

THE LABOR MOVEMENT

Factories first appeared in the United States during the late 1700s and early 1800s. The owners of these factories required people to work long hours at low pay. Buildings were poorly lighted and heated. Many jobs were dirty, monotonous, and dangerous. But if a worker complained, he was quickly replaced by one of the many persons looking for a job.

As time went on, some workers decided to join together and make demands as a group. It would be harder for the factory owner to replace a group of experienced workers rather than a single worker. Such an organization was called a "labor union." The union wanted higher wages, fewer hours of work, and better working conditions.

A number of weak local unions appeared during the late 1700s and early 1800s. But it was not until after the Civil War that stronger national unions were organized. These included the Knights of Labor, American Federation of Labor, and Congress of Industrial Organizations. The latter two unions eventually merged in 1955 to form the powerful AFL-CIO.



The First National Unions

Read the information on the chart below, then answer the questions which follow.

Union/Founder/Year	Membership	Comments
Knights of Labor Uriah S. Stephens 1869	Open to all workers, both skilled and unskilled. Reached a peak membership of 700,000 in 1885.	Took part in a number of railroad strikes, winning only one of them. Declined in importance after failing to win an 8-hour day, better pay, improved working conditions, and a limit on child labor.
American Federation of Labor (AFL) Samuel Gompers 1886	Included only skilled workers belonging to particular crafts, such as machinists, carpenters, and plumbers. Therefore, the skilled workers in a factory belonged to different national unions. Reached 8 million members by 1955.	Favored settling disputes peacefully in order to avoid long, costly strikes. Objectives: higher pay, shorter hours, better working conditions, end of child labor, and limits on immigration.
Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) Led by John L. Lewis 1938	Included all skilled and unskilled workers in a single industry, such as all automobile workers in the United States. Membership of 6 million in 1955.	Consisted of more than 30 industrial unions, including the automobile, steel, oil-refining, textile, and shipbuilding industries. Wanted higher pay and more fringe benefits for workers.

Completion

- (1) The first important national labor union was the _____.
- (2) _____ founded the American Federation of Labor in 1886.
- (3) Only machinists, carpenters, plumbers, and skilled workers belonging to certain _____ could join the American Federation of Labor.
- (4) The Congress of Industrial Organizations permitted both skilled and unskilled workers of a particular _____ to belong to the union.
- (5) The American Federation of Labor and the _____ joined together to form the AFL-CIO in 1955.

True/False

- (6) _____ The Knights of Labor succeeded in achieving its goals.
- (7) _____ Uriah S. Stephens started the Congress of Industrial Organizations.
- (8) _____ American workers in the late 1800s encouraged immigration to the United States.
- (9) _____ One of the goals of the American labor movement was to gain more money for workers.
- (10) _____ John L. Lewis was an early leader of the CIO.

Labor-Management Relations

Early labor unions had a difficult time achieving their goals of higher pay, shorter hours, and improved working conditions. Factory owners were strongly against the formation of unions. They pressured the government to pass laws which restricted union activities. Federal troops were sometimes used to forcefully end strikes. Courts usually sided with factory owners, and ordered striking employees back to work. Workers at a factory who tried to start a union were regarded as troublemakers, and were often dismissed from their jobs.

Most early unions, including the Knights of Labor, failed to make significant gains and eventually disappeared. But the American Federation of Labor attracted large numbers of workers and made important progress toward its goals.

As unions grew in strength, labor (the workers) and management (the factory owners) used different tactics against each other. Some of the terms in the following sentences refer to measures taken by labor to put pressure on management. Others represent tactics used by management to limit the power and success of unions. Two terms refer to methods used to settle differences between the two sides. Fill in the spaces with the appropriate answers.

- (1) _____ Names of union activists are put on a **blacklist** and given to employers, who refuse to hire them.
- (2) _____ During a **lockout**, the factory is closed in order to force workers to give up their demands.
- (3) _____ People walking a **picket line** outside of a factory carry signs calling attention to a labor dispute. They discourage others from entering the plant.
- (4) _____ A worker signs a “**yellow-dog**” **contract**, in which he agrees not to join a union.
- (5) _____ Representatives of labor and management discuss the terms of a new contract during a **collective bargaining** session.
- (6) _____ Only union members may be hired at a **closed shop**.
- (7) _____ At a **union shop**, the factory owner can hire nonunion workers only if they agree to join the union within a certain period of time.
- (8) _____ Factory owners can hire nonunion workers as well as union members at an **open shop**.
- (9) _____ Employees refuse to work during a **strike**, because their demands have not been met.
- (10) _____ A fair-minded third party, through the process of **arbitration**, hears both labor and management in a dispute, then recommends an agreement.
- (11) _____ A court order, called an **injunction**, can be used to prohibit a strike or to order strikers back to work.
- (12) _____ During a **boycott**, consumers are urged not to buy goods from a company involved in a labor dispute.
- (13) _____ **Scabs** were hired to replace employees who went on strike.

