

## Major Union Mergers, Alliances, and Disaffiliations, 1995-2007

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*U.S. labor unions have made moves toward maintaining their membership base through mergers that are still occurring, although at a slower pace than in past decades.*

Over the period from 1995 to 2007, union membership in the United States declined by about 4.2 percent, from approximately 16.4 million members to 15.7 million members.<sup>1</sup> During the same period, the level of employment rose by about 17 percent—from 117 million in 1995 to 138 million in 2007.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the percentage of U.S. workers represented by unions has declined, as well as the absolute number of union workers. These declines in membership have prompted union organizations to consider union mergers as a strategy for improving their bargaining power.<sup>3</sup> This article summarizes the union mergers, alliances, and disaffiliations that have occurred since 1995.<sup>4</sup>

### Types Of Mergers

Over the years, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) has encouraged and actively promoted mergers, stressing that mergers should involve unions representing workers in the same or related industries in order to build union power and conserve resources, while at the same time benefiting from the increased economy of scale.<sup>5</sup> For this article, union mergers are grouped into three types:

- Mergers occurring among unions already affiliated with the AFL-CIO
- An independent union merging with an AFL-CIO union, and
- Two or more independent unions merging

The AFL-CIO has also maintained that union mergers must be voluntary and subject to the democratic processes of the unions involved.

### Mergers

From 1995 to 2007, there were 31 union mergers in the United States.<sup>6</sup> Twenty-two of these mergers were among AFL-CIO affiliates, 6 occurred between the AFL-CIO and independent unions, and 3 mergers were among two or more independent unions. In terms of membership, the largest merger occurred in 2005, when the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International Union (PACE) merged with the United Steelworkers of America (USWA). The merger increased the size of the USWA to 860,000 members, making it the largest industrial union in the United States. In 2004, another merger of two major unions took place, uniting the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) and the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE), forming UNITE HERE, which has a combined membership of 440,000 workers. (See [exhibit](#).)

### Disaffiliations And Strategic Alliances

During the 1995-2007 period, there were nine major union disaffiliations (splits) from the AFL-CIO. The first major union disaffiliation occurred in 2001, when the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC) severed its relationship with the AFL-CIO. Then, in 2003, the International Union of Journeymen, Horseshoers, and Allied Trades disaffiliated with the AFL-CIO. In 2005, six of the largest unions joined with the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC) in disaffiliating with the AFL-CIO and created a strategic alliance called the Change to Win Federation.<sup>7</sup> The six disaffiliated unions were the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), the Laborers International Union (LIUNA), UNITE HERE, the United Farm Workers (UFW), and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). The

Change to Win Federation states that it is conducting campaigns to increase union membership in each of the affiliated unions core industries in order to rebuild worker power and unite millions in the growth industries of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>

In 2006, the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) disaffiliated from the AFL-CIO's Building and Construction Trades Department (BCTD) and joined with the following unions to form a strategic alliance called the National Construction Alliance (NCA)<sup>9</sup>: the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA), the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC), International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental, and Reinforcing Iron Workers (BSOIW), and the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC). The NCA represents more than 1.8 million union workers.

Another notable alliance that formed during the 1995-2007 period is the Merchant Officers Labor Alliance (MOLA), an agreement reached in 2007 between the International Organization of Masters, Mates, and Pilots and the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association (MEBA).<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in 2005, the Communication Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) formed a joint alliance of passenger service workers at U.S. Airways.

**Union Merger Activity, 1956-2007**

The table that follows summarizes the three types of mergers and their yearly distribution for the period from 1956--the year following the merger of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)--to 2007. The table shows that 48 mergers occurred during the two decades following the AFL-CIO amalgamation (1956-75), averaging about 2.4 a year. The next decade (1976-85) marked the busiest activity period with 45 mergers, or about 4.5 a year. Merger activity slowed down slightly from 1986 to 1994, with a total of 40 mergers or an average of 4.4 per year. During the most recent period (1995-2007), there were only 31 mergers or about 2.4 per year. In the recent period, the highest level of union merger activity occurred in 2003, when there were 6 mergers; the lowest number occurred in 1997, when there was 1 merger.

