

Labor Strife, 1890-1920

*From: Conflict Resolution and United
States History (Chambers and
Gardner, 2007)*

Objectives

- ✓ Examine the causes and consequences of the Pullman Railroad Strike of 1894 and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913
- ✓ Understand how the railroads transformed the fabric of American industrial life after the Civil War
- ✓ Compare the differing forms of labor organization in the late 1800s
- ✓ Understand the effects of the Depression of 1893 on the railroad industry
- ✓ Understand the goals of late 19th century social reformers
- ✓ Understand the 19th century doctrine of free labor and the courts' view of labor strikes or boycotts as illegal
- ✓ Compare the context in which labor disputes were resolved before and after the 1930s

Part One:

The Pullman Strike and Boycott, 1894

Historical Background

- After the Civil War the pace of industrialization accelerated dramatically.
- The number of workers in manufacturing and construction doubled from 2 to 4 million between 1860 and 1880.
- The Homestead Act of 1862 opened western lands to independent farmers
- Railroads were the most dynamic new industry.
 - Huge subsidies given to railroads to expand the national marketplace
 - The transcontinental railroad completed 18
 - Vast network of railroads not only settled the West with farmers, ranchers and miners but also created America's first big businesses
 - Railroad construction spurred the development of iron, steel, coal, lumber and manufacturing equipment
 - Fostered the growth of giant manufacturing companies, esp. Standard Oil
- Monopolistic trusts
- Fast pace of growth and change caused conflict in relations between labor and capital

New forms of labor organization

- Skilled craft unions in a number of trades in 1867 formed the short-lived National Labor Union to agitate for land reform, union recognition and an 8-hour day.
- Followed by the Knights of Labor in 1869, an industrial rather than craft union, with unskilled as well as skilled labor in all regions of the country (coal miners, railroad workers, shoemakers, machinists, glass blowers, iron workers and others) that advocated boycotts and arbitration, worker cooperatives and a graduated income tax (there was no income tax).
- They had a series of successful strikes against Jay Gould's southwestern railroad lines, but began to decline after a series of failed strikes in the late 1880s.
- A rival and ultimately more successful union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) organized in 1886, with a focus on better wages, hours and working conditions rather than broad reformist goals.

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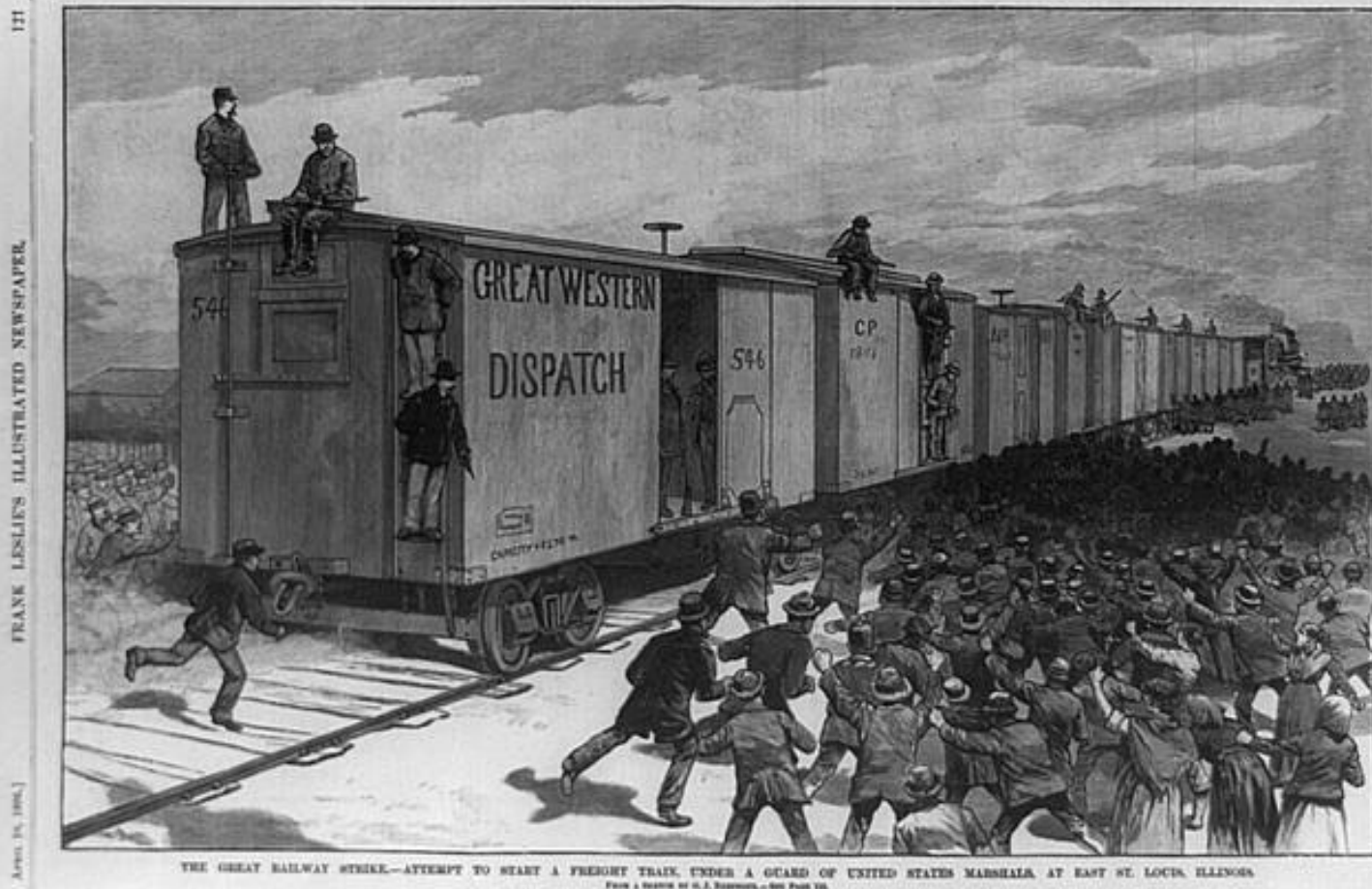
THE GREAT STRIKE—THE SIXTH MARYLAND REGIMENT FIGHTING ITS WAY THROUGH BALTIMORE.—From a Daguerotype by D. B. Deane.—[See Page 106.]

Great Railroad Strike, 1877

Haymarket Riot, 1886

- A nationwide strike for an 8-hour day began on May 1, 1886.
- On May 3, 1886 there was violence at McCormick Reaper works in Chicago.
- The following evening, May 4, 1886, there was a peaceful rally by anarchists in Chicago.
- The crowd was ordered to disperse by police. A bomb was thrown, which exploded, killing a police officer.
- The police opened fire and 60 officers and an unknown number of civilians were injured, 7 police and at least 4 workers were killed.
- Well-known anarchists and socialists were rounded up and charged with the death of the officer killed by the bomb.
- Eight were put on trial and found guilty, even though there was no direct evidence connecting any of them with the bomb.
- On November, 1887, four of them were hanged (one had committed suicide, two had their sentences commuted to life in prison (and were later pardoned)).
- The verdict and hangings sparked outrage from the budding labor movement.
- Following the Haymarket Riots, a voluntary association of 24 railways centering or terminating in Chicago formed a General Managers' Association (GMA) was formed.

Labor strife on the railroads, 1886



Knights of Labor trying to block one of Jay Gould's freight trains under guard by U.S. militia in East St. Louis, Illinois, 1886

Pullman Palace Car Company

1875: George Pullman incorporated the Pullman Palace Car Company in Illinois to build railroad dining, parlor and sleeping cars, which were leased to railroad companies along with the staff. The railroad companies charged customers double the price of regular tickets to ride in the Pullman cars.

