

# A Brief History of the American Labor Movement

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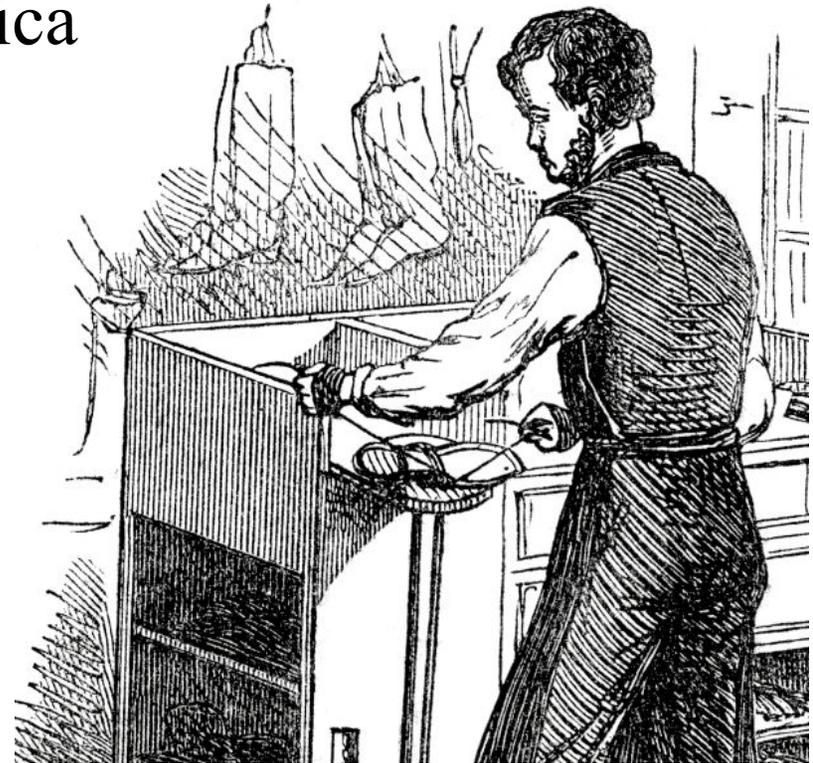


# Our Union Roots

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Late 1600's - Colonial America

In the early modern era, the European guild system consisted of tightly regulated local occupational and product monopolies, which initially never took hold in North America.



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# Colonial Times Continued

- However, primitive unions, or guilds, of carpenters and cordwainers, cabinet makers and cobblers made their appearance, often temporary, in various cities along the Atlantic seaboard of colonial America as the economy began to grow. Workers played a significant role in the struggle for independence; for example, carpenters disguised as Mohawk Indians were the "host" group at the Boston Tea Party in 1773.
- Additionally, the Continental Congress met in Carpenters Hall in Philadelphia in 1776.



# Colonial Times Continued

- Citing to our founding mantra, in "pursuit of happiness“, the printers were the first to go on strike. Philadelphia printers conducted the first recorded strike for higher wages in 1786, opposing a wage cut and demanding a minimum wage of \$6 per week.
- Philadelphia was a city of labor-union firsts: the first recorded labor strike, first labor newspaper, first city central body of unions, and first labor-union political activity.



# Union Roots begin to Grow

Thereafter, in 1794 printers were the first to go on strike in New York demanding shorter hours and higher pay; cabinet makers struck in 1796; carpenters in Philadelphia in 1797; cordwainers in 1799. In the early years of the 19th century, well documented efforts by unions to improve the workers' conditions, through either negotiation or strike action, became more frequent.



# Union Roots Grow Slowly

- However, most labor protests were spontaneous actions like that reported in 1763, when, according to the *Charleston Gazette*, Negro chimney sweeps "had the insolence, by a combination among themselves, to raise the usual prices, and to refuse doing their work."



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# Union Roots continued

- As ineffective as these first efforts to organize may have been, they reflected the need of working people for economic and legal protection from exploiting employers.
- The invention of the steam engine and the growing use of water power to operate machinery were developing a trend toward a factory system not much different from that in England which produced misery and slums for decades.
- Starting in the 1830s and accelerating rapidly during the Civil War, the factory system accounted for an ever-growing share of American production. It also produced great wealth for a few, grinding poverty for many.



