

## Major Work Stoppages in 2003

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*There were 14 major work stoppages that began in 2003, idling 129,200 workers and resulting in 4.1 million days of idleness. Although these figures are up from the previous year, they are low by historical standards.*

The number of workers idled, the number of days of idleness, and the percent of estimated working time lost because of strikes and lockouts rose in 2003, but each of these measures remained low by historical standards. There were 14 [major work stoppages](#) that began during the year,<sup>1</sup> idling 129,200 workers and resulting in 4.1 million workdays of idleness (about 1 out of every 10,000 available workdays).<sup>2</sup> In comparison, 19 major work stoppages began in 2002, which idled 46,000 workers and resulted in 660,000 days of idleness. (See table 1 and charts 1, 2, and 3.)

Major work stoppages are those involving 1,000 or more workers and lasting a full shift or longer; they include worker-initiated strikes, as well as lockouts by employers. A *strike* is defined as a temporary stoppage of work by a group of workers (not necessarily union members) to express a grievance or enforce a bargaining demand. A *lockout* is a temporary withholding or denial of employment by employers during a labor dispute to enforce employment terms on an employee group. Because of the complexity of labor disputes, BLS does not attempt to distinguish between strikes and lockouts in its statistics.<sup>3</sup> In this article, however, either of these terms may be used when referring to information from other sources.

### Work Stoppages By Industry

Twelve of the major work stoppages beginning in 2003 occurred in private industry, and the remaining two took place in State and local government. Within private industry, the largest number of work stoppages occurred in manufacturing (three) and in retail trade (three). Within State and local government, one major work stoppage occurred in transportation and warehousing and another in public administration. The following industry groups experienced the most days of idleness due to work stoppages in 2003:

- Retail trade (3,689,000 days)
- Transportation and warehousing (178,700 days)
- Manufacturing (82,800 days)

### Size And Duration Of The Most Significant Disputes

The five largest work stoppages (in terms of number of workers idled) that began in 2003 accounted for 82 percent of the nearly 130,000 workers who were idled that year. The largest stoppage, which idled 67,300 workers, resulted from a dispute between grocery store chains Albertsons, Ralphs, and Vons and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). The second largest dispute idled 17,500 workers and involved General Electric Company and the Communications Workers of America (IUE-CWA) and the United Electrical Workers (UE-Ind.).<sup>4</sup> The third largest work stoppage, which idled 10,200 workers, was the result of a dispute between grocery store companies Dierbergs, Schnucks, and Shop 'n Save and the UFCW.

The fourth and fifth largest work stoppages took place in State and local government. A dispute between the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) idled 6,200 workers, and a dispute between San Joaquin County and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) idled 5,000 workers. (See table 2.)

Nine-tenths of the total number of days of idleness in 2003 stemmed from three of the five previously mentioned disputes. The greatest number of days idle (3,374,200 days) resulted from the dispute between Albertsons, Ralphs, and Vons and the UFCW. The dispute between Dierbergs, Schnucks, and Shop 'n Save and the UFCW resulted in 183,600 days of idleness.

Finally, the dispute between the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the ATU led to 148,800 days of idleness.

The average length of work stoppages beginning in 2003 was 22 days, with 71 percent of all stoppages lasting 30 days or less. The longest work stoppage--that between Albertsons, Ralphs and Vons and the UFCW--began on October 12 and remained in effect on December 31.<sup>5</sup> This work stoppage was the only one in 2003 that lasted more than 50 days. The second longest dispute, lasting 50 days, was between Ohio-based Kroger Company--which now also owns Ralphs--and the UFCW. (See table 3.)

### Profiles Of Significant Disputes

The three disputes that occurred in retail trade had a significant impact on work stoppage activity in 2003. These disputes are profiled in this section.

