

POSTWAR CONFIDENCE AND ANXIETY

Viewpoints

After World War II, workers across the country went on strike to demand higher pay. Congress responded by passing the Labor-Management Relations Act, also known as the Taft-Hartley Act, to limit the power of labor unions. The law empowered the government to stop labor strikes in the interest of national security and outlawed strikes not organized by labor unions. President Harry S. Truman, a Democrat, vetoed the Taft-Hartley bill in 1947. Senator Robert A. Taft, a Republican, co-sponsored the bill, which passed over Truman's veto. ♦ *As you read the following excerpts, consider how the two opinions differ on the power of employers and employees. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

The Taft-Hartley Act
**Speech on Vetoing the
Taft-Hartley Bill, June 20, 1947,
by Harry S. Truman**

We have all been told that the Taft-Hartley bill is favorable to the wage earners of this country. It has been claimed that workers need to be saved from their own folly and that this bill would provide the means of salvation. Some people have called this bill the "workers' bill of rights." Let us see what this bill really would do to our workingmen. The bill is deliberately designed to weaken labor unions. When the sponsors of the bill claim that by weakening unions, they are giving rights back to individual workingmen, they ignore the basic reason why unions are important in our democracy. Unions exist so that laboring men can bargain with their employers on a basis of equality. Because of unions, the living standards of our working people have increased steadily until they are today the highest in the world.

Source: Available online at http://millercenter.virginia.edu/scripps/digilibrary/prezspeeches/truman/hst_1947_0620.html.

**Foreword to *Our New National
Labor Policy: The Taft-Hartley
Act and the Next Steps*, 1948, by
Robert A. Taft**

Originally the employer had had all of the advantages over his employees. . . . This unfair situation resulted in the enactment of the Clayton Act, the Norris-LaGuardia Act, and the Wagner Act. These laws, together with the consistently pro-labor attitude of the Executive, pro-labor interpretations, and pro-labor administration, more than [adjusted] the balance, so that by 1946 employers, except for the largest concerns, were practically at the mercy of labor unions. As a practical matter, no legal remedy remained to the employer, the public, or even to the individual labor union member, against the acts of labor union leaders. . . . The Taft-Hartley Law was an attempt to restore some equality between employer and employee. . . .

Source: *Our New National Labor Policy: The Taft-Hartley Act and the Next Steps* by A. Fred Hartley, Jr. (1948: Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York.) Available online at <http://questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=72116353>.

Questions to Think About

1. According to Truman, why do unions exist?
2. According to Taft, what had happened by 1946?
3. **Detect Points of View** Why does Truman oppose the Taft-Hartley Act? Why does Taft support it?