

## Documentary Essay

# Pittsburgh in Revolt: Sources and Artifacts of the Struggle Against Deindustrialization From the UE/Labor Archives at the University of Pittsburgh

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*Jesse Jackson at Rally for Striking Shipbuilders, Neville Island, PA, April 9, 1984 (UE/Labor Archives, University of Pittsburgh, IUMSWA (Shipbuilders) Local 61 Collection [UE/Lab 89:5])*

The deindustrialization of the Pittsburgh region, which gathered force in the 1970s and culminated in the 1980s, was a devastating, revolutionary social change. The livelihood and identity of numerous communities up and down the Monongahela, Ohio, and Allegheny Rivers were wedded to the fortunes of the steel industry, and, to a lesser degree,

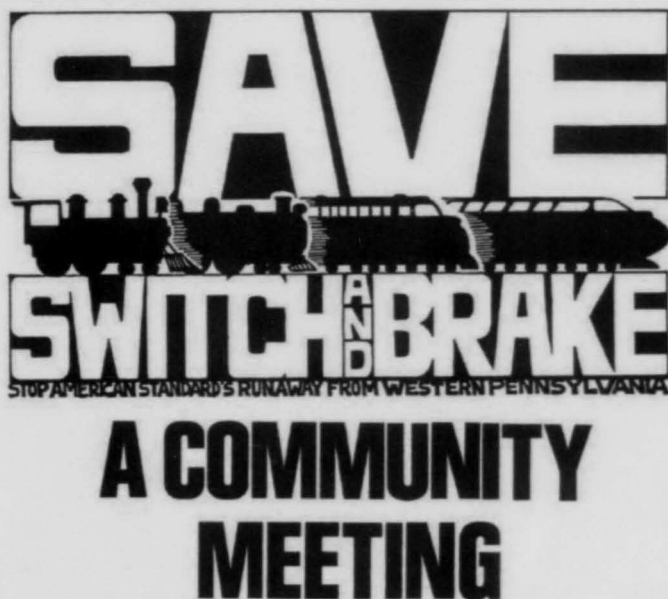
the electrical, railroad equipment, and barge-building industries. When these industries experienced sudden shocks in the 1980s, when the famous manufacturing facilities were first x-d out, eventually to be physically demolished, the communities that depended on them began to undergo rapid and alarming social and physical transformations.

How and why had this catastrophic change occurred? What resistances or alternatives were offered to the downward slide of the region's economy? Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to explain the course of deindustrialization in the steel industry is John Hoerr's *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry* (1988). Drawing heavily on Pittsburgh examples, Hoerr attaches primary significance to a system of industrial management, which, he says, froze labor and management into adversarial positions from which, tragically, they could not extricate themselves when more cooperative relations became imperative. Other books such as William Serrin's *Homestead: The Glory and Tragedy of an American Steel Town* (1992) or Judith Modell and Charlee Brodskoe, *A Town Without Steel: Envisioning Homestead* (1998) seek to come to terms with the human and community significance of the collapse in the region's most storied steel town. Dale Hathaway's *Can Workers Have a Voice?: The Politics of Deindustrialization in Pittsburgh* (1993) deals in large part with attempts by grassroots groups to halt or reverse the momentum of industrial decline.

As factories and union halls closed during the 1980s, companies and unions proved increasingly willing to donate organizational records to the archives. An extensive collection of company industrial relations files from USX National and DuquesneWorks was deposited in the archives in this fashion between 1987 and 1991. The collection contains, among other significant materials, a virtually complete set of grievance files, from the 1930s-1980s. These records should enable historians to explore, from the shop floor level upwards, the strengths and weaknesses of the grievance procedure and contract administration, issues which for Hoerr and others lie at the heart of the presumed management-labor gridlock.

