to Jean Baptiste Say, "There are few masters but what could exist several months or even years, without employing a single labourer, and few labourers that can remain out of work for many weeks, without being reduced to the extremity of distress." Surely, few American corporations could suffer a strike of several months or even years without jeopardizing their economic survival. And few French companies could have suffered through lengthy shutdowns in 1803 when J. B. Say wrote these lines. They, too, had to pay taxes, interest on loans, and high overhead costs regardless of operation and output. They, too, suffered grievously through time wasted, income lost and opportunities forgone.

The classical economists never were "masters" meeting payrolls and interest payments, facing deadlines for tax payments to various government authorities, or suffering frightening losses from sudden changes in market conditions. They probably never confronted labor unions that meant to inflict maximum harm on the owners. The great writers were academicians motivated by genuine sympathy and empathy and guided by deep feelings of good will for the poor.

Inapt Reverence for the Past

In all matters of labor relations public feeling is apt to side with the laborers. Their poverty, presumed or real, is like a badge of courtesy to which the public readily pays homage or at least demonstrates respect. Most economists who are mindful of public opinion are quick to render honor to labor combinations. In want of a labor union rationale, but guided by considerations of courtesy and public opinion, they may dwell on the history of labor and make much of the distant past.

Francis A. Walker was one of the first to question the present and salute the past. He added a thought to the intellectual armory of unionism that continues to haunt us even today, more than one hundred years later. No longer finding any ground "for expecting any benefit to the wages class" from labor combinations, he raised the questions of "when these should be put away as an outgrown thing." In short, he suggested that labor unions may have lost their justification in the present (1876), but that they were most useful in the past. He bestowed honor and prestige on labor unions by imputing a virtuous and glorious past.

Economics as a theoretical science elaborates eternal, inexorable principles of human action. It deals with the means man must apply in order to achieve attainable ends. History is but a register of human efforts and blunders which cannot confirm, refute, add to or subtract from economic knowledge. It cannot uncover

benefits of labor combination in the present or the past if economics finds "no benefits to the wages class." History cannot reveal benefits to all workers if economics demonstrates convincingly that union tactics cause unemployment. Historians should not proclaim the benefits of labor combination and collective force if economists can show that such force not only reduces economic output and thereby hurts consumers, but also inflicts serious harm on unemployed workers.

The unhampered market order allocates to every member the undiminished fruits of his labor. It does so in all ages and societies where individual freedom and private property are safeguarded. It did so 2,000 years ago in Rome, in eighteenth-century England, and in nineteenth-century America. The reason our forefathers earned $5 a week for 60 hours of labor must be sought in their low productivity, not in the absence of labor unions. The $5 they earned constituted full and fair payment for their productive efforts. The economic principles of the free market, the competition among employers, man's mobility and freedom of choice, assured full wages under the given production conditions.

Wages were low and working conditions primitive because labor productivity was low, machines and tools were primitive, technology and production methods were crude when compared with today's. If, for any reason, our productivity were to sink back to that of our forebears, our wages, too, would decline to their levels and our work week would lengthen again no matter what the activities of labor unions or the decrees of government.

Most historians are not economists who elaborate the inexorable principles of human action. They like to portray the Industrial Revolution as a disaster that brought untold misery to the working classes. They hail progressive governments and courageous labor unions for having offered relief to the suffering masses. To them the coercive power of both government and labor union is a necessary instrument for balancing the economic powers of the masters. To economists such an interpretation of history is deficient in basic economic knowledge. They view the Industrial Revolution and the phenomenal improvements of labor conditions and income as a great achievement of economic freedom. It set people free to apply science to industry, and to form and use capital in economic production.[10] The rise of unionism during the past two centuries is seen as the result of fallacious economic doctrines about laborers' disadvantage. Labor unions are the bitter fruit of erroneous theory, with a record of abuse far more grievous than the alleged evils the unions were supposed to rectify.[11]