Comment: Equality

1959 was a dynamic time in America. Alaska and Hawaii gained statehood, the Space Race was at its zenith, and the Guggenheim Museum opened to the public. The United States was on the cusp of what would later become the foundation for equal rights for all people.

In 1959 the state of Wisconsin would become one of the first in the nation to recognize public employee’s right to bargain collectively. This is rather ironic, considering Wisconsin would become one of the first states to strip public employees of that same right. Also in 1959 the Landrum-Griffen Act was passed which addressed the internal affairs of labor organizations, and the conduct of its officers.

In 1962 President Kennedy used an executive order to authorize federal employees to bargain collectively with government agencies.

In 1963, the Equal Pay Act was enacted to prohibit wage discrimination by employers. Also, in 1963 migrant farmworkers organized in Wisconsin.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 in conjunction with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 proved to be major accomplishments that addressed and shaped the civil rights movement.

The foundation for many of the advancements our nation has accomplished, can be traced back to these events and subsequent legislation. The Grape Boycott and accompanying 300-mile march on Sacramento, was one of the many non-violent displays of solidarity utilized by advocates for change. Union involvement to support and enable these changes has proved to be essential. As noted by the AFL-CIO, (1981) “The Civil Rights Act of 1964, strongly supported by the AFL-CIO, was a significant forward step toward equal rights for blacks and other minorities, at the workplace and in the community” (p. 20).

In closing, many of the social, political and economic freedoms we enjoy today, were fought for by others who valued these rights. Why are we, as a society, relinquishing many of the rights that have been fought for under the disguise of concessions?

References

AFL-CIO. (1998, March). A Short History of American Labor. Retrieved from <http://learning.nlc.edu/file.php/1001/week1/Short_History_Part_3.pdf>