**Table. Union mergers, 1956–2007**

Year	Total mergers	AFL-CIO only	AFL-CIO and independent	Independent only
<b>Total: 1956-2007</b>	164	92	57	15
<b>2007</b>	2	0	2	0
<b>2006</b>	2	2	0	0
<b>2005</b>	2	2	0	0
<b>2004</b>	2	2	0	0
<b>2003</b>	6	3	0	3
<b>2002</b>	2	0	2	0
<b>2001</b>	2	1	1	0
<b>2000</b>	4	4	0	0
<b>1999</b>	2	2	0	0
<b>1998</b>	2	2	0	0
<b>1997</b>	1	1	0	0
<b>1996</b>	2	1	1	0
<b>1995</b>	2	2	0	0
<b>1994</b>	5	4	1	0
<b>1993</b>	7	2	3	2
<b>1992</b>	5	3	2	0
<b>1991</b>	5	2	3	0
<b>1990</b>	1	0	1	0
<b>1989</b>	5	4	1	0

Year	Total mergers	AFL-CIO only	AFL-CIO and independent	Independent only
1988	4	3	1	0
1987	3	1	2	0
1986	5	3	2	0
1985	6	2	3	1
1984	5	2	3	0
1983	5	2	3	0
1982	6	3	3	0
1981	3	2	1	0
1980	6	4	1	1
1979	5	3	2	0
1978	3	2	1	0
1977	3	2	0	1
1976	3	2	1	0
1975	3	1	1	1
1974	1	1	0	0
1973	2	1	1	0
1972	5	3	2	0
1971	3	2	1	0
1970	1	0	1	0
1969	6	2	4	0
1968	4	3	0	1
1967	1	0	1	0
1966	1	0	0	1
1965	1	1	0	0
1964	1	0	1	0
1963	0	0	0	0
1962	3	0	1	2
1961	3	2	1	0
1960	4	1	2	1
1959	3	2	1	0
1958	1	1	0	0
1957	2	1	0	1
1956	3	3	0	0

**Exhibit.** Chronology of major union mergers, 1995-2007

**1995**

The United Rubber Workers Union (URW) merged into the United Steelworkers of America (USWA). With the merger, the URW added approximately 94,000 members to the rolls of the USWA, bringing the total membership of the combined union to more than 700,000.

The International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union merged to become the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE).

**1996**

The Independent Federation of Flight Attendants representing 5,400 Trans World Airline attendants merged with the 40,000 member Association of Flight Attendants.

International Chemical Workers Union merged with The United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) bringing 40,000 members that became the International Chemical Workers Union Council of the UFCW.

**1997**

The Newspaper Guild merged with the Communication Workers of America (CWA).

**1998**

The United Paperworkers International Union (UPIU) merged with the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union. The new 330,000-member union is known as the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International Union (PACE). The United Representatives Guild, Inc., and the Production Service and Sales District Council both merged with the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW).

**1999**

The Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers Union merged with the American Federation of Grain Millers, becoming the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers Union (BCTGM).  
The 11,000-member Laundry and Dry Cleaning International Union affiliated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which has about 1.3 million members.

**2000**

The Textile Processors Union affiliated with the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW).  
The local unions representing 7,200 members of the Textile Processors merged with the Union of Needletrades Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE).  
The International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine and Furniture Workers (IUE) merged into the Communications Workers of America (CWA).  
The Chicago Truck Drivers Union, with 5,000 members, affiliated with International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT).

**2001**

The Independent Association of Continental Pilots merged with the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), with 7,000 Continental pilots joining 58,000 ALPA pilots.  
The United Transportation Union (UTU) merged with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE). The merged union was named the United Transportation Union-Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (UTU-BLE).

**2002**

The Independent FedEx Pilots Association, with 4,200 member pilots, merged with the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA). In 2002, prior to the merger, ALPA represented 69,200 pilots at 43 different airlines.  
The Independent Baton Rouge Oil and Chemical Workers Union (OCAW) merged into the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International Union (PACE).

