

U.S. Labor History Time Line

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- 1492 Invasion of the Americas begins with Christopher Columbus's "discovery". Genocide of native population begins. Many are enslaved by Spanish to work in mining and agriculture.
- 1607 First permanent English settlement in North America uses indentured servants to grow tobacco and great fortunes for Virginia planters and their English backers.
- 1600s New England and Middle colonies settled by mix of free farmers and craftsmen, many indentured servants, and some African slaves. Skilled workers form first guilds.
- 1660 Virginia passes slave codes making slavery perpetual and setting punishments for misbehavior.
- 1676 Bacon's Rebellion pits poor Virginia farmers, indentured servants and African slaves against wealthy English planters and Indians in a struggle over land. Leads to the substitution of slaves for indentured servants in the plantation economy.
- 1765 Pre-Revolutionary movement launches first boycotts against British goods and taxes. Artisans and laborers are majority of protest groups pushing for economic and political rights.
- 1770 Boston Massacre in which British troops open fire on Boston workers killing five after many disputes over harassment and competition for jobs by the occupying army.
- 1773 Boston Tea Party – working people with a few wealthy patriots dump a shipload of tea in Boston Harbor to protest British taxes and royal monopolies.
- 1776 Publication of Common Sense by Tom Paine, an immigrant craftsman, electrifies the movement for independence. It is followed by the Declaration of Independence, which lays out the right of rebellion and asserts that "all men are created equal" and have rights.
- 1777 First unions organized by printers, carpenters, and shoemakers. They bargain and strike for better wages and shorter hours.
- 1789 U.S. Constitution establishes strong central government with unified market and firm protections for rights of property, especially rights of slave holders. Bill of Rights added on protecting civil liberties.
- 1798 Invention of cotton gin gives dying institution of slavery a new lease on life and leads to spread of cotton kingdom, eventually to Texas and extension of plantation slavery.
- 1805 Cordwainer Conspiracy trials find Philadelphia shoemakers guilty of criminal conspiracy when they strike to raise wages.
- 1822 Denmark Vesey, a free black carpenter, organizes a slave revolt in

- Charleston, South Carolina which is brutally repressed.
- 1825 The first all-women's union, The United Tailoresses of New York, forms in New York City.
- 1827 The Mechanics Union of Trade Associations, the first central labor union, forms in Philadelphia made up of skilled craftsmen of different trades. Demands 10-hour day.
- 1828 First Workingman's Parties formed in cities establish independent political voice for labor, demand an end to imprisonment for debt, public education, and rights for workers.
Beginnings of US industrial revolution in establishment of textile factories in New England.
- 1831 Nat Turner leads slave rebellion in Virginia brings down great repression on slaves and growing anti-slavery agitation in the South.
- 1834 The National Trades Union, first national labor federation, formed in New York.
- 1836 The National Cooperative Association of Cordwainers, the first national union of a specific craft, formed in New York City.
- 1836 Panic of 1837 leads to depression and destruction of growing labor movement.
- 1840 President Martin Van Buren establishes 10-hour workday for federal workers, but it is largely unenforced.
- 1842 The Massachusetts Supreme Court In Commonwealth vs. Hunt, declares that labor unions are not illegal conspiracies. Massachusetts and Connecticut pass children's 10-hour laws.
- 1845 The U.S. provokes war with Mexico taking half of Mexican territory and incorporating a large number of Mexicans into the U.S. workforce.
- 1847 New Hampshire passes first state 10-hour law.
- 1850 Growing anti-slavery movement in North opposes expansion of slavery. Northern white workers see slavery as undercutting free labor although they oppose equal rights for blacks.
- 1852 The Typographical Union founded - first national union to endure to the present day. Ohio passes first state 10-hour law for women. Economic growth stimulates establishment of many stable unions.
- 1860 Successful strike of 20,000 New England Shoemakers.
- 1863 Abraham Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation freeing the slaves. Civil War (1861-65) generates great wealth for growing corporations and kicks off second industrial revolution which increases manufacturing investment from \$1 million to \$12 million by 1900, and the number of industrial workers grows from 23 to 79 million making the U.S. the world's number one manufacturing nation.
- 1866 National Labor Union founded.