# Union Roots Find Difficulty Growing

- Courts of law were not fond of union methods either, and employers, consumers, and workers often resisted "militant" unions.
- Competition from imported goods made life difficult too. Some workers were intensely anti-union, not just employers.
- America was an open society, a frontier society, farm-dominated, sprawling, and free, and wages often were double those paid in England because labor was so scarce here.
- Although no reliable statistics are available, union membership probably remained below one percent of the work force most years from colonial times to the 1870s.



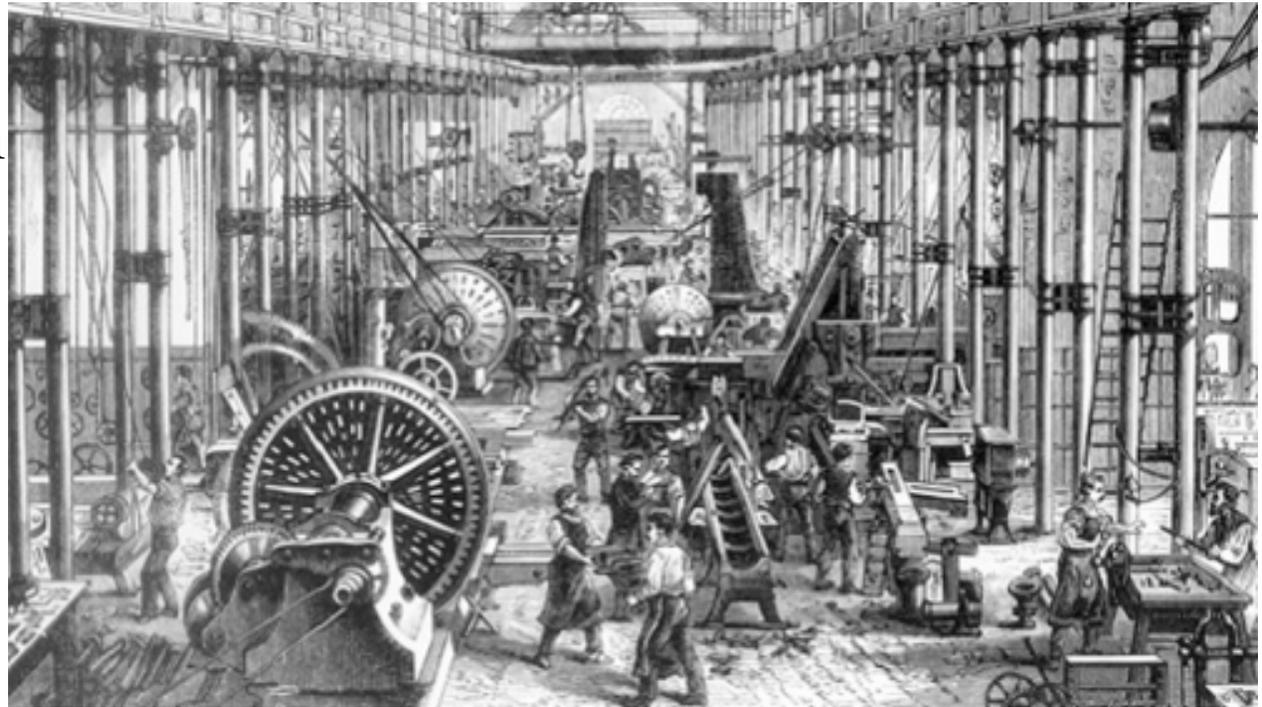
# Industrial Revolution

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Rise of the  
factory system

Unfair,  
exploiting  
employers

Purely profit  
driven



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# Children

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- No child labor laws
- Fourteen hour working days
- Paid less than 10 cents an hour.



