

## **Chapter 11: ROBBER BARONS AND REBELS**

### **HOWARD ZINN A PEOPLE'S HISTORY**

In the year 1877, the signals were given for the rest of the century: the blacks would be put back; the strikes of white workers would not be tolerated; the industrial and political elites of North and South would take hold of the country and organize the greatest march of economic growth in human history. They would do it with the aid of, and at the expense of, black labor, white labor, Chinese labor, European immigrant labor, female labor, rewarding them differently by race, sex, national origin, and social class, in such a way as to create separate levels of oppression—a skillful terracing to stabilize the pyramid of wealth.

Between the Civil War and 1900, steam and electricity replaced human muscle, iron replaced wood, and steel replaced iron (before the Bessemer process, iron was hardened into steel at the rate of 3 to 5 tons a day; now the same amount could be processed in 15 minutes). Machines could now drive steel tools. Oil could lubricate machines and light homes, streets, factories. People and goods could move by railroad, propelled by steam along steel rails; by 1900 there were 193,000 miles of railroad. The telephone, the typewriter, and the adding machine speeded up the work of business.

Machines changed farming. Before the Civil War it took 61 hours of labor to produce an acre of wheat. By 1900, it took 3 hours, 19 minutes. Manufactured ice enabled the transport of food over long distances, and the industry of meatpacking was born.

Steam drove textile mill spindles; it drove sewing machines. It came from coal. Pneumatic drills now drilled deeper into the earth for coal. In 1860, 14 million tons of coal were mined; by 1884 it was 100 million tons. More coal meant more steel, because coal furnaces converted iron into steel; by 1880 a million tons of steel were being produced; by 1910, 25 million tons. By now electricity was beginning to replace steam. Electrical wire needed copper, of which 30,000 tons were produced in 1880; 500,000 tons by 1910.

To accomplish all this required ingenious inventors of new processes and new machines, clever organizers and administrators of the new corporations, a country rich with land and minerals, and a huge supply of human beings to do the back-breaking, unhealthful, and dangerous work. Immigrants would come from Europe and China, to make the new labor force. Farmers unable to buy the new machinery or pay the new railroad rates would move to the cities. Between 1860 and 1914, New York grew from 850,000 to 4 million, Chicago from 110,000 to 2 million, Philadelphia from 650,000 to 1 1/2 million.

In some cases the inventor himself became the organizer of businesses—like Thomas Edison, inventor of electrical devices. In other cases, the businessman compiled other people's inventions, like Gustavus Swift, a Chicago butcher who put together the ice-cooled railway car with the ice-cooled warehouse to make the first national meatpacking company in 1885. James Duke used a new cigarette-rolling machine that could roll, paste, and cut tubes of tobacco into 100,000 cigarettes a day; in 1890 he combined the four biggest cigarette producers to form the American Tobacco Company.

While some multimillionaires started in poverty, most did not. A study of the origins of 303 textile, railroad, and steel executives of the 1870s showed that 90 percent came from middle- or upper-class families. The Horatio Alger stories of "rags to riches" were true for a few men, but mostly a myth, and a useful myth for control.

Most of the fortune building was done legally, with the collaboration of the government and the courts. Sometimes the collaboration had to be paid for. Thomas Edison promised New Jersey politicians \$1,000 each in return for favorable legislation. Daniel Drew and Jay Gould spent \$1 million to bribe the New York legislature to legalize their issue of \$8 million in "watered stock" (stock not representing real value) on the Erie Railroad.

The first transcontinental railroad was built with blood, sweat, politics and thievery, out of the meeting of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads. The Central Pacific started on the West Coast going east; it spent \$200,000 in Washington on bribes to get 9 million acres of free land and \$24 million in bonds, and paid \$79 million, an overpayment of \$36 million, to a construction company which really was its own. The construction was done by three thousand Irish and ten thousand Chinese, over a period of four years, working for one or two dollars a day.

The Union Pacific started in Nebraska going west. It had been given 12 million acres of free land and \$27 million in government bonds. It created the Credit Mobilier company and gave them \$94 million for construction when the actual cost was \$44 million. Shares were sold cheaply to Congressmen to prevent investigation. This was at the suggestion of Massachusetts Congressman Oakes Ames, a shovel manufacturer and director of Credit Mobilier, who said: "There is no difficulty in getting men to look after their own property." The Union Pacific used twenty thousand workers—war veterans and Irish immigrants, who laid 5 miles of track a day and died by the hundreds in the heat, the cold, and the battles with Indians opposing the invasion of their territory.

Both railroads used longer, twisting routes to get subsidies from towns they went through. In 1869, amid music and speeches, the two crooked lines met in Utah.

The wild fraud on the railroads led to more control of railroad finances by bankers, who wanted more stability-profit by law rather than by theft. By the 1890s, most of the country's railway mileage was concentrated in six huge systems. Four of these were completely or partially controlled by the House of Morgan, and two others by the bankers Kuhn, Loeb, and Company.

J. P. Morgan had started before the war, as the son of a banker who began selling stocks for the railroads for good commissions. During the Civil War he bought five thousand rifles for \$3.50 each from an army arsenal, and sold them to a general in the field for \$22 each. The rifles were defective and would shoot off the thumbs of the soldiers using them. A congressional committee noted this in the small print of an obscure report, but a federal judge upheld the deal as the fulfillment of a valid legal contract.

Morgan had escaped military service in the Civil War by paying \$300 to a substitute. So did John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Philip Armour, Jay Gould, and James Mellon. Mellon's father had written to him that "a man may be a patriot without risking his own life or sacrificing his health. There are plenty of lives less valuable."

It was the firm of Drexel, Morgan and Company that was given a U.S. government contract to float a bond issue of \$260 million. The government could have sold the bonds directly; it chose to pay the bankers \$5 million in commission.

On January 2, 1889, as Gustavus Myers reports:

**... a circular marked "Private and Confidential" was issued by the three banking houses of Drexel, Morgan & Company, Brown Brothers & Company, and Kidder, Peabody & Company. The most painstaking care was exercised that this document should not find its way into the press or otherwise become public.... Why this fear? Because the circular was an invitation ... to the great railroad magnates to assemble at Morgan's house, No. 219 Madison Avenue, there to form, in the phrase of the day, an iron-clad combination. ... a compact which would efface competition among certain railroads, and unite those interests in an agreement by which the people of the United States would be bled even more effectively than before.**

There was a human cost to this exciting story of financial ingenuity. That year, 1889, records of the Interstate Commerce Commission showed that 22,000 railroad workers were killed or injured.

In 1895 the gold reserve of the United States was depleted, while twenty-six New York City banks had \$129 million in gold in their vaults. A syndicate of bankers headed by J. P. Morgan & Company, August Belmont & Company, the National City Bank, and others offered to give the government gold in exchange for bonds. President Grover Cleveland agreed. The bankers immediately resold the bonds at higher prices, making \$18 million profit.

A journalist wrote: "If a man wants to buy beef, he must go to the butcher.... If Mr. Cleveland wants much gold, he must go to the big banker."

While making his fortune, Morgan brought rationality and organization to the national economy. He kept the system stable. He said: "We do not want financial convulsions and have one thing one day and another thing another day." He linked railroads to one another, all of them to banks, banks to insurance companies. By 1900, he controlled 100,000 miles of railroad, half the country's mileage.

Three insurance companies dominated by the Morgan group had a billion dollars in assets. They had \$50 million a year to invest-money given by ordinary people for their insurance policies. Louis Brandeis, describing this in his book *Other People's Money* (before he became a Supreme Court justice), wrote: "They control the people through the people's own money."

John D. Rockefeller started as a bookkeeper in Cleveland, became a merchant, accumulated money, and decided that, in the new industry of oil, who controlled the oil refineries controlled the industry. He bought his first oil refinery in 1862, and by 1870 set up Standard Oil Company of Ohio, made secret agreements with railroads to ship his oil with them if they gave him rebates- discounts-on their prices, and thus drove competitors out of business.

One independent refiner said: "If we did not sell out.... we would be crushed out.. .. There was only one buyer on the market and we had to sell at their terms." Memos like this one passed among Standard Oil officials: "Wilkerson & Co. received car of oil Monday 13th... . Please turn another screw." A rival refinery in Buffalo was rocked by a small explosion arranged by Standard Oil officials with the refinery's chief mechanic.

The Standard Oil Company, by 1899, was a holding company which controlled the stock of many other companies. The capital was \$110 million, the profit was \$45 million a year, and John D. Rockefeller's fortune was estimated at \$200 million. Before long he would move into iron, copper, coal, shipping, and banking (Chase Manhattan Bank). Profits would be \$81 million a year, and the Rockefeller fortune would total two billion dollars.

Andrew Carnegie was a telegraph clerk at seventeen, then secretary to the head of the Pennsylvania Railroad, then broker in Wall Street selling railroad bonds for huge commissions, and was soon a millionaire. He went to London in 1872, saw the new Bessemer method of producing steel, and returned to the United States to build a million-dollar steel plant. Foreign competition was kept out by a high tariff conveniently set by Congress, and by 1880 Carnegie was producing 10,000 tons of steel a month, making \$1 1/2 million a year in profit. By 1900 he was making \$40 million a year, and that year, at a dinner party, he agreed to sell his steel company to J. P. Morgan. He scribbled the price on a note: \$492,000,000.

Morgan then formed the U.S. Steel Corporation, combining Carnegie's corporation with others. He sold stocks and bonds for \$1,300,000,000 (about 400 million more than the combined worth of the companies) and took a fee of 150 million for arranging the consolidation. How could dividends be paid to all those stockholders and bondholders? By making sure Congress passed tariffs keeping out foreign steel; by closing off competition and maintaining the price at \$28 a ton; and by working 200,000 men twelve hours a day for wages that barely kept their families alive.

And so it went, in industry after industry-shrewd, efficient businessmen building empires, choking out competition, maintaining high prices, keeping wages low, using government subsidies. These industries were the first beneficiaries of the "welfare state." By the turn of the century, American Telephone and telegraph had a monopoly of the nation's telephone system, International Harvester made 85 percent of all farm machinery, and in every other industry resources became concentrated, controlled. The banks had interests in so many of these monopolies as to create an interlocking network of powerful corporation directors, each of whom sat on the boards of many other corporations. According to a Senate report of the early twentieth century, Morgan at his peak sat on the board of forty-eight corporations; Rockefeller, thirty-seven corporations.

