

1877-1913

Overview

This period was an amazing time of growth in America. The population was growing at a staggering rate. In 1860 the US population was 31,443,321 and grew to 76,212,168 in 1900 and 92,228,496 in 1910. Railroads, the epitome of the industrialization, expanded from about 30,000 miles of track before the Civil War to nearly 270,000 miles in 1900. The industrial labor force nearly tripled between 1880 and 1910 to about 8 million. Large factories, which had existed only in the textile industry before the Civil War, increasingly became more common in a variety of industries. Labor was in high demand to run these new industries. Unfortunately, the continued high population growth spurred by immigration helped to keep the value of individual workers low as there was a ready supply of people to fill the positions. Yet this was an active and fascinating period in our nation's labor history. Workers continued to organize and resist when their way of life and or health were threatened. The study of this period should focus on the struggles of labor to secure safe working conditions, and reasonable compensation.

Labor Related Issues of the Period

- Producer cooperatives and the elimination of the wage system was a philosophy of many unionists.
- Large factories created an impersonal workplace.
- Mechanization of industry set the pace of work and led to the decline of traditional skilled labor jobs.

Labor Related Events of the Period

- 1878 Greenback Labor Party organized by a merger of the Workingmen's Party and Greenback Party.
- 1879 Knights of Labor elect Terrence Powderly as Grand Master Workmen.
- 1881 Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, forerunner of the American Federation of Labor formed in Pittsburgh.
- 1882 First Labor Day celebration held in New York City.
- 1883 Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen organized.
- 1884 The Garfield Assembly, the first all female local of the Knights of Labor, is created. Federal Bureau of Labor established as part of Department of the Interior.
- 1885 Immigration of laborers on contract is outlawed by the Foran Act.
- 1885-6 Period of greatest influence by Knights of Labor.

- 1886 In Columbus, Ohio, the American Federation of Labor is formed with Samuel Gompers as the first president.
Violence erupts following a mysterious explosion at Haymarket Square in Chicago during a rally in support of the 8 hour day.
- 1887 Seven accused in the Haymarket explosion are sentenced to death. Five are later executed.
- 1888 First federal labor relations law passed but it only applies to rail companies.
- 1890 The AFL, at their annual convention, announce their support for women's suffrage.
United Mine Workers of America formed.
- 1892 Homestead Strike in Pennsylvania. The Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers lose the fight over Carnegie Steel's attempt to break the union.
- 1893 Business depression.
- 1894 Strike by the American Railway Union against the Pullman Palace Car Company near Chicago is defeated by the use of injunctions and federal troops.
- 1898 Erdman Act passed which provides for mediation and voluntary arbitration on the railroads. This law replaces the 1888 law.
- 1900 International Ladies Garment Workers Union founded.
- 1901 United States Steel defeats the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers after a strike which lasted three months.
United Textile Workers of America founded.
- 1902 Coal miners in Pennsylvania end a five month strike and agree to arbitration with a presidential committee.
- 1903 At the annual AFL convention, blue collar and middle class women unite to form the National Women's Trade Union League. This organization is created to help organize women. Mary Morton Kehew is elected president while Jane Addams is elected vice-president.
The Department of Commerce and Labor is formed.
Mother Jones (Mary Harris Jones) leads the March of the Mill Children to President Roosevelt's home in New York. Many of the children are victims of industrial accidents.
- 1905 In Chicago, the Industrial Workers of the World founded.
US Supreme Court in *Lochner v. New York*, declares a New York maximum hours law unconstitutional under the due process clause of the 14th Amendment.

- 1906 Upton Sinclair publishes *The Jungle* which exposes the unsafe and unclean aspects of the Chicago meatpacking industry.
The International Typographical Union struck successfully for the 8 hour day which helped pave the way for shorter hours in the printing trades.
- 1908 In *Muller v. Oregon*, the Supreme Court rules that female maximum hour laws are constitutional due to a woman's "physical structure and ...maternal functions."
Section 10 of the Erdman Act which deals with "yellow dog" contracts and forbids a person being fired for belonging to a union was declared unconstitutional. (*US v. Adair*)
- 1909 Two month strike by the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union was settled by providing preferential union hiring, a board of grievances, and a board of arbitration.
- 1911 Supreme Court upheld an injunction ordering the AFL to eliminate the Bucks Stove and Range Co. from its unfair list and to cease to promote an unlawful boycott. (*Gompers v. Bucks Stove and Range Co.*)
146 workers, mostly women, die in the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in New York City. This leads to the establishment of the New York Factory Investigating Commission to monitor factory condition.
- 1912 Massachusetts adapts the first minimum wage law for women and minors.
Textile strike led by the Industrial Workers of the World in Massachusetts wins wage increase.
- 1913 US Department of Labor established. Secretary of Labor given power to "act as a mediator and to appoint commissioners of conciliation in labor disputes."

Important Concepts

arbitration, boycott, Haymarket Tragedy, Homestead Strike, injunction, Ludlow Massacre, Pinkertons, Pullman Strike, scientific management, Taylorism