THE HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

SUMMARY

The following constitutes a chronology of key dates in the history of the American labor movement.

Late eighteenth century: The first trade unions, individually encompassing printers, carpenters, tailors and artisans of similar skill levels, are established.

1819: A major nationwide depression occurs and all but wipes out these early unions.

1822–1850: With the return of a healthy economy, skilled workers in the trades previously organized once again turn to union activity. But economic hard times from 1837 to 1850 cause unionism to vanish almost completely once again.

1850–1865: With the return of prosperity, unions are again a force to be reckoned with and now the nationwide scope of many labor markets gives them more incentive to try to standardize conditions. The first nationals are now formed and by the end of the Civil War in 1865 there is a post-1836 high of over 200,000 unionists—still virtually all skilled workers.

1873–1878: A new period of deep depression takes place and once again it (combined with aggressive employer onslaughts on labor) severely crimps unionism, but this time 50,000 unionists survive the bad years.

1885: The Knights of Labor, American labor’s most notable attempt to form a single, large “general” union wins a major strike against the Wabash Railroad and its growth then becomes spectacular, to 700,000 members one year later (from 70,000 in 1884). But a lack of leadership and other factors send it into a permanent decline by the late 1880s.

1886: The American Federation of Labor (actually established in 1881) is officially founded and the pragmatic master plan of its first leaders (most notably, its first president Samuel Gompers) proves to be so successful that its basic tenets, stressing the needs of skilled workers, remain unchallenged by the labor mainstream for the next five decades.

1929: The most severe business downturn in the nation’s history begins. By 1933, a staggering 24.9 percent of the civilian labor force is unemployed and a newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt and a “New Deal” Congress have squarely supported collective bargaining, marking a drastic change in public policy.

1935: The Wagner Act, restricting management’s labor relations conduct and establishing the National Labor Relations Board to determine appropriate bargaining units and conduct representation elections, is enacted.

John L. Lewis, unable to get his AFL colleagues to admit the new fast-growing mass production sector industrial unionists, forms the Committee for Industrial Organization (known after 1938 as the Congress of Industrial Organizations). This AFL offshoot, its national member unions now expelled by the AFL, claims almost 4 million recruits by 1937.

Late 1941: Total union membership now stands at 10.2 million compared with less than 3 million only nine years earlier. Much of the growth is due to newly aggressive AFL efforts, inspired by the CIO’s challenge, to emulate the CIO and recruit industrial workers.

1947: The Taft-Hartley Act, far less friendly to labor than the Wagner Act and due in large part to labor’s fall from public favor (because of its occasional strikes during World War II in the 1941-1945 period and especially to its huge wave of postwar strikes) is enacted.

1955: AFL and CIO leaders, culminating two years of intensive negotiations, merge into the AFL-CIO. The new constitution respects the “integrity of each affiliate,” including both its “organizing jurisdiction” and its “established collective bargaining relationships.”

1957: The AFL-CIO expels the International Brotherhood of Teamsters for “corrupt influences.”

1959: The Landrum-Griffin Act further restricts labor’s freedom of action, especially in the conduct of internal affairs.

2005: The original 15 million membership total of the AFL-CIO in 1955 is down to 13 million and unions now represent just 12.5 percent of the labor force, down from 35 percent in the later 1950s.

New AFL-CIO leadership under John J. Sweeney, who is elected federation president in late 1995 in the face of general union unhappiness with labor’s stagnation since the merger, starts to achieve some favorable results. New union members are recruited and there is for a time a marked increase in labor’s political influence as well.

But the returns for the first years of the 21st century in both of these areas are not as encouraging as in the early Sweeney years, and in 2005 three of the federation’s four largest unions sever their ties to the federation. With four other unions they announce the formation of a new coalition—“Change to Win”—designed to reverse labor’s now-resumed membership slide by pouring massive amounts of resources into heightened organizing attempts.

