Power in Numbers

How labor organizations pursued change

IS.1.11 "Describe the growth of unions and the labor movement and evaluate various approaches and methods used by different labor leaders and organizations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one method each organization used, circle one of its goals, and write a + beside a strength and a ? beside a limit of its approach.

Three Paths for Workers

1. In 1880, a railroad worker might have had little power to challenge a wage cut alone. As factories and railroads expanded, workers joined unions to bargain together. The Knights of Labor grew rapidly in the 1880s by inviting both skilled and unskilled workers, including many women and Black workers, into local assemblies. They called for an eight-hour day and worker-owned businesses, and they used petitions, boycotts, and strikes. Their broad reach gave more people a voice, but employers resisted. After a failed railroad strike in 1886 and public fear following the unrelated Haymarket bombing, the Knights lost members.

2. The American Federation of Labor (AFL), founded in 1886, took a narrower route. Its leader Samuel Gompers organized skilled workers by trade, such as carpenters and printers, into separate unions. Rather than seek a new economic system, the AFL focused on higher wages, shorter hours, and safer workplaces. Its unions collected dues, negotiated contracts, and used strikes when talks failed. Skilled members could withhold labor that employers had trouble replacing, which strengthened their bargaining position. Yet many AFL affiliates excluded unskilled workers, women, and Black workers. By 1904, the federation claimed about 1.7 million members, but its gains reached unevenly across the workforce.

3. In 1905, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) proposed organizing all workers in an industry together, regardless of skill, gender, or race. It aimed to replace the wage system, not just improve a contract. During the 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile strike, IWW organizers brought workers who spoke many languages into mass meetings and public marches. Their strike and the attention it drew helped win pay raises. This approach could unite workers whom craft unions overlooked, but employers and officials often attacked the IWW, and its loose organization made it difficult to maintain long-term bargaining power after a strike.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Knights of Labor's membership approach help workers, and what made the group's growth hard to sustain?

2. Why could the AFL's trade unions bargain effectively, and which workers did many affiliates leave out?

3. How did the IWW's methods help workers win raises in Lawrence, and what limited the organization's power after a strike?

4. How did the AFL's goal differ from the IWW's goal? Give one method each used to pursue its goal.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine that skilled mechanics and unskilled immigrant stitchers at a shoe factory face a wage cut. In four or five sentences, propose a strategy using methods from two organizations in the passage, explain why it fits these workers, and identify one likely obstacle.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one method each organization used, circle one of its goals, and write a + beside a strength and a ? beside a limit of its approach. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Knights of Labor's membership approach help workers, and what made the group's growth hard to sustain?	**Its broad membership gave skilled and unskilled workers a voice. Employer resistance, a failed railroad strike, and public fear after Haymarket contributed to its decline.**
2	Why could the AFL's trade unions bargain effectively, and which workers did many affiliates leave out?	**Skilled members could withhold labor that was hard to replace. Many affiliates excluded unskilled workers, women, and Black workers.**
3	How did the IWW's methods help workers win raises in Lawrence, and what limited the organization's power after a strike?	**It united workers across languages through mass meetings and marches, drawing attention to their strike. Attacks by employers and officials and loose organization made lasting bargaining power difficult.**
4	How did the AFL's goal differ from the IWW's goal? Give one method each used to pursue its goal.	**The AFL sought improvements such as higher wages through contract negotiations. The IWW sought to replace the wage system and organized workers across an industry.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would organize mechanics and stitchers in one union, as the IWW tried to do, so the wage cut becomes a shared issue. I would also collect dues and negotiate a contract, as AFL unions did. Both groups could strike if talks failed, making it harder for the factory to keep working. Employer resistance would be an obstacle, so the workers would need to stay organized.

Accept other evidence-based comparisons and strategies. For the open task, look for two distinct methods from the passage, a reason they fit the mixed workforce, and a plausible obstacle.