

Major Work Stoppages in 2004 and 2005

by [David Pongrace](#)

Bureau of Labor Statistics

Originally Posted: October 25, 2006

In 2004 and 2005, although the numbers of major work stoppages were higher than in 2003, total days of idleness decreased over the period. The number of workers idled by major work stoppages increased in 2004 before decreasing in 2005. The numbers of major work stoppages and the numbers of workers idled in 2004 and 2005 are low by historical standards.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has published data on major work stoppages, strikes and lockouts involving 1,000 or more workers, each year since 1947. This article summarizes the major work stoppages in 2004 and 2005 and discusses details of the largest work stoppages. A glossary and description of methodology are included to help clarify the data being discussed. The 2004 and 2005 data are discussed separately to reflect the summary data in the annual news releases.¹

Activity In 2004

In 2004, the number of workers idled because of lockouts and strikes increased from 2003, while the number of days of idleness decreased; each of these measures remained low by historical standards. Seventeen major work stoppages that began in 2004 and one major work stoppage that continued from 2003 collectively idled 170,700 workers and resulted in 3.3 million workdays of idleness. Comparable figures from 2003 were 14 major work stoppages, resulting in 129,200 workers idled and 4.1 million workdays of idleness.

- Retail Trade 2,447,900 days
- Accommodation and Food Services 384,700 days
- Information 204,000 days

Four work stoppages, three that began in 2004 and one that began in 2003, accounted for 83 percent of all workers idled in 2004. The largest work stoppage in 2004 was between SBC Communications, Inc. and the Communications Workers of America (CWA), with 102,000 workers idled. The second largest, the stoppage that began in 2003 and continued into 2004, was between Albertsons, Ralphs Grocery Company, and Vons, and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), with 61,300 workers idled. The third largest was a stoppage between the Home Health Care Agencies and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which idled an average of 19,000 workers.² The fourth largest was a stoppage between the hotel and casino employers in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and UNITE HERE, which idled 10,000 workers. These four work stoppages were responsible for 85 percent of the days of idleness in 2004.

The average length of a work stoppage beginning in 2004 was 14.6 days; 83 percent of all work stoppages lasted 30 days or less. The longest work stoppage was a dispute between the Automobile Dealers Association in St. Louis, Missouri, with the International Association of Machinists (IAM) and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), which lasted 52 days. The dispute between Albertsons, Ralphs Grocery Company, and Vons, and the UFCW lasted 39 days in 2004 and 56 days in 2003, for a combined 95-day work stoppage. There were two major work stoppages still in effect on December 31, 2004: a work stoppage between Ormet and United Steel Workers of America (USWA) and a work stoppage between Jersey Central Power and Light and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW).

Activity In 2005

Twenty-two major lockouts and strikes idled 99,600 workers and resulted in 1.7 million workdays of idleness in 2005. Despite an increase in the number of work stoppages, both the number of workers idled and the number of workdays of idleness declined from 2004. All of these levels are below historical averages. (See table 1 and charts 1, 2, and 3.)

Most of the work stoppages that began in 2005 occurred between March and June. Sixteen of the 22 strikes and lockouts involving at least 1,000 workers began during this period. Five stoppages began in May; April and June each saw the beginning of four stoppages, while three stoppages began in March.

Of the 22 major work stoppages that began in 2005, 17 were in private industry and 5 were in State and local governments. In private industry, the largest number of work stoppages occurring in one industry was six, in manufacturing. Of the eight work stoppages occurring in service-providing industries, the majority were in plumbing and mechanical contractors, while one was in the airline industry and another in the telecommunications industry. In State and local governments, three work stoppages occurred at colleges and universities and two were in transportation. The following industry groups experienced the most days of idleness due to work stoppages in 2005:

- Transportation and Warehousing 520,500 days
- Mining 134,100 days

The three longest work stoppages accounted for 62 percent of the 1.7 million days of idleness resulting from work stoppages in 2005. The largest work stoppage in terms of idleness in 2005 was between Northwest Airlines and the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association, with 371,700 days idle. The second largest was the work stoppage between Boeing and the International Association of Machinists, District 751, with 366,000 days idle. The third largest work stoppage in 2005 began in 2004 between Ormet and United Steel Workers of America Locals 5724 and 5760, with 324,300 days idle in 2005.