Meanwhile, the government of the United States was behaving almost exactly as Karl Marx described a capitalist state: pretending neutrality to maintain order, but serving the interests of the rich. Not that the rich agreed among themselves; they had disputes over policies. But the purpose of the state was to settle upper-class disputes peacefully, control lower-class rebellion, and adopt policies that would further the long-range stability of the system. The arrangement between Democrats and Republicans to elect Rutherford Hayes in 1877 set the tone. Whether Democrats or Republicans won, national policy would not change in any important way.

When Grover Cleveland, a Democrat, ran for President in 1884, the general impression in the country was that he opposed the power of monopolies and corporations, and that the Republican party, whose candidate was James Blaine, stood for the wealthy. But when Cleveland defeated Blaine, Jay Gould wired him: "I feel ... that the vast business interests of the country will be entirely safe in your hands." And he was right.

One of Cleveland's chief advisers was William Whitney, a millionaire and corporation lawyer, who married into the Standard Oil fortune and was appointed Secretary of the Navy by Cleveland. He immediately set about to create a "steel navy," buying the steel at artificially high prices from Carnegie's plants. Cleveland himself assured industrialists that his election should not frighten them: "No harm shall come to any business interest as the result of administrative policy so long as I am President ... a transfer of executive control from one party to another does not mean any serious disturbance of existing conditions."

The presidential election itself had avoided real issues; there was no clear understanding of which interests would gain and which would lose if certain policies were adopted. It took the usual form of election campaigns, concealing the basic similarity of the parties by dwelling on personalities, gossip, trivialities. Henry Adams, an astute literary commentator on that era, wrote to a friend about the election:

**We are here plunged in politics funnier than words can express. Very great issues are involved. . . . But the amusing thing is that no one talks about real interests. By common consent they agree to let these alone. We are afraid to discuss them. Instead of this the press is engaged in a most amusing dispute whether Mr. Cleveland had an illegitimate child and did or did not live with more than one mistress.**

In 1887, with a huge surplus in the treasury, Cleveland vetoed a bill appropriating \$100,000 to give relief to Texas farmers to help them buy seed grain during a drought. He said: "Federal aid in such cases . . . encourages the expectation of paternal care on the part of the government and weakens the sturdiness of our national character." But that same year, Cleveland used his gold surplus to pay off wealthy bondholders at \$28 above the \$100 value of each bond—a gift of \$45 million.

The chief reform of the Cleveland administration gives away the secret of reform legislation in America. The Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 was supposed to regulate the railroads on behalf of the consumers. But Richard Olney, a lawyer for the Boston & Maine and other railroads, and soon to be Cleveland's Attorney General, told railroad officials who complained about the Interstate Commerce Commission that it would not be wise to abolish the Commission "from a railroad point of view." He explained:

**The Commission ... is or can be made, of great use to the railroads. It satisfies the popular clamor for a government supervision of railroads, at the same time that that supervision is almost entirely nominal. . . . The part of wisdom is not to destroy the Commission, but to utilize it.**

Cleveland himself, in his 1887 State of the Union message, had made a similar point, adding a warning: "Opportunity for safe, careful, and deliberate reform is now offered; and none of us should be unmindful of a time when an abused and irritated people . . . may insist upon a radical and sweeping rectification of their wrongs."

Republican Benjamin Harrison, who succeeded Cleveland as President from 1889 to 1893, was described by Matthew Josephson, in his colorful study of the post-Civil War years, *The Politicos*: "Benjamin Harrison had the exclusive distinction of having served the railway corporations in the dual capacity of lawyer and soldier. He prosecuted the strikers [of 1877] in the federal courts . . . and he also organized and commanded a company of soldiers during the strike. ..."

Harrison's term also saw a gesture toward reform. The Sherman Anti-Trust Act, passed in 1890, called itself "An Act to protect trade and commerce against unlawful restraints" and made it illegal to form a "combination or conspiracy" to restrain trade in interstate or foreign commerce. Senator John Sherman, author of the Act, explained the need to conciliate the critics of monopoly: "They had monopolies . . . of old, but never before such giants as in our day. You must heed their appeal or be ready for the socialist, the communist, the nihilist. Society is now disturbed by forces never felt before. . . ."

When Cleveland was elected President again in 1892, Andrew Carnegie, in Europe, received a letter from the manager of his steel plants, Henry Clay Frick: "I am very sorry for President Harrison, but I cannot see that our interests are going to be affected one way or the other by the change in administration." Cleveland, facing the agitation in the country caused by the panic and depression of 1893, used troops to break up "Coxey's Army," a demonstration of unemployed men who had come to Washington, and again to break up the national strike on the railroads the following year.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court, despite its look of somber, black-robed fairness, was doing its bit for the ruling elite. How could it be independent, with its members chosen by the President and ratified by the Senate? How could it be neutral between rich and poor when its members were often former wealthy lawyers, and almost always came from the upper class? Early in the nineteenth century the Court laid the legal basis for a nationally regulated economy by establishing federal control over interstate commerce, and the legal basis for corporate capitalism by making the contract sacred.

In 1895 the Court interpreted the Sherman Act so as to make it harmless. It said a monopoly of sugar refining was a monopoly in manufacturing, not commerce, and so could not be regulated by Congress through the Sherman Act (*U.S. v. E. C. Knight Co.*). The Court also said the Sherman Act could be used against interstate strikes (the railway strike of 1894) because they were in restraint of trade. It also declared unconstitutional a small attempt by Congress to tax high incomes at a higher rate (*Pollock v. Farmers' Loan & Trust Company*). In later years it would refuse to break up the Standard Oil and American Tobacco monopolies, saying the Sherman Act barred only "unreasonable" combinations in restraint of trade.

A New York banker toasted the Supreme Court in 1895: "I give you, gentlemen, the Supreme Court of the United States-guardian of the dollar, defender of private property, enemy of spoliation, sheet anchor of the Republic."

Very soon after the Fourteenth Amendment became law, the Supreme Court began to demolish it as a protection for blacks, and to develop it as a protection for corporations. However, in 1877, a Supreme Court decision (*Munn v. Illinois*) approved state laws regulating the prices charged to farmers for the use of grain elevators. The grain elevator company argued it was a person being deprived of property, thus violating the Fourteenth Amendment's declaration "nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law." The Supreme Court disagreed, saying that grain elevators were not simply private property but were invested with "a public interest" and so could be regulated.

One year after that decision, the American Bar Association, organized by lawyers accustomed to serving the wealthy, began a national campaign of education to reverse the Court decision. Its presidents said, at different times: "If trusts are a defensive weapon of property interests against the communistic trend, they are desirable." And: "Monopoly is often a necessity and an advantage."

By 1886, they succeeded. State legislatures, under the pressure of aroused farmers, had passed laws to regulate the rates charged farmers by the railroads. The Supreme Court that year (*Wabash v. Illinois*) said states could not do this, that this was an intrusion on federal power. That year alone, the Court did away with 230 state laws that had been passed to regulate corporations.

By this time the Supreme Court had accepted the argument that corporations were "persons" and their money was property protected by the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Supposedly, the Amendment had been passed to protect Negro rights, but of the Fourteenth Amendment cases brought before the Supreme Court between 1890 and 1910, nineteen dealt with the Negro, 288 dealt with corporations.

The justices of the Supreme Court were not simply interpreters of the Constitution. They were men of certain backgrounds, of certain interests. One of them (Justice Samuel Miller) had said in 1875: "It is vain to contend with Judges who have been at the bar the advocates for forty years of railroad companies, and all forms of associated capital. . . ." In 1893, Supreme Court Justice David J. Brewer, addressing the New York State Bar Association, said:

**It is the unvarying law that the wealth of the community will be in the hands of the few. . . . The great majority of men are unwilling to endure that long self-denial and saving which makes accumulations possible . . . and hence it always has been, and until human nature is remodeled always will be true, that the wealth of a nation is in the hands of a few, while the many subsist upon the proceeds of their daily toil.**

This was not just a whim of the 1880s and 1890s—it went back to the Founding Fathers, who had learned their law in the era of *Blackstone's Commentaries*, which said: "So great is the regard of the law for private property, that it will not authorize the least violation of it; no, not even for the common good of the whole community."

Control in modern times requires more than force, more than law. It requires that a population dangerously concentrated in cities and factories, whose lives are filled with cause for rebellion, be taught that all is right as it is. And so, the schools, the churches, the popular literature taught that to be rich was a sign of superiority, to be poor a sign of personal failure, and that the only way upward for a poor person was to climb into the ranks of the rich by extraordinary effort and extraordinary luck.

In those years after the Civil War, a man named Russell Conwell, a graduate of Yale Law School, a minister, and author of best-selling books, gave the same lecture, "Acres of Diamonds," more than five thousand times to audiences across the country, reaching several million people in all. His message was that anyone could get rich if he tried hard enough, that everywhere, if people looked closely enough, were "acres of diamonds." A sampling:

**I say that you ought to get rich, and it is your duty to get rich.... The men who get rich may be the most honest men you find in the community. Let me say here clearly . . . ninety-eight out of one hundred of the rich men of America are honest. That is why they are rich. That is why they are trusted with money. That is why they carry on great enterprises and find plenty of people to work with them. It is because they are honest men. . . .**

**... I sympathize with the poor, but the number of poor who are to be sympathized with is very small. To sympathize with a man whom God has punished for his sins ... is to do wrong.... let us remember there is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings. . . .**

Conwell was a founder of Temple University. Rockefeller was a donor to colleges all over the country and helped found the University of Chicago. Huntington, of the Central Pacific, gave money to two Negro colleges, Hampton Institute and Tuskegee Institute. Carnegie gave money to colleges and to libraries. Johns Hopkins was founded by a millionaire merchant, and millionaires Cornelius Vanderbilt, Ezra Cornell, James Duke, and Leland Stanford created universities in their own names.

The rich, giving part of their enormous earnings in this way, became known as philanthropists. These educational institutions did not encourage dissent; they trained the middlemen in the American system—the teachers, doctors, lawyers, administrators, engineers, technicians, politicians—those who would be paid to keep the system going, to be loyal buffers against trouble.

In the meantime, the spread of public school education enabled the learning of writing, reading, and arithmetic for a whole generation of workers, skilled and semiskilled, who would be the literate labor force of the new industrial age. It was important that these people learn obedience to authority. A journalist observer of the schools in the 1890s wrote: "The unkindly spirit of the teacher is strikingly apparent; the pupils, being completely subjugated to her will, are silent and motionless, the spiritual atmosphere of the classroom is damp and chilly."

