

## **Labor**

### **1806**

The union of Philadelphia Journeymen Cordwainers was convicted of and bankrupted by charges of criminal conspiracy after a strike for higher wages, setting a precedent by which the U.S. government would combat unions for years to come.

### **27 April 1825**

The first strike for the 10-hour work-day occurred by carpenters in Boston.

### **3 July 1835**

Children employed in the silk mills in Paterson, NJ went on strike for the 11 hour day/6 day week.

### **July 1851**

Two railroad strikers were shot dead and others injured by the state militia in Portage, New York.

### **1860**

800 women operatives and 4,000 workmen marched during a shoemaker's strike in Lynn, Massachusetts.

### **13 January 1874**

The original Tompkins Square Riot. As unemployed workers demonstrated in New York's Tompkins Square Park, a detachment of mounted police charged into the crowd, beating men, women and children indiscriminately with billy clubs and leaving hundreds of casualties in their wake. Commented Abram Duryee, the Commissioner of Police: "It was the most glorious sight I ever saw..."

### **12 February 1877**

U.S. railroad workers began strikes to protest wage cuts.

### **21 June 1877**

Ten coal-mining activists ("Molly Maguires") were hanged in Pennsylvania.

### **14 July 1877**

A general strike halted the movement of U.S. railroads. In the following days, strike riots spread across the United States. The next week, federal troops were called out to force an end to the nationwide strike. At the "Battle of the Viaduct" in Chicago, federal troops (recently returned from an Indian massacre) killed 30 workers and wounded over 100.

### **5 September 1882**

Thirty thousand workers marched in the first Labor Day parade in New York City.

### **1884**

The Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, forerunner of the AFL, passed a resolution stating that "8 hours shall constitute a legal day's work from and after May 1, 1886." Though the Federation did not intend to stimulate a mass insurgency, its resolution had precisely that effect.

### **Late 1885/Early 1886**

Hundreds of thousands of American workers, increasingly determined to resist subjugation to capitalist power, poured into a fledgling labor organization, the Knights of Labor. Beginning on May 1, 1886, they took to the streets to demand the universal adoption of the eight hour day.

Chicago was the center of the movement. Workers there had been agitating for an eight hour day for months, and on the eve of May 1, 50,000 workers were already on strike. 30,000 more swelled their ranks

the next day, bringing most of Chicago manufacturing to a standstill. Fears of violent class conflict gripped the city. No violence occurred on May 1 -- a Saturday -- or May 2. But on Monday, May 3, a fight involving hundreds broke out at McCormick Reaper between locked-out unionists and the non-unionist workers McCormick hired to replace them. The Chicago police, swollen in number and heavily armed, quickly moved in with clubs and guns to restore order. They left four unionists dead and many others wounded.

Angered by the deadly force of the police, a group of anarchists, led by August Spies and Albert Parsons, called on workers to arm themselves and participate in a massive protest demonstration in Haymarket Square on Tuesday evening, May 4. The demonstration appeared to be a complete bust, with only 3,000 assembling. But near the end of the evening, an individual, whose identity is still in dispute, threw a bomb that killed seven policemen and injured 67 others. Hysterical city and state government officials rounded up eight anarchists, tried them for murder, and sentenced them to death.

On 11 November 1887, four of them, including Parsons and Spies, were executed. All of the executed advocated armed struggle and violence as revolutionary methods, but their prosecutors found no evidence that any had actually thrown the Haymarket bomb. They died for their words, not their deeds. A quarter of a million people lined Chicago's street during Parson's funeral procession to express their outrage at this gross mis-carriage of justice.

For radicals and trade unionists everywhere, Haymarket became a symbol of the stark inequality and injustice of capitalist society. The May 1886 Chicago events figured prominently in the decision of the founding congress of the Second International (Paris, 1889) to make May 1, 1890 a demonstration of the solidarity and power of the international working class movement. May Day has been a celebration of international socialism and (after 1917) international communism ever since.

