

## **Industrialization Problems and Solutions – Reading (Page 8)**

### **Industrialization Problems**

As industries grew, so did their need for workers. As a result, thousands of American citizens and immigrants rushed to the new industrial cities in search of new jobs and a chance for a better life. With so many people looking for work, factory owners could hire workers who were willing to work for long hours and very low wages. Wages were so low that it became impossible for a worker to support his family. In order to pay the rent and put food on the table, many parents were forced to send their children to work instead of school. Children as young as eight worked six days a week, eight to twelve hours a day for less than a dollar a day. They worked in factories, mills, coal mines, picked fruit, shined shoes, and sold newspapers. In addition to low wages and long hours, Americans also had to deal with dangerous conditions. Factories and mills were filled with new machines that were very dangerous to operate. As a result, thousands of workers were injured and hundreds more were killed each year. In addition, many Americans worked in crowded, unsanitary rooms where exit doors were locked to keep workers in and fresh air out. Locked doors also resulted in hundreds of worker deaths when fires broke out and escape was impossible.

### **Industrialization Solutions: Organized Labor**

As Americans became more and more concerned about their working conditions, some began to join together against the unfair practices of the powerful industries. Together they formed labor unions. A labor union is an organization that protects workers' rights to fair wages, a shorter work day, and safer working conditions.

An example of a labor union is the American Federation of Labor, or AFL for short. This labor union represented skilled workers such as cigar makers, plumbers, and carpenters. Its president and founder was Samuel Gompers. He organized many different skilled labor unions into one large federation (group) of unions. He knew that in order to fight back against big business, he would need a big labor union. By 1920 the AFL had over 4 million members. Because of its size, many business leaders began to listen to the AFL's demands for a better American workplace.

In some cases, however, wealthy owners ignored the demands of unions for better treatment of workers. As a result, workers would stop working, or went on strike. They would strike until their demands were met. Some strikes were peaceful but some were violent. The Homestead Strike was one of the most violent strikes during the Progressive Movement. It took place at the Carnegie Steel Mill in Homestead, Pennsylvania after a manager cut the worker's pay. During the strike, a gun battle erupted. Sixteen people died and many others were injured. Most workers left the union and returned to work after the strike. It took over thirty years for steel unions to regain their power to represent steel workers.

### **Progressive Movement Workplace Reforms**

During the late 1800s and the early 1900s, more and more Americans realized that major changes were needed in the workplace. These Progressive reformers wanted to expose the many problems facing the American worker and make life better for all Americans. They fought for safer conditions, better pay and shorter work days. Because of their efforts, the American workplace began to change. New laws set safety standards for the workplace. Laws were also passed to limit the number of hours in a workday. Other laws restricted the number of hours children could work and set a minimum age for employment.