***Albertsons, Ralphs, and Vons and the UFCW.*** This stoppage was the longest in the history of the supermarket industry, and it was the largest, in terms of the number of days of idleness.<sup>6</sup> The three supermarket chains bargained jointly and made their final offer shortly before midnight on October 5, 2003, the expiration date of their contract with the seven UFCW locals that were parties to the contract. Under the expiring contract, health insurance premiums were fully paid by the employers and covered workers had relatively low deductibles and co-payments. The three employers proposed that employees contribute toward part of the premium costs and that employee cost-sharing requirements be substantially increased. The employers also wanted to move covered workers into a defined contribution retirement plan for future years of service, rather than continue to provide them with a defined benefit plan. The employers also proposed a new, lower wage tier for new hires.<sup>7</sup>

The employees voted on October 8 and 9, and members of all seven UFCW locals rejected the proposed new contract. Negotiations continued, but they collapsed at around 9 p.m. on October 11. About 21,000 UFCW-represented employees at Vons then went on strike. Shortly thereafter, Albertsons locked out its 21,000 UFCW-represented employees, and the next morning Ralphs locked out its 17,000 workers, also represented by the UFCW. Employees began picketing the three grocery store chains.<sup>8</sup> Picket lines were withdrawn from Ralphs on October 31, although UFCW-represented workers remained idled.<sup>9</sup>

Negotiations resumed on November 10, but the UFCW extended its picketing to Safeway (Vons' parent company) stores in Northern California the next day. Talks soon broke off again, and picket lines were extended to other Safeway stores in California and in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area. On November 24, the UFCW extended picket lines to the chains' distribution and warehouse facilities. Negotiations resumed for a short time on December 19. Picket lines at Albertsons and Ralphs distribution and warehouse facilities were removed on December 22, allowing Teamsters who had honored the picket lines to go back to work. The picket lines at Vons, however, remained in place, with 2,000 Teamsters still idled.<sup>10</sup>

On January 11, 2004, union and company representatives announced that an informal attempt to restart negotiations had failed.<sup>11</sup> On February 4, the union proposed binding arbitration to settle the dispute. The employers turned the proposal down but expressed a desire to resume negotiations. On February 11, negotiations resumed.<sup>12</sup> After 15 days, a tentative agreement was reached and was ratified by UFCW members on February 29. Under the agreement, effective February 29, 2004 to March 3, 2007, the employers would continue to pay full health insurance premiums for all covered employees, including new hires, for at least 2 years. In the third year, covered employees would have to pay up to \$5 a week for single coverage and \$15 per week for family coverage. The new agreement also provided a lower base wage tier for new hires and provided current employees with lump-sum payments instead of base wage increases.<sup>13</sup>

***Dierbergs, Schnucks, and Shop 'n Save and the UFCW.*** Among the stoppages that began in 2003, this was the third largest in terms of number of workers idled, and the second largest in terms of days of idleness. On September 30, UFCW Local 655 members rejected a contract proposal from the Greater St. Louis Food Employers Council, which represented Dierbergs, Schnucks, and Shop 'n Save. Previous contracts had expired June 15 and the parties were operating under a

day-to-day extension. The employers' proposal included a wage increase of 25 cents per hour in each of the contract's final 3 years for workers earning more than \$9 per hour; courtesy clerks were offered an increase of 5 cents per hour over the same period. The proposed new contract stated that the companies would still pay the full cost of health insurance premiums, but employee deductibles and co-payments would increase.<sup>14</sup> On October 2, members of UFCW Local 655 voted to reject the proposed contract, and on October 7, they voted to authorize a strike. The UFCW-represented employees of Shop 'n Save stores went on strike shortly after the vote, and the other two companies responded by locking out their UFCW-represented workers.<sup>15</sup>

On October 29, the UFCW reached a tentative agreement with the three employers, and on October 31, the agreement was ratified. Under the new agreement, the employers agreed to continue paying the full cost of employee health insurance premiums. The new agreement also eliminated deductibles instead of the proposed \$200 individual and \$400 family deductibles. The agreement included a prescription drug co-payment of \$25 for a 30-day supply and \$75 for a 90-day supply; the rejected proposal had called for \$75 co-payments for a 30-day supply and \$175 co-payments for a 90-day supply. Under the new agreement, covered employees earning at least \$9 per hour would receive wage increases of 25 cents per hour in the last 3 years of the contract, and courtesy clerks would receive increases of 10 cents per hour in all 4 years of the contract.<sup>16</sup>

**Kroger Company and the UFCW.** This work stoppage lasted 50 days and took place in West Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky. It idled 3,300 workers and was the second longest in duration among the major stoppages that began in 2003. On October 13, members of UFCW Local 400 authorized a strike after rejecting Kroger's final offer for a new 4-year contract. In this dispute--unlike the one in California involving Albertsons, Ralphs, and Vons, and the UFCW--there were no plans to hire replacement workers. Instead, at 10 p.m. on October 13, Kroger temporarily closed 44 supermarkets, 37 of which were in West Virginia.<sup>17</sup>

