

**This letter is fictional but authentically represents the ideas of the historical figure. Quotations indicate statements actually made by the historical person.**

Dear President Cleveland,

I have recently been made aware of the dilemma you face in deciding what to do about the labor unrest in the mid-west. I hope you will take my perspective into account as you make this critical decision.

The Pullman strike is an act of desperation by men who felt they had no other option. I had earlier advised the men against a strike but after visiting the town, realized that there was no other hope. Over one-third of Pullman's workers have been laid-off. Wages have been slashed by up to one-half while company store prices and rents have not been lowered. The children of the strikers go without shoes and coats. There is no coal to heat their homes. Many families have no food for dinner and yet stock holder's dividends have actually increased. A local union committee voiced their complaints to company leaders but without satisfaction. In fact, three of those men were immediately fired with no explanation.

The American Railway Union convention chose twelve men to go to the company and propose arbitration of the wage dispute. These men were told by company leaders that there was "nothing to arbitrate" because wages and working conditions should be determined by management without interference by labor. After our efforts failed the ARU voted to boycott. Switchmen in the ARU were asked to refuse to switch Pullman cars onto trains. If the switchmen were discharged or disciplined for refusal, all ARU members of the railroad line pledged to cease work at once.

To date, there has been little violence and damage to railroad property has been minimal. I have encouraged the strikers to "keep away from railroad yards, or rights-of-way or other places where large crowds congregate." I have told them "a safe place is to remain away entirely from places where there is any likelihood of outbreak". Rioting has been done by hooligans and ruffians, not by strikers. Not a single ARU member in Chicago has been killed or wounded by law-enforcement authorities. The attorney general says that organizing workers into unions is an illegal conspiracy against trade violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. It is the attorney general who is guilty of conspiracy. He is conspiring to break up the union. The attorney general and the GMA have deliberately attached mail cars to Pullmans so that strikers would be accused of obstructing the delivery of the U.S. mail. And yet despite their efforts no mail has accumulated.

The Federal Court injunction forbids the strike leaders from encouraging the boycott by word or deed. We cannot even meet to discuss the strike. We believe this court order to be a violation of our first amendment rights of free speech and peaceable protest. Furthermore we dispute the courts use of the Sherman Anti-trust Act in justifying the injunction. The courts have used the act against labor rather than against big business which Congress had intended. We refuse to obey the injunction on the grounds that it is unconstitutional. We are going to ignore the court order even if we must go to jail for contempt of court.

Mr. President I respectfully request that you allow the boycott to continue without interference from the Federal Government. The local authorities have been able to handle the few cases of violence that have occurred. The government is favoring greedy business interests at the expense of the working class. The government should treat all Americans the same. We currently have the sympathy of the public because they know "our cause is just".

Pullman workers simply want enough to live on. They are putting their faith in the current political system. Please do not let them down.

Sincerely,

Eugene V. Debs