

THE PULLMAN STRIKE - CHICAGO, 1894

Gilded Age

ACT Practice

(P1)

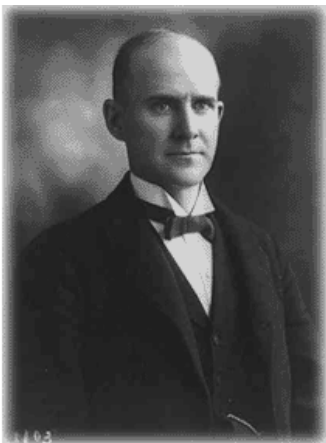
The Pullman Strike of 1894 was the first national strike in United States history. Before coming to an end, it involved over 150,000 persons and twenty-seven states and territories and would paralyze the nation's railway system. The entire rail labor force of the nation would walk away from their jobs. In supporting the capital side of this strike President Cleveland for the first time in the Nation's history would send in federal troops, who would fire on and kill United States Citizens, against the wishes of the states. The federal courts of the nation would outlaw striking by the passing of the Omnibus indictment. This blow to unionized labor would not be struck down until the passing of the Wagner Act in 1935. This all began in the little town of Pullman, Illinois, just south of Chicago.



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Pullman Palace Car Company was famed for its sleeper and luxury rail cars that it manufactured. One of these manufacturing locations was in Pullman, Illinois. George M. Pullman founded the town of Pullman as a place where his workers could live. This town was conceived and designed on the premise of being a model town for his workers, with every aspect complete including parks and a library. The problem arose when after the panic of 1893 the workers of Pullman received several wage cuts that on

the average added up to twenty-five percent. These cuts were bad in themselves, but when coupled with Pullman's actions of not lowering the rents for his company owned homes in Pullman, the labor began to unite. From the outside, Pullman appeared to be a model town, and guided tours were given to impress outsiders. The town however was not model; the homes on the outskirts of town were shabbily built -- some without any kind of plumbing. The rent for these houses was also about twenty-five percent higher than normal for the area. In addition, in order to work for Pullman, one had to live in his houses. The workers formed a committee and on May 7 went to Pullman to ask to have the rent lowered. On May 7 and 9, they were flatly refused. Three of the committee members were then terminated. This caused the workers to declare that they were going to strike, and on May 10, 1894 they walked off of their jobs. Then on May 11, 1894 the Pullman Plant closed.



Eugene V. Debs, 1897

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The strike went peacefully, but after several weeks the Pullman management had not changed its position and the strikers were desperate for aid. During the strike, the American Railway Union had convened in Chicago because it was the rail center of the United States. The recently formed American Railway Union had 465 local unions and claimed the memberships of 150,000 workers. Since the Pullman workers were an affiliated union on strike in Chicago, the ARU offered to send arbitrators for the Pullman cause. The Pullman workers refused this aid. Even so the ARU under the leadership of Eugene Debs decided to stop

handling Pullman cars on June 26, if the Pullman Union would not agree to arbitration. The stage was set for the largest strike in the nation's history.

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On June 26, the ARU switchmen started to refuse to switch trains with Pullman cars. In response, the General Managers Association began to fire the switchmen for not handling the cars. The strike and boycott rapidly expanded, paralyzing the Chicago rail yards and most of the twenty-four rail lines in the city.

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On July 2 a federal injunction was issued against the leaders of the ARU. This Omnibus Indictment prevented ARU leaders from "...compelling or inducing by threats, intimidation, persuasion, force or violence, railway employees to refuse or fail to perform duties..."(U.S. Strike Commission Report pp. 179). This injunction was based on the Sherman Anti-Trust Act and the Interstate Commerce Act and was issued by federal judges Peter S. Grosscup and William A. Woods under the direction of Attorney General Richard Olney. The injunction prevented the ARU leadership from communicating with their subordinates and chaos began to reign.