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# Women

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- Domestic service
- Textile factories
- Unsafe and unsanitary conditions
- Lack of any child care care



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## Getting Organized - The Early Years

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- National Trades' Union (1834)
- National Labor Union (1866-1873)
- Knights of Labor (1869)



# Guess who said it??

- “Show me the country that has no strikes and I'll show you the country in which there is no liberty.”
- “Do I believe in arbitration? I do. But not in arbitration between the lion and the lamb, in which the lamb is in the morning found inside the lion.”



# Answer

## SAMUEL GOMPERS

- President of the American Federation of Labor  
(1888-1924)



# Getting Organized

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- On November 15, 1881 in Pittsburgh, PA, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions formed.
- It included delegates from carpenters, the cigar makers, the printers, merchant seamen, and the steel workers



# American Federation of Labor

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- Columbus, OH, 1886, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions reorganized into the modern AFL.
- “More effective union organization”
- The American Federation of Labor (AFL) with 500,000 members in 25 unions



AFL label circa 1900



# American Federation of Labor

- Gompers and the AFL members used walkouts, boycotts, and negotiations to achieve their goals. A strike fund collected from workers' dues enabled the AFL members to strike for extended periods of time and still get paid. This put more pressure on management to negotiate fair deals with workers.
- Gompers' approach to labor problems resulted in solid growth for the AFL. By 1900, unions with a total of about 500,000 members formed the federation, and by 1920 it reached a peak of four million members.



# Strikes and Struggles

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Haymarket Riot 1886

**Attention Workingmen!**

————— GREAT —————

**MASS-MEETING**

**TO-NIGHT, at 7.30 o'clock,**

————— AT THE —————

**HAYMARKET, Randolph St., Bet. Desplaines and Halsted.**

Good Speakers will be present to denounce the latest atrocious act of the police, the shooting of our fellow-workmen yesterday afternoon.

CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.



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# Haymarket Riot of 1886

- On May 4, 1886, a rally at Haymarket Square was organized by labor radicals to protest the killing and wounding of several workers by the Chicago police during a strike the day before at the McCormick Reaper Works.
- Towards the end of the Haymarket Square rally, a group of policemen arrived to disperse the crowd. As the police advanced, an individual who was never identified threw a bomb at them. The police and possibly some members of the crowd opened fire and chaos ensued. Seven police officers and at least one civilian died as a result of the violence that day, and an untold number of other people were injured.

# Haymarket Aftermath

- The Haymarket Riot set off a national wave of xenophobia, as scores of foreign-born radicals and labor organizers were rounded up by the police in Chicago and elsewhere. In August 1886, eight men, labeled as anarchists, were convicted in a sensational and controversial trial in which the jury was considered to be biased and no solid evidence was presented linking the defendants to the bombing.
- Judge Joseph E. Gary imposed the death sentence on seven of the men, and the eighth was sentenced to 15 years in prison. On November 11, 1887, four of the men were hanged.



# Strikes and Struggles

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## 1892 Homestead Strike

- The Homestead strike, also known as the Homestead Steel strike, Pinkerton rebellion, or Homestead massacre, was an industrial lockout and strike which began on June 30, 1892, culminating in a battle between strikers and private security agents on July 6, 1892. The battle was one of the most serious disputes in U.S. Labor History.
- With the steel industry doing well and prices higher, the AA asked for a wage increase; the AA represented about 800 of the 3,800 workers at the plant.
- The company immediately countered with a 22% wage decrease that would affect nearly half the union's membership and remove a number of positions from the bargaining unit. Andrew Carnegie encouraged Henry Clay Frick to use the negotiations to break the union.
- The union, understandably, rejected the wage cut.



# Homestead Steel Strike

- Andrew Carnegie was quoted, "The mills have never been able to turn out the product they should, owing to being held back by the Amalgamated men".
- Carnegie was publicly in favor of labor unions. He condemned the use of strikebreakers and told associates that no steel mill was worth a single drop of blood. But Carnegie agreed with Frick's desire to break the union and "reorganize the whole affair, and . . . exact good reasons for employing every man. Far too many men required by Amalgamated rules."
- Carnegie ordered the Homestead plant to manufacture large amounts of inventory so the plant could weather a strike. He also drafted a notice withdrawing recognition of the union.

