

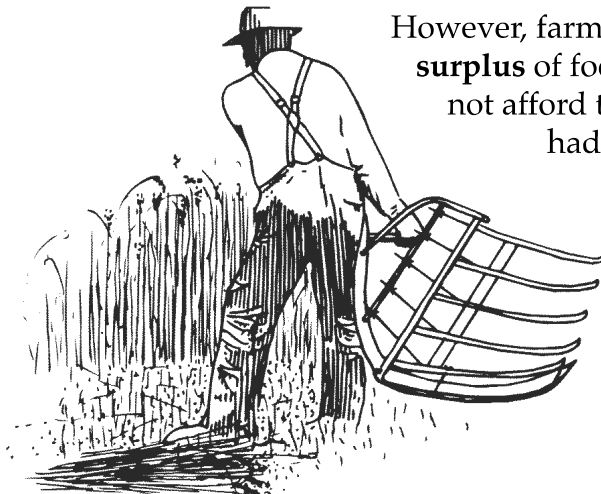
Introduction

The industrial age caused many problems for both farmers and factory workers. Farmers were able to increase their production of crops, but they were unable to sell all of them. Farmers had to depend on railroads to deliver their crops to cities and towns. Factory workers often had to work for low wages and in unsafe and dismal factories. For many years after the Civil War, factory workers had little choice but to accept what factory owners and managers were willing to offer.

To improve their situations, both farmers and factory workers organized. Farmers joined together to get their state and national governments to protect them from the unfair practices of big business. Similarly, factory workers organized **labor unions** to represent them in their attempts to gain higher wages and better working conditions.

Problems of the Farmer

Farmers benefited from early industry. They used new tools such as steel plows and reapers to farm their lands more quickly. Eventually, the horses that pulled these plows and reapers were replaced by engine-powered machines. These new ways of farming, as well as the movement West to vast new farmlands, meant that farmers were able to grow more crops than before.



Farmers benefited from new tools that replaced manual equipment.

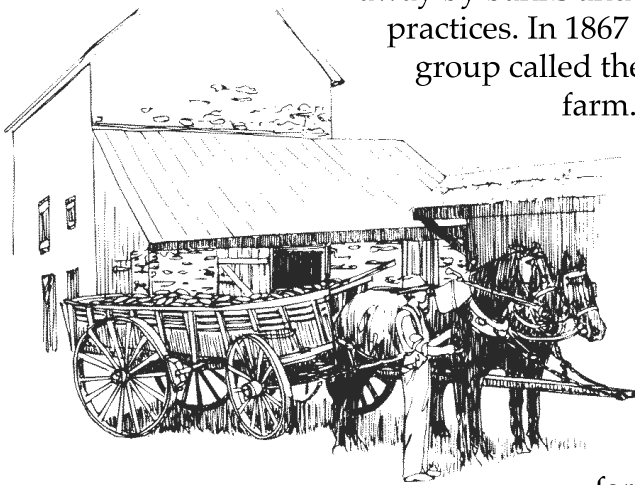
However, farmers found themselves with a **surplus** of food for sale because people could not afford to buy all the food the farmers had grown. With too much food available, the price the farmers could get for their crops went down. In addition, the farmers had to ship their crops by railroad. The railroads often cheated farmers by overcharging them for transporting crops.

Many farmers had borrowed money at high interest rates

from banks to buy machinery, land, and seed. Unable to pay off their loans, many farmers lost their land to the banks and had to move to the cities to work in factories.

The Farmers Organize

Farmers decided to work together to keep their lands from being taken away by banks and to stop unfair railroad practices. In 1867 farmers organized into a group called the **Grange**, a French word for farm. The *Grangers* elected men to government office who helped pass state laws that regulated big businesses, especially railroads, from unfair practices against farmers. Although the **Granger Laws** were not effective in changing the way big business treated farmers, the farmers saw that by joining together they could be heard by state legislators.



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Farmers continued to organize after the Grange failed. In the 1880s and 1890s, they formed **alliances**. With over three million members, the alliances had a strong voice in political elections. In 1891 farmers formed a new political party called the **Populists**, from the Latin word *populus*, meaning *people*. For almost 20 years, the Populists played an active role in representing the needs of farmers and other citizens against the interests of big business.

Problems of Industrial Workers

Industrial workers also had problems with big business. Men, women, and children were required to work 12 to 14 hours a day, six days a week. Wages were low. Skilled laborers earned \$2.00 a day, while unskilled laborers earned about \$1.25 per day. Children and women seldom earned over \$4.00 a week.

Many laborers worked in unpleasant and dangerous situations. There were few rest breaks while working and no toilet facilities. Machinery had

no safety devices, and factory lighting was very poor. Workers had no organization to protect themselves from these conditions.

