

JOHN DRISCOLL

"People do respond when you appeal to their belief in working for the common good, and believe that an injury to one is an injury to us all."

— John Driscoll

John Driscoll, the President of the Connecticut State Labor Council AFL-CIO from 1969 until his retirement in 1985, was a pivotal figure in union organization in the brass industry for nearly half a century.

He was born in Waterbury on December 11, 1911, attended local schools and graduated in 1929 from Crosby High School, where he was class president. He received a BA in philosophy from Wesleyan University in 1933, graduating Phi Beta Kappa. He earned his MA in English from Wesleyan in 1934, did graduate work at Brown University in 1934-1935 and attended Harvard Law School from 1935-1936.

In 1937, Driscoll went to work for 40 cents an hour at the Bristol Company in Waterbury and soon became involved in labor organization with Local 251 of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers of America. He served as Secretary of the Union until 1942 when he lost a bitterly contested election for the post of Union President. Becoming increasingly critical of the leadership's Communist ties, Driscoll helped to lead a secessionist movement in 1947 that created the Provisional Metalworkers Council. He was elected chairman and eventually led the group into the U.A.W. when he became an international representative.

In addition to being an enthusiastic representative for working men and women, Driscoll was an outspoken advocate for the rights of women and racial minorities. He was among those marching for civil rights at Selma, Alabama in 1965. Even in retirement, he crusaded for equitable coverage of labor unions in textbooks and assisted workers who lost their jobs due to plant closings.

He was a founder of the Connecticut State Labor Council CIO, which functions as the political arm of labor unions in Connecticut, and later was elected Secretary-Treasurer. With the merger of the AFL and CIO he became its first Executive Vice President and, in 1969, President. He was considered one of Connecticut's most influential citizens and was a familiar figure in the state capitol lobbying for favorable legislation. Frequently called "Mr. Labor", Driscoll contended that "the only power I have is the power of persuasion".

Among the many awards presented to John Driscoll was the Star of Solidarity given by the Italian Government in gratitude for his flood relief efforts, the Knights of St. Gregory award given by the Vatican, and in 1990, the State Register and Manual was dedicated to him as a "fighter, intellectual and activist, a man of principle and a man of heart." He died on July 21, 1994.