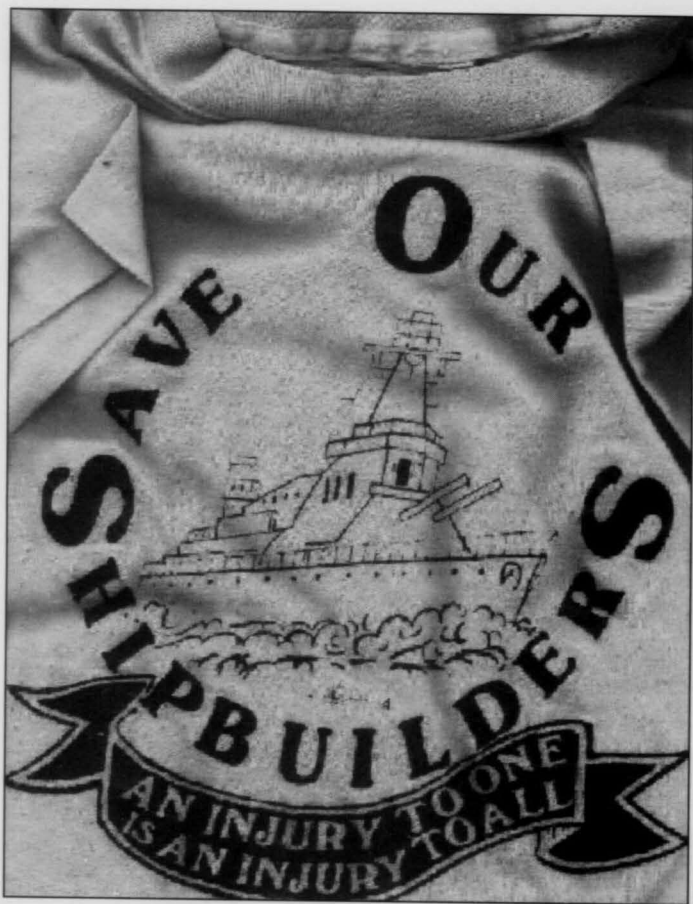
Union records also came loose from their moorings at about this time. Records of United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America [UE] Local 610, of International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Technical, Salaried and Machine and Furniture Workers (IUE) Local 601, and of Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America (IUMSWA), Local 61 all came to the UE/Labor Archives in 1989 as American Standard closed most of its Westinghouse Airbrake

plant in Wilmerding and its railroad switch plant in Swissvale; Westinghouse Electric Corporation closed the giant East Pittsburgh Plant and Dravo shut down its barge works on Neville Island in the Ohio River. The union records thus received generally span the entire period of the particular local's history. Since these were CIO unions, that history began with the organization of the locals in the late 30s or early 40s and followed on through the decades until the bitter ending of the 1980s. In two of these cases, there were aggressive campaigns to prevent the closing of the plant. In 1986, the United Electrical Workers Union (UE) allied with community groups in an effort to "Save WABCO [Westinghouse Airbrake Company] and Union Switch and Signal," while, at about the same time, on Neville Island, the leadership of the shipbuilders local struggled, without the blessing or support of the international, to save the shipyards.



*UE/Labor Archives, University of Pittsburgh, UE Local 610 Collection [UE/Lab 89:6]*

Alongside the abovementioned company and union records, the UE/Labor Archives has been fortunate in obtaining organizational records, including film, photographs, and memorabilia, of several grass-roots groups which supported union-based anti-plant closing struggles, but which were functionally independent of the unions, forming their



*UE/Labor Archives, University of Pittsburgh, Shipbuilders Local 61 Collection [UE/Lab 89:5]*

own organizations and looking at regional solutions to the crisis that was befalling the Mon-Ohio Valley. Most prominent were the Denominational Ministry Strategy (DMS), The Tri-State Conference on Steel, the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee (MVUC) and the Steel Valley Unemployed Center (SVUC)/Rainbow Kitchen. These groups included full time activist organizers, employed or unemployed worker activists, clergy activists, and, occasionally, supportive academics. Though they differed among themselves and became antagonistic at points, they did operate out of a sense of compassion (not unaccompanied at times by anger) for what was taking place in the Valley. They all challenged a fundamental premise of free-enterprise capitalism — at least such as was

trumpeted in those Reagan years — by insisting that the rights of private property, in this case corporate property, were not absolute and needed to be qualified by the claims of workers and community to intervene in the “public interest.” Hence the Denominational Ministry Strategy called for federal disaster aid to the Mon-Ohio Valley when the magnitude of U.S. Steel’s shutdowns became apparent. The Tri-State Conference on Steel (later Manufacturing) successfully promoted the creation of a public authority, named the Steel Valley Authority, which provided a mechanism by which the government, using powers of eminent domain, might take over and seek to operate industrial facilities which corporations were abandoning. A third group, the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee, successfully campaigned for the abolition of a lien law that was on the books in Pennsylvania for many years (which made it difficult for unemployed workers to sell their houses) and also worked to extend the benefits provided to unemployed steelworkers under the Trade Readjustment Act.

