

## FIGHTING FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE



All of organized labor has a proud history of ordinary people joining together to achieve extraordinary progress. Our power has always been in our solidarity and our strength is in our diversity.

It has been our solidarity that has enabled us to achieve fair wages, decent benefits and secure retirements for our members. Importantly, many of the gains we have made at the bargaining table have been passed on to others and have helped raise the standard of living for all Americans.

It is important to learn from and honor the men and women who came before us and built our unions. They had the courage, commitment and determination to face the challenges of their time. Now, we must pave the way for those who will come after us.

The union cause has always been about building a better, more just world, not just for us, but for future generations. The UAW was born fighting for social and economic justice and that is what we will continue to do.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ron Gettelfinger'.

Ron Gettelfinger  
President

# “This Union Cause”

## An Introduction

### This Union Cause...

has for 200 years been, simply, the cause of American working men and women, those who became adults with nothing to bring a livelihood but the skill of their hands and the strength of their backs.

Once, as indentured servants and slaves, these men and women helped create a new nation out of an untamed wilderness.

Today, their grandsons and daughters, through the unions formed by their fathers, enjoy the blessings of that nation. They enjoy good pay for their labor, insurance against sickness, assistance when laid off through no fault of their own, security in their old age and education for their children.

A seldom-publicized illustration of a unique protection that workers and their families and their communities have achieved through unions – and only through unions – is the system known as SUB–supplemental unemployment benefits. These were negotiated originally by the UAW in 1955 but by now are a provision in contracts written by other unions as well. These company-paid benefits in time of lay-off are added to the often-low State unemployment compensation. They have not only cushioned the crisis of unemployment for workers and their families; they have also proved to be a financial shock absorber for the economy of the community in which the workers live.

These and other numerous collective bargaining achievements have been won because...

### This Union Cause...

has been dedicated to the pursuit of economic independence and social stature for the individual. The instrument for achieving these goals has been the union contract. But the collective bargaining agreement did not spring full bloom from benevolent employers, eager to improve the lot of the American citizen.



True, some employers perceived the virtues behind union insistence upon economic security for workers and their families. These companies recognized two very important principles – first voiced by unions – that wages must keep pace with rises in the cost of living, and that the paycheck should reflect the worker's rightful share in the rising industrial productivity.

In 1948 the UAW was able to incorporate into its contracts an "escalator" clause to protect the worker's income as the cost of life's necessities rises or falls. Since that time this principle has been incorporated into most union contracts.

Of equal historic significance, in the 1948 negotiations, the UAW established firmly in its contracts the basic principle that a worker's pay should rise as the nation's productivity increases. This principle – the annual improvement factor – has since assured the workers that their standard of living will constantly improve as the nation's productivity continues to rise.

These are but a few examples of the mutually beneficial results which are reflected in collective bargaining when intelligent employers and enlightened union leaders, supported by a staunch union membership, resolve their problems in an atmosphere of civilized economic discussion. But the history of collective bargaining and union organizing is also, unfortunately, marred by ugly, shameful episodes of brutality displayed by stubborn employers refusing to share with their workers the fruits of America's industrial progress.

As a result, the advances achieved by This Union Cause have been at great personal sacrifice by many courageous and dedicated union members and their leaders who struggled, fought, bled and even died to make social and economic justice a reality. Beatings by employer-hired thugs such as those suffered by UAW officials in the long-to-be-remembered Battle of the Overpass at Ford Motor Co. on May 26, 1937 were the price paid by many workers who were forced into economic battle armed only with their indomitable convictions, because . . .

## This Union Cause...

has been the cause of the defenseless. Not always, even in America, could the majority of workers raise their heads from the machine and speak back to an arrogant supervisor, or send their elected representative to negotiate settlement of a dispute with their employer. Now they can.

## This Union Cause...

has been the cause of minorities. The succeeding waves of migration to these shores have brought millions of men and women of every race, color, religious creed and national extraction. There has been no more influential an instrument than This Union Cause in overcoming prejudice toward them and among them.

## This Union Cause...

has been the cause of the aged. The employer-paid pension that enables an old man to sit in peace in his rocker and smoke his pipe has not been a gift from the private enterprise system. It was fought for by unions as a fair payment for past labor. It was in 1949 that members of the UAW, rallying to the slogan, "Too Old to Work, Too Young to Die," threatened to strike unless their employer, Ford Motor Co., provided their older brother unionists with pensions paid by the company, jointly administered and fully funded. This, too, is a collective bargaining achievement since embraced in the contracts of many other unions. Just as the twilight of life for workers has been mellowed and enriched, so have the futures of these workers' children, because, at the same time...

