Power on the Job

Indiana labor strategies, 1870 to 1900

IS.4.8 "Describe the growth of unions and the labor movement and evaluate various approaches and methods used by different labor leaders and organizations in Indiana from 1870-1900."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each group's goal, circle a method it used, and number one risk or limit of that method. Use your marks to compare how Indiana workers and labor leaders tried to gain power.

Who Could Change the Workday?

1. On an Indiana rail line in 1877, a wage cut could mean less food at a worker's table. During the nationwide Great Railroad Strike, railroad employees in Indiana joined protests against pay cuts. Trains stopped, making workers' power visible but also disrupting travel and trade. As factories, mines, and railroads expanded in the late 1800s, more Hoosiers depended on wages set by employers. Workers formed unions to press for safer conditions, shorter hours, and better pay. Yet labor leaders disagreed about whom to organize and how to gain change. A walkout could pressure an employer quickly, but workers risked losing wages or jobs.

2. In the 1880s, the Knights of Labor organized Indiana workers across trades, including many who lacked a specialized skill. Its national rules allowed women and Black workers to join, though equal treatment was not guaranteed in every local group. Knights sought broad changes such as an eight-hour day and an end to child labor. They used meetings, public campaigns, and sometimes strikes to win support. The American Federation of Labor, founded in 1886, instead brought together unions of skilled workers by craft. Its unions concentrated on bargaining with employers over wages, hours, and working conditions, leaving many less-skilled workers outside their ranks.

3. Terre Haute's Eugene V. Debs showed how a leader's strategy could change. As an officer of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, he favored mutual aid and negotiation for members of one railroad occupation. In 1893, he helped found the American Railway Union, which aimed to unite railroad workers across jobs. In the 1894 Pullman boycott, its members refused to handle trains carrying Pullman cars, hoping to force negotiations over a dispute involving Pullman workers. Federal intervention and court orders helped defeat the boycott, and Debs was jailed. The union reached beyond one craft, but its wide boycott also faced powerful opposition.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did stopping trains in 1877 give Indiana workers leverage, and what did workers risk by walking out?

2. How did the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor differ in whom they organized and the changes they pursued?

3. How did Debs's approach to organizing railroad workers change between the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and the American Railway Union?

4. What was one possible strength and one demonstrated weakness of the American Railway Union's Pullman boycott?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine that an Indiana glass factory in 1898 cuts pay and adds longer shifts for both skilled glassblowers and workers who pack bottles. In five to seven sentences, propose a plan that combines or adapts two approaches from the passage, then explain whom it would help and one risk.

Power on the Job

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each group's goal, circle a method it used, and number one risk or limit of that method. Use your marks to compare how Indiana workers and labor leaders tried to gain power. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did stopping trains in 1877 give Indiana workers leverage, and what did workers risk by walking out?	**Stopped trains disrupted travel and trade, putting pressure on employers. Workers risked losing wages or jobs.**
2	How did the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor differ in whom they organized and the changes they pursued?	**The Knights organized across trades and sought broad changes, including an eight-hour day and an end to child labor. The AFL organized skilled workers by craft and focused on bargaining over wages, hours, and conditions.**
3	How did Debs's approach to organizing railroad workers change between the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and the American Railway Union?	**In the Brotherhood, he favored mutual aid and negotiation for one occupation. With the American Railway Union, he sought to unite workers across railroad jobs and used a boycott.**
4	What was one possible strength and one demonstrated weakness of the American Railway Union's Pullman boycott?	**Refusing to handle trains with Pullman cars could pressure others to negotiate. Federal intervention and court orders helped defeat the boycott.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would organize glassblowers and bottle packers in one union, following the Knights' approach of bringing different workers together. This would give both groups a voice when the factory changes pay and hours. The union would first bargain with the owner, as AFL unions did, and ask for the pay cut to be reversed and the longer shifts reduced. If the owner refused, members could vote on whether to strike. A strike might put pressure on the factory because both skilled and less-skilled workers would stop working. It would also put their wages and jobs at risk.

Accept other historically grounded comparisons and plans that identify a method, explain whom it serves, and evaluate a plausible risk. Students need not choose a strike for the open task.