Back in 1859, the desire of mill owners in the town of Lowell that their workers be educated was explained by the secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education:

**The owners of factories are more concerned than other classes and interests in the intelligence of their laborers. When the latter are well-educated and the former are disposed to deal justly, controversies and strikes can never occur, nor can the minds of the masses be prejudiced by demagogues and controlled by temporary and factious considerations.**

Joel Spring, in his book *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State*, says: "The development of a factory-like system in the nineteenth-century schoolroom was not accidental."

This continued into the twentieth century, when William Bagley's *Classroom Management* became a standard teacher training text, reprinted thirty times. Bagley said: "One who studies educational theory aright can see in the mechanical routine of the classroom the educative forces that are slowly transforming the child from a little savage into a creature of law and order, fit for the life of civilized society."

It was in the middle and late nineteenth century that high schools developed as aids to the industrial system, that history was widely required in the curriculum to foster patriotism. Loyalty oaths, teacher certification, and the requirement of citizenship were introduced to control both the educational and the political quality of teachers. Also, in the latter part of the century, school officials-not teachers-were given control over textbooks. Laws passed by the states barred certain kinds of textbooks. Idaho and Montana, for instance, forbade textbooks propagating "political" doctrines, and the Dakota territory ruled that school libraries could not have "partisan political pamphlets or books."

Against this gigantic organization of knowledge and education for orthodoxy and obedience, there arose a literature of dissent and protest, which had to make its way from reader to reader against great obstacles. Henry George, a self-educated workingman from a poor Philadelphia family, who became a newspaperman and an economist, wrote a book that was published in 1879 and sold millions of copies, not only in the United States, but all over the world. His book *Progress and Poverty* argued that the basis of wealth was land, that this was becoming monopolized, and that a single tax on land, abolishing all others, would bring enough revenue to solve the problem of poverty and equalize wealth in the nation. Readers may not have been persuaded of his solutions, but they could see in their own lives the accuracy of his observations:

**It is true that wealth has been greatly increased, and that the average of comfort, leisure and refinement has been raised; but these gains are not general. In them the lowest class do not share... This association of poverty with progress is the great enigma of our times. ... There is a vague but general feeling of disappointment; an increased bitterness among the working classes; a widespread feeling of unrest and brooding revolution... . The civilized world is trembling on the verge of a great movement. Either it must be a leap upward, which will open the way to advances yet undreamed of, or it must be a plunge downward which will carry us back toward barbarism. ...**

A different kind of challenge to the economic and social system was given by Edward Bellamy, a lawyer and writer from western Massachusetts, who wrote, in simple, intriguing language, a novel called *Looking Backward*, in which the author falls asleep and wakes up in the year 2000, to find a socialistic society in which people work and live cooperatively. *Looking Backward*, which described socialism vividly, lovingly, sold a million copies in a few years, and over a hundred groups were organized around the country to try to make the dream come true.

It seemed that despite the strenuous efforts of government, business, the church, the schools, to control their thinking, millions of Americans were ready to consider harsh criticism of the existing system, to contemplate other possible ways of living. They were helped in this by the great movements of workers and farmers that swept the country in the 1880s and 1890s. These movements went beyond the scattered strikes and tenants' struggles of the period 1830-1877. They were nationwide movements, more threatening than before to the ruling elite, more dangerously suggestive. It was a time when revolutionary organizations existed in major American cities, and revolutionary talk was in the air.

In the 1880s and 1890s, immigrants were pouring in from Europe at a faster rate than before. They all went through the harrowing ocean voyage of the poor. Now there were not so many Irish and German immigrants as Italians, Russians, Jews, Greeks-people from Southern and Eastern Europe, even more alien to native-born Anglo-Saxons than the earlier newcomers.

How the immigration of different ethnic groups contributed to the fragmentation of the working class, how conflicts developed among groups facing the same difficult conditions, is shown in an article in a Bohemian newspaper, *Svornost*, of February 27, 1880. A petition of 258 parents and guardians at the Throop School in New York, signed by over half the taxpayers of the school district, said "the petitioners have just as much right to request the teaching of Bohemian as have the German citizens to have German taught in the public schools.... In opposition to this, Mr. Vocke claims that there is a great deal of difference between Germans and Bohemians, or in other words, they are superior."

The Irish, still recalling the hatred against them when they arrived, began to get jobs with the new political machines that wanted their vote. Those who became policemen encountered the new Jewish immigrants. On July 30, 1902, New York's Jewish community held a mass funeral for an important rabbi, and a riot took place, led by Irish who resented Jews coming into their neighborhood. The police force was dominantly Irish, and the official investigation of the riot indicated the police helped the rioters: "... it appears that charges of unprovoked and most brutal clubbing have been made against policemen, with the result that they were reprimanded or fined a day's pay and were yet retained upon the force."

There was desperate economic competition among the newcomers. By 1880, Chinese immigrants, brought in by the railroads to do the backbreaking labor at pitiful wages, numbered 75,000 in California, almost one-tenth of the population. They became the objects of continuous violence. The novelist Bret Harte wrote an obituary for a Chinese man named Wan Lee:

**Dead, my revered friends, dead. Stoned to death in the streets of San Francisco, in the year of grace 1869 by a mob of halfgrown boys and Christian school children.**

In Rock Springs, Wyoming, in the summer of 1885, whites attacked five hundred Chinese miners, massacring twenty-eight of them in cold blood.

The new immigrants became laborers, housepainters, stonecutters, ditchdiggers. They were often imported en masse by contractors. One Italian man, told he was going to Connecticut to work on the railroad, was taken instead to sulfate mines in the South, where he and his fellows were watched over by armed guards in their barracks and in the mines, given only enough money to pay for their railroad fare and tools, and very little to eat. He and others decided to escape. They were captured at gunpoint, ordered to work or die; they still refused and were brought before a judge, put in manacles, and, five months after their arrival, finally dismissed. "My comrades took the train for New York. I had only one dollar, and with this, not knowing either the country or the language, I had to walk to New York. After forty-two days I arrived in the city utterly exhausted."

Their conditions led sometimes to rebellion. A contemporary observer told how "some Italians who worked in a locality near Deal Lake, New Jersey, failing to receive their wages, captured the contractor and shut him up in the shanty, where he remained a prisoner until the county sheriff came with a posse to his rescue."

A traffic in immigrant child laborers developed, either by contract with desperate parents in the home country or by kidnapping. The children were then supervised by "padrones" in a form of slavery, sometimes sent out as beggar musicians. Droves of them roamed the streets of New York and Philadelphia.

As the immigrants became naturalized citizens, they were brought into the American two-party system, invited to be loyal to one party or the other, their political energy thus siphoned into elections. An article in *L'Italia*, in November 1894, called for Italians to support the Republican party:

**When American citizens of foreign birth refuse to ally themselves with the Republican Party, they make war upon their own welfare. The Republican Party stands for all that the people fight for in the Old World. It is the champion of freedom, progress, order, and law. It is the steadfast foe of monarchial class rule.**

There were 5 1/2 million immigrants in the 1880s, 4 million in the 1890s, creating a labor surplus that kept wages down. The immigrants were more controllable, more helpless than native workers; they were culturally displaced, at odds with one another, therefore useful as strikebreakers. Often their children worked, intensifying the problem of an oversized labor force and joblessness; in 1880 there were 1,118,000 children under sixteen (one out of six) at work in the United States. With everyone working long hours, families often became strangers to one another. A pants presser named Morris Rosenfeld wrote a poem, "My Boy," which became widely reprinted and recited:

**I have a little boy at home,  
A pretty little son;  
I think sometimes the world is mine  
In him, my only one. . . .**

**'Ere dawn my labor drives me forth;  
Tis night when I am free;  
A stranger am I to my child;  
And stranger my child to me. ...**

Women immigrants became servants, prostitutes, housewives, factory workers, and sometimes rebels. Leonora Barry was born in Ireland and brought to the United States. She got married, and when her husband died she went to work in a hosiery mill in upstate New York to support three young children, earning 65 cents her first week. She joined the Knights of Labor, which had fifty thousand women members in 192 women's assemblies by 1886. She became "master workman" of her assembly of 927 women, and was appointed to work for the Knights as a general investigator, to "go forth and educate her sister working-women and the public generally as to their needs and necessities." She described the biggest problem of women workers: "Through long years of endurance they have acquired, as a sort of second nature, the habit of submission and acceptance without question of any terms offered them, with the pessimistic view of life in which they see no hope." Her report for the year 1888 showed: 537 requests to help women organize, 100 cities and towns visited, 1,900 leaflets distributed.

In 1884, women's assemblies of textile workers and hatmakers went on strike. The following year in New York, cloak and shirt makers, men and women (holding separate meetings but acting together), went on strike. The *New York World* called it "a revolt for bread and butter." They won higher wages and shorter hours.

That winter in Yonkers, a few women carpet weavers were fired for joining the Knights, and in the cold of February, 2,500 women walked out and picketed the mill. Only seven hundred of them were members of the Knights, but all the strikers soon joined. The police attacked the picket line and arrested them, but a jury found them not guilty. A great dinner was held by working people in New York to honor them, with two thousand delegates from unions all over the city. The strike lasted six months, and the women won some of their demands, getting back their jobs, but without recognition of their union.

What was astonishing in so many of these struggles was not that the strikers did not win all that they wanted, but that, against such great odds, they dared to resist, and were not destroyed.

Perhaps it was the recognition that day-to-day combat was not enough, that fundamental change was needed, which stimulated the growth of revolutionary movements at this time. The Socialist Labor party, formed in 1877, was tiny, and torn by internal arguments, but it had some influence in organizing unions among foreign workers. In New York, Jewish socialists organized and put out a newspaper. In Chicago, German revolutionaries, along with native-born radicals like Albert Parsons, formed Social Revolutionary clubs. In 1883, an anarchist congress took place in Pittsburgh. It drew up a manifesto:

**... All laws are directed against the working people. ... Even the school serves only the purpose of furnishing the offspring of the wealthy with those qualities necessary to uphold their class domination. The children of the poor get scarcely a formal elementary training, and this, too, is mainly directed to such branches as tend to producing prejudices, arrogance, and servility; in short, want of sense. The Church finally seeks to make complete idiots out of the mass and to make them forego the paradise on earth by promising a fictitious heaven. The capitalist press, on the other hand, takes care of the confusion of spirits in public life. ... The workers can therefore expect no help from any capitalistic party in their struggle against the existing system. They must achieve their liberation by their own efforts. As in former times, a privileged class never surrenders its tyranny, neither can it be expected that the capitalists of this age will give up their rulership without being forced to do it.**

...  
The manifesto asked "equal rights for all without distinction to sex or race." It quoted the *Communist Manifesto*: "Workmen of all lands, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains; you have a world to win!"

