World History Notes

3/7/2024

* Strikes could turn violent, with workers battling police or private guards hired by companies to try to break the strike to force employees back to work.
* Union strength ebbed and flowed through the late 1800s, but a series of new national labor organizations arose that brought together various unions under one banner.
* This dramatically strengthened the power of labor unions. In America, one of these new federations was the Knights of Labor.
* Knights of Labor attracted many members in the late 1870s because it accepted both skilled and unskilled workers, including women and African Americans.
* The American Federation of Labor came along later and diminished the strength of the Knights of Labor because they focused more on skilled labor and fewer, “more important” issues.
* In the early 1900s, another labor organization arose, known as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).
* IWW leaders introduced radical ideas into the union movement, adopting the socialist theories of Karl Marx.
* Marx believed that there was an inherent class conflict between the profit interests of capitalists and the concerns of laborers.
* [A Brief Introduction to Marxism](https://youtu.be/W0GFSUu5UzA)
* Though not purely Marxist, unions at this time employed many socialist ideas to try and better the lives of the working class.
* By 1900 most workers in the West worked fewer hours. Although hours still varied from one industry to another, the 10-hour workday and 6-day workweek became the standard.
* **From Laissez-Faire to Regulation**
* During at least the first century of the Industrial Revolution, industries grew without government intervention.
* Western governments largely heeded the economic laws set down by Adam Smith in his book The Wealth of Nations, published in 1776.
* Laissez-faire, a French term that loosely translates as “leave it alone.” This was Adam Smith’s primary economic theory.
* The idea was to allow businesses to function without any intervention from the government.
* In the late 1800s, however, the rise of corporations led government, especially in the United States, to rethink its position on laissez-faire.