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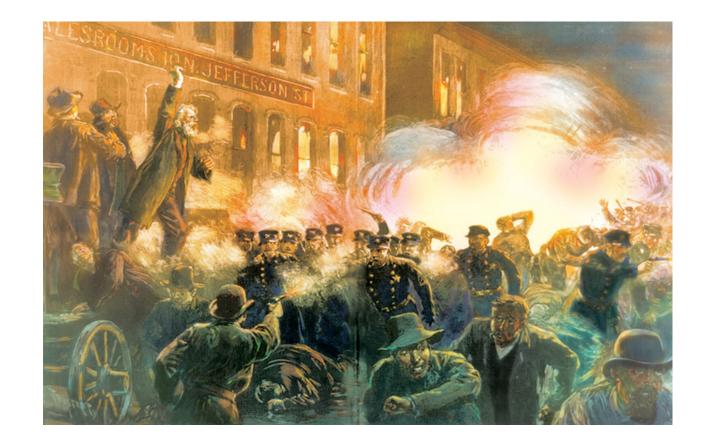
- Mills and factories were hot in summer and cold in winter. To keep costs low, owners crowded workers together rather than finding additional space.
- Of all workplace dangers, fires were among the most destructive.
 In New York, tall buildings often lacked fire escapes.



 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.



- 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.



- 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.



- 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.



- 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 nonunion workers and hired 300 armed guards to protect these strikebreakers.



- 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.

