

Chapter 4 – Section 4

The Great Strikes



Gap Between Rich and Poor

- Top 9% owned 75% of the wealth (not much different today)
- In best of times workers earned just enough to get by (a few hundred \$/year)
- When hard times hit, most suffered in silence, but more and more became politically active in an effort to improve their lives
- (Resented the extravagant lifestyles of factory owners)



Socialism

- An economic and political philosophy that favors public (or social) control of property and income rather than private control
- (gaining popularity at the time in Europe)



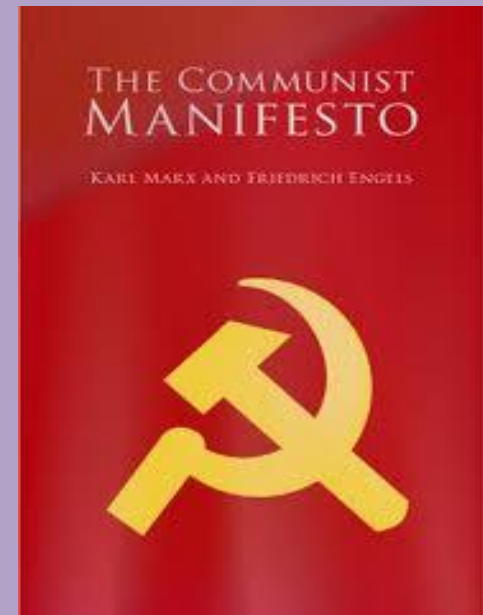
Socialists

- Believe that society at large (not just private individuals) should be in charge of a nation's wealth
- Wealth should be distributed to *everyone*



Communist Manifesto

- Pamphlet written by Karl Marx (1848) that denounced capitalism and predicted workers one day would overturn it
- Most Americans opposed socialism, but appealed to some
- Wealthy saw it as a threat to their fortunes
- Politicians saw it as a threat to public order



Early labor unions

- Formed to try to protect workers' rights
- Usually within a specific trade



National Trades Union

- The 1st national labor organization
- Open to workers from all crafts
- (1834 ~ 21,000 members)
- (only lasted a few years until a depression began in 1837)



Union demands

- Shorter workdays
- Better working conditions
- Higher wages



Knights of Labor

- Represented skilled & unskilled workers (incl. African Americans)
- Fought for equal pay for equal work
- End to child labor
- Wages was not a primary goal
- Union membership grew when demands worked (RR owner Jay Gould gave up RR wage cut)



Samuel Gompers & the AFL

- The head of the American Federation of Labor
- Got their demands met using economic pressure like strikes and boycotts
- (why can't some professions, like teachers, strike?)



Women & African Americans

- Generally weren't protected by unions
- Due to racism and women were hired cheaper and this hurt men (the heads of households)



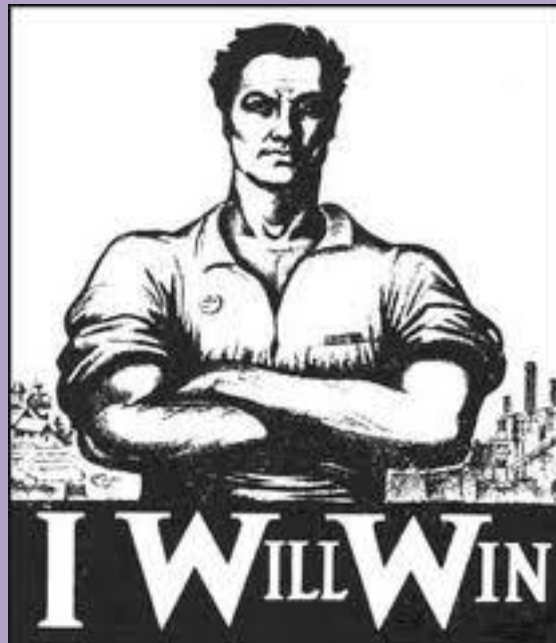
Collective Bargaining

- A process in which workers negotiate *as a group* w/ employers
- Workers acting as a group are more powerful than a worker acting alone



Wobblies (or IWW)

- The Industrial Workers of the World
- A more radical labor organization w/ many socialists as leaders
- Represented unskilled workers like miners and migrant farm workers



Stopping Unions

- Employers disliked and feared unions
- Forbade union meetings
- Fired union organizers
- Forced new employees to sign contracts saying they wouldn't join a union or strike (“yellow dog” contracts)
- Refused to bargain collectively when strikes did occur
- Refused to recognize unions as their workers' legitimate representatives