- 1868 First federal 8-hour law passed, applied only to some federal employees.
- 1869 First Knights of Labor local founded in Philadelphia open to all workers regardless of race, ethnicity or gender.
- 1873 Most severe depression in U.S. history partially caused by financial corruption leads to great misery. Meanwhile, railway robber barons bribe Congress and receive huge subsidies for railroad construction.
- 1875 Conviction of "Molly Maguires" for anthracite coalfield murders, 10 were hanged.
- 1877 Knights of Labor go national under Terrence Powderly's leadership as Grand Master Workman.
Federal troops withdraw from south leaving freed slaves at the mercy of resurgent white racism. Troops are sent North to repress labor unrest, then West to fight the Indians.
Great railway strike leads to worker insurrections in many cities and great repression. Begins period known as the labor wars which lasts for sixty years.
- 1881 Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (FOOTALU, predecessor of the American Federation of Labor) founded in Pittsburgh.
- 1882 Congress passes 10-year ban on immigration of Chinese labor, extended repeatedly. Racial violence against African-American and Mexican workers on the rise. Jim Crow laws bring segregation to the South. Many craft unions practice racial exclusion of non-whites.
- 1886 Great Southwest (railway) Strike from Kansas City to Texas, led by Knights of Labor which peaks at 700,000 members. The movement for an 8-hour day leads to general strikes in many cities. Haymarket Affair in Chicago provokes massive repression of unions and radicals. Seven innocent leaders sentenced to death, 5 executed.
American Federation of Labor (AFL) founded in Columbus, Ohio, Samuel Gompers as President.
- 1890 United Mineworkers of America founded.
- 1891 Labor Day established as a national holiday on the first Monday in September.
- 1892 Homestead Strike. Andrew Carnegie, with the help of state militia drive steelworkers union out of his mill at Homestead Pennsylvania.
- 1893 Depression until 1897. Unemployment tops 18%. Coxey's Army of unemployed marches on Washington and attacked by police.
- 1894 Pullman Strike and Boycott by Eugene Debs' American Railway Union becomes nationwide rail strike, defeated by use of injunction and federal troops.
- 1898 Congress passes Erdman Act providing mediation and voluntary arbitration in rail disputes.
- 1900 International Ladies Garment Workers formed

- 1901 Progressive Era. Socialist Party formed.
- 1902 Anthracite coal miners in Pennsylvania end 5-month strike and agree to arbitration by a presidential panel.
- 1903 Department of Commerce and Labor founded by Congress.
Women's Trade Union League founded
- 1905 Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) founded in Chicago
Supreme Court in *Lochner vs. New York* rules bakery workers maximum hours law unconstitutional.
- 1906 Typographers win 8 hour day in printing industry.
- 1908 Supreme Court in *Danbury Hatters Case* finds union boycott to be a conspiracy in restraint of trade under Sherman Antitrust Act. In *Muller vs. Oregon* upholds state law limiting women workers' hours.
- 1909 20,000 New York Garment workers strike and win union recognition in many sweatshops.
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People formed
- 1911 IWW leads free speech fights for right to organize. Supreme Court upholds injunction ordering AFL to remove Bucks Stove & Range Co. from its unfair list and cease promoting a boycott (*Gompers v. Bucks Stove*). Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in New York City - 146 workers die. Leads to first workplace safety laws.
- 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts textile strike led by I.W.W. wins. Eugene Debs, labor leader and Socialist, gets 6% of the presidential vote.
- 1913 U.S. Department of Labor established.
- 1914 Ludlow massacre of 39 at striking miners' tent colony in Colorado during strike against Rockefeller-owned mine.
Clayton Act limits use of injunctions in labor disputes.
Henry Ford introduces assembly line.
- 1916 Adamson Act provides basic 8-hour day for railroad workers.
- 1917 US enters First World War.
I.W.W. copper strike leads to "deportation" of 1200 strikers into Arizona desert.
Courts uphold Yellow Dog Contracts in *Hitchman Coal & Coke vs. Mitchell*.
- 1918 National War Labor Board established by President Wilson. For the first time, African Americans are recruited to leave the south and gain jobs in basic industry.
- 1919 Massive strike wave and intense government repression in the Red Scare and Palmer Raids. IWW smashed. Seattle General Strike, Boston police strike, and Great Steel Strike all defeated.
- 1920 Supreme Court rules secondary boycotts illegal and allows use of injunctions for union actions courts decide are illegal conspiracies in