At the time of the negotiations, Kroger was paying about \$325 per month for each full-time employee for health care coverage. Under the company's proposal, increases to Kroger's contributions would be capped at 8 percent per year. However, the union argued that without at least a 25-percent increase, covered workers would start losing benefits or be forced to offset costs themselves. Kroger had also proposed a direct wage increase of 20 cents per hour in 2003, and 25 cents per hour in 2005; these wage increases would alternate with lump-sum payments of \$300 in 2004 and \$500 in 2006. But the union wanted direct wage increases in all 4 years.<sup>18</sup>

On December 9, the parties announced that a tentative agreement was reached after two days of marathon bargaining in Cincinnati, Ohio, where Kroger's corporate headquarters are located. The new agreement, approved on December 11, provided for the same raises the company had proposed in October. Under the new agreement, however, Kroger agreed to increase its health care fund contributions by 8 percent per year, and would pay up to an additional 2.5 percent more per year if an independent actuary determined that additional contributions were needed to maintain benefits. To help keep health care costs down, the union agreed to switch from an open insurance system to a preferred provider plan.<sup>19</sup>

During the work stoppage, Kroger officials had said that they would reopen only as many stores as was economically possible. Shortly after ratification, Kroger announced that it would not reopen three of the stores closed during the stoppage. These stores had been only marginally profitable before the dispute, and the company said that the economic impact of the dispute and the cost of restocking made reopening them not economically feasible.<sup>20</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> One additional work stoppage began prior to 2003 and continued into 2003. This dispute kept another 1,300 workers off their jobs and added 13,800 days of idleness in 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Information on work stoppages is obtained from reports from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service and State labor market information offices and from media sources such as the *Daily Labor Report* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Either the employer, the union, or

both parties involved in the work stoppage are then contacted to verify the duration of the stoppage and the number of workers idled by it. For more information, see [Major Work Stoppages in 2003](#), USDL 04-418 (U.S. Department of Labor), March 19, 2004; or visit the Collective Bargaining page of the BLS website at <http://www.bls.gov/cba/home.htm>.

3 For more information on the major work stoppages data series, including why it is difficult for BLS to identify accurately the relationship between collective bargaining agreement expirations and work stoppages, see Michael H. Cimini and John K. Steinmeyer, "What Can You Tell Me About Collective Bargaining Expirations and Work Stoppages?" *Compensation and Working Conditions Online*, May 28, 2003; available on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/cwc/cb20030522ar01p1.htm>.

4 The employee organizations listed in this article are affiliated with the AFL-CIO except where parenthetically noted as "Ind." for "independent."

5 Although 21,000 Vons employees represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) went on strike at 10:30 p.m., local time, on October 11, 2003, the first full day of the stoppage was not until October 12. This work stoppage ended on February 29, 2004, with the number of workers idled ranging between 59,300 and 67,300 workers. For more information, see "[Major Work Stoppages: Detailed Monthly Data](#)," available on Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/wsp/mwsdetail.htm>.

6 For more information on this dispute, see Eric Lekus, "Approval of Agreement in Southern California Seen Ending Longest Grocery Work Stoppage," *Daily Labor Report*, March 1, 2004, p. A-9.

7 See Eric Lekus, "UFCW says 70,000 Grocery Store Workers in California May Soon Hit the Picket Lines," *Daily Labor Report*, October 7, 2003, pp. A-11-13.

8 This dispute provides an example of why BLS uses the term "work stoppage" instead of distinguishing between strikes and lockouts. In this instance, the evidence indicates that the dispute involved both a strike and a lockout. See "California Supermarkets, UFCW Planning to Meet with Federal Mediator Oct. 10," *Daily Labor Report*, October 10, 2003, p. A-8; and Eric Lekus, "Workers Picket Three Grocery Store Chains As Work Stoppage in California Continues," *Daily Labor Report*, October 15, 2003, p. A-6.

9 See Catherine Hollingsworth, "UFCW Drops Picket Lines at Ralphs; Strike Will Be Extended to Other Areas," *Daily Labor Report*, November 3, 2003, p. A-8.

