

Name: _____

Should We Organize Labor?

1. Who is Henry Clews? Who is Samuel Gompers?
2. What is Clews's argument against the Knights of Labor? To Labor in general?
3. How does this apply to the employer in the economic equation?
4. How has Labor compromised American businesses?
5. What does Clews believe will happen when the strike is broken?

6. According to Clews, why does striking pose no problem in terms of the labor force?
7. Why does Clews say laboring men should count themselves lucky to live in America?
8. What kinds of labor issues does Gompers cite in his section "What Workers Can Discuss"?
9. What role does Gompers feel machinery has in the plight of the worker?
10. What does Gompers say about laissez-faire economics and workers?
11. What is Gompers' response when someone says "Labor cannot afford to attack capital?" What does he mean?
12. What Constitutional rights does Gompers bring up? How had President Cleveland violated these rights?

Who do you believe is right? Why?

this manner returning their surplus wealth to the mass of their fellows in the forms best calculated to do them lasting good.

Thus is the problem of rich and poor to be solved. The laws of accumulation will be left free, the laws of distribution free. Individualism will continue, but the millionaire will be but a trustee for the poor, intrusted for a season with a great part of the increased wealth of the community, for administering it for the community far better than it could or would have done for itself. The best minds will thus have reached a stage in the development of the race in which it is clearly seen that there is no mode of disposing of surplus wealth creditable to thoughtful and earnest men into whose hands it flows, save by using it year by year for the general good. This day already dawns. Men may die without incurring the pity of their fellows, still sharers in great business enterprises from which their capital cannot be or has not been withdrawn, and which is left chiefly at death for public uses, yet the day is not far distant when the man who dies leaving behind him millions of available wealth, which was free for him to administer during life, will pass away, unwept, unhonored, and unsung," no matter to what uses he leaves the dross which he cannot take with him. Of such as these the public verdict will then be "The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced."

Such, in my opinion, is the true gospel concerning wealth, obedience to which is destined some day to solve the problem of the rich and the poor, and to bring "Peace on earth, among men good will."

For Further Reading

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VIEWPOINT 8A

The Organizing of Labor into Unions Is Dangerous (1886)

Henry Clews (1834–1923)

Henry Clews was a leading financier and investor during and after the Civil War, and served as an economic adviser to President Ulysses S. Grant. In the

following viewpoint, taken from an article originally published in the June 1886 issue of the *North American Review*, Clews denounces what he sees as a clear danger to America—the growth of unionism in the American labor force. He specifically attacks the Knights of Labor, the leading U.S. national organization of workers during the 1880s. He cites a May 1886 general strike that was held in Chicago (the strike ended in violence with fatalities suffered by both police and strikers) as an example of the problems unions create.

What individual rights does Clews emphasize? What significance does Clews see in the number of immigrants entering America? Why does he believe that laborers have "no ground for complaint"?

The Knights of Labor have undertaken to test, upon a large scale, the application of compulsion as a means of enforcing their demands. The point to be determined is whether capital or labor shall, in future, determine the terms upon which the invested resources of the nation are to be employed.

To the employer, it is a question whether his individual rights as to the control of his property shall be so far overborne as to not only deprive him of his freedom but also expose him to interferences seriously impairing the value of his capital. To the employees, it is a question whether, by the force of coercion, they can wrest, to their own profit, powers and control which, in every civilized community, are secured as the most sacred and inalienable rights of the employer.

This issue is so absolutely revolutionary of the normal relations between labor and capital, that it has naturally produced a partial paralysis of business, especially among industries whose operations involve contracts extending into the future. There has been at no time any serious apprehension that such an utterly anarchical movement could succeed so long as American citizens have a clear perception of their rights and their true interests; but it has been distinctly perceived that this war could not fail to create a divided if not hostile feeling between the two great classes of society; that it must hold in check not only a large extent of ordinary business operations but also the undertaking of those new enterprises which contribute to our national progress, and that the commercial markets must be subjected to serious embarrassments.

