

Topic Page: [International Ladies Garment Workers Union](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/international_ladies_garment_workers_union)

Summary Article: **International Ladies Garment Workers Union**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(ILGWU), former U.S. labor union, formed in 1900 by the amalgamation of seven local unions. At the turn of the century most of the workers in the garment industry were Jewish immigrants, whose attempts at organization were hampered by clashes between anarchists and socialists; this heritage of strife was carried over into the ILGWU, and in its early years many members were sympathetic to various radical movements. Despite these conflicts the union grew rapidly in its first years. However, the depression of 1903 and the open-shop campaign launched by the newly formed National Association of Manufacturers wiped out many hard-won gains.

By 1908 it appeared as if the union might be merged with the United Garment Workers, then the American Federation of Labor (AFL) union of men's tailors. At that point the union launched two spectacular and successful mass strikes (1909–11) in the garment district of New York City. As a result of the strikes, the dress manufacturers agreed to deal with the ILGWU and its affiliates. That settlement also embodied the famous Protocol of Peace, which was proposed by Louis D. Brandeis and was based on the concept of perpetual economic peace in the union. Although that concept was in sharp contrast to the radical trade-union philosophy then prevailing among garment workers, it served as a model of cooperation between labor and management.

The Communists' drive for control of the union during the 1920s was defeated by moderates under the leadership of David Dubinsky. Although the struggle seriously hurt the ILGWU, the union benefited from the labor policies of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and membership rose to 300,000 in 1942. In 1937 the ILGWU briefly joined the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO); it then temporarily became an independent union and finally rejoined the AFL in 1940. Under the presidency of Dubinsky, the ILGWU grew into one of the nation's most powerful and progressive unions, with a wide range of member benefits. The ILGWU gained the respect of the manufacturers by its willingness to assist employers in the industry with loans and technical assistance. Dubinsky retired in 1966. The following year a \$1 million Dubinsky Foundation was established, with the goal of making grants to causes and institutions in line with ILGWU objectives.

From 1968 to the early 1990s the union lost more than 300,000 workers as a result of low cost imports and the transfer of factories overseas. In 1995 the 125,000-member ILGWU merged with the 175,000-member Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union to form the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE). UNITE merged in 2004 with HERE (the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union) to Unite Here. Five years later union officials largely representing the former UNITE voted to secede from the larger group and, as Workers United, affiliate with the Service Employees International Union.

See Lorwin, L. L. , *The Women's Garment Workers* (1924);.

Stolberg, B. , *Tailor's Progress* (1944);.

Danish, M. D. , *The World of David Dubinsky* (1957);.

Tyler, G. , *Look for the Union Label* (1998).

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