In Chicago, the new International Working People's Association had five thousand members, published newspapers in five languages, organized mass demonstrations and parades, and through its leadership in strikes was a powerful influence in the twenty-two unions that made up the Central Labor Union of Chicago. There were differences in theory among all these revolutionary groups, but the theorists were often brought together by the practical needs of labor struggles, and there were many in the mid-1880s.

In early 1886, the Texas & Pacific Railroad fired a leader of the district assembly of the Knights of Labor, and this led to a strike which spread throughout the Southwest, tying up traffic as far as St. Louis and Kansas City. Nine young men recruited in New Orleans as marshals, brought to Texas to protect company property, learned about the strike and quit their jobs, saying, "as man to man we could not justifiably go to work and take the bread out of our fellow-workmen's mouths, no matter how much we needed it ourselves." They were then arrested for defrauding the company by refusing to work, and sentenced to three months in the Galveston county jail.

The strikers engaged in sabotage. A news dispatch from Atchison, Kansas:

**At 12:45 this morning the men on guard at the Missouri Pacific roundhouse were surprised by the appearance of 35 or 40 masked men. The guards were corralled in the oil room by a detachment of the visitors who stood guard with pistols ... while the rest of them thoroughly disabled 12 locomotives which stood in the stalls.**

In April, in East St. Louis, there was a battle between strikers and police. Seven workingmen were killed, whereupon workers burned the freight depot of the Louisville & Nashville. The governor declared martial law and sent in seven hundred National Guardsmen. With mass arrests, violent attacks by sheriffs and deputies, no support from the skilled, paid-paid workers of the Railway Brotherhoods, the strikers could not hold out. After several months they surrendered, and many of them were blacklisted.

By the spring of 1886, the movement for an eight-hour day had grown. On May 1, the American Federation of Labor, now five years old, called for nationwide strikes wherever the eight-hour day was refused. Terence Powderly, head of the Knights of Labor, opposed the strike, saying that employers and employees must first be educated on the eight-hour day, but assemblies of the Knights made plans to strike. The grand chief of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers opposed the eight-hour day, saying "two hours less work means two hours more loafing about the corners and two hours more for drink," but railroad workers did not agree and supported the eight-hour movement.

So, 350,000 workers in 11,562 establishments all over the country went out on strike. In Detroit, 11,000 workers marched in an eight-hour parade. In New York, 25,000 formed a torchlight procession along Broadway, headed by 3,400 members of the Bakers' Union. In Chicago, 40,000 struck, and 45,000 were granted a shorter working day to prevent them from striking. Every railroad in Chicago stopped running, and most of the industries in Chicago were paralyzed. The stockyards were closed down.

A "Citizens' Committee" of businessmen met daily to map strategy in Chicago. The state militia had been called out, the police were ready, and the *Chicago Mail* on May 1 asked that Albert Parsons and August Spies, the anarchist leaders of the International Working People's Association, be watched. "Keep them in view. Hold them personally responsible for any trouble that occurs. Make an example of them if trouble occurs."

Under the leadership of Parsons and Spies, the Central Labor Union, with twenty-two unions, had adopted a fiery resolution in the fall of 1885:

**Be it Resolved, That we urgently call upon the wage-earning class to arm itself in order to be able to put forth against their exploiters such an argument which alone can be effective: Violence, and further be it Resolved, that notwithstanding that we expect very little from the introduction of the eight-hour day, we firmly promise to assist our more backward brethren in this class struggle with all means and power at our disposal, so long as they will continue to show an open and resolute front to our common oppressors, the aristocratic vagabonds and exploiters. Our war-cry is "Death to the foes of the human race."**

On May 3, a series of events took place which were to put Parsons and Spies in exactly the position that the *Chicago Mail* had suggested ("Make an example of them if trouble occurs"). That day, in front of the McCormick Harvester Works, where strikers and sympathizers fought scabs, the police fired into a crowd of strikers running from the scene, wounded many of them, and killed four. Spies, enraged, went to the printing shop of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and printed a circular in both English and German:

**Revenge!**

**Workingmen, to Arms!!!**

**. . . You have for years endured the most abject humiliations; . . . you have worked yourself to death... your Children you have sacrificed to the factory lord-in short: you have been miserable and obedient slaves all these years: Why? To satisfy the insatiable greed, to fill the coffers of your thieving master? When you ask them now to lessen your burdens, he sends his bloodhounds out to shoot you, kill you!**

**... To arms we call you, to arms!**

A meeting was called for Haymarket Square on the evening of May 4, and about three thousand persons assembled. It was a quiet meeting, and as storm clouds gathered and the hour grew late, the crowd dwindled to a few hundred. A detachment of 180 policemen showed up, advanced on the speakers' platform, ordered the crowd to disperse. The speaker said the meeting was almost over. A bomb then exploded in the midst of the police, wounding sixty-six policemen, of whom seven later died. The police fired into the crowd, killing several people, wounding two hundred.

With no evidence on who threw the bomb, the police arrested eight anarchist leaders in Chicago. The *Chicago Journal* said: "Justice should be prompt in dealing with the arrested anarchists. The law regarding accessories to crime in this State is so plain that their trials will be short." Illinois law said that anyone inciting a murder was guilty of that murder. The evidence against the eight anarchists was their ideas, their literature; none had been at Haymarket that day except Fielden, who was speaking when the bomb exploded. A jury found them guilty, and they were sentenced to death. Their appeals were denied; the Supreme Court said it had no jurisdiction.

The event aroused international excitement. Meetings took place in France, Holland, Russia, Italy, Spain. In London a meeting of protest was sponsored by George Bernard Shaw, William Morris, and Peter Kropotkin, among others. Shaw had responded in his characteristic way to the turning down of an appeal by the eight members of the Illinois Supreme Court: "If the world must lose eight of its people, it can better afford to lose the eight members of the Illinois Supreme Court."

A year after the trial, four of the convicted anarchists-Albert Parsons, a printer, August Spies, an upholsterer, Adolph Eischer, and George Engel-were hanged. Louis Lingg, a twenty-one-year-old carpenter, blew himself up in his cell by exploding a dynamite tube in his mouth. Three remained in prison.

The executions aroused people all over the country. There was a funeral march of 25,000 in Chicago. Some evidence came out that a man named Rudolph Schnaubelt, supposedly an anarchist, was actually an agent of the police, an *agent provocateur*, hired to throw the bomb and thus enable the arrest of hundreds, the destruction of the revolutionary leadership in Chicago. But to this day it has not been discovered who threw the bomb.

While the immediate result was a suppression of the radical movement, the long-term effect was to keep alive the class anger of many, to inspire others-especially young people of that generation-to action in revolutionary causes. Sixty thousand signed petitions to the new governor of Illinois, John Peter Altgeld, who investigated the facts, denounced what had happened, and pardoned the three remaining prisoners. Year after year, all over the country, memorial meetings for the Haymarket martyrs were held; it is impossible to know the number of individuals whose political awakening-as with Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, long-time revolutionary stalwarts of the next generation-came from the Haymarket Affair.

(As late as 1968, the Haymarket events were alive; in that year a group of young radicals in Chicago blew up the monument that had been erected to the memory of the police who died in the explosion. And the trial of eight leaders of the antiwar movement in Chicago around that time evoked, in the press, in meetings, and in literature, the memory of the first "Chicago Eight," on trial for their ideas.)

After Haymarket, class conflict and violence continued, with strikes, lockouts, blacklisting, the use of Pinkerton detectives and police to break strikes with force, and courts to break them by law. During a strike of streetcar conductors on the Third Avenue Line in New York a month after the Haymarket Affair, police charged a crowd of thousands, using their clubs indiscriminately: "The New York *Sun* reported: "Men with broken scalps were crawling off in all directions...."

Some of the energy of resentment in late 1886 was poured into the electoral campaign for mayor of New York that fall. Trade unions formed an Independent Labor party and nominated for mayor Henry George, the radical economist, whose *Progress and Poverty* had been read by tens of thousands of workers. George's platform tells something about the conditions of life for workers in New York in the 1880s. It demanded:

1. that property qualifications be abolished for members of juries.
2. that Grand Jurors be chosen from the lower-class as well as from the upperclass, which dominated Grand Juries.
3. that the police not interfere with peaceful meetings.
4. that the sanitary inspection of buildings be enforced.
5. that contract labor be abolished in public works.
6. that there be equal pay for equal work for women.
7. that the streetcars be owned by the municipal government.

The Democrats nominated an iron manufacturer, Abram Hewitt, and the Republicans nominated Theodore Roosevelt, at a convention presided over by Elihu Root, a corporation lawyer, with the nominating speech given by Chauncey Depew, a railroad director. In a campaign of coercion and bribery, Hewitt was elected with 41 percent of the vote, George came second with 31 percent of the vote, and Roosevelt third with 27 percent of the vote. The New York *World* saw this as a signal:

**The deep-voiced protest conveyed in the 67,000 votes for Henry George against the combined power of both political parties, of Wall Street and the business interests, and of the public press should be a warning to the community to heed the demands of Labor so far as they are just and reasonable. . . .**

In other cities in the country too, labor candidates ran, polling 25,000 out of 92,000 votes in Chicago, electing a mayor in Milwaukee, and various local officials in Fort Worth, Texas, Eaton, Ohio, and Leadville, Colorado.

It seemed that the weight of Haymarket had not crushed the labor movement. The year 1886 became known to contemporaries as "the year of the great uprising of labor." From 1881 to 1885, strikes had averaged about 500 each year, involving perhaps 150,000 workers each year. In 1886 there were over 1,400 strikes, involving 500,000 workers. John Commons, in his *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, saw in that:

**... the signs of a great movement by the class of the unskilled, which had finally risen in rebellion. . . . The movement bore in every way the aspect of a social war. A frenzied hatred of labour for capital was shown in every important strike. . . . Extreme bitterness toward capital manifested itself in all the actions of the Knights of Labor, and wherever the leaders undertook to hold it within bounds, they were generally discarded by their followers. . . .**

Even among southern blacks, where all the military, political, and economic force of the southern states, with the acquiescence of the national government, was concentrated on keeping them docile and working, there were sporadic rebellions. In the cotton fields, blacks were dispersed in their work, but in the sugar fields, work was done in gangs, so there was opportunity for organized action. In 1880, they had struck to get a dollar a day instead of 75 cents, threatening to leave the state. Strikers were arrested and jailed, but they walked the roads along the sugar fields, carrying banners: "A DOLLAR A DAY OR KANSAS." They were arrested again and again for trespassing, and the strike was broken.