From the nature of the case, however, this labor disease must soon end one way or another; and there is not much difficulty in foreseeing what its termination will be. The demands of the Knights and their sympa-

Henry Clews, "The Folly of Organized Labor," *North American Review*, June 1886.

thizers, whether openly expressed or temporarily concealed, are so utterly revolutionary of the inalienable rights of the citizen and so completely subversive of social order that the whole community has come to a firm conclusion that these pretensions must be resisted to the last extremity of endurance and authority; and that the present is the best opportunity for meeting the issue firmly and upon its merits.

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"[Labor organizations] stand discredited and distrusted before the community at large as impracticable, unjust, and reckless."

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The organizations have sacrificed the sympathy which lately was entertained for them on account of inequities existing in certain employments; they stand discredited and distrusted before the community at large as impracticable, unjust, and reckless; and, occupying this attitude before the public, their cause is gone and their organization doomed to failure. They have opened the floodgates to the immigration of foreign labor, which is already pouring in by the thousands; and they have set a premium on nonunion labor, which will be more sought for than ever, and will not be slow to secure superior earnings by making arrangements with employers upon such terms and for such hours as may best suit their interests. Thus, one great advantage will incidentally come out of this crisis beneficial to the workingman, who, by standing aloof from the dead-level system of the unions, will be enabled to earn according to his capacity and thereby maintain his chances for rising from the rank of the employee to that of the employer.

This result cannot be long delayed; because not only is loss and suffering following close upon the heels of the strikers, but the imprudences of their leaders are breeding dissatisfaction among the rank and file of the organizations, which, if much further protracted, will gravely threaten their cohesion. It is by no means certain that we may not see a yet further spread of strikes, and possibly with even worse forms of violence than we have yet witnessed; but, so long as a way to the end is seen, with a chance of that end demonstrating to the organizations that their aspirations to control capital are impossible dreams, the temporary evils will be borne with equanimity. The coolness with which the past phases of the strikes have been endured shows that the steady judgment of our people may be trusted to keep them calm under any further disturbance that may arise.

It is quite evident that the backbone of the strike is broken and that the worst is past, and that a gen-

eral recovery of trade will assert itself, more or less, in spite of whatever obstacles may be raised by the labor organizations.

The labor movement inaugurated as a stupendous undertaking and announced to come off on the 1st of May, now past, has been a signal failure. The cause of justice and peace has achieved for itself new prestige sufficient to give it longevity, for the reason that the strike movement has been deprived of justification and right of existence. . . .

The timely and forcible action of Mayor Harrison, of Chicago, will put dynamiters and rioters where they belong, and thus divide the sheep from the goats in a very short time. If officials would sink political bias, the country would soon be rid of law-breakers and disturbers of the peace. As this plan has now been adopted, it will be far-reaching in its effect, and stop mob gatherings, riotous speechmaking, and other such bad incentives which recently have been so conspicuous in Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and elsewhere. The laboring classes, who are parties to the strike, will now have an opportunity to retire to their homes, where there will be more safety than in the streets—which will bring to them reflection; they will then soon become satisfied that they are the aggrieved parties; and the not-unlikely result will be their turning upon the leaders who have deceived them.

Labor and Immigration

There have been numerous vacancies created by the strikers voluntarily resigning. There has been no difficulty in filling these vacancies by those that are equally capable, if not more so, from other countries flocking to our shores. The steam ferry which connects this country and Europe has demonstrated this by the steamer that arrived in six days and ten hours' time from European shores to our own. As the interval between the downtrodden and oppressed operatives of the Old World and America is thus reduced to hours, Europe will quickly send to us all the labor we need to meet the emergency. Mrs. Gray, the Third Avenue Railroad Company, and the Missouri Pacific are the generals that have won the victory. Strikes may have been justifiable in other nations but they are not justifiable in our country, and there is where the mistake was in organizing such a movement. The Almighty has made this country for the oppressed of other nations, and therefore this is the land of refuge for the oppressed, and the hand of the laboring man should not be raised against it.

