

Module 05: Industrialization and Its Discontents: The Great Strike of 1877

Evidence 14: A Working Man, "Good Advice to the Working Men," 24 July 1877

A

Introduction

As the strike spread across the United States, it provoked a growing national controversy. While some communities clearly supported the strikers, many feared the disorder and violence that seemed inevitably to accompany their protests. Others, like the laborer who authored this letter to the editor, worried about the long-term economic consequences of the strike.

Questions to Consider

- What advice did the author offer?
- What justification does he give for his advice?
- How did he respond to those claiming that capital and labor were enemies?

Document

To the Railroad and Working Men:

Comrades: Stand still where you are, and think before you go further in the troubles around us. An hour's work may cost millions of money and hundreds of lives! All the lives lost will not be on one side only, and the money will come back on the people to be paid for out of the taxes of us all. Powder burns more than one hand when it is used. Don't burn your own hands with it!

These strikes are doing great damage to business, and will cost a great deal of money. Neither capital nor labor can afford to stand such heavy losses, and it is better to work on, knowing that a peaceable and honorable course will gain in the end, than by doing wrong to get an advantage which cannot last.

Keep on the side of the law, and keep the law on your own side!

There is a great deal of talk about capital being the enemy of labor. This is not true. Capital and labor must work together. There capitalist and the laborer are partners in business, and it requires good faith on both sides to make business profitable. Neither can prosper alone.

Beware of men who talk violence, riots, and bloodshed! There are your worst enemies. All the expenses, and losses, and damages, will be paid by the City or State, and only add so much more to your taxes. Every working man who talks about riots is preparing to lay more taxes on his own shoulders. The times are hard now. Will you make them harder? The best way to go is to go to work, keep the wheels moving in all branches of business, and avoid everything that makes an unfriendly feeling with those who have all the risks of the business, both for themselves and you.

Turn away from bad advisers, and above all "don't unchain the tiger!"

Source:

"Good Advice to Working Men," *New York Times*, 25 July 1877, 3.