Two of the three largest work stoppages in terms of worker participation in 2005 took place in State and local government. The dispute between the New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority and the Transit Workers Union, Local 100 was the largest stoppage, as measured by worker participation, idling 35,000 employees, while the stoppage involving the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority and the Transport Workers Local 234 and United Transportation Union Local 1594 was third largest, idling 5,300 workers. The second largest dispute involved Boeing and the International Association of Machinists, District 751 where 18,300 workers were idled. These three work stoppages accounted for about 60 percent of all workers idled by a strike or lockout.

The average length of a work stoppage that began in 2005 was 20 days, with 73 percent lasting for less than 20 days. The longest work stoppage beginning in 2005 lasted 96 days and involved Asarco, Inc. and the United Steelworkers of America Locals 915, 5252, 88601, and 88602, and the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers, Local 75. The second longest was the Northwest Airlines, Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association work stoppage that lasted 91 days in 2005. The longest work stoppage in effect during 2005 was between Ormet and the United Steel Workers of America, which lasted 251 days in 2005. As this work stoppage did not begin during the reference period, it does not contribute to the average length of 20 days for a work stoppage beginning in 2005. Including the work stoppages involving Ormet and Jersey Power and Light, which also began in 2004, the average length of a work stoppage in 2005 was about 30 days.

At the end of 2005, the work stoppages involving Northwest Airlines, Ormet, and Boeing were still ongoing.

Methodology And Glossary Of Terms

The Major Work Stoppages series³, which has been published annually, by month, by BLS since 1947, covers strikes and lockouts involving 1,000 or more employees and lasting at least one shift. Due to the complexity of labor disputes, BLS does not attempt to distinguish between strikes and lockouts in its statistics; strikes and lockouts are both categorized as a "work stoppage." 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.

A *strike* is defined as a temporary stoppage of work by a group of workers (not necessarily union members) in order 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 employees.

Days of idleness are the aggregate number of work days lost as a result of a work stoppage. It is calculated by taking the number of workers involved in the strike or lock-out and multiplying it by the number of *workdays* workers are off the job. Aggregate figures are the result of summing all products thus obtained. For work stoppages spanning two different calendar years, only those days of idleness in the calendar year of the reference year are counted.

Workdays. In computing workdays during the month, Saturdays, Sundays, and Federal holidays are excluded.

The *number of workers* includes all workers made idle for one shift or longer in establishments directly involved in a stoppage. The BLS rounds this figure to the nearest hundred, although companies and unions may have rounded the figures before providing BLS the data. Number of workers includes those directly affected by the work stoppage as well as others in the establishment who honor picket lines or are idled because the plant is closed down. Other branches or plants of the employer may also be affected, and workers so idled are also counted. The data do not account for secondary idleness -- that is, the effect of a stoppage on other establishments or other industries whose employees may be made idle as a result of material or service shortages.

Profiles Of Significant Disputes In 2004 And 2005

Communications Workers of America and SBC Communications, Inc.

The largest stoppage of 2004, in terms of number of workers idled, was between SBC Communications, Inc. (SBC) and the Communications Workers of America (CWA). This stoppage idled 102,000 workers. With SBC's four regional contracts set to expire in April (April 1 for SBC West, April 3 for SBC Midwest, SBC Southwest, and SBC East), the two sides began collective bargaining talks in February around the country. On March 15, SBC and CWA representatives began to conduct negotiations on national issues at the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS). On April 7, in accordance with a prior agreement, the CWA gave SBC a 30-day notice that there may be a stoppage of work after the contracts' expiration dates passed without a new agreement⁴, and on April 29, union members voted to give union officials authorization to call a work stoppage.⁵ On May 19, with the main points of the talks -- wages, job security, health care, and pensions -- being unresolved, CWA stopped national negotiations and called for a four-day stoppage beginning on May 21.⁶

