

Work and Labor

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Thesis

Despite attempts to make work and labor less oppressive for the American worker, the progressive movement did not overcome innate obstacles of Capitalism that restricted class movement, and thus improved but could not completely transform the system.

Topic #1

The Progressive Era was successful because it demanded that it was the government's responsibility to protect the unalienable human rights of the American worker.



Antitrust Laws

- State and government laws that restrict the power of business corporations and monopolies which creates more fair competition and benefits the consumer
- Sherman Acts 1890 and Clayton Act 1914:
 - requires investigation of trust
 - outlaws monopolies, cartels, and trusts

Antitrust Laws Analysis

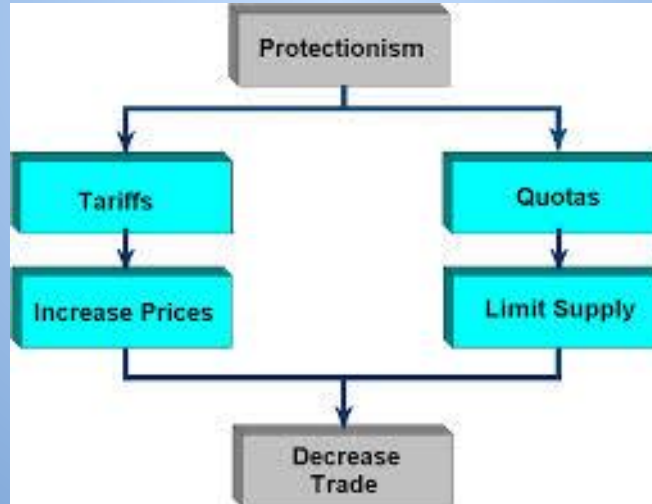
This leads to a more balanced lifestyle for the working class as their lives weren't dictated by monopolies and large corporations.

STOP THE
MERGERS!
ENFORCE
ANTI-TRUST
LAWS!



Protectionist Laws

- Economic policies restricting trade between states by imposing taxes and quotas on imported goods, the opposite of free trade, which calls for little government intervention in trade
- This protects domestic industries from foreign competition



Analysis:

Leads to a decrease in quality of products, because people can't get better products from foreign companies. Workers end up paying more for lower quality products which leads to the hiring of domestic workers, rather than foreign immigrants.

Before Reform

- Factories became more demanding, requiring greater efficiency
- Working hours were from dawn to dusk 6 days a week
- No vacation, sick leave, unemployment pay, or reimbursement for injuries from the workplace
- Dangerous and unsanitary working conditions



After Reform

- 1938- nationally mandated minimum wage law
- The Adamson Act in 1916 established an eight hour work day
- Compensation offered for injured workers

Legal Action

- Pendleton Service Act 1883: government jobs were not given based on personal connections; jobs given based on merit/worthiness/ability
- 1898= supreme court makes laws limiting the number of hours that laborers could work in dangerous jobs such as mining
- Between 1900-1915 the average weekly wages for unionized industries rose from \$17.50 to \$24
 - average workweek fell from 54.5 hours to under 49 hours
- 1911= Department of Labor is created
- 38 states outlawed child labor by 1900



Legal Action Analysis

- The government was changing to make labor laws more fair
 - Minimum wage, maximum work hours (overtime payment), system based on merit, child labor laws
- Shows a shift in the government, becoming more active in the lives of people, not only providing safety for citizens but also making life more enjoyable and fair between classes

Topic #2

The reforms implemented were allegedly supposed to help the working class, however they were not applied to a large groups of people and rather only to a specific audience such as immigrants, children, and women.

Immigration

- Feared that too many unskilled and low paid immigrants would hinder the efforts of labor unions to increase wages
- Wanted to impose restrictions on Immigration, especially ones from China and other Asian countries
- Eugenic advocates also pushed for restrictions on Immigrants



Immigration Analysis

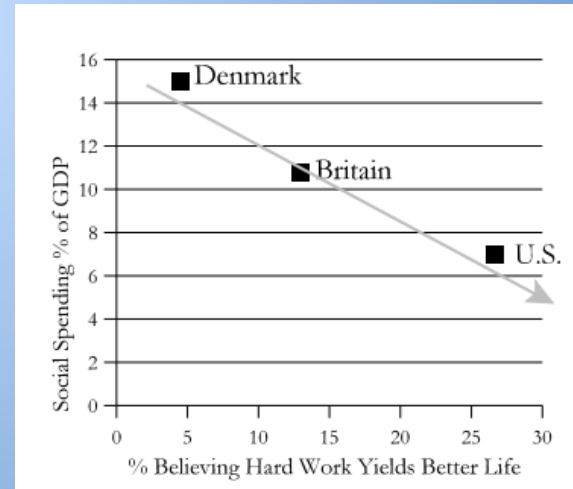
Strongly promoted “Americanization” programs which would aim to make immigrants into model American citizens, as well as erase their allegiance to the old countries.

Topic #3

Due to the fact mobility is still extremely restricted for small groups of people, capitalism cannot be overcome, which ultimately undermines the “American dream.”

Evidence

- From 1880-1900 the increase in white collar was up only 1.8%, whereas skilled workers were up 4.1% and unskilled were up 1.7%
- Figure 1: data from 2001



Analysis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOoydrvMtB8>

- Today capitalism continues to thrive and oppress, so it must have been even more oppressive 100 years ago

Conclusion

Embedded in American society was a hierarchy that gave wealthy citizens the power to suppress the lower class and disregard their well-being. Progressives were able to pressure the government into addressing the issue of the unhealthy working conditions and insufficient wages; however, they were unable to eradicate the class divisions and, thus, working class citizens continued to be oppressed by capitalists and immigrants were forced into the working class.