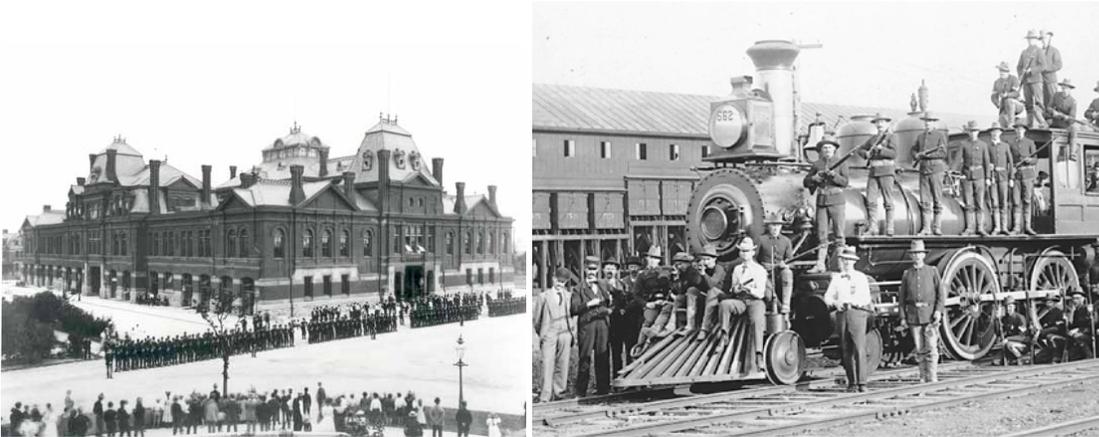


**Mock Trial: The Pullman Strike**  
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**George Mortimer Pullman** was an influential locomotive industrialist of the 19th century and the founder of the **Pullman Palace Car Company**. His innovations brought comfort and luxury to railroad travels in the 1800's with the introduction of sleeping cars, dining cars, and parlor cars. Like other industrialists of the period Pullman built a company town in Illinois near his factory to accommodate his workers' housing needs (it was named **Pullman, Illinois** after the company), which was annexed to the city of Chicago in 1889. He advertised it as a model community, which offered his workers modern amenities in a beautiful setting. By 1890, the Pullman Palace Car Company was operating 2,135 railroad cars on approximately 160,000 miles of track in the United States with a work force of 12,367 employees.

In 1893, a major economic depression hit the United States and this affected the railroad business. Matters grew worse when the Pullman Company closed its Detroit shops, employing about 800, and concentrated its contract and repair business at Pullman, Illinois. The company and the railroads had a surplus of cars, hence pending orders were canceled and car building stopped. The Pullman Company also cut wages of their employees by on average 25 percent. At the same time, the employees of the company argued it was unfair that they had to live in Pullman, Illinois, where the rents were 20-25 percent more than living in Chicago (and the rent was paid to their employer the Pullman Company).

Due to the cut in wages and high rents, on the evening of May 10, 1894 the local locomotive unions met and voted to strike at once. As soon as the strike was declared the company laid off hundreds of employees and closed its shops. During this period the Civic Federation of Chicago, composed of powerful and wealthy citizens, called upon the company twice to urge reconciliation and arbitration between the Pullman Company and the unions. The Pullman Company responded by saying there was nothing to reconcile, the unions were wrong. The Civic Federation suggested the Pullman Company consider negotiating with unions about rents as well as wages. The Pullman Company argued that rent is not something that the unions could negotiate, if the employees did not like the rent they could move elsewhere and that the wages were fair. In June of 1894, the Pullman Company declined to receive any further communication from the **American Railway Union**. As a result of this, the union launched a boycott. Within four days, 125,000 workers on twenty-nine railroads had quit work rather than handle Pullman cars. Adding fuel to the fire the railroad companies began hiring replacement workers (that is, strikebreakers or "scabs"), which only increased hostilities.

On June 29, 1894, **Eugene V. Debs**, head of the American Railway Union, hosted a peaceful gathering to obtain support for the strike from fellow railroad workers at Blue Island, Illinois. Afterward groups within the crowd became enraged and set fire to nearby buildings and derailed a locomotive. Elsewhere in the United States, sympathy strikers prevented transportation of goods by walking off the job, obstructing railroad tracks or threatening and attacking

strikebreakers. This increased national attention to the matter and fueled the demand for federal action. As a result, the federal courts demanded that the strikers cease their activities or face being fired. Debs and other leaders of the union ignored the injunction, and federal troops were called into action.