The laboring man in this bounteous and hospitable country has no ground for complaint. His vote is potential and he is elevated thereby to the position of man. Elsewhere he is a creature of circumstance, which is that of abject depression. Under the gov-

ernment of this nation, the effort is to elevate the standard of the human race and not to degrade it. In all other nations it is the reverse. What, therefore, has the laborer to complain of in America? By inciting strikes and encouraging discontent, he stands in the way of the elevation of his race and of mankind.

The tide of emigration to this country, now so large, makes peaceful strikes perfectly harmless in themselves, because the places of those who vacate good situations are easily filled by the newcomers. When disturbances occur under the cloak of strikes, it is a different matter, as law and order are then set at defiance. The recent disturbances in Chicago, which resulted in the assassination of a number of valiant policemen through some cowardly Polish nihilist firing a bomb of dynamite in their midst, was the worst thing that could have been done for the cause of the present labor agitation, as it alienates all sympathy from them. It is much to the credit, however, of Americans and Irishmen that, during the recent uprising of the labor classes, none of them have taken part in any violent measures whatsoever, nor have they shown any sympathy with such a policy.

If the labor troubles are to be regarded as only a transient interruption of the course of events, it is next to be asked: What may be anticipated when those obstructions disappear? We have still our magnificent country, with all the resources that have made it so prosperous and so progressive beyond the record of all nations. There is no abatement of our past ratio of increase of population; no limitation of the new sources of wealth awaiting development; no diminution of the means necessary to the utilization of the unbounded riches of the soil, the mine, and the forest. Our inventive genius has suffered no eclipse. In the practical application of what may be called the commercial sciences, we retain our lead of the world. As pioneers of new sources of wealth, we are producing greater results than all the combined new colonizing efforts which have recently excited the ambitions of European governments. To the overcrowded populations of the Old World, the United States still presents attractions superior to those of any other country; as is evidenced by the recent sudden revival of emigration from Great Britain and the Continent to our shores.

VIEWPOINT 8B

Labor Unions Are Essential (1894)

Samuel Gompers (1850–1924)

One of America's most prominent labor leaders was Samuel Gompers, who cofounded the American Federation of Labor in 1886 and served as the AFL's

president almost continuously thereafter until his death. The following viewpoint is taken from an 1894 open letter by Gompers to Peter Grosscup, a judge in the U.S. District Court of Illinois. During a strike against the Pullman Company in 1894, Grosscup had presided over the indictment of American Railway Union president Eugene V. Debs for violating a court injunction against strikes (such injunctions were frequently used by the courts to stifle labor activities), and in his charge to the jury made the then-common argument that union organizing constituted an illegal conspiracy. Gompers in the viewpoint below defends the right and necessity of laborers to organize and bargain collectively.

How have changes in industrial technology affected the plight of laborers, according to Gompers? What might Gompers find most objectionable about the arguments of Henry Clews, author of the opposing viewpoint? Is Gompers for or against laissez-faire economics, given his comments on trusts? What role does Gompers see for the government in helping the working class?

You say that, as you stated in your charge to the grand jury, you believe in labor organizations within such lawful and reasonable limits as will make them a service to the laboring man and not a menace to the lawful institutions of the country. I have had the pleasure of reading your charge to the grand jury, and have only partially been able to discover how far you believe in labor organizations.

What Workers Can Discuss

You would certainly have no objection officially or personally to workmen organizing, and in their meetings discuss perhaps "the origin of man," benignly smiling upon each other and declaring that all existing things are right, going to their wretched homes to find some freedom in sleep from gnawing hunger. You would have them extol the virtues of monopolists and wreckers of the people's welfare. You would not have them consider seriously the fact that more than 2 million of their fellows are unemployed, and though willing and able, cannot find the opportunity to work in order that they may sustain themselves, their wives, and their children. You would not have them consider seriously the fact that [George] Pullman who has grown so rich from the toil of his workmen that he can riot in luxury, while he heartlessly turns these very workmen out of their tenements into the streets and leave to the tender mercies of corporate greed. Nor would you have them ponder upon the hundreds of other Pullmans

From a letter of Samuel Gompers, reprinted in the *American Federationist*, vol. 1., September 1894.

of different names.