1880-1884: George Pullman built model factory town of Pullman, Illinois, just south of Chicago, with 8,500 residents, which grew to more than 12,000 by 1893.

George Pullman felt that he was improving the lives of his workers by providing them with housing, shopping and entertainment next to their workplace.

The Pullman town was meant to solve the labor problems, but ended up exacerbating them. Resident (workers) felt that the company had taken over every aspect of their lives.

Pullman Palace Car Company



Pullman workers exiting factory, 1893

Labor strife intensified in the 1890s

- As industries developed and grew in the United States in the later 19th century, workers came to believe that their labor had mixed with the property of the owners and that they had some entitlement.
- However, industrialists saw their businesses as their private property, believed that they had an obligation to maximize profits by cutting costs and viewed workers as interchangeable.
- New forms of labor organization were developing that wanted to change the relationship of labor and industry.
- They exerted their strength in numbers through strikes.
- In 1892, labor declared a general strike in New Orleans.
- Coal miners struck in Tennessee.
- Railroad switchmen struck in Buffalo, New York.
- Cooper miners struck in Idaho.

Homestead Strike, 1892

- Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers organized employees at Carnegie Steel works in Homestead, Pa, outside of Pittsburgh.
- In 1890, the price of steel products began to decline. To cut wages and break the union, Carnegie's manager, Henry Clay Frick, announced on June 25, 1892 that he would not negotiate with the union; only with individual employees.
- The employees refused to negotiate without the union and on June 30, 1892 Frick locked out the workers with a fence topped with barbed wire.
- Frick hired private Pinkerton agents to guard the steel mill and planned to open operations with non-union workers on July 6.
- The workers learned of these plans and rushed to prevent the Pinkertons from coming ashore from their boats. Gunfire was exchanged. The Pinkertons tossed dynamite. The workers tried to set fire to the river.
- The National Guard were ordered in. Ultimately 9 strikers and 7 Pinkerton security guards died.
- The strikers charged with conspiracy. The public generally thought the employees had reasonable requests.
- After an anarchist shot and wounded Frick, support for the strike evaporated and by Oct. 1892 Amalgamated was bankrupt. The union called off the strike but by this time most of the employees and all of the strike leaders had been blacklisted.

The Depression of 1893

- Railroad expansion had long been a potent engine of economic growth, ranging from 15 to 20% of total national investment in the 1870s and 80s.
- The crash of wheat prices, a run on gold by European investors and the bankruptcy of the overextended Philadelphia and Reading Railroad triggered a depression in 1893.
- The New York Stock Exchange shut down for the first time ever for more than a week.
- Construction of railroads and buildings stopped and tens of thousands of businesses went bankrupt.
- June 1893: American Railway Union (ARU) founded under the leadership of Eugene V. Debs to unite railway labor in a single organization.
- Sept. 1893: Wages at Pullman were reduced by an average of 25%.
- By 1894, a million workers were out of work



Coxey's Army of the unemployed, 1893

Immediate background to the Pullman Strike

- Sept. 1893: Wages at Pullman were reduced by an average of 25%.
- Mar-April 1894: Workers in Pullman's Palace Car Company joined the ARU.
- May 7, 1894: A committee of Pullman workers, led by Thomas Heathcoate, met with Thomas Wickes, a Pullman corporate vice-president seeking relief either through a restoration of wages or a reduction of rents.
- May 9, 1894: George Pullman refused to consider changes in wages or rents.
- May 10, 1894: Three workers on the grievance committee were laid off allegedly for lack of work. Pullman workers voted to strike.
- May 11, 1894: At noon, nearly 3,000 Pullman workers walked off their jobs. By evening, the Pullman works were closed.
- May, 1894: The Chicago Civic Federation appointed a special committee to attempt to arbitrate the differences between the Pullman company and its striking workers. Jane Addams, vice-president of the Civic Federation met with Heathcoate and other representatives of the striking workers and thought that there might be grounds for settlement.

George Pullman, president, Pullman Palace Car Company

George M. Pullman was the founder and chief owner of the Pullman Palace Car Company. He was born in 1831 in western New York. His father was a poor but intelligent mechanic. He was one of ten children. Pullman worked first as a cabinetmaker, and then as a contractor for improvements on the Erie Canal. Later, with the development of railroads, he designed luxurious railroad cars for sleeping and dining and established the Pullman Palace Car Company, which constructed, maintained and operated these special cars, along with the staff, for railroad companies which leased them for set fees. Pullman developed a paternalistic company town outside of Chicago for his employees. He took great pride in this model town, but was considered by employees and subordinates as brusque, unapproachable and domineering.



Thomas Heathcoate, chairman, Pullman Workers Strike Committee

By 1894, Thomas Heathcoate had been a skilled railroad car builder for thirty years. He had been employed by Pullman and lived in Pullman for five years. He joined the ARU in April 1894, and was elected president of one of the American Railway Union locals in the Pullman shops. Heathcoate was highly respected by his fellow ARU members. They chose him to chair the 46-members grievance committee that met with Wickes, and later Pullman, before the outbreak of the strike. He was then elected chairman of the strike committee and met with Addams and representatives of the Arbitration Committee for the Chicago Civic Federation. Following the Pullman strike, Heathcoate was not reemployed at the Pullman works and, in testimony before the U.S. Strike Commission in 1894, he expressed the belief that he had been blacklisted, that is, denied future employment in the industry.

Jane Addams, the mediator

Jane Addams was born in 1860 to a comfortable middle class family and grew up in a small town in Illinois. Her father was a Quaker, a mill owner and a friend of Abraham Lincoln. Addams was educated at Rockford Female Seminary. Shocked by her encounters with poverty in Illinois and later on a visit to London and inspired by English examples, Addams and a friend opened a settlement house, Hull House, in 1889 to provide educational cultural, health care and other services to poor immigrants in Chicago's slums. She lobbied strenuously against "sweatshops" and for factory inspections, improved city services and educational reform. She sympathized with the suffering of the Pullman workers and understood their grievances, especially about rent. Addams was a liberal reformer who worked with many reformers, such as socialists and women activists, with whom she did not totally agree. She saw no reason why the differences between the Pullman company and its workers could not be resolved and offered her assistance. She was mediating as vice-president of the Chicago Civic Federation and a member of its special committee to help resolve the differences between the Pullman Company and its striking workers.



Mock Mediation, May 1894

It is the end of May 1894. Jane Addams has offered to arbitrate the dispute between the Pullman Palace Car Company and its workers. Although in reality her offer was refused by George Pullman, we will take a small step away from history and role-play what might have happened if he had agreed to allow Addams to act as a mediator to help the disputants come to a resolution.

Directions:

Divide into groups of four. Each group should have a person acting in the role of:

1. George Pullman, Pullman Palace Car Company
2. Thomas Heathcoate, Pullman workers
3. Jane Addams, mediator from the Chicago Civic Federation
4. An observer from the Chicago Civic Federation

Preparation:

1. Each participant should read the information about the historical background, the people involved, and their positions and interests to gain as thorough an understanding as possible of the events, characters, and historical context.
2. The participants should imagine they have been invited to a meeting by the Chicago Civic Federation to resolve the issues underlying the strike by the Pullman workers. Each participant should act in a manner consistent with his/her character and interests.

Roles:

1. The role of the mediators is not to find a solution that he or she thinks is appropriate but rather to help identify a solution to which all parties can agree.
2. The role of the representatives is to try to find a solution that is consistent with the limitations of their historical roles.
3. The role of the observers is to objectively observe, record and report on the mediation process using the evaluation form. The observer does not participate in the mediation.

