

## Student Handout: Advocates for and Against Prohibition

- **Woman's Christian Temperance Union** evolved from the traditional temperance movement, which originally believed only distilled spirits were the problem and advocated moderation and abstinence. In the past, the group focused its efforts locally with public demonstrations in front of saloons. One temperance advocate, Carry Nation, went so far as to take an ax to smash saloons in Kansas. Gradually, as the beer industry grew, the Union turned against all forms of alcohol and focused their efforts from local demonstrations to a national organization involved in many aspects of reform. They believe prohibiting alcohol in America will help women fight for their families, their homes, and their children. They accused the brewers' associations of trying to keep women as second class citizens and deny them the right to vote. They believe that education and devotion to God will do better to rid the country of the tyranny of drinking than any law because people will just ignore the law.
- **Civil Libertarians** warn of the dangers of trying to legislate morality and having too much government in people's personal lives. They feel that a prohibition amendment would lead to a loss in liberty and make people more dependent on government. They don't want tax-payer money going to enforce a law against people's personal choice. They feel people are intelligent and strong enough to handle their own problems and don't think it's the government's business what people drink or how much. They support efforts like the Washington Society with a voluntary system for addressing people's problems with alcohol.
- **Progressive Reformers** point to the fact that over half the population now live in the cities and the people living there are in trouble. Progressives point out that people in the cities don't have the traditional support systems of extended family and religion that they once had in the rural areas. They feel many city-dwellers are defenseless against ravages of industrialized society and political corruption. They identify the saloon as the headquarters of these two corrosive forces. They feel alcohol is ruining the lives of the working class and the poor and that government must step in with laws to prohibit its manufacture and sale and programs to help people overcome its dangerous effects.
- **Industrialists and Union Organizers** support some form of Prohibition but for different reasons. The richest industrialists in the country – including Andrew Carnegie and Henry Ford -- back Prohibition because they believed alcohol undercuts the output of their workers. They cite incidences where workers have come drunk to work, or miss work due to being too hung over. They point out that workers will spend all their paycheck at the saloon and then turn around and demand higher wages.

Many union organizers also support prohibition. They see how excessive use of alcohol has made workers weak against the oppression of factory owners and industrialists. Some union groups, including the radical Industrial Workers of the World believe alcohol is part of a capitalist plot to weaken the workingman.

- **Anti-Saloon League** is focused on the singular goal of getting rid of alcohol. They see America at war between the “rum shops” (the saloons) and the moral fiber of the nation and only one can win. They have taken this battle all the way to the halls of Congress, strongly supporting those who agree with their cause and working hard against those who don’t. The League condemns the growing influence of the saloon and criticizes the beer industry’s business model of fronting saloon businesses all across the country. This group believes local efforts to instill prohibition are ineffective because people will just go to the next town to get their alcohol. They believe that a national prohibition law is the best way to defeat the evil drink.
  
- **Brewers’ and Distillers’ Industry** explained how alcohol is part of the American culture and that the problems with alcohol are more the result of an individual’s personal problems and not the fault of their products. They point out that the neighborhood saloon has served as an integral part of the community, providing entertainment, a place for socializing and making business connections, and for many of the working class, a home away from home. Members of the alcohol industry make the point that their business is just as legitimate as any other industry in America and deserves to exist. The alcohol industry employs thousands of workers all across the country and pays millions of dollars in taxes. To make it illegal would greatly affect the economic well being of many Americans