By late 2008, it is still too early to tell whether or not the new organization will have any lasting consequences in the membership recruitment sphere – or, indeed, in the political arena. The returns are both tentative and mixed.

The chapter ends with “Some Concluding Thoughts,” a segment that above all argues that the current reports of unionism’s impending doom may be greatly exaggerated: Organized labor has confronted conditions at least as bleak as those surrounding it today many times in its long history and has always proved equal to the challenge. It would appear that to many workers, from the early nineteenth century to the present, there really has been no acceptable substitute for collective bargaining as a means of maintaining and improving employment conditions.

# True/False # 1

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| 1. | The first genuine labor unions in America date from the closing years of the eighteenth century. | T |
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| 2. | Shakespeare said that “what is past is prologue.” | T |
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| 3. | The “Cordwainer doctrine” removed unions from the anti-trust laws. | F |
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| 4. | *Commonwealth* v. *Hunt* was a decision within the jurisdiction of the state of Pennsylvania. | F |
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| 5. | A major nationwide depression occurred in 1830. | F |
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| 6. | By the mid-1830s, unions had been formed among the stonecutters, hatters, and printers. | T |
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| 7. | George Henry Evans preached the virtues of socialistic agricultural communities. | F |
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| 8. | The advent of the Civil War brought a new spurt in union membership. | T |
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| 9. | Abraham Lincoln said that “labor and capital are co-equals in free enterprise and warrant the same consideration.” | F |
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| 10. | At the end of the Civil War, almost 8 percent of the U.S. labor force was unionized. | F |
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| 11. | There were only 50,000 union members in the United States in 1878. | T |
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| 12. | The Molly Maguires were primarily printers and builders. | F |
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| 13. | The labor injunction was first applied by the courts during a railway strike in the 1870s. | T |
| 14. | The Knights of Labor specifically banned totally unskilled workers from membership. | F |
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| 15. | The Knights of Labor scored a major 1885 strike victory against the Burlington and Northern Railroad. | F |
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| 16. | Terrence V. Powderly was a strong advocate of the strike weapon. | F |
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| 17. | The immediate predecessor of the AFL was FOTLU. | T |
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| 18. | Samuel Gompers was unanimously elected as the AFL’s first president. | T |
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| 19. | Samuel Gompers was president of the AFL for 37 years. | T |
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| 20. | In both the Homestead and Pullman strikes, the unions involved suffered crushing defeats. | T |
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| 21. | President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard University was an enthusiastic supporter of unionism. | F |
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| 22. | Under a yellow dog contract, employees would promise in writing never to attempt to break a strike. | F |
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| 23. | The Owen-Keating Act dealt with child labor abusers. | T |
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| 24. | Samuel Gompers’ successor as AFL president was William Green. | T |
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| 25. | The Norris-LaGuardia Act marked a drastic change in public policy toward unions. | T |
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| 26. | The National Industrial Recovery Act was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1938. | F |
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| 27. | “Federal locals” are locals that are directly affiliated with the AFL rather than with an established national union. | T |
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| 28. | William L. Hutcheson was president of the Clothing Workers. | F |
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| 29. | By late 1941, there were over 10 million United States union members. | T |
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| 30. | The Taft-Hartley Act was passed over the veto of Franklin D. Roosevelt. | F |
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| 31. | Walter Reuther succeeded Philip Murray as CIO president. | T |
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| 32. | The AFL-CIO expelled the Teamsters in the late 1950s for alleged domination by Communists. | F |
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| 33. | Of the original 15-million membership total for the AFL-CIO, two-thirds was provided by the AFL. | T |
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| 34. | The Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959 widened labor’s freedom of action. | F |
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| 35. | George Meany headed the AFL-CIO until 1998. | F |
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| 36. | George Meany was strongly opposed to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. | F |
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| 37. | George Meany staunchly backed U.S foreign policy during the Vietnamese War. | T |
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| 38. | Andy Stern was Samuel Gompers’ successor as head of the AFL-CIO. | F |
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| 39. | Lane Kirkland headed the AFL-CIO in the 1980s. | T |
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| 40. | John J. Sweeney was elected AFL-CIO president in late 2001. | F |
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| 41. | John J. Sweeney once headed the Service Employees Union. | T |
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| 42. | In 1995, blacks accounted for 15 percent of total union membership. | T |
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| 43. | In 1995, Hispanics accounted for 8 percent of total union membership. | T |
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| 44. | In the 1990s, women increased their percentage of union membership from  20 percent to 48 percent. | F |
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| 45. | In 1995, the AFL-CIO executive council expanded to 18 members, from 12. | F |
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| 46. | Henry Rodriguez was, in 1995, elected to the new post of AFL-CIO executive vice president. | F |
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| 47. | Between 1996 and 2002, the Service Employees Union grew by 60 percent. | T |
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| 48. | Overall the 2004 election results did not bring good news to the Democrats. | T |
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| 49. | Ben Bernanke was a former protégé of John Sweeney. | F |
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| 50. | “Change to Win” was formed in 2005. | T |

