

Northern Factory Owners and Merchants

YOU ARE A POWERFUL CLASS growing more powerful. You manufacture and sell products like cotton cloth and machinery. You depend on a government that will not interfere with your right to make profits. However, this isn't to say you want a "do-nothing" government. Not at all. You have a number of concerns that require a strong and sympathetic government. You are still worried about products from other countries, especially from Great Britain and her colonies, being sold here more cheaply than your products. To make sure that people buy from you, you want the government to tax imported goods from other countries. These import taxes are called tariffs. For example, as recently as the early 1840s, cotton cloth made in the U.S. sold for just under seven cents a yard. The tariff was seven and a half cents—over 100 percent! This was great because it made foreign cloth more expensive than your cloth. However in 1857 Congress lowered the tariff to 24 percent. This hurt your industry and, in fact, you think this contributed to the terrible depression of 1857, which still hurts business. Of course, *some* people support low tariffs because with low tariffs goods are cheaper to buy.

To keep growing, you need more and more places to sell your products. Transportation is a problem. If there were more railroads to the western states and territories you'd be able to sell

a great deal more than you do now. You could get cheap food and whiskey from the western regions, and could sell them cloth, guns, tools, stoves, and the like. You'd also be able to invest in the railroads and make even more money.

Here's a problem: Many workers and farmers want the government to allow them to "homestead" (farm on free land) in the western territories. You worry about your workers leaving to become farmers. Then who'd do all the work? As it is, because of labor shortages, you pay between a third and a half more in wages than do factory owners in Great Britain. Cheaper labor gives them an unfair advantage. The only thing that helps out the labor shortage here is the steady supply of immigrants coming to the United States from Europe. The more workers available, the lower the wages you have to pay. You don't like homesteads—and you want a president who opposes homesteads—but you might be willing to put up with a homestead law if you could get the president and Congress to support higher tariffs on foreign goods.

Your major political rivals are the southern slave owners, almost all of whom are Democrats. Just about everything you support, they oppose. You need the cheap cotton they send north and you need them to buy your products. But you don't need them to get any stronger in Congress.