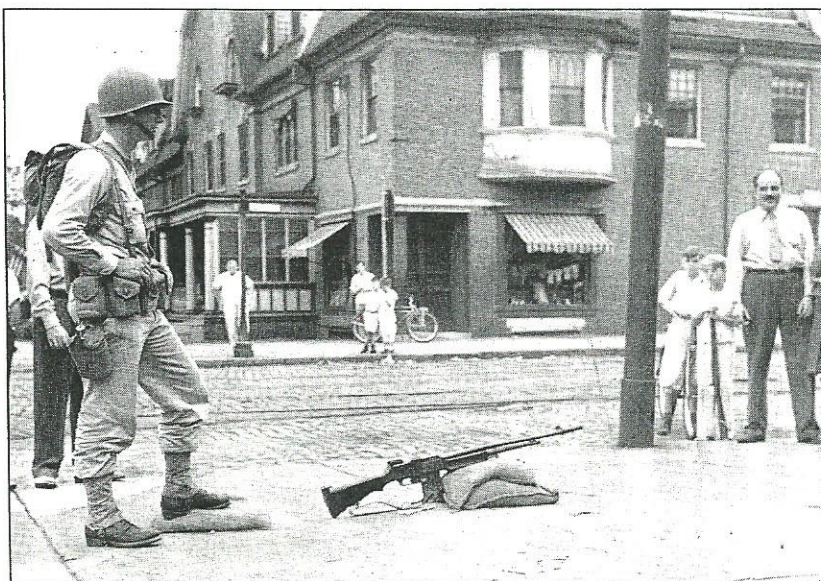
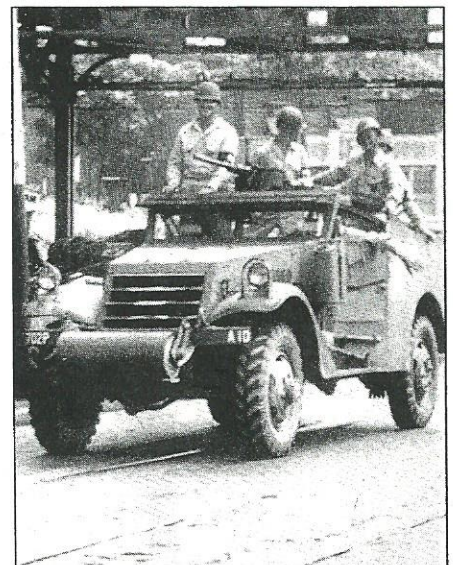
On August 9, PTC finally inked its first contract with the TWU. Local 234 began to build and consolidate its organization.

Credit for the important victories goes to the TWU organizers and the Local 234 members. A contemporary report gave recognition to the many Local 234 volunteers who, "devoting their own time and effort, and often incurring financial loss" to themselves "carried on the drive in the depots, shops, and other locations."



"When we first came to Philadelphia, it was the red issue. Now it's the black issue. From red to black, no matter what the issue, our only issue is wages, hours, pay and working conditions."

Michael J. Quill
TWU President, 1943



LEFT: National Guardsman stands ready for action during wildcat strike in August 1944. **MIDDLE:** Military vehicle patrols City to protect the public and operators from acts of violence during the wildcat. **ABOVE:** Black transit workers sign up for promotions to operators jobs in 1944. TWU strongly supported the government order ending discrimination against Black workers..



PTC
UNFAIR
TO EMPLOYEES

PTC
UNFAIR
TO EMPLOYEES
FAMILY

PTC
UNFAIR
TO EMPLOYEES

AFTER the intense battles of 1943 and 1944, Local 234 settled down to the job of negotiating annual contracts, battling management for the workers' rights and building up the union.

Working closely with the International Union, the Local held its first election of officers in October of 1944. J.B. Dougherty, a bus operator and chairman of the victorious organizing drive, was elected the Local's first President. Anthony Gallagher, a Luzerne trainman, was elected Recording Secretary, and Joseph Marks, a Cumberland bus operator was elected Secretary Treasurer.