The records of these grassroots local organizations provide opportunities to study a number of interesting questions. One relates to the fragmentation of the protest movement and its failure to achieve its aims, or, let us say, at best, its only very limited successes. Dale Hathaway’s book *Can Workers Have a Voice?* describes a longstanding, historic weakness, based on the exclusion of workers and unions from regional planning and economic decision making. Could this historic weakness



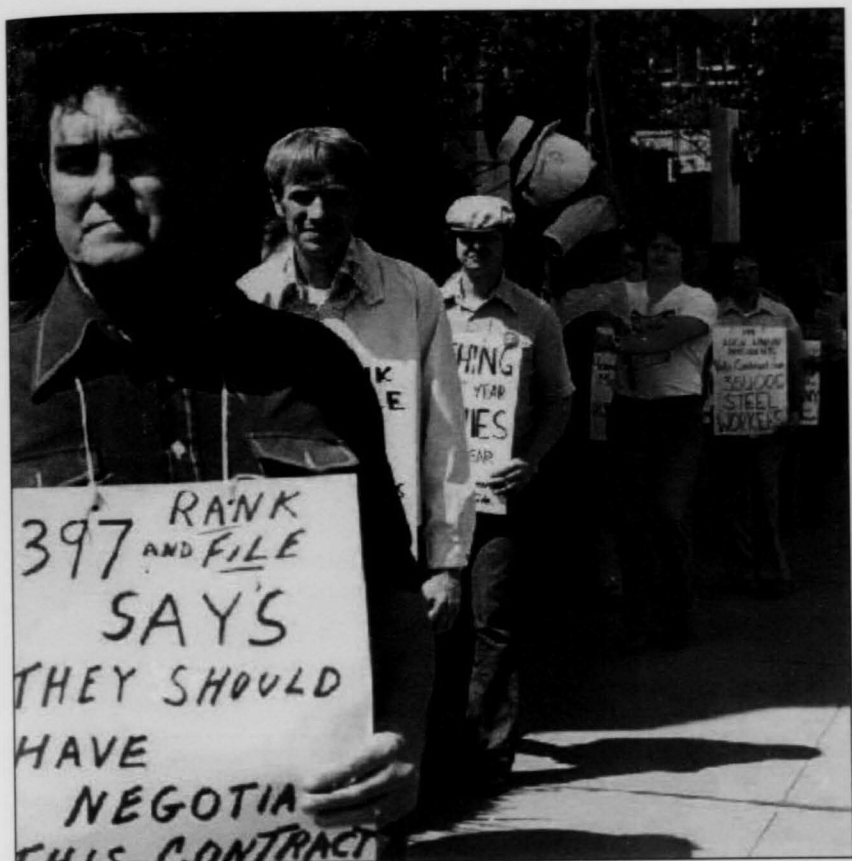
*Labor Solidarity Demonstration, downtown Pittsburgh, December 14, 1983 (UE/Labor Archives 89:5)*



*Clergy and union activists protest corporate plant-closing decision at Shadyside Presbyterian Church, April 7 (Easter Sunday), 1985. (Photo by Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Photographer, Harry Coughenour [UE/Labor 89:7] Reproduced with permission of the Pittsburgh Post Gazette*

have been overcome in the midst of the crisis? The 1980s, the Reagan-Bush era, was certainly fundamentally adverse; at the same time, the economic picture, e.g. the fall in the price of certain steel products, frustrated many of the plans for eminent domain takeovers and employee ownership/operation of company dis-owned plants. Nonetheless, the reasons why the protestors did not coalesce better or succeed more in organizing outside the ranks of the already committed are questions broached by Hathaway but which ultimately invite further research in these collections. Could the election of a more activist leadership in the steel workers union have prevented or slowed the demise of that industry? The internal rebellion within the steel workers union (the Sadlowski campaign, the Steel Workers Rank and File movement) can partly be studied through several collections in the UE/Labor Archives (Tri-State, Lawrence Evans and Steffi Domike Collections).

