6-26-1964

United States Steel Corporation Columbia-Geneva Steel Division Geneva Works and United Steelworkers of America Local Union 2701

Sylvester Garrett

BOARD OF ARBITRATION

Case No. G-184

June 26, 1964

ARBITRATION AWARD

UNITED STATES STEEL CORPORATION
COLUMBIA-GENEVA STEEL DIVISION
Geneva Works

and

Grievance No. CP-8-37-64

UNITED STEELWORKERS OF AMERICA
Local Union No. 2701

Subject: Safety and Health

Statement of the Grievance: "The amount of smoke on top of the batteries has increased greatly and has created a condition that is unhealthy and unsafe beyond the normal condition inherent to the operation.

"We ask Management to immediately correct this condition."

This grievance was filed in the Third Step of the grievance procedure March 30, 1964.

Contract Provision Involved: Section 14 of the April 6, 1962 Agreement as amended June 29, 1963.

Statement of the Award: The grievance is denied.

Larry Car Operators and Lidmen of the Coke Plant of Geneva Works allege that changes in door cleaning practices violate Section 14 of the April 6, 1962 Agreement as amended June 29, 1963, because they have added smoke on top of the batteries to that generated by an accelerated pushing cycle instituted on March 16, 1964. 1

The Geneva Coke Ovens were built by Koppers Company during 1942. They consist of four batteries of 63 ovens each, or a total of 252 ovens. In normal four battery operation, batteries 1 and 2 on the south side are operated by one crew, and batteries 3 and 4 on the north side by another crew. This award is concerned only with those employees who perform the charging, leveling and pushing operations on the Coke Ovens. 2

The Larry Car Operators, also called Larrymen, position their Larry Car underneath a coal bin which discharges a definite volume of coal into the hoppers of the Larry Car. At this time the lids of the goosenecks of the stand pipes and the lids over the oven which will be charged are opened. After the Larry Car has been positioned over the charging holes, the Larryman and Lidman close the lids on the goosenecks and put on steam. The coal from the Larry Car hoppers is then discharged into the oven chamber forming peaked piles. The leveling door at the top of the oven door on the pusher side (mostly called "chuck door") is opened by the Pusher Operator and the leveling bar on the pusher is moved back and forth across the peaked coal piles to level them. The bar next is withdrawn from the oven, the chuck door and charging holes are closed and the coking operation begins. The Larry Car Operator and Lidman turn off the steam, and coal dust is swept around the charging hole lids to make a tighter seal. 3

For a better understanding of this case, a detailed discussion of door cleaning practices prior and subsequent to March 16, 1964, is required. The ends of the oven are equipped with removable refractory-lined doors. After a coal charge is fully coked and the oven dampered off the main, suitable equipment on both the pusher and the so-called door machine on the coke side removes the doors and holds them during the pushing operation. Attached to the door machine is a coke guide which conveys the coke which is pushed by the pusher into the quenching car. While the ram of the pusher pushes the coke out of the oven, 4

the Door Cleaners on the pusher side and the Door Cleaner and the Door Machine Operator on the coke side perform certain cleaning functions which will be discussed later. After pushing, the doors are replaced and sealed preparatory to recharging the oven.

Until recent years, the method of sealing the doors was to trowel and smooth ground "mud" into a V-shaped opening between the door and the door jamb. For more modern ovens, such as found at Geneva, there have been developed self-sealing doors which do not require luting. In principle, the self-sealing door is a spring-loaded door that effects a metal-to-metal contact between the door and the continuous machine-surfaced cast-iron jamb. The sealing edge of the door is carried by a flexible frame, and the door assembly is so designed that a powerful spring between each locking bar and the door forces the sealing edge against the metal door jamb with considerable pressure, thus preventing the escape of volatile products from the oven. In operating practice, the metal-to-metal contact between the door and the jamb does not provide a perfect seal. After a period of continuous operation the parts are no longer properly aligned and the knife edges are subject to damage. Therefore, the Coke Oven Operators expect that the seal is formed by the tar which is generated by the coking process. It is a matter of considerable controversy which cleaning practices contribute most to obtain a good tar seal. 5

The pusher-side door is also equipped with a somewhat similar small self-sealing "chuck" door to permit leveling of the coal as charged and removal of any excess coal. 6