10 See "Talks in California Grocery Dispute Break off Shortly After They Resume," *Daily Labor Report*, December 23, 2003, p. A-6.

11 See Eric Lekus, "California Supermarket Work Stoppage Enters Fourth Month as Informal Talks Break Down," *Daily Labor Report*, January 13, 2004, pp. A-5-6.

12 Before the UFCW made the arbitration proposal, the three employers released a statement saying that their representatives had met with the international union leaders in Denver on January 15-16. According to Eric Lekus, "These meetings resulted in proposed solutions, which the companies believed could have ended this ongoing labor dispute. These solutions were apparently rejected by the Southern California UFCW Local Unions and were never presented to striking and locked out workers." A spokeswoman for two of the locals involved in the work stoppage said that the meetings did not involve leaders of the locals and that the companies were still offering "a very negative proposal." See Eric Lekus, "California Grocery Chains Decline UFCW's Offer to Settle Dispute Through Arbitration," *Daily Labor Report*, February 5, 2004, pp. A-8-9.

13 See Eric Lekus "California Settlement Maintains Most Health Benefits, Creates Two-Tier Wages," *Daily Labor Report*, March 2, 2004, pp. A-1-4.

14 Under the proposal, however, the employers still would have paid about 90 percent of employees' covered medical expenses. See "UFCW Members at St. Louis Grocery Chains Reject 47-Month Proposal; Strike Vote Set," *Daily Labor Report*, October 2, 2003, pp. A-11-12.

15 See Eric Lekus, "UFCW Local 655 Strikes St. Louis Chain; Two Other Grocery Chains Lock Out Workers," *Daily Labor Report*, October 8, 2003, pp. A-3-4.

16 See Eric Lekus, "St. Louis UFCW Members Ratify Contract Ending 25-Day Supermarket Work Stoppage," *Daily Labor Report*, November 3, 2003, pp. A-9-10.

17 The Kroger Company, which also owns Ralphs, closed 37 supermarkets in West Virginia, 5 in southeast Ohio, and 2 in Ashland, Kentucky. See Bebe Raupe, "Kroger Co. Closes 44 Supermarkets in Three States Following UFCW Strike," *Daily Labor Report*, October 15, 2003, pp. A-7-8.

18 *Ibid.*

19 See Bebe Raupe, "Kroger Reopens 41 Stores After Ratification of New Contract; Closes Three Other Stores," *Daily Labor Report*, December 16, 2003, pp. A-8-9.

20 *Ibid.*

**Table 1. Work Stoppages Involving 1,000 or More Workers, 1947-2003**

Period	Number of stoppages beginning in period	Number of workers involved <sup>(1)</sup> (in thousands)	Number of days idle <sup>(2)</sup> (in thousands)	Percent of estimated working time <sup>(3)</sup>
1947	270	1,629	25,720	(4)
1948	245	1,435	26,127	0.22
1949	262	2,537	43,420	0.38
1950	424	1,698	30,390	0.26
1951	415	1,462	15,070	0.12
1952	470	2,746	48,820	0.38
1953	437	1,623	18,130	0.14
1954	265	1,075	16,630	0.13
1955	363	2,055	21,180	0.16
1956	287	1,370	26,840	0.2
1957	279	887	10,340	0.07
1958	332	1,587	17,900	0.13
1959	245	1,381	60,850	0.43
1960	222	896	13,260	0.09
1961	195	1,031	10,140	0.07
1962	211	793	11,760	0.08
1963	181	512	10,020	0.07
1964	246	1,183	16,220	0.11
1965	268	999	15,140	0.1
1966	321	1,300	16,000	0.1
1967	381	2,192	31,320	0.18
1968	392	1,855	35,367	0.2
1969	412	1,576	29,397	0.16
1970	381	2,468	52,761	0.29
1971	298	2,516	35,538	0.19
1972	250	975	16,764	0.09
1973	317	1,400	16,260	0.08
1974	424	1,796	31,809	0.16
1975	235	965	17,563	0.09
1976	231	1,519	23,962	0.12
1977	298	1,212	21,258	0.1
1978	219	1,006	23,774	0.11
1979	235	1,021	20,409	0.09
1980	187	795	20,844	0.09
1981	145	729	16,908	0.07

Footnotes:

- (1) Workers are counted more than once if they are involved in more than one stoppage during the reference period.
- (2) Days idle includes all stoppages in effect during the reference period. For work stoppages that are still ongoing at the end of the calendar year, only those days of idleness in the calendar year are counted.
- (3) Agricultural and government employees are included in the calculation of estimated working time; private households, forestry, and fishery employees are excluded.
- (4) Data are not available.
- (5) Less than 0.005.