**Governor John Peter Altgeld** of Illinois had been hesitant to employ the Illinois National Guard 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 and did not want federal troops to intervene. However, using the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890, which was created to stop company monopolies, **President Grover Cleveland** demanded the American Railway Union stop the strike. The strike was broken up by United States Marshals and some 12,000 federal soldiers, sent in by President Cleveland on the premise that the strike interfered with the delivery of U.S. Mail, ignored a federal injunction and represented a threat to public safety. The arrival of the military and subsequent deaths of workers led to further outbreaks of violence. During the course of the strike, 13 strikers were killed and 57 were wounded. The local police arrested 515 people. An estimated 6,000 rail workers committed \$340,000 in property damage. Many of the strike leaders, including Debs, were arrested and put in jail for numerous crimes including stopping the delivery of the U.S. Mail.

#### **Trial Participants:**

George Pullman (company owner)  
 Frank Glover (against strikers)  
 Chicago Tribune Reporter (against strikers)  
 Eugene Debs (union leader and striker)  
 William Smith (striker)  
 Jennie Curtis (striker)  
 Lawyers for the Pullman Company  
 Lawyers for the Strikers of the American Railway Union  
 Judge  
 Jury

#### **Document 1: Strikers Denounce Pullman (Statement from the Strikers – including William Smith)**

Mr. President and Brothers of the American Railway Union: We struck at Pullman because we were without hope. We joined the American Railway Union because it gave us a glimmer of hope. Twenty thousand souls, men, women, and little ones, have their eyes turned toward this convention today, straining eagerly through dark despondency for a glimmer of the heaven-sent message you alone can give us on this earth.

In stating to this body our grievances it is hard to tell where to begin. You all must know that the proximate cause of our strike was the discharge of two members of our grievance committee the day after George M. Pullman, himself, and Thomas H. Wickes, his second vice-president, had guaranteed them absolute immunity. The more remote causes are still imminent. Five reductions in wages, in work, and in conditions of employment swept through the shops at Pullman between May and December, 1893. The last was the most severe, amounting to nearly 30 percent, and our rents had not fallen. We owed Pullman \$70,000 when we struck May 11. We owe him twice as much today. He does not evict us for two reasons: One, the force of popular sentiment and public opinion; the other because he hopes to starve us out, to break through in the back of the American Railway Union, and to deduct from our miserable wages when we are forced to return to him the last dollar we owe him for the occupancy of his houses...

When we went to tell him our grievances he said we were all his "children." Pullman, both the man and the town, is an ulcer on the body politic. He owns the houses, the schoolhouses, and churches of God in the town he gave his once humble name. The revenue he derives from these, the wages he pays out with one hand—the Pullman Palace Car Company, he takes back with the other—the Pullman Land Association. He is able by this to bid under any contract car shop in this

country. His competitors in business, to meet this, must reduce the wages of their men. This gives him the excuse to reduce ours to conform to the market. His business rivals must in turn scale down; so must he. And thus the merry war—the dance of skeletons bathed in human tears—goes on, and it will go on, brothers, forever, unless you, the American Railway Union, stop it; end it; crush it out.

Our town is beautiful. In all these thirteen years no word of scandal has arisen against one of our women, young or old. What city of 20,000 persons can show the like? Since our strike, the arrests, which used to average four or five a day, has dwindled down to less than one a week. We are peaceable; we are orderly, and but for the kindly beneficence of kindly-hearted people in and about Chicago we would be starving. We are not desperate today, because we are not hungry, and our wives and children are not begging for bread. But George M. Pullman, who ran away from the public opinion that has arisen against him, like the genie from the bottle in the Arabian Nights, is not feeding us. He is patiently seated beside his millions waiting for what? To see us starve. We have grown better acquainted with the American Railway Union these convention days, and as we have heard sentiments of the noblest philanthropy fall from the lips of our general officers—your officers and ours—we have learned that there is a balm for all our troubles, and that the box containing it is in your hands today only awaiting opening to disseminate its sweet savor of hope

George M. Pullman, you know, has cut our wages from 30 to 70 percent. George M. Pullman has caused to be paid in the last year the regular quarterly dividend of 2 percent on his stock and an extra slice of 1 1/2 percent, making 9 1/2 percent on \$30,000,000 of capital. George M. Pullman, you know, took three contracts on which he lost less than \$5,000. Because he loved us? No. Because it was cheaper to lose a little money in his freight car and his coach shops than to let his workingmen go, but that petty loss, more than made up by us from money we needed to clothe our wives and little ones, was his excuse for effecting a gigantic reduction of wages in every department of his great works, of cutting men and boys and girls; with equal zeal, including everyone in the repair shops of the Pullman Palace cars on which such preposterous profits have been made...

We will make you proud of us, brothers, if you will give us the hand we need. Help us make our country better and more wholesome. Pull us out of our slough of despond. Teach arrogant grinders of the faces of the poor that there is still a God in Israel, and if need be a Jehovah—a God of battles. Do this, and on that last great day you will stand, as we hope to stand, before the great white throne "like gentlemen unafraid."

