

The wagner act and strikes in america essay

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



The Wagner Act, prompted by the rising number of strikes, has managed to direct the conflicts between the employers and the employees into the courtroom. Apart from providing the workers with the essential rights, the Act mitigated the violence that had characterized the previous strikes, for example, and the railroad strikes of 1877, the Homestead strike, and the Ludlow strike of 1914.

At the time of the Railroad strike, the strikes were almost a “disease” of the US. Lack of rights, long working hours, and especially the depression of 1873-79 are typically cited as the reasons for this tendency in general and the strike in particular (Weir 357; Brenner, Day, and Ness 484). The direct reason for the 1877 strike was the intent to reduce the wages of firemen and brakemen on the “Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in Martinsburg, West Virginia”, after which the strike spread to “Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Columbus, Chicago, Terre Haute, Kansas City, and San Francisco” (Brenner, Day, and Ness 484). It ended up in the destruction of railroad property and was subdued with the help of federal militia; in general, more than 100 lives were lost in this strike on both sides (Weir 667; Lipold and Isaac 178). The results of the strike were twofold: while some companies sought to appease the workers, others tightened their policies; apart from that, the negative image of the strikers created in the media reduced the number of people willing to participate in trade unions (Weir 638-639).

During the Homestead “steel lockout” that took place in Pennsylvania, the organized workers attempted to rebel against Carnegie, who, despite the claims of being a philanthropist, was doing everything to reduce labor costs. The man, who was actually responsible for the problem, Henry Frick, was

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known for his attempts at deskilling the industry and, in such a way, undermining the power of craft unions. The relationship of Frick with the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers ended in the lockout of the Homestead plant and the consequent strike on June 30, 1892. Officially, the workers controlled the plant until November 17, but the strike was effectively subdued in July with the help of 300 Pinkerton detectives hired by Frick (Weir, 340-341). Eleven people were killed in the course of this strike (Lipold and Isaac 178). The conclusion that the businessmen made from this occurrence included the fact that a large corporation could disregard the demands of a large trade union (Brenner, Day, and Ness 68).

The Ludlow Strike or Massacre took place on April 20, 1914, in the isolated company town of Ludlow, where people were particularly dependent on the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company owned by Rockefeller (for example, they lived in company-owned houses and were paid specific currency that was only accepted by the company store). About 1, 200 miners of Ludlow joined the strike of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) and were evicted from the houses and forced to live in a tent colony in winter. The camp was later attacked by militia (with the help of machine-gun fire), which resulted in the death of thirty-eight people, twenty-three of them being children (Weir, 441-442). The situation spurred UMWA to engage in an open conflict that resulted in numerous deaths (estimated between 69 to 200); the media, for once, was on the side of the strikes.

In general, between 1877 and 1947, the number of deaths that have been caused by and related to strikes in the US amounted to 1, 000 (Lipold and

Isaac 178-179). They were organized by trade unions and directed against the unfair and cruel policies of the industries. None of them was truly successful, but their persistence showed that the underlying problems were not resolved, and the violence was bound to occur again. In the 30s, realizing the necessity to act, the government passed two laws; the latter of them, the Wagner Act, turned out to be successful in alleviating the problem.

The Wagner Act (The National Labor Relations Act, NLRA) was passed in 1935 to replace a National Industrial Recovery Act, NIRA, that had been passed in 1933 (Weir 513-515). The primary goal of the Wagner Act was to ensure “ industrial peace” while the second one was to provide the equality of bargaining power to the employers and the employees (Wachter 20). To achieve this, the Wagner Act defined the organization of unions and collective bargaining as the right of the workers (which NIRA did as well) and provided the “ legal infrastructure” and procedures for these rights, which NIRA had failed to do (Brenner, Day, and Ness 46; Weir 515). Apart from that, the Act created the National Labor Relations Board to manage the labor relations issues impartially (Weir 515).

The law was initially opposed by the business society, but NLRA was confirmed to be constitutional and is legit nowadays. Still, throughout its existence, NLRA has been subject to amendments, which reflects the unending conflicts between the interests of the employees and the employers (Weir 516). The strikes did not disappear (see, for example, the 2003 surgeons strike in Virginia), but they became much less violent (Brenner, Day, and Ness 13).

The violence of the strikes before the Act, while it gave might have spurred the resolution of the problem, was a painful, unwanted consequence that the Wagner Act has managed to mitigate if not eliminate. This fact along with the rights that the Act provided for the workers explains why NLRA is considered to be a “ most important legislative victory in the US history” (Brenner, Day, and Ness 12).

Brenner, Aaron, Benjamin Day, and Immanuel Ness. *The Encyclopedia of Strikes In American History*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Taylor and Francis, 2015. Print.

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