The Bayview Massacre also took place at this time, where seven people, including one child, were killed by state militia. On 1 May 1886 about 2,000 Polish workers walked off their jobs and gathered at Saint Stanislaus Church in Milwaukee, angrily denouncing the ten hour workday. They then marched through the city, calling on other workers to join them; as a result, all but one factory was closed down as sixteen thousand protesters gathered at Rolling Mills, prompting Wisconsin Governor Jeremiah Rusk to call the state militia. The militia camped out at the mill while workers slept in nearby fields, and on the morning of May 5th, as protesters chanted for the eight hour workday, General Trevauner ordered his men to shoot into the crowd, some of whom were carrying sticks, bricks, and scythes, leaving seven dead at the scene. The Milwaukee Journal reported that eight more would die within twenty four hours, and without hesitation added that Governor Rusk was to be commended for his quick action in the matter.

### **23 November 1887**

The [Thibodaux Massacre](#). The Louisiana Militia, aided by bands of "prominent citizens," shot at least 35 unarmed black sugar workers striking to gain a dollar-per-day wage, and lynched two strike leaders.

### **25 July 1890**

New York garment workers won the right to unionize after a seven-month strike. They secured agreements for a closed shop, and firing of all scabs.

### **6 July 1892**

The Homestead Strike. Pinkerton Guards, trying to pave the way for the introduction of scabs, opened fire on striking Carnegie mill steel- workers in Homestead, Pennsylvania. In the ensuing battle, three Pinkertons surrendered; then, unarmed, they were set upon and beaten by a mob of townspeople, most of them women. Seven guards and eleven strikers and spectators were shot to death.

### **11 July 1892**

Striking miners in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho dynamited the Frisco Mill, leaving it in ruins.

**1893**

The first of several bloody mining strikes at [Cripple Creek, Colorado](#).

**5 July 1893**

During a strike against the Pullman Palace Car Company, which had drastically reduced wages, the 1892 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago's Jackson Park was set ablaze, and seven buildings were reduced to ashes. The mobs raged on, burning and looting railroad cars and fighting police in the streets, until 10 July, when 14,000 federal and state troops finally succeeded in putting down the strike.

**1894**

Federal troops killed 34 American Railway Union members in the Chicago area attempting to break a strike, led by Eugene Debs, against the Pullman Company. Debs and several others were imprisoned for violating injunctions, causing disintegration of the union.

**21 September 1896**

The state militia was sent to Leadville, Colorado to break a miner's strike.

**10 September 1897**

19 unarmed striking coal miners and mine workers were killed and 36 wounded by a posse organized by the Luzerne County sheriff for refusing to disperse near Lattimer, Pennsylvania. The strikers, most of whom were shot in the back, were originally brought in as strike-breakers, but later organized themselves.

**1898**

A portion of the Erdman Act, which would have made it a criminal offense for railroads to dismiss employees or discriminate against prospective employees based on their union activities, was declared invalid by the United States Supreme Court.

**12 October 1898**

Fourteen were killed, 25 wounded in violence resulting when Virden, Illinois mine owners attempted to break a strike by importing 200 nonunion black workers.

**29 April 1899**

When their demand that only union men be employed was refused, members of the Western Federation of Miners dynamited the \$250,000 mill of the Bunker Hill Company at Wardner, Idaho, destroying it completely. President McKinley responded by sending in black soldiers from Brownsville, Texas with orders to round up thousands of miners and confine them in specially built "bullpens."

**1899 and 1901**

U.S. Army troops occupied the Coeur d'Alene mining region in Idaho.

**12 October 1902**

Fourteen miners were killed and 22 wounded by scabherders at Pana, Illinois.

**23 November 1903**

Troops were [dispatched to Cripple Creek, Colorado](#) to control rioting by striking coal miners.

**July 1903**

Labor organizer [Mary Harris \("Mother"\) Jones](#) leads child workers in demanding a 55 hour work week.

