Three Primary Source Documents on: The Pullman Strike

United States Strike Commission: LOSSES AND CRIMES DURING THE PULLMAN DISPUTE

ACCORDING to the testimony the railroads lost in property destroyed, hire of United States deputy marshals, and other incidental expenses, at least $685,308. The loss of earnings of these roads is estimated at $4,672,916. Some 3,100 employees at Pullman lost in wages, as estimated, at least $350,000. About 100,000 employees upon the 24 railroads centering at Chicago, all of which were more or less involved in the strike, lost in wages, as estimated, at least $1,389,143. Many of these employees are still adrift and losing wages.

The suspension of transportation at Chicago paralyzed a vast distributive center, and imposed many hardships and much loss upon the great number of people whose manufacturing and business operations, employment, travel, and necessary supplies depend upon and demand regular transportation service to, from, and through Chicago.

During the strike the fatalities, arrests, indictments, and dismissals of charges for strike offenses in Chicago and vicinity were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number shot and fatally wounded</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number arrested by the police</td>
<td>515</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number arrested under United States statutes and against whom indictments were found</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number arrested against whom indictments were not found</td>
<td>119</td>
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The arrests made by the police were for murder, arson, burglary, assault, intimidation, riot, inciting to riot, and lesser crimes. The cases passed upon by the special United States grand jury, which convened on July 10, 1894, related to obstruction of the mail, forbidden by Section 3995 of the United States Revised Statutes; conspiracy to commit offenses against the United States, forbidden by Section 5440 of the Revised Statutes; conspiracy in restraint of trade or commerce among the several States, forbidden by Chapter 647 of the United States, laws of 1890; conspiracy to injure, oppress, threaten, or intimidate citizens in the free exercise and enjoyment of their rights and privileges under the Constitution and Laws of the United States, forbidden by Section 5508 of the United States Revised Statutes.

Several indictments were found against Eugene V. Debs, George W. Howard, L. NV. Rogers, and Sylvester Keliher, officers of the American Railway Union, under these different statutes...

These great losses and many crimes; the vast numbers, strength, and resources of the labor that contended under the leadership of the American Railway Union upon the one side and Pullman's Palace Car Company and the General Managers' Association upon the other; the attitude of labor toward capital, disclosed in its readiness to strike sympathetically; the determination of capital to crush the strike rather than to accept any peaceable solution through conciliation arbitration, or otherwise; the certainty with which vast strikes let loose the disreputable to burn, plunder, and even murder; the conversion of industrious and law-abiding men into idlers, law breakers, or associates of criminals; the want brought to many innocent families the transformation of railroad yards tracks, and stations, as well as the busy marts of trade, into armed camps; the possibilities of future strikes on more extended lines of union against even greater combinations of capital—are all factors bearing upon the present industrial situation which need to be thoroughly understood by the people and to be wisely and prudently treated by the government.

Troops, Military, Etc.

For the protection of city, state, and federal property, for the suppression of crime and the preservation of order, the city, county, state, and federal forces were utilized...

PULLMAN'S Palace Car Company is in the market at all times to obtain all possible contracts to build cars. Its relations with railroads, its large capital and surplus, its complete and well-located plant and efficient management enable it at all times to meet all competitors on at least equal terms...

The depression of 1893 naturally affected the business at once... Matters grew worse until, in the fall of 1893, the company closed its Detroit shops, employing about 800, and concentrated its contract and repair business at Pullman. The company and the railroads had a surplus of cars...hence pending orders were canceled and car building stopped, except as occasional straggling contracts were obtained at prices which averaged less than shop cost....

The cut in wages during this period [September 1893 - May 1894] averaged about 25 per cent....

During all of this reduction...none of the salaries of officers, managers, or superintendents were reduced....

In its statements to the public...the company represents that its object[ive]...was to continue operations for the benefit of its workmen and of trades people in and about Pullman and to save the public from the annoyance of interrupted travel. The commission thinks that the evidence shows that it sought to keep running mainly for its own benefit as a manufacturer, that its plant might not rust, that its competitors might not invade its territory, that it might keep its cars in repair, that it might be ready for resumption when business revived with a live plant and competent help, and that its revenue from its tenements might continue.