- restraint of trade in Duplex Printing Press vs. Deering.
- Great Coalfield War in West Virginia. President Harding threatens to use airforce against miners.
- 1922 Railway Shop Craft's strike lost. Organized labor declines to 10% of the workforce from wartime high of about 20%.
- 1924 Samuel Gompers dies. William Green becomes president of AFL.
- 1926 Railway Labor Act requires employers to bargain.
- 1928 Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, founded in 1925 with A. Philip Randolph as President, threatens strike; over 7,000 are fired.
- 1929 Stock-market crash signals beginning of Great Depression that will last more than a decade.
- 1931 Davis-Bacon Act provides for payment of prevailing wage rates to workers on public construction projects.
- 1932 Norris-LaGuardia Act outlaws antiunion injunctions and Yellow Dog Contracts.
- 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act guarantees right to organize and bargain (later ruled unconstitutional).
First woman Cabinet member, Francis Perkins, appointed by President Franklin Roosevelt as Secretary of Labor.
- 1934 Major upsurge in militant recognition strikes: Toledo Autolite, Minneapolis Teamster strike, San Francisco General Strike, and Southern and New England Textile Strike.
- 1935 The Wagner National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) passes establishing first national labor policy protecting workers rights to organize and bargain.
CIO – Congress of Industrial Organizations forms out of split with AFL.
Social Security Act passed.
- 1936 Wave of sit-down strikes for organization of workers first in auto and rubber and then spreading to workers as far flung as shop clerks and elevator operators.
- 1937 Flint Sit-down strike – General Motors recognizes UAW.
First sit-down strike against Ford Motor Company occurs in Kansas City.
U.S. Steel recognizes Steelworkers Organizing Committee. Chicago police kill ten strikers at Memorial Day Massacre during Little Steel Strike.
Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee organizes meatpacking industry.
Supreme Court rules National Labor Relations Act is constitutional.
- 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act establishes 40 hour week and minimum wage, outlaws child labor.
CIO organizes as independent federation with John L. Lewis as President.
- 1940 John L. Lewis resigns as CIO President, Philip Murray replaces him.

- War production revives economy.
- 1941 Ford recognizes the United Auto Workers.
US enters Second World War. AFL & CIO give no strike pledges for duration of war.
- 1942 President Roosevelt creates National War Labor Board which decrees that wartime wage increases will be capped at 15% over 1941 levels. Corporate profits soar. A Philip Randolph's threat of a March on Washington wins Executive Order banning discrimination in war industries and establishing Fair Employment Practices Commission.
- 1943 Labor shortages prompt government to recruit women into wartime industry, establish the bracero program for contract Mexican labor and repeal Chinese exclusion.
- 1944 19,370,000 women were working. 37% of all women of work age were employed.
- 1946 The war's end generates the biggest strike-wave in US history - more than 4.5 million workers strike.
United Mineworkers win health and welfare fund.
- 1947 Taft-Hartley Act passes aimed at containing labor expansion. It outlaws solidarity strikes, purges radicals, and allows states to pass "right-to-work" laws.
- 1949 Beginning of McCarthy era results in purges of 11 left-wing unions and leaders from CIO.
- 1950 UAW wins 5-year contract from General Motors sign providing for pensions, cost of living wage adjustments, and guaranteeing annual increases and modified union shop.
- 1952 William Green and Philip Murray die. George Meany becomes President of AFL and Walter Reuther of CIO.
- 1955 AFL and CIO agree to merge with George Meany as first President.
Unions represent 33% of workforce. UAW wins supplementary unemployment benefits from Ford Motor Co.
- 1957 AFL-CIO expels Teamsters, Bakery Workers and Laundry Workers for corruption.
- 1959 Congress passes Labor-Management Reporting & Disclosure Act (Landrum-Griffin) requiring unions to report finances to government, regulating union internal affairs and providing Bill of Rights for union members.
Half a million Steelworkers strike for 116 days against U.S. Steel ends in victory for union against take-backs from management.
- 1960 New York teachers win collective bargaining and a contract.
- 1961 Presidential Executive Order gives federal employees right to bargain.