At Geneva, the lining of the door is sectionalized and made up of clay-brick shapes. The thickness of the lining, and the precision of the inside face of the lining relative to the end vertical flue of the oven is important as it influences the heating of the ends of the coal charged. 7

Oven-door expense is a large factor in over-all oven repair and maintenance costs. This expense can be controlled by careful design of door-handling equipment and strict adherence to good operating practice. At some installations, other than Geneva, the knife edges and gas channels of doors, and the 8

surface of jambs, are not cleaned regularly after each push; at others only the doors are cleaned after each push but not the jambs; or, the jamb is cleaned but not the doors. At some installations Operators are put in charge of a given section of the oven and are responsible for the cleaning operations which they can perform in any way they see fit. Common practice at all including Geneva is periodic chipping, that is, cleaning of knife edges and gas channels of doors, and of the surface of jambs, to the bare metal. In addition, coal and dust spillage has to be cleaned carefully from the door sill. In at least one installation, this is done with compressed air.

Prior to March 16, 1964, it was the practice at Geneva to clean the doors and the door jambs regularly after each pushing of an oven. This cleaning consisted of passing a sharp-edged tool over the knife edges and through the gas channels of the doors and over the surfaces of the jambs. This procedure caused some carbon in irregular pattern to remain on the points of contact between door and jamb. In addition to this routine cleaning, the doors and jambs were also chipped thoroughly down to the base metal on a regular schedule under which each door and jamb was chipped on an approximately 21-day cycle. (Cleaning a door or a door jamb takes between one and two minutes each, on the average; chipping, between five and ten minutes each.) 9

Sometime in 1959 Coke Oven Supervision at Geneva experimented with a different system under which regular cleaning of the door jamb was omitted in the hope that the remaining deposits would provide a quicker tar seal. The experiments had good results, but no action was taken at that time to change the existing procedure. 10

It also should be pointed out that the doors are equipped with adjusting screws which press down on the knife edge and which, with proper adjustment, can be helpful in alleviating improper seal. Prior to 1950, Geneva had a full-time employee who adjusted these screws. However, this position has remained unfilled since 1950. 11

There is some indication that in the early 1960's Management embarked on a cost reducing program in the Coke Plant and reduced the amount of maintenance on the doors; in the early spring of 1964 the Door Repair Shop of the Coke Plant had a complement of two Millwrights on a five-day, one-turn schedule. 12

At that time, working on a schedule of up to 252 oven per day pushing, the crews servicing Nos. 1 and 2, and Nos. 3 and 4 batteries, each included one Pusher Operator, two Door Cleaners on the pusher side, one Larryman, one Lidman, one Door Machine Operator and one Door Cleaner on the coke side. The Company saw an opportunity to supplement the production of metallurgical coke by also producing chemical coke for sale to outsiders. It was anticipated that the batteries could enter full-scale operations under which each crew would push as many as 60 ovens per turn, or a total of 360 ovens pushed for the two crews in a 24-hour period. In order to stay competitive, Management considered it necessary not to increase the crews for that full-scale operation. Under prior practice, an additional Door Cleaner would have been scheduled both on the pusher side and on the coke side, and one additional Lidman, per crew. (The Company then had operated for some considerable time at a level of 252 ovens per day. Therefore, the failure to increase crews at the higher pushing schedule would not have directly affected any employees then at work.) 13

Sometime in March of 1964 the Superintendent of the Coke Plant called the crews to his office and presented a new incentive application to them under which an earnings potential was anticipated larger than that under the then current incentive (and also larger than those found at most other coke oven installations) but providing a crew smaller than that formerly provided for various levels of operation. The employees did not agree to accept this new incentive application. A particularly strong objection came from the employees working on the top of the batteries, and Management changed the proposal by continuing the assignment of two Lidmen to each crew on a 253 to 360 oven schedule. When the employees refused to accept the incentive as amended, Management instituted it unilaterally on March 16, 1964, and at the same time increased the pushing schedule to 56 ovens per crew per turn, or a total of 336 ovens per day. Shortly after the incentive and schedule was instituted, a shortage of coal developed and the schedule was reduced temporarily to 294 ovens per day or 49 ovens per crew per turn. At the time of the hearing, the schedule had been increased again to 336 ovens per day. (The Union protested the crew reductions and the validity of the changed incentive in other grievances which are not presently before the Board. Nothing in this decision shall indicate any opinion of the Board on the merit of these grievances.) At the same time the Company eliminated the practice of cleaning door jambs routinely after each push. 14