You know, or ought to know, that the introduction of machinery is turning into idleness thousands faster than new industries are founded, and yet, machinery certainly should not be either destroyed or hampered in its full development. The laborer is a man, he is made warm by the same sun and made cold—yes, colder—by the same winter as you are. He has a heart and brain, and feels and knows the human and paternal instinct for those depending upon him as keenly as do you.

What shall the workers do? Sit idly by and see the vast resources of nature and the human mind be utilized and monopolized for the benefit of the comparative few? No. The laborers must learn to think and act, and soon, too, that only by the power of organization and common concert of action can either their manhood be maintained, their rights to life (work to sustain it) be recognized, and liberty and rights secured.

Since you say that you favor labor organizations within certain limits, will you kindly give to thousands of your anxious fellow citizens what you believe the workers could and should do in their organizations to solve this great problem? Not what they should not do. You have told us that.

The National Wealth

I am not one of those who regards the entire past as a failure. I recognize the progress made and the improved conditions of which nearly the entire civilized world are the beneficiaries. I ask you to explain, however, that if the wealth of the whole world is, as you say, "preeminently and beneficially the nation's wealth," how is it that thousands of able-bodied, willing, earnest men and women are suffering the pangs of hunger? We may boast of our wealth and civilization, but to the hungry man and woman and child our progress is a hollow mockery, our civilization a sham, and our "national wealth" a chimera.

You recognize that the industrial forces set in motion by steam and electricity have materially changed the structure of our civilization. You also admit that a system has grown up where the accumulations of the individual have passed from his control into that of representative combinations and trusts, and that the tendency in this direction is on the increase. How, then, can you consistently criticize the workingmen for recognizing that as individuals they can have no influence in deciding what the wages, hours of toil, and conditions of employment shall be?

You evidently have observed the growth of corporate wealth and influence. You recognize that wealth, in order to become more highly productive, is concentrated into fewer hands, and controlled by repre-

sentatives and directors, and yet you sing the old siren song that the workingman should depend entirely upon his own "individual effort."

The school of laissez-faire, of which you seem to be a pronounced advocate, has produced great men in advocating the theory of each for himself and his Satanic majesty taking the hindermost, but the most pronounced advocates of your school of thought in economics have, when practically put to the test, been compelled to admit that combination and organization of the toiling masses are essential both to prevent the deterioration and to secure an improvement in the condition of the wage earners.

If, as you say, the success of commercial society depends upon the full play of competition, why do not you and your confreres turn your attention and direct the shafts of your attacks against the trusts and corporations, business wreckers and manipulators in the food products—the necessities of the people. Why garland your thoughts in beautiful phrase when speaking of these modern vampires, and steep your pen in gall when writing of the laborers' efforts to secure some of the advantages accruing from the concentrated thought and genius of the ages? . . .

Progress and Poverty

One becomes enraptured in reading the beauty of your description of modern progress. Could you have had in mind the miners of Spring Valley or Pennsylvania, or the clothing workers of the sweatshops of New York or Chicago when you grandiloquently dilate,

Who is not rich today when compared with his ancestors of a century ago? The steamboat and the railroad bring to his breakfast table the coffees of Java and Brazil, the fruits from Florida and California, and the steaks from the plains. The loom arrays him in garments and the factories furnish him with a dwelling that the richest contemporaries of his grandfather would have envied. With health and industry he is a prince.