# Homestead Steel Strike

- In late June, Frick responded by locking the workers out and building a massive barbed-wire-topped fence around the plant. The workers dubbed the plant “Fort Frick.”
- On July 2 Frick fired all 3,800 workers, and during the dark early hours of July 6, a force of 300 Pinkerton agents—private security guards hired by Frick—traveled up the river in two covered barges to occupy the plant.

# Homestead Steel Strike

- Thousands of workers and their families stormed the plant before dawn and rushed the pier where the guards were trying to dock. Inevitably, shots were fired, and for the next 12 hours, the Pinkertons and the workers exchanged intense fire.
- Eventually, the workers accepted the surrender of the Pinkertons, who were led off their barges and to the local jail for protection. Many Pinkertons were savagely beaten by the crowd along the way to the jail, and the barges they arrived on were burned.
- Later that night the Pinkertons were released and sent away from the town on a train bound for Pittsburgh. At least three Pinkertons and seven workers were killed during the battle and its aftermath.

# Homestead Steel Strike

- The workers then took control of the steel mill, but this did not last long. Frick asked Pennsylvania Gov. Robert Emory Pattison for help.
- The Governor responded by sending in 8,500 soldiers of the state National Guard. The plant was turned over to the militiamen on July 12.
- By July 15 the plant was again operational but with replacement workers.
- The final result was a major defeat for the union of strikers and a setback for their efforts to unionize steelworkers.



# Strikes and Struggles-

## The Danbury Hatters case

- The "Hat City" of Danbury made news in 1902 when hat manufacturer, Dietrich Loewe, refused to recognize the hatters' union. Most of his employees went on strike, lured by the promise of higher union wages. Loewe resumed work with a scab crew, and the striking workers organized a boycott. The boycott was carried to other states wherever Loewe's hats were sold. The goal of the operation was for UHU to gain union recognition as the bargaining agent for employees at Loewe & Co.



# The Danbury Hatters Decision

In a unanimous decision written by Chief Justice Melville Fuller, the Union was found to have been acting in restraint of interstate commerce and to have violated the Sherman Antitrust Act. Fuller began the opinion by recounting the relevant provisions of the Sherman Act. The Judge found as follows:

1. Every contract, combination in the form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy, in restraint of trade or commerce among the several States, or with foreign nations, is illegal.
2. Every person who monopolizes, or attempts to monopolize, or combine or conspire with any other person or persons, to monopolize any part of the trade or commerce among the several States, or with foreign nations, is in violation of the statute.
3. Any person who is injured in his business or property by any other person or corporation by reason of anything forbidden or declared illegal by the act may sue in federal court in the district of the defendant and recover three fold damages.



# Strikes and Struggles Continue

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1902, Pennsylvania, United Mine Workers Strike



# Coal Strike of 1902

- Also known as the anthracite coal strike, it was a strike by the United Mine Workers of America in the anthracite coalfields of eastern Pennsylvania. Miners struck for higher wages, shorter workdays and the recognition of their union.
- The strike threatened to shut down the winter fuel supply to major American cities. At that time, residences were typically heated with anthracite or "hard" coal, which produces higher heat value and less smoke than "soft" or bituminous coal.



# The Resolution

- President Theodore Roosevelt became involved and established a fact-finding commission that suspended the strike. The strike never resumed, as the miners received a 10% wage increase and reduced workdays from ten to nine hours; the owners got a higher price for coal and did not recognize the trade union as a bargaining agent.
- It was the first labor dispute in which the US Federal Government intervened as a neutral arbitrator.



# Strikes and Struggles Continue

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- 1909 “Uprising of the 20,000”
- Ladies’ Garment Workers
- Largest women’s strike to date
- Gained 52-hour work week
- Wages increases



# Strikes and Struggles-1910

## Cloakmakers' Strike - the Great Revolt

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- On July 7, 1910, another large strike hit the garment factories of Manhattan, building on the "Uprising of the 20,000" the previous year.
- About 60,000 cloakmakers left their jobs, backed by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. The factories formed their own protective association. Both strikers and factory owners were largely Jewish. Strikers also included many Italians. Most of the strikers were men.
- Louis Brandeis, then a prominent Boston-area lawyer, was appointed to oversee negotiations, and to try to get both sides to withdraw from attempts to use courts to settle the strike.
- The settlement led to a Joint Board of Sanitary Control being established, where labor and management agreed to cooperate in establishing standards above the legal minimums for factory working conditions, and also agreed to cooperatively monitor and enforce the standards.
- This was the precursor to arbitration.



