



came to protect factory property. **Pinkertons** were private police hired by companies to protect the buildings and equipment. The governor of Pennsylvania sent in the national guard to force the strikers out of the steel plant. **National guard** is another name for state militia.

The workers continued the strike for five months. The workers in Carnegie's other steel mills were not part of the Iron and Steel Workers Union, and they did not go on strike. This allowed the Carnegie Steel Company to continue producing steel and making a profit. Finally, the workers at the Homestead Plant gave up and went back to work at the lower wages.

38. Why did workers at the Homestead Steel Plant go on strike?

39. Why was their strike not successful?

40. What are Pinkertons?

41. What is the national guard?



Pullman Strike

**Pullman strike.** In 1894, another major railroad strike occurred, this time against the Pullman Car Company in Chicago. George Pullman's company made the railroad sleeping cars and dining cars used throughout the country. The Pullman Company was being hurt by the depression that started in 1893 because railroad companies stopped ordering new dining and sleeping cars. The strike started when the Pullman Car Company tried to maintain profits by cutting back the wages of its workers. At the same time, Pullman refused to reduce rent for the housing in which many of his workers lived.

When the Pullman Company refused to negotiate with its workers, the American Railway Union, led by Eugene V. Debs, joined in support of the workers. The union supported the workers by refusing to hook up any Pullman cars to trains. Railroad owners asked for help from the government. The courts said that the union had to stop the strike, and federal troops were sent to Chicago. A battle between troops and strikers broke out. Several strikers were killed, and Debs was arrested and jailed. Within a month, the strike was stopped and the workers had gained nothing.

42. Why did workers strike against the Pullman Car Company?

43. What was the effect of their strike?

**Industrial Workers of the World.** A very different kind of national union started in 1905. Unlike the American Federation of Labor, which was limited to skilled workers, the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW) tried to organize unskilled workers such as lumberjacks, miners, construction workers, field hands, dock workers, and cannery workers. Many of these workers were scattered across the West and had jobs that required moving from place to place. The IWW used strikes and work slowdowns to try to improve worker wages and conditions. Although the union had less than 200,000 workers, they were well known for their giant rallies, picket lines, and songs about workers. The union won few strikes because it was so difficult to organize its members.

44. How was the IWW different from the AFL?

45. Why was it hard for the IWW to organize its members?



Mine workers

**Discussion** What unions are there in your state? What workers do they represent?

## Why Unions Had Limited Success

Between 1881 and 1905, over 37,000 strikes occurred in the United States

as workers tried to improve working conditions and secure wages to obtain a decent standard of living. Unions were successful in solving the workers' problems only when the workers had high skills, and there were few workers with those skills. Nevertheless, unions helped other workers by bringing attention to their low wages and poor working conditions. Unions benefited some workers, even non-union members, by pressuring businesses to improve wages and working conditions.

46. Unions were successful in solving problems for what kind of workers?

47. How did unions help other workers?

One reason that unions did not have much success is that most workers did not belong to a union. Out of 17 million workers in 1900, no more than three million were union members. Some workers did not join a union because they believed, as the settlers had, that each person had to take care of himself. Other workers did not join a union because they were afraid that they would lose their job. Employers could fire union workers and blacklist them. Employers could require that workers sign yellow dog contracts before they were hired.

Immigrants were often unlikely to become union members. They were not sure how long they would remain in America. African Americans were not allowed to join most unions, and as a result, many African American men worked as strikebreakers. **Strikebreakers** are people who work for a business when the regular workers are on strike. Business owners hire strikebreakers so that the business can keep making products and not lose money during a strike. In unions that did allow African Americans, such as the miners, meatpackers, and longshoremen, African Americans became loyal union members. However, by not including immigrants, unskilled workers, and African Americans, most unions lost many potential members. Not until the 1930s did new unions work successfully to include African Americans, Mexican Americans, and unskilled workers. This movement was started by John L. Lewis and the United Mine Workers.

48. Why did many African Americans work as strikebreakers?

49. What is one reason why unions were not successful?

50. What are some reasons why workers did not join the unions?

A second reason the unions did not have much success is that legislators did not pass any effective laws that helped solve the workers' problems. Only a few early unions, like the National Labor Union and the Knights of Labor, even tried to get legislation passed. In Pennsylvania, a law was passed to make mines safer, but the legislation was not enforced. In 1890, Illinois passed legislation that allowed state inspectors to examine factory working conditions. However, the first factory inspector, Florence Kelley, was primarily concerned with overwork and physical danger to women. Workers realized that big business influenced the state and federal government to work against any legislation that would improve working conditions.

51. What is another reason why unions did not have much success?

The third reason that unions did not succeed was that the courts supported big business owners. In 1890, Congress passed the Sherman Antitrust Act, which had originally been intended to prevent big corporations from limiting competition. However, the Supreme Court used the antitrust parts of the Act against the unions. When unions went on strike, business owners would go to court. The courts said that the strike violated the Sherman Antitrust Act because unions had a monopoly of workers and the strike limited trade. The



Oil Workers



Wood worker



People moving into shantytown  
on Chicago's lakefront



courts would issue an order for the union to stop striking. If the union did not stop striking, police and National Guard soldiers could be called in.

52. What is the third reason that unions did not have much success?

53. How did the Supreme Court hurt unions?

Test

**Question 2:** Explain how workers in the late 1800s tried to solve their problems with wages and unsafe working conditions. Begin with a general statement about the problem, the solution, and the effect.

**Basic Answer:** In the late 1800s, workers organized unions to solve their problems. Their problems were low wages and unsafe working conditions. The solution was for the workers to cooperate and form unions. First, workers formed local unions and later formed national unions. These unions used strikes to try to force employers to increase wages or make working conditions safer. Some unions worked on getting new laws passed. Unions had little success in solving the problems of the workers.

**Exemplary Answer:** In the late 1800s, workers organized unions to solve their problems. Their problems were low wages and unsafe working conditions. First, workers formed local unions in single factories. These unions used strikes to try to force employers to increase wages or make working conditions safer. These unions did not have enough power to dominate business owners, so workers formed national unions. Some unions, like the Knights of Labor, tried accommodation and worked on getting new laws passed. Most other unions continued using strikes. Unions were not successful because they did not have enough members, legislators would not pass effective laws, and the courts supported the business owners.



Practice

Describe three ways in which industrialization changed America in the late 1800s.

## End of Section Questions: **Workers' Problems and Solutions**

### Part A: **Core Test Questions**

1. Describe three ways in which industrialization changed America in the late 1800s.
2. Explain how workers in the late 1800s tried to solve their problems with wages and unsafe working conditions.

### Part B: **Supplemental Questions**

3. **Vocabulary.** Write the word or words for each lettered definition:
  - a. a group of workers who join together to try to get better wages.
  - b. a promise by a worker not to join a union.
  - c. people who work for a business when the regular workers are on strike.
  - d. a secret organization named after an Irish rebel group.
  - e. another name for state militia.
  - f. someone who thinks all governments are corrupt.
  - g. workers stop working in order to force employers to

meet their demands.

h. private police hired by companies.

4. What determines a person's standard of living?
5. How did low wages affect workers' standard of living?
6. Describe the working-condition problems many workers had.
7. What happens to a person who is blacklisted?
8. By 1869, what three things did unions realize about their attempts to gain power?
9. What are the two ways that unions tried to organize on a national level?
10. What are two ways the unions tried to gain power for the workers?
11. What event ruined the Knights of Labor?