RENTS

If we exclude the aesthetic and sanitary features at Pullman, the rents there are from 20 to 25 per cent higher than rents in Chicago or surrounding towns for similar accommodations. The aesthetic features are admired by visitors, but have little money value to employees, especially when they lack bread...

The company's claim that the workmen need not [rent] its tenements and can live elsewhere if they choose is not entirely tenable. The fear of losing work keeps them in Pullman as long as there are tenements unoccupied, because the company is supposed, as a matter of business, to give a preference to its tenants when work is slack.... While reducing wages, the company made no reduction in rents. Its position is that the two matters are distinct, and that none of the reasons urged as justifying wage reduction as an employer can be considered by the company as a landlord...

On the evening of May 10 the local unions met and voted to strike at once... As soon as the strike was declared the company laid off its 600 employees who did not join the strike. and kept its shops closed until August 2. During this period the Civic Federation of Chicago, composed of eminent citizens in all kinds of business and from all grades of respectable society, called upon the company twice to urge conciliation and arbitration. The company reiterated the statement of its position, and maintained that there was nothing to arbitrate; that the questions at issue were matters of fact and not proper subjects of arbitration. The Civic Federation suggested that competition should be regarded in rents as well as in wages. The company denied this. Wages and rents were to it separate matters; the principles applicable to one had no relation to the other. Later it gave the same answer to a committee of its employees. Upon June 15 and 22 it declined to receive any communication from committees of the American Railway Union, one proposition being that the company select two arbitrators, the court two...

This is an association of about 150,000 railroad employees, as alleged, organized at Chicago on the 20th of June, 1893, for the purpose of including railway employees born of white parents in one great brotherhood.

The theory underlying this movement is that the organization of different classes of railroad employees (to the number of about 140,000) upon the trade-union idea has ceased to be useful or adequate; that pride of organization, petty jealousies, and the conflict of views into which men are trained in separate organizations under different leaders, tend to defeat the common object of all, and enable railroads to use such organizations against each other in contentions over wages, etc.; that the rapid concentration of railroad capital and management demands a like union of their employees for the purpose of mutual protection; that the interests of each of the 850,000 railroad employees of the United States as to wages, treatment, hours of labour, legislation, insurance, mutual aid, etc., are common to all, and hence all ought to belong to one organization that shall assert its united strength in the protection of the rights of every member.

In March, 1894, the employees of Pullman's Palace Car Company, being dissatisfied with their wages, rents, and shop treatment for the first time in the history of the town, sought organization, and joined the American Railway Union in large numbers...

The Pullman company is hostile to the idea of conferring with organized labor in the settlement of differences arising between it and its employees....

Since the strike, withdrawal from the American Railway Union is required from those seeking work. The company does not recognize that labor organizations have any place or necessity in Pullman, where the company fixes wages and rents... The laborer can work or quit on the terms offered; that is the limit of his rights... This position secures all the advantage of the concentration of capital, ability, power, and control for the company in its labor dealings, and deprives the employees of any such advantage or protection as a labor union might afford. In this respect the Pullman company is behind the age.

To admit the Pullman shop employees, however, into the American Railway Union as "Persons employed in railway service" was not wise or expedient. The constitution can not fairly be construed to include as eligible members those who build cars and run them in and out over private switches... To reach out and take in those so alien to its natural membership as the Pullman employees, was, in the inception of the organization at least, a mistake. This mistake led the union into a strike purely sympathetic and aided to bring upon it a crushing and demoralizing defeat.

It is undoubtedly true that the officers and directors of the American Railway Union did not want a strike at Pullman, and that they advised against it, but the exaggerated idea of the power of the union, which induced the workmen at Pullman to join the order, led to their striking against this advice. Having struck, the union could do nothing less, upon the theory at its base, than support them...