Period	Number of stoppages beginning in period	Number of workers involved(1) (in thousands)	Number of days idle(2) (in thousands)	Percent of estimated working time(3)
1982	96	656	9,061	0.04
1983	81	909	17,461	0.08
1984	62	376	8,499	0.04
1985	54	324	7,079	0.03
1986	69	533	11,861	0.05
1987	46	174	4,481	0.02
1988	40	118	4,381	0.02
1989	51	452	16,996	0.07
1990	44	185	5,926	0.02
1991	40	392	4,584	0.02
1992	35	364	3,989	0.01
1993	35	182	3,981	0.01
1994	45	322	5,021	0.02
1995	31	192	5,771	0.02
1996	37	273	4,889	0.02
1997	29	339	4,497	0.01
1998	34	387	5,116	0.02
1999	17	73	1,996	0.01
2000	39	394	20,419	0.06
2001	29	99	1,151	(5)
2002	19	46	660	(5)
2003	14	129	4,091	0.01

Footnotes:

- (1) Workers are counted more than once if they are involved in more than one stoppage during the reference period.
- (2) Days idle includes all stoppages in effect during the reference period. For work stoppages that are still ongoing at the end of the calendar year, only those days of idleness in the calendar year are counted.
- (3) Agricultural and government employees are included in the calculation of estimated working time; private households, forestry, and fishery employees are excluded.
- (4) Data are not available.
- (5) Less than 0.005.

**Table 2. Work Stoppages Involving 5,000 or More Workers Beginning in 2003**

Organizations involved and location (1)	Industry code (2)	Beginning date	Ending date	Number of workers (3)	Days idle
<b>General Electric Company Interstate Communication Workers (IUE-CWA); United Electrical Workers (UE-Ind)</b>	334612	1/14/03	1/15/03	17,500	35,000

Footnotes:

- (1) Labor organizations are affiliated with the AFL-CIO except where noted as independent (Ind.).
- (2) Industry code is from the 2002 NAICS (North American Industry Classification System).
- (3) The number of workers is rounded to the nearest 100.
- (4) As of December 31, 2003, the work stoppage was still ongoing.
- (5) The number of workers idled on October 12, 2003 was 59,300; on November 24, 2003 the number increased to 67,300 and on December 23, 2003 the number decreased to 61,300.

Organizations involved and location (1)	Industry code (2)	Beginning date	Ending date	Number of workers (3)	Days idle
The County of San Joaquin (Stockton, CA) Service Employees (SEIU)	921190	8/4/03	8/8/03	5,000	25,000
Dierbergs, Schnucks, and Shop 'n Save (St. Louis, MO) Food and Commerical Workers (UFCW)	445110	10/7/03	10/31/03	10,200	183,600
Albertsons, Ralphs, and Vons (Southern CA) Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)	445110	10/12/03	(4)	67300(5)	3,374,200
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Los Angeles, CA) Transit Workers (ATU)	485111	10/14/03	11/17/03	6,200	148,800

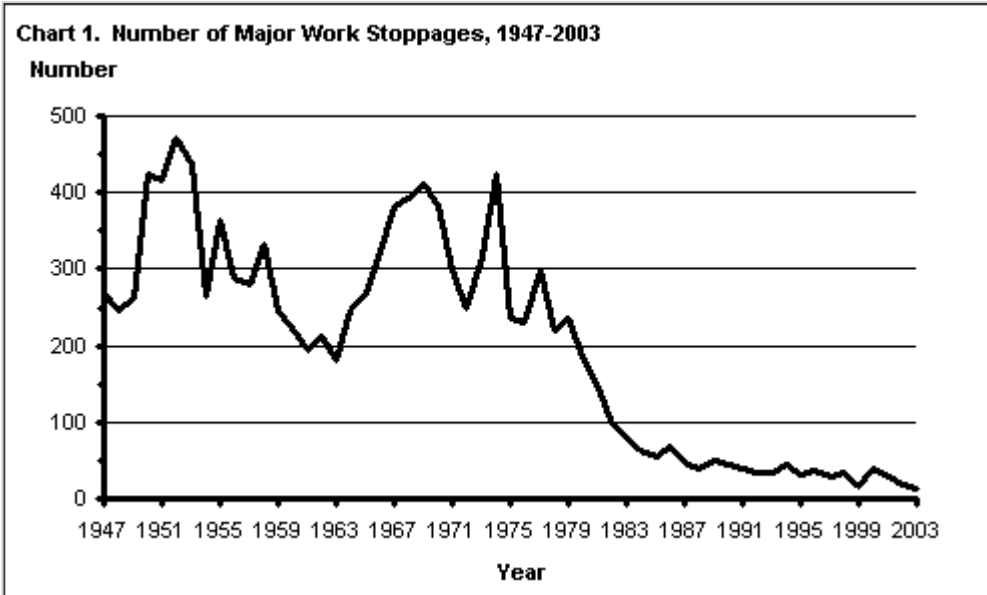
Footnotes:

- (1) Labor organizations are affiliated with the AFL-CIO except where noted as independent (Ind.).
- (2) Industry code is from the 2002 NAICS (North American Industry Classification System).
- (3) The number of workers is rounded to the nearest 100.
- (4) As of December 31, 2003, the work stoppage was still ongoing.
- (5) The number of workers idled on October 12, 2003 was 59,300; on November 24, 2003 the number increased to 67,300 and on December 23, 2003 the number decreased to 61,300.

**Table 3. Duration of Work Stoppages Beginning in 2002 and 2003**

Duration	2002		2003	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1-2 days	2	11	1	7
3-10 days	4	21	6	43
11-20 days	5	26	1	7
21-30 days	3	16	2	14
31-40 days	1	5	2	14
41-50 days	3	16	1	7
over 50 days	1	5	1	7

Note: Percent totals may not add to 100 because of rounding.

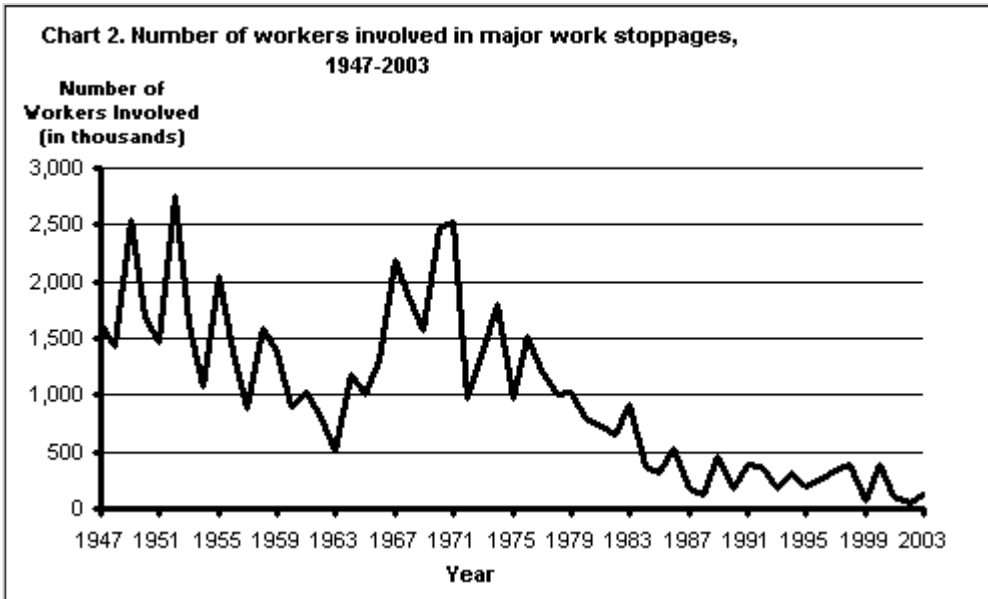


Data for Chart 1. Number of Major Work Stoppages, 1947-2003

Period	Beginning in Period
1947	270
1948	245
1949	262
1950	424
1951	415
1952	470
1953	437
1954	265
1955	363
1956	287
1957	279
1958	332
1959	245
1960	222
1961	195
1962	211
1963	181
1964	247
1965	268
1966	321
1967	381
1968	392
1969	412
1970	381