**23 February 1904**

William Randolph Hearst's San Francisco Chronicle began publishing articles on the menace of Japanese laborers, leading to a resolution of the California Legislature that action be taken against their immigration.

**8 June 1904**

A battle between the Colorado Militia and striking miners at Dunnville ended with six union members dead and 15 taken prisoner. Seventy-nine of the strikers were deported to Kansas two days later.

**17 April 1905**

The Supreme Court held that a maximum hours law for New York bakery workers was unconstitutional under the due process clause of the 14th ammendment.

**1908**

The Erdman Act was further weakened when Section 10 was declared unconstitutional. This section had made it illegal for railroad employers to fire employees for being involved in union activities (see [1898](#)).

**22 November 1909**

The "Uprising of the 20,000." Female garment workers went on strike in New York; many were arrested. A judge told those arrested: "You are on strike against God."

**25 December 1910**

A dynamite bomb destroyed a portion of the Llewellyn Ironworks in Los Angeles, where a bitter strike was in progress.

**1911**

The Supreme Court ordered the AFL to cease its promotion of a boycott against the Bucks Stove and Range Company. A contempt charge against union leaders (including AFL President Samuel Gompers) was dismissed on technical grounds.

**25 March 1911**

The Triangle Shirtwaist Company, occupying the top three floors of a ten-story building in New York City, was consumed by fire. One hundred and forty-seven people, mostly women and young girls working in sweatshop conditions, lost their lives. Approximately 50 died as they leapt from windows to the street; the others were burned or trampled to death as they desperately attempted to escape through stairway exits locked as a precaution against "the interruption of work". On 11 April the company's owners were indicted for manslaughter.

**2 December 1911**

A Chicago "slugger," paid \$50 by labor unions for every scab he "discouraged," described his job in an interview: "Oh, there ain't nothin' to it. I gets my fifty, then I goes out and finds the guy they wanna have slugged. I goes up to `im and I says to `im, `My friend, by way of meaning no harm,' and then I gives it to `im -- biff! in the mug. Nothin' to it."

**24 February 1912**

Women and children were beaten by police during a textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

**18 April 1912**

The National Guard was called out against striking West Virginia coal miners.

**11 June 1913**

Police shot three maritime workers (one of whom was killed) who were striking against the United Fruit Company in New Orleans.

**5 January 1914**

The Ford Motor Company raised its basic wage from \$2.40 for a nine hour day to \$5 for an eight hour day.

**20 April 1914**

The "Ludlow Massacre." In an attempt to persuade strikers at Colorado's Ludlow Mine Field to return to work, company "guards," engaged by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and other mine operators and sworn into the State Militia just for the occasion, attacked a union tent camp with machine guns, then set it afire. Five men, two women and 12 children died as a result.

**13 November 1914**

A Western Federation of Miners strike is crushed by the militia in Butte, Montana.

**19 January 1915**

World famous labor leader [Joe Hill](#) was arrested in Salt Lake City. He was convicted on trumped up murder charges, and was executed 21 months later despite worldwide protests and two attempts to intervene by President Woodrow Wilson. In a letter to Bill Haywood shortly before his death he penned the famous words, "Don't mourn - organize!"

On this same day, twenty rioting strikers were shot by factory guards at Roosevelt, New Jersey.

**25 January 1915**

The Supreme Court upholds "yellow dog" contracts, which forbid membership in labor unions. **22 July 1916**

A bomb was set off during a "Preparedness Day" parade in San Francisco, killing 10 and injuring 40 more. Thomas J. Mooney, a labor organizer and Warren K. Billings, a shoe worker, were convicted, but were both pardoned in 1939.

**19 August 1916**

Strikebreakers hired by the Everett Mills owner Neil Jamison attacked and beat picketing strikers in Everett, Washington. Local police watched and refused to intervene, claiming that the waterfront where the incident took place was Federal land and therefore outside their jurisdiction. (When the picketers retaliated against the strikebreakers that evening, the local police intervened, claiming that they had crossed the line of jurisdiction.)

