

TEACHER GUIDE

1944 DOC. #1: "Our Friend" Poster

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Labor unions were at the peak of their national power in the 1930s and 1940s. Unions had won the right to organize with Roosevelt's support and were important national institutions in the push for social reform. Roosevelt knew that the unions could help turn out the vote for him and he made a point of seeking their support. Unions and other organizations formed Political Action Committees or PACs to support particular candidates.

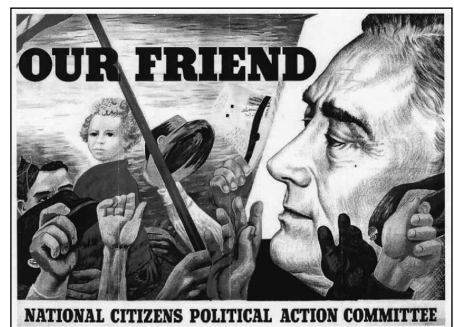
The National Citizens PAC of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, or CIO, was a branch of organized labor devoted to electing a progressive President and Congress in 1944. In particular they wanted to help elect Franklin Roosevelt to an unprecedented fourth term. The CIO contributed heavily to FDR's campaigns in 1940 and 1944. They also helped to distribute campaign literature for Roosevelt and worked on get-out-the-vote campaigns to help his reelection.

> **Project** the document.

This poster was published by the CIO's Political Action Committee in 1944. It was designed by their lead graphic artist Ben Shahn, a well-known painter, printmaker, and muralist, as well as a social activist.

QUESTION	Which candidate does the poster support? How do you know?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	The poster supports FDR.
EVIDENCE	his image on the right and the words "Our Friend"
QUESTION	Who are the target groups for this message? What is your evidence?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Workers are the main target group.
EVIDENCE	sponsorship by the CIO, a union organization
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Other target groups are young families and veterans.
EVIDENCE	the child being held in the arms of a young father wearing a military cap
SUGGESTED ANSWER	The poster also targets people who support racial equality.
EVIDENCE	the racially integrated crowd

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PowerPoint Slide

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Should an independent organization like a labor union or a corporation be allowed to give money to presidential campaigns? Why or why not?

Should political action committees (PACs) be banned?

How do candidates appeal to workers today?

ADDITIONAL INFO

The CIO had become a militant rival to the older and more traditional AFL (American Federation of Labor) in the 1930s. The CIO sought to organize all workers within an industry—such as autoworkers or steelworkers—as opposed to organizing by craft skills as had been common before. Because the CIO tried to organize unskilled and previously unorganized branches of the work force, it was more open to organizing women and African Americans than the AFL had been. In 1955, the two union organizations joined to form the AFL-CIO.

Ben Shahn was born in Lithuania in 1898 and emigrated to America at the age of five. In the 1920s, Shahn became a Social Realist, his art often referring to cases of social injustice. He created powerful works commenting on the execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti as well as the imprisonment of trade union leader, Tom Mooney. In the 1930s he joined the Public Works of Art Project, creating murals that dealt with issues such as anti-Semitism and poor working conditions. Shahn also worked as a photographer to publicize the conditions of the rural poor in America. The child in the “Our Friend” poster was modeled on his own son, Jonathan.

Political Action Committees have come under increasing criticism in recent elections, and have had their influence limited by campaign finance laws.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Family Man
“Hero”

Target Audience (soldiers,
workers of all races)