## This Union Cause...

has been the cause of the young. From their inception, working people's unions have fought to establish the principle of free public education as a right, not a privilege. Unions fight for the principle of national health security as a right, not a privilege. Unions fight to improve and humanize working conditions, for the right of all workers to a guaranteed annual income, and for earlier retirement with adequate and assured pension benefits.

## This Union Cause...

is the cause of the future. Two centuries ago not all men and women in America were free. Some were indentured servants, others were slaves. Today, not all men and women in the world are free. Some are slaves to ignorance and superstition. Others are indentured to totalitarian masters. But the American adventure in freedom, strengthened by the achievements of American unions, is offering other working men and women in other nations, new and old, a chance to find freedom, dignity and security through ...

## This Union Cause...

here reviewed for you in pictures.

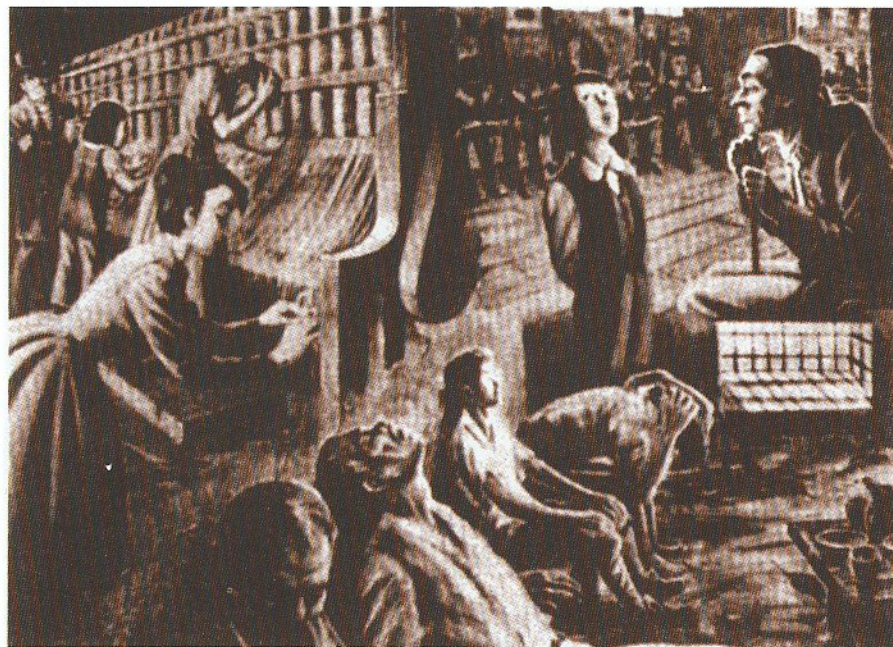


## The Colonial Days



**INDENTURED SERVANTS**, shown disembarking from a ship from England, were one of three main sources of labor in America in the 1600s. The others were prisoners and slaves. To be indentured meant that these men, women and children agreed to repay passage to America by working without wages for years wholly under the control of masters who bought them like oxen. The demand for able-bodied workers was so great that colonial merchants' agents scoured Europe offering imaginary inducements. These glittering promises, coupled with an anxious desire to escape poverty, led thousands to enter indenture – a harsh existence of exhausting labor, on a meager diet, with movement restricted to the place of work and terms of service extended for even the pettiest of claimed offenses. Protests at this hideous system of hire grew, but it was to be decades before indenture disappeared as a way of life for many American workmen.

## Early Social Conditions



**LONG, BODY-WRECKING HOURS** at machines in filthy mills were all factory workers could look forward to in the early 19th century in America. The workweek was six days "from sunup to sundown," usually 75 hours in the winter and 82 in the summer. Furthermore, 58% of northern cotton mill workers were women, while 7% were children under 12. Leisure was frowned on; education, if any, came through charity; and there was always the threat of debtor's prison. Under this barbaric practice at least 75,000 people were thrown into disease-ridden jails every year for debts often so petty that Massachusetts records 18 cases involving altogether debts of only \$155. A shorter workweek, an end to debtor's prison and free public education became the dream of a few. But these few were men determined to find a less wretched life for themselves and a brighter future for their children.



