

1830-1850

Overview

This was a significant period of reform in American history. Emerson and Thoreau were contemplating the essentials of life and William Lloyd Garrison founded the abolition movement. Out of this climate came the ten-hour movement. The ten-hour movement achieved legislative success in several states for the ten-hour day. However these laws contained one loophole which employers used. All these laws allowed employees to contract for longer hours if they wanted. Employers manipulated this to apply to all workers and those who refused were fired and/or blacklisted. The presence of an eager labor pool, caused by immigration, weakened employee's bargaining power on this and other issues.

Labor Related Issues of the Period

- The threat of conspiracy lawsuits is lifted by the reversal of previous court decisions in *Commonwealth v. Hunt* (1842).
- Growth of the Ten Hour movement and subsequent passage of ten-hour laws in several states.
- Land reform movements called for the free distribution of the public domain to help cure labor ills.
- In the 1830s children under 16 made up about one-third of the New England labor force.
- Manufacturers had earned a strong voice in determining the nation's destiny along with agricultural and commercial interests.
- Reform organizations seek a wide range of changes from abolition to child labor restrictions to the ten-hour day.
- Women's labor organizations increased its voice and militancy.

Labor Related Events of the Period

- 1831 Birth of American abolition movement when *The Liberator* published by William. L. Garrison.
Nat Turner leads a slave rebellion in Virginia, he was later killed and executed.
In New York City, 1600 tailoresses go on strike for two months over wages and lose.
- 1833 Workingmen's Ticket is a political party formed of men and women to promote labor ideology.
- 1834 The National Trades Union formed in New York City. The first attempt at a national labor federation.
The Factory Girls' Association is formed in Lowell and go on strike over working conditions and wages.
800 women go on strike over the right to organize and wage reductions in Dover, New Hampshire.
- 1835 Geneva shoemakers tried and convicted for conspiracy. See below.

- 1836 The National Cooperative Association of Cordwainers, the first national union of a specific trade, was founded in New York City.
A convention of mechanics, farmers, and workingmen met in Utica, NY. They wrote a Declaration of Rights which opposed bank notes, paper money, arbitrary power of the courts, and called for legislation to guarantee labor the right to organize to increase wages. They formed the Equal Rights Party to be free of existing party control.
Lowell girls go on strike again over working conditions and wages.
- 1837 Panic of 1837 puts an end to the National Trades Union and most other unions.
President Jackson declares ten hour day in Philadelphia Navy Yard to quell discontent caused by Panic of 1837.
- 1838 One-third of the nation's workers were unemployed due to the economic hard times.
- 1840 Ten hour day without reduction in pay proclaimed by President Van Buren for all federal employees on public works.
- 1842 In *Commonwealth v. Hunt*, the Massachusetts Supreme Court rules that labor unions, as such, are not illegal conspiracies.
Connecticut and Massachusetts pass laws prohibiting children from working over ten hours per day.
- 1844 200 delegates form New England Workingmen's Association to fight for the ten-hour day.
- 1845 Female workers in five cotton mills in Allegheny, Pennsylvania strike for the ten hour day. They are supported by workers in Lowell, Mass. and Manchester, New Hampshire.
First professional teacher's association is created in Massachusetts.
Sarah Bagley helps form the Female Labor Reform Association (an auxiliary of the New England Workingmen's Association) in Lowell, Mass. to work for a ten-hour day.
- 1847 New Hampshire is the first state to make the ten hour day the legal workday.
- 1848 Child labor law in Pennsylvania makes twelve the minimum age for workers in commercial occupations.
Pennsylvania passes a ten hour day law. When employers violate it women mill workers riot and attack the factory gates with axes.
- 1850 Compromise of 1850 perpetuates slavery and the sectional debates between North and South.

Important Concepts

abolition, panic (economic), ten-hour day