# Triangle Shirtwaist Co. Tragedy

- In 1911 a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Co. on New York's lower east side. About 150 employees almost all of them young women-perished when the fire swept through the upper floors of the loft building in which they worked. Many burned to death; others jumped and died.
- The safety exits on the burning floors had been securely locked, allegedly to prevent "loss of goods." New York and the country were provoked by the tragedy. A state factory investigation committee headed by Frances Perkins paved the way for many long needed reforms in industrial safety and fire prevention measures.



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# Early Legislation

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- 1890 Sherman Antitrust Act
- 1912 Children's Bureau
- 1913 creation of U.S. Department of Labor
- 1914 Clayton Act
  - The act seeks to capture anticompetitive practices in their incipiency by prohibiting particular types of conduct, not deemed in the best interest of a competitive market.
- 1916 Adamson Act
  - Railroad workers achieved the 8 hour work day



# Post World War and Great Depression

- Wages were down
- Union membership diminished
- Rising unemployment
- Anti-unionism
- Fear of communism



# Post World War and Great Depression

- President Roosevelt took office on March 4, 1933, and immediately began implementing programs to alleviate the economic crisis.
- In June, he passed the National Industrial Recovery Act which gave workers the right to organize into unions. Though it contained other provisions, like minimum wage and maximum hours, its most significant passage was:

"Employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representative of their own choosing, and shall be free from the interference, restraint, or coercion of employers."



# Post World War and Great Depression Continued

- National Industrial Recovery Act was ultimately deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1935 and replaced by the Wagner Act two months after that, it fueled workers to join unions and strengthened those organizations.
- Workers who were previously unorganized in a number of industries—such as rubber workers, oil and gas workers and service workers—began to look for organizations that would allow them to band together. Workers' resolve to unionize and instead of participating in unemployment or hunger marches skyrocketed and they started to participate in strikes for union recognition in various industries. In 1933, the number of work stoppages jumped to 1,695, double its figure from 1932. In 1934, 1,865 strikes occurred, involving more than 1.4 million workers.



# AFL and CIO

- 1935 Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO)
  - Industrial unionism
  - U.S. Steel signs contract with Steel Workers
  - Rise in membership in both AFL and CIO unions
    - Social Security program
    - Unemployment compensation
    - Federal minimum wage (25 cents/hour in 1938)
- National Labor Relations Act
- Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938



# Improvements in working conditions

- Fair Labor Standards Act
  - Established the 40-hour work week
  - Regulated child labor
  - Standards for minimum wage and overtime pay



# POST WORLD WAR II ERA

- Organized labor emerged from World War II in a seemingly stronger position than ever before.
- The war mobilization dramatically expanded union membership, from 8.7 million in 1940 to over 14.3 million in 1945, about 36% of the work force. For the first time large numbers of women factory workers were enrolled. Both the AFL and CIO supported Roosevelt in 1940 and 1944, with 75% or more of their votes, millions of dollars, and tens of thousands of precinct workers.
- All labor unions strongly supported the war effort after June 1941 (when Germany invaded the Soviet Union). In 1943, the middle of the war, when the rest of labor was observing a policy against strikes, John Lewis led the miners out on a twelve-day strike for higher wages. The bipartisan conservative coalition in Congress passed anti-union legislation over liberal opposition, most notably the Taft Hartley Act of 1947.



# All conditions were not rosy

- The end of the war masked significant problems in labor.
- A labor backlash and red scare swept the country and caught union leaders in its grasp in the late 1940s and 1950s.
- Organizing victories became fewer and fewer. Anti-labor politicians gained control of the Congress and passed repressive legislation like the Taft-Hartley Act, which severely damaged the ability of unions to compete with employers in organizing drives. With new ammunition, companies fought organizing drives harder and with greater success.