## One of the First Strikes



**CORDWAINERS** were journeymen shoemakers, some of whom banded together in the early 1800s. To oppose them, employers turned to the courts. Six times between 1806 and 1815 the Cordwainers were tried for “criminal conspiracy” charged with “combining unlawfully” to raise their wages. Prosecutions were based upon English common law, even though independence had been won and there were no statutes forbidding such associations. Defense attorneys argued that the “conspiracy” doctrine violated the spirit of the U. S. Constitution, but their efforts were in vain. Cordwainers and others were always found guilty. Not until 1842 did a high court set aside “conspiracy” indictments. That charge was no longer to plague workmen’s associations, but courts sympathetic to employers later found another weapon with which to harass unions – the injunction. But workmen did not stop trying to organize. Furthermore, they became politically conscious.

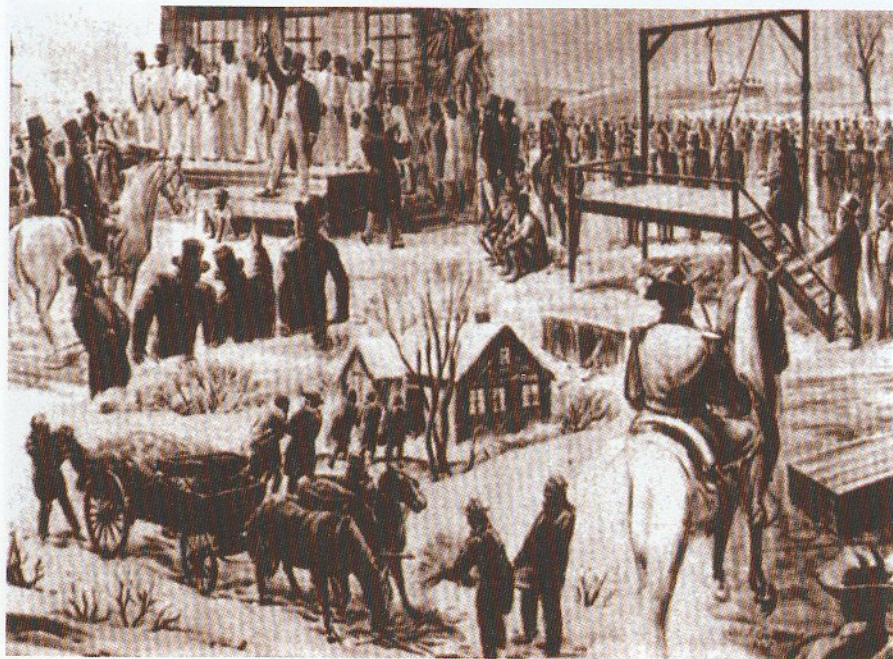
## Workers Enter Politics



**WORKINGMEN’S POLITICAL PARTIES** began with the Mechanics’ Union of Trade Association in Philadelphia. Soon the movement spread throughout New England and as far west as Ohio in at least a dozen states. Briefly, these groups were highly influential, either electing their own candidates or holding the balance of power between the major parties in local elections. With the rise of President Andrew Jackson many of their goals were absorbed by the Democratic Party until by the late 1830s, workingmen’s parties had largely disappeared. But labor had won political recognition. Free public education continued to be an unfulfilled demand, but there were advancements in other directions. For instance, in 1840 President Van Buren’s executive order established the 10-hour workday on government projects. Truly, free men had begun to realize some of their rights. Still left, however, was the most odious practice of all – slavery.