By 1886, however, the Knights of Labor was organizing in the sugar fields, in the peak year of the Knights' influence. The black workers, unable to feed and clothe their families on their wages, often paid in store scrip, asked a dollar a day once more. The following year, in the fall, close to ten thousand sugar laborers went on strike, 90 percent of them Negroes and members of the Knights. The militia arrived and gun battles began.

Violence erupted in the town of Thibodaux, which had become a kind of refugee village where hundreds of strikers, evicted from their plantation shacks, gathered, penniless and ragged, carrying their bed clothing and babies. Their refusal to work threatened the entire sugar crop, and martial law was declared in Thibodaux. Henry and George Cox, two Negro brothers, leaders in the Knights of Labor, were arrested, locked up, then taken from their cells, and never heard from again. On the night of November 22, shooting broke out, each side claiming the other was at fault; by noon the next day, thirty Negroes were dead or dying, and hundreds wounded. Two whites were wounded. A Negro newspaper in New Orleans wrote:

**. . . . Lame men and blind women shot; children and hoary-headed grandsires ruthlessly swept down! The Negroes offered no resistance; they could not, as the killing was unexpected. Those of them not killed took to the woods, a majority of them finding refuge in this city. . . .**

**Citizens of the United States killed by a mob directed by a State judge. . . . Laboring men seeking an advance in wages, treated as if they were dogs! . . .**

**At such times and upon such occasions, words of condemnation fall like snow-flakes upon molten lead. The blacks should defend their lives, and if needs must die, die with their faces toward their persecutors fighting for their homes, their children and their lawful rights.**

Native-born poor whites were not doing well either. In the South, they were tenant farmers rather than landowners. In the southern cities, they were tenants, not homeowners. C. Vann Woodward notes (*Origins of the New South*) that the city with the highest rate of tenancy in the United States was Birmingham, with 90 percent. And the slums of the southern cities were among the worst, poor whites living like the blacks, on unpaved dirt streets "choked up with garbage, filth and mud," according to a report of one state board of health.

There were eruptions against the convict labor system in the South, in which prisoners were leased in slave labor to corporations, used thus to depress the general level of wages and also to break strikes. In the year 1891, miners of the Tennessee Coal Mine Company were asked to sign an "iron-clad contract": pledging no strikes, agreeing to get paid in scrip, and giving up the right to check the weight of the coal they mined (they were paid by the weight). They refused to sign and were evicted from their houses. Convicts were brought in to replace them.

On the night of October 31, 1891, a thousand armed miners took control of the mine area, set five hundred convicts free, and burned down the stockades in which the convicts were kept. The companies surrendered, agreeing not to use convicts, not to require the "ironclad contract" and to let the miners check on the weight of the coal they mined.

The following year, there were more such incidents in Tennessee. C. Vann Woodward calls them "insurrections." Miners overpowered guards of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, burned the stockades, shipped the convicts to Nashville. Other unions in Tennessee came to their aid. An observer reported back to the Chattanooga Federation of Trades:

**I should like to impress upon people the extent of this movement. I have seen the written assurance of reinforcements to the miners of fully 7500 men, who will be on the field in ten hours after the first shot is fired. . . . The entire district is as one over the main proposition, "the convicts must go". I counted 840 rifles on Monday as the miners passed, while the vast multitude following them carried revolvers. The captains of the different companies are all Grand Army men. Whites and Negroes are standing shoulder to shoulder.**

That same year, in New Orleans, forty-two union locals, with over twenty thousand members, mostly white but including some blacks (there was one black on the strike committee), called a general strike, involving half the population of the city. Work in New Orleans came to a stop. After three days-with strikebreakers brought in, martial law, and the threat of militia-the strike ended with a compromise, gaining hours and wages but without recognition of the unions as bargaining agents.

The year 1892 saw strike struggles all over the country: besides the general strike in New Orleans and the coal miners' strike in Tennessee, there was a railroad switchmen's strike in Buffalo, New York, and a copper miners' strike in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The Coeur d'Alene strike was marked by gun battles between strikers and strikebreakers, and many deaths. A newspaper account of July 11, 1892, reported:

**... The long-dreaded conflict between the forces of the strikers and the nonunion men who have taken their places has come at last. As a result five men are known to be dead and 16 are already in the hospital; the Frisco mill on Canyon Creek is in ruins; the Gem mine has surrendered to the strikers, the arms of its employees have been captured, and the employees themselves have been ordered out of the country. Flushed with the success of these victories the turbulent element among the strikers are preparing to move upon other strongholds of the non-union men... .**

The National Guard, brought in by the governor, was reinforced by federal troops: six hundred miners were rounded up and imprisoned in bullpens, scabs brought back, union leaders fired, the strike broken.

In early 1892, the Carnegie Steel plant at Homestead, Pennsylvania, just outside of Pittsburgh, was being managed by Henry Clay Frick while Carnegie was in Europe. Frick decided to reduce the workers' wages and break their union. He built a fence 3 miles long and 12 feet high around the steelworks and topped it with barbed wire, adding peepholes for rifles. When the workers did not accept the pay cut, Frick laid off the entire work force. The Pinkerton detective agency was hired to protect strikebreakers.

Although only 750 of the 3,800 workers at Homestead belonged to the union, three thousand workers met in the Opera House and voted overwhelmingly to strike. The plant was on the Monongahela River, and a thousand pickets began patrolling a 10-mile stretch of the river. A committee of strikers took over the town, and the sheriff was unable to raise a posse among local people against them.

On the night of July 5, 1892, hundreds of Pinkerton guards boarded barges 5 miles down the river from Homestead and moved toward the plant, where ten thousand strikers and sympathizers waited. The crowd warned the Pinkertons not to step off the barge. A striker lay down on the gangplank, and when a Pinkerton man tried to shove him aside, he fired, wounding the detective in the thigh. In the gunfire that followed on both sides, seven workers were killed.

The Pinkertons had to retreat onto the barges. They were attacked from all sides, voted to surrender, and then were beaten by the enraged crowd. There were dead on both sides. For the next several days the strikers were in command of the area. Now the state went into action: the governor brought in the militia, armed with the latest rifles and Gatling guns, to protect the import of strikebreakers.

Strike leaders were charged with murder; 160 other strikers were tried for other crimes. All were acquitted by friendly juries. The entire Strike Committee was then arrested for treason against the state, but no jury would convict them. The strike held for four months, but the plant was producing steel with strikebreakers who were brought in, often in locked trains, not knowing their destination, not knowing a strike was on. The strikers, with no resources left, agreed to return to work, their leaders blacklisted.

One reason for the defeat was that the strike was confined to Homestead, and other plants of Carnegie kept working. Some blast furnace workers did strike, but they were quickly defeated, and the pig iron from those furnaces was then used at Homestead. The defeat kept unionization from the Carnegie plants well into the twentieth century, and the workers took wage cuts and increases in hours without organized resistance.

In the midst of the Homestead strike, a young anarchist from New York named Alexander Berkman, in a plan prepared by anarchist friends in New York, including his lover Emma Goldman, came to Pittsburgh and entered the office of Henry Clay Frick, determined to kill him. Berkman's aim was poor; he wounded Frick and was overwhelmed, then was tried and found guilty of attempted murder. He served fourteen years in the state penitentiary. His *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* gave a graphic description of the assassination attempt and of his years in prison, when he changed his mind about the usefulness of assassinations but remained a dedicated revolutionary. Emma Goldman's autobiography, *Living My Life*, conveys the anger, the sense of injustice, the desire for a new kind of life, that grew among the young radicals of that day.

The year 1893 saw the biggest economic crisis in the country's history. After several decades of wild industrial growth, financial manipulation, uncontrolled speculation and profiteering, it all collapsed: 642 banks failed and 16,000 businesses closed down. Out of the labor force of 15 million, 3 million were unemployed. No state government voted relief, but mass demonstrations all over the country forced city governments to set up soup kitchens and give people work on streets or parks.

In New York City, in Union Square, Emma Goldman addressed a huge meeting of the unemployed and urged those whose children needed food to go into the stores and take it. She was arrested for "inciting to riot" and sentenced to two years in prison. In Chicago, it was estimated that 200,000 people were without work, the floors and stairways of City Hall and the police stations packed every night with homeless men trying to sleep.

The Depression lasted for years and brought a wave of strikes throughout the country. The largest of these was the nationwide strike of railroad workers in 1894 that began at the Pullman Company in Illinois, just outside of Chicago.

Annual wages of railroad workers, according to the report of the commissioner of labor in 1890, were \$957 for engineers, the aristocrats of the railroad-but \$575 for conductors, \$212 for brakemen, and \$124 for laborers. Railroad work was one of the most dangerous jobs in America; over two thousand railroad workers were being killed each year, and thirty thousand injured. The railroad companies called these "acts of God" or the result of "carelessness" on the part of the workers, but the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine* said: "It comes to this: while railroad managers reduce their force and require men to do double duty, involving loss of rest and sleep . . . the accidents are chargeable to the greed of the corporation."

It was the Depression of 1893 that propelled Eugene Debs into a lifetime of action for unionism and socialism. Debs was from Terre Haute, Indiana, where his father and mother ran a store. He had worked on the railroads for four years until he was nineteen, but left when a friend was killed after falling under a locomotive. He came back to join a Railroad Brotherhood as a billing clerk. At the time of the great strikes of 1877, Debs opposed them and argued there was no "necessary conflict between capital and labor." But when he read Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, it deeply affected him. He followed the events at Homestead, Coeur d'Alene, the Buffalo switchmen's strike, and wrote:

**If the year 1892 taught the world any lesson worthy of heed, it was that the capitalist class, like a devilfish, had grasped them with its tentacles and was dragging them down to fathomless depths of degradation. To escape the prehensile clutch of these monsters, constitutes a standing challenge to organized labor for 1893.**

In the midst of the economic crisis of 1893, a small group of railroad workers, including Debs, formed the American Railway Union, to unite all railway workers. Debs said:

**A life purpose of mine has been the federation of railroad employees. To unify them into one great body is my object. . . . Class enrollment fosters class prejudices and class selfishness. ... It has been my life's desire to unify railroad employees and to eliminate the aristocracy of labor ... and organize them so all will be on an equality. ...**

Knights of Labor people came in, virtually merging the old Knights with the American Railway Union, according to labor historian David Montgomery.

Debs wanted to include everyone, but blacks were kept out: at a convention in 1894, the provision in the constitution barring blacks was affirmed by a vote of 112 to 100. Later, Debs thought this might have had a crucial effect on the outcome of the Pullman strike, for black workers were in no mood to cooperate with the strikers.

