

Looking back at Compensation and Working Conditions

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Originally Posted: September 28, 2012

Beginning this fall, *Compensation and Working Conditions Online (CWC Online)* will be incorporated into the online *Monthly Labor Review*. Readers of *CWC Online* still will be able to find high-quality articles on compensation, occupational safety and health, and collective bargaining, while also gaining from the strengths of the *Monthly Labor Review*. BLS has published the *Monthly Labor Review* for nearly a century, and many of its articles have examined similar topics as those covered in *CWC Online*. Making *CWC Online* part of the *Monthly Labor Review* will make it easier for readers of both publications to find a broader array of articles on topics that interest them. As *CWC Online* begins this transition, this article looks back at the rich history of that publication over the last two decades.

In its current electronic form, *Compensation and Working Conditions Online* began in January 2003, making it one of the first online-only publications of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Prior to that, *Compensation and Working Conditions (CWC)* had been published since May of 1991, when it replaced its predecessor, *Current Wage Developments (CWD)*, which was “a monthly report on employee compensation, including: wage and benefit changes resulting from collective bargaining settlements and unilateral management decisions; statistical summaries; and special reports on wage trends.”¹ The first issue of *CWD* was published in 1948 as part of the requirement for BLS to report on collective bargaining activities authorized by Section 211 of the Taft-Hartley Act.² The interest in collective bargaining data had been initially prompted by the wartime need to monitor labor disputes and develop policies for stemming rising wage rates. The principal user of federal wage surveys at that time was the National War Labor Board. (For an example of the publication's covers over the years, see [Exhibit](#).)

World War II and the postwar economic climate created a need for the federal government to alter and increase its role in economic policy, compared with the prewar era. As a consequence, the role of the BLS also became more prominent, specifically with respect to measuring the effects of new economic policies on the labor and consumer markets, but also as a way of creating statistical information on the impact of collective bargaining on pay, benefits, and working conditions. The labor movement during World War II—and in the years immediately following it—intensified, in terms of number of work stoppages and days idled. In its endeavor to produce new statistical information on the labor force, the BLS focused in particular on such heavy manufacturing industries as steel production and automotive and aircraft manufacturing, with *CWD* reporting “on the negotiated changes in wages and benefits for individual, key bargaining situations, such as General Motors, United States Steel, The Boeing Company, and the bituminous coal mine operators.”³

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Korean and Vietnam Wars precipitated changes in the labor force and in the economy. The federal government once again stepped up, increasing its role in regulating the workplace, and the Congress passed or amended several acts aimed at improving the conditions for workers. And once again the BLS continued to adjust and expand its compensation programs to respond to the needs created by new laws and regulations. As a result, *CWD* continued to expand its published series of the data obtained from examining collective bargaining settlements.⁴

In the 1960s labor-management strife continued, but it refocused somewhat on improvements in employee benefits, resulting in expanded medical coverage, new provisions for coordination with the newly introduced Medicare, and enhancements in retirement benefits, including, in some cases, more generous formulas under defined benefit plans.⁵

In the 1970s and 1980s a prominent feature of *CWD* was the monthly publication of contract reports, which included bargaining agreements covering 1000 workers or more. As Linda Bell of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York wrote, “This source lists all major collective bargaining settlements covered by the Labor Department and includes data on bargaining pairs (establishment and union), industry, region,” as well as the “number of workers covered, and settlement terms (including information about wages, cost-of-living adjustments [COLAs], benefits, and work rules).”⁶ As before, *CWD*

continued with its stated objective, which was to document and report on important trends in labor relations and compensation. In the 1980s union concessions became more commonplace than before, with the automotive industry being among those most significantly affected. The concessions included reduction in wages and benefit levels, as well as payments of lump-sums and profit sharing bonuses in place of regular wage increases.

In May of 1991, the publication changed its name to *Compensation and Working Conditions (CWC)* to reflect “an expansion of the publications focus to include data and brief technical articles on the total compensation package (rather than just wages) and other aspects of the work environment, such as safety and health.”⁷ Throughout the 1990s, *CWC* covered a wide array of these topics, allowing BLS and other authors to focus on occupational safety and health statistics, for example. Although a large number of occupational safety and health statistics are published every year, articles appearing in *CWC* often provided an in-depth treatment to a specific issue in safety and health or to a specific industry. Another focus of attention for *CWC* is collective bargaining. Every year, an article profiling the most significant work stoppages appeared, complimenting the data series on strikes and lock-outs of 1,000 or more workers.

