

**Situation in 1865**

- Labour rights limited to what workers could negotiate with their employers in their own workplace.
- Only unions that existed were small and exclusive to skilled workers.
- Employers under no legal obligation to recognize labour unions.
- Industrial workers increased from 885,000 to 3.2 million – fast-growing workforce had no representation or protection from exploitation.
- William H. Sylvis – one of the first to promote working-class solidarity; called a convention of workers’ leaders in 1866 which resulted in creation of National Labour Union.
- NLU = campaigned for 8 hour day, end of convict labour and immigration restrictions; failure of Iron Founders strike showed Sylvis that political reform was needed to move forward – his sudden death in 1869 marked the demise of the NLU.

1.

**Actions of businessmen and employers**

- Workers during this period faced hazardous conditions (e.g. in 1889, 2000 railway workers were killed in accidents); employers resisted the introduction of health and safety standards on the grounds of cost.
- Workers disabled by industrial accidents (or those widowed as a result) received minimal aid from employers.
- Employers able to exploit racial and cultural divisions of the workforce and reject labour rights; in times of unrest, white Americans and immigrant workers were laid off and replaced with black labourers.

5.

**Divisions between skilled and unskilled workers**

- By the 1880s, workers were becoming increasingly unskilled and low paid. 1890 = unskilled women = 35% of the workforce.
- Expansion of factory system created unprecedented demand for unskilled workers – by the 1880s, nearly one-third of workers in the railroad and steel industries were common labourers.
- Industrialists in sectors such as construction, garment manufacturing and machine tool industries used the **contract system** to hire unskilled labourers.

2.

**Immigration, racial and ethnic diversity**

- Willingness of immigrant workers to accept bad working conditions made native-born Americans angry.
- Suspicious that some immigrant groups (particularly Italians) brought traditions of radicalism, violence and anarchy; seemed to be confirmed by the levels of violence that accompanied strikes involving immigrant labour.
- African Americans began to enter the industrial workforce in increasing numbers after end of slavery; immigrants from Europe divided by language and culture; both immigrants and native-born white Americans refused to work with African Americans.
- The National Labour Union, formed in 1866, encouraged African Americans to organise but in racially separate unions.

6.

**Leadership**

- The Knights of Labour (KOL) founded in 1869 by Uriah Smith Stephens; gained real momentum when **Terence V. Powderly** became leader in 1879; demanded an eight-hour day, equal pay for women and the abolition of child labour; Powderly rejected strikes as a means of achieving its ends, preferring to seek reforming legislation; by 1881 membership had grown to 20,000, however, not all members supported Powderly’s anti-strike position.
- The American Federation of Labour (AFL) effectively replaced the KOL; leader **Samuel Gompers** argued that to stand up to large corporations, labour had to harness the bargaining power of skilled workers (who were not easily replaceable) and concentrate on the practical goals of raising wages and reducing hours; whilst seeking reform through legislation, Gompers also supported the use of strikes and boycotts.
- The ability of the workforce to protest was inhibited by poverty; troublemakers easily dismissed from employment.; impediment to assertive leadership necessary to unite the labour force and win reform.

3.

**Militancy within labour unions**

- Industrial Workers of the World (est. 1905) – militant organisation with a reputation for violence, meaning employers viewed it with suspicion; membership peaked at 100,000 members in 1923.
- The Haymarket Affair:** May 1886, violence between police and striking workers at the McCormick Harvester Plant in Chicago; four workers killed when police opened fire; protest took place in Haymarket Square during which a bomb was thrown, killing seven policemen; the police retaliated by opening fire on the crowd – a further four workers were killed.
- Between 1881 and 1905, seven million workers participated in 37,000 strikes, some of which involved damage to property and looting.

**State and federal authorities**

- Laissez-faire** approach allowed a small number of capitalists to control several key industries and **monopolise** them; lack of restrictive legislation allowed employers to act as they pleased; use of armed force in the event of attempted strikes was not uncommon.
- Courts supported employers; court injunctions used to break strikes after 1894; judgement in the case of *Lochner v. New York (1905)* invoked the 14th Amendment to declare unconstitutional a law imposing a ten-hour day, claiming that it violated the rights of workers to determine their hours of work.