Three days later, twenty-two union men attempted to speak out at a local crossroads, but each was arrested; arrests and beatings of strikebreakers became common throughout the following months, and on 30 October vigilantes forced IWW speakers to run the gauntlet, subjecting them to whipping, tripping kicking, and impalement against a spiked cattle guard at the end of the gauntlet. In response, the IWW called for a meeting on 5 November. When the union men arrived, they were fired on; seven people were killed, 50 were wounded, and an indeterminate number wound up missing.

**7 September 1916**

Federal employees win the right to receive Worker's Compensation insurance.

**12 July 1917**

After seizing the local Western Union telegraph office in order to cut off outside communication, several thousand armed vigilantes forced 1,185 men in Bisbee, Arizona into manure-laden boxcars and "deported" them to the New Mexico desert. The action was precipitated by a strike when workers' demands (including improvements to safety and working conditions at the local copper mines, an end to discrimination against labor organizations and unequal treatment of foreign and minority workers, and the institution of a fair wage system) went unmet. The "deportation" was organized by Sheriff Harry Wheeler. The incident was investigated months later by a Federal Mediation Commission set up by President Woodrow Wilson; the Commission found that no federal law applied, and referred the case to the State of Arizona, which failed to take any action, citing patriotism and support for the war as justification for the vigilantes' action.

**15 March 1917**

The Supreme Court approved the Eight-Hour Act under the threat of a national railway strike.

**1 August 1917**

IWW organizer Frank Little was lynched in Butte, Montana.

**5 September 1917**

Federal agents raided the IWW headquarters in 48 cities.

**3 June 1918**

A Federal child labor law, enacted two years earlier, was declared unconstitutional. A new law was enacted 24 February 1919, but this one too was [declared unconstitutional](#) on 15 May 1922.

**27 July 1918**

United Mine Workers organizer Ginger Goodwin was shot by a hired private policeman outside Cumberland, British Columbia.

**26 August 1919**

United Mine Worker organizer Fannie Sellins was gunned down by company guards in Brackenridge, Pennsylvania.

**19 September 1919**

Looting, rioting and sporadic violence broke out in downtown Boston and South Boston for days after 1,117 Boston policemen declared a work stoppage due to their thwarted attempts to affiliate with the American Federation of Labor. Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge put down the strike by calling out the entire state militia.

**22 September 1919**

The "Great Steel Strike" began. Ultimately, 350,000 steel workers walked off their jobs to demand union recognition. The AFL Iron and Steel Organizing Committee called off the strike on 8 January 1920, their goals unmet.

**11 November 1919**

The [Centralia Massacre](#). Violence erupted when members of the American Legion attempted to force their way into an IWW hall in Centralia, Washington during an Armistice Day anniversary celebration. Four Legionnaires were shot dead by members of the IWW, after which IWW organizer Wesley Everest was lynched by a local mob.

**22 December 1919**

Amid a strike for union recognition by 395,000 steelworkers (ultimately unsuccessful), approximately 250 "anarchists," "communists," and "labor agitators" were deported to Russia, marking the beginning of the so-called "Red Scare."

**2 January 1920**

The U.S. Bureau of Investigation began carrying out the nationwide Palmer Raids. Federal agents seized labor leaders and literature in the hopes of discouraging labor activity. A number of citizens were turned over to state officials for prosecution under various anti-anarchy statutes.

**19 May 1920**

The Battle of Matewan. Despite efforts by police chief (and former miner) Sid Hatfield and Mayor C. Testerman to protect miners from interference in their union drive in Matewan, West Virginia, Baldwin-Felts detectives hired by the local mining company and thirteen of the company's managers arrived to evict miners and their families from the Stone Mountain Mine camp. A gun battle ensued, resulting in the

deaths of 7 detectives, Mayor Testerman, and 2 miners. Baldwin-Felts detectives assassinated Sid Hatfield 15 months later, sparking off an armed rebellion of 10,000 West Virginia coal miners at "The Battle of Blair Mountain," dubbed "the largest insurrection this country has had since the Civil War" by [The Battle of Matewan Home Page](#).

