

Topic: Labor Unrest – Baltimore Rail Strike

Historical Thinking Skills Assessed: Sourcing, Critical Reading, Contextualizing

Grade Level: High

[National History Standards](#)

Era 6: The Development of the Industrial United States (1870-1900)

Standard 3: The rise of the American labor movement and how political issues reflected social and economic changes.

Using the Item: The question assesses students' ability to synthesize information by reading critically and contextualizing. In this item, students will have to deduce that the source describes a railroad strike by noting that the location of each event is at a rail station. They may also use prior knowledge of the time period, realizing that 1877 was a time of great economic instability and labor unrest.

Background: This source is from a larger damage assessment of a labor strike that was conducted against the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) Railroad in several locations in Maryland and West Virginia in 1877. The strike was precipitated by an overinvestment in railroads and the poor economic conditions for most of the previous decade. In July 1877, workers, angered by a ten percent reduction in wages, began to strike, with some of the protests becoming violent. State militias and even federal troops were used to help restore order.

Losses and Damages to Telegraph Department.		July 1877
July 20 th	<u>Camden Station.</u> By burning of Dispatcher's Office ---	
	1 eight wire switchboard	\$40.00
	5 Relay Instruments @ \$12. ⁰⁰	60.00
	6 Sounders " 6. ⁰⁰	36.00
	6 Keys " 5. ⁰⁰	30.00
	1 small switchboard	5.00
	1 Main line sounder instrument damaged	6.00
	1 call bell	6.00
	1 Bell-Key	3.00
	12 complete cups local battery @ 1. ⁵⁰	16.80
	25 lbs. Blue Vitriol ".08 ⁰⁰	2.00
	12 " Office wire "...75 ⁰⁰	9.00
	10 " " " (Bishop's gutta serena) ".60 ⁰⁰	16.00
	6 feet hard rubber tubing ".40 ⁰⁰	2.40
	25 Office Brackets ".03 ⁰⁰	.75
	1 Howard clock	24.00
	1 Telegraph Pole	1.50
	6 Cross arms @ .30 ⁰⁰	1.80
	24 Insulators ".08 ⁰⁰	1.92
	24 Pins .04	.96
	8 Days Labor for same @ \$2.00	16.00
	Total.	279.13
July 21 st	<u>Mount Clare Junction.</u> Destroyed by rioters by burning oil cans.	
	1 Telegraph Pole, Brackets & Insulators =	1.37
	Labor on same - 1/2 day - @ \$2.00 -	1.00
	Total	2.37
	Total Loss and Damage to Telegraph Dept., =	\$281.50

Transcription

Losses and Damages to Telegraph Department. July 1877

July 20th	<u>Camden Station.</u>		
	By burning of Dispatcher's Office ---		
	1 Eight wire switchboard		\$40.00
	5 Relay instruments	@\$12.00	60.00
	6 Sounders	" 6.00	36.00
	6 Keys	" 5.00	30.00
	1 small switchboard		5.00
	1 Main Line Sounder Instrument damaged		6.00
	1 call bell		6.00
	1 Bell-Key		3.00
	12 complete cups local battery	@1.40	16.80
	25 lbs. Blue Vitriol	" .08¢	2.00
	12 " Office wire	" .75¢	9.00
	10 " " " (Bishops gutta porcha)	"1.60¢	16.00
	6 feet hard rubber tubing	" .40¢	2.40
	25 Office Brackets	" .03¢	.75
	1 Howard clock		24.00
	1 Telegraph Pole		1.50
	6 Cross arms	@.30¢	1.80
	24 Insulators	" .08	1.92
	24 Pins	.04	.96
	8 Days Labor for same	@ \$2.00	16.00
		Total	279.13
July 21st	<u>Mount Clare Junction</u>		
	Destroyed by rioters by burning oil cars.		
	1 Telegraph Pole, Brackets & Insulators =		1.37
	Labor on same – ½ day -- @\$2.00 --		1.00
	Total	2.37	
Total Loss and Damage to Telegraph Dep't., =		\$281.50	

Which scenario is most likely to have caused these damages?

- A. **Striking workers angered by the railroad company (4)** [answer cue]
- B. Postal workers upset about jobs lost to telegraph operators (2)
- C. Women angered by a lack of voting rights (0)
- D. A disgruntled telegraph worker angered upset by the rise of the telephone (1)

Explanation

“A” is the best answer here because both locations belonged to the railroad (Camden Station and Mount Claire Junction). Students may also know that the economic downturn of the 1870’s led to unemployment and discontent among workers. Answer “B” is plausible because both of the locations were telegraph facilities within the rail stations, but it would be unlikely that only rail stations would have been targeted if postal workers were upset at telegraph operators. Also references to “oil cars” and a “dispatcher’s office” make it more likely that the event described relates to a railroad rather than an independent telegraph office. There is no evidence in the source that voting rights had anything to do with this event, so answer “C” is irrelevant. Answer “D” may have some merit in that the students would have seen that there were losses and damages to the telegraph department. **[Sourcing, Critical Reading, Contextualizing]**

HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Directions: Analyze the source and its transcription below, and circle the response that best answers the question.

	Losses and Damages to Telegraph Department.	
	July 1977	5.
July 20 th	<u>Camden Station.</u>	
	By burning of Dispatcher's Office --	
	1 eight wire switchboard	\$40.00
	5 Relay Instruments @ \$12.00	60.00
	6 Soulders @ 6.00	36.00
	6 Keys @ 5.00	30.00
	1 small switchboard	5.00
	1 Main line soulder instrument damaged	6.00
	1 Call bell	6.00
	1 Bell-Key	3.00
	12 complete cups local battery @ \$1.40	16.80
	25 lbs. Blue Vitriol @ .08	2.00
	17 " Office wire @ .50	8.50
	10 " " " (Bishops gutta serena) @ .60	6.00
	6 feet hard rubber tubing @ .40	2.40
	25 Office Brackets @ .03	.75
	1 Howard clock	24.00
	1 Telegraph Pole	1.50
	6 Cross arms @ .30	1.80
	24 Insulators @ .08	1.92
	24 Pins @ .04	.96
	8 Days Labor for same @ \$2.00	16.00
	Total.	279.13
July 21 st	<u>Mount Clare Junction.</u>	
	Destroyed by rioting by burning oil cars.	
	1 Telegraph Pole, Brackets & Insulators	1.37
	Labor on same - 1/2 day - @ \$2.00	1.00
	Total	2.37
	Total Loss and Damage to Telegraph Dept.,	\$281.50

Transcription

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July 20th	<u>Camden Station.</u>			
	By burning of Dispatcher's Office ---			
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- A. Striking workers angered by railroad company
- B. Postal workers upset about jobs lost to telegraph operators
- C. Women angered by a lack of voting rights
- D. A disgruntled telegraph worker angered upset by the rise of the telephone