# Post War Fallout

- Workers faced dramatic layoffs as military orders dried up following the war. A wave of strikes swept the country in the winter of 1945 and 1946, idling workers in steel, rubber, meatpacking, oil refining, and appliance industries. Walkouts in Rochester, N.Y., Oakland, Calif., and Pittsburgh turned into general strikes.



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# Push for legislation to curtail Unions further

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- Hobbs Act
  - The Hobbs Act, passed in 1946, was an anti-racketeering act intended to deter robbery and extortion across state lines. It was commonly used to prosecute unions involved in restraint-of-trade to intimidate management.
- The Taft–Hartley Act of 1947
  - The Act was a response to public demands for action after the wartime coal strikes and the postwar strikes in steel, autos and other industries that were perceived to have damaged the economy, as well as a threatened 1946 railroad strike that was called off at the last minute before it shut down the national economy. The Act was bitterly fought by unions, vetoed by President Harry Truman and passed over his veto.
- Repeated union efforts to repeal or modify it always failed, and it remains in effect today.



# The Merger – AFL-CIO

- A unified labor movement
- First AFL-CIO convention, December 5, 1955
  - Greater political interests
    - Committee on Political Education
      - Educate workers on the records and promises of political candidates
      - Encourage voting
      - Endorse candidates
  - Organized more workers
  - Supported the Civil Rights of Act of 1964



# 1955–2018 – Fight for survival

- In the early 1950s, as the AFL and CIO merged, around a third of the American labor force was unionized; by 2012, only about 11% of the entire workforce was unionized. Of this percentage, roughly 5% were in the private sector and 40% in the public sector.
- Although the NLRA was initially a boon for unions, it also paved the way for the labor movement's decline. The act enshrined the right to unionize, but the system of workplace elections it created meant that unions had to organize each new factory or firm individually rather than organize by industry. In many European countries, collective-bargaining agreements extended automatically to other firms in the same industry, but in the United States, they usually reached no further than a plant's gates.



# 1955–2018 – Fight for survival

- By the 1970s, a rapidly increasing flow of imports (such as automobiles, steel and electronics from Germany and Japan, and clothing and shoes from Asia) undercut American producers. By the 1980s there was a large-scale shift in employment with fewer workers in high-wage sectors and more in the low-wage sectors. Many companies closed or moved factories to Southern states—where unions were weak.
- The effectiveness of strikes declined sharply, as companies after the 1970s threatened to close down factories or move them to low-wage states or to foreign countries. The number of major work stoppages fell by 97% from 381 in 1970 to 187 in 1980 to only 11 in 2010.
- The accumulating weaknesses were exposed when President Ronald Reagan—a **former union president**—broke the Professional Air Traffic Controllers strike in 1981, dealing a major blow to unions.



# Professional Air Traffic Controllers strike of 1981

- On August 3, 1981, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers union—which supported Reagan—rejected the government's pay raise offer and sent its 16,000 members out on strike to shut down the nation's commercial airlines.
- They demanded a reduction in the workweek to 32 from 40 hours, a \$10,000 bonus, pay raises up to 40%, and early retirement.
- Federal law prohibited such a strike, and the Transportation department assigned supervisors and military air controllers to keep the system running.
- The strikers were given 48 hours to return to work, or they would be fired and banned from ever again working in a federal capacity.
- A fourth of the strikers came back to work, but 13,000 did not. The strike collapsed, PATCO vanished, and the union movement as a whole suffered a major reversal, which accelerated the decline of membership across the board in the private sector.



# A Small Resurgence

- The number of union members nationwide increased from 2016 to 2017, and some states saw union growth for the first time in several decades.
- Union growth in 2017 was primarily millennial workers. For example, roughly 76 percent of new UAW union members during their increase came from workers under the age of 35. Although the total number of union members increased 1.7 percent in 2017, the Economic Policy Institute noted that year-to-year union membership often fluctuates due to hiring or layoffs in particular sectors, and cautioned against interpreting one-year changes as trends.
- The percentage of the workforce belonging to unions was 10.7 percent in 2017, unchanged over the previous year, but down from 11.1 percent in 2015, and 12.1 percent in 2007.



