Origins of Today's Union Movement

Pullman Strike began on May 11, 1894.

1866   National Labor Union founded
1867   Congress begins reconstruction policy in former slave states
1869   Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor and Colored National Labor Union formed
1870   15th Amendment to the Constitution adopted; states the right to vote may not be abrogated by color
1877   National uprising of railroad workers Ten Irish coal miners ("Molly Maguires") hanged in Pennsylvania; nine more subsequently were hanged
1881   Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions formed
1882   First Labor Day parade in New York City
1885   Successful strike by Knights of Labor on the Southwest (or Gould) System: the Missouri Pacific; the Missouri, Kansas and Texas; and the Wabash
1886   American Federation of Labor founded
1887   Seven "anarchists" charged with the bombing in Chicago's Haymarket Square and sentenced to death
1890   Carpenters President P.J. McGuire and the union strike and win the eight-hour day for some 28,000 members
1892   Iron and steel workers union defeated in lockout at Homestead, Pa. Integreated general strike in New Orleans succeeds
1894   Boycott of Pullman sleeping cars leads to general strike on railroads
1898   Erdman Act prohibits discrimination against railroad workers because of union membership and provides for mediation of railway labor disputes
The Progressive Era

AFL President Samuel Gompers (front, center) helped launch the International Labor Organization.

1900  AFL and National Civic Federation promote trade agreements with employers
      U.S. Industrial Commission declares trade unions good for democracy.
1902  Anthracite strike arbitrated after President Theodore Roosevelt intervenes
1903  Women’s Trade Union League formed at AFL convention
1905  Industrial Workers of the World founded
1908  AFL endorses Democrat William Jennings Bryan for President
1909  “Uprising of the 20,000” female shirtwaist makers in New York strike against
      sweatshop conditions Unorganized immigrant steel workers strike in McKees Rocks, Pa.
      And win all demand
1911  Triangle Shirtwaist factory in fire in New York kills nearly 150 workers
1912  Bread and Roses strike begun by immigrant women in Lawrence, Mass., ended
      with 23,000 men and women and children on strike and with as many as 20,000 on the
      picket line Bill creating Department of Labor passes at the end of congressional session
1913  Woodrow Wilson takes office as president and appoints the first secretary of
      labor, William B. Wilson of the Mine Workers
1914  Ludlow Massacre of 13 women and children and seven men in Colorado coal
      miners’ strike
1917  United States enters World War I
1918  Leadership of Industrial Workers of the World sentenced to federal prison
      oncharges of disloyalty to the United States
1919  One of every five workers walked out in great strike wave, including national
      clothing coal and steel strikes; a general strike in Seattle; and a police strike in Boston
      International Labor Organization founded in France
Repression and the Depression

Women won the right to vote in 1920.

1920 19th Amendment to the Constitution gives women the right to vote
1924 Samuel Gompers dies; William Green becomes new AFL president
1925 A. Philip Randolph helps create the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters
1926 Railway Labor Act sets up procedures to settle railway labor disputes and forbids discrimination against union members
1929 Stock market crashes as stocks fall 40 percent; Great Depression begins
1931 Davis-Bacon Act provides for prevailing wages on publicly funded construction projects
1932 Norris-LaGuardia Act prohibits federal injunctions in most labor disputes
1933 President Franklin Roosevelt proposes New Deal programs to Congress

Democratizing America

The National Labor Relations Act, signed by President Roosevelt in 1935, protected the right of American workers to organize and bargain collectively.
1934  Upsurge in strikes, including national textile strike, which fails
1935  National Labor Relations Act and Social Security Act passed Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) formed within AFL
1936  AFL and CIO create labor's Non-Partisan League and help President Roosevelt win re-election to a second term
1937  Auto Workers win sit-down strike against General Motors in Flint, Mich. Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters wins contract with Pullman Co.
1938  Fair Labor Standards Act establishes first minimum wage and 40-hour week Congress of Industrial Organizations forms as an independent federation
1940  John L. Lewis resigns and Philip Murray becomes CIO president
1941  A. Philip Randolph threatens march on Washington to protest racial discrimination in defense jobs
1941  U.S. troops enter combat in World War II National War Labor Board created with union members
1943  CIO forms first political action committee to get out the union vote for President Roosevelt

The Fight for Economic and Social Justice

The 1955 merger of the AFL under President George Meany and the CIO, headed by Walter Reuther, strengthened the efforts of union members to win living wages for all American workers.

1946  Largest strike wave in U.S. history
1947  Taft-Hartley Act restricts union members' activities
1949  First two of 11 unions with Communist leaders are purged from CIO
1952  William Green and Philip Murray die; George Meany and Walter Reuther become presidents of AFL and CIO, respectively
1955  AFL and CIO merge; George Meany becomes president
1957  AFL-CIO expels two affiliates for corruption
1959  Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (Landrum-Griffin) passed
1962  President John Kennedy's order gives federal workers the right to bargain
1963  March on Washington for jobs and Justice Equal Pay Act bans wage discrimination based on gender
1964  Civil Rights Act bans institutional forms of racial discrimination
1965  AFL-CIO forms A. Philip Randolph Institute César Chávez forms AFL-CIO United Farm Workers Organizing Committee
1968  Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated in Memphis, Tenn., during sanitation workers' strike

**Progress and new challenges**

*Thousands of Americans were out of work in the 1970s, as industries increasingly shifted production to low-wage countries.*

1970  Occupational Safety and Health Act passed
1972  Coalition of Black Trade Unionists formed
1973  Labor Council for Latin American Advancement founded
1974  Coalition of Labor Union Women founded
1979  Lane Kirkland elected president of AFL-CIO
1981  President Reagan breaks air traffic controllers’s strike AFL-CIO rallies 400,000 in Washington on Solidarity Day
1989  Organizing Institute created
1990  United Mine Workers of America win strike against Pittston Coal United Steelworkers of America labor Alliance created within the AFL-CIO
1992  Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance created within AFL-CIO
1995  Thomas Donahue replaces Lane Kirkland as interim had of AFL-CIO (BULLEG) John Sweeney president of AFL-CIO
1997  AFL-CIO defeats legislation giving the president the ability to “Fast Track’ trade legislation without assured protection of workers’ rights and the environment
1997  Pride at Work, a national coalition of lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender workers and their supporters, becomes an AFL-CIO constituency group AFL-CIO membership renewed growth
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 Broad Campaign for Global Fairness pushes for economic and social justice worldwide Union movement organizes biggest program of grassroots electoral politics ever