Steps in Mediation

1. Mediator introduces parties and sets ground rules—no triggers, etc.
2. Each side tells story
3. Mediator clarifies through questions and paraphrasing
4. Mediator tries to get disputants to identify facts and issues
5. Parties agree on issues and interests
6. Brainstorm alternative solutions
7. Evaluate solutions—discuss and revise
8. Optional Caucus: mediator speaks with disputants separately
9. Mediator helps parties agree on a solution
10. Mediator writes down the agreement

The Pullman workers: positions and interests

Positions

- Pullman workers were pressured to live in Pullman housing and the rents and other fees were deducted directly from their wages.
- Rents at Pullman are 30% higher than surrounding communities.
- The shop foreman had broad and arbitrary authority.
- Workers had been laid off and wages were cut by 1/3 for those who kept their jobs.
- The company was profitable enough to ease the wage cuts or reduce the rents.
- They wanted management to recognize and engage in collective bargaining with the ARU.

Interests

- Immediate economic survival: reduced rent or restoration of part of the wage cut
- More long-term stability in the relationship between their income and cost of living
- More autonomy at work and the resolution of grievances over the arbitrary authority of shop foremen
- Recognition of the union as a collective bargaining agent for them
- Freedom of choice over where they live
- A fair or just wage

George Pullman: Positions and Interests

Positions:

- The depression had led to a decline in orders and necessitated a cut in expenses, especially labor costs.
- Company housing needed to pay for itself and was a separate issue from wages.
- The company had the best interests of its employees at heart and he needed to be free to manage the business without interference.

Interests:

- Profits for its shareholders.
- A skilled, reliable and productive workforce.
- Maintaining his reputation as a visionary leader.

Debriefing

The Process

- To what extent did the parties use active listening skills?
- To what extent did the parties brainstorm and evaluate possible alternatives
- To what extent were the parties able to articulate their real interests?
- To what extent did rhetoric get in the way of pursuing the parties real interests?

The Results

- Were the parties able to reach mutually acceptable solutions?
- Why or why not?
- To what extent were the role played with historical accuracy?

The Facts Continued through July 1, 1894

- Pullman, however, rebuffed Addams' offers to mediate.
- The strike continued.
- The Pullman shop workers were encouraged by the outpouring of support from trade unions in Chicago and around the country.
- At the June 1894 ARU Convention (which had selected Chicago as the site months before the strike) ARU president Eugene Debs gave a stirring opening speech.
- On the third day, the Pullman strikers outlined their grievances and sought support from their fellow ARU members.
- A group of ARU members met with Pullman VP Thomas Wickes who continued to insist that there was nothing to arbitrate.
- The convention voted unanimously to have all union members boycott Pullman cars starting June 26.
- The GMA encouraged all railroads to challenge the ARU boycotters by attaching sleeping cars to ALL trains in the hope of gaining federal intervention.
- The Pullman strike had now become a boycott centered in Chicago affecting all railroads to the west.
- The GMA recruited 2500 strikebreakers and encouraged local prosecutions for destruction of property and other offenses.

Directions for a Mock Court Hearing for an Injunction, July 2, 1894

The setting is a hearing before federal circuit court judges on the morning of July 2 to determine whether an injunction requested by the government should be issued to prohibit the workers from conspiring to interfere with interstate commerce or movement of the mails. An injunction is a writ granted by a court of equity whereby one is required to do or to refrain from doing a specified act. A mock trial usually involves witnesses and fact finding. This mock court hearing is more like a moot court which is a mock court hearing before a panel of judges, without witnesses, that is focused on the application of law, public policy issues and issues of fairness.

The Participants:

- 1-3: U.S. Attorney General Richard Olney, District Attorney Thomas Milchrist, and special federal prosecutor Edward Walker
- 4-5: GMA representatives—Everett St. John, president of Chicago Rock Island and Pacific Railroad and chairman, GMA, and John Eagen, GMA strike manager
- 6. Illinois Governor Altgeld
- 7-9. ARU—Eugene Debs
AFL—Samuel Gompers
Henry Demarest Lloyd (liberal reformer)
- 10-11. Judges William A. Woods and Peter S. Grosscup
- 12- Observers

Preparation:

- 1. Everyone should read and understand the historical background, the individuals involved, their positions and arguments.
- 2. The U.S. Attorney, District Attorney, Special Federal Prosecutor and GMA representatives should work together to develop their arguments
- 3. The ARU, AFL, Illinois Governor and Henry Demarest Lloyd should work together to develop their arguments.
- 4. The judges should select a chief judge who will preside and work together to develop questions²⁵ they might want to ask those seeking and those opposing the issuance of an injunction.

The Federal Government

Requested a federal court injunction ordering the railroad workers back to work and authorizing the use of federal troops to implement the order, arguing:

- Railroads were vital to the national economy
- Workers were interfering the delivery of US mail
- The boycott exceeded the capacity of local authorities to maintain order and business.



***U.S. Attorney
General Richard
Olney***

General Managers Association

Everett St. John, chairman, or John M. Egan, strike manager.

The GMA supported the request for an injunction, arguing:

- The boycott was illegal and interfered with the right of railroads to manage their property, relying on *Santa Clara*

American Railway Union (ARU)

Eugene Debs argued on behalf of the American Railway Union (ARU) against the injunction that:

- Pullman strikers had legitimate grievances against the Pullman Co.
- The ARU had legitimate grounds for supporting the Pullman strikers
- American workers had the right to withdraw their labor and not be compelled to work at a particular job
- The U.S. government was misconstruing the intent of the Sherman Antitrust Act
- The railroads were attempting to restraint trade
- The GMA could operate trains without Pullman cars
- The boycott was not interfering with the delivery of U.S. Mail
- There was no need for an injunction to require the men to go back to work because it had been a peaceful strike
- The use of federal troops to enforce the injunction would inflame the community and lead to great disorder.



Eugene Debs

American Federation of Labor (AFL)

Samuel Gompers and the AFL publicly supported the strike. Their views were:

- Workers had an unquestionable right to organize and to strike to improve their working conditions
- Workers' right to strike should not be interfered with by the government
- An injunction based on the Sherman Antitrust Act to restrict the actions of unions would be an illegitimate interpretation of the law.



Samuel Gompers

Illinois Governor John Peter Altgeld

Governor Altgeld was a self-made man, an attorney, judge, and in 1894 a popular, pro-labor, democratic governor who was suspicious of business interests. He argued on behalf of the State of Illinois:

- There was no immediate danger to public safety
- The strike was peaceful and could result in the negotiation of fair, reasonable outcome
- He could call the state militia if the need arose.
- Under the U.S. Constitution, the federal government could only dispatch troops to deal with a domestic disturbance if requested to do so by the state governor or state legislature. Neither had requested federal troops.
- The federal government must respect the rights of local self-government.



Governor Altgeld

Reformers

Henry Demarest Lloyd was a nationally known social reformer, journalist and anti-monopolist. In his famous 1894 book, *Wealth against Commonwealth*, he denounced monopolies and espoused a labor-populist alliance for the moral reform of the industrial system. Lloyd and other reformers argued that:

- The ARU workers had legitimate grievances.
- The workers had a right to strike.
- The GMA and the railroad companies were monopolies that violated the public interest.
- The proper role of the federal government should be to take over and operate the railroads in the public interest.



