

TECHMUNC 2025

# INDUSTRY LEADERS: 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY CRISIS BACKGROUND GUIDE



## **Letters from the Dias**

### **Co Chair: Betty Ince**

Hello delegates!

Welcome to TechMUNC 2026! My name is Betty Ince, and I will be your co-chair for this conference. I am a senior at Brooklyn Tech, and it is my fourth year on the BTHS Model UN team. I am delighted to be heading up this conference for all of you. For the past four years, Model UN has been the highlight of many weekends. I have made friends across the city, explored global issues, practiced public speaking, and discovered my passion for international relations. This committee is a historically based crisis conference. I hope you will all explore the perspectives that your delegations have to offer and take full advantage of the crisis nature of the committee. Our team has worked diligently to make this guide, and I am excited to see where you take it next. Please contact me if you have any questions, concerns, or need advice at [bettyi3@nycstudents.net](mailto:bettyi3@nycstudents.net). Good luck with your preparations, and I'm looking forward to seeing you at the conference!

- Betty Ince

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### **Co Chair: Valentina Arkin**

Hi Delegates! My name is Valentina Arkin, and I will be your co-chair for this conference. I am a senior at Brooklyn Tech, and this is my 3rd year in Model UN. I am incredibly excited to be a part of this conference! Throughout my time in MUN, I have met people from not only the entire city, but all over the world. I have improved my

research skills, my public speaking, and made lifelong memories. I have also delved into many different international topics, and expanded my knowledge of current events. The historical topic for this committee is very interesting, and I hope you all enjoy it. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me at [Valentinaa104@nycstudents.net](mailto:Valentinaa104@nycstudents.net) .

Good luck, and I look forward to meeting all of you!

- Valentina Arkin

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### **Rapporteur: Ava Dobran**

Hi delegates!

Welcome to TechMUNC 2026! My name is Ava Dobran, and I am thrilled to be serving as your rapporteur for this committee. I am currently a senior at Brooklyn Tech, and this is my second year participating in Model UN. Over the years, MUN has pushed me to think critically, collaborate creatively, and engage with complex global issues in ways I never expected. It has also allowed me to meet so many incredible people, delegates who challenge, inspire, and motivate me at every conference. This committee's historical focus offers an exciting opportunity to dive into the past, understand the forces that shaped our world, and consider how different decisions might have changed everything. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or need clarification as you prepare; I'm always happy to help!

- Ava Dobran

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## **Head of Backrooms: Roscoe Baram**

Dear Delegates,

Thank you so much for coming to TechMUNC 2026! My name is Roscoe Baram and I'll be the head of backrooms for this conference. As a senior at Brooklyn Tech, this is my 3rd year in Model UN, and through my time in this organization, I've spent time building my teamworking skills, public speaking skills, and much more. I truly believe that MUN can grow so many important skills and can be such a useful resource in life. I'm incredibly excited to be a part of this upcoming conference and I hope that you will have a fun, educational, and memorable experience!

- Roscoe Baram

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# **Introduction**

This committee is a historically based crisis committee, on the period of **rapid industrialization** In the 1900s, with the goal of discussing financial and legal accountability. Private industry was not controlled in America, with the government adopting a Laissez faire style. This period saw major Industrial expansion. **Advances in Steel, Oil, rail, shipping, and Finance** led to this economic growth. **The Laissez Faire style of governance** also led to the period being marked by an unprecedented **concentration of private power**. Industrial leaders had as much influence on the economies as the government did, with monopolies growing under people such as **John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and Henry Ford**. These changes exposed the weak and lacking regulation. Allegations of exploitation, bribery, and manipulation were uncovered by **Muckrackers**(investigative journalists). This was followed by strikes, unions, and calls for legislation.

In this committee, delegates will explore the ways in which governments, labor movements, and monopolies struggled to define the limits of industrial power in a world undergoing rapid change. The goal is to understand how early efforts at antitrust enforcement and labor protection emerged. This means delegates must balance economic stability with justice, national interest with global accountability, and innovation with the rule of law in an era where the rules had only just begun to be written.

# **Topic History**

The Gilded Age (1870s–1900) and the early Progressive Era (1900–1917) marked a time of incredible change in America. With rapid industrialization, a growing population, and a hands-off approach to the economy, this era was both thrilling and challenging. The belief in laissez-faire economics meant that the government largely stayed out of business, letting industries flourish with minimal interference. While this attitude helped create remarkable economic growth, it also brought significant social issues to the forefront.