# The Teacher Strikes of 2018

- In 2018, a series of statewide teacher strikes and protests happened that captured nationwide attention due to their success, as well as the fact that several of them were in states where public-employee strikes are illegal.
- Many of the major strikes were in Republican majority state legislatures, leading to the name "Red State Revolt". Protests were held in Arizona, Colorado, North Carolina, Oklahoma and West Virginia. Additional smaller protests were held in Kentucky and North Carolina.
- The strikes included an adjunct faculty strike at VCU in Richmond Virginia leading to an increase in adjunct wages.



# The 2018 DeKalb County School District bus drivers' strike

- The protests spread to a bus driver strike in the suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia where nearly 250 bus drivers participated.
- The DeKalb County School District condemned the strike. "We have been clear from the beginning. We will keep an open dialogue with employees provided they work collaboratively and keep our children safe by reporting to work. Unfortunately, some employees chose another route, and that carries serious consequences."
- On April 20, seven DCSD bus drivers, that were involved in leading the strike, were terminated of employment.
- The school district claimed the bus drivers in DeKalb County were among the highest paid in the Atlanta area. This included pay raises in 2014 and 2015 in the response of longer work days, that drivers receive benefits despite being part-time, and that the county provides a Transportation Leadership Academy to offer career advancement for bus drivers.
- Threats of a second strike seemed possible as the Coalition demanded the fired employees be granted their employment back. On April 26, Green said he would host a meeting with the DeKalb County School Bus Driver Solidarity Coalition to discuss a plan to improve pay and working conditions for bus drivers.
- On May 2, 2018 a petition formed from the parents of DCSD urging Green to reinstate the terminated drivers



# Public Sector unions under attack

- While manufacturing and farming steadily declined, state- and local-government employment quadrupled from 4 million workers in 1950 to 12 million in 1976 and 16.6 million in 2009.
- In 2009 the U.S. membership of public sector unions surpassed membership of private sector unions for the first time, at 7.9 million and 7.4 million respectively.
- In 2011 states faced a growing fiscal crisis and the Republicans had made major gains in the 2010 elections. Public sector unions came under heavy attack especially in Wisconsin, as well as Indiana, New Jersey and Ohio from conservative Republican legislatures.
- Conservative state legislatures tried to drastically reduce the abilities of unions to collectively bargain. Conservatives argued that public unions were too powerful since they helped elect their bosses, and that overly generous pension systems were too heavy a drain on state budgets



# Public Sector Under Attack

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- **“Right-to-Work”**

Statutes that prohibit union security agreements between companies and workers' unions. Under these laws, employees in unionized workplaces are banned from negotiating contracts which require all members who benefit from the union contract to contribute to the costs of union representation.

- *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Council 31*

This was a landmark US labor law United States Supreme Court case concerning the ability of labor unions to collect fees from non-union members. Under the Taft Hartley Act, which applies to the private sector, union security agreements can be allowed by state law. The Supreme Court ruled however that such union fees in the public sector violate the First Amendment, overturning the 1977 decision in *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education* that had previously allowed such fees.



# Labor's Achievements

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- The Weekend



- Unions were crucial in the passage of just about all the benefits and rules that we take for granted today, starting with the weekend. The 40-hour workweek became the standard in the 1937 with the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act.



# Labor's Achievements

Overtime pay

Pension benefits

Health benefits

Unemployment insurance

Parental leave

Equal pay for equal work

Grievance procedure

OSHA

Workers' comp.

Sick leave

Paid vacations



# Labor's Achievements

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- In 1986, the AFL-CIO created Union Privilege to offer Union Plus benefits to union members and their families. Union Plus offers over 20 benefits, including:
  - AT&T Discounts
  - Mortgage programs
  - Auto Buying programs
  - Travel Discounts and more!



# Labor Day Quiz

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- Do you know what year Labor Day was established?
  - 1894, by President, Grover Cleveland



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# THANK YOU!

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