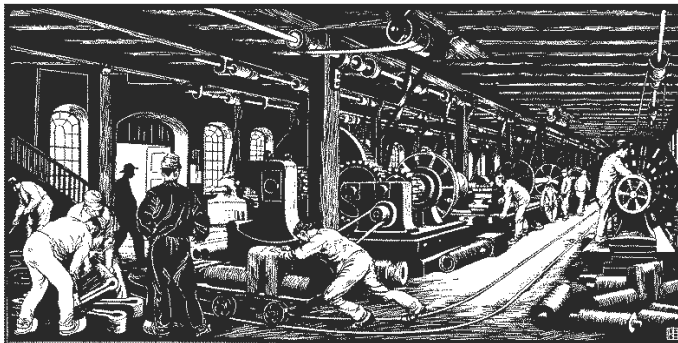
Meanwhile, some companies were growing increasingly wealthy and powerful. They often built and owned entire towns. These companies owned the houses workers lived in, as well as the stores where workers spent their wages on food, clothing, and other goods. These companies often controlled the town governments. If a worker complained about his situation, he could be fired. When that happened, he also lost a place to live.

The Rise of the Labor Unions

Industrial workers decided to organize. They could then pressure companies into providing better pay and working conditions. The workers used several methods to force businesses to recognize their problems.

One method was the **strike**. A strike occurs when employees stop working as a way of protesting their low wages or working conditions. Strikes can cause a factory to reduce production or even to close down entirely. Consequently, the factory loses a lot of money when workers strike.

At first, the United States government was on the side of the businesses. Governors often sent in the state militia to break, or end, a strike. The President of the United States even sent the United States Army to break some of the strikes. Some of the strikes became very violent, and workers often were injured or killed by private detectives hired by factory owners or by state or national militia sent in to break the strike. Even though they faced injury or death, workers used strikes as an important weapon to improve their life in the factories.



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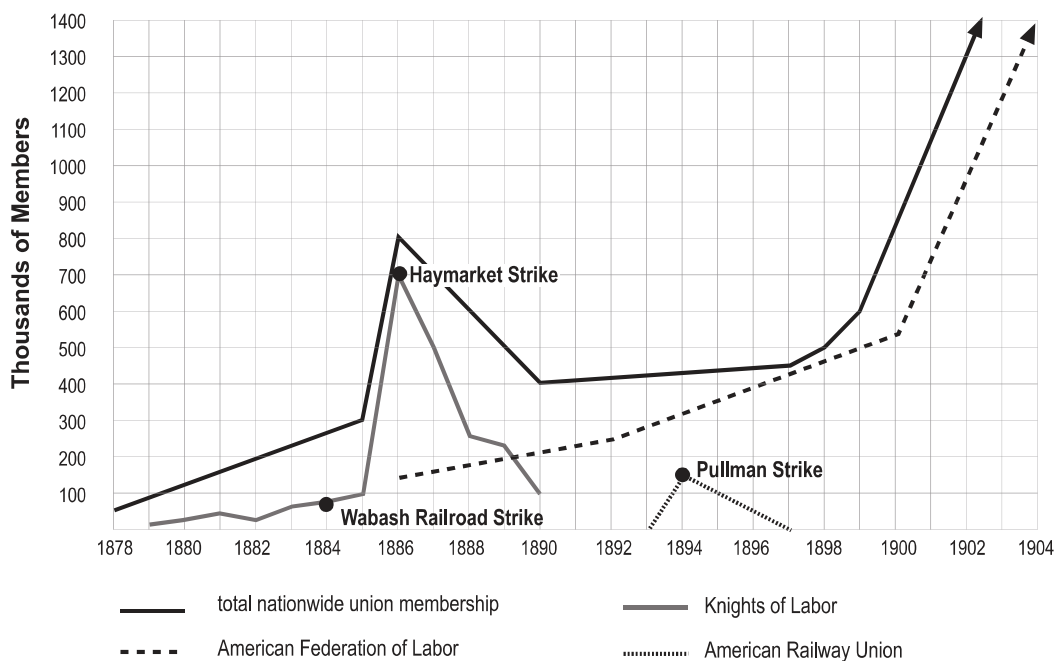
One form of organization the workers used was the *labor union*. Unions had leaders who presented workers' grievances, or complaints, in talks with factory owners and managers.

The **Knights of Labor** was an early national labor union. Organized in 1869 shortly after the Civil War, the union admitted all workers—men, women, African Americans, whites, and skilled and unskilled laborers. Under the leadership of *Terence V. Powderly*, membership in this union grew from 9,000 to 700,000 workers.

The Knights of Labor won a few strikes against the railroads and forced some businesses to improve conditions in their factories. In 1886, however, fighting broke out during a strike in Chicago. Several workers and policemen were killed in the battle that was called the *Haymarket Square Riot*. When the Knights of Labor were blamed for the violence, many workers left the union. Eventually this union lost power and fell apart.

