

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

Evidence 11: "Striking and Striking Back," 22 July 1877

A

Introduction

The editorial below, which appeared in the *Reading* [Pennsylvania] *Daily Eagle*, was equally supportive of the strikers. The day following its publication, troops from the Fourth National Guard arrived in the city and shot into the assembled crowd, killing eleven people and injuring several more.

Questions to Consider

- How did the author of the editorial characterize the strike?
- Who did the author claim deserved blame for the strike?

Document

. . .The peculiarity of this strike is that it is a strike back. The railway employees have had their wages repeatedly reduced until their pay merely covered the bare necessities of living. The last turn of the screw cut into the live flesh, and they rebelled against the extortions and tyranny of the corporations which used their enormous capital for their own ends, regardless of the rights and sufferings of the working people. It was the corporations that struck the first blow, and though noiseless it fell with terrible effect on the heads and homes and hearts of hundreds of laborers. This fact must not be lost sight of in forming a sound judgment of the case.

The corporations have got a terrible advantage over their laborers in times like these. Labor is the under dog. The corporations can dictate their own terms, adopt what rules they please, pay just such wages as they see fit to allow, and the poor laborer can either accept what is graciously given or suffer the consequence, which is virtually starvation. The corporations have the law on their side. They own the Legislatures. They retain the ablest lawyers. They control the most of the newspapers and manufacture public opinion. And if the laborers protest in the only way that is left to them to exert their manhood, and contend for the inherent rights of human nature

and American citizenship, they are branded as rioters, met by force of arms, provoked to violence, and then shot dead.

The case is two sided. Papers seem to be all arrayed against the laborers, who are merely striking back, with scarcely a whisper of rebuke to the rich and powerful corporations which were the first and real strikers in the case. The popular sympathy for the laborers is significant. It shows that the popular heart is sound. It is full of warning to the corporations to adopt a wise and kindlier policy in their dealings with their employees. America is a country of working people, and they will not see their fellows wronged and crushed continuously by despotic corporations without a resistance which the latter will repent having provoked.

Source:

"Striking and Striking Back," *Reading Daily Eagle*, 22 July 1877, 4.