

Problems and Progress at Home

Overview By the early 1900's many Americans became more aware of the major problems in our country. Many people wanted to solve these problems in order to improve life in the United States. The people who worked for these changes were called *Progressives*. The first two Presidents of the 1900's agreed with many of the ideas of the Progressives and worked for reforms.

Objectives After reading this section, you should be able to:

- identify social problems that faced American's in the early 1900's;
- list the goals of the Progressives;
- give examples of the reforms that Presidents Roosevelt and Taft supported.

The Need for Reform. The rapid growth of American industries and cities that began in the late 1800's continued in the early 1900's. This growth changed many aspects of American life. Although some of the changes were good for the country, many of the changes also caused problems.

For example, during the late 1800's some business leaders had become very powerful by building monopolies. Some of them used their power to control politicians. Usually these business leaders supported those politicians who would put the interests of big business ahead of the interests of the majority of the people. In part, this was why little legislation was passed in the late 1800's to improve the living and working conditions of the poor in the cities. At that time, many people worked long hours under dangerous conditions for little pay in the factories. The low wages often forced many of the workers to live in crowded city slums. But because the poor had little power in the government, most lawmakers did not work to solve the problems of the poor.

- *What problems did many American workers face in the late 1800's?*

The Muckrakers. During the late 1800's and early 1900's, some people began to write magazine articles and books about the country's problems. Their goal was to call attention to the poor living and working conditions facing many Americans, particularly in the cities. These writers were called *muckrakers*. The term came from President Roosevelt who compared these writers to "the Man with the Muckrake . . . who could look no way but downward." Some muckrakers wrote about the wrongdoings of business owners and politicians. Others wrote about child labor or about poverty.

Ida M. Tarbell was one of these writers. In 1902 and 1903 she wrote a series of articles that called attention to the unfair practices of the Standard Oil Company. As a result of the articles that exposed unfair business practices, many people began to feel that the government should put some controls on big business.

Lincoln Steffens, another muckraker, wrote articles about dishonest politicians and business leaders in the city governments. His book *The Shame of the Cities* showed that many city governments did not serve the people. However, the most famous book from these years was *The Jungle*. It was written by Upton Sinclair. *The Jungle* was a novel about the Chicago stockyards. People who read *The Jungle* were shocked by the description of the dirty, dangerous conditions in the meatpacking business. As a result, many readers demanded that the government set standards for the way food was prepared and packaged.

Because of the muckrakers, Americans learned about the different problems in the country. Soon, a growing number of Americans began to call for needed reforms. The people who worked for these reforms during the early 1900's came to be known as Progressives.

- *What was the goal of the muckrakers?*

The Progressives. The Progressives were not one unified group of people. Rather, they belonged to different groups that worked for a variety of

reforms. Some worked directly to improve conditions in the cities. Others tried to make things better by backing new state laws. Still others worked for national reforms.

The Progressives believed that better laws could improve life in the United States. They wanted to give the people more power in the government. Progressives also wanted to lessen the power of big business.

During the late 1800's reformers had failed to gain many of their goals. In part, this was because they did not have widespread backing throughout the country. However, between 1900 and 1910, the Progressives were more successful. Their cause was helped when Theodore Roosevelt became President.

- *What were the goals of the Progressives?*

Roosevelt the Reformer. Before entering national politics, Theodore Roosevelt had been the governor of New York. He had worked for many different reforms as governor, and he shared many ideas with the Progressives. When Roosevelt became President in 1901, many people hoped that he would continue to support reform ideas.

President Roosevelt did use the power of the federal government to bring about many reforms. For example, during the late 1800's *trusts* had grown very powerful. A **trust** was a combination of businesses that was formed to create a monopoly. Without competition, a trust could set prices at whatever level it wanted. Many Progressives argued that the owners of these trusts held too much power, which could be misused.

Business trusts had been made illegal by the Sherman Antitrust Law of 1896 but the law was not enforced. Therefore, trusts were allowed to continue. When Roosevelt became President, he agreed that some businesses had too much power, and he decided that some trusts should be broken up. He asked the Attorney General to file suit against the Northern Securities

Company. This was a railroad business owned by J. P. Morgan, John Davison Rockefeller, James J. Hill, and E. H. Harriman. Ultimately the government won the case. The court ruled that the Northern Securities Company had to be broken up.

The Progressives were pleased with the outcome in this case. In short, the ruling warned business owners that the federal government planned to watch and to limit the activities of big business.