# True/False # 2

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| 1. | Santayana said that “history is a pack of tricks that we play on the dead.” | F |
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| 2. | Strikes and slowdowns in colonial America were, without exception, spontaneous and spur-of-the-moment efforts. | T |
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| 3. | Labor of all kinds was plentiful in Colonial America. | F |
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| 4. | Under closed-shop agreements, work is “closed” to union members. | F |
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| 5. | The *Commonwealth* v. *Hunt* decision was issued in 1842. | T |
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| 6. | A major nationwide depression occurred in 1819. | T |
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| 7. | The immigration of the 1840s greatly helped American unions to grow. | F |
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| 8. | By 1836, there were an estimated 300,000 unionized workers in the United States. | T |
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| 9. | “Associationists” tried to establish socialistic urban communities. | F |
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| 10. | The country’s oldest permanent national union is the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. | F |
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| 11. | The advent of the Civil War caused union membership to shrink significantly. | F |
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| 12. | The Molly Maguires was a secret society. | T |
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| 13. | The Molly Maguires specifically banned coal miners from membership. | F |
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| 14. | By 1900, the Knights of Labor had become virtually extinct. | T |
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| 15. | Most Knights of Labor members favored use of the strike weapon. | T |
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| 16. | The American Federation of Labor was officially founded in 1881. | F |
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| 17. | Samuel Gompers was a Jewish immigrant from Poland. | F |
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| 18. | Samuel Gompers was very much against the concept of “exclusive jurisdiction.” | F |
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| 19. | The political base of Samuel Gompers was the International Brotherhood of Millinery Workers. | F |
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| 20. | Union membership growth in the 1897–1904 period constituted a rate of expansion that has never been equaled since. | T |
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| 21. | The “American Plan” was a pro-union project. | F |
| 22. | In 1933, union membership in the United States was slightly less than it had been in 1916. | F |
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| 23. | John L. Lewis was a major founder of the Committee for International Organization. | F |
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| 24. | “Sit-down” strikes are now illegal. | T |
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| 25. | Sam “Chowderhead” Cohen was a well-known labor organizer. | F |
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| 26. | The bipartite War Labor Board oversaw collective bargaining disputes during World War II. | F |
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| 27. | Strikes steadily decreased during World War II. | F |
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| 28. | *Featherbedding* involves the receipt of payment for unperformed work. | T |
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| 29. | The Taft-Hartley Act gave greater protection to both employers and individual employees. | T |
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| 30. | Immediately after World War II, eighteen AFL unions were believed to be dominated by Communists. | F |
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| 31. | Walter Reuther and George Meany both died suddenly and only eleven days apart. | F |
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| 32. | The AFL and CIO merged in 1955. | T |
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| 33. | The AFL-CIO constitution respected the “integrity of each affiliate.” | T |
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| 34. | Two years of intensive negotiations preceded the AFL-CIO merger. | T |
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| 35. | In the later 1950s, unions represented 35 percent of the nation’s labor force. | T |
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| 36. | The Teamsters were readmitted to the AFL-CIO in 1997. | F |
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| 37. | The Landrum-Griffin Act guarantees union members a “Bill of Rights” that employers cannot violate. | F |
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| 38. | Landrum-Griffin lays out specific ground rules for union elections. | T |
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| 39. | Landrum-Griffin was enacted in 1984. | F |
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| 40. | George Meany was once president of the Service Employees Union. | F |
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| 41. | George Meany was still AFL-CIO president at the age of 85. | T |
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| 42. | Jimmy Hoffa became AFL-CIO president when George Meany retired. | F |
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| 43. | Lane Kirkland played a key AFL-CIO role in toppling communist regimes in Eastern Europe. | T |
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| 44. | Lane Kirkland served eight two-year terms as head of the AFL-CIO. | T |
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| 45. | Thomas R. Donahue was a longtime AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer. | T |
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| 46. | Linda Chavez-Thompson became second-in-command of the AFL-CIO in 1995. | T |
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| 47. | John J. Sweeney once headed the American Federation of Teachers. | F |
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| 48. | U.S. union membership increased by over 600,000 in 2005. | F |
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| 49. | UNITE HERE represents both teachers and nurses. | F |
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| 50. | Andy Stern was the key person in the formation of the “Change to Win” coalition in 2005. | T |