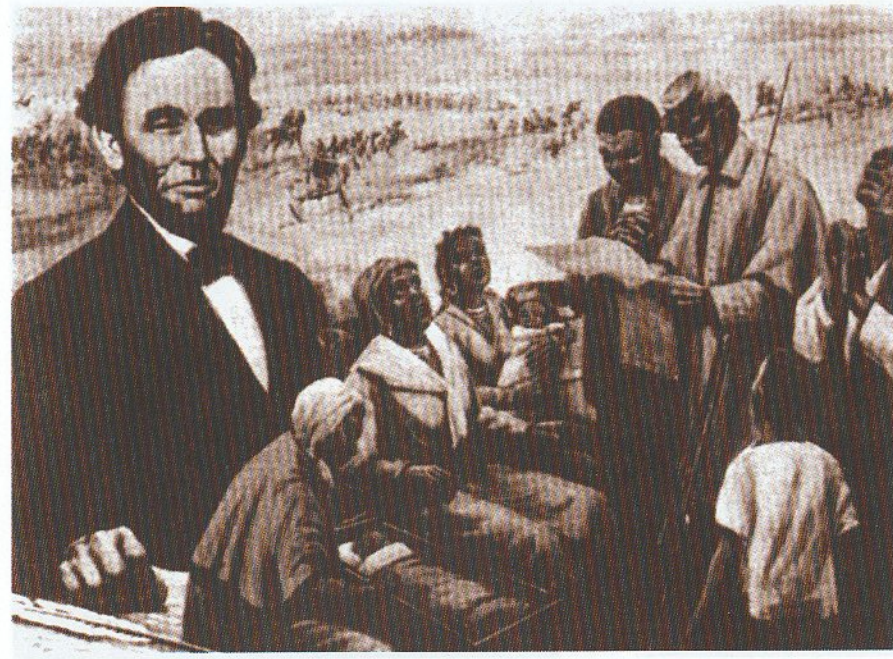


## Slave Labor



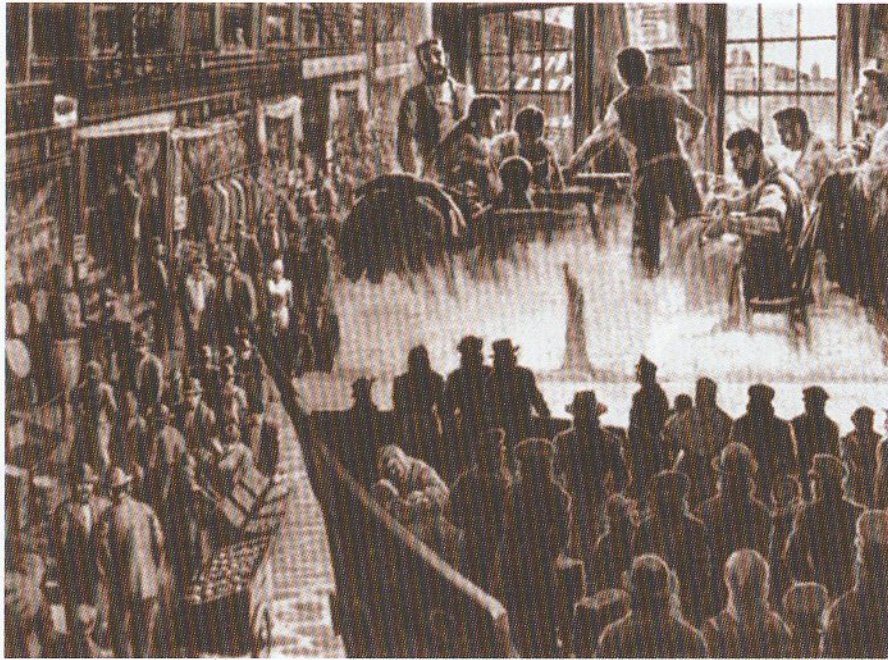
**THOUSANDS OF NEGROES** were shanghaied from Africa to America in the 1700s and sold into slavery at auctions. By 1850, there were at least 4 million slaves in the U.S. The “free” population in Southern states outnumbered them only two to one. On this foundation of human misery, the South had erected an agricultural economy in which a few thousand slave owners were rich and politically powerful. Northern opposition was symbolized by “underground railroads” through which hundreds of Negroes were smuggled to freedom. Further resentment against slavery flamed with the execution of John Brown in 1859. An “abolitionist,” he had tried to launch a revolt of slaves by capturing a federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry, Va. He failed and was hanged. Within two years, Civil War between the agricultural South and the heavily industrialized North was to rip America and an inhuman system of forced labor was about to topple.

## A New Birth of Freedom



**THE CIVIL WAR** brought an end to slavery with President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation but for the working man it created a new economic crisis. War profiteering that enriched the manufacturer triggered inflation that cut deeply into the lower, relatively-fixed incomes of wage earners. By 1863, tightly-knit groups of workmen were protesting this injustice with strikes. President Lincoln’s policy generally was to keep the government out of strikes. “Labor,” he said in 1864, “is the superior of capital and deserves much the higher consideration.” Bolstered by this encouragement, the number of trade unions rose rapidly from 79 in 1863 to 270 in 1864 when it was estimated that some 200,000 workmen had joined unions, 32 of which were nation-wide organizations. The working man’s effort to protect himself through unions was moving ahead, but his organizations soon were to face a growing problem – a rising tide of immigration.