In June 1894, workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company went on strike. One can get an idea of the kind of support they got, mostly from the immediate vicinity of Chicago, in the first months of the strike, from a list of contributions put together by the Reverend William H. Carwardine, a Methodist pastor in the company town of Pullman for three years (he was sent away after he supported the strikers):

Typographical Union #16  
Painters and Decorators Union #147  
Carpenters' Union No. 23  
Thirty- fourth Ward Republican Club  
Grand Crossing Police  
Hyde Park Water Department  
Picnic at Gardener's Park  
Milk Dealer's Union  
Hyde Park Liquor Dealers  
Fourteenth Precinct Police Station  
Swedish Concert  
Chicago Fire Department  
German Singing Society  
Cheque from Anaconda, Montana

The Pullman strikers appealed to a convention of the American Railway Union for support:

**Mr. President and Brothers of the American Railway Union. We struck at Pullman because we were without hope. We joined the American Railway Union because it gave us a glimmer of hope. Twenty thousand souls, men, women and little ones, have their eyes turned toward this convention today, straining eagerly through dark despondency for a glimmer of the heavensent message you alone can give us on this earth... .**

**You all must know that the proximate cause of our strike was the discharge of two members of our grievance committee.... Five reductions in wages.. .. The last was the most severe, amounting to nearly thirty per cent, and rents had not fallen. ... .**

**Water which Pullman buys from the city at 8 cents a thousand gallons he retails lo us at 500 percent advance. ... Gas which sells at 75 cents per thousand feet in Hyde Park, just north of us, he sells for \$2.25. When we went to tell him our grievances he said we were all his "children."... .**

**Pullman, both the man and the town, is an ulcer on the body politic. He owns the houses, the schoolhouses, and churches of God in the town he gave his once humble name....**

**And thus the merry war-the dance of skeletons bathed in human tears-goes on, and it will go on, brothers, forever, unless you, the American Railway Union, stop it; end it; crush it out.**

The American Railway Union responded. It asked its members all over the country not to handle Pullman cars. Since virtually all passenger trains had Pullman cars, this amounted to a boycott of all trains-a nationwide strike. Soon all traffic on the twenty-four railroad lines leading out of Chicago had come to a halt. Workers derailed freight cars, blocked tracks, pulled engineers off trains if they refused to cooperate.

The General Managers Association, representing the railroad owners, agreed to pay two thousand deputies, sent in to break the strike. But the strike went on. The Attorney General of the United States, Richard Olney, a former railroad lawyer, now got a court injunction against blocking trains, on the legal ground that the federal mails were being interfered with. When the strikers ignored the injunction, President Cleveland ordered federal troops to Chicago. On July 6, hundreds of cars were burned by strikers.

The following day, the state militia moved in, and the Chicago *Times* reported on what followed:

**Company C. Second Regiment . . . disciplined a mob of rioters yesterday afternoon at Forty-ninth and Loomis Streets. The police assisted and . . . finished the job. There is no means of knowing how many rioters were killed or wounded. The mob carried off many of its dying and injured.**

A crowd of five thousand gathered. Rocks were thrown at the militia, and the command was given to fire.

... To say that the mob went wild is but a weak expression. . . The command to charge was given. . . From that moment only bayonets were used. . . A dozen men in the front line of rioters received bayonet wounds. . .

Tearing up cobble stones, the mob made a determined charge.... the word was passed along the line for each officer to take care of himself. One by one, as occasion demanded, they fired point blank into the crowd. . . The police followed with their clubs. A wire fence enclosed the track. The rioters had forgotten it; when they turned to fly they were caught in a trap.

The police were not inclined to be merciful, and driving the mob against the barbed wires clubbed it unmercifully. . . The crowd outside the fence rallied to the assistance of the rioters.... The shower of stones was incessant. . .

The ground over which the fight had occurred was like a battlefield. The men shot by the troops and police lay about like logs. . .

In Chicago that day, thirteen people were killed, fifty-three seriously wounded, seven hundred arrested. Before the strike was over, perhaps thirty-four were dead. With fourteen thousand police, militia, troops in Chicago, the strike was crushed. Debs was arrested for contempt of court, for violating the injunction that said he could not do or say anything to carry on the strike. He told the court: "It seems to me that if it were not for resistance to degrading conditions, the tendency of our whole civilization would be downward; after a while we would reach the point where there would be no resistance, and slavery would come."

Debs, in court, denied he was a socialist. But during his six months in prison, he studied socialism and talked to fellow prisoners who were socialists. Later he wrote: "I was to be baptized in Socialism in the roar of conflict... in the gleam of every bayonet and the flash of every rifle the class struggle was revealed. ... This was my first practical struggle in Socialism."

Two years after he came out of prison, Debs wrote in the *Railway Times*:

**The issue is Socialism versus Capitalism. I am for Socialism because I am for humanity. We have been cursed with the reign of gold long enough. Money constitutes no proper basis of civilization. The time has come to regenerate society-we are on the eve of a universal change.**

Thus, the eighties and nineties saw bursts of labor insurrection, more organized than the spontaneous strikes of 1877. There were now revolutionary movements influencing labor struggles, the ideas of socialism affecting labor leaders. Radical literature was appearing, speaking of fundamental changes, of new possibilities for living.

In this same period, those who worked on the land-farmers, North and South, black and white-were going far beyond the scattered tenant protests of the pre-Civil War years and creating the greatest movement of agrarian rebellion the country had ever seen.

When the Homestead Act was being discussed in Congress in 1860, a Senator from Wisconsin said he supported it:

**... because its benign operation will postpone for centuries, if it will not forever, all serious conflict between capital and labor in the older free States, withdrawing their surplus population to create in greater abundance the means of subsistence.**

The Homestead Act did not have that effect. It did not bring tranquility to the East by moving Americans to the West. It was not a safety valve for discontent, which was too great to be contained that way. As Henry Nash Smith says (*Virgin Land*), and as we have seen: "On the contrary, the three decades following its passage were marked by the most bitter and widespread labor trouble that had yet been seen in the United States."

It also failed to bring peace to the farm country of the West. Hamlin Garland, who made so many Americans aware of the life of the farmer, wrote in the preface to his novel *Jason Edwards*: "Tree land is gone. The last acre of available farmland has now passed into private or corporate hands." In *Jason Edwards* a Boston mechanic takes his family West, drawn by advertising circulars. But he finds that all land within 30 miles of a railroad has been taken up by speculators. He struggles for five years to pay off a loan and get title to his farm, and then a storm destroys his wheat just before harvest.

Behind the despair so often registered in the farm country literature of that day, there must have been visions, from time to time, of a different way to live. In another Garland novel, *A Spoil of Office*, the heroine speaks at a farmers' picnic:

**I see a time when the farmer will not need to live in a cabin on a lonely farm. I see the farmers coming together in groups. I see them with time to read, and time to visit with their fellows. I see them enjoying lectures in beautiful halls, erected in every village. I see them gather like the Saxons of old upon the green at evening to sing and dance. I see cities rising near them with schools, and churches, and concert halls and theaters. I see a day when the farmer will no longer be a drudge and his wife a bond slave, but happy men and women who will go singing to their pleasant tasks upon their fruitful farms. When the boys and girls will not go west nor to the city; when life will be worth living. In that day the moon will be brighter and the stars more glad, and pleasure and poetry and love of life come back to the man who tills the soil.**

Hamlin Garland dedicated *Jason Edwards*, written in 1891, to the Farmers Alliance. It was the Farmers Alliance that was the core of the great movement of the 1880s and 1890s later known as the Populist Movement.

Between 1860 and 1910, the U.S. army, wiping out the Indian villages on the Great Plains, paved the way for the railroads to move in and take the best land. Then the farmers came for what was left. From 1860 to 1900 the population of the United States grew from 31 million to 75 million; now 20 million people lived west of the Mississippi, and the number of farms grew from 2 million to 6 million. With the crowded cities of the East needing food, the internal market for food was more than doubled; 82 percent of the farm produce was sold inside the United States.

Farming became mechanized-steel plows, mowing machines, reapers, harvesters, improved cotton gins for pulling the fibers away from the seed, and, by the turn of the century, giant combines that cut the grain, threshed it, and put it in bags. In 1830 a bushel of wheat had taken three hours to produce. By 1900, it took ten minutes. Specialization developed by region: cotton and tobacco in the South, wheat and corn in the Midwest.

Land cost money, and machines cost money-so farmers had to borrow, hoping that the prices of their harvests would stay high, so they could pay the bank for the loan, the railroad for transportation, the grain merchant for handling their grain, the storage elevator for storing it. But they found the prices for their produce going down, and the prices of transportation and loans going up, because the individual farmer could not control the price of his grain, while the monopolist railroad and the monopolist banker could charge what they liked.

William Faulkner, in his novel *The Hamlet*, described the man on whom southern farmers depended:

**He was the largest landholder ... in one county, and Justice of the Peace in the next, and election commissioner in both.... He was a farmer, a usurer, a veterinarian.... He owned most of the good land in the county and held mortgages on most of the rest. He owned the store and the cotton gin and the combined grist mill and blacksmith shop... ..**

The farmers who could not pay saw their homes and land taken away. They became tenants. By 1880, 25 percent of all farms were rented by tenants, and the number kept rising. Many did not even have money to rent and became farm laborers; by 1900 there were 4 1/2 million farm laborers in the country. It was the fate that awaited every farmer who couldn't pay his debts.

Could the squeezed and desperate farmer turn to the government for help? Lawrence Goodwyn, in his study of the Populist movement (*The Democratic Promise*), says that after the Civil War both parties now were controlled by capitalists. They were divided along North-South lines, still hung over with the animosities of the Civil War. This made it very hard to create a party of reform cutting across both parties to unite working people South and North-to say nothing of black and white, foreign-born and native-born.

The government played its part in helping the bankers and hurting the farmers; it kept the amount of money-based on the gold supply- steady, while the population rose, so there was less and less money in circulation. The farmer had to pay off his debts in dollars that were harder to get. The bankers, getting the loans back, were getting dollars worth more than when they loaned them out-a kind of interest on top of interest. That is why so much of the talk of farmers' movements in those days had to do with putting more money in circulation-by printing greenbacks (paper money for which there was no gold in the treasury) or by making silver a basis for issuing money.

It was in Texas that the Farmers Alliance movement began. It was in the South that the crop-lien system was most brutal. By this system the farmer would get the things he needed from the merchant: the use of the cotton gin at harvest time, whatever supplies were necessary. He didn't have money to pay, so the merchant would get a lien-a mortgage on his crop-on which the farmer might pay 25 percent interest. Goodwyn says "the crop lien system became for millions of Southerners, white and black, little more than a modified form of slavery." The man with the ledger became to the farmer "the furnishing man," to black farmers simply "the Man." The farmer would owe more money every year until finally his farm was taken away and he became a tenant.

