Fields, Mines, Ballots

How collective action shaped Oklahoma in the 1910s

OKH.C.7.3.C "Analyze how various segments of Oklahoma's economy and society, such as agriculture, mining, and state politics were influenced by organized labor and socialist movements."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one problem facing farmers and one facing miners, circle one response by each movement, and number two effects or limits of their work in state politics.

Working Together in Oklahoma

1 In the 1910s, a tenant farmer in Oklahoma might raise cotton on land owned by someone else. After paying rent and buying supplies on credit, the farmer could finish the season owing money. The Socialist Party of Oklahoma drew support from many such farmers, especially in the south and west of the state. Its organizers argued that cooperative buying and selling could help farmers bargain for better prices and rely less on costly middlemen. They also called for changes in land ownership and lending. These proposals offered farmers a way to challenge an economy in which hard work did not guarantee financial security.

2 Coal miners faced a different workplace. In eastern Oklahoma, miners worked underground for companies that controlled jobs and often set the terms of pay. The United Mine Workers of America organized miners to press for higher wages, safer conditions, and a voice in work rules. When miners struck, coal production could stop, giving workers leverage but also costing them wages. Some socialists supported unions because they saw collective action as a way to shift power away from employers. Yet a union bargaining with a mine company and a party seeking broader changes were not the same organization or strategy.

3 Organizing also reached state politics. In the 1910s, Oklahoma socialists ran candidates and published newspapers that linked farm debt and low wages to unequal economic power. They sought votes for policies favorable to working people, rather than relying only on individual farmers or miners to negotiate alone. Socialist candidates won some local offices, but they did not control the state government. Other voters and officials resisted their plans. Organized labor and socialist movements therefore influenced public debate even when they could not pass every proposal. Their influence crossed farm, mine, and ballot box, but each setting offered different tools and limits.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the socialists' proposal for cooperative buying and selling respond to the financial problems tenant farmers faced?

2. Why could a miners' strike pressure a coal company, and what did miners risk by striking?

3. How were a miners' union and the Socialist Party alike in their goals but different in their methods?

4. What does the passage show about the socialists' political influence and the limits of that influence?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are writing a 1910s Oklahoma newspaper editorial proposing a joint public meeting for tenant farmers and coal miners. In 80 to 105 words, explain a concern they share, a different tool each group could use, and how the meeting might affect a local election without guaranteeing a victory.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.7.3.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one problem facing farmers and one facing miners, circle one response by each movement, and number two effects or limits of their work in state politics. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the socialists' proposal for cooperative buying and selling respond to the financial problems tenant farmers faced?	**Cooperatives could help farmers bargain for better prices and depend less on costly middlemen, leaving them less vulnerable when rent and credit costs were high.**
2	Why could a miners' strike pressure a coal company, and what did miners risk by striking?	**A strike could stop coal production and give miners leverage, but miners would lose wages while they were off the job.**
3	How were a miners' union and the Socialist Party alike in their goals but different in their methods?	**Both sought to shift power toward working people. The union bargained with mine companies and could strike, while the party proposed broader changes and ran candidates.**
4	What does the passage show about the socialists' political influence and the limits of that influence?	**Socialists brought farm and labor concerns into public debate and won some local offices, but they did not control state government or pass every proposal.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Tenant farmers and coal miners both want more power over the terms of their work. At a public meeting, farmers could explain how cooperative selling might reduce their dependence on buyers and lenders. Miners could explain how a union uses bargaining or a strike to press a company for safer conditions and better pay. Together, they could ask local candidates to state their positions on worker safety and farm credit. The meeting could make these issues harder to ignore, even if voters reject the candidates who support the groups' proposals.

Accept other passage-supported cause-and-effect explanations. For the editorial, look for a shared concern, distinct tools for farmers and miners, and a plausible political effect that does not assume success.