

Volume 2

Number 015R

Coxey's Army – II

Lead: With the United States mired in a deep depression Jacob Coxey organized a March on Washington.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In 1894, Jacob Coxey, a successful businessman from Massillon, Ohio, and his associate Carl Brown, a labor organizer, wanted to get the US government to do something to relieve the suffering of unemployed workers during the aftermath of the Recession or Panic of

1893. Specifically, they wanted the Federal government to increase the amount of silver in circulation so that businesses could expand and hire more workers, and to appropriate \$500 million dollars to put the unemployed to work building roads.

When legislative pressure failed to get the Congress to act, Browne came up with the idea of a March on Washington. In Chicago, demonstrations at government offices had brought results on the state level, he and Coxey thought the same might work on the federal level. On March 25, 1894 Coxey left Massillon with 100 marchers headed for D.C. The conservatively dressed businessman led the way with the flamboyant Browne complete with goatee,

shoulder length hair and fringed buckskin jacket acting as Chief Marshall. Before he left Coxey named his newly born son, Legal Tender Coxey and brought along his eighteen year old son Jesse, dressed in a Union Blue Coat and Confederate gray pants to symbolize the unity of need in both North and South.

The march was a major event in the history of American labor and the publicity was enormous. Reporters calling themselves "war correspondents" joined "General" Coxey's Army as it moved slowly eastward toward the capital. The notoriety surrounding the march stimulated other groups of workers from California, Colorado, and Montana to start out hoping to

converge on Washington at the same time as Coxe. One contingent commandeered a locomotive in the race to get to Washington. The novelist Jack London caught up with the California group in Council Bluffs, Iowa and walked with them to the Mississippi River. On the journey he kept a diary of the hardship the men faced.

On May 1, 1894 Coxe, Browne and now more than 500 marchers arrived in Washington. Coxe was to make a speech on the Capital steps but barriers had been erected to keep the marchers away. When Coxe tried to scale the wall the police pushed him down, a riot ensued and several of the protesters were beaten by the police. Coxe was allowed to leave but

Browne was arrested. There ended the protest movement known as Coxey's Army. No direct changes in public policy resulted but the way had been pioneered for those seeking relief during times of economic distress. The March on Washington would be a oft-used tactic in the American political arsenal.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.

Resources

McMurray, Donald L. *Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1958.

Schwantes, Carlos A. *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985.