1. In Praise of Mechanization (1897)

As capitalists competed for markets and profits, they pushed their workers even harder. Factory laborers came to dread the "speedup"—the order to produce more goods in less time. The already screeching din of the shop floor then whined to an even higher pitch, as machines were made to run faster—and more dangerously. Some observers claimed that the peculiarly profit-hungry and competitive U.S. business environment rendered the conditions of labor in the United States particularly intolerable. Yet new workers by the millions fled the farms of both America and Europe to seek work tending the rattling industrial machines. In the following comments by a French economist who visited the United States near the end of the nineteenth century, how does he appraise the overall impact of mechanization? Is he convincing? What differences does he see between work conditions in Europe and those in the United States? What does he identify as the principal complaints of U.S. workers? Does he consider them justified?

Thinking Questions

* What arguments are provided "praising" mechanization?

* How might you counter the author's arguments?

* Is industrialism good for America? all Americans?
The unionized sector of the economy has been growing, and the proportion of salaries and wages to the total number of hourly paid workers is rising. This trend indicates an increase in the bargaining power of workers, which is evident in higher wages and better working conditions. In addition, the proportion of unionized workers in the manufacturing sector has also increased, which suggests a greater influence of the unionized sector in setting wages and working conditions.

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