Henry Demarest Lloyd

The court: Judge Woods and Judge Grosscup

- The federal judges hearing the case did not have a reputation for being sympathetic to labor. Judge Woods had already issued a limited restraining order that prohibited strikers on the Illinois divisions of the Santa Fe Railroad from interfering with workers who continued to work for that company.
- Reflecting the dominant societal views of the Gilded Era, 19th century courts emphasized individualism, community well-being and natural law.
- The “free labor” doctrine held that workers had an inalienable right to their own labor, but denied workers an unlimited right to withhold their labor (i.e., strike or boycott) if such action infringed on the rights of other workers, harmed the community or “illegally” diluted the value and use of employer’s private property.
- The rights of private property reigned supreme in the 19th century legal system.
- Courts issued rulings and injunctions that restrained workers and less frequently employers from acting to injure others through combinations that violated the laissez faire rules of the marketplace.
- Fear that workers acting through unions might take the law into their own hands underlay the tendency by courts to issue injunctions against strikes and boycotts in the late 19th century.

Precedents

Prevailing societal vies not sympathetic to labor:

- 19th century courts emphasized individualism, community well-being and natural law
- The “free labor” doctrine held that individuals had a right to their own labor but denied workers an unlimited right to withhold their labor (by strike or boycott) if such action infringed the rights of other workers, harmed the community or “illegally” diluted the value and use of employers’ private property.
- Strikes were condemned as criminal conspiracies.

Legal Precedents:

- 1886, *Santa Clara Co.*, US Supreme Court held due process and equal protection applied to corporations and their property same as to individuals.
- 1891, federal district court rules a union boycott to be a form of illegal coercion
- 1893, federal judges held Sherman Anti-Trust Act applied to combinations of labor as well as businesses.
- 1894, federal court issued sweeping injunction that prohibited striking employees from quitting en masse and from interfering with the operation of a railroad.
- 1894, 7th Circuit lifted an injunction aimed at a strike by the railroad brotherhood against a railroad.

Directions for the Arguments and Decision

Arguments: 20 minutes per side:

- ✓ Those seeking an injunction argue first
- ✓ Those arguing against the issuance of an injunction argue second
- ✓ The judges may interrupt with short, relevant questions

Decision: 10 minutes:

- ✓ The chief judge will ask the other judges for their inclinations
- ✓ If it is not unanimous, the judges will discuss the merits and try to influence each other
- ✓ The chief judge will seek a final opinion (which may be split) and reasoning.

What really happened?

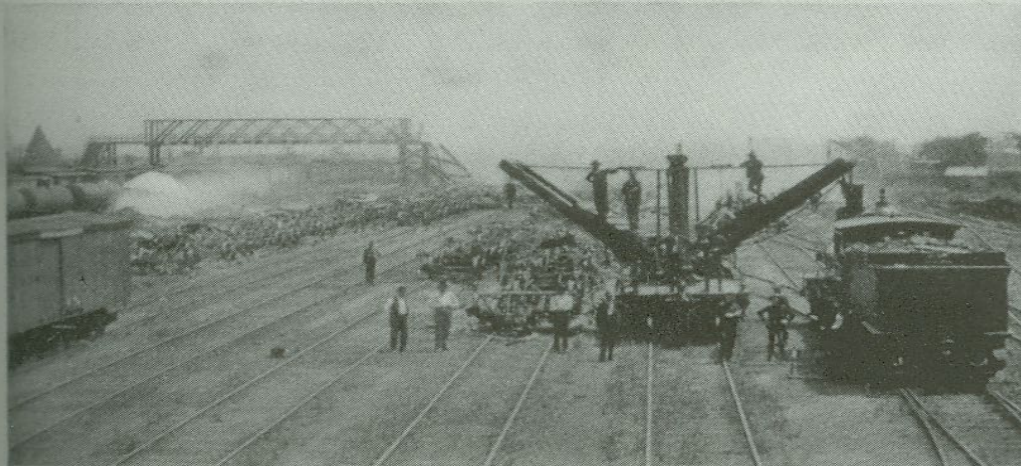
- June 15, 1894: Pullman Co. refused to receive communication from the ARU or to permit proposed arbitrators to determine whether there was anything to arbitrate.
- June 21, 1894: Delegates of ARU voted to stop handling Pullman cars starting June 26th unless Pullman Company agreed to arbitration.
- June 25, 1894: Pullman Company met with the GMA and agreed to resist the proposed boycott.
- June 26, 1894: ARU, representing 465 local unions, led a general boycott of all Pullman cars. Boycott spread rapidly as GMA members discharged men who refused to switch passengers trains with Pullman cars.
- July 1, 1894: Pullman Strike had become exceedingly effective: little rail traffic moved in or out of Chicago.
- July 2, 1894: Federal injunction issued enjoining ARU leaders from “compelling or inducing by threats, intimidation, persuasion, force or violence railway employees to refuse or fail to perform their duties.”
- July 3, 1894: Federal troops sent to Chicago.
- July 5,6, 1894: Illinois Governor Altgeld protested the use of federal troops to President Cleveland.



LOOKING UP THE PANHANDLE RAILROAD.—FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY J. W. TAYLOR.



IN THE PANHANDLE RAILROAD YARDS.—FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY J. W. TAYLOR.



WORKING MEN AT WORK IN THE CINCINNATI, BURLINGTON, AND QUINCY RAILROAD YARD, LOOKING EAST.—FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY M. D. CLEVELAND.

Destruction of railroad cars, 1894

Impact of the Pullman Strike and other labor unrest

- July-August 1894: 13 died and 56 wounded as result of military intervention to end the boycott
- Eugene Debs and other ARU officials were jailed for violating the federal injunction
- Railroads established blacklists denying employment to workers who had been involved in striking
- 1898: Erdman Act established a framework for the voluntary arbitration of labor disputes
- 1916: Adamson Act guaranteed railroad workers eight-hour day
- 1926: Railway Labor Act established retirement program for railroad workers, collective bargaining and cooling off periods
- Other industries did not gain similar benefits until later:
 - ✓ 1914: Clayton Anti-Trust Act limited use of anti-trust laws to restrict labor organizing
 - ✓ 1935: National Labor Relations Act (or “Wagner Act”) legitimized the right of employees to join labor unions and to bargain collectively



Debs Presidential Campaign Poster, 1920

- The ARU fell apart after the Pullman Strike under the effects of the railway employers' use of the blacklist against strikers and refusal to recognize the union.
- But the spirit of industrial unionism embodied in the ARU was carried forward by the United Mine Workers and the Industrial Workers of the World.
- After serving six months in federal prison in 1894, Eugene Debs became a socialist.
- For the rest of his life he worked tirelessly to persuade American workers and their allies in the middle class that their best hope for improving their lives lay in a socialistic society.
- He was the Socialist Party candidate for president of the United States in 1900, 1904, 1908, 1912 and 1920.
- In 1912, Debs, as the Socialist Party candidate, obtained 6% of the vote.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why was the gulf between Pullman and his workers so great? What interests did they have in common?
2. What would you find appealing or disconcerting if we had been living in George Pullman model community?
3. Why did railroad managers find the American Railway Union to be such a threat?
4. What are the pros and cons of compulsory arbitration of labor disputes, such as those that were eventually adopted by the railroads?
5. What should be the role of the courts in dealing with labor disputes? What good or harm might a federal injunction and the use of federal troops to enforce it produce? To whom? Why?
6. What should be the role of the state and/or federal government in maintaining order or restricting strike activity?
7. What other outcomes can you imagine for the Pullman strike? How might they have been achieved?

