The Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902

Service Learning Project

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PA State Standards: 8.2 Pennsylvania History

8.2.9. GRADE 9
Analyze the political and cultural contributions of individuals and groups to Pennsylvania history from 1787 to 1914. Identify and analyze primary documents, material artifacts and historic sites important in Pennsylvania history from 1787 to 1914. Identify and analyze how continuity and change have influenced Pennsylvania history from the 1787 to 1914. Identify and analyze conflict and cooperation among social groups and organizations in Pennsylvania history from 1787 to 1914.

8.2.12. GRADE 12
Evaluate the political and cultural contributions of individuals and groups to Pennsylvania history from 1890 to Present. Identify and evaluate primary documents, material artifacts and historic sites important in Pennsylvania history from 1890 to Present. Identify and evaluate how continuity and change have influenced Pennsylvania history from the 1890s to Present. Identify and evaluate conflict and cooperation among social groups and organizations in Pennsylvania history from 1890 to Present.

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will identify of the main people involved in the Anthracite Strike of 1902.
2. Students will explain how the federal government played a key role in ending the Anthracite Strike of 1902.
3. Students will analyze political cartoons and apply their understanding about the Anthracite Strike of 1902 accurately to their group members and the class.

Materials Needed:

1. Copies of political cartoons for every student
2. Copies of PA maps for every student
3. Computer that is hooked up to a projector to show a short video

Brief Introduction:

To get students involved before a lecture, ask them some basic questions about the PA coal mining industry. Some questions to consider are:

1. What is anthracite coal?
2. Have you ever been to a coal mine?
3. Where are coal mines in PA?
4. Can you describe what a coal mine looks like?

Teacher will lecture on all the following sections: Brief history of the 1900 strike, Who, What, Where, When, and Why.

Brief history of the 1900 strike:

Anthracite mine workers went on strike to fight for better wages and hours. Operators wanted to attack miners for their decision to go on strike, but Mark Hanna, Senator of Ohio, persuaded operators to end the long-drawn-out conflict. This was completely a political move because Republicans did not want the 1900 strike to affect their chances of re-election. A coal strike would have hurt the Republicans because it was Republicans who controlled a great portion of the coal mining industry. Operators and miners came to a truce, but not a settlement. Operators did not recognize their union (The United Mine Workers), but as a truce operators gave them a 10% wage increase. Since demands were not met from 1900, a strike occurred in 1902.¹

Who

1. **John Mitchell** was the leader of the United Mine Workers; Mitchell came to power in 1898. He was an important leader for the UMW because he helped consolidate miners’ interests. This was a very difficult task for Mitchell because the mining community was very diverse. Mitchell helped miners overcome ethnic boundaries such as language and culture and helped them unite under one common interest. Mitchell disapproved of radicalism and violence as a means to have miners’ demands met.² He was also completely willing to accept the findings of any commission appointed by President Roosevelt. Mitchell faced criticism from George F. Baer, President of the Philadelphia

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² Ibid, 172.
and Reading Railroad, because Baer felt the UMW was responsible for the strike since they were going against the free market economy.

2. **George F. Baer** was the President of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. He was a tough hard boiled spokesman for the operators of the anthracite coal mines. Baer completely opposed the demands of the UMW because he felt it went against owners’ property rights. Furthermore, he opposed the demands of President Theodore Roosevelt. Baer felt the federal government and the miners had no right to oppose the free market economy his company belonged to. In response to the UMW and Roosevelt, Baer stated, “The rights and interests of the laboring men will be protected and cared for, not by the labor agitators, but by the Christian men to whom God and his infinite wisdom is giving control of the property interests of the country and upon the successful management of which so much depends.” Baer completely opposed the labor commission set up by Roosevelt, and never acknowledged the UMW’s existence. Because of Baer’s pride and stubbornness, he was forced by President Roosevelt to come to a compromise with the UMW.

3. **Theodore Roosevelt**, President of the United States of America during the 1902 anthracite coal strike who called attention to the conflict between Baer and the UMW. Roosevelt’s main concern was the health and wellbeing of the public. With the help of his Commissioner of Labor Carroll D. Wright, Roosevelt was able to investigate the anthracite conflict. The information collect by Wright gave Roosevelt insights to the quarrel that led him to side with the mine workers. The strike started in June of 1902 and

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3 Dubofsky and Dulles, 173.
was still continuing into early autumn. Roosevelt felt if the strike continued any further it would be detrimental to the economy and Americans survival in the winter. On October 3, 1902, Roosevelt called a conference at the White House for settling the anthracite strike between operators and strike leaders. Roosevelt pleaded "With all the earnestness there is in me I ask that there be an immediate resumption of operations in the coal mines in some such way as will meet the crying needs of the people." Roosevelt wanted a peaceful negotiation, but the operators didn’t want to compromise. His last attempt to end the strike was to intervene directly with federal troops taking over the anthracite mines of PA. With Baer’s options limited, he was forced to settle the labor dispute. If Roosevelt did not intervene, it would have created a social conflict not only between the miners and operators, but with the American public.