Railroad Strike of 1877

- RR cut wages (by 10%)
- Layoffs and increased risk of accidents (due to 2X as many cars as usual)
- Rioting spread throughout cities (Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Louis)



Labor Relations

- President (Hayes) sent in federal troops to put down the strikes (1st time in history)
- Shots fired and rioters killed (when they set fire to RR property in Pittsburgh)
- * *Beginning of a new and violent era in labor relations*



Massive Strikes

- Between 1881 and 1900 there were 24,000 strikes (factories, mines, mills, and rail yards)



“Scabs”

- Workers called in to replace striking laborers
- Disliked by the unions b/c it allowed the company to continue to operate w/out having to bargain w/ the union (takes away union’s power)



Anarchists

- Groups of radicals who violently oppose all government



Haymarket Riot

- Anarchists joined strikers
- (Someone threw a bomb at the police – gunfire broke out between cops and protesters – killed dozens on both sides – many unionists viewed the anarchists who took part as heroes, but not all did)
- Overall it hurt the union cause b/c the public came to associate unions w/ violence and radicalism (like PETA)



Homestead Strike

- Carnegie steel refused to bend to strikers who were protesting a cut in wages
- Sent in “pinkertons’ (a brutal police force known for ability to break strikes)
- Shootout w/ strikers – people at first sympathized w/ strikers,
- However, *public turned against unions* (after an anarchist attempted to assassinate Carnegie’s partner, Henry Frick)



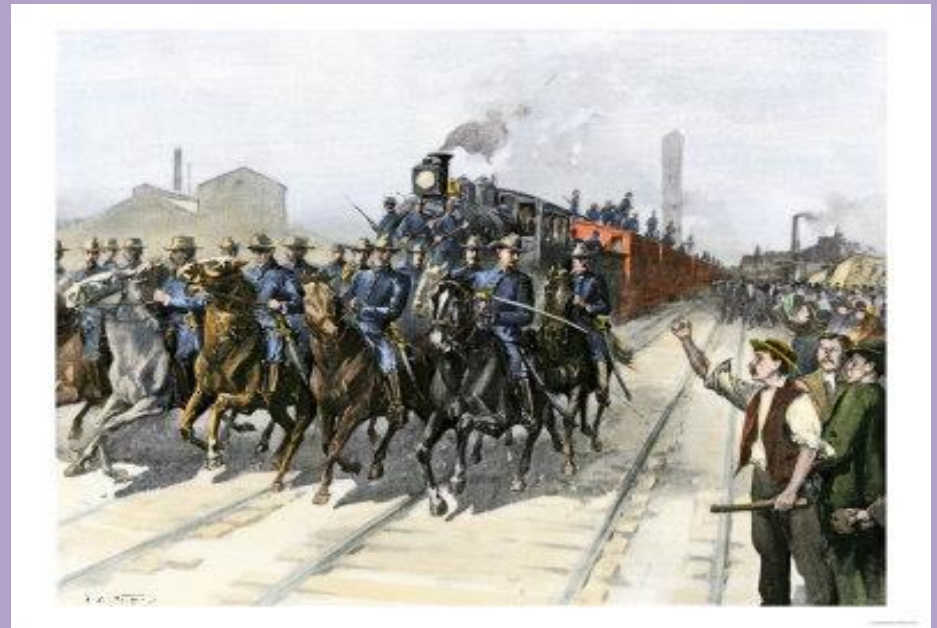
Pullman Strike

- George Pullman cut RR workers' wages by 25%
- (When delegation of workers went to him to protest he fired them)
- Not only did the local RR strike, but the American Railway Union (led by popular labor organizer, Eugene Debs) called for boycott of Pullman cars throughout country
- Completely disrupted western RR traffic incl. mail delivery (120,000 workers joined in)



Government Response

- After owners turned to Fed. Govt. for help they sent in troops forcing them back to work (set precedent of owners obtaining court orders against unions)
- Govt. more often supported owners and limited union power for 30 years



Homework

- You are a union member working for a factory, railroad, or elsewhere. Describe your work conditions and why you joined the union. Also, describe one of the major strikes that you either witnessed or participated in.
 - *Alternatively*
- You are a factory or RR owner. Describe why you oppose the unions and feel that they are a threat to your country. Describe one of the strikes from an owner's perspective.