On May 25, 2004, the CWA and SBC agreed to a contract that was met with approval from both sides, ending the stoppage. The contract allowed for across-the-board wage increases of 12 percent over the next five years with an additional one-percent lump-sum payment in the first year, along with cost-of-living adjustments during the fourth and fifth years of the contract. Employees would also receive cash bonuses of \$250 in April 2006 and \$375 in April 2007 and 2008. In the area of health care, SBC promised to continue to pay the full cost of health care premiums for active and retired employees.⁷

Home Healthcare Agencies and the Service Employees International Union

The work stoppage involving New York City Home Healthcare Agencies (HHA) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1199 was the third largest work stoppage in terms of workers idled in 2004. On May 12, with some agency contracts having been expired for as long as a year, SEIU issued notices that its members would stop work for 72 hours starting on June 7. The union wanted to increase wages from between \$6 and \$7 per hour to \$10 per hour, and also sought to gain benefits such as health insurance, vacation, sick pay, and pensions for its members.⁸ On the seventh of June, 23,000 HHA employees began to strike.

The stoppage ended as planned on June 9 after 72 hours. By that time, tentative agreements had been reached with agencies employing over half of the union members participating in the work stoppage. Terms of the agreement included a wage increase to \$10 per hour by June 2007, as well as a guaranteed hour system for the aides.⁹

Automobile Dealers Association, International Association of Machinists, and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters

The longest work stoppage of 2004, lasting 52 days, was between the Automobile Dealers Association in St. Louis, Missouri, the International Association of Machinists (IAM), and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT). The stoppage began on August 1, when IAM and IBT members voted to reject separate contract offers with the Automobile Dealers Association.

The main point of contention for the IBT was a provision in the contract that would reduce vacation and sick leave for new employees. The IBT also had issues with proposed pay increases, as the new contract would not increase wages at all in the first year and would increase wages 25 cents per hour for higher-paid workers in years two and three. There would be a 15-cent increase for lower-paid workers in the second and third years of the contract. The IAM rejected a similar offer from the Automobile Dealers Association.

On October 9, the IBT approved a new contract; it was accepted after the Teamsters had rejected two previous offers from the Dealers Association. However, the work stoppage did not end because the IAM had not approved a new contract and the IBT honored the Machinists' picket lines. The new IBT contract provided for a 25-cent-per-hour increase in wages for all employees, and the dealers would continue to pay the full cost of health, dental, and vision premiums. The contract also reduced vacation and sick leave for employees, as workers can no longer accumulate a fourth week of vacation, and employees will have to work longer before being able to earn a second and third week of vacation, while sick leave was halved.¹⁰

The stoppage ended on October 14, after IAM members voted to approve a new contract presented by a federal mediator. This came days after the mechanics voted for a third time to reject a contract offer from the dealers. The accepted proposal provides for a 25-cent-per-hour increase in wages in each year of the contract. The contract also addressed another major issue for the IAM: the proposed expansion of tasks performed by helpers. The union felt that this would lead to a reduction in employment for higher-paid journeymen. Under the approved contract, the dealers could hire any number of helpers, but had to keep the same number of journeymen from July 1, 2004. If the number of journeymen was reduced, dealers could have one helper for every three journeymen until 2007, when they could have one helper for every two journeymen.¹¹

Northwest Airlines and the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association

The work stoppage involving Northwest Airlines and the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA) was the largest in 2005 in terms of days idle, with 371,700 days of idleness, idling 4,200 workers. It was also the second longest in 2005, lasting 91 days. The stoppage began on August 20, when AMFA members refused to accept pay cuts and lay offs to about half of the union's members. Northwest Airlines had proposed a pay decrease of about 25 percent as well as a layoff about 2,000 employees. The company was prepared for a stoppage and brought in replacement workers at the beginning of the stoppage.¹² This stoppage was still ongoing at year's end.

