

THE FIRST STRIKE

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Did you know that the first strike of which there is written evidence was in the year 1165 B.C. in Egypt under Ramses III, a pharaoh of the New Empire? According to the *ostracae* (very small blocks of limestone that the Egyptians used as draft or note paper and which were found in the old village of Deir el-Medina near the Valley of the Kings), the people working in the pharaoh's tomb had not been receiving proper food and treatment for a certain time, so they decided not to go to work on that morning, and addressed their claim to the vizier asking him to plead with the pharaoh for them. Their plea was accepted, the workers received what they needed, and they resumed work the next day.

Not only do people nowadays still follow the example of the ancient Egyptians and use strikes as a means of persuasion when they feel they are being abused in their rights as citizens and working force, but they also do not seem to have made a great leap towards progress if we think that, in ancient Egypt, the working day had eight hours, divided by a lunch break into two periods each of four hours; also every morning when resuming work at the tomb, the worker had to report to the scribe who would note his arrival time on the attendance sheet. In today's factories and some organisations, progress has brought a more sophisticated procedure: that of clocking in and clocking out.

As a curiosity, it is interesting to mention that during the ruling of the great Ramses II, a foreman named Paneb was accused by the vizier of using the workers and the materials for the pharaoh's tomb on his own behalf - a very common misdemeanour also in our times. He defended himself against the vizier's accusation, but he was not successful in his plea, so he appealed directly to the pharaoh. The vizier was dismissed from his functions. How many top managers in our days would have the courage of practising this kind of justice? The answer needs thinking out.

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