

CHAPTER 12 / Analyzing a Primary Source

Review the information in the chapter about the 1917 lumberjack strike. Then read the following union song and answer the questions that follow.

Fifty Thousand Lumberjacks

- 1 Fifty-thousand lumberjacks, fifty thousand packs,
Fifty-thousand dirty rolls of blankets on their backs.
Fifty-thousand minds made up to strike and strike like men;
For fifty years they've packed a bed, but never will again.

CHORUS: "Such a lot of devils" — that's what the papers say —
"They've gone on strike for shorter hours and some increase in pay:
They left the camps, the lazy tramps, they all walked out as one;
They say they'll win the strike or put the bosses on the bum."

- 2 Fifty thousand wooden bunks full of things that crawl;
Fifty thousand restless men have left them once for all,
One by one they dared not say "Fat, the hours are long."
If they did they'd hike — but now they're fifty thousand strong.
- 3 Take a tip and start right in; plan some cozy rooms,
Six or eight spring beds in each, with towels, sheets, and brooms,
Shower baths for men who work keep them well and fit,
A laundry, too, and drying room would help a little bit,

—From *IWW Songbook*, 13th ed. (1917)

- (1) What does the phrase "they've packed a bed" mean?
- (2) What are some of the words and phrases used to describe conditions for the lumberjacks?
- (3) How does the chorus contrast with the verses of the song?
- (4) How does the reference to "what the papers say" reflect the political atmosphere in Montana at the time?
- (5) Do you think this song would gain support for striking lumberjacks? Why or why not?