Multiple Choice # 1

1. The “Cordwainer doctrine” was first modified by

a. the Clayton Act. c. *Emporium Capwell*.

\*b. *Commonwealth* v. *Hunt*. d. the Philadelphia Plan.

2. The nation’s oldest permanent national union is the

\*a. International Typographical Union. c. Molders Union.

b. Machinists Union. d. Cigar Makers Union.

3. Associationists were instrumental in the establishment of a number of

a. secret societies. c. farm worker union locals.

b.industrial relations centers. \*d. socialistic-agricultural communities

4. Terrence V. Powderly was president of the

\*a. Knights of Labor. c. UAW.

b. Teamsters. d. Molders.

5. Samuel Gompers was at one time a

a. National Founders’ Association leader.

b. Latino.

\*c. Marxian Socialist.

d. Prohibitionist.

6. The LaFollette Act of 1915 dealt with

a. child labor. c. injunctions.

b. female workers. \*d. merchant seamen.

7. In the 1920s, many companies introduced what became known as

\*a. welfare capitalism. c. candy nights.

b. closed shops. d. injunctions.

8. In the 1932 presidential election, the AFL

a. endorsed Franklin D. Roosevelt. \*c. endorsed neither candidate.

b. endorsed Herbert Hoover. d. asked its members not to vote at all.

9. John L. Lewis was president of the

a. Clothing Workers. \*c. Mine Workers.

b. Ladies’ Garment Workers. d. Carpenters.

10. The AFL executive council suspended the leaders of the CIO for practicing

\*a. dual unionism. c. Christian Science.

b. exclusive jurisdiction. d. trade assemblies.

11. John L. Lewis’ successor as CIO president was

a. Sidney Hillman. c. Earl Browder.

b. Walter Reuther. \*d. Philip Murray.

12. Slave labor act was an epithet hurled at the

a. Norris-LaGuardia Act. \*c. Taft-Hartley Act.

b. Wagner Act. d. Landrum-Griffin Act.

13. The Teamsters were expelled by the AFL-CIO in

a. the late 1940s. c. 1973.

\*b. the late 1950s. d. 1978.

14. A Bill of Rights for union members is included in the

\*a. Landrum-Griffin Act. c. Owen-Keating Act.

b. Erdman Act. d. Taft-Hartley Act.

15. In 1995, the black membership percentage in unions was

a. 2.1. c. 10.0.

b. 3.6. \*d. 15.0.