- Upsurge in public employee organizing throughout 1960s.
- 1962 Equal Pay Act passed.
Negro American Labor Council and other civil rights groups organize March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.
- 1964 Title VII of the Civil Rights Act bars discrimination in employment because of race, color, religion, sex or national origin (age and disability later added).
- 1968 Martin Luther King assassinated while supporting Memphis sanitation workers who were striking for union recognition against a racist city administration. They and their union, the American Federation of State, County, & Municipal Employees win.
- 1969 Department of Labor drive to open construction jobs to minorities begins in Philadelphia.
- 1970 Congress passes Occupational Safety & Health Act.
200,000 Postal Workers conduct wildcat strike in at least 200 cities which lasts two weeks. Congress passes Postal Reorganization Act giving them rights under the NLRA.
- 1973 The United Steelworkers sign Experimental Negotiating Agreement replacing the right to strike with binding arbitration of issues not resolved in negotiations. It is abandoned in subsequent contracts.
- 1974 Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) founded in Chicago.
Congress passes Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) regulating all private pension plans.
AFL-CIO creates a public employee department in recognition of growth of public employee unionism.
- 1975 Union supported labor law reform legislation defeated in Congress.
80,000 Pennsylvania public employees conduct the first large, legal strike of state workers.
- 1980 The AFL-CIO appoints the first woman, Joyce Miller, of the ILGWU, to its Executive Council
- 1981 President Reagan fires 11,000 air traffic controllers and decertifies their union, PATCO, during an illegal strike. This unleashes over a decade of union busting.
Half a million trade unionists and supporters rally in Washington for Solidarity Day against Reagan's economic policies. It's the largest labor rally in history.
- 1982 Frank Lorenzo declares bankruptcy at Continental Airlines and voids union contract.
Phelps Dodge Strike in Arizona breaks pattern bargaining in copper industry.
- 1984 AFL-CIO publishes report The Changing Situation of Workers & Their Unions.

- 1985 United Food & Commercial Workers Local P-9 strikes Hormel in Austin Minnesota defying union's policy of accepting concessions in meat packing industry. They lose.
- 1989 United Mineworkers win 11 month strike against Pittston Coal Company. Main issue is health benefits for retirees.
- Eastern Airlines employees strike against union busting and demands for massive concessions by CEO Frank Lorenzo. Eastern goes bankrupt, shuts down.
- Greyhound strike against concessions. Strikers replaced.
- First Workers Memorial Day.
- 1990 Solidarity Day 2 brings thousands to Washington to protest wave of union busting.
- Labor Party Advocates founded and a few years later forms new Labor Party.
- 1992 Justice for Janitors organizes thousands of low-paid, immigrant service workers in LA and other cities. This is one of many innovative, community-based organizing strategies.
- The Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA) is created as a constituency group within the AFL-CIO.
- 1993 Congress passes Family & Medical Leave Act and Americans with Disabilities Act protecting the rights of new parents and seriously ill workers to leave without losing their jobs and the rights of the permanently disabled to accommodation in the workplace.
- Workers at A.E. Staley locked out after they conduct an in-plant campaign against deadly working conditions and company demands for 12-hour shifts. Union solidarity campaign reaches entire country.
- Caterpillar and Bridgestone Firestone in 1992 and 94 provoked strikes after demanding concessions. The Staley, Cat and Firestone disputes lasted years and ended in victory for the companies clearly symbolizing the end of the post-war era in which a labor-management truce provided for steadily improving wages and working conditions for U.S. workers. The new era of globalization meant a return to much more conflict in labor relations reminiscent of previous eras.
- Labor mobilizes strongest political campaign in years against North American Free Trade Agreement.
- 1995 Lane Kirkland announces retirement as AFL-CIO President. First contested election in decades in which John Sweeney wins on New Voice platform and first woman and Hispanic, Linda Chavez Thompson becomes Vice-President.
- Detroit Newspaper Strike against two of largest newspaper chains in nation: Gannet & Knight Ridder drags on to 1999 and ends in stalemate.
- United Farm Workers, with help of AFL-CIO, launch nation-wide campaign to organize strawberry workers which fails despite efforts to win over

consumers.

- 1997 The AFL-CIO defeats legislation giving the president the ability to "Fast Track" trade legislation without assured protection of workers' rights and the environment.
Pride at Work, a national coalition of lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender workers and their supporters, becomes an AFL-CIO constituency group.
In a big win for their members and all of organized labor, the Teamsters reach a new five-year agreement with United Parcel Service (UPS) on Aug. 18, ending a two-week strike over abuse of part-time workers and health care for retirees.
- 1999 More than 75,000 human service workers are unionized in Los Angeles County 30,000 to 50,000 working family activists take to Seattle streets to tell the World Trade Organization and its allies, "If the Global Economy Doesn't Work for Working Families, It Doesn't Work."
5,000 North Carolina textile workers gain a union after a 25-year struggle.
65,000 Puerto Rico public-sector workers join unions.
- 2001 April 5, 10,000 Public school teachers and 3000 state university faculty in Hawaii shut down all public education in the State in the nation's first state-wide education strike.
- 2004 70,000 Southern California grocery workers strike Safeway to protect their health benefits and stop imposition of a vicious two-tier wage system.
- 2005 Seven major national unions, representing six million workers, disaffiliate from the AFL-CIO and, in September and form a new labor coalition called "Change to Win."