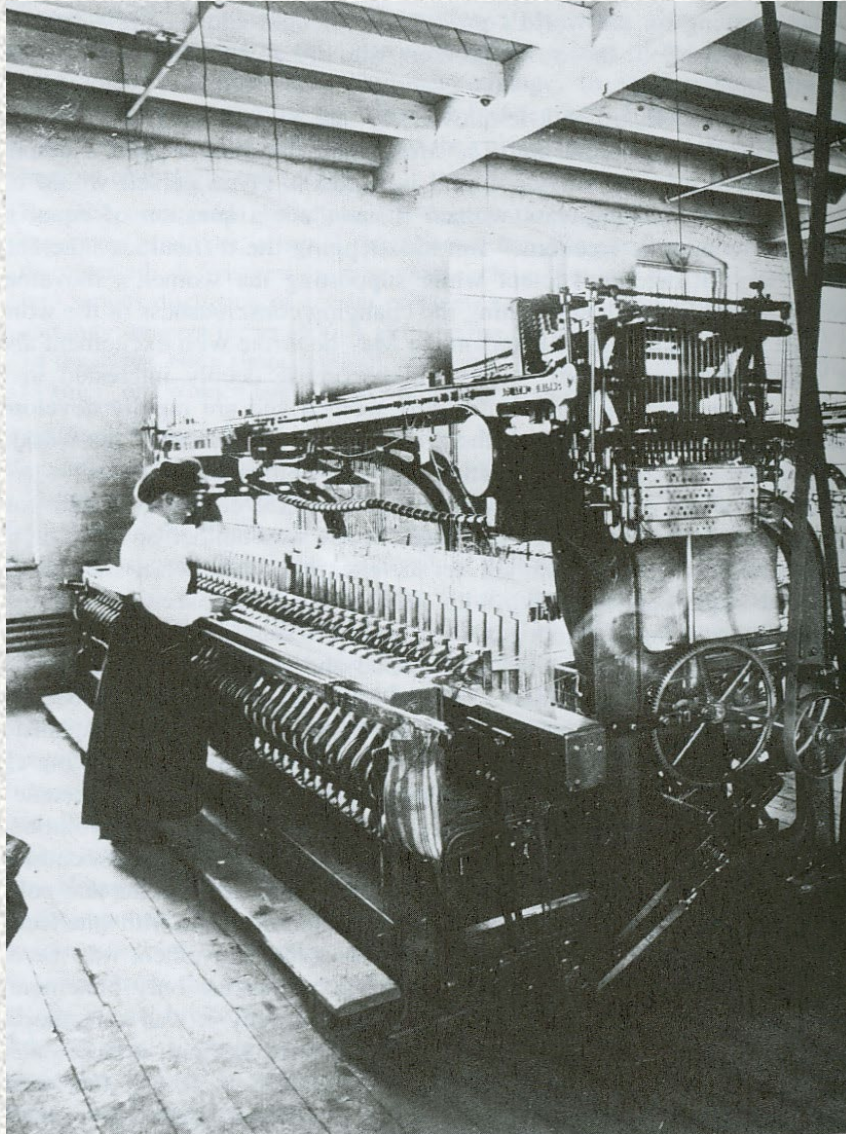
Part Two:

The Paterson Silk Strike, 1913

- Twenty years after the Pullman Strike and little has changed.
- Following decades of labor unrest, skilled and unskilled workers, almost all recent immigrants, organized a strike against the silk manufacturers in Paterson, NJ.
- Immediate cause was the imposition of four looms at one silk mill
- The strike spread rapidly.
- The manufacturers refused to deal with the striking workers until they returned to work.
- The manufacturers used the power of local government to prohibit meetings and picketing.
- We have a mock collective bargaining session, as has been required by federal law under the Wagner Act since 1935.
- The Wagner Act legitimized the right of workers to join labor unions and to bargain collectively on “terms and conditions of employment.”

Historical background

- Paterson, New Jersey, 20 miles from New York City, had become the first industrial community in the country in 1792 with Alexander Hamilton's investment group, the "Society of Useful Manufacturers."
- The Great Falls of the Passaic River powered textile mills, firearms and railroad locomotive manufacturing in Paterson.
- By the latter half of the 1800s, silk production became the dominant industry.
- Paterson was also the site of historic labor unrest: as early as 1828 one of the nation's first strikes occurred here when women and children demanded a reduction to a 12-hour day.
- Management later hired immigrants from different ethnic groups to impede the development of worker organizations among the unskilled and semi-skilled workers.
- The discord between labor and industry at the turn of the 20th century was as much an ethic and class conflict as it was about economics.



***Silk ribbon
weaver
at a
Paterson
Silk Mill,
1906***

The Progressive Era

- A broad consensus had developed about the need for government to address the problems created by rapid industrialization and mass immigration.
- In the 1912 election, Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt and Eugene Debs all ran as industrial reformers (Democrat Wilson won against the conservative Republican candidate, William Taft).
- It was an open and fluid moment in American history when the lines between radicals and liberals were not clearly drawn.
- The role of women was dramatically changing as the momentum built for women's suffrage and more women joined the workforce.
- Working class immigrant women played a leading role in the successful wool garment workers strike in Lawrence, MA in 1912.
- These dramatic victories encouraged the hopes of many reformers, revolutionaries and feminists.
- It made the idea of workers' influence on the system of production seem possible,



“Lambert’s Castle,” in Paterson, NJ, built by Catholina Lambert in 1892-1893

The Immediate Facts: 1913

- As Paterson became the center of the nation's silk weaving industry, the owners of the silk mills made fortunes.
- Silk mill owners, such as Catholina Lambert, were able to build magnificent mansions.
- By 1910, Henry Doherty had built the largest silk mill in the Paterson area, positioning the looms so that each weaver could watch four of them.
- In 1910 and 1912, Doherty's weavers had refused to work four looms and had walked out.
- In 1913, in addition to demanding a return to two looms (which only affected the broad-silk workers), the workers at the Doherty silk mill gained the backing of the other silk weavers, dyer's helpers and ribbon weavers with a unifying demand for an eight-hour day that affected all workers.
- Paterson silk workers had been working ten-hour days, or 55-hour weeks (this included a half day on Saturday).
- An eight-hour day had been the goal of organized labor since the 1880s.
- Local silk workers called, planned and organized the strike with the aid of Local 152 of the International Workers of the World (IWW). They brought in experienced IWW speakers to make rallying speeches at their daily mass meetings.
- By February 24, 1913 there was a general strike by Paterson silk workers and the silk mills in Paterson were closed down.

Silk Manufacturers

Catholina Lambert began work as a ten-year old boy in a cotton mill in Yorkshire, England. At 17, he had immigrated to the United States and became an office boy in a Boston silk firm. Four years later he purchased a partnership in the firm, renamed it Dexter, Lambert & Co. and moved it to Paterson. There he made enough money from his five silk mills to build an English-style castle and to buy some 400 original paintings by European masters. He was part of the old-line manufacturing group that dominated the Silk Association and the Paterson Board of Trade. Lambert was 79 years old in 1913 and took a very hard line in the strike. He never recovered from the strike. After World War I he was forced to declare bankruptcy and to sell his famous art collection.

Samuel McCollom was another large silk manufacturer in Paterson. He believed that he had the right to hire whomever he pleased. Fed up with workers' interference, he moved several of his larger factories to rural Pennsylvania. McCollom took a hard line against the unions and strikers in Paterson. He opposed any union. He had been responsible for the restructuring of the local city government which weakened the labor-supported Board of Alderman and created the more powerful, non-elected (and business influenced) Board of Commissioners. McCollom urged silk manufacturers to stand as a united front against the strikers.



Catholina Lambert

Silk Manufacturers

Henry Dougherty, Jr. was a proud, independent, aging mill owner who had worked his way up. Arriving in Paterson as a young weaver from England in 1868, he soon became a shop foreman. In 1879, he started his own silk shop with a partner and one loom. Within two years, his business had expanded to 100 looms and 250 workers. In 1910, he built the largest mill in Paterson, with state-of-the-art looms. He increased the loom assignments from two to four. He sought and received prior approval from the AFL's United Textile Workers, the recognized union of most of the weavers at the time. He was shocked to see the majority of his workers walk out of his fine new mill after they turned to the IWW Local 152 for support. As the strike spread and the months rolled by, Dougherty's business suffered tremendously. He tried to find some point of accommodation.