**Contract system:** *employment of workers that could be laid off in slack periods (times where less work was required).*

<p><b>Short-Term Impacts of WWI</b></p> <p><u>Positive:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The needs of war and the opportunities it offered to industrialists to increase their profits encouraged a more conciliatory approach towards unions.</li> <li>Between 1914 and 1918 factory production increased by 35%. Whilst prices rose, real wages increased by 20%.</li> <li>Employers agreed to safeguard working conditions by responding positively to the request of the War Labor Board to implement an 8 hour working day.</li> <li>Union membership increased during the war years from 2.7 million in 1916 to 5 million by 1920.</li> <li>For the first time the federal government recognised the unions as organisations representing labour and negotiated with them, through the National War Labor Board.</li> </ul> <p><u>Negative:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A spate of strikes broke out in 1919. Labour leaders in Seattle organised a strike and although this was very orderly and peaceful, the Mayor of Seattle accused union leaders of attempting to cause anarchy and called for federal troops to deal with the strike.</li> <li>In 1919 there were outbreaks of extreme violence that, although racially motivated, were also fuelled by the influx of returning soldiers into the labour market and the irrational fear of communist infiltration.</li> </ul>	<p>1.</p>
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<p><b>Long-Term Impacts of WWI</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1920-29 = unprecedented prosperity; increase in mass-produced consumer goods, increase in wages and availability of credit.</li> <li>Increase in nativism (hostility of white Americans to new immigrants) plus fear of communism = industrial action open to suspicion.</li> <li>Increased output from manufacturing industry increased power of employers; further increased by formation of giant corporations (e.g. Ford, General Motors, US Steel) – keen to keep profits high they adopted their own methods of satisfying the workforce.</li> <li>Rise in real wages and fall in unemployment reduced many causes of industrial unrest; improved conditions, reduction in working hours, benefits (e.g. pensions) etc. were in effect a ruse by employers to avert strikes = 'welfare capitalism'.</li> <li>'Company unions' were set up where representatives could meet with employers and discuss grievances but they were not allowed to call strikes or negotiate wages; management spies continued to work for employers and many workers had to sign 'yellow dog contracts'.</li> </ul>	<p>2.</p>
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<p><b>Was WWII a setback for organised labour?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During period of US involvement in WWII, control of industry was taken away from owners – this temporarily tipped the balance in favour of workers since their labour was essential to war effort.</li> <li>National War Labor Board (NWLB) established to deal with wage disputes; permitted 15% cost of living increase to wages – average industrial earnings boosted by 70%.</li> <li>Trade unions grew rapidly = 8.9 million members in 1940; 14.8 million in 1945; NWLB looked favourably on unions.</li> <li>However, control exerted over union action = in 1943, President able to seize any plant where strike action threatened to interfere with war production; unions required to give 30 days notice for all strikes.</li> <li>Fall in unemployment from 9 million in 1940 to 783,000 in 1943; labour shortages provided opportunities for women, young people and African-Americans; women generally paid less than men for same work and equal pay opposed by both management and unions alike.</li> <li>Black factory workers reduced to menial jobs; in response A. Philip Randolph threatened a march of 50,000 on Washington in 1941 – President responded with order to end racial discrimination in all defence projects and created Fair Employment Practices Committee.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Post-war Labour: A backward step?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>End of wartime controls unleashed massive wave of strikes; growing belief in political circles that unions were becoming too powerful; post-war anti-Communist feeling produced obsessive suspicion of the activities of the Communist Party of America who were active in the labour union movement.</li> <li>Republicans won both Houses of Congress in 1946 and resolved to restrain union activity; Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 restrained powers of unions and sought to purge organised labour of Communist elements.</li> <li>Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) greatly weakened – divisions between non-Communist and Communist led unions; expulsion of 10 Communist-led unions in 1949 led to loss of one-third of its members and also some of its most capable leaders = amalgamation with AFL in 1955.</li> <li>Positive outcomes in long running struggle between workers and General Motors – in 1948 a pay code linked to standard of living was introduced; in 1950 this package was expanded to include a five-year contract giving pensions and cost of living increases to employees.</li> </ul>
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**Yellow dog contract:** agreement between employer and employee that employee will not join a labour union as a condition of their employment.

**Impact of the Great Depression**

- Wall Street Crash of 24<sup>th</sup> October 1929 caused total collapse of US economy – factory closures, bankruptcy of many businesses, mass unemployment (from 3% in 1929 to 25% in 1933).
- 13 million unemployed by 1933 making many families destitute; African Americans particularly badly affected with unemployment rates double that of white Americans.
- People in work were pleased to have a job at all however there was greater conflict employers and workers – strikes, sit-ins and factory occupations all increased; employers called in the police or their own strike breakers.
- By 1933, only 10% of the workforce was unionised as sackings of striking workers was common.