### **1920 and 1921**

Army troops were used to intervene against striking mineworkers in West Virginia.

### **22 June 1922**

Violence erupted during a coal-mine strike at Herrin, Illinois. Thirty-six were killed, 21 of them non-union miners.

### **2 June 1924**

A child labor ammendment to the U.S. Constitution was proposed; only 28 of the necessary 36 states ever ratified it.

### **14 June 1924**

A San Pedro, California IWW hall was raided; a number of children were scalded when the hall was demolished.

### **25 May 1925**

Two company houses occupied by nonunion coal miners were blown up and destroyed by labor "racketeers" during a strike against the Glendale Gas and Coal Company in Wheeling, West Virginia.

### **1926**

Textile workers fought with police in Passaic, New Jersey. A year-long strike ensued.

### **21 November 1927**

Picketing miners were massacred in Columbine, Colorado.

### **3 February 1930**

"Chicagorillas" -- labor racketeers -- shot and killed contractor William Healy, with whom the Chicago Marble Setters Union had been having difficulties.

### **14 April 1930**

Over 100 farm workers were arrested for their unionizing activities in Imperial Valley, California. Eight were subsequently convicted of 'criminal syndicalism.'

### **4 May 1931**

Gun-toting vigilantes attack striking miners in Harlan County, Kentucky.

### **7 March 1932**

Police kill striking workers at Ford's Dearborn, Michigan plant.

### **10 October 1933**

18,000 cotton workers went on strike in Pixley, California. Four were killed before a pay-hike was finally won.

### **1934**

The Electric Auto-Lite Strike. In Toledo, OH, two strikers were killed and over two hundred wounded by National Guardsmen. Some 1300 National Guard troops, including eight rifle companies and three machine gun companies, were called in to disperse the protestors.

## **1934**

International Longshoremen and Warehouse union strike of 1934. Two longshoremen, Nick Bordoise and Howard Sperry, were shot to death by the San Francisco Police. **May 1934**  
Police stormed striking truck drivers in Minneapolis who were attempting to prevent truck movement in the market area.

### **1 September - 22 September 1934**

A strike in Woonsocket, RI, part of a national movement to obtain a minimum wage for textile workers, resulted in the deaths of three workers. Over 420,000 workers ultimately went on strike.

### **9 November 1935**

The Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) was formed to expand industrial unionism.

### **11 February 1937**

General Motors recognizes the United Auto Workers union following a sit-down strike.

### **26 May 1937**

The 'Battle of the Overpass'. Walter Reuther and a group of UAW supporters, fresh from having organized GM and Chrysler, attempting to distribute leaflets at Gate 4 of the Ford Motor Company's River Rouge plant, and were beaten up (together with bystanders) by Ford Service Department guards.

### **30 May 1937**

Police killed 10 and wounded 30 during the "Memorial Day Massacre" at the Republic Steel plant in Chicago.

### **25 June 1938**

The Wages and Hours (later Fair Labor Standards) Act is passed, banning child labor and setting the 40-hour work week. The Act went into effect in October 1940, and was upheld in the Supreme Court on 3 February 1941.

### **27 February 1939**

The Supreme Court rules that sit-down strikes are illegal.

### **20 June 1941**

Henry Ford recognizes the UAW.

### **15 December 1941**

The AFL pledges that there will be no strikes in defense-related industry plants for the duration of the war.

### **28 December 1944**

President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the Army to seize the executive offices of Montgomery Ward and Company after the corporation failed to comply with a National War Labor Board directive regarding union shops.

## **1946**

Workers in packinghouses nation-wide went on strike.

### **1 April 1946**

A strike by 400,000 mine workers in the U.S. began. U.S. troops seized railroads and coal mines the following month.