Moses Strauss was a successful Jewish manager of two Paterson silk mills, one of which employed male weavers on older, slower, labor-intensive German looms and the other with female weavers on new, high-speed looms. He believed that the skilled male weavers would be replaced in 15-20 years because of technological advances. He had little sympathy for the complaints of the higher-paid male workers. He was paternalistic towards the female workers. Strauss was surprised when in early March 1913 some 200 women and girls walked out of one of the mills because they had never told him that they had any grievances.

American Federation of Labor (AFL)

- The AFL was a conservative, craft-oriented union. By 1913 it had been in existence for 30 years. At this point it had little interest in recruiting unskilled, female or immigrant workers. The AFL sought shorter working hours and better pay. The AFL and IWW had very different approaches to labor-management relations and were fiercely vying with each other for membership in the early 1900s, especially after the IWW victory for textile workers in Lawrence, MA in 1912.
- **John Golden** was president of the AFL's United Textile Workers Union. He was appalled at the success of the IWW hotheads in the Lawrence, MA strike. To Golden, IWW leaders were anarchists and lawbreakers who urged the uneducated masses of newly arrived immigrants to sabotage businesses and all workers would lose.
- In April 1913, Golden opened two recruiting offices in Paterson in an effort to offer workers a less radical approach. He had little success because many weavers saw the AFL as a collaborator with Doherty's plan to implement the four-loom speedup. Golden believed that four looms were inevitable and should be accepted.

Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

- The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) Founded in 1905 in Chicago and originally spearheaded by western miners and lumberjacks, the IWW became famous in the east after its 1912 victory in the Lawrence, Ma, wool textile strike. Like the Knights of Labor before it and the CIA after it in the 1930s, the IWW reached out to the workers who the AFL would not or could not organize—the unskilled new immigrants from southern and eastern Europeans, women, blacks and Hispanics.
- The IWW wanted to replace employer management with worker self management and to abolish the wage system.
- The IWW believed that class struggle was inevitable. They were skeptical of politics and believed in the power of the strike. The IWW encouraged workers to take increasing democratic responsibilities for running their local shop and their industry until worker management extended everywhere.
- They saw no legitimacy in management or in conservative unions, such as the AFL which recruited only skilled workers and was narrowly focused on wages and hours.
- The IWW neither started nor directed the Paterson strike. Its leaders were invited as speakers and advisors.
- At the height of the strike, almost 10,000 Paterson silk workers joined the IWW.

William "Big Bill" Haywood

William Haywood was president of the IWW. He had participated in the violent labor-management battles in the western mining camps. Haywood was an imposing figure, well over six feet tall. He arrived in Paterson on March 7, 1913 after the strike had already been planned and started. His chief role was to make public speeches stressing worker equality and the need for solidarity to achieve their goals. Haywood was a bridge to New York socialists and philanthropists and helped to plan the "Paterson Pageant" on June 7, 1913.



Elizabeth Gurley Flynn

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was 22 years old at the time of the Paterson strike, but had been involved with labor activities since she was a child. She had often attended union meetings with her father, Tom Flynn, a socialist and IWW organizer. Her mother, Irish-born Annie Gurley, was an outspoken, early feminist. By 17, Flynn had married and miner and within two years had a son. Soon she and her husband were separated so that Flynn could continue to pursue her labor activities. A fiery orator, the young Flynn often delivered two and three speeches a day during the Paterson strike and met weekly with groups of women workers. She favored non-violence on tactical grounds. She was the IWW leader most involved in the day-to-day details of the strike and most popular with the strikers, men and women. Dark-haired, young and vibrant, Flynn was idealistic, yet practical, and equipped with a sharp sense of humor and dramatic flair.



Carlo Tresca

Carlo Tresca was born in southern Italy and came to the United States in 1904 as a revolutionary fugitive. He came to the IWW from a European anarchist background as was the least likely to urge the strikers to be non-violent. He was never comfortable speaking English and instead worked with the Italian strikers in Paterson in his native tongue, and was a hero among these workers. Radical in their social lives as well as their politics, Flynn and Tresca, both married to others, were openly lovers in Paterson, and they worked closely together during the strike.



Ewald Koettgen

Ewald Koettgen was the only full-time organizers of the IWW local 152. Of German descent, Koettgen had worked in Paterson as a ribbon weaver since the 1890s. He had been a member of the IWW for several years and was deeply committed to the organization's radical goals and militant methods. At age 40, he was tall and gaunt, with deep lines in his face. As leader of the IWW silk workers local 152, Koettgen had built his membership to nearly 500. In January 1913, he was elected chairman of the IWW's National textile Union. Koettgen was out of town when the Doherty mill workers decided to strike in February 1913 but hurried back to help local 152 sound out its membership about a general strike.

The Silk Workers

There were several different groups of silk workers.

The ribbon weavers highly skilled men and women who wove narrow silks for hat bands and ties. Most of them came from English and German background and were native-born.

The broad silk weavers were semi-skilled men and women who worked the machines that wove silk cloth for dresses. Most of them were Catholics from Italy or Jews from Eastern Europe who had immigrated to Paterson within the last 10-15 years.

The dyer's helpers were unskilled men who dyed the silk yarn before it was woven. Most of them were from Italy.

Although the protest against four-looms only affected the ribbon weavers, the worker's demand for an eight-hour was a unifying cry for all of the silk workers.

The Silk Workers

Adolf Lessig was a broad silk weaver of German descent who had been weaving both cotton and silk since the 1880s. He moved to Paterson in 1902 and briefly joined the AFL but switched to the IWW shortly after it was founded in 1905. When Doherty mill workers decided to walk out to protest working four looms, Lessig inquired among local 152 members in other mills about supporting a general strike. Lessig called a series of mass meetings and formed the executive Strike Committee.

Louis Magnet was an experience ribbon weaver. He was concerned that many women were moving into the craft and willing to work for less at longer hours. He was an active member in the Socialist Party but did not agree with the industrial radicalism of the IWW. He tried but failed to develop alternatives to the IWW during the strike

The Silk Workers

Carrie Golzio was a second-generation broad silk and jaquard weaver. Her parents had been involvement in labor disputes back in their native Piedmont region in Northern Italy, as well as in Paterson. Golzio was in her 20s in 1913 and was drawn into the IWW by the dynamic speaking of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. AS a skilled craftsperson, Golzio took pride in the quality of her workmanship. She feared that the four-loom system would reduce the quality of her work. She believed that the mill owners took the workers for granted and was drawn together in a cooperative spirit with eastern European Jewish female silk weavers who worked with her.

Hannah Silverman was a 17-year old skilled Jewish employee who enthusiastically took part in the picketing at the mill. The weekly women-only meetings helped to inspire young girls like Hannah Silverman to emerge as leaders in the strike. Silverman was captain of the pickets and one of the co-directors of the Paterson Strike Pageant at Madison Square Garden.

The Silk Workers



Dyers in a Paterson silk mill, 1908

Scully Bell was an unskilled dye worker from Southern Italy. It was horrible work that often required double shifts just to stay employed. Dyer's helpers added chemicals to the large vats of boiling water to which the silk yarns were added. The dye house was dirty and always filled with steam and fumes. The dyer's helpers wore wooden clogs to try to protect their feet from the slop on the floor. The dyer's helpers were the most easily replaced because the job could be learned in a week.