**2003**

The American Flint Glass Workers, with 12,500 members, merged with the United Steelworkers of America (USWA).  
The 35,000-member United Service Workers (USW) disaffiliated from the Transportation Communications International Union and merged with the International Union of Journeymen Horseshoers and Allied Trades.  
The 10,000-member Independent National Public Employees Union (NPEU) also merged with the International Union of Journeymen Horseshoers and Allied Trades.  
The 10,000-member Independent National Organization of Industrial Trade Unions (NOITU) merged with the International Union of Journeymen Horseshoers and Allied Trades.  
The Association of Flight Attendants merged into the Communications Workers of America (CWA). The CWA previously had 700,000 members, and the AFA added another 33,881 members.  
The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) in the United States and Canada merged with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), bringing rail employees into the Teamsters for the first time.

**2004**

The Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) and the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE) merged to become UNITE HERE, a new union of 440,000 members.  
The Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees merged with International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT).

**2005**

The Graphic Communications International Union merged with International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT). The GCIU has 60,000 members in the United States.  
The United Steel Workers of America (USWA) and Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International Union (PACE) merged to create an 860,000-member union called USWA. The USWA is now the largest industrial union in the United States.

**2006**

The Professional Flight Attendants Association (PFAA) affiliated with the Transport Workers Union (TWU). At the time, PFAA represented 9,500 Northwest Airlines employees, and TWU represented 135,000 workers.

New York State United Teachers, a 525,000-member affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), merged with the National Educational Association/New York. The new combined union is known as New York State Teachers NEA/AFT, with 560,000 members.

**2007**

The Independent Steelworkers Union (ISU) merged with the United Steelworkers of America (USWA).

The International Organization of Masters, Mates and Pilots and the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association united to form the Merchant Officers Labor Alliance.

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**Notes**

1 See [Union Members in 2007](#), USDL 08-0092 (U.S. Department of Labor), January 25, 2008, on the Internet at [http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/union2\\_01252008.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/union2_01252008.pdf); and [Union Members in 1995](#), USDL 96-41, February 9, 1996, on the Internet at [http://www.bls.gov/news.release/History/union2\\_020996.txt](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/History/union2_020996.txt).

2 Employment data from the BLS [Current Employment Statistics \(CES\)](#) survey. For more information, visit the CES home page at <http://www.bls.gov/ces/>.

3 *A Plan to Help Workers Win: Uniting Our Power to Build a Stronger, Growing Labor Movement*, Resolution 1 (AFL-CIO Executive Council), p. 5; available on the Internet at: <http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheafcio/convention/2005/upload/res1.pdf> (visited April 15, 2008).

4 For more information on union mergers during the previous 10-year period, see Lisa Williamson, "[Union mergers: 1985-94 update](#)," *Monthly Labor Review*, February 1995, pp. 18-25; available on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1995/02/art2full.pdf>.

5 *A Plan to Help Workers Win: Uniting Our Power to Build a Stronger, Growing Labor Movement*, Resolution 1 (AFL-CIO Executive Council), p. 1.

6 *Daily Labor Report* archives, 1995-2007 (Bureau of National Affairs), on the Internet at <http://www.bna.com>. (visited March 18, 2008).

7 "Uniting for the American Dream," Resolution (Change to Win: The American Dream for Americas Workers), available on the Internet at [http://www.changetowin.org/fileadmin/pdf/convention-2007-resolution-american\\_dream.pdf](http://www.changetowin.org/fileadmin/pdf/convention-2007-resolution-american_dream.pdf) (visited August 12, 2008). For more information, visit the Change to Win website at <http://www.changetowin.org/>.

8 *Ibid.*, 2007.

9 For more information on the National Construction Alliance (NCA), visit the organizations website at <http://www.ncabuild.org/>.

10 More information on the formation of the Merchant Officers Labor Alliance can be found in the "Whats New?" section of the International Organization of Masters, Mates, and Pilots website, on the Internet at [www.bridgedeck.org](http://www.bridgedeck.org). A copy of the agreement between the Masters, Mates, and Pilots and the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association can be found at <http://www.bridgedeck.org/WhatsNew/MOLA.pdf>.