

S0572 International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (1900-) Photograph Collection, 1930-1977 242 Images

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The International Ladies' Garment Workers Union was formed in New York City in 1900 in response to sweatshop conditions in the manufacture of ladies and children's clothing. By 1920 membership had reached 100, 000 members. The unemployment of the depression era cut back membership to 23, 000, but during the New Deal period of 1932-1934 it rose to 217, 000. In 1938 the ILGWU produced a musical on Broadway entitled Pins and Needles with a cast made entirely mad up of union members. It ran longer than any other show had previously. In 1995 the 150, 000 members ILGWU merged with the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) to Form the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Workers (UNITE).

The collection contains photographs of organizing meetings, members from the St. Louis area, work places, strikes, union meetings and shows including Pins and Needles. The photographs are entered into the Western Historical Manuscript Collection Photograph Database.

Key Events in the History of the ILGWU

1980s In response to a resurgence of exploitative sweatshop conditions, the union mobilizes to fight for tougher laws and stronger enforcement at the Federal level and in key states, including New York, California and New Jersey. In response to a resurgence of exploitative sweatshop conditions, the union mobilizes to fight for tougher laws and stronger enforcement at the Federal level and in key states, including New York, California and New Jersey.

1984 The ILGWU is instrumental in launching the Garment Industry Development Corporation, a unique labor-industry-government partnership that supports the New York City-based industry through training of workers and managers, technological, marketing and other innovative services to individual firms, and promotion of exports. **1987-1988** In historic agreements, ILGWU contracts covering 125,000 workers provide for six months parental leave by either parent following birth or adoption.

1986 Jay Mazur succeeds Sol C. Chaikin as President.

1985 The union helps form a national industry-labor coalition for a more equitable system of regulating apparel imports. A bill passes Congress in 1987, but it is vetoed by the President. A second bill passes in 1990 and also is vetoed.

1983 Union and industry join with the City of New York to establish the Garment Industry Day Care Center of Chinatown, the first public-private industry day care center in New York City.

1982 When employers try to undermine the union in New York City's Chinatown, the largely Chinese membership of ILGWU Local 23-25 rallies to the union, staging the largest demonstration of Chinese-Americans ever. The employers back down.

1975 Americans first see and hear, "Look for the Union Label," in new commercials, as the ILGWU educates consumers about the export of American jobs.

1975 President Stulberg is succeeded by Sol. C. Chaikin.

1966 After leading the union for more than half of its existence, David Dubinsky retires. He is succeeded by Louis Stulberg.

1963 Thousands of ILGWU members participate in the historic March on Washington for civil rights. A staunch fighter against racism, the union provides crucial organizational support to the civil rights movement through the 1960s.

1958 The largest strike in the union's history takes place when 100,000 workers in eight states are mobilized. The strike is settled with many victories including the adoption of a union label.

1953-1956 Over three years, the union wins a 35-hour work week in contracts covering 97 percent of its members.

1943-1944 ILGWU agreements provide for an employer-financed worker retirement fund and an employer-financed health insurance plan. In 1937 the union produces "Pins 'n' Needles," a musical by Harold Rome, with a cast made up 100 percent of LGWU members. In 1938, the show opens on Broadway. It runs longer than any previous show.

1932-1934 Helped by New Deal measures which protect workers' rights. President Dubinsky leads the union on a period of rapid renewal. Membership expands from 24,000 to 217,000 in just three years.

1932 David Dubinsky is elected President of the ILGWU.

1929-1931 The already crippled union is devastated by the unemployment of the Great Depression Membership shrinks to 24,000 in 1931. 1910-1920 The infant union wins organizing battles across the country and grows to a membership of 100,000, a huge number for that time.