Shortly after March 16, 1964, grievants noticed that the smoke condition on top of the battery had worsened, and ascribed this to the changed door cleaning practices. This grievance was filed as a result. 15

The Union pointed out in the grievance procedure and before the Board that the Company has, under Section 14, the obligation "To make reasonable provisions for the safety and health of its employees at the plant during the hours of their employment." The Union argued that the change in the method of cleaning door jambs has created an unsafe condition beyond the normal hazard inherent in the jobs of the Lidman and Larryman. It was submitted that the "uncleaned jambs make the ovens smoke beyond the normal amount of smoke encountered in this type of operation." At the time of the hearing the Union admitted that the Company had entered into a program of alleviating the smoke condition by taking the following steps: "First, by the addition of two Millwrights in the Door Shop to accelerate the door repair program. Secondly, replacement of cracked door jambs. Third, observation by Supervisors of unusual smoking of doors so that the next time the door is removed, the cause of excess smoking can be determined. Fourth, adjustment of door screws at the time doors are chipped. Fifth, increase the suction on the exhaustors." 16

The grievants in this case do not complain about the increase in smoke generated by the accelerated pushing cycle; they are of the opinion that the changed door jamb cleaning practices have added smoke to that generated by the accelerated pushing cycle. 17

The Company takes the position that the change in door jamb cleaning practice did not affect the emission of smoke from oven doors. Smoke conditions are said to vary from door to door because of variations in jamb castings, oven door castings, sealing rings, and knife edges. Indeed, the Company came to the conclusion that by omitting the cleaning of door jambs regularly, the tar seal is formed quicker; in support of this belief it found that doors emitted more smoke after chipping because the chipping accentuated the defects and misalignments in the doors. 18

The arbitrator was given an opportunity to inspect the Coke Plants at Geneva, Fairfield Coke, Gary Steel, Clairton and Fairless Works. 19

FINDINGS

On the basis of the record in this case and of the Coke Plant inspections, the Board is of the opinion that the change in door jamb cleaning practice did not materially worsen the smoke conditions on top of the Geneva Coke Ovens. 20

The grievants' jobs involve hot work under adverse surroundings. The heat, smoke, fumes and extremes of weather to which they are exposed are recognized in the classification of their jobs at 3.2 under Factor 11, a coding designating under the Job Description and Classification Manual of January 1, 1963, as "Extreme heat approaching the point of endurance where relief from surroundings at regular intervals is a necessity." Specifically, in the Master Job Descriptions and Classifications for Lidmen and Larrymen, the Surroundings are described as follows: "Exposed to extreme heat, fumes and dust." In case of the Lidman, "Works outside in all weather" is added. 21

The amount of smoke found on top of a given coke oven battery depends on a great variety of circumstances. Only a few and more obvious ones can be pointed out here: the age and condition of the Coke Batteries and its accessories, particularly the doors; the maintenance program for doors; the amount of volatile matter in the coal; weather conditions; the location of a given battery in relationship to other batteries, the condition of goosenecks, gooseneck lids and chuck doors; the presence of one or two collecting mains on top of the battery; the presence of three or four charging holes per coke oven; the size of the coal charged (i.e. whether it is pulverized or not); and the moisture content of the coal charged. All these factors have to be taken into consideration when a comparison of smoke conditions at different coke batteries is attempted. However, such comparison is not required for the purposes of this decision since the sole issue here before the Board involves the effect of door jamb cleaning practices on the formation of a quick tar seal between the door knife edge and the door jamb, and the relationship of door jamb cleaning to smoke conditions atop the ovens where grievants work. 22

At the outset it should be noted that the record discloses a fundamental difference between the Union and the Company in their approach to the problems raised by this case. The Union took the position that Section 14-A of the Agreement 23

requires the Company to continue to make reasonable provisions for the safety and health of its employees previously in effect at a particular plant. It argued that the Company is required to continue its door jamb cleaning practices because it is required to keep the smoke conditions in tolerable limits.