## **Document 2: Testimony of Jennie Curtis**

August 16, 1894

*State your name, residence, and occupation.*

Jennie Curtis; reside at Pullman; have been a seamstress for the Pullman company in the repair shops sewing room; worked for them five years.

*Are you a member of any labor organization?*

Yes, sir; I am a member of the American Railway Union.

*How long have you been a member of that union?*

Since about the 8th day of last May. I am president of the girls' union, local, No. 269, at Pullman.

*State what took place at the first interview.*

We went there and asked, as the men did, for more wages; we were cut lower than any of the men's departments throughout the works; in 1893 we were able to make 22 cents per hour, or \$2.25 per day, in my department, and on the day of the strike we could only earn, on an average, working as hard as we possibly could, from 70 to 80 cents a day. Whenever the men were cut in their wages the girls also received a cut. We were cut twice inside of a week in November, 1893,

and in January our wages were cut again; that was the last cut we received, and we worked as hard as we possibly could and doing all we could, too. The most experienced of us could only make 80 cents per day, and a great many of the girls could only average 40 to 50 cents per day.

My father worked for the Pullman company for thirteen years. He died last September, and I paid the rent to the Pullman company up to the time he died; I was boarding at the time of my father's death. He being laid off and sick for three months, owed the Pullman company \$60 at the time of his death for back rent, and the company made me, out of my small earnings, pay rent due from my father. The contract was that I should pay \$3 on the back rent every pay day; out of my small earnings I could not give them \$3 every pay day, and when I did not do so I was insulted and almost put out of the bank by the clerk for not being able to pay it to them. My wages were cut so low that I could not pay my board and give them \$3 on the back rent, but if I had \$2 or so over my board, I would leave it at the bank on the rent. On the day of the strike I still owed them \$15, which I am afraid they never will give me a chance to pay back.

### **Document 3: Testimony of Frank Glover**

August 22, 1894

I was going to Kensington the other afternoon and was talking with a gentleman on the cars about business and also in regard to the strike and he asked my opinions and asked me if I was willing to come before this commission and give my ideas in regard to the conditions at Pullman. I said I would. This gentleman has no connection with the Pullman company, but is a large real estate owner joining me.

*How do rentals compare in Kensington with rentals in Pullman?*

I should say, if I was interested, I would consider the Pullman property rentals cheaper than my own. I have frame houses of six rooms which I rent at \$12 per month. The Pullman houses, while I have never been in them, look very inviting from the outside, and I consider the prices as quoted in the papers at \$17 and \$22 a great deal cheaper than my houses, or houses joining me in Kensington which rent at from \$10 to \$12.

*What are the conveniences?*

No conveniences at all with the exception of running water in one room. No bathtubs or anything of that kind? No sir, we have no sewerage there, nothing but open ditches, and in one sense of the word, to a respectable laboring man, it is not very inviting... I know nothing about the conveniences, but I am told by the papers they have conveniences, and when a tenant leaves Pullman property and wants to rent one of my houses he invariably says, what beautiful homes they have in Pullman! I judge that the houses are kept in good repair; the houses in Kensington are not kept in good repair. I say to our tenants, "We make no repairs; whatever repairs you want you make yourself,"...

### **Document 4: George Pullman Answers His Strikers**

At the commencement of the very serious depression last year, we were employing at Pullman 5,816 men, and paying out in wages there \$305,000 a month. Negotiations with intending purchasers of railway equipment that were then pending for new work were stopped by them, orders already given by others were canceled, and we were obliged to lay off, as you are aware, a large number of men in every department, so that by November 1, 1893, there were only about 2,000 men in all departments, or about one third of the normal number. I realized the necessity for the most strenuous exertions to procure work immediately, without which there would be great embarrassment, not only to the employees and their families at Pullman, but also to those living in the immediate vicinity, including between 700 and 800 employees who had purchased homes and to whom employment was actually necessary to enable them to complete their payments.

I canvassed the matter thoroughly with the manager of the works and instructed him to cause the men to be assured that the company would do everything in its power to meet the competition which was sure to occur because of the great number of large car manufacturers that were in the same condition, and that were exceedingly anxious to keep their men employed. I knew that if there was any work to be let, bids for it would be made upon a much lower basis than ever before. (NOTE: The selling prices of passenger, baggage, box, refrigerator and street cars in the last two years have fallen by percentages, varying in the separate classes, from 17 to 28, the average reduction, taking the five classes together, being 24 percent.)

I can only assure you that if this company now restores the wages of the first half of 1893, as you have asked, it would be a most unfortunate thing for the men, because there is less than sixty days of contract work in sight in the shops under all orders and there is absolutely no possibility, in the present condition of affairs throughout the country, of getting any more orders for work at prices measured by the wages of May 1893. Under such a scale the works would necessarily close down and the great majority of the employees be put in idleness, a contingency I am using my best efforts to avoid.

