The Industrial Workers
Rise of the Labor Movement

Conditions for workers in the 2nd Industrial Revolution were tough

1. Low-skilled jobs made workers expendable as number of workers were abundant
   a. Automation created short-term losses of jobs; better in long-run (TALYORIZATION)
   b. Before mechanization, most manufacturing was done by skilled craft workers (such as shoemakers, saddle-makers); the earliest unions were trade unions.
   c. Working conditions were often dismal and impersonal
   d. Recourse for workers was minimal in the face of the vast power of industrialists
Rise of the Labor Movement

Conditions for workers in the 2nd Industrial Revolution were tough

REALITIES OF DEALING WITH THE MAN

- Strikes were often nullified by the use of "scab" workers.
- Conservative federal courts often ruled in favor of corporations.
- Corporations could also ask states to call in troops.
- Employers could lock-out workers & starve them into submission.
- Workers often were forced to sign "ironclad oaths" or "yellow dog contracts" which were agreements not to join a labor union.
- Businesses also blacklisted rebellious workers.
Rise of the Labor Movement

Conditions for workers in the 2nd Industrial Revolution were tough

e. Corporations sometimes owned a "company town" where high-priced grocery stores, easy credit, and rent deductions created a cycle of debt

f. Public grew tired of frequent strikes; became unsympathetic to labor's demands.
   - Strikes seemed to many Americans as foreign and socialistic and thus, unpatriotic
   - Yet, wages were perhaps the highest in the world.
Rise of the Labor Movement

Conditions for workers in the 2nd Industrial Revolution were tough

2. Labor's goals of currency reform (calls for inflation, greenback currency) and opposition to the national bank alarmed conservatives for the rest of the century.
Industrial Workers

- Industrial work was hard:
  - Laborers worked long hours & received low wages but had expensive living costs
  - Industrial work was unskilled, dangerous, & monotonous
  - Gender, religious, & racial biases led to different pay scales

- These conditions led to a small, but significant union movement
LIFE IN THE FACTORIES

- **Low wages** ($400-500/year but living cost $600); railroad injury rate 1 in 26, death rate 1 in 399; Composition of work force in 1900: 20% women (in 296 of 303 jobs) 10% of girls & 20% of boys had jobs (“child labor” meant ↓14 yrs)

- **children poorly paid**, but girls less than boys; Earning comparisons: Adults > Children; Men > Women; Skilled > Unskilled; Protestants > Catholics or Jews; Whites > Blacks & Asians; Blacks worked menial jobs; Chinese worked on Pacific Coast; often discriminated against (Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882)
Women in the Age of Industrialism

- Women, who had swarmed to factories and had been encouraged by recent inventions, found new opportunities, and the “Gibson Girl,” created by Charles Dana Gibson, became the romantic ideal of the age.

  - The **Gibson Girl** was young, athletic, attractive, and outdoorsy (not the stay-at-home mom type).
  - However, many women never achieved this, and instead toiled in hard work because they had to do so in order to earn money.
Labor grows slowly

- The Civil War put a premium on labor, which helped labor unions grow.

- The **National Labor Union**, formed in 1866, represented a giant boot stride by workers and attracted an impressive total of 600,000 members, but it only lasted six years.
  - However, it excluded Chinese and didn’t really try to get Blacks and women to join.
  - **Union Colored National Labor** founded in 1869 by African Americans after they were encouraged to form a separate branch of the NLU

- It worked for the arbitration of industrial disputes and the eight-hour workday, and won the latter for government workers, but the depression of 1873 knocked it out.
Molly Macguires
Molly McGuires

**Molly Maguires** (formed in 1875 by Irish anthracite-coal miners in Pennsylvania)

1. Members were part of an Irish American secret fraternal organization (Ancient Order of Hibernians).
2. Mollies used intimidation, arson, and violence to protest owners’ denial of their right to unionize.
3. President of Reading Railroad called in Pinkerton detective agency for help.
4. Mollies were destroyed and twenty of its members hanged in 1877. (Largely by testimony of industrialists and the Pinkerton detectives)
5. The Mollies became martyrs for labor and a symbol for violence among conservatives
In Unions There Is Strength

- With the inflow of immigrants providing a labor force that would work for low wages and in poor environments, the workers who wanted to improve their conditions found that they could not, since their bosses could easily hire the unemployed to take their places.

- Corporations had many weapons against strikers, such as hiring strikebreakers or asking the courts to order strikers to stop striking, and if they continued, to bring in troops. Other methods included hiring “scabs” or replacements or “lockouts” to starve strikers into submission, and often, workers had to sign “ironclad oaths” or “yellow dog contracts” which banned them from joining unions.
  - Workers could be “blacklisted,” or put on a list and denied privileges elsewhere.
Labor grows slowly

- A new organization, the **Knights of Labor**, was begun in 1869 and continued secretly until 1881. This organization was similar to the National Labor Union.
  - It only barred liquor dealers, professional gamblers, lawyers, bankers, and stockbrokers, and they campaigned for economic and social reform.
  - Led by **Terence V. Powderly**, the Knights won a number of strikes for the **eight-hour day**, and when they staged a successful strike against Jay Gould’s Wabash Railroad in 1885, membership mushroomed to ¾ of a million workers.
- Sought to include all workers in "**one big union**" including blacks & women.
Top of Pole: “Tobacco, wine, higher wages, ham, bread”

Flags: “Knights of Labor, Pittsburgh Free Strikers”

Pole: “Greased”

Bucket: “Monopoly Grease”

Men sitting: Vanderbilt, Gould

Caption: **First Annual Picnic of the "Knights of Labor" - More Fun for the Spectators than for the Performers.**

Puck Magazine, June 21, 1882
An American Autocrat. He Ties Up Railroads and Exposes the Public to Inconvenience and Danger Whenever He is Obliged to Do Something to Earn His Salary.