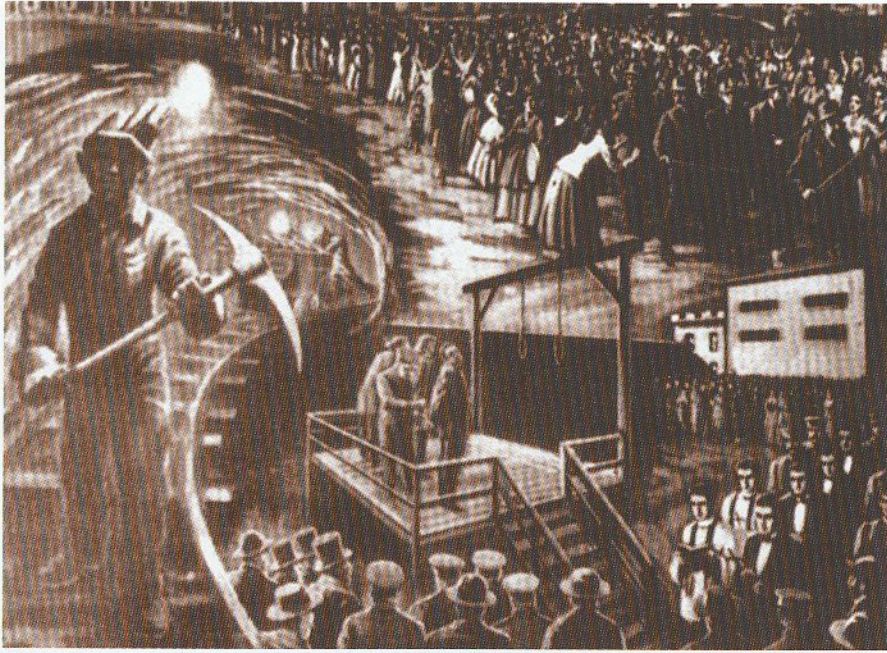
**MILLIONS OF IMMIGRANTS** streamed into America in the later 1800s. Fugitives from poverty and oppression in Europe, they came aflame with dreams. But “the streets of gold” they found were crowded, ratinfested slums in New York, Boston or Philadelphia where a dozen or more people might have to live in one dreary tenement room. The “land of opportunity” they had looked forward to turned out to be sweatshops that paid wages as low as \$2 a week for laborers and only \$11 a week for the highly skilled. Still, they came to work in steel mills, lumber camps, coal mines and garment factories where they worked 14 to 16 hours a day. Gradually, these stifling conditions drew protests from the immigrants who joined in idealistic political reform movements. From these, they leaned to the growing American labor organizations which they invigorated with their demands for a better life that included higher education for their children.



**HIGHER EDUCATION** for some workmen’s youngsters finally began with the 1862 Morrill Act setting up federal land grants for state colleges. In 1866 came realization of another goal, the first National Labor Congress ever convened in the United States. Its president was William H. Sylvis (lower left). He had spent his entire adult life organizing iron moulders into what was then the largest union “because,” as he said, “I love this union cause more dearly than life itself.” This growth reflected the entire nation’s expansion. The Homestead Act sent settlers creaking westward in wagons soon to be followed by puffing locomotives on rails spanning the land coast to coast. Back east, financiers forged giant corporations and trusts in the basic industries. Men found themselves insignificant cogs tolling for employers they never saw, a new industrial relationship calling for a new kind of union. Among the first to try to build such a union were the coal miners.