In January 2003, as the Internet became increasingly prominent as a tool for both obtaining and disseminating federal statistical information, *CWC* discontinued its printed edition and became an online-only publication—*Compensation and Working Conditions Online*. *CWC Online* has three departments: compensation, safety and health, and collective bargaining. It is made up of articles, tables and charts, and archives, which are grouped under one of the three departments. All of the articles published in *CWC Online* are available on the BLS website, and they will be incorporated into a larger, fully searchable *MLR* index in the coming months.

Over the years, *CWC Online* and its predecessor, *CWC*, have focused on compensation and the various aspects of its components: earnings (wages and salaries) and employee benefits. Since BLS compensation data are produced by various employee and employer characteristics, such as full- and part-time status of the employees or size of establishment, trends and tendencies can be revealed and analyzed using these data. Such analyses have been presented in *CWC* articles on earnings and benefits. The articles on earnings generally analyze the differences in wages or salaries of various employee groups, such as union or nonunion workers, for example. The articles on employee benefits have been written on a wide array of subtopics, from emerging and alternative benefits to the analysis of unpublished data on the use of sick leave. Health care costs and cost containment features have been the subject of a number of articles, as the cost of this benefit began rising at unprecedented rates in the 1980s and 1990s.

CWC and *CWC Online* paralleled changes in the surveys and programs conducted by the Office of Compensation and Working Conditions and, occasionally, other BLS programs that pertained to compensation. Although the majority of the articles published have been written by BLS employees, researchers outside the Bureau have published their work in the journal as well. Some articles were written jointly by BLS employees and outside researchers. In one case, five BLS employees (two economists, two statisticians, and one computer specialist) collaborated with a non-BLS statistician.⁸

Another topic of *CWC* articles has been changes in methodologies or classification systems and their implications for data available to the public—the 2005–2006 rebasing and reweighting of the Employment Cost Index (ECI) and its switch to the new industry and occupational classifications, for example. Such articles facilitate the transitions for data users, so links to them are provided on the relevant program pages on the Internet. *CWC* articles have also been written as explanations to data users as to how a particular data series can be used for their purposes. One example is the guide to using the ECI in contract escalation or an article that explains how to “age” available wage data.

As *CWC Online* becomes a part of the *MLR*, a publication with a broad readership and its own extensive history, the BLS will continue publishing data on earnings, employee benefits, employer costs, collective bargaining, work stoppages, and occupational safety, along with in-depth and innovative research and analysis.

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Notes

- 1 *Handbook of Labor Statistics*, US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1947, p. 448.
- 2 The Taft-Hartley Act was enacted in the summer of 1947 in response to the excessive strike activity, both in terms of duration and numbers of workers involved, of 1946. The Act empowered the President and federal court to force parties involved in disruptive labor disputes to end them in an expedited manner. The act also banned a number of union activities and practices previously allowed. Section 211(a) directed BLS to collect and maintain Collective Bargaining Agreements “for the guidance and information of interested representatives of employers, employees, and the general public.”
- 3 Richard E. Schumann “Compensation from World War II to the Great Society,” *Compensation and Working Conditions*, January 2003, <http://www.bls.gov/opub/cwc/cm20030124ar04p1.htm>.
- 4 IBID
- 5 Walter W. Kolodrubetz, “Employee Benefit Plans in 1966,” *Social Security Bulletin*, April 1968, <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v31n4/v31n4p23.pdf>.
- 6 Linda A. Bell “Union Concessions in the 1980s,” *FRBNY Quarterly Review*, Summer 1989, http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/quarterly_review/1989v14/v14n2article4.pdf.
- 7 *Compensation and Working Conditions*, US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 1991
- 8 Michael K. Lettau, Jonathan Liscic, Jesus Ranon, Bradley D. Rhein, Thuy T. Shipp, and Sarah J. Stafira “Local Area Employee Benefits Estimates for 15 Metropolitan Areas,” *Compensation and Working Conditions Online*, September 28, 2009, <http://www.bls.gov/opub/cwc/cm20090924ar01p1.htm#author2>.

Exhibit. Cover images for selected editions of *Current Wage Developments* and *Compensation and Working Conditions*