After the Civil War, many Americans including political leaders and business moguls thought that individual effort, rather than government assistance, was the key to success. Consequently, the federal and local governments didn't step in to regulate monopolies or establish labor protections. Instead, they promoted industrial expansion through tax incentives and favorable laws, encouraging entrepreneurs to take risks and chase opportunities.

Between 1880 and 1910, the pace of industrial growth was astonishing. New technologies, like the Bessemer steel process and electric power, transformed how goods were produced and communications were handled. Railroads emerged as the dominant industry, connecting distant markets and allowing people to travel and trade like never before. The nation's population swelled as well, fueled by high birth rates and waves of immigrants from Europe and Asia seeking a better life. These newcomers provided the

labor needed for factories and also spurred urban expansion as cities grew to accommodate the influx of workers.

As industries grew, so did the size and power of corporations. Figures like John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie built vast empires that dominated sectors like oil and steel. Rockefeller's Standard Oil controlled an astonishing 90 percent of the nation's oil refining at its zenith, while Carnegie's steel shaped the very infrastructure of America. This era saw companies consolidate into trusts, effectively cooperating to control prices and squash competition. With minimal government oversight, monopolies were able to flourish unchecked.

Yet the same environment that fueled this economic boom also brought serious issues. Many workers, often recent immigrants, faced brutal working conditions. Factories were hazardous, with long hours and meager pay, and there was little recourse for injury or exploitation. Urban housing was often cramped, unsanitary, and unsafe. Meanwhile, wealth inequality soared; a small number of individuals amassed incredible fortunes while countless others lived in poverty.

The overwhelming influence of corporate interests often led to political corruption, as wealthy business leaders wielded their power to shape laws and sway elections to their advantage. Because of these growing problems, a clamor for reform began to emerge. Journalists known as "muckrakers" took on the crucial role of revealing the harsh realities of industrial life, highlighting unsafe workplaces and the struggles of the poor. Meanwhile, labor unions organized strikes and protests, fighting

for fair treatment, safer conditions, and better pay. Figures like Jane Addams, Ida Tarbell, and Upton Sinclair energized the push for reforms, advocating for government involvement to remedy the detrimental effects of unregulated industrial growth.

Faced with mounting public pressure, the federal government gradually began to shift from a strict laissez-faire stance toward more proactive regulation. The Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 was one of the first attempts to curb monopolistic practices, although it took some time for it to be effectively enforced. President Theodore Roosevelt, known for his aggressive antitrust stance, expanded federal authority, championing inspections of food and drug production and overseeing railroad regulation through the Interstate Commerce Commission. He also made strides in conservation, acknowledging the need to protect natural resources. The Progressive Era brought about additional reforms, including laws against child labor, new workplace safety regulations, and the establishment of the Federal Trade Commission.



## **Current Situation**

During the committee, the United States is experiencing rapid industrial growth, but that growth has concentrated power in a small group of business leaders controlling the railroad, oil, steel, banking, and manufacturing industries. They control pricing, transportation networks, and labor markets. This had raised concerns about monopolies and how to enforce antitrust laws. The Sherman Act, though having become the law with the hope of making sure economic competition and preventing monopoly, court decisions are inconsistent and many companies still operate as trusts through holding companies, secret agreements. These monopolies continued to practice vertical and horizontal integration, furthering their power.

Meanwhile, Business leaders wield a great deal of political power. Through practices such as bribery, Campaign funding, insider connections, and fraudulence with the aid of Tammany Hall, legislation and decisions on regulation are being influenced. The public begins to lose faith in the government's power to act independently, as investigations into corporate wrongdoing are slow to materialize and often inconclusive.

Labor unrest intensifies as workers resist long hours, unsafe conditions, and minimal wages. Unions and major strikes have exposed gaps in federal authority over labor rights and workplace safety. Corporate resistance to unionization has created debate on what the government's responsibility is for protecting workers' rights.

Together, these pressures have led to a decrease in public trust. The growing frustration creates a need for stronger laws and enforcement through a federal system that can rein in industry leaders without destabilizing the nation's economy. The people

have watched the effects of this through tragedy such as the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, and are now calling for serious change.

