History Of The Labor Movement In Th United States Essay, Research Paper

This is a brief history of the labor movement in the United States

from the late eighteen hundreds to the present. In 1881 a movement

toward organized labor was beginning to be inforced. A group of

people from a few trades and industries such as carpenters, cigar-

makers, the printers, merchants, and the steel workers met and formed

The Federation of Organized Trades And Labor Unions. Although

it had little power, the organization was defanantly and the side as the

workers. It stated that a eight hour work day was considered a full day

and asked that all affiliated unions include this as part of there law by

May 1, 1886.

Dispite some success it was felt that the organization needed

reorganizing to make it a more effective center for the trade unions.

It was now that the American Federation of Labor came to be.

Gompers was elected president and was a leader in the national

cigar makers union as well. The newly formed American Federation

of Labor (AFL) began to recognize that women should be represented

through organized unions. In 1894 it adapted a resolution that “women

should be organized into trade unions to the end that they may

scientifically and permanently abolish the terrible evils accompanying

their weakend, unorganized state; and we demand that they receive

equal compensation with men for equal services performed.”

While 8 hour day strike movement was generally peaceful, there was

some acts of violence that set the labor movement back. The

McCormick Harvester Company in Chicago learned ahead of time of

a planned strike and so locked out all its employees who held union

cards. Because of this fights broke out and police opened fire on the

union members killing four of them. A public rally to protest these

killings at Haymarket Square drew a large crowd. When a bomb went

off, killing seven police officers and wounding fifty more, the police

began to fire into the crowd and several more people were killed and

about two-hundred wounded. This incident set the eight -hour-day

movement back by a few years.

In the early parts of the 20th century, many struggles between

unions and corporations over hard work, unsafe and unhealthy

working conditions for very low wages were surfacing.

One confrontation, that in the end was stoped by a federal court

raised many questions about weather the government could simply

force union workers to return to work though an injunction. It was

the American Railroad Union that boycotted the handaling of

Pullman railroad cars and eventualy went on strike. Federal troops

were sent in to break up the strike and an injunction forced the wokers

back to work. This was becoming a common occurance which became

a legal weapon against union organizing and action.

A sign of better intervention showed during a strike of the United

Mine Workers. The two sides were asked to go to arbitration and

eventualy seteled the strike.

Moving foward to world war 1, the AFL by helping supply the

government with supplies gaind the support of political leaders.

But after the war however the labor movement suffered setbacks.

The postwar depression brought wages down and caused a major

decline in union membership, a loss of about a million members from

the years 1920 to 1923. Many employers made use of the work force`s

desparate state by making workers sign the “yellow dog contract” in

order to get a job. Because this contract prohibited them from joining

a union, membership dropped even further.

Finaly Roosevelt`s efferts to bring the county out of the depression

also helped the labor movement. The National Recovery Administation

included on its statute books the right of unions to exist and negotiate

with employers. The Wagner Act eventually replaced this and set up

many rules for both unions and employers to follow.

Unions continued to grow though the ninteen sixty`s before slowing.

Better working conditions and more employee rights lessed the need

for being part of a union. Due to this union participation has been

declining in recent years.

The labor movement was and still is one of the most important

movements for the growth of our county. It has allowed us to have

more say in the way we can lead our lives and given us more freedom

to act on our thoughts. This ideals are the same basic principles that

this country was founded on as well as the reason for forming this

nation.