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Reforms of the Progressive Era

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| Problems Before the Reform | The Reform(s) |
| **Spoils System/Patronage**Victorious candidates used the spoils system to give government positions to friends and supporters. But many of these people lacked the qualifications necessary for doing a good job.  |  |
| **High Railroad Rates**In spite of the Interstate Commerce Act, railroads rates remained excessively high. Railroad companies found ways to avoid charging lower rates set by Interstate Commerce.  |  |
| **Poor Working Conditions**Workers, including women and children, were on the job 12 to 14 hours a day, six or seven days a week. Wages were terribly low. Bad working conditions often caused illness and accidents.  |  |
| **Monopolies** Many big businesses became monopolies or trusts. One company, or several companies working together, gained control of an industry, such as oil. They charged high prices because there was no competition to hold prices down.  |  |
| **Tainted Food and Medicine**Terrible conditions existed in the food processing industry, Upton Sinclair, a muckraker, told how packinghouses often kept meat on dirty floors. He found that chopped meat sometimes contained rat hairs, wood splinters, bits of rope, or pieces of spoiled meat.  |  |
| **Pollution & Environmental Destruction**Wilderness areas were being ruined. Great buffalo herds disappeared, and other forms of wildlife were threatened. Government land and mineral resources were either sold cheaply or given away.  |  |
| **Unfair Taxation System** Taxes were usually based on the amount of property a person owned. But many wealthy people hid some of their property from the government. Consequently, they did not pay their fair share of the taxes being collected.  |  |
| **Indirect Election of Senators** The two Senators that each state sent to Congress were chosen by the members of the various state legislatures.  |  |
| **Suffrage Restricted to Males**Only male citizens 21 or older could vote. In 1869 Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton founded the National Woman’s Suffrage Association which campaigned for the right of women to vote.  |  |
| **Lake of Water in the West**Scarce water resources led to competition between landowners in the West. Farmers needed water for irrigation, citites needed it for drinking & waste disposal, and ranchers needed it for their stock.  |  |
| **Alcohol Abuse** Excessive alcohol abuse, especially by workers. It lowered worker efficiency when worker took off “Saint Monday” (when Monday becomes a holiday because you’re still drunk from the weekend) |  |
| **Irresponsiveness of Elected Officials in Municipal Govt.**Elected officials sometimes disregarded the needs and desires of the people. While citizens could petition government, they could not propose a law unless it was sponsored by a legislator. There was also increasing concern about corruption among elected officials and citizens wanted to pass some laws through direct votes.  |  |
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