

Lesson 25: The Rise of Industry

Did the benefits of industrialization outweigh the costs?

25.5 Working Conditions

- Working conditions in most industries were appalling because business owners, like Carnegie and Rockefeller, knew little about their workers.
- With so many people looking for jobs, business owners could pay wages so low that many men could not support their families.
 - Wives and children worked as well, usually at even lower wages, to make ends meet.
 - Millions of young children worked in mines, mills, and factories.



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- A newspaper reported that young boys hired by coal miners to separate lumps of coal from rocks “go to work . . . at seven o'clock in the morning and work till it is too dark to see any longer. For this they get \$1 to \$3 a week.”
- They also suffered from curved spines because they had to bend over piles of coal all day.



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- Mills and factories were hot in summer and cold in winter. To keep costs low, owners crowded workers together rather than finding additional space.
- Of all workplace dangers, fires were among the most destructive. In New York, tall buildings often lacked fire escapes.



25.6 Labor Unions

- Labor unions organized workers to fight for better wages and working conditions. Sometimes they negotiated with business owners to achieve their goals. Other times, they used strikes.



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- In 1869, Uriah Stephens organized a new union known as the Knights of Labor, hoping to unite “men and women of every craft, creed, and color” into “one common brotherhood.”
- After the Knights led several successful strikes against telegraph and railroad companies, the union grew to over 700,000 members.



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- As the number of Knights declined, a group of local trade unions formed the American Federation of Labor.
- Led by Samuel Gompers, the AFL tried to negotiate agreements with employers on such issues as wages.



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- Despite the AFL's peaceful approach, many employers made their workers sign pledges not to join unions.
- They also fired union members and exchanged lists of such “troublemakers” with other employers.



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- **Some business owners used force to defeat unions.**
- When workers struck at a Carnegie steel plant in Homestead, Pennsylvania, Henry Clay Frick, Carnegie's partner, refused to talk about their demands.
- Instead, Frick made plans to reopen his plant with non-union workers and hired 300 armed guards to protect these strikebreakers.



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- Labor unions were only somewhat successful at improving working conditions.
- For instance, although a strike by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union resulted in a shorter workweek and better pay, workers' demands for safety improvements were not met.

