PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-54

The Studebaker pension figures of 2,900 and "more than 4,000" traced to the Senate hearing at South Bend of 4 June 1971

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SUMMARY

When Studebaker closed its South Bend plant in December 1963, many of its workers lost all or most of their pensions, and the case became the one reformers cited for the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974. The figures most often repeated, 2,900 workers who received nothing and about 4,000 who received about 15 percent, go back at least to a hearing of the Senate Special Committee on Aging held at South Bend on 4 June 1971. There Senator Vance Hartke said that "the failure of 2,900 Studebaker workers to receive any pension payment whatsoever is wrong," and that "more than 4,000 other Studebaker employees between the ages of 40 and 59 received only 15 percent" of the pensions due them. A telegram from the UAW's president, Leonard Woodcock, printed in the same hearing, gave the union's count: "Of 11,000 active workers at Studebaker 2900 lost all pension entitlements, and 4500, average age 52, average service 23 years, lost all but 15% of their pension entitlements."

THE RECORD

1. **U.S. Senate, Special Committee on Aging, Subcommittee on Employment and Retirement Incomes, *Unemployment Among Older Workers*, Hearings, Part 1: South Bend, Ind., June 4, 1971 (Washington, 1971), p. 2, Senator Hartke**

   > *"I believe that the failure of 2,900 Studebaker workers to receive any pension payment whatsoever is wrong." "In like manner, I believe it is wrong that more than 4,000 other Studebaker employees between the ages of 40 and 59 received only 15 percent"*

   U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging · See the record (https://www.aging.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/publications/641971.pdf)

2. **The same, telegram from Leonard Woodcock, president of the UAW**

   > *"Of 11,000 active workers at Studebaker 2900 lost all pension entitlements, and 4500, average age 52, average service 23 years, lost all but 15% of their pension entitlements."*

   U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging · See the record (https://www.aging.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/publications/641971.pdf)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The common breakdown of the Studebaker pension losses is traced to a dated, public source of 1971, and the union's own count of the same year, 4,500 rather than 4,000 at 15 percent, is set beside it.

LIMITS

The hearing gives the senator's and the union's figures, not the pension plan's own accounts, and the two counts differ from each other and from later federal figures (the

Department of Labor counts about 7,000 who received no more than 15 percent). The page of the telegram was read in a text copy of the printed hearing.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

Wooten (2001); the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation's history; the Department of Labor's timeline; Wikipedia; ASPPA (2021); the Internet Archive's text of the American Enterprise Institute (1968) and Brookings (1977) studies; web searches for the figures.

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/), and how we weigh each kind of record in Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/).

"New" means new to print as far as we can tell. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will credit it here and raise the note's version.

WORKS CITED

Earlier work, catalogues and databases named in this note, besides the records quoted above.

1. James A. Wooten, "'The Most Glorious Story of Failure in the Business': The Studebaker-Packard Corporation and the Origins of ERISA," *Buffalo Law Review* 49 (2001), 683. https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/buffalolawreview/vol49/iss2/6
2. U.S. Department of Labor, "Studebaker plant closes," history timeline. https://www.dol.gov/node/22391

THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in The day the line stopped (projectscroll.com/news/the-day-the-studebaker-line-stopped/). In the discoveries register:

- `stude-pension-1971` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#stude-pension-1971)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

Michael Urbanski, “The Studebaker pension figures of 2,900 and ‘more than 4,000’ traced to the Senate hearing at South Bend of 4 June 1971,” Project Scroll Research Note 2026-54, version 1 (5 November 2026), https://projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-54/. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23968744.

BibTeX

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@techreport{urbanski202654,
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  orcid       = {0009-0006-8183-5828},
  title       = {{The Studebaker pension figures of 2,900 and ``more
than 4,000'' traced to the Senate hearing at South Bend of 4 June
1971}},
  institution = {Project Scroll},
  type        = {Project Scroll Research Note},
  number      = {2026-54},
  year        = {2026},
  month       = {nov},
  url         = {https://projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-54/},
  doi         = {10.5281/zenodo.23968744},
  note        = {Version 1}
}
```