_Puck_, August 20, 1890
Thomas Nast, “Liberty is not Anarchy”, Harper’s Weekly, Sept. 4, 1886
Railroad Strike of 1877

1. Several railroads announced wages to be cut by 10% for 2nd time since 1873.

2. First nationwide strike paralyzed railroads throughout the East and Midwest and idled some 100,000 workers.
   1. Later, farmers, coal miners, craft workers, and the unemployed joined in.
   2. Involved 14 states and ten railroads.
   3. President Hayes sanctioned use of federal troops in PA; set precedent for future federal intervention.

3. Led to over 100 deaths and terrified propertied classes.

4. Strike inspired support for the Greenback-Labor party in 1878 and workingmen's parties in the 1880s.
Railroad Strike of 1877
Unions lack middle class support

- The middle-class, annoyed by the recurrent strikes, grew deaf to the workers’ outcry.
- The view was that people like Carnegie and Rockefeller had battled and worked hard to get to the top, and workers could do the same if they “really” wanted to improve their situations.
- Most of all (like in French Revolution), they wanted to protect “theirs”. (property, wealth, homes)
The Haymarket Riot in Chicago in May 1886 killed several people, and resulted in a highly controversial trial followed by executions of four men who may have been innocent. The American labor movement was dealt a severe setback, and the chaotic events resonated for many years.

**American Labor on the Rise**

American workers had begun organizing into unions following the Civil War, and by the 1880s many thousands were organized into unions, most notably the Knights of Labor.

In the spring of 1886 workers struck at the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company in Chicago, the factory that made farm equipment including the famous McCormick Reaper. The workers on strike demanded an eight-hour workday, at a time when 60-hour work weeks were common. The company locked out the workers and hired strikebreakers, a common practice at the time.
Haymarket Square Riot

- On May 1, 1886, a large May Day parade was held in Chicago, and two days later, a protest outside the McCormick plant resulted in a person being killed.
- **Protest Against Police Brutality**
  - A mass meeting was called to take place on May 4, to protest what was seen as brutality by the police. The location for the meeting was to be Haymarket Square in Chicago, an open area used for public markets.
  - At the May 4th meeting a number of radical and anarchist speakers addressed a crowd of approximately 1,500 people. The meeting was peaceful, but the mood became confrontational when the police tried to disperse the crowd.
The Haymarket Square Riot

- **The Haymarket Bombing**
  - As scuffles broke out, a powerful bomb was thrown. Witnesses later described the bomb, which was trailing smoke, sailing above the crowd in a high trajectory. The bomb landed and exploded, unleashing shrapnel.
  - The police drew their weapons and fired into the panicking crowd. According to newspaper accounts, policemen fired their revolvers for a full two minutes.
  - Seven policemen were killed, and it’s likely that most of them died from police bullets fired in the chaos, not from the bomb itself. Four civilians were also killed. More than 100 persons were injured.
Haymarket Riot a Setback for American Labor

- It was never officially determined who threw the bomb in Haymarket Square, but that didn't matter at the time. Critics of the American labor movement pounced on the incident, using it to discredit unions by linking them to radicals and violent anarchists.

- The Haymarket Riot resonated in American life for years, and there is no doubt it set back the labor movement. The Knights of Labor had its influence plummet, and its membership dwindled.

- At the end of 1886, at the height of the public hysteria following the Haymarket Riot, a new labor organization, the American Federation of Labor was formed. And the A.F.L. eventually rose to the forefront of the American labor movement.
The birth of the AFL

- In 1886, Samuel Gompers founded the American Federation of Labor.
  - It consisted of an association of self-governing national unions, each of which kept its independence, with the AF of L unifying overall strategy.

- Gompers demanded a fairer share for labor.
  - He simply wanted “more,” and sought better wages, hours, and working conditions.
  - These were his “Bread and Butter issues”

- The AF of L established itself on solid but narrow foundations, since it tried to speak for all workers but fell far short of that.
  - Composed of skilled laborers, it was willing to let unskilled laborers fend for themselves. Critics called it “the labor trust.”
“Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what we will..”
A.F. of L

- To avoid people labeling them socialist or communist, he stressed the “Bread and Butter” only involved winning labor their fair share (not overthrowing the system.
- However, he did persuade his members to vote for pro-union candidates
- **Other Strategies:**
  - Closed shop instituted by the AF of L: all workers in a unionized industry had to belong to the union.
  - Provided necessary funds to ride out prolonged strikes.
  - **walk-out and boycott**
    - By 1900, it had about 500,000 members (critics called it the "labor trust")
- did not represent unskilled labor especially women and blacks.