Delegates need to decide what reforms are called for and to what extent the government should directly challenge some of the most powerful men in American history.

# Delegate Positions

## Industrialists & Financiers

**Andrew Carnegie:** Carnegie was a Scottish-American immigrant who rose to dominate the steel industry, building one of the largest industrial empires in the world. He became one of the richest men of his era and later devoted much of his fortune to philanthropy, funding libraries and education. While he believed in the moral duty of the wealthy to give back, he resisted government interference in business, preferring voluntary reform through philanthropy rather than regulation. His stance on industry reform was paternalistic, emphasizing charity rather than structural change.

**John D. Rockefeller:** Rockefeller founded Standard Oil and became the wealthiest man in America, pioneering the modern corporation and monopolistic practices. He consolidated oil refining into a near-total monopoly, which drew sharp criticism from reformers and journalists. He opposed government regulation, arguing that efficiency and consolidation benefited society. His stance on reform was defensive, resisting antitrust measures and portraying his monopoly as socially useful.

**Cornelius Vanderbilt:** Vanderbilt was a shipping and railroad tycoon who amassed vast wealth by controlling key transportation networks. He played a central role in building America's infrastructure but was notorious for ruthless competition. He resisted reform and regulation, believing consolidation was natural and necessary for progress. Reformers saw him as a symbol of "robber baron" excess, unwilling to compromise with calls for fairness.

**J. P. Morgan:** Morgan was a powerful banker and financier who orchestrated massive corporate mergers and stabilized financial markets during crises. He wielded extraordinary influence over industry, often acting as a “kingmaker” in business. He opposed radical reform but supported limited regulation to prevent chaos in markets. His stance was pragmatic, favoring order and stability over fairness or democratization of industry.

**Henry Ford** (emerging): Ford revolutionized automobile manufacturing with the assembly line, making cars affordable for ordinary Americans. He became famous for introducing the \$5 workday and shorter hours, which improved worker conditions within his company. However, he resisted unions and broader industry regulation, preferring to control reform internally. His stance was paternalistic, offering selective reforms to stabilize labor while rejecting outside interference.

**Jay Gould:** Gould was a notorious financier and railroad speculator, infamous for manipulative practices and corruption. He profited from instability and was widely despised as one of the most unscrupulous “robber barons.” He resisted reform and regulation, exploiting loopholes and manipulating markets for personal gain. His stance was openly hostile to reform, embodying the worst excesses of unregulated capitalism.

**Phillip Danforth Armour:** Armour was a meatpacking magnate who built Armour & Company into a dominant force in the food industry. He played a central role in Chicago’s rise as a meatpacking hub. He resisted reforms aimed at food safety, opposing regulations inspired by Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*. His stance prioritized efficiency and profit over consumer protection, making him a target of reformers.

**Cecil Rhodes:** Rhodes was a British imperialist and businessman who founded the De Beers diamond company and expanded British influence in southern Africa. He amassed wealth through resource exploitation and became a political figure promoting empire. He resisted industry reform, focusing instead on monopolistic control and imperial expansion. His stance prioritized exploitation and consolidation over regulation or fairness.

**George F. Baer:** Baer was a coal industry executive and president of the Reading Railroad. He became infamous during the anthracite coal strike for dismissing workers' demands, claiming they should trust divine providence rather than unions. He opposed labor reforms and resisted government intervention in industry. His stance reflected elite arrogance, rejecting reform and defending corporate power.

**William Randolph Hearst:** Hearst was a newspaper publisher who built a vast media empire and pioneered sensationalist "yellow journalism." He wielded enormous influence over public opinion and politics. He often supported reform rhetorically, using his papers to expose corruption and champion progressive causes. However, his stance was opportunistic, aligning reform with his personal ambitions rather than consistent principles.

**William "Boss" Tweed:** Tweed was a New York City political boss who led Tammany Hall and became notorious for corruption and graft. He controlled city politics through patronage and embezzlement. He resisted reform entirely, profiting from corruption and undermining reform movements. His stance was anti-reform, embodying political-industrial corruption at its worst.

