

the movement for an independent political party to destroy the "money power." Besides, with the decline of the labor unions many workers turned to politics for relief. Gompers was inclined to support the greenback movement, especially since the decision of the government to redeem its bonds in gold seemed to indicate that it had "entered into an unholy alliance with the goldbugs who to us represented the unscrupulous Wall Street exploiters."

In 1876 Gompers voted for Peter Cooper, the presidential candidate of the Greenback party, but the workingmen generally did not respond to the Greenback appeal. The *National Labor Tribune*, which had predicted a revolution in the labor vote, found the results of the election "sickening." After the election, Gompers urged the workers to forget politics for the time and concentrate on the organization of the workers into unions, where they would learn by experience to wean themselves from their enemies, both political and economic.¹

But the strikes of 1877 and the brutality with which they were crushed produced a determination in the labor movement to elect officials who would defend the workers' rights. Independent workingmen's parties began to spring up in every important city. These parties soon formed an alliance with the Greenbackers, and early in 1878 the National Greenback-Labor party was launched. Blaming the depression on legislative dictation by the moneylenders, bankers, and bondholders, the party's platform emphasized currency reform, but also demanded legislation to reduce the hours of labor, the establishment of state bureaus of labor statistics, the prohibition of convict contract labor, and an end to the importation of "servile labor." The party made considerable gains in the congressional elections of 1878, but the Labor-Greenback alliance already showed signs of falling apart. By 1880, it was almost exclusively an agrarian party, but Gompers voted for its presidential candidate, General James B. Weaver. In 1884 he again cast a protest vote for the Greenback party.²

While he was an independent voter himself, he opposed efforts to commit the trade unions to the support of any political party. In 1877, the Cigarmakers International Union narrowly defeated a resolution to support the Workingmen's party, which was tabled on Gompers' motion. But it did endorse the platform of that party, with Gompers casting one of the two negative votes

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Two years later he presented a resolution to the cigarmakers' convention, which was adopted, that declared it "both injudicious and detrimental to the best interests and welfare of the organization for any union as such to contract political affiliations. And for these reasons no union under the jurisdiction of the International Union shall be permitted to aid, co-operate or identify itself with any political party whatsoever."³

In the spring of 1886, the Carl Sahm Musical Club placed a boycott on the Theiss dance hall in New York. Several pickets were arrested and sent to prison as felons. One of the men was George Harris, who had worked at the bench with Gompers as a cigarmakers' apprentice in London and later became a vice-president of the A.F. of L. At a conference held on the last day of the trial, delegates from the cigarmakers', bartenders', and waiters' unions, the Carl Sahm Club, and the Socialist Labor party decided to call a protest meeting on July 7 in Cooper Union. John Morrison presided over the meeting, which was addressed by Gompers, George Swinton, and S. E. Schevitsch, editor of the socialist *New Yorker Volkszeitung*. There was strong sentiment for political action to prevent the recurrence of such indictments, which threatened the legality of the trade unions. At the next meeting of the central labor union, a resolution presented by the socialists was passed, calling for a conference on August 5 of all labor and reform organizations.

Four hundred and two delegates representing 165 organizations with 50,000 members attended the conference. The Independent Labor party was established, a platform consisting almost entirely of labor planks was presented, and Henry George was asked to be its candidate for mayor of New York. George was a former seaman, printer, and editor whose experiences and observations in the West had led him to the conclusion that the capitalist class derived its wealth and power and maintained its exploitation of the propertyless classes from its monopoly on land and the unearned increment from it. In his book, *Progress and Poverty*, he described how, with the advance of civilization, the masses were becoming impoverished by the tightening of monopoly control. He offered as a panacea for the ills of society the single tax on land, which would break the monopoly on land-holding and open the doors of economic advancement for all. While his eco-

conomic analysis may have been faulty and his conclusions inadequate, in terms of his millennial expectations, he opened the eyes of hundreds of thousands to the facts of exploitation and monopoly, and his program appealed to those who looked to political action as the only means of wresting control of the government from the plutocrats.

George did not accept the platform which had been presented at the labor conference, but wrote his own. The labor demands were compressed into one plank, which included the abolition of property qualifications for jurors, stopping police interference with peaceful assembly, enforcement of the laws for safety and the sanitary inspection of buildings, abolition of contract labor on public works, and equal pay for women on such work. Other planks proposed government ownership of the railroads and telegraph and denounced political corruption. The single tax was made the main issue.⁴

Gompers was not enthusiastic about the campaign. He retained his old objections to labor's participation in politics, recalling some of the unsuccessful ventures of the past. Swinton advised him to forget the past: "The world is whirling. . . . Today is not yesterday and tomorrow will be different from both." But Gompers was more inclined to be guided by his experience than by the promises of a better tomorrow. Also, Gompers did not look kindly on the single tax theory, for its acceptance by labor would necessarily imply a lesser need for trade union activity to solve the problems of the workingmen. While the socialists did not agree with the single tax theory either, they considered it a step toward socialism in the thinking of the people, and the George campaign was regarded as a means of uniting labor in an independent political movement which might lead to greater things. The campaign aroused great enthusiasm in the ranks of labor, and Gompers was practically forced to support it. An executive board of trade unionists was appointed to mobilize the support of the labor movement, and on it Gompers was put in charge of the speakers bureau.

Opposing George were Theodore Roosevelt, the young Republican candidate, who told the workers that the solution for their problems lay in individual self-help; and Abram Hewitt, the Democratic candidate, who stated that the issue of the election

was the attempt to organize the laboring class against all others.

In September, Gompers went to Syracuse to attend the meeting of the Political Branch of the State Workingmen's Assembly, of which he was also president, as the delegate of the Defiance Assembly. Interest centered around two problems—repeal of that part of the penal code under which the Theiss boycotters had been convicted, and full labor participation in the coming election. Gompers was chairman of the committee on resolutions which reported favorably on both questions. A committee of five, including Gompers, was appointed to call on Governor David B. Hill to pardon the imprisoned boycotters, a mission in which they were successful. The convention also endorsed the candidacy of Henry George and appointed an executive committee—on which Gompers served—to conduct labor's campaign for George and for a pro-labor legislature.

Henry George clubs were organized in every precinct, and all the clubs in a district comprised a Henry George legion to conduct meetings and demonstrations. Gompers was secretary of the city organization of the legions. He spoke to labor meetings daily and sometimes several times a day—at noon shop meetings, after union meetings, and in the evenings. He centered his fire against Hewitt, always emphasizing trade union issues and interests. In a great rally which he organized on the Saturday before election day, he answered Hewitt's charges that the George campaign was a class movement and dangerous to the city, and warned Hewitt that his attacks would merely widen the schism between the classes and drive the workers from constitutional and legal methods to others less constitutional.

The election returns showed 91,000 for Hewitt, 68,000 for George, and 61,000 for Roosevelt. Since the usual Republican vote was 75-80,000, it was apparent that many Republicans had voted for Hewitt in order to secure the defeat of George. It was widely believed that the regular party henchmen had stolen many of his votes, for he had few watchers at the polls and no influence with the police and election officials. One of the local Republican leaders who watched the campaign stated just before he died that he had always felt that George had really won the election.⁵

The results of the election in New York and elsewhere were very encouraging to those who wanted to establish a labor party