**Shortcomings**
AF of L membership between 1881 and 1911
The U.S. experienced an “era of strikes” from 1870-1890

The Great RR Strike of 1877 shut down railroads from WV to CA & resulted in hundreds of deaths.

During the Chicago Haymarket Strike (1886), unionists demanded an 8-hr day; led to mob violence & the death of the Knights of Labor.

The Homestead Strike (1892) resulted from a 20% pay cut at one of Carnegie’s steel plants.
Homestead Steel Strike

- **Homestead Strike** (1892) occurred in Carnegie’s steel plant near Pittsburgh
  - Henry Clay Frick & Carnegie announced a 20% pay slash for steelworkers
  - Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers went on strike and Frick then locked them out.
    - Workers surrounded the factory; *scabs* were not allowed through the picket lines
    - Frick called in 300 *Pinkerton detectives* to break the strike
    - Armed strikers forced Pinkertons to surrender after 9 Pinkertons and 7 workers were killed and about 150 wounded.
Homestead Steel Strike
This 1892 drawing from *Illustrated Weekly* depicts the labor troubles at Homestead, Pennsylvania, and the "Attack of the strikers and their sympathizers on the surrendered Pinkerton men".
Homestead Steel Strike

RESULTS OF STRIKE:
1. Pennsylvania’s governor brought in 8,000 state militia and 
   scabs replaced workers; strike effectively broken
2. Dozens of workers were indicted on 167 counts of murder, rioting, 
   and conspiracy but the jury eventually found the leaders innocent.
3. Union was effectively broken.
4. Demonstrated a strong employer could break a union if it 
   hired a private police force and gained gov’t and court 
   protection.
PULLMAN STRIKE, 1894

- Pullman Palace Car Company responded to the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 by building a model company town for his workers near its factory in Chicago.
- Pullman Co. was hit hard by the depression & cut wages by 1/3 yet maintained rent prices in the company town.
- Eugene V. Debs helped organize American Railway Union of about 150,000 rail workers
  - Workers went on strike while overturning some Pullman cars
  - Railway traffic from Chicago to the Pacific Coast was paralyzed.
Pullman Strike 1894

SOLDIERS DISPERSING A. R. U. STRIKERS AND SYMPATHIZERS AT 49th STREET, CHICAGO.
PULLMAN STRIKE, 1894

- Attorney General Richard Olney sent in federal troops stating strikers were interfering with the transit of U.S. mail.
  - President Cleveland: "If it takes the entire army and navy to deliver a postal card in Chicago, that card will be delivered"

Take that….Yeah……postcard!
RESULTS OF THE PULLMAN STRIKE

- Troops sent in over Governor Altgeld’s objections and violence spread to several states, costing 34 lives.
- The strike was crushed and the ARU was destroyed.
- Debs and his lieutenants sentenced to 6 months jail time for contempt of court.
- Debs used his time to read radical literature which influenced his later leadership of the Socialist movement in U.S.
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PULLMAN STRIKE

First time the federal gov’t used an *injunction* to break a strike

- The gov’t made striking, an activity not previously defined as illegal, a crime
- Strikers would thus be held in contempt of court and could be imprisoned without a jury trial.
Between 1881-1900, 23,000 strikes occurred involving 6.6 million workers (about 3% of all working people)

- a. Public finally began to accept workers’ right to organize, bargain collectively, and strike.
- b. Labor Day made a legal holiday by Congress in 1894.
### Memory Device for the Labor Movement: 1865-1900

<table>
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<tr>
<th>3 Big Unions</th>
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- Great Railroad Strike, 1877
- Homestead Strike, 1892
- Pullman Strike, 1894
UNIONS: SUCCESS OR FAILURE? Stay tuned!

By 1900 Unions had largely failed to achieve their goals

1. Wages remained almost the same compared to 1865
2. Work hours remained high in most industries
3. Working conditions remained oppressive
4. Most unions were either broken or severely weakened by owner or government actions (e.g. Knights of Labor, American Railway Union)
5. **American Federation of Labor** was among the few unions that remained intact and saw improvements for its workers
LABOR BY EARLY 20th CENTURY

- **Lochner v. New York** (1905) – Supreme Court overturned a New York law limiting New York bakers to 60 hr weeks.
- **Danbury Hatters** case, 1908 in CT had assessed more than $250K on striking hatmakers who were striking; workers were to lose savings and homes.
  - Supreme Court had ruled trade union had violated **Sherman Act** by interfering with interstate commerce.
- Supreme Court in 1908 upheld use of broadest injunctions and did much to destroy organized labor.
- **AFL** vigorously entered national politics in 1908 and **endorsed Democratic party**
- **Clayton Anti-Trust Act, 1913**—exempted unions from Sherman Antitrust provisions.
  - Hailed by Gompers as "**the magna carta of labor.**"
  - By 1917 AFL membership reached 3 million