16. The most successful of all U.S. unions in organizing between 1980 and 1995 was the

a. carpenters. \*c. service employees.

b. nurses. d. teachers.

17. In 1995, John J. Sweeney and his supporters got the AFL-CIO to expand the executive council

a. from 10 to 15 members. c. from 20 to 26 members.

b. from 18 to 25 members. \*d. from 35 to 53 members.

18. In 1995 the AFL-CIO announced plans to create a new

a. political party. \*c. Women’s Department.

b. union of white collar workers. d. Gay Rights Department.

19. As a percentage of their budgets in recent decades most AFL-CIO member unions have spent on organizing

a. about 40 percent. c. over eighty percent.

b. about 50 percent. \*d. none of the above.

20. Nationally in the 2004 elections labor spent about

a. $25 million. c. $5 billion.

\*b. $150 million. d. $10 billion.

21. John J. Sweeney’s successor as Service Employees Union president was

\*a. Andy Stern. c. Harvey Weinstein.

b. Peter Arnett. d. Dennis Hastert.

22. In 2004 the AFL-CIO endorsed for president

a. Ralph Nader. \*c. John Kerry.

b. Al Gore. d. George W. Bush.

23. The statement “A good friend stabs you in the front” has been generally attributed to

a. Sirhan Sirhan. c. James P. Hoffa.

\*b. Oscar Wilde. d. John Wilkes Booth.

24. Change to Win’s first board chairperson was

a. Mario Batali. \*c. Anna Burger.

b. Asif Zardari. d. Henry Paulson.

25. Labor’s successes have always emanated from

a. a **one big union** concept.

\*b. a highly pragmatic **bread-and-butter** form.

c. wartime periods or the threat of war.

d. a concern for social reform on its part.

# Multiple Choice # 2

1. There were no genuine labor unions in the United States until

\*a. the late 18th century. c. the mid-19th century.

b. the early 19th century. d. the late 19th century.

2. Among the earliest trade unions was that of the

a. teachers. \*c. tailors.

b. military base workers. d. electricians.

3. *Commonwealth* v. *Hunt* was decided in

a. 1806. c. 1881.

\*b. 1842. d. 1886.

4. In the early 1800s, craftsmen were unionized in

a. Buffalo. c. Louisville.

b. Cincinnati. \*d. All of the above.

5. George Henry Evans preached the virtues of

a. producers’ cooperatives. \*c. land reform.

b. socialist agricultural communities. d. Marxism.

6. The American Federation of Labor was originally entitled the

a. Knights of Labor.

b. Mystic Knights of the Sea.

c. National Trades’ Union.

\*d. Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions.

7. The attitude of Samuel Gompers toward national union autonomy was

a. slightly negative. c. slightly positive.

b. strongly negative. \*d. strongly positive.

8. Under a “yellow-dog contract,” workers must promise in writing

\*a. never to engage in union activities.

b. to join the union within 30 days of their employment.

c. never to engage in political activities.

d. to join the union as a prerequisite to their being employed.

9. By 1917 some thirty states had introduced

a. antitrust laws for unions.

b. laws making the convict labor system illegal.

\*c. workmen’s compensation systems.

d. Right-to-Work laws.

10. The Norris-LaGuardia Act

\*a. carries a 1932 date.

b. bans company-dominated unions.

c. provides for secret-ballot union representation elections.

d. None of the above.

11. Between 1932 and 1941, United States union membership

a. almost doubled. c. more than quadrupled.

\*b. more than tripled. d. almost quintupled.

12. The War Labor Board was an institution of

a. World War I. c. the Korean War.

\*b. World War II. d. the Vietnamese War.

13. During World War II the Mine Workers

\*a. engaged in several strikes.

b. formed their own volunteer military contingent.

c. formed their own home guard.

d. honored their no-strike promise immaculately.

14. In 1940, John L. Lewis endorsed

a. Franklin D. Roosevelt. c. Philip Murray.