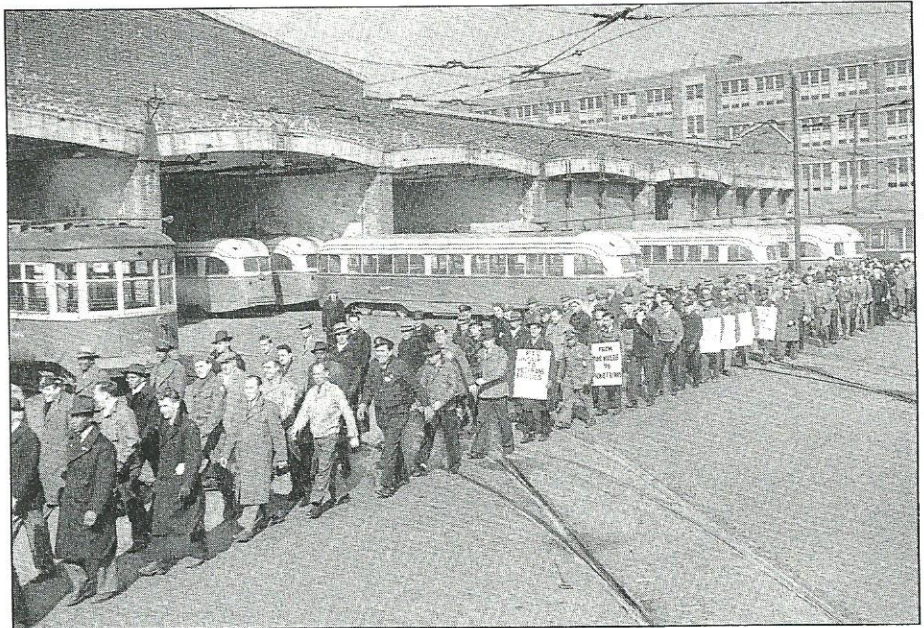
Sustaining the new Local financially was a major concern. It was not until May 1945 that the union secured a dues checkoff. Prior to that, dues money had to be collected by hand.

The first two TWU contracts with the PTC in 1944 and 1945 provided important fringe benefits and solid cash bonuses. But actual wage increases were impossible due to wartime restrictions.

But 1946 was different. PTC refusal to meet union demands led to the first TWU led strike in Philadelphia. Nearly 10,000 Local 234 members walked off the job on February 11. Not one PTC vehicle moved. Within 48 hours, the union had a contract that provided a real wage increase, a pension, three weeks vacation, a guarantee for extra men and many other improvements.

The membership's solidarity during the 1946 strike struck a cord of fear with management. In both 1947 and 1948, the threat of strike was enough to make the PTC see it TWU's way.

***OPPOSITE:** Andrew Kaelin, an original organizer of Local 234 and President of the Local from 1948 to 1952 stands his ground in 1946 strike. **UPPER RIGHT:** Hundreds picket car barn in 1946 two-day strike. **RIGHT:** TWU members wave strike signs at mass meeting.*



Early Strikes, Important Gains





RIGHT: Families got involved in night march to City Hall during '49 strike. **ABOVE:** Picketers were on the job 24 hours a day. **TOP:** Overflow rally at Town Hall gave Local 234 leaders authorization to strike.

1949 proved to be another defining moment for the Local 234. The PTC, crying poverty after agreeing to liberal wage and benefit gains in the previous three contracts with TWU, toughened its stance. The company offered 2-cents an hour raise, and nothing more.

Negotiations went on non-stop for more than six-weeks. Then on Feb. 11, 1949 Local 234 fulfilled its "No Contract, No Work" threat and brought Philadelphia transit to a grinding halt.

With more than 11,000 members at the time, the strike was the largest in the history of mass transit.

After ten-days, PTC management decided enough was enough. The company agreed to an 8-cent across-the-board wage increase, improved sick leave and additional paid vacation allowances.

On Sunday, February 20th, Local 234 members packed Town Hall to the rafters to listen to the tentative accord and take a vote. International President Michael J. Quill and Local 234 President Andy Kaelin were among those who addressed the standing room only crowd.



ABOVE: February 1949 was cold and snowy as attested by this photo of strike bound rolling stock. **RIGHT:** International President Michael J. Quill (left) leads pickets in night march through Philadelphia. **BELOW:** Local 234 President Andrew Kaelin addresses striking TWU members outside the Callowhill depot. The 1949 strike lasted 10 days, but produced important benefits.