Goodwyn gives two personal histories to illustrate this. A white farmer in South Carolina, between 1887 and 1895, bought goods and services from the furnishing merchant for \$2,681.02 but was able to pay only \$687.31, and finally he had to give his land to the merchant. A black farmer named Matt Brown, in Black Hawk, Mississippi, between 1884 and 1901, bought his supplies from the Jones store, kept falling further and further behind, and in 1905 the last entry in the merchant's ledger is for a coffin and burial supplies.

How many rebellions took place against this system we don't know. In Delhi, Louisiana, in 1889, a gathering of small farmers rode into town and demolished the stores of merchants "to cancel their indebtedness," they said.

In the height of the 1877 Depression, a group of white farmers gathered together on a farm in Texas and formed the first "Farmers Alliance." In a few years, it was across the state. By 1882, there were 120 suballiances in twelve counties. By 1886, 100,000 farmers had joined in two thousand suballiances. They began to offer alternatives to the old system: join the Alliance and form cooperatives; buy things together and get lower prices. They began putting their cotton together and selling it cooperatively-they called it "bulking."

In some states a Grange movement developed; it managed to get laws passed to help farmers. But the Grange, as one of its newspapers put it, "is essentially conservative and furnishes a stable, well- organized, rational and orderly opposition to encroachments upon the liberties of the people, in contrast to the lawless, desperate attempts of communism." It was a time of crisis, and the Grange was doing too little. It lost members, while the Farmers Alliance kept growing.

From the beginning, the Farmers Alliance showed sympathy with the growing labor movement. When Knights of Labor men went on strike against a steamship line in Galveston, Texas, one of the radical leaders of the Texas Alliance, William Lamb, spoke for many (but not all) Alliance members when he said in an open letter to Alliance people: "Knowing that the day is not far distant when the Farmers Alliance will have to use Boycott on manufacturers in order to get goods direct, we think it is a good time to help the Knights of Labor. . . ." Goodwyn says: "Alliance radicalism- Populism-began with this letter."

The Texas Alliance president opposed joining the boycott, but a group of Alliance people in Texas passed a resolution:

**Whereas we see the unjust encroachments that the capitalists are making upon all the different departments of labor ... we extend to the Knights of Labor our hearty sympathy in their manly struggle against monopolistic oppression and ... we propose to stand by the Knights.**

In the summer of 1886, in the town of Cleburne, near Dallas, the Alliance gathered and drew up what came to be known as the "Cleburne Demands"-the first document of the Populist movement, asking "such legislation as shall secure to our people freedom from the onerous and shameful abuses that the industrial classes are now suffering at the hands of arrogant capitalists and powerful corporations." They called for a national conference of all labor organizations "to discuss such measures as may be of interest to the laboring classes," and proposed regulation of railroad rates, heavy taxation of land held only for speculative purposes, and an increase in the money supply.

The Alliance kept growing. By early 1887, it had 200,000 members in three thousand suballiances. By 1892 farmer lecturers had gone into forty-three states and reached 2 million farm families in what Goodwyn calls "the most massive organizing drive by any citizen institution of nineteenth century America," it was a drive based on the idea of cooperation, of farmers creating their own culture, their own political parties, gaining a respect not given them by the nation's powerful industrial and political leaders.

Organizers from Texas came to Georgia to form alliances, and in three years Georgia had 100,000 members in 134 of the 137 counties. In Tennessee, there were soon 125,000 members and 3,600 suballiances in ninety-two of the state's ninety-six counties. The Alliance moved into Mississippi "like a cyclone," someone said, and into Louisiana and North Carolina. Then northward into Kansas and the Dakotas, where thirty-five cooperative warehouses were set up.

One of the leading figures in Kansas was Henry Vincent, who started a journal in 1886 called *The American Nonconformist and Kansas Industrial Liberator*, saying in the first issue:

**This journal will aim to publish such matter as will tend to the education of the laboring classes, the farmers and the producer, and in every struggle it will endeavor to take the side of the oppressed as against the oppressor.. . .**

By 1889, the Kansas Alliance had fifty thousand members and was electing local candidates to office.

Now there were 400,000 members in the National Farmers Alliance. And the conditions spurring the Alliance onward got worse. Corn which had brought 45 cents a bushel in 1870 brought 10 cents a bushel in 1889. Harvesting wheat required a machine to bind the wheat before it became too dry, and this cost several hundred dollars, which the farmer had to buy on credit, knowing the \$200 would be twice as hard to get in a few years. Then he had pay a bushel of corn in freight costs for every bushel he shipped. He had to pay the high prices demanded by the grain elevators at the terminals. In the South the situation was worse than anywhere-90 percent of the farmers lived on credit.

To meet this situation, the Texas Alliance formed a statewide cooperative, a great Texas Exchange, which handled the selling of the farmers' cotton in one great transaction. But the Exchange itself needed loans to advance credit to its members; the banks refused. A call was issued to farmers to scrape together the needed capital for the Exchange to operate. Thousands came on June 9, 1888, to two hundred Texas courthouses and made their contributions, pledging \$200,000. Ultimately, \$80,000 was actually collected. It was not enough. The farmers' poverty prevented them from helping themselves. The banks won, and this persuaded the Alliances that monetary reform was crucial.

There was one victory along the way. Farmers were being charged too much for jute bags (to put cotton in), which were controlled by a trust. The Alliance farmers organized a boycott of jute, made their own bags out of cotton, and forced the jute manufacturers to start selling their bags at 5 cents a yard instead of 14 cents.

The complexity of Populist belief was shown in one of its important leaders in Texas, Charles Macune. He was a radical in economics (antitrust, and capitalist), a conservative in politics (against a new party independent of the Democrats), and a racist. Macune came forward with a plan that was to become central to the Populist platform-the sub-Treasury plan. The government would have its own warehouses where farmers would store produce and get certificates from this sub-Treasury. These would be greenbacks, and thus much more currency would be made available, not dependent on gold or silver, but based on the amount of farm produce.

There were more Alliance experiments. In the Dakotas, a great cooperative insurance plan for farmers insured them against loss of their crops. Where the big insurance companies had asked 50 cents an acre, the cooperative asked 25 cents or less. It issued thirty thousand policies, covering 2 million acres.

Macune's sub-Treasury plan depended on the government. And since it would not be taken up by the two major parties, it meant (against Macune's own beliefs) organizing a third party. The Alliances went to work. In 1890 thirty-eight Alliance people were elected to Congress. In the South, the Alliance elected governors in Georgia and Texas. It took over the Democratic party in Georgia and won three-fourths of the seats in the Georgia legislature, six of Georgia's ten congressmen.

This was, however, Goodwyn says, "an elusive revolution, because the party machinery remained in the hands of the old crowd, and the crucial chairmanships of important committees, in Congress, in the state legislatures, remained in the hands of the conservatives, and corporate power, in the states, in the nation, could use its money to still get what it wanted."

The Alliances were not getting real power, but they were spreading new ideas and a new spirit. Now, as a political party, they became the People's party (or Populist party), and met in convention in 1890 in Topeka, Kansas. The great Populist orator from that state, Mary Ellen Lease, told an enthusiastic crowd:

**Wall Street owns the country. It is no longer a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street and for Wall Street.... Our laws are the output of a system which clothes rascals in robes and honesty in rags. ... the politicians said we suffered from overproduction. Overproduction, when 10,000 little children ... starve to death every year in the U.S. and over 100,000 shop girls in New York are forced to sell their virtue for bread. ,..**

**There are thirty men in the United States whose aggregate wealth is over one and one-half billion dollars. There are half a million looking for work... We want money, land and transportation. We want the abolition of the National Banks, and we want the power to make loans direct from the government. We want the accused foreclosure system wiped out. . . . We will stand by our homes and stay by our firesides by force if necessary, and we will not pay our debts to the loan-shark companies until the Government pays its debts to us.**

**The people are at bay, let the bloodhounds of money who have dogged us thus far beware.**

At the People's party national convention in 1892 in St. Louis, a platform was drawn up. The preamble was written by, and read to the assemblage by, another of the great orators of the movement, Ignatius Donnelly:

**We meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot box, the legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench. These people are demoralized. . . . The newspapers are subsidized or muzzled; public opinion silenced; business prostrate, our homes covered with mortgages, labor impoverished, and the land concentrating in the hands of capitalists.**

**The urban workmen are denied the right of organization for self-protection; imported pauperized labor beats down their wages; a hireling standing army . . . established to shoot them down... . The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes. . . . From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed two classes-paupers and millionaires... .**

A People's party nominating convention in Omaha in July of 1892 nominated James Weaver, an Iowa Populist and former general in the Union army, for President. The Populist movement was now tied to the voting system. Their spokesman Polk had said they could "link their hands and hearts together and march to the ballot box and take possession of the government, restore it to the principles of our fathers, and run it in the interest of the people." Weaver got over a million votes, but lost.

A new political party had the job of uniting diverse groups-northern Republicans and southern Democrats, urban workers and country farmers, black and white. A Colored Farmers National Alliance grew in the South and had perhaps a million members, but it was organized and led by whites. There were also black organizers, but it was not easy for them to persuade black farmers that, even if economic reforms were won, blacks would have equal access to them. Blacks had tied themselves to the Republican party, the party of Lincoln and civil rights laws. The Democrats were the party of slavery and segregation. As Goodwyn puts it, "in an era of transcendent white prejudice, the curbing of 'vicious corporate monopoly' did not carry for black farmers the ring of salvation it had for white agrarians."

There were whites who saw the need for racial unity. One Alabama newspaper wrote:

**The white and colored Alliance are united in their war against trusts, and in the promotion of the doctrine that farmers should establish cooperative stores, and manufactures, and publish their own newspapers, conduct their own schools, and have a hand in everything else that concerns them as citizens or affects them personally or collectively.**

The official newspaper of the Alabama Knights of Labor, the *Alabama Sentinel*, wrote: "The Bourbon Democracy are trying to down the Alliance with the old cry 'nigger'. It won't work though."

Some Alliance blacks made similar calls for unity. A leader of the Florida Colored Alliance said: "We are aware of the fact that the laboring colored man's interests and the laboring white man's interest are one and the same."