1

**How effective was the National Labor Relations Act in extending labour rights to all workers?**

- Rise in union membership but disputes between employers and workers continued to be acrimonious; divisions in the trade union movement continued to deprive unskilled workers of their rights.
- AFL predominantly interested in amalgamating craft unions at the exclusion of unskilled labour = breakaway group formed called Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO).
- CIO aimed to organize labour in mass-production industries (steel, cars, glass etc.), gathering 3.7 million members in the process; use of new forms of protest – ‘sit-ins’; African-Americans and other ethnic minority workers benefitted from joining CIO, as did many women’s unions.

**A turning point in the development of union rights?**

- 1932 – Franklin D. Roosevelt elected US President and given unprecedented powers by Congress (for 100 days) to implement a programme of reform that would get the economy back on track; further challenge was to settle industrial unrest that existed.
- June 1933 – Congress passed the National Industry Recovery Act (NIRA) which established the National Recovery Administration (NRA); the NRA aimed to foster co-operation between different sides of industry by developing codes of conduct for wage rates, working hours, union rights etc.
- Law passed giving workers the right to organize trade unions and take part in collective bargaining.
- Positive effects of NRA limited = employers such as Henry Ford refused to sign codes; agreed codes tended to favour employers rather than employees; Supreme Court ruled NRA unconstitutional in 1935.

2

**What did the New Deal do for disadvantaged workers?**

- New Deal made significant impact on unionization of workers thereby extending their rights – however, these were largely skilled workers; remained a significant number of unskilled workers (including agricultural and domestic workers) who still had no organization.
- African Americans and Mexican Americans continued to face discrimination in the workplace; no new employment opportunities for Native Americans – however, FDR’s Fair Employment Practices Commission (1941) did attempt to eliminate racial discrimination in war industries. However, discrimination was particularly experienced by African American women.
- Position of women in the workplace was not improved – NIRA and Fair Labor Standards Act 1938 established a minimum wage but upheld differentials between men and women.
- Welfare reform helped some of the poorer paid but attempts by federal government to help those in need were constantly thwarted by the conflict between states’ rights and federal government.

**Was the Wagner Act of 1935 a turning point?**

3

- National Labour Relations Act (Wagner Act) advanced the cause of trade unionism; Wagner’s intention was to regulate and reduce labour disputes by providing structure for collective bargaining – reducing picket line violence and the disruption of strikes.
- Gave workers the right to join trade unions and elect their own representatives to take part in collective bargaining; use of spies on the factory floor by employers was banned.
- National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) set up – power to bargain on behalf of workers and reinstate unfairly dismissed workers.
- Facilitated expansion of union membership – 3.7 million in 1933 to 9 million in 1938.
- Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 created \$25 minimum weekly wage for industrial workers ; prohibited employment of children under 16.

5

Kennedy's New Frontier

- Inauguration of Kennedy in 1961 symbolized the beginning of a new era (a 'new frontier').
- Ambitious programme of reform only partly successful – lack of support in Congress meant agenda was frequently opposed by coalition of Republicans and Southern Democrats.
- 1961 – bill to increase minimum wage rejected by Congress.
- In attempts to redress problems of inflation, Kennedy succeeded in persuading Steelworkers' Union to accept non-inflationary contract with employers that included acceptance of minimal rises in wages; employers failed to keep their agreement not to raise steel prices so the workers lost out (unable to benefit from increased profit levels).
- Equal Pay Act of 1963 made wage discrimination on the basis of gender illegal and established principle of 'equal pay for equal work'. Act was an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. Salaries of women compared to men rose dramatically; by 1970, earnings were equal to 62% of male earnings, rising to 80% in 2004.

1

Johnson's Great Society

- Lyndon B. Johnson succeeded to the presidency after JFK's assassination in 1963; quickly launched his vision of a 'Great Society'.
- With support of labour unions he won a landslide victory in 1964, with 61.1% of the popular vote.
- First priority in creating 'Great Society' was to reduce the number of people living below the poverty line – creation of millions of new jobs and spending on social security benefits.
- Focus overwhelmingly on the war on poverty – advancing rights of organized labour seems to have assumed less importance. However, some aspects of reform did impact labour rights and the work force:
- **Civil Rights Act of 1964:** prohibited discrimination on basis of race, religion, sex or national origin; benefitted African Americans, Hispanics and other ethnic groups who had faced discrimination in the work place.
- **Economic Opportunity Act 1964:** established Office of Economic Opportunity to fund a jobs corps to attract and train young people in vocational skills, or provide education that would increase their employability.