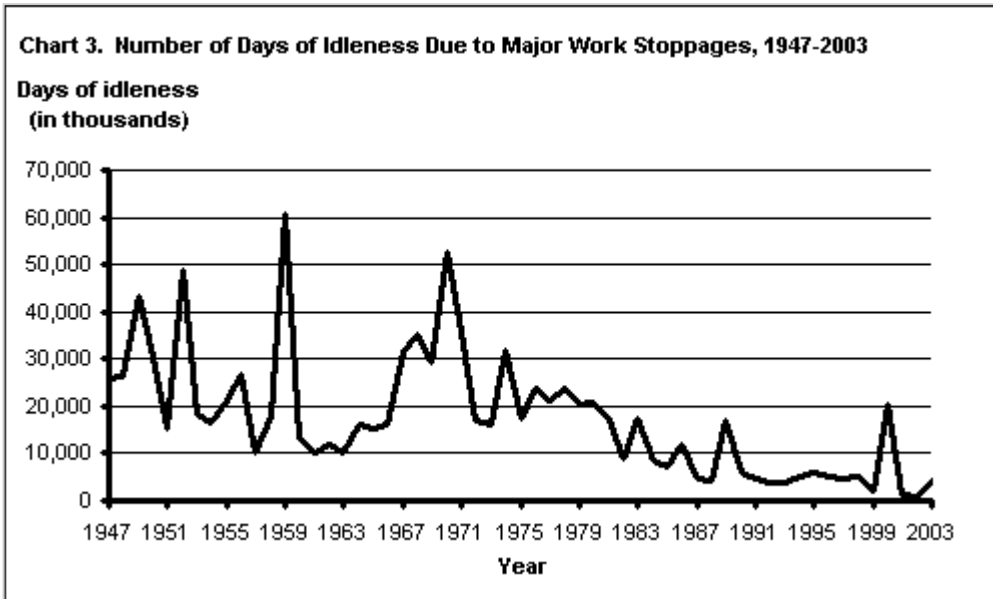
Period	Beginning in Period
1971	298
1972	250
1973	317
1974	424
1975	235
1976	231
1977	298
1978	219
1979	235
1980	187
1981	145
1982	96
1983	81
1984	62
1985	54
1986	69
1987	46
1988	40
1989	51
1990	44
1991	40
1992	35
1993	35
1994	45
1995	31
1996	37
1997	29
1998	34
1999	17
2000	39
2001	29
2002	19
2003	14



Data for Chart 2. Number of workers involved in major work stoppages, 1947-2003

Period	Workers (in thousands)
1947	1629
1948	1435
1949	2537
1950	1698
1951	1462
1952	2746
1953	1623
1954	1075
1955	2055
1956	1370
1957	887
1958	1587
1959	1381
1960	896
1961	1031
1962	793
1963	512
1964	1183
1965	999
1966	1300
1967	2192
1968	1855
1969	1576
1970	2468

Period	Workers (in thousands)
1971	2516
1972	975
1973	1400
1974	1796
1975	965
1976	1519
1977	1212
1978	1006
1979	1021
1980	795
1981	729
1982	656
1983	909
1984	376
1985	324
1986	533
1987	174
1988	118
1989	452
1990	185
1991	392
1992	364
1993	182
1994	322
1995	192
1996	273
1997	339
1998	387
1999	73
2000	394
2001	99
2002	46
2003	129



Data for Chart 3. Number of Days of Idleness Due to Major Work Stoppages, 1947-2003

Year	Days (in thousands)
1947	25720
1948	26127
1949	43420
1950	30390
1951	15070
1952	48820
1953	18130
1954	16630
1955	21180
1956	26840
1957	10340
1958	17900
1959	60850
1960	13260
1961	10140
1962	11760
1963	10020
1964	16220
1965	15140
1966	16000
1967	31320
1968	35367
1969	29397
1970	52761

Year	Days (in thousands)
1971	35538
1972	16764
1973	16260
1974	31809
1975	17563
1976	23962
1977	21258
1978	23774
1979	20409
1980	20844
1981	16908
1982	9061
1983	17461
1984	8499
1985	7079
1986	11861
1987	4481
1988	4381
1989	16996
1990	5926
1991	4584
1992	3989
1993	3981
1994	5021
1995	5771
1996	4889
1997	4497
1998	5116
1999	1996
2000	20419
2001	1151
2002	660
2003	4091