Another early national union in the history of American labor was the **American Federation of Labor (AFL)**, organized by *Samuel Gompers*. This union consisted of separate smaller unions that represented craft workers. *Craft* means *skill*, and the AFL accepted only skilled workers such as railroad workers and mine workers. This union helped skilled workers get higher wages and shorter working hours. The AFL is still a major labor union today, having joined with the **Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)** in 1955 to become the AFL-CIO (see page 210).

The Growth of Union Membership, 1878-1904



Other unions followed the AFL. Some unions worked to pass child labor laws. Children often worked as hard and as many hours as adults did, yet they received the lowest pay. In 1879 Congress passed the first child labor law, limiting children from working more than 60 hours a week. Other laws restricted children from working at dangerous jobs. It was not until the late 1930s, however, that all states had child labor laws that included age restrictions.

Unions had weakened the control factory owners had over workers. The owners claimed that workers did not have the right to organize and make demands on business. Business leaders wanted to force workers not to join unions.

One way businessmen tried to control unions was through the **yellow-dog contract**. By signing a yellow-dog contract, the worker promised not to join a union. Another way businessmen tried to limit the unions was the **blacklist**. This list contained the names of workers who joined unions. Factory owners and managers passed this list to one another. If a worker's name was on the list, he or she would not be hired.

Some Americans did not like unions. They blamed unions for the violent strikes and riots, and for the higher prices of products. They agreed that workers had no right to make demands of business. But the growth of unions continued, and workers continued to improve their working conditions.

Attitudes toward Unions Change

By 1900 public attitudes toward labor changed. People and government accepted the right of labor to organize. In 1894 Congress declared *Labor Day* a legal holiday to honor workers. This did not mean that employers stopped fighting organized labor. But labor had made great strides toward public recognition.

In 1935 Congress passed the **Wagner Act**. This law guaranteed the workers' right to join unions. It ended the use of blacklists and yellow-dog contracts.

Following the Wagner Act, a new kind of union was formed. This was the industrial union. An industrial union represents all the workers in one type of industry. For example, workers with General Motors, Ford, or other motor companies could join the United Auto Workers of America.

Workers in the steel industry could belong to the United Steel Workers.



steel workers

These industrial unions are called the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The first CIO leader was *John L. Lewis*.

In 1955 the AFL and the CIO joined together to form the powerful AFL-CIO. Today, they represent most of the labor unions in the United States.

The major weapon of labor against management today is **collective bargaining**. In collective bargaining, union leaders discuss the conditions of employment with employers. If an agreement is not reached, however, workers may strike.

The rise of labor unions has been an important event in American history. Although they were often opposed by citizens and government, labor unions have survived to become powerful representatives of workers. They provide the American worker with ways to get fair wages and safe working conditions.

Immigration Increased the Labor Force

An *immigrant* is a person who settles in a new country. Before 1890, most people who immigrated to the United States were from Northern and Western Europe. These *old* immigrants came from such countries as England, Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia. Many of these workers spoke English and had skills or trades valuable to business and farming.

Between 1890 and 1920, thousands of foreigners began to arrive in the United States. They were called the **new immigrants**. People from countries such as Italy, Greece, Poland, and Russia arrived on the East Coast. Many immigrants on the West Coast came from Asia. These *new* immigrants were in many ways different from the *old* immigrants. These differences would create new problems in the cities and in labor.

Many of the new immigrants lived and worked in American cities. Most of them spoke no English and were very poor. Entire families had to share

small rooms in **tenements**, or old apartment buildings. Life was not comfortable for them, but they wanted to become Americans.

The new immigrants quickly entered the labor force. They, too, worked long hours for low pay. An immigrant who had a skill had a better chance of getting a good job. But an unskilled immigrant had to take any job he or she could find. The unskilled immigrant had to compete with other unskilled—but native born—Americans. Older Americans and industry often discriminated against the new immigrants.

Problems of Urban Growth

Cities were ill prepared to handle these new arrivals. Neighborhoods became crowded and dirty. Most cities did not have sewers or clean drinking water. By 1900 about half of all Americans lived in cities and towns. Rapid urban growth had become a major problem in industrial America.

Summary

Farmers joined forces to increase their power and solve their problems. Eventually, they were able to get laws passed that protected them from unfair practices by big business. Factory workers also formed unions. Unions represented workers and got them higher wages and safer working conditions. In the early stages of the industrial age, big business and factory owners worked against the labor unions with the support of state and national government. However, Congress passed laws that protected workers' rights to organize. The labor force was greatly increased between 1890 and 1920 as thousands of immigrants came to the United States looking for work. Many *new immigrants* took unskilled labor jobs at low wages and lived in poor conditions.