A somewhat brief, very us-centric, random pile of information regarding the organization of labor.
Some History

- Earliest recorded strike occurred in 1768 when New York journeymen tailors protested wage reduction.

- First sustained trade union organization begins with shoemakers in Philadelphia in 1794.
The Knights of Labor

- Began as a secret society of tailors in 1869
- Major platform points were 8 hour work day, abolition of child labor, equal pay for equal work and a graduated income tax.
The Knights of Labor

- The knights were unique in welcoming workers of all skill levels, both sexes and blacks (though still segregated locals).

- Definitely not Chinese though. They supported the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.
The Knights of Labor

- The knights power grew with 700,000 members in 1886 but after the general strike in Chicago on May 1, 1886, where police fired on protesting workers, the country came down hard on labor unions and in just 4 years had only 100,000 members.
The Knights of Labor

- The knights of labor were very big during reconstruction among former slaves in the south, often engaging in armed conflicts with the local militia to try and protect their membership, like sugar cane workers in Louisiana.

- They took the amendment about slaves becoming national citizens as meaning that they deserve a share of the means of production. “forty acres and a mule” as the Homestead Act guaranteed which affirmed the idea that a fully free citizen was someone who had access to a piece of land.
Andrew Carnegie: Pretty cool, but kind of a douche.
Andrew Carnegie: Pretty cool, but kind of a douche.

- standard work week: 84 hours per week, <$10 a week ($250 in today's terms)
- 1891 Carnegie took over the Homestead mill, a bastion for union power.
- Carnegie’s second in command, Henry Frick was super anti-labor. Frick and Carnegie’s directors were complaining that he was too soft on organized labor so he was like, fuck this I’m going to England and let Frick run the show while he was gone.
Homestead Strike (1892)
The Pinkertons

- Frick hired a fleet of Pinkerton agents.

- The Pinkerton National detective agency was basically just hired muscle. They were the largest private security force in the world. During the civil war they were Lincoln’s body guards (this ended with the anti-pinkerton act of 1893). They now operate as “Pinkerton Corporate Risk Management”.

- Carnegie won. About 16 people died, roughly half-half Pinkertons and steel workers.
J.P. Morgan: Pretty sure he was a total douche.
1902 Coal Miner Strike

- In 1902, coal miners in eastern PA struck, 150,000 strong for an 8 hour work day and the right to unionize.

- Morgan and other owners of the railroad company that owned the coal mine hired scabs and armed guards and coal jumped from 5 fold. Shit was getting violent so Teddy Roosevelt called in management and union officials to the white house and suggested arbitration. The owners said fuck that, the union are a bunch of criminals. Teddy was pissed
Teddy hated these tycoons who were running the country so he sent in 10,000 federal troops to seize control of the mine. Morgan finally caved and accepted the arbitration.
American Federation of Labor

‣ Founded 1886 and the largest union in the first half of the 20th century

‣ Marxism taught Samuel Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and his fellow socialists that trade unionism was the indispensable instrument for preparing the working class for revolution. The founders of the AFL translated this notion into the principle of “pure and simple” unionism: only by self-organization along occupational lines and by a concentration on job-conscious goals would the worker be “furnished with the weapons which shall secure his industrial emancipation.”
American Federation of Labor

- The AFL took a fairly center stance politically, engaging sometimes in support of progressive or socialist parties, but mainly confining themselves to industry. This started to change during the great depression and the new deal. The John Lewis of the United Mine Workers and his followers broke away and founded the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) which unionized emerging unions like Auto, rubber and steel. Also an alliance with the democratic party began due to the democratic parties support of the new immigrant class and New Deal reforms.

- National Labor Relations Act passed that encouraged collective bargaining, and created the National Labor Relations Board to enforce acts of private companies that harm workers.
this alliance with the democrats was very strict, and left-wing unions that supported progressive party candidates (like Henry Wallace in 1948) were expelled for breaking rank.
The Merger

- By the end of WWII, more than 12 million workers belonged to unions.

- The afl-cio eventually merged in 1955 and kicked ass for about 25 years. Between 1945 and 197- weekly earnings in manufacturing tripled, gaining for union workers an unprecedented measure of security against old age, illness and unemployment through contractual protections.
With the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, an antiunion administration was born, the likes of which had not been seen since the Harding era.

Union membership fell by 5 million people. By the end of the 1980’s less than 17 percent of American workers were organized, less than half the proportion of the early 1950’s.
Unions and shared prosperity

Source: Author's analysis of Historical Statistics of the United States, unionstats.com, Piketty and Saez 2003, and The World Top Incomes Database
The US sucks at Labor More Generally....

Infant Mortality Rate – Deaths per 1000 Live Births
OECD Member Countries – 2011 or nearest available year

Deaths of infants under one year old

Source: OECD Health Data 2013, released June 2013
Labor Day!

- In Canada unions were illegal until 1872 until auto workers marched to John MacDonal and the march became an annual tradition.

- In 1882, Toronto labor leaders invited a United States labor leader to check out Canada’s parade and he was so stoked he made one in New York City (choosing Sep 5th to fill the void from July 4th to thanksgiving.)

- Two years later, labor day was formed, being the first Monday in September, and Oregon was the first state to make the holiday official in 1887.
8 Hour Work Day
8 Hour Work Day

- Women and children were granted the 10 hour day in 1847, the French won the 12 hour day in 1848.

- England: Factory act of 1833:
  - 9-13: 8 hours
  - 14-18: 12 hours
  - 0-9: go to feckin’ school.
8 Hour Work Day

- Print unions in Iran in 1919, enacted into government law in 1946; In France countrywide in 1936; parts of Germany as early as 1900; 1919 basically countrywide in Portugal; Russia 1917 (surprise surprise); Spain passed a national 8 hour day law in 1919 after local victories (due to anarchists) as early as 1873.

- US 1869 passed an 8 hour law for federal employees. Johnson vetoed it but it was overridden. 1869 Grant issued a National Eight Hour Law Proclamation, but 8 hour days were really won independently in different industries at different times. United Mine Workers, 1898, Building Trades Council in 1900, etc. Fair Labor Standards act was proposed under the New Deal, leading to 40 hour work week with mandatory overtime for more than 40 hours.
Triangle Shirtwaist Factory
United Autoworkers
Some Victories of the Contract

- Raising NYU Polytechnic School of Engineering grads' hourly pay rate from $10 to $15 immediately, and to $20 by the end of the contract;
- Up to $1,500 in bonuses each academic year for NYU Poly workers;
- Guaranteed annual minimum increases on total compensation;
- 90 percent individual health care for all previously uncovered PhD student workers; (just a year earlier, NYU lowered healthcare benefits by 33%.)
- A newly established landmark family health care fund;
- Formal labor-management committees;
- Fees for StuDent dental plan covered;
- Broadening fee waivers.
Thanks for listening!