When the Texas People's party was founded in Dallas in the summer of 1891, it was interracial, and radical. There was blunt and vigorous debate among whites and blacks. A black delegate, active in the Knights of Labor, dissatisfied with vague statements about "equality," said:

**If we are equal, why does not the sheriff summon Negroes on juries? And why hang up the sign "Negro", in passenger cars. I want to tell my people what the People's Party is going to do. I want to tell them if it is going to work a black and white horse in the same field.**

A white leader responded by urging there be a black delegate from every district in the state. "They are in the ditch just like we are." When someone suggested there be separate white and black Populist clubs which would "confer together," R. M. Humphrey, the white leader of the Colored Alliance, objected: "This will not do. The colored people are part of the people and they must be recognized as such." Two blacks were then elected to the state executive committee of the party.

Blacks and whites were in different situations. The blacks were mostly field hands, hired laborers; most white Alliance people were farm owners. When the Colored Alliance declared a strike in the cotton fields in 1891 for a dollar a day wages for cotton pickers, Leonidas Polk, head of the white Alliance, denounced it as hurting the Alliance farmer who would have to pay that wage. In Arkansas, a thirty-year-old black cotton picker named Ben Patterson led the strike, traveling from plantation to plantation to get support, his band growing, engaging in gun battles with a white posse. A plantation manager was killed, a cotton gin burned. Patterson and his band were caught, and fifteen of them were shot to death.

There was some black-white unity at the ballot box in the South- resulting in a few blacks elected in North Carolina local elections. An Alabama white farmer wrote to a newspaper in 1892: "I wish to God that Uncle Sam could put bayonets around the ballot box in the black belt on the first Monday in August so that the Negro could get a fair vote." There were black delegates to third- party conventions in Georgia: two in 1892, twenty-four in 1894, The Arkansas People's party platform spoke for the "downtrodden, regardless of race."

There were moments of racial unity. Lawrence Goodwyn found in east Texas an unusual coalition of black and white public officials: it had begun during Reconstruction and continued into the Populist period. The state government was in the control of white Democrats, but in Grimes County, blacks won local offices and sent legislators to the state capital. The district clerk was a black man; there were black deputy sheriffs and a black school principal. A night-riding White Man's Union used intimidation and murder to split the coalition, but Goodwyn points to "the long years of interracial cooperation in Grimes County" and wonders about missed opportunities.

Racism was strong, and the Democratic party played on this, winning many farmers from the Populist party. When white tenants, failing in the crop-lien system, were evicted from their land and replaced by blacks, race hatred intensified. Southern states were drawing up new constitutions, starting with Mississippi in 1890, to prevent blacks from voting by various devices, and to maintain ironclad segregation in every aspect of life.

The laws that took the vote away from blacks-poll taxes, literacy tests, property qualifications-also often ensured that poor whites would not vote. And the political leaders of the South knew this. At the constitutional convention in Alabama, one of the leaders said he wanted to take away the vote from "all those who are unfit and unqualified, and if the rule strikes a white man as well as a negro let him go." In North Carolina, the *Charlotte Observer* saw disfranchisement as "the struggle of the white people of North Carolina to rid themselves of the dangers of the rule of negroes and the lower class of whites."

Tom Watson, the Populist leader of Georgia, pleaded for racial unity:

**You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both.**

According to the black scholar Robert Alien, taking a look at Populism (*Reluctant Reformers*), Watson wanted black support for a white man's party. No doubt, when Watson found this support embarrassing and no longer useful, he became as eloquent in affirming racism as he had been in opposing it.

Still, Watson must have addressed some genuine feelings in poor whites whose class oppression gave them some common interest with blacks. When H. S. Doyle, a young black preacher who supported Watson for Congress, was threatened by a lynch mob, he came to Watson for protection, and two thousand white farmers helped Doyle escape.

It was a time that illustrated the complexities of class and race conflict. Fifteen blacks were lynched during Watson's election campaign. And in Georgia after 1891 the Alliance-controlled legislature, Alien points out, "passed the largest number of anti-black bills ever enacted in a single year in Georgia history." And yet, in 1896, the Georgia state platform of the People's party denounced lynch law and terrorism, and asked the abolition of the convict lease system.

C. Vann Woodward points to the unique quality of the Populist experience in the South: "Never before or since have the two races in the South come so close together as they did during the Populist struggles."

The Populist movement also made a remarkable attempt to create a new and independent culture for the country's farmers. The Alliance Lecture Bureau reached all over the country; it had 35,000 lecturers. The Populists poured out books and pamphlets from their printing presses. Woodward says:

**One gathers from yellowed pamphlets that the agrarian ideologists undertook to re-educate their countrymen from the ground up. Dismissing "history as taught in our schools" as "practically valueless", they undertook to write it over-formidable columns of it, from the Greek down. With no more compunction they turned all hands to the revision of economics, political theory, law, and government.**

The *National Economist*, a Populist magazine, had 100,000 readers. Goodwyn counts over a thousand Populist journals in the 1890s. There were newspapers like the *Comrade*, published in the cotton country of Louisiana, and the *Toiler's Friend*, in rural Georgia. Also, *Revolution* was published in Georgia. In North Carolina, the Populist printing plant was burned. In Alabama, there was the *Living Truth*. It was broken into in 1892, its type scattered, and the next year the shop was set afire, but the press survived and the editor never missed an issue.

Hundreds of poems and songs came out of the Populist movement, like "The Farmer Is the Man": . . . the farmer is the man

The Farmer is the man  
Lives on credit till the fall  
With the interest rates so high  
It's a wonder he don't die  
And the mortgage man's the one  
that gets it all.

The farmer is the man  
The farmer is the man  
Lives on credit till the fall  
And his pants are wearing thin  
His condition it's a sin  
He's forgot that he's the man  
that feeds them all.

Books written by Populist leaders, such as Henry Demarest Lloyd's *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, and William Harvey Cain's *Financial School*, were widely read. An Alabama historian of that time, William Garrott Brown, said about the Populist movement that "no other political movement-not that of 1776, nor that of 1860-1861-ever altered Southern life so profoundly."

According to Lawrence Goodwyn, if the labor movement had been able to do in the cities what the Populists did in the rural areas, "to create among urban workers a culture of cooperation, self-respect, and economic analysis," there might have been a great movement for change in the United States. There were only fitful, occasional connections between the farmer and labor movements. Neither spoke eloquently enough to the other's needs. And yet, there were signs of a common consciousness that might, under different circumstances, lead to a unified, ongoing movement.

Norman Pollack says, on the basis of a close study of midwestern Populist newspapers, that "Populism regarded itself as a class movement, reasoning that farmers and workers were assuming the same material position in society." An editorial in the *Farmers' Alliance* spoke of a man working fourteen to sixteen hours a day: "He is brutalized both morally and physically. He has no ideas, only propensities, he has no beliefs, only instincts." Pollack sees that as a homespun version of Marx's idea of workers' alienation from his human self under capitalism, and finds many other parallels between Populist and Marxist ideas.

Undoubtedly, Populists, along with most white Americans, had racism and nativism in their thinking. But part of it was that they simply did not think race as important as the economic system. Thus, the *Farmers' Alliance* said: "The people's party has sprung into existence not to make the black man free, but to emancipate all men ... to gain for all industrial freedom, without which there can be no political freedom. . . ."

More important than theoretical connections were the Populist expressions of support for workers in actual struggles. The *Alliance-Independent* of Nebraska, during the great strike at the Carnegie steel plant, wrote: "All who look beneath the surface will see that the bloody battle fought at Homestead was a mere incident in the great conflict between capital and labor." Coxe's march of the unemployed drew sympathy in the farm areas; in Osceola, Nebraska, perhaps five thousand people attended a picnic in Coxe's honor. During the Pullman strike, a farmer wrote to the governor of Kansas: "Unquestionably, nearly, if not quite all Alliance people are in fullest sympathy with these striking men."

On top of the serious failures to unite blacks and whites, city workers and country farmers, there was the lure of electoral politics—all of that combining to destroy the Populist movement. Once allied with the Democratic party in supporting William Jennings Bryan for President in 1896, Populism would drown in a sea of Democratic politics. The pressure for electoral victory led Populism to make deals with the major parties in city after city. If the Democrats won, it would be absorbed. If the Democrats lost, it would disintegrate. Electoral politics brought into the top leadership the political brokers instead of the agrarian radicals.

There were those radical Populists who saw this. They said fusion with the Democrats to try to "win" would lose what they needed, an independent political movement. They said the much-ballyhooed free silver would not change anything fundamental in the capitalist system. One Texas radical said silver coinage would "leave undisturbed all the conditions which give rise to the undue concentration of wealth."

Henry Demarest Lloyd noted that the Bryan nomination was subsidized in part by Marcus Daly (of Anaconda Copper) and William Randolph Hearst (of the silver interests in the West). He saw through the rhetoric of Bryan that stirred the crowd of twenty thousand at the Democratic Convention ("we have petitioned, and our petitions have been scorned; we have entreated, and our entreaties have been disregarded; we have begged, and they have mocked when our calamity came. We beg no longer; we entreat no more, we petition no more. We defy them!"). Lloyd wrote bitterly:

**The poor people are throwing up their hats in the air for those who promise to lead them out of the wilderness by way of the currency route. . . . The people are to be kept wandering forty years in the currency labyrinth, as they have for the last forty years been led up and down the tariff bill.**

In the election of 1896, with the Populist movement enticed into the Democratic party, Bryan, the Democratic candidate, was defeated by William McKinley, for whom the corporations and the press mobilized, in the first massive use of money in an election campaign. Even the hint of Populism in the Democratic party, it seemed, could not be tolerated, and the big guns of the Establishment pulled out all their ammunition, to make sure.

It was a time, as election times have often been in the United States, to consolidate the system after years of protest and rebellion. The black was being kept under control in the South. The Indian was being driven off the western plains for good; on a cold winter day in 1890, U.S. army soldiers attacked Indians camped at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, and killed three hundred men, women, and children. It was the climax to four hundred years of violence that began with Columbus, establishing that this continent belonged to white men. But only to certain white men, because it was clear by 1896 that the state stood ready to crush labor strikes, by the law if possible, by force if necessary. And where a threatening mass movement developed, the two-party system stood ready to send out one of its columns to surround that movement and drain it of vitality.

And always, as a way of drowning class resentment in a flood of slogans for national unity, there was patriotism. McKinley had said, in a rare rhetorical connection between money and flag: "... **this year is going to be a year of patriotism and devotion to country. I am glad to know that the people in every part of the country mean to be devoted to one flag, the glorious Stars and Stripes; that the people of this country mean to maintain the financial honor of the country as sacredly as they maintain the honor of the flag.** The supreme act of patriotism was war. Two years after McKinley became President, the United States declared war on Spain.