

This Day in History... July 5, 1935

The National Labor Relations Act of 1935

On July 5, 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 into law. The basis of modern US labor law, it guarantees private sector employees the right to organize in trade unions, bargain collectively, and strike.

The Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression wreaked havoc on the American economy. Wages were cut, businesses closed, and by 1933, nearly 15 million Americans were unemployed. But newly elected President Franklin Roosevelt offered Americans his New Deal to help improve their lives and end the Depression.



Stamp issued for the 40th anniversary of Wagner Act.

Over the next few years, Roosevelt introduced a record number of bills aimed at stimulating the economy and helping American workers. While President Roosevelt's New Deal and Works Progress Administration (WPA) programs gave millions of Americans jobs, workplace safety became a growing concern. More people than ever before were working in factories, but many did not realize the dangers they faced without taking simple precautions.



Stamp issued for Labor Day and honored American workers.

One way to decrease injuries was the passage of the National Labor Relations Act (also known as the Wagner Act after Senator Robert F. Wagner). Officially called "An act to diminish the causes of labor disputes burdening or obstructing interstate and foreign commerce, to create a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and for other purposes, it was signed into law by President Roosevelt on July 5, 1935. The Wagner Act gave private sector employees the right to organize into trade unions, participate in collective bargaining, and strike, if necessary, to demand a safer workplace. The act also created the National Labor Relations Board, which is tasked with preventing unfair labor practices.



Issued to celebrate the American Labor movement and its founders.

Across the country, Safety Divisions were created and expanded. These agencies staged regular inspections to ensure safe conditions. They also offered training in workplace safety, first aid, and accident prevention. In one year alone, this training benefited 484 communities in 35 states, likely preventing thousands of injuries and saving lives. These efforts helped create a strong and competent American workforce, which would be vital to the war that soon followed.



Stamp features some of FDR's New Deal projects.

While the legislation did not apply to farm workers, other acts and organizations were later created to help them, namely the Farm Security Administration. Formed in 1937, the FSA offered education to struggling farm families to help them become self-sustaining. It also set up homestead communities, which taught farmers a better way to work.

These programs, as well as the institution of a federal minimum wage and 40-hour work week in 1938, were major steps in improving the lives of millions of Americans during and after the Depression. The Wagner Act was later amended by the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which established prohibitions on certain types of strikes.

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