The Boeing Company and the International Association of Machinists

The work stoppage affecting Boeing and the International Association of Machinists was the second largest work stoppage in 2005 in terms of worker participation, idling 18,300 workers, and the second longest in terms of days of idleness among stoppages beginning in 2005, causing 366,000 idle days. The stoppage began on September 2, three days after Boeing made its last offer. Pension benefits were a major issue of contention, with the union rejecting the company's proposal to raise the pension multiplier from \$60 per year of service to \$66. This was not close to the \$80 per year that the union believed was possible. The sides were also far apart on the issue of lump-sum bonuses. Boeing offered lump-sum bonuses of \$3000 for the first two years of the contract. Union members could have then contributed the bonuses to their retirement accounts, with the company matching 50 percent of the contribution. The union rejected the offer, and 86 percent of the membership voted for a work stoppage¹³ on September 1.

The stoppage ended after 28 days, on September 30. The agreement raised the pension multiplier from \$60 to \$70 per year of service. It also gave employees a \$3,000 lump-sum bonus for years two and three of the contract, as well as an 8-percent ratification bonus. The new agreement maintained current health care plans under the same cost provisions of the previous contract; retiree medical coverage was also unchanged.¹⁴

New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority and the Transit Workers Union (TWU)

This was the largest work stoppage, as measured by worker participation, in 2005, involving 35,000 employees. On December 20, transit workers began the work stoppage after the two sides were unable to come to an agreement the previous night. The Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) had offered annual raises of 3 percent, 4 percent, and 3.5 percent,

over the next three years, respectively; the union rejected this offer. However, the main point of contention was the MTA's proposal to increase the age for employees to be eligible for a full pension from 55 to 62, which the union cited as unfair.¹⁵

On December 23, TWU members returned to work as negotiations resumed.¹⁶ The MTA and TWU reached an agreement on December 27, but the agreement was voted down by the union's membership in January of 2006. Union members voted for a second time in April, this time voting for ratification of the contract. However, the MTA would not recognize the second vote, and now the TWU has brought a lawsuit against the MTA in an effort to have the contract recognized.¹⁷

David Pongrace

Economist, Division of Compensation Data Analysis and Planning, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Telephone: 202-691-6199; E-mail: Pongrace.David@bls.gov

Notes

¹ For more information, please read *Major Work Stoppages in 2004*, USDL 05-598 (U.S. Department of Labor), April 8, 2005; and *Major Work Stoppages in 2005*, USDL 06-363 (U.S. Department of Labor), March 2, 2006; or see the Collective Bargaining page of the BLS website at <http://www.bls.gov/wsp/home.htm>.

² This stoppage idled 23,000 workers on its first day, and 17,000 on its second and third days for an average of 19,000.

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 See "CWA Gives 30-Day Strike Notice to SBC; Contract Talks to Continue, Union Says," *Daily Labor Report*, April 8, 2004, p. A-13.

⁵ See "CWA Members Authorize Strike Against SBC Communications if Necessary," *Daily Labor Report*, April 30, 2004, p. A-7.

⁶ See "CWA Sets Four-Day Strike at SBC To Start May 21, Ends National Bargaining," *Daily Labor Report*, May 20, 2004, p. A-13.

⁷ See "CWA, SBC Communications Announce Tentative Agreement for 102,000 Employees," *Daily Labor Report*, May 26, 2004, p. A-8.

⁸ See "Home Health Care Aides in New York Set to Walk Off Their Jobs June 7-9," *Daily Labor Report*, June 1, 2004, p. A-2.

⁹ See "Rivera Pledges More Strikes in July in New York City Home Care Campaign," *Daily Labor Report*, June 10, 2004, p. A-11.

¹⁰ See "Teamsters Ratify Contract With Auto Dealers in St. Louis; Strike Goes on With IAM in Talks," *Daily Labor Report*, October 13, 2004, p. A-11.

¹¹ See "Striking Auto Mechanics in St. Louis Vote to Approve Mediator's Contract Proposal," *Daily Labor Report*, October 18, 2004, p. A-9.

¹² See Joshua Freed, "Northwest Hires Replacements as Strike Goes On," *The Washington Post*, August 22, 2005.