What

This video from history.com accurately represents an overview of the 1902 Anthracite Coal Strike.6

What was gained from the Strike: Because of Roosevelt and Carroll Wright’s intervention, miners were given a ten percent wage increase and awarded an eight or nine hour work day compared to the previous ten hour work days. It was not until March of 1903, five months after miners went back to work that they received these benefits. Miners received

benefits but not everything they fought for. The UMW was not recognized by the coal operators; however miners were happy with the settlement received.  

Where

This is a map of Pennsylvania and its counties.  

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7 Dubofsky and Dulles, 175.
This is a map of the three anthracite coal regions in Pennsylvania. The previous map will help you locate where these counties are located in Pennsylvania.

Where—Luzerne County, Carbon County, and Schuylkill County were the three regions in Pennsylvania that shaped the anthracite coal industry.\textsuperscript{10}

When

**Events of 1902**

June 2 Anthracite coal strike officially began

July Newspapers began to report incidents of violence in the mining region

July 30 A storeowner was beaten to death by a mob while a deputy sheriff was escorting two miners who refused to join the strike. The Pennsylvania Governor began to call out militia to guarantee order.

August 21-30 Press commentary on letter by George F. Baer

October Growing fear of a "coal famine" as winter approached

October 3 Roosevelt invited UMW leaders and operators to a White House conference

October 6 Entire Pennsylvania militia ordered to duty; eventually 8,750 men served in the anthracite fields

October 8 Miners at mass meetings voted unanimously to continue the strike, belying the operators' assertions that, if given police protection, the majority of miners would go back to work

October 12 J.P. Morgan pressed George Baer to agree to arbitration of the strike

October 13 Roosevelt discussed with General John M. Schofield having he U.S. Army seize the coal mines and operate them until such time as the owners agreed to arbitration

October 14 J.P. Morgan met with Roosevelt regarding arbitration

October 16 Roosevelt announced the appointment of a commission to arbitrate the dispute

October 23 Miners returned to work

October 24 Arbitration commission met with Roosevelt

This timeline is directly taken from the internet on ehistory.\textsuperscript{11}


Why

Demands from the 1900 strike were not met – higher wages, better working conditions, shorter hours, union recognition.

The system set up by coal operators kept workers dependent upon their employer. Systems created by operators such as the company store and company housing made employers in control even further over their employees.\(^{12}\)

From the miner’s point of view, they agreed with the “labor of theory value.” It was the miners’ labor that gave coal its value, so miners felt it was their right to fair wage and good working conditions.

Annotative Bibliography:


These two political cartoons show the conflicts between big business (oligopoly capitalism) and the American worker. Specifically, compromises had to be made through federal involvement.

eHistory contributors. 2010. "Hurry Up and Take the Smaller One, Mr. Baer." eHistory @ The Ohio State University. http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/mmh/gildedage/1902anthracitestrike/content/Baer.cfm (accessed October 4, 2010).

This political cartoon shows the conflicts between big business (oligopoly capitalism) and the American public.


This timeline serves as an overview of the events taking place in the year 1902 on the 1902 Anthracite Coal Strike.


This book focuses primarily on coal strikes from 1840-1868 in Pennsylvania. It connects ethnicities, working conditions, labor struggles and political ties to the coal industry. The struggles of the 1902 coal strike relate to the struggles and conflicts in Palladindo’s book.


This article provides an excellent description of the progressive principles used by Theodore Roosevelt to help end the Anthracite Coal strike of 1902. The article provides a detailed overview of politics, and shows Roosevelt’s sympathy towards Pennsylvania Coal miners and the American public.


This is a map of specific counties in Pennsylvania that have anthracite coal. Use both maps to visualize what part of the state these coal counties are located.


The article “On Strike” is a descriptive overview of the 1902 Anthracite Coal Strike. The article describes political, economic and social issues which complicated the strike.


This source is a detailed overview of the 1900 and the 1902 Anthracite Coal Strike. It talks about the connection between these two strikes, the politics involved during this crisis, and how the strike was resolved.
Activity and Assessment using Political Cartoons:

Directions

- Pass cartoons out to groups of students and have them discuss the questions in mind and how they relate to the 1902 coal strike.

Each group of students will answer these four questions about each political cartoon. Of course, these are not the only questions each group has to answer.

1. Describe what you see in the political cartoons.
2. Who is/are portrayed in each political cartoon?
3. Which side of the argument is the cartoon favoring?
4. What does this cartoon show about public opinion?
First Political Cartoon.\textsuperscript{13}

Second Political Cartoon.¹⁴

Third Political Cartoon.¹⁵

¹⁴ eHistory contributors. 2010. "Hurry Up and Take the Smaller One, Mr. Baer." eHistory @ The Ohio State University. http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/mmh/gildedage/1902anthracitestrike/content/Baer.cfm (accessed October 4, 2010).