
**Letter to President of the United States
Grover Cleveland in Washington
from Eugene V. Debs, President
of the American Railway Union, and
J.R. Sovereign, Grand Master Workman
of the Order of the Knights of Labor
in Chicago, July 7, 1894**

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Chicago, Ill., July 7 [1894].

To the Hon. Grover Cleveland,
President of the United States,
Executive Mansion, Washington, DC.

Dear Sir:—

Through a long period of depression, enforced idleness, and low wages, resulting in widespread poverty and in many cases actual starvation, the working people have been patient, patriotic, and law-abiding, and not until the iron heel of corporate tyranny was applied with the intention to subjugate the working people to the will of arrogant monopolies, did they make any effort to stay their oppressors. The Pullman strike was not declared until the employees of the Pullman Company were driven to the verge of starvation, their entreaties spurned with contempt, and their grievances denied a hearing. No refusal to handle Pullman cars was declared by any railway employee until all propositions looking toward arbitration and conciliation were rejected by the Pullman Company. Notwithstanding the facts set forth above were known to the public and the national authorities, you have seen fit, under the guise of protecting the mails and federal property, to invoke the service of the United States Army, whose very

presence is used to coerce and intimidate peaceable working people into a humiliating obedience to the will of their oppressors.

By your acts, in so far as you have supplanted civil and state authorities with the federal military power, the spirit of unrest and distrust has so far been augmented that a deep-seated conviction is fast becoming prevalent that this government is soon to be declared a military despotism. The transmission of the United States mails is not interrupted by the striking employees of any railway company, but by the railway companies themselves, who refused to haul the mails on trains to which Pullman cars were not attached. If it is a criminal interference with the United States mails for the employees of a railway company to detach from a mail train a Pullman palace car contrary to the will of the company, then it holds true that it is the same criminal interference whenever a Pullman palace car is detached from a mail train in accordance with the will of a railway company while said mail train is in transit. The line of criminality in such case should not be drawn at the willingness or unwillingness of railway employees, but at the act itself, and inasmuch as it has been the common practice of railway corporations to attach and detach from mail trains Pullman palace cars at will, while said trains are in transit and carrying the mails of the United States, it would seem an act of discrimination against the employees of the railway corporations to declare such acts unlawful interference with the transmission of the mails when done by employees with or without the consent of their employers.

In view of these facts we look upon the far-fetched decision of Attorney General [Richard] Olney, the sweeping un-American injunctions against railway employees, and the movements of the regular army as employing the powers of the general government for the support and protection of the railway corporations in their determination to degrade and oppress their employees.

The present railway strike was precipitated by the uneasy desire of the railway corporations to destroy the organizations of their employees and make the working people more subservient to the will of their employers; and as all students of government agree that free institutions depend for their perpetuity upon the freedom and prosperity of the common people, it would seem more in consonance with the spirit of democratic government if federal authority was exercised in deference to the rights of the toiling masses to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But on the contrary there is not an instance on record where in any conflict between corporations and the people the

strong arm of the military [power] has been employed to protect the working people and the industrial masses from the [ravage] and persecution of corporate greed. But the measure of character has been in the [mode?] of declaring the corporations always good and in the right and the working people always bad and in the wrong.

Now sir, we pledge to you the power of our respective organizations, individually and collectively, for the maintenance of peace and good order and the preservation of life and property, and will aid in the arrest and punishment of all violators of the civil and criminal laws of state and nation. In the present contest between labor and railway corporations we shall use every peaceable and honorable means at our command consistent with the law and our constitutional rights, to secure for the working people just compensation for labor done and respectable consideration in accordance with the inherent rights of all men and the spirit of republican government. In doing so we appeal to all the liberty-loving people of the nation to aid and support us in this most just and righteous cause.

[American Railway Union,]

by *Eugene V. Debs*, *President*.

Order of the Knights of Labor,

by *J.R. Sovereign*, *Grand Master Workman*.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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