During his two terms, Roosevelt brought cases against 44 business trusts. In this way, he worked to limit the power of big business. This is also why President Roosevelt became known as a trustbuster.

- *Why did the Progressives oppose trusts?*

The Coal Strike of 1902. Another goal of the Progressives was to improve life for industrial workers. President Roosevelt also shared this goal. In working toward this goal, he laid the foundations for government involvement in business when the public interest was in danger.

In May 1902, 50,000 coal miners in Pennsylvania went on strike. They asked for more pay and an 8 hour workday. These miners belonged to the United Mine Workers Union. The union leaders wanted to meet with the mine owners to settle the strike, but the mine owners refused.

The strike continued into the fall of 1902. As the weather grew colder, the country needed more coal. President Roosevelt said that it was his duty to see that Americans would have enough coal. Therefore, he wanted the strike to end. In October, Roosevelt asked the mine owners and the union leaders to meet with him in Washington. He thought that they could reach an agreement. The union leaders were willing to meet, but the owners refused. They did not want the miners to have a union.

Instead, the owners asked Roosevelt to call in

the army to force the miners back to work. But Roosevelt would not do this. He told the owners that he would have soldiers go into the mines to get the needed coal. Because of Roosevelt's warning, the owners agreed to settle the matter.

Roosevelt's actions in this strike marked a new role of government. It was the first time that a President had entered a labor matter that was not directly stopping federal activities. In the view of many people, he had acted as a friend to labor.

- *Why did President Roosevelt act to end the coal strike of 1902?*

Roosevelt's Second Term. President Roosevelt was nominated by the Republicans as their candidate in the election of 1904. He won easily over his Democratic opponent, Alton Parker.

President Roosevelt continued to back reforms during his second term. He read *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair. Because of this, Roosevelt wanted the government to set certain standards for businesses that took part in processing food.

Due to President Roosevelt's backing and leadership, Congress passed the **Meat Inspection Act** and the **Pure Food and Drug Act** in 1906. With these laws, the government began to inspect and regulate food and drug businesses. These were the first federal laws to protect consumers.

The Progressives also wanted the government to set standards for the operation of railroads. Many people said that the railroad rates were too high. President Roosevelt agreed that some railroads charged unfair rates. Because of this, Roosevelt favored the **Hepburn Act**, which was passed by Congress in 1906. It gave the government the power to set maximum railroad rates.

Roosevelt also worked to protect the country's natural resources. He tried to show the public

that there was a need to save land for forests and parks.

Roosevelt did not want to run for office again in 1908. Instead, he recommended that the Republicans nominate William Howard Taft. Roosevelt believed that Taft would follow the programs that he had begun. In 1908, Taft was nominated and elected President.

