

AFL and CIO merge - (1955)

The American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations were once two separate groups with very different ideologies about how to spread the Labor Movement and promote workers' rights. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) was founded by famed labor leader Samuel Gompers in 1886 and quickly became the largest and most influential labor organization in the country. The AFL became so prominent because it was different from other labor groups that had existed in the past. The AFL did not oppose capital. Instead of fighting capital at every turn, the AFL realized that "engaging capital" for the purpose of creating more jobs is a better approach. This strategy worked for the labor community until the Great Depression struck. In the wake of the worst Depression in United States history, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) formed in 1935 as a more radical labor group than the AFL.

The AFL and the CIO were rivals for the twenty year period when they existed separately as two organizations that "vied for supremacy over the labor movement." In staunch opposition to the AFL, "the CIO founded the State, County and Municipal Workers of American (SCMWA) to oppose the AFL's American Federal State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)" in 1937. This split between the AFL and the CIO became a crippling force in a movement that is only strong with solidarity, a fact which was not lost on either organization. By the 1950's the groups realized that they would be much stronger and more effective as a single organization. In 1955 the two groups merged and became known as the AFL-CIO, the same organization which continues their struggle today. George Meany was unanimously elected as the first leader of the AFL-CIO, and in 1958 Massachusetts became the final state federation to merge.