Probably you have not read within the past year of babes dying of starvation at their mothers' breasts. More than likely the thousands of men lying upon the bare stones night after night in the City Hall of Chicago last winter escaped your notice. You may not have heard of the cry for bread that was sounded through this land of plenty by thousands of honest men and women. But should these and many other painful incidents have passed you by unnoticed, I am fearful that you may learn of them with keener thoughts with the coming sleets and blasts of winter.

You say that "labor cannot afford to attack capital." Let me remind you that labor has no quarrel with capital, as such. It is merely the possessors of capital who refuse to accord to labor the recognition, the

right, the justice which is the laborers' due with whom we contend.

See what is implied by your contemptuous reference to the laborer when you ask, "Will the conqueror destroy his trophy?" Who ever heard of a conqueror marching unitedly with his *trophy*, as you would have them? But if by your comparison you mean that the conqueror is the corporation, the trust, the capitalist class, and ask then whether they would destroy their *trophy*, I would have you ask the widows and orphans of the thousands of men killed annually through the avarice of railroad corporations refusing to avail themselves of modern appliances in coupling and other improvements on their railroads.

Inquire from the thousands of women and children whose husbands or fathers were suffocated or crushed in the mines through the rapacious greed of stockholders clamoring for more dividends. Investigate the sweating dens of the large cities. Go to the mills, factories, through the country. Visit the modern tenement houses or hovels in which thousands of workers are compelled to eke out an existence. Ask these whether the conqueror (monopoly) cares whether his trophy (the laborers) is destroyed or preserved. Ascertain from employers whether the laborer is not regarded the same as a machine, thrown out as soon as all the work possible has been squeezed out of him.

Labor Legislation

Are you aware that all the legislation ever secured for the ventilation or safety of mines, factory, or workshop is the result of the efforts of organized labor? Do you know that the trade unions were the shield for the seven-year-old children from being the conqueror's trophy until they become somewhat older? And that the reformatory laws now on the statute books protecting or defending the trophies of both sexes, young and old from the fond care of the conquerors were wrested from congresses, legislatures, and parliaments despite the Pullmans, the Jeffries, the Ricks, the Tafts, the Williams, the Woods, or the Grosscups.

By what right, sir, do you assume that the labor organizations do not conduct their affairs within lawful limits, or that they are a menace to the lawful institutions of the country? Is it because some thoughtless or overzealous member at a time of great excitement and smarting under a wrong may violate under a law or commit an improper act? Would you apply the same rule to the churches, the other moral agencies and organizations that you do to the organizations of labor? If you did, the greatest moral force of life today, the trade unions, would certainly stand out the clearest, brightest, and purest. Because a certain class (for which you and a number of your col-

leagues on the bench seem to be the special pleaders) have a monopoly in their lines of trade, I submit that this is no good reason for their claim to have a monopoly on true patriotism or respect for the lawful institutions of the country.

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*"The labor movement as represented
by the trades unions stands for right,
for justice, for liberty."*

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But speaking of law reminds me of the higher law of the land. The Constitution prescribes that all rights not specifically granted to the general government are reserved to the states. There is another provision prohibiting the President from sending armed forces into any state except for the purpose of maintaining "a republican form of government," and then only upon the requisition of the legislature of the state, or of the governor when the legislature is not in session. Yet when, during the recent [1894 Pullman] railroad strike, the President [Grover Cleveland] sent the troops into Illinois, it was not in compliance with the request of the legislature of that state, nor of the governor, but in spite of his protest. Yes, even when the governor remonstrated he was practically told by the President to stop arguing the law upon the question. Pardon the simplicity of my inquiry, but does not the law require that its limits shall be observed by a president, a judge, equally as by a labor organization?

The Interstate Commerce Law

If I remember aright you based the injunctions recently issued by you upon the provisions of the [1887] Interstate Commerce Law, a law enacted by Congress upon the demand of the farmers and shippers of our country to protect them against the unjust and outrageous discriminations imposed by the railroads. Where in the law can you find one word to justify your course applying to workmen organized and engaged in a strike?