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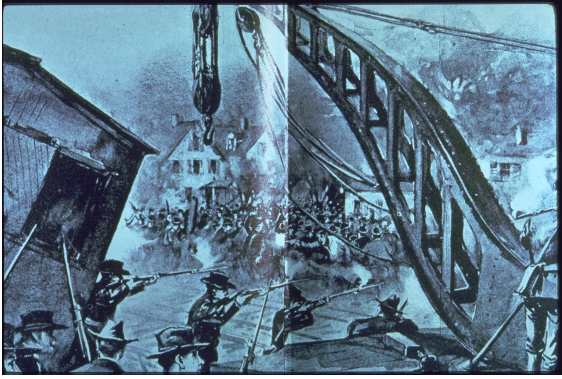
Governor Altgeld of Illinois had been hesitant to employ the state militia to put down the strike instead relying on the local authorities to handle the situation. However, he said he would use the National Guard to protect property. Above all Governor Altgeld did not want federal troops to intervene. However, the issuing of this federal injunction and the fact that mail-trains might be delayed caused President Grover Cleveland to send in federal troops from Fort Sheridan. On July 3, Federal troops entered Chicago against Governor Altgeld's repeated protests. Governor Altgeld protested by writing President Cleveland on July 5, saying

"...surely the facts have not been correctly presented to you in this case, or you would not have taken the step, for it seems to me, unjustifiable. Waiving all questions of courtesy I will say that the State of Illinois is not only able to take care of itself, but it stands ready to furnish the Federal Government any assistance it may need else where..." (Altgeld pp. 656)

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Despite these repeated protests by Governor Altgeld, President Cleveland continued to send in federal troops. The reaction of the strikers to the appearance of the troops was that of outrage. What had been a basically peaceful strike turned into complete mayhem. The mayhem began on July 4, with mobs of people setting off fireworks and tipping over rail cars. The workers started to tip railcars and build blockades in reaction to the presence of the federal troops. In addition to this, there was additional level of chaos caused by the ARU leaders' inability to communicate with the strikers because of the federal indictments. The rioting grew and spread then on July 7, a large fire consumed seven buildings at the World's Colombian Exposition in Jackson Park. This burning and rioting came to a zenith on July 6, when fires caused by some 6,000 rioters destroyed 700 railcars and caused \$340,000 of damages in the South Chicago Panhandle yards.

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At this time in the Chicago vicinity, there were 6,000 federal and state troops, 3,100 police, and 5,000 deputy marshals. However, all this manpower could not prevent the violence from peaking when on July 7, national guardsmen after being assaulted, fired into the crowd killing at least four (possibly up to thirty) and wounding at least twenty. The killing continued when two more people were killed by troops in Spring Valley, Illinois. All this violence started to cause the strike to ebb and on that same day Eugene Debs and four other ARU leaders were arrested for violating the indictment. These officers were later released on \$10,000 bond. The strike was failing rapidly, so the ARU tried to

enlist the aid of the AFL in the form of sympathetic strikes. When this was refused the ARU attempted to abandon the strike, on the grounds that workers would be rehired without prejudice except were convicted of crimes however, this offer was refused by the General Managers' Association. The strike continued to dwindle, and trains began to move with increased frequency. The strike became untenable for the workers and on August 2 the Pullman works reopened.

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This strike was truly monumental if some of the figures for lost revenues are looked at. The railroads alone lost an estimated \$685,308 in expenses incurred during the strike. However, the railroads lost even more in revenue an estimated \$4,672,916 [\$120,000,000 in 2009 values]. In addition, 100,000 striking employees lost wages of an estimated \$1,389,143. These costs are just the localized effects of the paralyzation of the nation's rail center and do not include the far ranging financial effects. The manpower used to break the strike was also immense. The total forces of the strikebreakers both government and private were: 1,936 federal troops, 4,000 national guardsmen, about 5,000 extra deputy marshals, 250 extra deputy sheriffs, and the 3,000 policemen in Chicago for a total of 14,186 strikebreakers. In addition to these figures there were also twelve people shot and killed, and 71 people who were arrested and sentenced on the federal indictment. This strike had other far ranging consequences. The federal government took an unprecedented step in using indictments to make any form of a strike essentially illegal and supported this action by deploying federal troops against the will of the states.