Beyond providing resources to address significant historiographic



*Rank and file demonstration at USWA headquarters led by the late Ronald Weisen, activist and later President of Homestead Local, April 14, 1977 (Steffi Domike Collection, UE/Lab 97:20)*

issues, material from these collections projects a real flavor of the times. The Pittsburgh industrial workforce, as suggested, did not go entirely gently into its good night. Artifacts from the collections sometimes reflect a sense of insurrectionary hope and a conviction that the juggernaut of deindustrialization could, perhaps, be halted and the trend reversed.

This sense of hope and mission, of participating in a far-reaching and possibly historic struggle, was fueled by visits from international visitors and figures of fame from the political and entertainment worlds. French steelworkers visited in the 80s. The successful Solidarity revolt in Poland seemed auspicious. Bruce Springsteen, "The Boss," threw a benefit concert and turned over a \$10,000 check to the steelworkers and the battling Rainbow Kitchen. Jesse Jackson announced



*Presidential Candidate Jesse Jackson addresses Labor Support Breakfast in Pittsburgh's Hill District. . . (UE/Labor 89:5)*



*and is greeted by women unionists at shipbuilders rally (April 9, 1984) (UE/Labor 89:5)*



for President here in 1984, very conspicuously allying himself with white working-class protest, proclaiming the infrastructure needed to be rebuilt and for that we would need steel and a robust domestic industry. He walked the picket lines of the striking shipbuilders and donned the strike hat of IUMSWA Local 61.

The sense of historic agency and freedom of these activities was captured fleetingly and yet appropriately in the snapshot — the thousands of photos taken by participants (it was a good time to have Kodak stock if not U.S. Steel). Photos could then be mounted — alas, for archival purposes, generally glued — onto sheets of construction paper. They would then adorn the walls of the union hall, perpetuating the solidarity and spirit of the demonstrations, reminding, exhorting, that this was for real.

More experienced photographers also captured the spirit of what William Serrin has called “the Mon Valley insurgency.” The activities of DMS, Steel Workers Rank and File, the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee, and the Rainbow Kitchen are all visually well-represented in the Archives thanks to the efforts of Steffi Domike, Teresa Chalich, and others. Steelworker writer and film producer Larry Evans recorded signifi-



*Downtown Rally, Pittsburgh, December 14, 1983 (UE/Labor 89:5)*

cant interviews with workers and activists on videotape, as did filmmakers Domike and Richard Fishkin ("Peace TV"). Bob Anderson's oral history interviews with union and community leaders of the 70s and 80s probe some of the issues and choices facing grass roots organizers.

Other artifacts in the Archives of the mid-1980s protests include banners from the campaign to try and save the Dorothy Six Blast Furnace at Duquense, posters from downtown protest rallies, buttons, T-shirts, and recorded protest songs.



*Recording: STAND UP (Valley of Steel) (1985) and Button: Save Dorothy 6 (Tri-State Conference on Steel Collection, UE/Labor 93:10)*

# **PITTSBURGH'S 2ND ANNUAL HOLY COMMUNION MEMORIAL & PRAYER SERVICE FOR:**

**Those Who Have Committed Suicide**

**Those Who Are Enduring Unemployment**

**The Success of Dorthy Six**

**U.S. Steel Dravo Mellon Bank May They Ease The Pain  
of Those Their Economic Policies are Destroying**

**Tue June 4 at 12:00 Noon**

**At The U.S. Steel Plaza**

**Grant and Sixth Street**

**Downtown Pittsburgh**

*Poster from Open-air Service by clergy and union activists at U.S. Steel Building plaza, June 4, 1985 (D.M.S. Collection, UE/Labor 89:7)*

The sentiments and actions of the region's business and political leadership were another —if not simply “the other” — side of the social dynamic. In 1984, University of Pittsburgh School of Business Professor William C. Frederick conducted a series of interviews with corporate leaders regarding their attitudes toward the regional industrial crisis, and produced a paper, “From Community Protest to Community Partnership,” which sought to delineate a more “socially responsible role [for] corporate America.” Some of the interview protocols and position papers of business leaders, as well as notes of Frederick's meetings with

Mon Valley dissidents, are contained in his donated papers.

