

*Key Facts about Labor Unions,
Labor Laws, and Labor Strikes*

The Knights of Labor

- Grew rapidly under Terence Powderly's leadership, peaking at 730,000 members in 1886
- Grew due to combination of:
 - Open-membership policy
 - The continuing industrialization of the American economy
 - Growth of urban population

The Knights of Labor

- **Welcomed unskilled and semi-skilled workers, including**

- Women
- Immigrants
- African Americans

- **Were idealists who believed they could eliminate conflict between labor and management**

- Goal was to create a cooperative society in which laborers, not capitalists, owned the industries in which they worked

- **Haymarket Square riot was unfairly blamed on the Knights**

- Public came to associate them with anarchists

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

■ Led by:

- “Mother” Jones
- Elizabeth Flynn
- Big Bill Haywood
- Eugene Debs
 - A founder and one of the best known socialists in America

■ Like the Knights of Labor, the IWW strove to unite all laborers, including unskilled workers and African Americans, who were excluded from craft unions

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

■ **Motto: “An injury to one is an injury to all”**

- Goal
 - Create “One Big Union”

■ **Unlike the Knights, Wobblies embraced the rhetoric of class conflict and endorsed violent tactics**

■ **IWW members probably never exceeded 150,000 workers**

- Organization collapsed during WWI

The American Federation of Labor (AFL)

■ Led by Samuel Gompers

- Leader of the Cigar Makers Union

■ An alliance of skilled workers in craft unions

■ Under Gompers leadership, concentrated on bread-and-butter issues:

- Higher wages
- Shorter hours
- Better working conditions

The Great Railroad Strike, 1877

- Provoked by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad's decision to cut wages for the second time in a year
- Remembered as the first general strike in American history
- Paralyzed the nation's commerce for 45 days
- Forced governors in ten states to mobilize 60,000 militia to reopen rail traffic

Sherman Antitrust Act, 1890

- Forbade any unreasonable combinations or contracts in restraint of trade
- Had little impact on the regulation of large corporations
- Primarily used to curb labor unions during the last decade of the 19th century
- Declared illegal “every contract, combination in the form of trust, or otherwise, or conspiracy in restraint of trade among the several states”

Homestead Strike, 1892

- **Began as a dispute between the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (the AA) and the Carnegie Steel Company**

- AA refused to accept pay cuts and went on strike in Homestead, Pennsylvania

- **Culminated in a battle between strikers and private security guards hired by the company**

The Pullman Strike, 1894

■ During the late 19th century, the American labor movement experienced a number of violent strikes

- Homestead Strike (1892)
- Pullman Strike (1894)

■ Strike Origins

- National economy fell into depression
- Pullman Palace Car Company cut wages while maintaining rents and prices in a company town where 12,000 workers lived

The Pullman Strike, 1894

- Halted a substantial portion of American railroad commerce
- Ended when President Grover Cleveland ordered federal troops to Chicago, ostensibly to protect rail-carried mail but, in reality, to crush the strike

The Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902

- **Strike by the United Mine Workers of American in the anthracite coal fields of eastern Pennsylvania**
- **Arbitrated with the active involvement of President Theodore Roosevelt**
 - Marked the first time the federal government intervened in a labor dispute as a neutral arbitrator

The Wagner Act of 1935

- Also known as the National Labor Relations Act
- Called the Magna Carta of labor because it ensured workers' right to organize and bargain collectively
- Passage of the act led to a dramatic increase in labor union membership

The Congress of Industrial Workers (CIO)

- Led by John L. Lewis
- Organized unskilled and semiskilled factory workers in basic manufacturing industries such as steel and automobiles

The Split between the AFL and CIO

- American Federation of Labor (AFL) split apart at its national convention in 1935
- Majority of AFL leaders refused to grant charters to new unions organized on an industry-wide basis
- AFL favored the organization of workers according to their skills and trades
- The CIO favored the organization of all workers in a particular industry

Taft-Hartley Act, 1947

■ **Primary purpose was to curb the power of labor unions**

■ **Supporters believed:**

- Unions were abusing their power
- Widespread strikes would endanger the nation's vital defense industries
- Some labor unions had been infiltrated by Communists
- Employers were being coerced into hiring union workers

■ **Opposed by organized labor**

United Farm Workers

■ Organized and led by:

- César Chávez
- Dolores Huerta
- Philip Vera Cruz
- Larry Itliong

■ Union of farm workers

■ César Chávez is recognized as a significant civil rights leader