- *What were the first federal laws to protect consumers?*

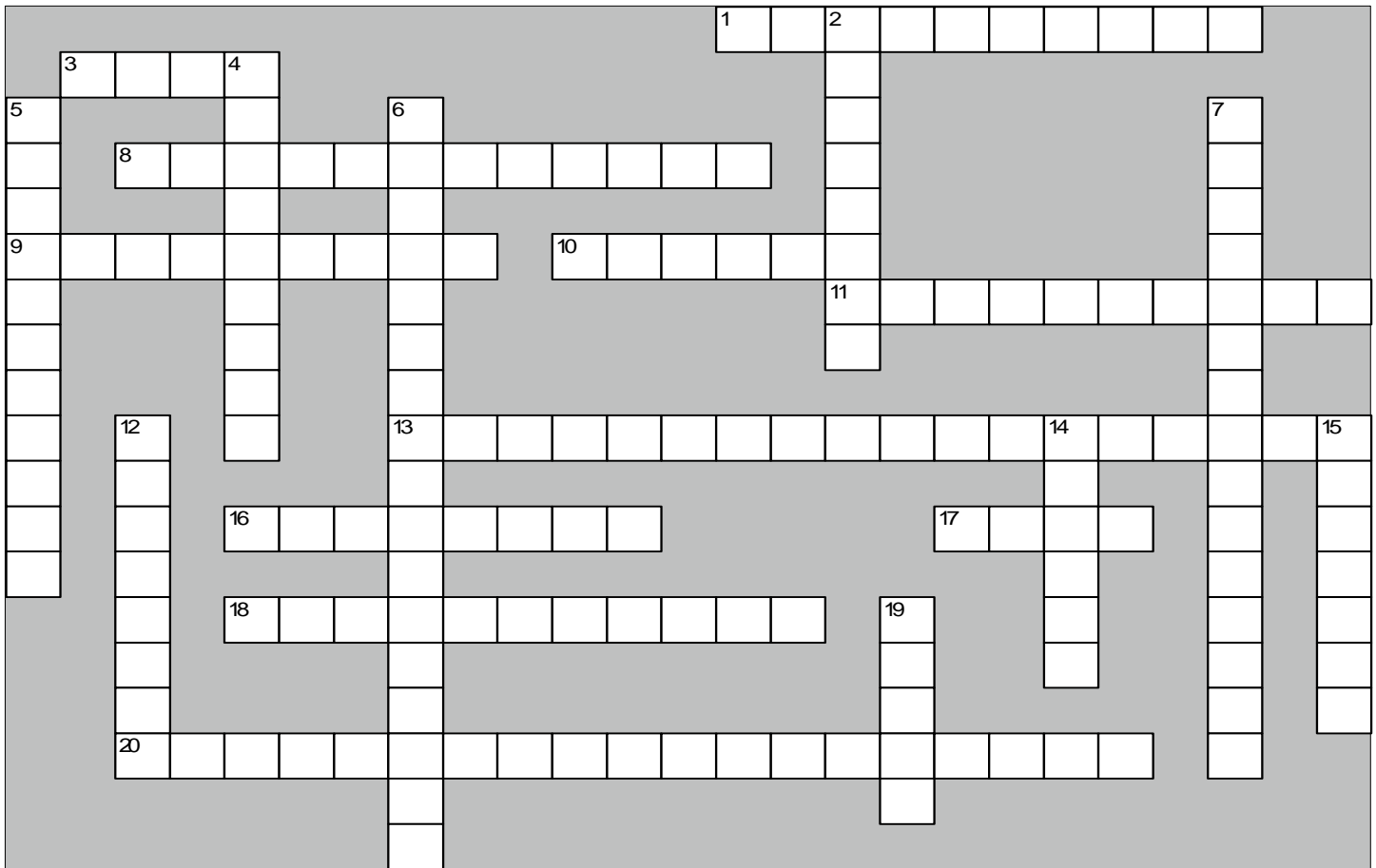
Reforms by Taft. During his time in office, President Taft also worked for reforms. He used the **Sherman Antitrust Law** to break up trusts. From 1909 to 1912, the government brought suits against 70 companies. Taft also backed a number of other reform measures, among which was the Mann-Elkins Act. When passed, this law gave the federal government more power to regulate railroads and telephone and telegraph companies.

Taft also favored the **Sixteenth Amendment** to the Constitution. This amendment gave the federal government the power to tax incomes. Many Progressives thought that a tax on income was the fairest way for the government to raise money. The Sixteenth Amendment was ratified while Taft was President.

Even though Taft worked for reforms, some people did not think that he had done enough. Former President Roosevelt also disagreed with some of Taft's decisions. Because of this, many Republicans did not want Taft to run again in 1912. They wanted Roosevelt to be their candidate instead .

- *What was established by the Sixteenth Amendment?*

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Across

- 1 gave the government the power to set maximum railroad rates
- 3 In the late 1800's, the ____ had little power in the government.
- 8 name given to that group of Americans who worked for reforms during early 1900's
- 9 The ____ Amendment gave the federal government the power to tax incomes (the money people earn).
- 10 The ____ - a book exposing the unsafe and unsanitary conditions in the meat packing industry.
- 11 name given to people who wrote about the problems facing the U.S. in the late 1800's and early 1900's.
- 13 law passed to protect consumers from unsafe food and medicines
- 16 Upton ____; author of The Jungle
- 17 William Howard ____; Roosevelt's successor
- 18 In the late 1800's, some ____ put the interests of "Big Business" ahead of the interests of the majority of the people.
- 20 law used by Roosevelt to attack the trusts

Down

- 2 Many of the changes in American life that resulted from industrialization caused _____.
- 4 Theodore _____ - the first progressive President
- 5 name given to Theodore Roosevelt because of his efforts to control the power of big business
- 6 law passed to regulate, or control, the meat packing industry
- 7 Theodore Roosevelt was known as a _____ because he placed millions of acres of forestlands in federal reserves.
- 12 Lincoln _____ wrote a book exposing corruption in city governments.
- 14 to change for the better; a change made to solve a problem
- 15 Ida M. _____ wrote a book exposing the unfair business practices of the Standard Oil Company
- 19 a combination of businesses formed to create a monopoly