2

<p><b><u>Changing Economy and Organisation of American Industry</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic growth slowing by mid-1970s partly due to increase in foreign competition in manufacturing which reduced demand for home produced goods.</li> <li>Rising inflation increased production costs and consumer prices – further reducing competitive capability of American industries.</li> <li>Reduction of productivity = fall in the real wages of 80% of semi-skilled and unskilled workers; rise in unemployment.</li> <li>Further expansion of high-tech industry reduced demand for unskilled labour but increased need for skilled workers, whose wage levels rose significantly.</li> <li>Mid-1970s-1992, gap between poorer paid and the better off widened; wages of chief executives rose by 340% whilst the majority got poorer.</li> <li>Majority of workers appear to have settled for what they had; reduction in strike action; increasing opportunities for married women provided a second income for families that enabled them to maintain a reasonable standard of living,</li> <li>Rationalisation of large manufacturing industries into smaller units in order to reduce costs and make them more competitive; relocated to rural areas outside of major urban sites – many smaller firms established in the south and south-west (traditionally anti-unionist areas).</li> </ul>	<p>1</p>	<p><b><u>Shift in the 'balance of power' between employers and the labour unions</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-unionized firms had greater flexibility when it came to the negotiation of wage levels, keeping production costs lower and potentially increasing profit margins – making them more competitive and at an advantage compared to unionized firms.</li> <li>Increasing tendency for employers to flout the law in their dealings with workers by denying them their rights, particularly with regard to wage agreements, working hours and conditions; clear employers could get away with this – workers generally failed to protest.</li> <li>Complaints made to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) were processed so slowly that employers had a clear signal that they could risk pushing the boundaries of the law; by 1970 the membership of the NLRB had fewer union leaders than in earlier times – indicating their waning influence.</li> </ul>	<p>3</p>
<p><b><u>The changing composition of the workforce</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater dispersal and fragmentation of the workforce – not conducive to solidarity.</li> <li>Concentration of large numbers of workers in one place of work generally became a thing of the past – trade union organization and recruitment became more difficult.</li> <li>Unskilled workforce divided culturally and ethnically – Hispanic and African American workers augmented by a new wave of immigrants from Asia – majority of whom were unskilled and prepared to work for low wages (limiting union influence).</li> <li>Continuing growth of white collar workers to meet the needs of high-tech industry; reduction of blue collar workers who had been made redundant by machines – by 1980 there were 50.5 million white collar workers compared to 30.5 million in 1960.</li> <li>White collar workers less well disposed to union membership; many benefited from generous welfare schemes provided by employers and so were more inclined to support them rather than embarking on union action.</li> </ul>	<p>2</p>	<p><b><u>Changing political attitudes and policies</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organised labour could no longer rely on same level of support from politicians; as union membership declined by late-1970s, value of the unions to the Democrats diminished.</li> <li>Nixon's <b>Affirmative Action</b> did benefit black and other ethnic minority workers by challenging discrimination in employment.</li> <li><b>Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970</b> established health and safety regulations in the work place; success for the unions as they ensured that responsibility for setting standards for health and safety rested with the Department of Labor, not an independent board that might be swayed by employers.</li> <li>1977 – Jimmy Carter and Congress established hourly minimum wage at \$2.65 but attempts by the AFL-CIO to persuade Carter to reform the National Labor Relations Act failed – Democrats more interested in gaining the support of employers than workers.</li> <li>Ronald Reagan set out to curb the power of the unions – aspect of a policy designed to revitalize American industry by lifting restrictive regulations and giving more autonomy to employers; privatization of publicly owned businesses and services – not in interest of workers; ensured that members of NLRB were presidential appointments who agreed with his radical position.</li> </ul>	<p>4</p>
		<p><b><u>What remained of trade unionism between the 1970s and 1992?</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trade union membership declined significantly but the unions did not expire, although their power and influence was greatly reduced.</li> <li>However, 1970s did see an upsurge in union membership amongst public sector workers (teachers, bank employees, municipal workers); in response the AFL-CIO created a public service department within its organization; 1970 saw first nationwide strike of public employees when the US Postal Workers took industrial action; 1972 – teachers went on strike in response to reduction in real wages; 1975 – American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees organized a strike of 80,000 members.</li> <li>Striking of public service employees alienated public opinion because of the negative impact on public life, even though strikes from mid-70s until 1992 were in the majority localized and small.</li> <li>Developments within black trade unionism; 1972 – black labour leaders met in Chicago and formed the Coalition of Black Trade Unions (CBTU), representing 37 national unions; discussion of where they should place their support in upcoming election but also sought to establish their position within labour movement – particular interest in position of black women workers.</li> </ul>	<p>5</p>