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The results of the Pullman Strike were both enormous and inconsequential. They were enormous because the strike showed the power of unified national unions. At the same time the strike showed the willingness of the federal government to intervene and support the capitalists against unified labor. The results were inconsequential because for all of the unified effort of the unions the workers did not get their rents lowered.

Questions

1. What sentence below best supports the Pullman worker's point of view regarding the Pullman strikes?
 - a. Workers felt they were being treated unfairly by their employer.
 - b. Workers didn't feel they had proper representation in leadership of the company
 - c. Workers didn't feel they were supported by the federal government
 - d. Workers felt they were overworked, and underpaid by the company
2. In Paragraph 10, what does the passage say the Pullman strikes revealed in regards to the Federal Government?
 - a. They fully supported the requests of the Pullman employees.
 - b. The willingness to support businesses over labor forces.
 - c. The willingness to support workers in the labor force.
 - d. The support for the hardships workers face when trying to gain fair wages
3. According to the passage, what set the stage for "for the largest strike in the nation's history?"
 - a. The riot on the company grounds by the Pullman employees
 - b. The lowering of rental prices for company owned homes
 - c. The ARU leaderships decision to stop handling Pullman Cars
 - d. The arbitrations sessions not producing any results
4. What events lead to the workers of the Pullman Palace Car Company declaring the need to strike?
 - a. Severe wage cuts
 - b. High cost of living in the area
 - c. No adjustment to costs for high rental homes
 - d. All of the above
5. According to the text in the last sentence of **Paragraph 9**, the Pullman Strike was the first time the Federal government had taken what action in the United States?
 - a. Proposed the use of local law enforcement to shut down a union strike.
 - b. Used indictments to make the act of striking illegal, along with manpower to end the strike.
 - c. Intervened to support striking employees against a business or organization.
 - d. Determined that striking employees had rights not defined by business operations.
6. According to the following sentence in Paragraph 1, what does **striking** mean?

The federal courts of the nation would outlaw striking by the passing of the Omnibus indictment.

- a. A score you get when you knock over all the pins in bowling
 - b. To hit someone or something with force
 - c. An act of withholding labor because of an important disagreement on an issue involving working conditions
 - d. Involving lightning during a storm
7. According to the following sentence in Paragraph 3, what does **convened** mean?

During the strike, the American Railway Union had convened in Chicago because it was the rail center of the United States.

- a. A large party or gathering, usually in a very large room
- b. To take place in a location
- c. An area that has a lot of water
- d. An act of trying to get someone on your side of the argument

8. According to the following sentence in Paragraph 7, what does **zenith** mean?

This burning and rioting came to a zenith on July 6, when fires caused by some 6,000 rioters destroyed 700 railcars and caused \$340,000 of damages in the South Chicago Panhandle yards.

- a. The time at which something is most powerful or successful
- b. The time at which something is least powerful or successful
- c. An astrological term that is used to describe stars
- d. The level of hotness something becomes when it is heated up

9. According to the second sentence of Paragraph 7, the workers reaction to the arrival of troops was one of what?

- a. Very happy to see the troops
- b. Work along with the troops to end the strike
- c. They were outraged by the arrival of troops
- d. Decided to fight back against the troops that were sent to end the strike

10. According to Paragraph 4, sentence number 3, the events of the Pullman strike caused what to happen?

- a. The strikes really didn't affect the community at all
- b. The strikes strengthened the power of workers, and weakened the company's powers.
- c. Caused the overall strength of the federal government to increase
- d. Caused the closure of most of the rail lines in the city.

Key

- 1. A
- 2. B
- 3. C
- 4. D
- 5. B
- 6. C
- 7. A
- 8. A
- 9. C
- 10. D