Read the discussions in Congress when that law was under consideration. You will not find a remote reference to the application of the laws as you construe it. In fact, I am informed upon excellent authority that when the law was before the Senate in the form of a bill, Senator Morgan, of Alabama, proposed an amendment which, if adopted, would have had the effect of empowering judges to issue an order of the nature you have in the recent railroad strike; but it was not adopted; it was defeated. How then in the face of this you can issue your omnibus

restraining order passes the comprehension of ordinary men. . . .

Year by year man's liberties are trampled underfoot at the bidding of corporations and trusts, rights are invaded, and law perverted. In all ages, wherever a tyrant has shown himself, he has always found some willing judge to clothe that tyranny in the robes of legality, and modern capitalism has proven no exception to the rule.

You may not know that the labor movement as represented by the trades unions stands for right, for justice, for liberty. You may not imagine that the issuance of an injunction depriving men of a legal as well as a natural right to protect themselves, their wives, and little ones must fail of its purpose. Repression or oppression never yet succeeded in crushing the truth or redressing a wrong.

In conclusion let me assure you that labor will organize and more compactly than ever and upon practical lines; and despite relentless antagonism, achieve for humanity a nobler manhood, a more beautiful womanhood, and a happier childhood.

For Further Reading

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VIEWPOINT 9A

A New Industrial South of Racial Harmony Is Rising (1887)

Henry W. Grady (1850-1889)

Henry W. Grady was editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* in Georgia and a noted public speaker. He gained nationwide attention as a spokesman for the "New South," a term he helped popularize in the United States in a famous 1886 address in New York. Grady and members of his generation of southern leaders envisioned a post-Reconstruction South reconciled to the Union, devoted to white supremacy, and diversified in its economy beyond growing a few staple crops such as cotton. In the following viewpoint, taken from a speech made at a Texas state fair in Dallas on October 26, 1887, Grady summarizes

From Joel Chandler Harris, *Life of Henry W. Grady, Including His Writings and Speeches* (New York: Cassell Publishing, 1890).

his views on race, industry, and the future of the South.

How does Grady contrast the situation of blacks before and after the end of slavery? Why must whites maintain political supremacy over blacks, in his view? Does Grady make any links between the two problems of race relations and economic development in the South? What evidence does he provide for his optimistic outlook on the South's economic future?

I shall be pardoned for . . . adhering to-day to blunt and rigorous speech—for there are times when fine words are paltry, and this seems to me to be such a time. So I shall turn away from the thunders of the political battle upon which every American hangs intent, and repress the ardor that at this time rises in every American heart—for there are issues that strike deeper than any political theory has reached, and conditions of which partisanry has taken, and can take, but little account. Let me, therefore, with studied plainness, and with such precision as is possible—in a spirit of fraternity that is broader than party limitations, and deeper than political motive—discuss with you certain problems upon the wise and prompt solution of which depends the glory and prosperity of the South. . . .

The future holds a problem, in solving which the South must stand alone; in dealing with which, she must come closer together than ambition or despair have driven her, and on the outcome of which her very existence depends. This problem is to carry within her body politic two separate races, and nearly equal in numbers. . . .

What shall the South do to be saved? Through what paths shall she reach the end? Through what travail, or what splendors, shall she give to the Union this section, its wealth garnered, its resources utilized, and its rehabilitation complete—and restore to the world this problem solved in such justice as the finite mind can measure, or finite hands administer?

In dealing with this I shall dwell on two points.

First, the duty of the South in its relation to the race problem.

Second, the duty of the South in relation to its no less unique and important industrial problem. . . .

Views on Former Slaves

What of the negro? This of him. I want no better friend than the black boy who was raised by my side, and who is now trudging patiently with downcast eyes and shambling figure through his lowly way in life. I want no sweeter music than the crooning of my old "mammy," now dead and gone to rest, as I heard it when she held me in her loving arms, and bending