¹³ See James Wallace, "Boeing, Union Differ by \$1 Billion, Mulally Says," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, September 9, 2005.

¹⁴ See James Wallace, "Boeing Machinists Back in the Fold," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, September 30, 2005.

¹⁵ See Desmond Butler, "New York City Transit Workers Strike," *The Associated Press*, Dec 20, 2005.

¹⁶ See Steven Greenhouse and Sewell Chan, "Workers Choose to Come Back and Talk," *The New York Times*, December 23, 2005.

¹⁷ See Anemona Hartocollis, "Metro Briefing | New York: Manhattan: Transit Union Sues on Contract," *The New York Times*, May 2, 2006.

Table 1. Work Stoppages Involving 1,000 or More Workers, 1947-2005

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⁾
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	0.20
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	0.10
1966	321	1,300	16,000	0.10
1967	381	2,192	31,320	0.18
1968	392	1,855	35,367	0.20
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	0.10
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

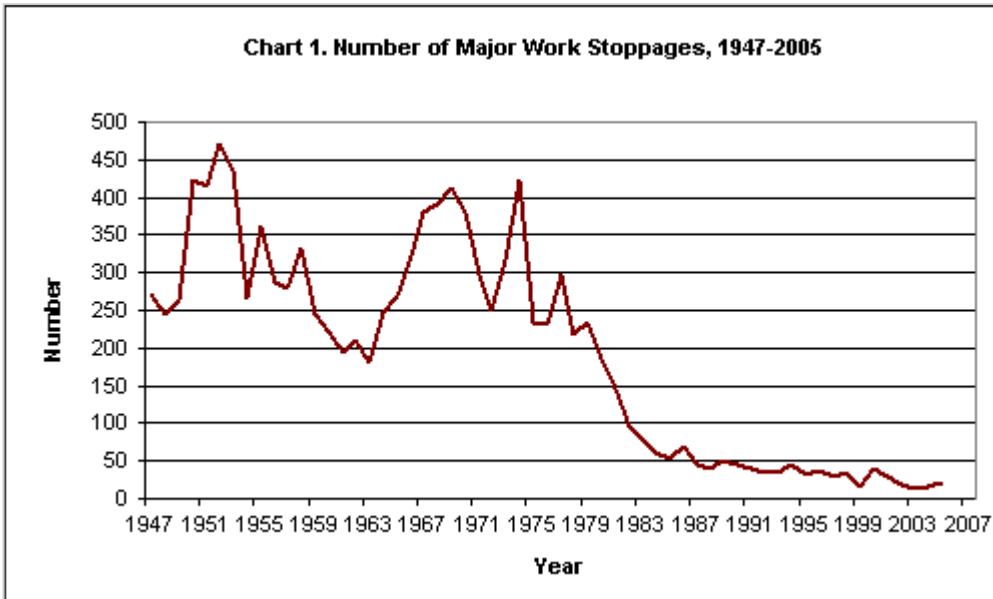
Footnotes:

- (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
2004	17	171	3,344	0.01
2005	22	100	1,736	0.01

Footnotes:

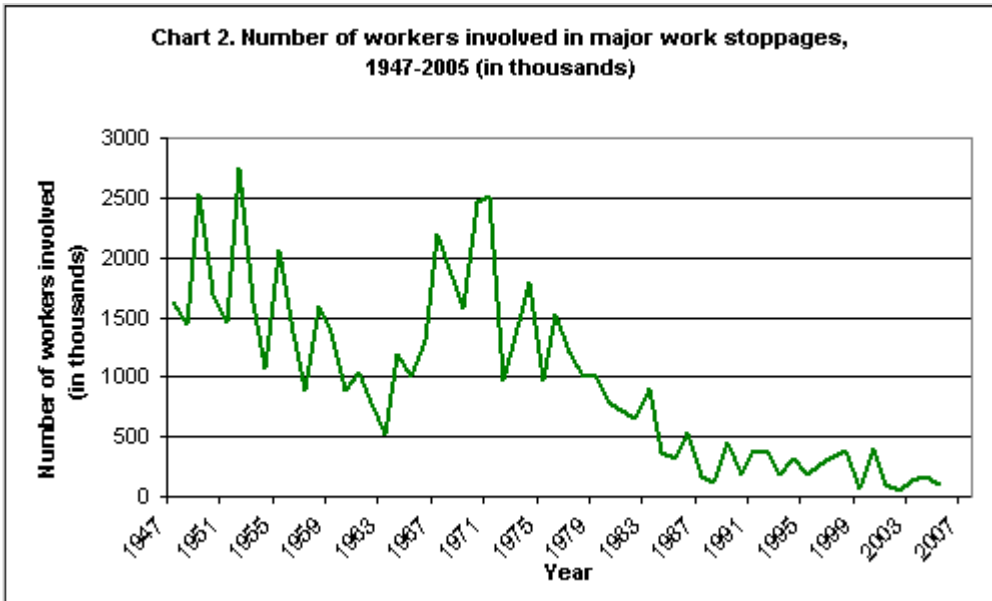
- (1) Workers are counted more than once if they are involved in more than one stoppage during the reference period.
- (2) Days idle includes all stoppages in effect during the reference period. For work stoppages that are still ongoing at the end of the calendar year, only those days of idleness in 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.



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
1971	298

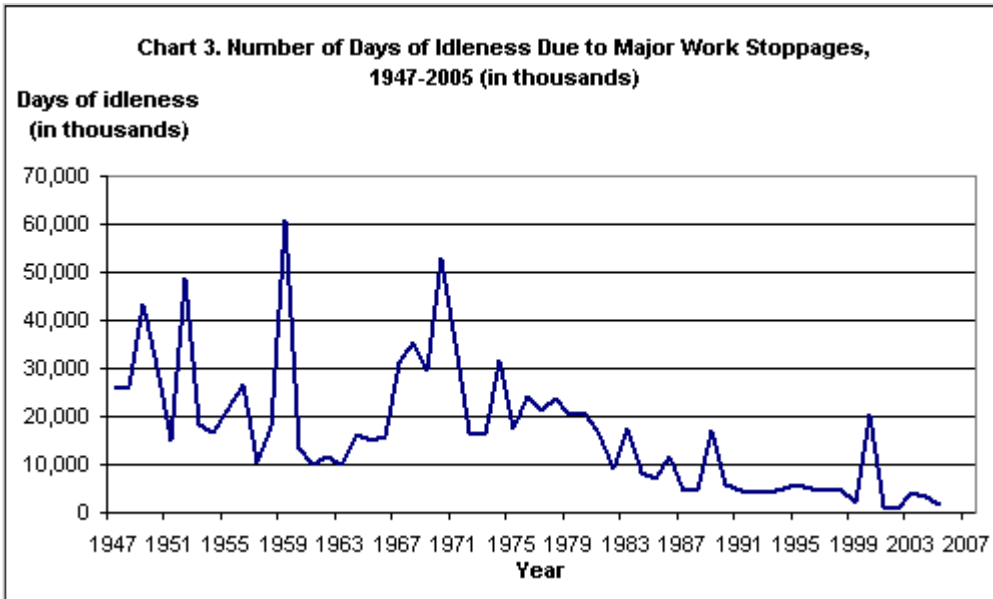
Period	Beginning in Period
1972	250
1973	317
1974	424
1975	235
1976	231
1977	298
1978	219
1979	235
1980	187
1981	145
1982	96
1983	81
1984	62
1985	54
1986	69
1987	46
1988	40
1989	51
1990	44
1991	40
1992	35
1993	35
1994	45
1995	31
1996	37
1997	29
1998	34
1999	17
2000	39
2001	29
2002	19
2003	14
2004	17
2005	22
2006	
2007	



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
1971	2516

Period	Workers (in thousands)
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
2004	171
2005	100
2006	
2007	



Data for Chart 3. Number of Days of Idleness Due to Major Work Stoppages, 1947-2005

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
1971	35538

Year	Days (in thousands)
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
2004	3300
2005	1700
2006	
2007	