

1946-1990

Overview

The post-war period was an economic boom time for the United States. The nation was transformed with the development of the highway system and the growth of the suburbs. It was also changed as many industries moved from the longtime strongholds of the North and the Midwest to the South and the West. This was also the era of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, which drove US policy and conflicts globally and led to a second Red Scare domestically. The post-war period is perhaps most significant as an era of dramatic social change. African Americans organized for equality. The women's rights, environmental, and student movements also transformed the nation. But there was a backlash against these movements that ushered in a new era of political conservatism. Working people and unions saw their post-war gains begin to erode. The century closed with an increasingly globalized economy and growth of a service sector jobs at home.

Labor Related Issues of the Period

- Though the timeline below does not show it, a growing trend developed and continues for the unification of unions in related occupations. In the 1990s, unions with no apparent connection are merging to form large associations. This mirrors the trends in business consolidations for reasons of economy of resources.
- A shift of industry from strong union states in the North and the Midwest to the South and the West foreshadows a decline in overall union membership nation wide.

Labor Related Events of the Period

1946 Largest strike wave in history as pent up labor troubles are unleashed by the end of war-time controls.

1947 Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act which restricts union activities and permits the states to pass "right-to-work" laws.
The Norris-La Guardia Act prohibition against injunctions in labor disputes was held to be inapplicable to the Government in U.S. v. John L. Lewis.

1948 General Motors and the United Auto Workers signed the first major contract with an escalator clause, providing for wage increases based on the Consumer Price Index. In Washington D.C., the Federal Government's first national conference on industrial safety met.

1949 An amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 directly prohibited child labor for the first time.
The CIO anti-Communist drive led to the expulsion of two unions at its annual convention. Nine other unions expelled by mid-1950.
Free, democratic trade unions from various countries withdrew from the World Federation of Trade Unions which came to be dominated by communists. The

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions formed in London by labor representatives of 51 countries.

- 1950 A five year contract between the United Auto Workers (UAW) and General Motors granted pensions, automatic cost of living wage adjustments and a modified union shop.
- 1951 An amendment to the Taft-Hartly Act permitted the negotiation of union shop agreements without previous polls of employees.
- 1952 President Truman seized the steel industry when companies reject the Wage Stabilization Board's recommendations. An 8 week strike followed when the Supreme Court found the president's action unconstitutional.
George Meany became president of the AFL following the death of William Green. Walter Ruether, former UAW president, became president of the CIO following the death of Philip Murray.
- 1955 Ford Motor Company and the UAW agreed to a supplementary unemployment compensation plan financed by company contributions.
The AFL and CIO reunited with George Meany as the first president. This brought together about 85% of all union members under one large union.
- 1957 AFL-CIO expelled Bakery Workers, Laundry Workers and Teamsters for corruption.
- 1959 The Landrum-Griffen Act (Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act) passed by Congress which regulates the internal affairs of unions in order to lessen corruption.
- 1962 Federal employee's unions given the right to bargain collectively with government agencies as a result of President Kennedy's executive order.
- 1963 The Equal Pay Act prohibited wage differences for workers based on sex.
- 1964 The Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination in employment based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin.
- 1966 Coalition bargaining occurred in negotiations between eleven unions and General Electric.
- 1968 The Age Discrimination in Employment Act went into effect. It made it illegal to discriminate in hiring or firing person between 40-65 on the basis of age.
The UAW left the AFL-CIO and joined the Teamsters in forming the Alliance for Labor Action (ALA).
- 1969 The Department of Labor started to actively promote minority placement in the Philadelphia construction industry.

- 1970 First mass postal strike in the history of the US Postal Service.
Hawaii became the first state to allow its state and local officials the right to strike.
Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA).
- 1973 The major steel companies and the United Steelworkers of America approved an "Experimental Negotiation Agreement" where the union gave up the right to strike in favor of binding arbitration. The companies agreed to end stockpiling of products.
Washington became the first state to allow the union shop for civil service employees.
- 1974 Coalition of Labor Union Women formed in Chicago.
Pension funds to be regulated by Congress under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act.
In response to the growth of public employee unionism, the AFL-CIO created a public employee department.
- 1975 80,000 members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) went on strike in the first legal large scale strike of public employees.
- 1977 President and the Congress raised minimum wage to \$2.65.
- 1980 The first woman was appointed to the AFL-CIO executive board, Joyce Miller.
- 1981 Most of the nation's air traffic controllers fired by President Reagan who then decertified their union in response to an illegal strike.
- 1990 Population of the US: 248,709,873.

Important Concepts

binding arbitration, coalition bargaining, consumer price index, Equal Pay Act, escalator clause, Landrum-Griffen Act, right-to-work laws, supplementary unemployment compensation, union shop