The Nation's First Major Strikes

The struggle between labor and management erupted into three bitter strikes during the late 1800s. Read the summaries of each of these strikes, then decide whether labor or management came out ahead. Fill in the spaces with the appropriate answers.

Railroad Strike of 1877

This was the first large-scale strike in the United States. Several railroad companies announced a wage cut, prompting the workers to walk off their jobs. Replacement workers were hired to keep the trains running. Violence broke out between strikers and the local militia. Considerable property was destroyed before President Rutherford B. Hayes sent in federal troops. Order was restored, and the trains resumed their schedules. The strikers, fearful of losing their jobs, accepted the pay cut and went back to work.

Homestead Strike (1892)

The Carnegie Steel Company announced a reduction in pay at its Homestead, Pennsylvania, plant. The president of the company warned the workers that if they did not accept the pay cut, they would be replaced by nonunion employees. When the workers decided to go on strike, the company hired 300 guards from the Pinkerton detective agency. The guards were supposed to protect the plant in case of trouble. A battle soon broke out between the Pinkertons and the union men. A total of ten guards and strikers were killed. The Pinkerton men were forced to leave Homestead by train. But the Pennsylvania National Guard arrived and ended the rebellion. Strikebreakers were hired and the plant reopened.

Pullman Strike (1894)

Workers at the Pullman Company's sleeping-car manufacturing plant went on strike rather than accept a 25 percent reduction in wages. They were supported by the American Railway Union. The union disrupted train service across the country, and seriously slowed the delivery of U.S. mail. Public opinion shifted against the Pullman workers. A judge issued an injunction ordering the union to stop interrupting rail service and the delivery of mail. When strikers ignored the injunction, President Grover Cleveland sent in cavalry, infantry, and artillery. Mobs turned to violence as riots broke out in many cities. Several workers were killed and many more wounded before peace was finally restored. Strike leaders were arrested for violating the injunction, and train service returned to normal.

Congress Passes Labor Legislation

During the 1900s, many laws were passed by Congress which affected labor-management relations. Which side — labor or management — do you think benefited the most from the passage of each of the following laws?

- (1) _____ Adamson Act (1916): Established an 8-hour day and time-and-a-half pay for overtime for workers on interstate railroads.
- (2) _____ Norris-LaGuardia Anti-Injunction Act (1932): Strictly limited the power of courts to issue injunctions forbidding strikes and picketing.
- (3) _____ National Labor Relations Act (or Wagner Act) (1935): Set up a National Labor Relations Board to: (a) protect the right of workers to organize unions and take part in collective bargaining (b) protect workers against unfair actions by employers (c) help settle labor disputes.

- (4) _____ Social Security Act (1935): (a) set up a pension system for retired workers (b) provided payments to workers who became sick or unemployed (c) gave federal aid to the states for the care of needy children, elderly Americans, the blind, and disabled persons.
- (5) _____ Wages and Hours Act (1938): Established a minimum hourly wage, and a 40-hour workweek with time-and-a-half pay for overtime.
- (6) _____ Taft-Hartley Act (1947): (a) outlawed the closed shop, in which only union members could be hired (b) said that employees of the federal government could not go on strike (c) prevented a union from practicing “featherbedding” — forcing an employer to use more workers than is needed on a job (d) forbid workers from making contributions to candidates running for federal office (e) required a 60-day “cooling-off” period before a union could go on strike.

Collective Bargaining

Pretend it is the mid-1800s, and that the contract at a textile mill in Boston, Massachusetts, is about to expire. Labor and management must get together and negotiate a new work agreement through the process of “collective bargaining.” They will discuss wages, hours of employment, vacation time, medical insurance, other fringe benefits, and general working conditions at the mill.

The class will be divided into groups of four students. Two people in each group will represent management (wealthy owners of the textile company), and two will represent labor (the garment workers). They will finalize terms of a new contract which will replace the one now in effect. The old agreement says:

- (1) Workers must be on the job 12 hours per day, six days a week.
- (2) There are no paid sick days.
- (3) All employees may take one week off per year for vacation, but will not be paid for that week.
- (4) Management is not responsible for medical bills resulting from job-related injuries or illnesses.
- (5) Weekly wages are \$5 for men, \$3 for women, and \$2 for children.

Representatives of labor should try to get management to improve the terms and conditions in the old contract. Labor should also try to convince management to do something about inadequate heating and lighting, an insufficient number of fire escapes, the hiring of immigrants and very young children, and the absence of dining and recreational facilities. Meanwhile, management should try to put into the new contract as many provisions of the old contract as possible. Management will save money by holding down wages and fringe benefits, while agreeing to few improvements in working conditions.

Each group member must list the terms of the new contract they help negotiate. Contracts will be submitted to the teacher, who will then decide whether labor or management has out-bargained the other in each group. In some cases, a settlement might be negotiated which is “fair” to both sides — that is, it gives neither labor or management a significant advantage. Such agreements are often the result of successful collective bargaining sessions.