\*b. Wendell L. Willkie. d. Vaclav Havel.

15. Sidney Hillman was president of the

a. Automobile Workers. \*c. Clothing Workers.

b. Electrical Workers. d. Teamsters.

16. The Taft-Hartley Act

\*a. was passed over President Truman’s veto.

b. replaced the Wagner Act.

c. replaced the Landrum-Griffin Act.

d. resulted from intense labor union lobbying.

17. In 1949 and 1950, the CIO

a. gained about one million new members.

\*b. expelled most of its Communist unions.

c. was led by Owen Keating.

d. None of the above.

18. Specific ground rules for union elections are laid out by the

a. AFL-CIO. \*c. Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959.

b. Representation Act of 1947. d. Civil Rights Act of 1964.

19. Walter Reuther was to Philip Murray as George Meany was to

a. Elena Ceausescu. c. Terrence V. Powderly.

b. William Sylvis. \*d. William Green.

20. The Teamsters were allowed to rejoin the AFL-CIO in

a. 1967. c. 1984.

b. 1977. \*d. 1987.

21. Linda Chavez-Thompson was in 1995 elected

a. head of the Farm Workers.

b. head of the American Federation of School Administrators.

\*c. executive vice president of the AFL-CIO.

d. head of the National Labor Relations Board.

22. When the AFL-CIO executive council was expanded to 53 members, 10 of the 18 new slots were reserved for

a. gays. c. women.

b. military veterans. \*d. women and minorities.

23. John J. Sweeney once headed the

a. Flight Engineers. c. Mystic Knights of the Sea

b. Knights of Labor. \*d. None of the above.

24. Lane Kirkland once headed the

a. Teamsters. c. Automobile Workers.

\*b. AFL-CIO. d. None of the above.

25. The National Industrial Recovery Act was declared unconstitutional in the

\*a. 1930s. c. 1950s.

b. 1940s. d. 1960s.

# Essay Questions

1. “The total absence of labor unions in this country for well over a century was a complete fluke that defies any convincing explanation.” Discuss this statement.

2. “Almost from its inception, the American Federation of Labor was a highly realistic organization.” Comment fully.

3. Is it possible that the several powerful factors that combined to make the 1920s a decade of great failure for the labor movement will at some near-future date combine again to work against unionism? Specifically cite the factors in your answer.

4. What is meant by the statement that “with the (1955) act of merger, the open warfare that had first revitalized and then damaged the labor movement passed from the scene”?

5. “It has not been by sheer coincidence that all major periods of union growth, excepting only wartime ones, have been marked by widespread job insecurity.” Discuss, with specifics.

6. “The Knights of Labor simply had too many built-in weaknesses to be anything more than a very temporary success and its fate was really quite predictable.” Comment, with specifics.

7. “In the years of the Great Depression, the American Federation of Labor realized a significant resurgence in spite of itself.” Discuss.

8. Who, in your opinion, was the greatest labor leader in American history? Why?

9. “Labor’s membership stagnation in the last half-century can be explained by several formidable obstacles.” Discuss.

10. “Labor’s new leadership at least has the potential to turn union membership around, perhaps in a significant way.” Comment, with specifics.

# Term Paper Topics

1. The role of personality in American labor union history.

2. The role of violence in American labor union history.

3. The rise and fall of James R. Hoffa of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

4. An evaluation of organized labor’s relationship with the black community.

5. The female challenge to the Labor Establishment.

6. The earliest unions and their very limited successes: An attempt at an explanation.

7. Terrence V. Powderly: Why was this Knight different from all other Knights?

8. The 1935 AFL Atlantic City convention: A critical turning-point for American labor.

9. Samuel Gompers and John L. Lewis: A comparison of two labor giants.

10. The Teamsters and the AFL-CIO: Divorce and reconciliation.

11. The 1995 changing of the guard at the AFL-CIO.

12. The 2005 formation of the “Change to Win” Union Coalition, and its record to date.