The Company on the other hand took the position that 24
the smoke condition at the Geneva Coke Plant compares favorably with that found at other Company Coke Oven operations and that the conditions now existing at Geneva certainly are not more severe than those normally inherent in coke oven operations.

The Board cannot agree that a grievance instituted 25
under Section 14-A or -C can be adjudicated solely by a comparison of operational practices or conditions at different mills. However, in this case, a violation of Section 14-A or -C can be found only if it appears that door jamb cleaning practices at Geneva affected the smoke conditions on top of the batteries so materially that they must be considered as a health and safety practice and not just as an incident of coke plant operations.

However, the record fails to substantiate the Union's 26
case in this respect. The first Union witness was a Pusher Operator who stated that after March 16, 1964, there was more smoke (a fact agreed to by both parties). He did not connect the additional smoke with the changed door jamb cleaning practices although as a Pusher Operator he is in a position to observe the doors from close range. The second Union witness was a Larry Car Operator who also testified that after March 16, 1964, there was more smoke on top of the batteries. He admitted, however, that this condition prevailed primarily because more ovens were pushed per hour than before. There is no indication in his testimony that the smoke was increased by the change in door jamb cleaning practices. The witness also admitted that a better maintenance program, recently instituted, had helped to alleviate the smoke condition. The third Union witness also was a Larryman. He is the only Union witness who testified that he noticed more doors smoking after March 16, 1964. He asked his Foreman to go with him to the bench of the battery and to walk along the doors to observe those which are smoking. In his own words, the smoke came "right from the bottom up." He thought that the changed door cleaning practices may have had some connection with the smoking. However, he finally stated "I think it is bad doors or bad jambs." He continued to state "Some of those

doors I've seen they can take off, the bottom of the brick or the top is red-hot." The witness also pointed out that more smoke comes from the pusher side of the battery. (This is a condition prevailing on most coke batteries since the oven doors on the pusher side are higher due to the presence of chuck doors which in themselves are a potential source of additional smoke.)

27 The last Union witness was a Patcher Helper whose maintenance work takes him to the top of the batteries, and who does not have much opportunity to observe cleaning practices on doors in the course of his work. He testified that the smoking condition on the ovens has steadily worsened since 1950 because the position of the employee who adjusted set screws remained unfilled. The witness observed an intensified cleaning program in April of 1964 but that, in his opinion, did not improve the smoke condition. Whatever improvement there has been recently, he ascribed to the stepped-up maintenance work starting in the middle of March of 1964.

28 This brief summary of the Union's testimony indicates that the record fails to connect the smoke condition prevailing at the top of the batteries with the change in door jamb cleaning practice.

29 In light of this record there is little use to review the Company testimony which included the showing of a movie of two oven doors and their smoke condition before and after complete chipping. It suffices to state here that, in the opinion of the Company's experts, the new cleaning practices at Geneva help to form a tar seal quicker than under the old system of routine superficial clearing of the door jambs.

30 As mentioned before, the arbitrator found a wide variety of cleaning and chipping practices on his visit to various coke plants. Since there seems to be a great divergence of opinion even among Coke Oven Operators, the arbitrator is in no position to evaluate the relative merits of the different practices. Probably, best results depend first of all on the alertness of the individual operators and Door Cleaners and their "knack" to treat doors individually, and, more importantly, on the ratio of maintenance hours to operating hours.

This latter point was brought to the attention of the arbitrator also during the coke plant inspection at Geneva. The General Foreman had a list showing the condition of all coke oven doors and was able to pinpoint at any given door the exact damage and the effect of such damage on the tightness of the smoke seal. It can be anticipated that the smoke condition will improve at Geneva if the current accelerated door maintenance program is continued. A good indication of what can be done is the condition of the doors on No. 4 battery which were overhauled recently when the battery was put back into service after two years' idleness. 31

On the basis of the record in this case, therefore, the Board cannot find that the door seals are not as effectively formed under the present practice of door jamb cleaning as prior to March 16, 1964. The increase of smoke on the top of the batteries results from the accelerated pushing schedule followed since March 16, 1964, and is inherent in the operation. 32

AWARD

The grievance is denied. 33

Findings and Award recommended pursuant to Section 7-J of the Agreement, by

Peter Florey
Assistant to the Chairman

Approved by the Board of Arbitration

Sylvester Garrett
Chairman