Silk Manufacturers

Positions

- Will not deal with the IWW because it is a lawless organizations
- Will listen to grievances from individual employees
- Will make adjustments only when the strikers return to work.

Interests

- Maintain a handsome profit on investment—by 1913 Paterson silk manufacturers were caught in declining profits resulting from lower prices due to an increasingly competitive industry
- Reduce labor costs and/or increase labor productivity to remain competitive
- Main managerial control over the terms and conditions of employment
- Wanted satisfied, reliable, loyal, skilled workers: high turnover and work stoppages, walkouts and strikes were costly.

Silk Workers

Positions

- Tending four looms made one worker do the work of two. It was a physical hardship.
- The for-loom system would result in lower quality.
- Workers wanted more control over the conditions of their employment
- Workers wanted a fair system where greater profits due to increased productivity was shared with the workers.
- Technological improvement were acceptable as long as it was not used solely to reduce their wages.

Interests

- Management should share the economic benefits of new technology and productivity with workers.
- Unskilled workers simply wanted to improve their hours, wages and working conditions.
- Skilled workers feared the downgrading of skills by the use of machines.
- The only unifying demand was for an eight-hour day.

I.W.W.

Positions

- The industrial, capitalistic wage system exploited workers and was undemocratic.
- The solution and goal is to replace capitalism with worker management.
- Strikes are battles in the class struggle that will continue until the ultimate victory of workers.

Interests

- Maintain and enhance the reputation of a labor organization that was tough in dealing with management and could win concessions to improve workers' income and working conditions.
- Continue the momentum of victory from Lawrence, MA.
- Need to have manufacturers negotiate with them.

Collective Bargaining under the National Labor Relations Act

Sec. 7: Guarantees employees the right to self-organization, to form, join or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining...

Sec. 8 defines as unfair labor practices, for an employer:

1. to interfere with, restrain or coerce employees in the exercise of rights guaranteed in section 7;
2. to interfere with the formation or administration of any labor organization...
3. to discriminate in the hiring or tenure of employment or any term or condition of employment; to encourage or discourage membership in a labor organization
4. to discharge or otherwise discriminate against an employee because he has filed charges or given testimony under this Act;
5. to refuse to bargain collectively with the representatives of his employees.

Employers and employees are required to bargain over “wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment.” This has been defined over the years to include wages and fringe benefits, grievance procedures, arbitration, health and safety, nondiscrimination clauses, no-strike clauses, length of contract, management rights, discipline, seniority and union security.

Roles for Mock Collective Bargaining Session

Divide the class into two groups: (Manufacturers and Workers/Union reps.) and assign the following roles:

Silk Manufacturers:

1. Henry Doherty
2. Catholina Lambert
3. Samuel McCollom
4. Moses Strauss

Workers/Union reps.:

5. John Golden
6. Ewald Koettgen
7. Adolf Lessig
8. Louis Magnet
9. Carrie Golzio
10. Hannah Silverman
11. Scully Bell
12. Bill Haywood
13. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn
14. Carlo Tresca

Observer/recorder/reporters

Directions for Mock Collective Bargaining Session

Step 1: Internal Negotiations

1. The manufacturers should meet, discuss their positions and interests, try to identify options that might be acceptable to workers and manufacturers and agree on the best strategy to take to the collective bargaining session with the workers and union reps. And who will represent the manufacturers in the collective bargaining session.
2. The silk workers and IWW and AFL union reps should meet, discuss their positions and interests, try to identify options that might be acceptable to workers and manufacturers, and agree on the best strategy to take to the collective bargaining session with the manufacturers and who will represent the workers in the collective bargaining session with the manufacturers

Step 2: Collective Bargaining Session

1. The designated representatives from the workers/unions and the manufacturers will meet for a collective bargaining session
2. The representatives will lay out and negotiate their views on hours, wages and conditions of employment and try to come to an agreement on these issues.
3. If these negotiations lead to an offer that differs from their internal agreement, either side may ask for a recess to consider the proposal with the internal group

The observer/recorder/reporters should watch their assigned groups and take notes on the process and the results. The observers do not participate directly in the negotiations.

Debriefing

The Process

- Did the participants use active listening skills?
- Where there missed opportunities for compromise?
- Did rhetoric get in the way of pursuing the interests?
- Were the role played with historical accuracy?

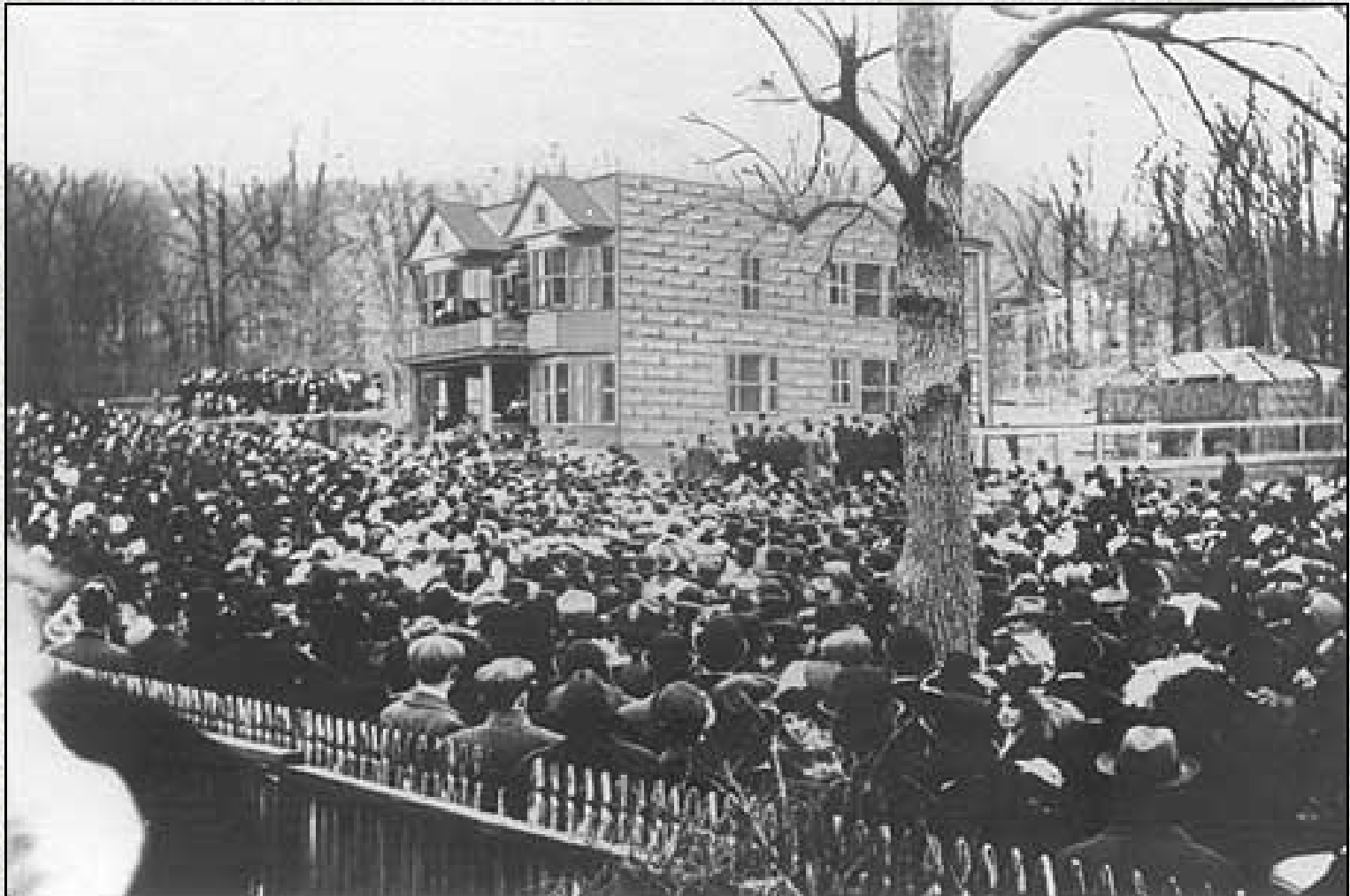
The Results

- Review the results from each group
- Review what really happened in history
- Compare the results of the mock collective bargaining sessions and what really happened in history
- Consider the reasons for any similarities or differences