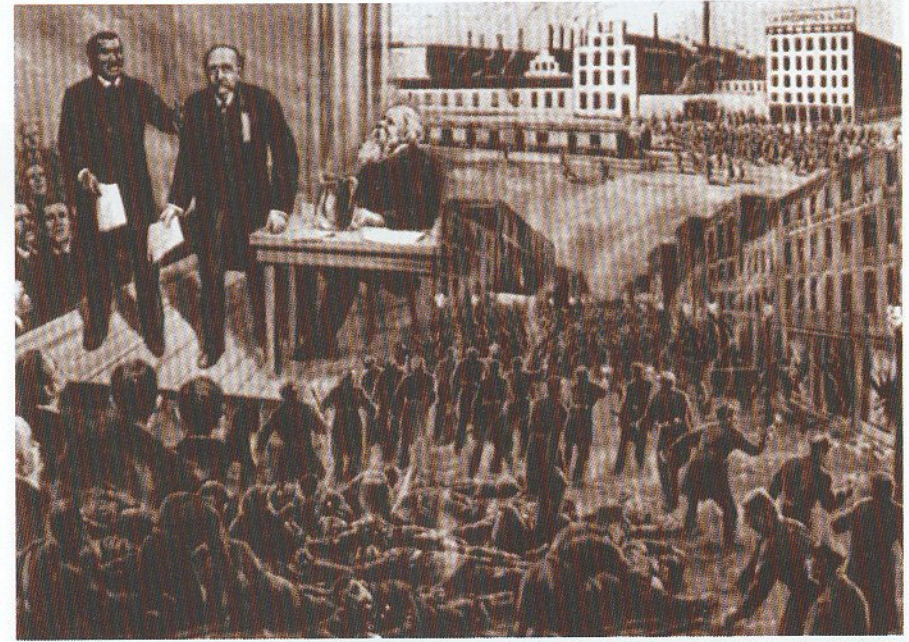


## The Miners' Struggle



**LIFE WAS SQUALID** in the Pennsylvania coalfields. Boys sent into the mines before they were 10 were old at the age of 14. Such misery led to formation of a miners' union, but it was smashed in a strike in 1874 when owners got troops and Pinkerton private police to escort scabs (strike breakers) into the pits. The owners' violence preventing open organization forced miners into a secret society, the "Molly Maguires." They were broken up, however, when betrayed by a Pinkerton spy in their ranks. Ten Mollies were hanged on evidence later proved false, but the owners' goal of preventing immediate organization of an effective miners' union was achieved. Later, the United Mine Workers led by John Mitchell were to reach a membership of 300,000 by 1908, an amazing achievement for that era. But meanwhile, in the 1880s, the future of America's workmen seemed to lie with an organization known as the Knights of Labor.

## The Haymarket Riot



**"UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD"** was the creed of the Knights of Labor, formed in 1869 as a union for all trades. Within a mere 15 years, the Knights attracted 700,000 members led by Frank J. Farrell, Terence V. Powderly and Gen. Fitzhugh Lee, shown upper left. One of their aims was an 8-hour day. The Knights' had already begun to decline when armed strikebreakers killed four workmen locked out of McCormick's International Harvester plant in Chicago on May 3, 1886. At a protest meeting next day in Haymarket Square a bomb was thrown, killing one of 180 policemen who opened fire, killing 10. Newspapers whipped up public hysteria against the "Haymarket Anarchists." A trial ensued. Four were hanged. Six years later the workmen's innocence was revealed, but too late for the executed and for the Knights who in the face of public disfavor dwindled away. Their major successor was to be the American Federation of Labor.



## Birth of the AFL



**A CIGAR MAKER** and a carpenter were to create two of the workingman's landmarks, the AFL and Labor Day. The carpenter was Peter J. McGuire (upper left) of New York who suggested setting aside the first Monday of September as Labor Day. The first observance in 1882 was celebrated with a mammoth parade in New York City. The cigarmaker was Samuel Gompers, who became labor's foremost spokesman for a third of a century. An immigrant from England, Gompers went to work at the age of 13 in a cigar factory, where he gleaned much of his early learning from the union's practice of reading aloud to workmen on the job (upper right). When the AFL (American Federation of Labor) was formally launched in 1886, Gompers was elected its first president, a post he held until his death in 1923. The cause of unionism was rising, despite such setbacks as the 1894 Pullman strike, in which the government broke a union.

## The Pullman Strike



**THE PULLMAN STRIKE** of 1894 was a frightening example of how the federal government could use an injunction to break a strike and cripple a union. American Railway Union members had walked off the job when the Pullman company, sleeping car manufacturers, fired three grievance committeemen. Pullman wouldn't negotiate, refused to arbitrate and locked out the workmen, who launched a boycott that spread to other rail companies. An association of executives from 24 railroads imported strikebreakers and through influence with U.S. Attorney General Olney had them sworn as federal deputies. The cavalry was also called in. Olney obtained an injunction along with indictment of Eugene V. Debs (upper right), the union leader. Debs was dramatically defended by famed attorney Clarence Darrow (lower left) but was sent to prison. The strike was broken. The struggle was uphill but men could count on women to support the cause.