
Altgeld and Pullman

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Published in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, vol. 18, no. 10 (Oct. 1894), pp. 975-977.

For a number of years the town of Pullman has been regarded as a sort of a paradise, an Eden, where the "thorny stem of time" was continually blossoming and producing the most delicious fruits that labor ever gathered and garnered. Descriptions of Pullman became revised editions of "Baxter's Saints' Rest."¹ Painted or modeled, Pullman appeared a fairy land, and George M. Pullman, in white robes, playing angel, was forever singing:

Here bring your tools and skill,
Here rent my houses,
Labor has no sorrows
Pullman cannot heal.

And, sure enough, men flocked to Pullman with their wives and children, their tools and their skill; they rented Pullman houses, burned Pullman gas, drank Pullman water, and became Pullman slaves.

George M. Pullman grew fat faster and faster until he bloomed into a multimillionaire. The more millions he secured, the meaner he became. Pullman gradually lost its paradisiacal pretensions and became more like a poor farm — a penitentiary, or slave pen. Wages were reduced, clothes became rags, food scarce, rent high, and hence, debt, destitution, and despair transformed Pullman into a sort of a hell hole, where George M. Pullman personated his royal forked tailed highness to a dot. With true satanic genius he gave his slaves the choice to work or starve, or work and starve. In either case, starvation was their fate, and starvation has come. Fully eight thousand men, women and children in Pullman are in the grasp of famine.

¹ Reference to *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650), by **Richard Baxter** (1615-1691).

Governor Altgeld, having been made aware of the deplorable condition of George M. Pullman's late employees, issued the following proclamation to the people of Illinois, and especially to the citizens of Chicago:

There is great distress growing out of the want of food in and around the town of Pullman. More than a thousand families, or in the neighborhood of six thousand people, are utterly destitute — nearly four-fifths of these are women and children. The men have endeavored to get work, but were unable to do so. * * * As a rule the men are a superior class of laboring people — industrious, capable and steady, and some of them have worked for the Pullman Company for more than ten years. Those who have been given work can get food, but are still in such an impoverished condition that they cannot help their neighbors if they would. The relief society is unable to get more supplies. On last Saturday it gave to each family two pounds of oatmeal and two pounds of cornmeal, and, having nothing left, it suspended operations, leaving the people in an absolutely helpless condition. The County Commissioners of Cook County, as overseers of the poor, have rendered some assistance, but, owing to limited appropriation, they can furnish relief but for a short time We cannot now stop to inquire the cause of this distress. The good people of this state cannot allow women and children by the hundred to perish of hunger. I therefore call upon all humane and charitably disposed citizens to contribute what they can toward giving relief to these people.

The Governor has also called on the Commissioners of Cook county to do all in their power in the matter.

The foregoing reads like a wail from India or Russia. It informs the world that Pullman is famine cursed and that help must come speedily if Pullman's slaves are to be rescued from death by starvation. Gov. Altgeld telegraphed George M. Pullman regarding the condition of his former employees, as follows:

It is claimed they struck because, after years of toil, their loaves were so reduced that their children went hungry. Admitting that they were wrong and foolish, they had yet served you long and well, and you must feel some interest in them. They do not stand on the same footing with you, so that much must be overlooked. The State of Illinois has not the least desire to meddle in the affairs of your company, but it cannot allow a whole community within its borders to perish of hunger. The local overseer of

the poor has been appealed to, but there is a limit to what he can do. I cannot help them very much at present, so, unless relief comes from some other source, I shall either have to call an extra session of the legislature to make special appropriations or else issue an appeal to the humane people of the state to give bread to your recent employees. It seems to me that you would prefer to relieve the situation yourself, especially as it has cost the state upwards of \$50,000 to protect your property and as both state and the public have suffered enormous loss and expense on account of disturbances that grew out of the trouble between your company and its workmen.

The millionaire, true to his coldblooded nature, remained silent and passive. Gov. Altgeld became heroic, and having made a personal inspection of Pullman homes, addressed a letter to the conscienceless author of the horrible discord, in which he said:

I examined the conditions at Pullman yesterday, visited even the kitchens and back rooms of many of the people. I learn from your manager that last spring there were 3,260 people on the pay roll. Yesterday there were 2,220 at work, but over 600 of these are new men, so that only about 1,000 of the old employees have been taken back, thus leaving over 1,000 of the old employees who have not been taken back. A few hundred have left. The remainder have applied for work, but were told that they were not needed. These are utterly destitute. The relief committee has exhausted its resources. It seems to me your company cannot afford to have me appeal to the charity and humanity of the state to save the lives of your old employees. Four-fifths of those people are women and children. No matter what caused this distress, it must be met. If you will allow me, I will make this suggestion: If you had shut down your works last fall when you say business was poorer you would not have expected to get any rent from your tenants; now, while a dollar is a large sum to each of these people, all the rent now due is a comparatively small matter to you. If you will cancel all rent to Oct. 1 you would be as well off as if you had shut down. This would enable those who are at work to meet their most pressing wants. Then, if you cannot give work to all, work some half time, so that all can at least get something to eat for their families. This will give immediate relief to the whole situation, and then by degrees assist as many to go elsewhere as desire to do so, and all to whom you cannot give work. In this way something like a normal condition could be reestablished at Pullman before winter, and you would not be out

any more than you would have been had you shut down a year ago.

To this letter Governor Altgeld received a reply from George M. Pullman, declining to contribute to the suffering people in his town, and the Governor therefore dismissed him, substantially, as follows:

I see that your company refuses to do anything towards relieving the situation at Pullman. If you will make the round I made, go into the houses of these people, meet them face to face, and talk with them, you will be convinced that none of them had \$1,300 or any other sum of money a few weeks ago. It is not my business to fix the moral responsibility in this case. There are nearly six thousand people suffering for want of food. They were your employees, and four-fifths of them are women and children. Some of these people have worked for you more than ten years. I assumed that even if they were wrong and had been foolish, you would not be willing to see them perish. I also assumed that, as the state had just been to a large expense to protect your property, you would not want to have the public shoulder the burden of relieving distress in your town. As you refuse to do anything to relieve the suffering in this case, I am compelled to appeal to the humanity of the people of Illinois to do so.

The foregoing is only an outline of a corporation campaign against enslaved and starving men, women, and children of unparalleled greed and satanic cruelty. We introduce a mere synopsis of Pullman's rapacity and depravity, to preserve the record, and exhibit George M. Pullman before the world as one of the meanest monsters the country has produced.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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First Edition