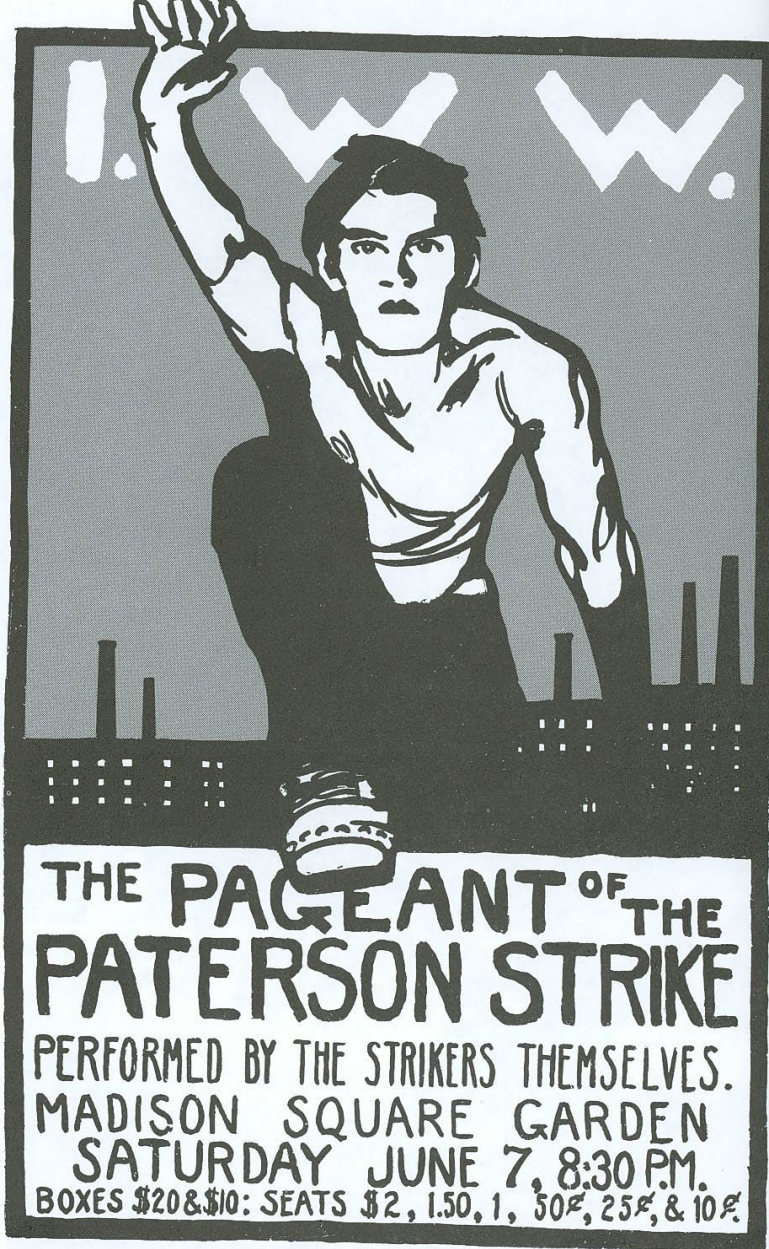
What Really Happened?

- The Paterson silk workers had forged an unprecedented united front.
- However, the equally united manufacturers refused to negotiate with the strikers and rejected all attempts at third-party mediation.
- The owners tried to separate the strikers from the IWW, to split the native-born and immigrants, to pit different ethnic groups against each other, to no avail.
- The owners used the power of local government: more than 2,200 strikers were arrested mostly for “disorderly conduct” in peaceful picketing.

The city closed the two halls in which the strikers had been meeting in Paterson, forcing the strikers to meet outside of the city, in nearby Haledon, which had a socialist mayor.



Strikers meet at the Botto House in Haledon, just outside of Paterson, 1913



The greatest effort to get publicity for the strike was the Pageant of the Paterson Silk Strike.

Advertisement for the Pageant of the Paterson Silk Strike, from The Masses, June 1913

The strikers sought to widen their support and fundraising.

They staged an innovative “Pageant of the Paterson Silk Strike” in Madison Square Garden in June 1913, to obtain sympathy and support.

- The strikers were unable to close down mills outside of Paterson.
- By summer, the strikers had used up all personal saving and contributions and were down to one meal a day.
- The manufacturers had greater resources, were able to continue to manufacture silk outside of Paterson and ultimately starved the workers back to work after four long months (from late February to mid-June, 1913)



SPEAKING OF ANARCHY

"To Hell with Your Laws,"

Paterson silk manufacturer standing on ripped pages of "free speech," "right of assembly," and "child labor" laws. Political cartoon from

Solidarity, June 7, 1913.

The Aftermath

- Everyone was hurt by the silk strike: the workers, the manufacturers, the city itself. Eventually, silk manufacturing disappeared from Paterson.
- The silk manufacturers would not recover from the 1913 strike and the absence of capital due to the beginning of World War I soon thereafter. Silk manufacturing moved out of Paterson. Some of the silk manufacturers were forced to declare bankruptcy. Lambert was compelled to sell his famous painting collection.
- The IWW never fully recovered from the defeat, which resulted in internal squabbling and the loss of momentum.
- The workers did manage to put off the advent of the hated four-loom system for another decade and six years later they were able to win an eight-hour day.
- Political parties responded to some extent to the grievances of organized labor with the Clayton Act in 1914, Wilson the first president to address an annual convention of organized labor (the AFL) in 1916.
- During World War I, President Wilson supported union organization and collective bargaining in industries with government contracts and union membership—almost all of it AFL which supported the war effort—grew dramatically.

Long-term effects

- Debs, as well as the bulk of the Socialist Party, opposed the war. With vigilante actions and government prosecutions, the IWW and the Socialist Party were effectively crushed between 1917 and 1920, along with them the hopes of replacing capitalism with worker management.
- Instead in the 1930s and 40s, with the support of the Roosevelt administration, a new legal context for labor and management relations was developed.
- The National Labor Relations Board created by the National Labor Relations Act in 1935 established a cooperative relationship between labor and management by requiring collective bargaining on issues related to hours, wages and conditions of employment.
- Private sector union membership dramatically increased from 6.5% in 1900 to a peak of 39% in 1958 but dropped to 20.6% in 1980 and 12% in 2006.

Questions for Discussion

1. Did the Paterson silk workers and silk mill owners have any common interests? If so, what were they? Could these have been used to achieve a resolution of the workers' grievances to everyone's satisfaction?
2. Were there ways in which the asymmetrical power relationships between workers and employers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries could have been equalized? How did the Wagner Act of 1935 help to equalize the power of employees and employers?
3. Was the 1913 Paterson Silk Strike a failure for the workers? For the manufacturers? For the IWW/ For the AFT? Why or why not?
4. Discuss the critical role of women in the Paterson silk strike? Why was this the case? Did working class women change their self-perception after taking leadership role in the strike?
5. What roles do unions and government play in regard to American workers today?