### **4 October 1946**

The U.S. Navy seized oil refineries in order to break a 20-state post-war strike.

**20 June 1947**

The Taft-Hartley Labor Act, curbing strikes, was vetoed by President Truman. Congress overrode the veto.

**20 April 1948**

Labor leader Walter Reuther was shot and seriously wounded by would-be assassins.

**27 August 1950**

President Truman ordered the U.S. Army to seize all the nation's railroads to prevent a general strike. The railroads were not returned to their owners until two years later.

**8 April 1952**

President Truman ordered the U.S. Army to seize the nation's steel mills to avert a strike. The act was ruled to be illegal by the Supreme Court on 2 June.

**5 December 1955**

The two largest labor organizations in the U.S. merged to form the AFL-CIO, with a membership estimated at 15 million.

**5 April 1956**

Columnist Victor Riesel, a crusader against labor racketeers, was blinded in New York City when a hired assailant threw sulfuric acid in his face.

**14 September 1959**

The Landrum-Griffin Act passes, restricting union activity.

**7 November 1959**

The Taft-Hartley Act is invoked by the Supreme Court to break a steel strike.

**1 April 1963**

The longest newspaper strike in U.S. history ended. The 9 major newspapers in New York City had ceased publication over 100 days before.

**10 June 1963**

Congress passes a law mandating equal pay to women.

**5 January 1970**

Joseph A. Yablonski, unsuccessful reform candidate to unseat "Tough Tony" Boyle as President of the United Mine Workers, was murdered, along with his wife and daughter, in their Clarksville, Pennsylvania home by assassins acting on Boyle's orders. Boyle was later convicted of the killing. West Virginia miners went on strike the following day in protest.

**18 March 1970**

The first mass work stoppage in the 195-year history of the Post Office Department began with a walkout of letter carriers in Brooklyn and Manhattan, soon involving 210,000 of the nation's 750,000 postal employees. With mail service virtually paralyzed in New York, Detroit, and Philadelphia, President Nixon declared a state of national emergency and assigned military units to New York City post offices. The stand-off culminated two weeks later.

**29 July 1970**

United Farm Workers forced California grape growers to sign an agreement after a five-year strike.

**3 August 1981**

Federal air traffic controllers began a nationwide strike after their union rejected the government's final offer for a new contract. Most of the 13,000 striking controllers defied the back-to-work order, and were dismissed by President Reagan on 5 August.

**October 1982**

A boycott was initiated by the Industrial Association of Machinists against Brown & Sharpe, a machine, precision, measuring and cutting tool manufacturer, headquartered in Rhode Island. The boycott was called after the firm refused to bargain in good faith (withdrawing previously negotiated clauses in the contract), and forced the union into an unwanted and bitter strike during which police sprayed pepper gas on some 800 IAM pickets at the company's North Kingston plant in early 1982. Three weeks later, a machinist narrowly escaped serious injury when a shot fired into the picket line hit his belt buckle. The National Labor Relations Board subsequently charged Brown & Sharpe with regressive bargaining, and of entering into negotiations with the express purpose of not reaching an agreement with the union.

**6 October 1986**

1,700 female flight attendants won an 18-year lawsuit (which included \$37 million in damages) against United Airlines, which had fired them for getting married.

**24 October 1987**

The 35-member executive council of the AFL-CIO decided unanimously to readmit the 1.6-million member Teamsters Union to its ranks. The scandal-ridden union had been expelled from the federation in 1957. President Jackie Presser was awaiting trial at the time, and the U.S. Justice Department was considering removal of the union's leadership because of possible links to organized crime.

**17 September 1989**

Ninety-eight miners and a minister occupied the the Pittston Coal Company's Moss 3 preparation plant in Carbo, Virginia, beginning a year-long strike against Pittston Coal. While a month-long Soviet coal strike dominated U.S. news broadcasts, the year-long Pittston strike garnered almost no mainstream press coverage whatsoever.