## Reformers, Journalists, & Activists

**Ida Tarbell:** Tarbell was a pioneering investigative journalist and one of the leading “muckrakers.” She is best known for her exposé of Standard Oil’s monopolistic practices. She strongly supported reform through antitrust laws and fair competition. Her stance was progressive, using journalism to fuel public demand for industry regulation.

**Upton Sinclair:** Sinclair was a novelist and social reformer whose book *The Jungle* exposed unsafe labor and food practices in the meatpacking industry. His work shocked the public and led to major reforms in food safety. He championed government regulation of industry, particularly to protect workers and consumers. His stance was radical, linking industry reform to broader socialist ideals.

**Mother Jones:** Jones was a fiery labor organizer who fought for miners and against child labor. She became one of the most prominent voices in labor activism, often leading marches and strikes. She demanded strong reforms to protect workers, clashing with industrialists and authorities. Her stance was uncompromising, prioritizing human dignity over profit.

**Florence Kelley:** Kelley was a social reformer who worked for child labor laws, fair wages, and improved working conditions. She was a leader in the National Consumers League and pushed for protective legislation. She strongly supported government

regulation to protect vulnerable workers. Her stance was progressive, linking industry reform to social justice.

**Jacob Riis:** Riis was a journalist and photographer who documented urban poverty in works like *How the Other Half Lives*. He exposed the harsh realities of tenement life to middle-class audiences. He supported reform through housing and sanitation improvements, arguing industry had a duty to address social consequences. His stance emphasized moral responsibility and social reform.

**Theodore Roosevelt:** Roosevelt was the 26th President of the United States and a champion of progressive reform. He promoted the “Square Deal,” supporting antitrust actions and regulation of corporations. He believed reform was necessary to balance business power with public interest. His stance was pragmatic, using government intervention to curb abuses while preserving capitalism.

**John J. Lewis:** Lewis was a labor leader who headed the United Mine Workers and later the Congress of Industrial Organizations. He became a powerful advocate for union rights and collective bargaining. He demanded strong government intervention in industry to protect workers. His stance was militant, prioritizing worker power and reform through union strength.

**Samuel Gompers:** Gompers was the founder of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). He emphasized practical gains for workers through collective bargaining and incremental improvements. He resisted radical socialism, focusing instead on achievable reforms within capitalism. His stance was moderate, seeking reform without overthrowing the system.

**International Labor Organization Rep:** The ILO was founded to promote fair labor standards globally. Its representatives advocated for safe conditions, fair wages, and collective bargaining rights. They supported reform through international cooperation and legal frameworks. Their stance was cooperative, linking industry reform to global justice.

**Louis Brandeis:** Brandeis was a lawyer and later Supreme Court justice known for his advocacy of progressive reforms. He opposed monopolies and championed consumer protections. He believed unchecked industry threatened democracy and fairness. His stance was legalistic, embedding reform in law and judicial precedent.

**Robert F. Wagner:** Wagner was a U.S. senator from New York who authored the Wagner Act. This landmark legislation guaranteed workers' rights to unionize and bargain collectively. He strongly supported reform through government intervention. His stance was legislative, embedding labor reform in federal law.

**Eugene V. Debs:** Debs was a socialist leader and labor organizer who ran for president multiple times. He advocated for public ownership of major industries and opposed capitalist exploitation. He demanded radical reform, linking industry change to socialist transformation. His stance was revolutionary, rejecting incremental reform.

**Big Bill Haywood:** Haywood was a radical labor leader in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). He promoted direct action, strikes, and militant organizing. He demanded sweeping reform, rejecting compromise with industrialists. His stance was revolutionary, seeking to dismantle capitalist industry.



**Frank Norris:** Norris was a novelist whose works exposed corruption in railroads and agriculture. His book *The Octopus* highlighted monopolistic abuses and their impact on farmers. He supported reform by raising public awareness of industry's darker side. His stance was literary but reformist, using fiction to inspire change.

**Gifford Pinchot:** Pinchot was a forester and conservationist, serving as the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service. He promoted sustainable resource management and conservation. He supported government regulation to prevent exploitation of natural resources. His stance linked industry reform to environmental stewardship.

**Woodrow Wilson:** Wilson was the 28th President of the United States, leading the nation during World War I. He advanced progressive reforms such as the Federal Trade Commission and Clayton Antitrust Act. He believed regulation was necessary to curb corporate abuses. His stance was reformist but tied to political pragmatism.

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