#### **Document 5: Chicago Tribune Reporter on the Pullman Strike**

*In these July 3, 1894 excerpts, the Chicago Tribune shows its anti-union bias as it describes how Federal troops were called in to break up the strike.*

Jeer At Uncle Sam: Debs' Strikers Insultingly Defy Federal Courts.

To hell with the government! To hell with the courts!" was the response of a mob of 2,000 rioters last night at Blue Island when United States Marshal Arnold read the injunction... restraining them from interfering with the operation of the Rock Island and twenty other railroads. Then the rioters howled defiance at the Marshal and his deputies and promptly violated the injunction by throwing a box car across the tracks and stopping all traffic for the night. The Marshal immediately reiterated his demand for United States troops and it is the general belief that Uncle Sam's soldiers will today teach the lawless followers of [Eugene] Debs that the law is not a thing to be trifled with...

The injunction treated so contemptuously by the Blue Islanders restrains Debs and his strikers from interfering in any way with the business of railways which carry mails and inter-State freight and passenger trains. Its provisions are broad and all the roads are protected under the order. It is regarded as one of the strongest ever issued by a court. Ten thousand copies were printed, and will be posted on the line of every road this morning. In Dictator Debs' opinion the injunction is worthless. Last night he declared it was not worth "hell room."

Uncle Sam will take Dictator Debs' lawless rabble by the back of the neck at Blue Island today. The grip which will crush the life out of the strike nuisance will be given by the Fifteenth Regiment of United States Infantry now stationed at Fort Sheridan. The troops are standing to their arms, the artillery is loaded upon flat cars, in the yards stands an engine with steam up and manned by a trusted crew; nothing now is necessary but Attorney-General Olney's order to move...

[Marshal Arnold said,] I am here at Blue Island. Have read the order of the court to the rioters here and they simply hoot at it. They pay no attention to it and have made threats that they will not allow any Pullman car to pass through on the Rock Island road. We have had a desperate time with them here all day and our force is inadequate. In my judgement it is impossible to move trains without having the Fifteenth Infantry from Fort Sheridan ordered here at once. There are over 2,000 rioters here and more coming. Mail trains are in great danger.

#### **Document 6: Eugene V. Debs Speech**

June 1, 1895, Terre Haute, Indiana.

Sirs and Brothers—A cruel wrong against our great order, perpetrated by Wm. A. Woods, United States Circuit Judge, has been approved by the United States Supreme Court, and from

under its shadow I address this communication to you; but though prison walls frown upon myself and others whom you chose as officials, I assure you that neither despondency nor despair has taken the place of the courage which has characterized our order since the storms of persecution first began to beat upon us. Hope has not deserted us...

To crush the American Railway Union was the one tie that united them all in the bonds of vengeance; it solidified the enemies of labor into one great association, one organization which, by its fabulous wealth, enabled it to bring into action resources aggregating billions of money and every appliance that money could purchase. But in this supreme hour the American Railway Union, undaunted, put forth its efforts to rescue Pullman's famine-cursed wage slaves from the grasp of an employer as heartless as a stone, as remorseless as a savage and as unpitying as an incarnate fiend. The battle fought in the interest of starving men, women and children stands forth in the history of Labor's struggles as the great "Pullman Strike." It was a battle on the part of the American Railway Union fought for a cause as holy as ever aroused the courage of brave men; it was a battle in which upon one side were men thrice armed because their cause was just, but they fought against the combined power of corporations which by the use of money could debauch justice, and, by playing the part of incendiary, bring to their aid the military power of the government, and this solidified mass of venality, venom and vengeance constituted the foe against which the American Railway Union fought Labor's greatest battle for humanity.

What has been your reward for your splendid courage and manifold sacrifices? Our enemies say they are summed up in the one word "defeat." They point to the battlefield and say: "Here is where the host of the American Railway Union went down before the confederated enemy of labor." They point to the spot where Miles' serried soldiery stood with drawn swords, tramping steeds and shotted guns to kill innocent men whose only crime was devotion to wretched men and women, the victims of Pullman's greed. They designate the places where the minions of a despotic judge, the thieves and thugs, taken from Chicago slums, transformed into deputy marshalls and armed with clubs and pistols, went forth to murder indiscriminately and to arouse the vengeance of the people by incendiary fires... whose pitiless enmity of labor would have glorified in widespread conflagration rather than permitted a strike in the interest of famishing men, women and children, to have succeeded...

Brothers of the American Railway Union, even in defeat our rewards are grand beyond expression, rewards which come only to brave men, the consciousness of noble deeds performed in the holy cause of labor's emancipation. Cowards, the fawning, sycophantic poltroons of power, never knew the thrills of joy that reward the heroes of battles fought in the interest of the oppressed.