The State and Local Government Oral History Project originated by the Archives also contains relevant interviews with political leaders, like Allegheny County Commissioner Barbara Hafer and business leaders like USX's David Roderick. The Tri-State records document interactions between that organization and local, state, and congressional officials, as the group sought to find legislative ways of extending the viability of plants slated for closing. The collection contains a number of economic reports and feasibility studies which illuminate the specific economic situation of the industry, locally and in other regions, during the 1980s.

On the level of state government, documentation on the economic and industrial policy of the Thornburgh administration can be found in the Thornburgh Archives, also part of the Archives Service Center at the University of Pittsburgh. The University's Environmental Collections, meanwhile, provide information on other issues affecting the prospects for industrial survival e.g. decisions to invest in or divest from plants requiring new pollution-control technology, community mobilizations against pollution versus union and community campaigns to retain industrial jobs. The Environmental Collections are discussed in an article by Dominic LaCava and Ruth C. Carter in the special Environmental History issue of *Pennsylvania History*, vol. 66, number 4, 1999.

On a national and broader Pennsylvania scale, the Archives of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) at the Archives Service Center contain documentation about specific anti-plant closing campaigns in plants covered by the union. A UE film, "Industry's Disinherited," (1960) attempted to put public pressure on the Westinghouse Corporation not to move work and jobs away from one of its local plants; other resources in the collections document other attempts to forestall plant relocations or to insure equity for laid-off workers. Cartoons and drawings by UE Labor cartoonist Fred Wright also address these issues in the unique manner of that medium.

The aforementioned accumulation of materials from unions, companies, grassroots organizations, and individuals has given the UE/Labor Archives the nucleus — and more — of a significant research collection which we hope will attract scholars and researchers to study the numerous issues related to these vitally important social and economic issues. Already a German research project from Bochum University's Institute for the Study of the European Labor Movement has used these records for a comparative study of responses to deindustrialization

among steelworkers in Western Pennsylvania and in the Ruhr region of Germany.

We enthusiastically welcome leads to collections of company records, union records and other organizational and individual papers that might help us continue to document the realities of industrial society, in all of its phases. If you have such leads, please contact the Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, 400 North Lexington Street, Lexington Building, University of Pittsburgh. Phone: (412) 244-7091; fax 412 244-7077. E-mail [HYPERLINK mail to:asceref@pitt.edu](mailto:HYPERLINK mail to:asceref@pitt.edu). Information about more of our collections may be found on the Archives home page with the University Library System Home Page: <http://www.library.pitt.edu>. Below are listed some of the collections at the UE/Labor Archives, University of Pittsburgh. Some collections are still unprocessed or only partly processed. Potential users should be sure to discuss their research plans with an Archivist prior to their visit.

(This article has been abridged and adapted from a paper of the same title presented at the Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh, August 1999.)

**Short List of Collections and Resources Relating to  
Deindustrialization in the Archives Service Center,  
University of Pittsburgh**

- Armour Workers United, 1983-1985**, 1 cu. ft. Laid-off meatpackers pursued employee-ownership strategy after Armour Co., division of Con-Agra, closed its Crafton, Pa. meatpacking plant in December 1983. Correspondence, leaflets, video. UE/Lab 91:11
- Denominational Ministry Strategy Collection, 1983-1989**, 5 cu. ft. Clergy and union activists deployed high profile tactics to focus attention on the plight of deindustrializing communities. Correspondence, leaflets, flyers, news releases, newsletters and newspapers, legal documents, research, film, photographs. UE/Lab 89:7
- Steffi Domike Papers, 1974-1984**, 2 cu. ft. Sadlowski Campaign, Women in the Steel Industry after the Consent Decree, Steelworkers Rank and File in the Mon Valley. Part of UE/Lab 84:20
- Steffi Domike Video, Photograph and Audio Materials, c. 1976-1990**, 14.5 cu. ft. Coverage of many rallies, demonstrations, worker meetings and conferences in Pittsburgh, 1982-86. E.g. Airbrake Strike, Grand Concourse Strike, DMS Mellon Bank Demonstration in Monessen, plus photos of steelworkers at Duquesne Works on last day of operation. UE/Lab 97:20, Box 15
- Lawrence Evans, Film and Periodicals, 1978-1988**, 22 cu. ft., includes 117 videotapes, a number of them focusing on rallies and demonstrations, anti-plant closing efforts, conferences and meetings in Pittsburgh, 1982-1987. UE/Lab 88:17
- Richard Fishkin, Peace TV, Films, 1982-1992**. (selected film: "Ed Asner at Rainbow Kitchen" (1990); Barry Bluestone, Tri-State Conference (1992); Rev. D. Douglas Roth (1984). UE/Lab 93:6
- William C. Frederick Collection, 1982-1990**, 1 cu. ft., Professor Frederick interviewed Pittsburgh CEOs, anonymously and on-the-record, for a 1984 paper on corporate leaders' attitudes and response to regional downturn. UE/Lab 99:22
- Harold Haney Collection**, Haney, a retired welder and Democratic committeeman, analyzed the evolution of the regional power structure, via an unpublished manuscript, a power chart, and an OH Interview forming part of the State and Local Government OH Project. AIS OH 97:2

**Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America, Local 61 (Neville Island, Pgh., PA) 1943-1989**, 98 cu. ft. Local President Darrell Becker led shipbuilders in a struggle to prevent the Dravo Corporation from closing its Neville Island barge building facility. Becker's personal papers, included with the collection, document his activities with the DMS and Network to Save the Mon Ohio Valley. UE/Lab 89:5

**International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Technical, Salaried and Machine and Furniture Workers (IUE), Local 601 (East Pittsburgh, Pa.), 1950-1985**, 67 cu. ft. Minutes, grievance records, photographs, etc. related to the union that represented Westinghouse Electric East Pittsburgh workers starting in 1950.

**Interviews with USX CEO David Roderick, Allegheny County Commissioner Barbara Hafer, and other political figures as part of State and Local Government Oral History Project.** AIS OH 97:2

**Robert Jurich Scrapbooks.** 2.5 cu. ft. Jurich was Chief Steward of UE Local 610 and led the 1981-82 strike at WABCO and Union Switch and Signal. UE/Lab 90:15

**Roy Lubove Papers.** Not yet organized, but used in several articles in this collection.

**Charles J. McCollester, Papers related to the Strike at Union Switch and Signal, 1981-1982**, 0.5 cu. ft., Copies of company letters issued during strike, copies of clippings and union communications. UE/Lab 88:18

**Mon Valley Unemployed Committee, 1982-1984**, 2.5 cu. ft. OH Project and book, Crashin' Out, compares McKeesport denizens' recollections of the Great Depression of the 1930s with conditions in the deindustrialized 1980's. UE/Lab 84:20 and Micro 84:20

**Rainbow Kitchen, 1985-1991**, 34 cu. ft. Correspondence, memorabilia, minutes, photographs, posters, printed materials, reports, subject files. The photographs and slides of Teresa Chalich, copies of the oral history interview tapes of Robert Anderson and several videos of 1980s meetings and rallies are also part of this accession. UE/Lab 91:10. Note: Robert Anderson's original oral history interview tapes plus transcripts of the interviews are held by the Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, Pittsburgh, Pa.)

- Dick Thornburgh Archives**, 1200 cu. ft. Papers of the former Governor of Pennsylvania (1979-1987), later Attorney General of the United States. Contains documentation on state assistance programs and efforts to attract new manufacturing jobs to the state.
- Tri-State Conference on Steel (later Tri-State Conference on Manufacturing)**, 1982-1993, 74 cu. ft. Organization sought to save or revive regional manufacturing facilities by applying the notion of a public right ("eminent domain") to such facilities. Research reports, board minutes, correspondence, newsletters, buttons, banners, sound recordings and film. UE/Lab 93:10
- UE Archives**. Includes **Records of UE Local 610 (Swissvale and Wilmerding, Pa.)**, 1937-1989, 51 cu. ft. Contains records related to Campaign to Save Westinghouse Airbrake and Union Switch and Signal. Additional UE national, district and local-level records document anti-plant closing campaigns in various localities. Note, however, that access to UE records is closed for twenty-five years from the date of their creation. The Fred Wright Cartoons and Drawings are also part of this collection.
- USX National Works and Duquesne Works Collections**, 1916-1989, c. 300 cu. ft. Industrial Relations Department files, employment records, grievance records, safety records. UE/Lab 91.6 and 87.3