

1930-1939

Overview

The Great depression brought unprecedented economic devastation to working people. At its peak between 13 and 15 million people were out of work. Nearly half of the country's banks failed, wiping out the life savings of thousands of families. This period also saw unprecedented organizing by workers, ushering a new era of union activity. It also saw a wave of new government programs in response to the crisis, from the establishment of Social Security to unemployment insurance and the right to organize.

Labor Related Issues of the Period

- The Great Depression was devastating to the common working man but saw dramatic growth in the labor movement.
- Use of the sitdown strike strategy brings recognition of unions in several large industries including the auto industry.
- Many of the labor movement's battles were fought and decided in the courts.
- Conditions in the South caused a massive migration of the region's Blacks to northern cities.

Labor Related Events of the Period

- 1929 The stock market crash in October began the longest economic downturn period in American history.
- 1930 The Supreme Court upheld the Railway Labor Act's prohibition of employer interference or coercion in the choice of bargaining representative (Texas & N.O.R. Co. v. Brotherhood of Railway Clerks).
- 1931 In the Davis-Bacon Act, Congress provided for the payment of the prevailing wages to employees of contractors and subcontractors on public construction.
- 1932 The Anti-Injunction Act prohibited Federal injunctions in most labor disputes. Wisconsin created the first unemployment insurance act in the United States.
- 1933 Francis Perkins becomes the Secretary of Labor and the first woman named to a Cabinet position.
The Wagner-Peyser Act created the United States Employment Service within the Dept. of Labor.
- 1934 500,000 Southern millworkers walked off the job in the Great Uprising of '34.
The first National Labor Legislation Conference was called by the Secretary of Labor to obtain closer Federal-State cooperation in working out a sound national labor legislation program.

The US joined the International Labour Organization.

- 1935 The Wagner Act (National Labor Relations Act) establishes the first national labor policy of protecting the right of workers to organize and to elect their representatives for collective bargaining.
The Guffey Act passed to stabilize the coal industry and to improve labor conditions. Later declared unconstitutional (1936).
Social Security Act approved.
Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) formed within the AFL to foster industrial unionism.
- 1936 The United Rubber Workers (CIO), in the first large sit-down strike, won recognition at Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co.
In Flint, Michigan, United Auto Workers make effective use of the sit-down strike in a General Motors plant.
The Anti-Strikebreaker Act (Byrnes Act) declared it unlawful to transport or aid strikebreakers in interstate or foreign trade.
The Public Contracts Act (Walsh-Healey Act) established labor standards, including minimum wages, overtime pay, child and convict labor provisions, and safety standards on all federal contracts.
- 1937 General Motors agreed to recognize the United Auto Workers (CIO) as the bargaining agents for auto workers and not discriminate against union members following a year of sit-down strikes.
US Steel recognizes the Steel Workers Organizing Committee as the official bargaining agent of the steel workers. Workers also earn a 10% wage increase and an 8 hour day/40 hour week.
The Wagner Act (National Labor Relations Act) was declared Constitutional by the Supreme Court (NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corp.).
In south Chicago, 10 people were killed and 80 wounded in the Memorial Day Massacre during the "Little Steel" strikes. Police attacked an unarmed crowd of men and women who were supporting the strike between the Steel Workers Organizing Committee and Republic Steel.
The 5 week strike "Little Steel" strike was broken when Inland Steel employees went back to work without union recognition or other gains.
The CIO is expelled from the AFL over charges of dual unionism or competition.
The National Apprenticeship Act passed which established the Bureau of Apprenticeship within the Dept. of Labor.
- 1938 A Federal Maritime Labor Board is created by the Merchant Marine Act.
The Fair Labor Standards Act created a \$.25 minimum wage and time and a half for hours over 40 per week.
The CIO becomes the Congress of Industrial Organizations with John L. Lewis as its president.

Important Concepts.

collective bargaining, Fair Labor Standards Act, Memorial Day Massacre, overtime pay, sit-down strike, Social Security Act, Wagner Act