

Labor Movement

A. Unions

National Labor Union The organization supported the eight-hour day movement, but also embraced banking reform and an end to conviction labor.

Knights of Labor The Knights of labor dreamed of a national labor movement.. They welcomed all wage earners, and demanded equal pay for women, an end to child and convict labor, and cooperative employer-employee ownership. In their organization, they excluded bankers, lawyers, professional gambler, and liquor dealers.

American Federation of Labor (AFL): Confronted by big business, Samuel Gompers and Adolph Strasser put together a combination of national crafts unions to represent the material interests of labor in the matter of wages, hours, and safety precautions. They demanded bargaining in labor contracts with large corporations such as railroads, mining, and manufacturing. They did not intend to have a violent revolution nor political radicalism.

American Railway Union: Created by Eugene V. Debs, it was a union created in a short-lived attempt to bring all of the railroad workers into one organization. This union was a precursor of the union movement that followed in the 1930s. The union was involved in the 1894 Pullman Strike

B. Important People

William Sylvis: In 1866, acting on his dream of a nationwide association to represent all workers. Sylvis called a convention in Baltimore that formed the National Labor Union (NLU).

Terence Powderly was born on January 22, 1849, in Carbondale, Pennsylvania. In 1874, he became an organizer for the Industrial Brotherhood labor union and was also accepted into the Knights of Labor. He established and led a local order of the Knight of Labor in Scranton and in 1876 became its master workman. From 1879 to 1893, he served as head of the Knights.

Samuel Gompers: An American labor leader, he, as president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), stressed cooperation between management and labor instead of strike actions, as a means of obtaining labor demands. He led the AFL for forty years, until his death in 1924.

John Peter Altgeld: He served as the liberal governor of Illinois from 1893 to 1897. He was criticized for pardoning the anarchists who threw the bomb in the Haymarket Square Riot and for objecting to the use of federal troops in the Pullman strike. His action was considered dangerously radical by the American public.

Eugene V. Debs: As the president and the organizer of the American Railway Union, he helped bring about the shut down of western railroads with the 1894 Pullman Strike. He was arrested for these actions. He also helped organize the Social Democrat party in 1897, after meeting socialist

Victor Berger. He was the party's presidential candidate five times: in 1900, 1904, 1908, and 1912. He later became a lecturer and organizer for the Socialist movement.

Richard Olney: He was the United States Attorney General from 1893 to 1897. He also sat on the board of directors of three major networks of railroads. The General Manager's Association attempted to get an federal injunction from Olney against the strikers for refusing to move cars carrying U.S. mail.

C. Strikes

Great Railroad Strike, 1877: A group of railroad workers on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad rose up and began to strike due to wage cuts. This spread up and down the railroad line across the nation. Railroad roadhouse were torched. President Rutherford B. Hayes sent in troops to stop the strike. 100 people died in the strike.

Haymarket square riot: Strikers and police had a confrontation while a strike was in progress on May 4, 1886, at the McCormick reaper works in Chicago. Several protesters were shot by police the day before, and a protest against police violence was called. The police were attempting to break up the meeting when a bomb was thrown by a protester. A violent gun battle ensued in which seven police were killed. Many police and civilians were injured as well.

Homestead Strike: Called in 1892 by the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers, it was one of the most violent strikes in U.S. history. It was against the Homestead Steel Works, which was part of the Carnegie Steel Company, in Pennsylvania in retaliation against wage cuts. On July 6, company guards and Pinkertons opened fire on the strikers after four months of striking, killing and wounding many strikers. The state militia dispersed the strikers.

Pullman Strike: The American Railway Union and Eugene V. Debs led a nonviolent strike which brought about a shut down of western railroads, which took place against the Pullman Palace Car Company in Chicago in 1894, because of the poor wages of the Pullman workers. President Grover Cleveland interfered and stopped the strike by saying that they had interfered with the right of the government to maintain the uninterrupted transport of mail. Debs was arrested and the strike was broken up.

Danbury Hatters Strike: The Supreme Court declared in 1908, after a strike by workers in Danbury, Connecticut, which was known for its hat industry, that unions were prohibited from setting up boycotts in support of strikes. It was said that a boycott was a "conspiracy in restraint of trade."

D. Other Terms

Collective bargaining: The major function of unions is collective bargaining, a process by which unions and employers negotiate terms of employment. The terms are set forth in a written agreement that the union and the employer promise to enforce. The AFL demanded collective bargaining in labor contracts with large corporations.

Injunction: An injunction is a court order. It was generally used against strikers. It is an order or decree in the law of equity, requiring a defendant to refrain from committing a specific act, either in process or threatened, injurious to the plaintiff. Injunctions are generally preventive, restraining, or prohibitory in nature.

Pinkertons: They were a group in Allan Pinkerton's organization, the National Detective Agency. They often spied on the unions for the companies. In 1877, when a railroad strike broke out, they were called in as strikebreakers. In the Homestead Strike, the Pinkertons fired on the strikers, killing many of them.

Closed Shop: The closed shop is an agreement between a trade union and an employer which is a collective bargain. It provides that employees in the bargaining unit shall be union members and remain in good standing in the union as a condition of employment. Many of these shops were banned by the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947.

Blacklist, Yellow Dog Contracts: With the formation of labor unions, workers began to strike to obtain better conditions. However, employers blacklisted employees that went on strike, which made getting another job later much harder. They also made employees sign yellow dog contracts, which forced the employee to agree not to strike or join a union.