

Literacy Essentials — Labor Unions

Big Idea

As you read through the following passages, complete this timeline by filling in the incidents of labor unrest and the results of each incident.



Working in the United States

Problems and Solutions

Explain how employers might respond to the problem.

Problem: Workers formed a union.

Solution:

The difference in their standard of living caused workers to resent the wealthy. In the late 1800s **deflation**, a rise in the value of money, also hurt relations between workers and owners. Deflation caused companies to cut wages, so workers earned less money for the same work. Many workers then decided to organize unions. Industries had two kinds of workers. Craft workers had special skills and training. Common laborers had few skills and earned lower wages. In the 1830s, craft workers began to form **trade unions**. Employers opposed unions, especially **industrial unions**, which represented all craft workers and common laborers in the same industry.

Employers sometimes put those who tried to start a union or strike on a **blacklist**, a list of “troublemakers” no company would hire. Employers could use a **lockout**—when employers locked workers out of the property and refused to pay them—to break up unions that did form. If the union called a strike, employers hired replacement workers. Courts often fined labor leaders who led strikes.

Struggling to Organize

Making Inferences

Why did the Knights of Labor union lose members after the Haymarket Riot?

In 1873, a recession forced many companies to cut wages. In 1877, one railroad cut wages again, and its workers went on strike. More than 80,000 railroad workers nationwide joined the protest. Some turned to violence, and President Hayes eventually ordered the army to open the railroads.

Founded in 1869, the Knights of Labor was the first nationwide industrial union. The Knights supported the eight-hour workday, equal pay for women, and the end of child labor. At first, the Knights preferred **arbitration**, in which a third party helps workers and employers reach agreements.

In 1886, about 3,000 protesters rallied at Chicago's Haymarket Square. When police arrived, someone threw a bomb that killed a police officer. Violence erupted, and about 100 people, including nearly 70 police officers, were injured in the Haymarket Riot. No one knew who threw the bomb, but eight men were convicted for it. One was a member of the Knights of Labor. The union lost members as a result.

Railroad workers formed the industrial American Railway Union (ARU) in 1893. The ARU unionized workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company in Illinois. The Pullman Company required workers to live in the town it built and to buy goods from its stores. When Pullman cut wages in 1893, workers could not afford their rent or the store's high prices. They began a strike. Other ARU members refused to pull Pullman cars. President Cleveland sent in troops, and a federal court issued an **injunction** ordering the strike to end. Both the strike and the union were ended.

New Unions Emerge

Predicting

Make a prediction about women's working conditions in the 1800's:

Trade unions were more successful in the late 1800s. In 1886, several of them organized the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The AFL had three goals: to get companies to recognize unions and agree to negotiations; to create **closed shops**, which hired only union members; and to promote an eight-hour workday. By 1900, the AFL was the largest union in the country, but most workers were not union members.

After the Civil War, more women began earning wages. About one-third of them worked as domestic servants. One-third were teachers, nurses, and sales clerks. The final third were industrial workers, mostly in clothing and food processing factories. Women were paid less than men and could not join most unions. In 1903, two women founded the Women's Trade Union League to address women's labor issues.

Section Wrap-Up

Answer these questions to check your understanding of the entire section.

1. What were some barriers to labor unions?

2. What were some goals of labor unions?