



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Lawrence, MA factory workers strike "for Bread and Roses," U.S. 1912

11 January

1912

to: 12 March

1912

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** *Lawrence, Massachusetts*

**Goals:**

Better wages and living conditions for factory workers

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 013. Deputations
- 016. Picketing
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 031. "Haunting" officials
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 051. Walk-outs
- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 013. Deputations
- 016. Picketing
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 031. "Haunting" officials
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 013. Deputations
- 016. Picketing
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 031. "Haunting" officials
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 013. Deputations
- 016. Picketing
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 031. "Haunting" officials
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 068. Sanctuary
- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 013. Deputations
- 016. Picketing
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 031. "Haunting" officials
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 068. Sanctuary
- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 013. Deputations
- 016. Picketing
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors

- 031. "Haunting" officials
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 068. Sanctuary
- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 179. Alternative social institutions

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Economic Justice

**Group characterization:**

- (Mostly Female Immigrant) Factory Workers

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

International Workers of the World (IWW) leaders and Italian Socialist Federation (ISF) of the Socialist Party of America leaders

**Partners:**

IWW and ISF

**External allies:**

IWW members and supporters throughout the country

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- ISF
- IWW
- UTW

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 10 days*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### **Opponents:**

Factory owners and local government

### **Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

### **Campaigner violence:**

Some campaigners threw ice chunks at factory windows, breaking them

### **Repressive Violence:**

Strong continuous militia presence, including beatings and arrests

## Success Outcome

### **Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

6 points out of 6 points

### **Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

### **Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

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As we come marching, marching, we battle too for men,  
For they are women's children, and we mother them again.  
Our lives shall not be sweated from birth until life closes;  
Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!  
- James Oppenheim (Used as the rallying cry for the movement)

Lawrence, Massachusetts was the home of a thriving textile mill industry at the beginning of the 20th Century. Men, women, and children (some younger than fourteen) all worked in the factory, despite its inherent dangers and shockingly high rate of injury and death among the workers (roughly a third of all workers would die before their 25th birthdays). In 1900, technology had tended to eliminate the need for most skilled workers, and factories turned to large numbers of unskilled employees, who were mostly female immigrants. However, technological advances, such as the two-loom system of textile production, also began to allow the factories to create their products significantly faster. As a result, factory owners were able to cut costs by laying off large numbers of workers. Those that were lucky enough to keep their jobs were paid roughly \$9.00 a week, and forced to work about 60 hours.

Although union organization was growing in the United States at this time, immigrants in Lawrence tended to not be under union protection. The United Textile Workers and the International Workers of the World (IWW) each claimed only a few hundred members from Lawrence.

On January 1, 1912, as part of the broad labor reform movement, the Massachusetts government began enforcing a law reducing the maximum allowed hours per week for female workers from 56 hours to 54. Ten days later, workers across the city discovered that their pay had been reduced by the amount that their hours had been forcibly reduced.

When the women at Everett Cotton Mills learned about this wage cut, they left the mill immediately, beginning what would become known as the "Bread and Roses" strike. Within a week, more than 20,000 workers (out of Lawrence's total population of 85,000) were on strike. Their first demands included a 15% wage increase, double pay for overtime work, and no discrimination against striking workers. The theme of the strike, as reflected by the poem above, was not simply better wages

(bread), but decent and humane living conditions as well (roses).

Though the strikers were enthusiastic, they were not particularly prepared to lead a coordinated, long-term action against the factory owners. Organizers in the IWW and the Italian Socialist Federation of the Socialist Party of America took up the cause. They formed a strike committee, which was strategically composed of two members of each striking ethnic group. This committee was responsible for all major decisions.

At the same time, the United Textile Workers were also working to end the strike. Unfortunately for them, the striking workers, already united by ethnic ties to the IWW's strike committee, were not willing to listen to anything the UTW had to say. The UTW soon realized that it was not welcome, and stopped trying to be involved.

The city ordered the local militia to patrol the streets to quell the striking workers. The workers, in response, began a large-scale picket in front of the mills. Hundreds were arrested when the workers refused to disperse.

William Wood, owner of one of the factories, was publicly discredited when it was discovered that he had paid a man to frame the striking workers by planting sticks of dynamite throughout town. The discovery of the payments and the strikers' sworn commitment to nonviolence swung public opinion strongly in favor of the laborers.

The city police soon declared martial law, banning all public meetings and greatly increasing the militia's presence in town. Two IWW leaders were framed and arrested for the murder of a striking worker (who was probably shot by police). Both leaders would remain in jail for months after the end of the strike.

The IWW retaliated with more support, reaching out nationally, with particular attention to the rest of New England, for funds to support the striking workers. They were able to provide makeshift soup kitchens, medical care, and other food for strikers to take home to their families. They also transported hundreds of children to New York, where they stayed with supporting families, out of danger, for the rest of the strike.

On February 24, the police attempted to stop the transport of about a hundred children to Philadelphia. The militia was sent to the train station to stop the children from getting on the train and to arrest their mothers and fathers that accompanied them to the station. When the families were uncooperative, the militia began to beat mothers and children indiscriminately, dragging them away to be detained.

This event drew the attention of the national media, who swiftly descended upon Lawrence. Helen Taft, the President's wife, was drawn to the cause, and encouraged the US House and Senate to investigate.

With the immense pressure of national attention weighing heavily on the factory owners, they quickly scrambled to reach an agreement with the laborers. On March 12, American Woolen Company agreed to meet all of the laborers initial demands. The rest of the factories in Lawrence, and throughout the northeast, soon also agreed to do the same. The strikers returned to work, successful.

## Research Notes

### Sources:

[http://www.lucyparsonspj.org/iww/kornbluh\\_bread\\_roses.html](http://www.lucyparsonspj.org/iww/kornbluh_bread_roses.html)

<http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/unions/lawrence-strike/strike.htm>

Watson, Bruce. Bread and Roses: Mills, Migrants, and the Struggle for the American Dream. New York, NY: Viking Publishing Group, 2005.

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Kelly Schoolmeester, 29/03/2010

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