

Workers' Rights. Independent farmers and artisans were the foundations of Jefferson's vision of democracy in the United States. As the journeyman artisan was squeezed by an expanding mercantile capitalism, crafts were broken down into tasks that could be completed by less skilled workers and laborers. Initial forms of workingmen's associations and unions emerged in the 1790s and early 1800s. The industrial manufacturing system took root in the United States during the Civil War, and the number of wage earners increased from 1.5 million in 1860 to 5.5 million by the turn of the century.

The expansion of industry and the campaign for an eight-hour day prompted the organization of the National Labor Union in 1866 by William Sylvis, the Knights of Labor in 1869 which grew under Terence Powderly's leadership to over 700,000 members in 1886, and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) for craft unions by Samuel Gompers in 1886. A radical rival to the AFL, the Industrial Workers of the World, was organized in 1905, but its growth was checked by World War I and the Federal government's repression in the Red scare that followed.

The AFL followed a tradition of voluntarism, looking to the power of organized labor to protect workers by making and enforcing contracts with corporations -- not considering the state to be a reliable ally in defending workers' rights. Corporations moved to make the state their ally, seeking injunctions against strikes under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890 -- which had been passed to break up the power of corporate industrial monopolies. And in the case of *Hitchman Coke and Coal Co. v. Mitchell*, the Supreme Court upheld labor contracts that forbid union activity (the infamous "yellow dog" contract).

John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers (actually an industrial union within the AFL) came to support labor legislation, including the Anti-Injunction (Norris-La Guardia) Act which prohibited Federal injunctions in labor disputes and outlawed "yellow dog" contracts, and Section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), which recognized the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively. When Title I of NIRA was held unconstitutional, its labor guarantees were written into the National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act of 1935. The first minimum wage was established by the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938.

John L. Lewis led the UMW and the new industrial union organizing committees out of the AFL in 1935 and founded the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which proceeded to organize unions in the steel, auto, rubber, oil and other major industries. CIO membership rose from 1.5 million in 1937 to 2.8 million in 1941; AFL membership jumped from 2.5 to 4.5 million over the same period. After World War II, business took the offensive to blunt the power of organized labor with the Labor Management Relations (Taft-Hartley) Act of 1947, passed over President Truman's veto. In response to the business offensive, labor moved toward greater unity. Walter Reuther became president of the United Auto Workers and then the CIO in 1952; that year George Meany succeeded William Green as president of the AFL. In December 1955 the two federations merged to form the AFL-CIO. In 1959 Congress passed the Labor-

Management Reporting and Disclosure (Landrum-Griffin) Act to secure the democratic rights of union members.

Union membership peaked at 35 percent of the work force in 1945; by 2004 only 12.5 percent was unionized. The shift from manufacturing to service work has been dramatic: in 1983, thirty percent of union members worked in manufacturing; by 2005 less than 13 percent did. During the 1990s the AFL-CIO took a number of steps aimed at curbing the attrition in labor's ranks. The Organizing Institute was established to train organizers, and the Union Summer program was initiated to recruit college students to work in support of organizing drives. But the decline in union membership continued.

Dissenting union leaders, led by SEIU's Andy Stern, challenged AFL-CIO president John Sweeney, himself a reformer, to devote more resources to organizing new members.

In September 2005 the discontented unions broke away to form the Change to Win Federation. The AFL-CIO retains 54 unions with nine million members. Change to Win is comprised of seven unions with a total of five million members: the Service Employees (SEIU), UNITE HERE (which represents hotel, restaurant and apparel workers), United Food and Commercial Workers, United Farm Workers, the Teamsters, the Carpenters, and the Laborers.

KEY LABOR LEGISLATION

1931: Davis-Bacon Act. Requires payment of prevailing wage rates to laborers and mechanics employed by contractors and subcontractors on public construction.

1932: Anti-Injunction (Norris-La Guardia) Act. Prohibits federal injunctions in labor disputes, and outlaws "yellow-dog" contracts.

1933: National Industrial Recovery Act. Section 7(a) guaranteed the right of employees covered by NRA agreements to organize and bargain collectively through representatives. (Title I of NIRA declared unconstitutional by Supreme Court in *Schechter v. U.S.* in 1935).

1935: National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act. Protected the right of workers to organize and elect representatives for collective bargaining.

1938: Fair Labor Standards Act. Established minimum wage and limited child labor.

1947: Labor Management Relations (Taft-Hartley) Act. Title 14(b) established ability of states to pass "right to work" laws banning "union shop," the requirement of union membership as a condition of employment.

1959: Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure (Landrum-Griffin) Act. Required reporting of union business matters, protected democratic rights of union members, and banned secondary boycotts.

Two progressive groups concentrate on internal democracy and participation in unions: the Association for Union Democracy and the Labor Education and Research Project, publisher of *Labor Notes*, and sponsor of the annual Labor Notes Conference. The National Right to Work Committee is a conservative organization that defends individuals who oppose membership or participation in unions. Union women address common concerns through the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), founded in 1974, which has some 20,000 members and 75 chapters around the country.

International Worker's Rights. The International Labor Organization (ILO), established in 1919, develops international agreements to protect the rights of workers. Now functioning as a specialized agency of the United Nations, the ILO monitors the implementation of conventions and evaluates complaints by labor, employers, and governments. Cold War conflicts between the United States and the Soviet Union limited the effectiveness of the ILO (the U.S. actually withdrew from the ILO between 1978 and 1980). Over the last decade the ILO has been increasingly effective in securing the rights of labor in Eastern Europe (particularly Solidarity in Poland) and elsewhere. The United States has ratified only a few of the ILO conventions, and the Economic Policy Council of the United Nations Association of the USA has recommended U.S. ratification of the conventions on freedom of association, the right to bargain collectively, and equality of treatment and elimination of discrimination in employment.

On the international level, the AFL-CIO unions have worked with their counterparts through the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), founded in 1949 and headquartered in Brussels. The ICFTU had 241 affiliated organizations in 151 countries. The ICFTU worked closely with the ILO, and had consultative status with the UN. In November 2006 the ICFTU merged with a smaller Christian Democratic union network, the World Confederation of Labour, to form the International Trade Union Confederation, which will carry on the functions of the ICFTU. Its offices will remain in Brussels.

Annotated Bibliography

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