

AP U.S. History "To Make a Millionaire a Billionaire"

HW- read

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**Life in a Company Town**

*Pullman Strikers*

In 1894, workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company, which manufactured railroad cars, protested wage cuts and company control of housing and stores. Their town—Pullman, Illinois—was entirely owned by their employer, George Pullman. The company used an injunction to prevent the union from obstructing the railways and the mails. President Grover Cleveland finally sent troops to end the strike. This statement by the Pullman strikers was delivered at a convention of the American Railway Union.

**M**r. 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 heaven-sent message you alone can give us on this earth.

... 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 thirty 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.

Rents all over the city in every quarter of its vast extent have fallen, in some cases to one-half. Residences, compared with which ours are hovels, can be had a few miles away at the price we have been contributing to make a millionaire a billionaire. What we pay \$15 for in Pullman is leased for \$8 in Roseland; and remember that just as no man or woman of our 4,000 toilers has ever felt the friendly pressure of George M. Pullman's hand, so no man or woman of us all has ever owned or can ever hope to own one inch of George M. Pullman's land. Why, even the very streets are his. . . .

Water which Pullman buys from the city at 8 cents a thousand gallons he retails to us at 500 percent advance and claims he is losing \$400 a month on it. Gas which sells at 75 cents per thousand feet in Hyde Park, just north of us, he sells for \$2.25. 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 coun-

try. 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.

138

Thinking Questions

- \* What are the criticisms of Pullman? Are they valid?
- \* When does industriousness become greed?