

Grover Cleveland Thinks Aloud

These are troubled times. As I began my second term as president, the Depression of 1893 plunged the country into a deep economic depression that has caused hardships for all Americans. Businesses are failing and large numbers of people are out of work. Just two months ago, hundreds of unemployed men marched on Washington demanding that the government create jobs. Now, the strike against the Pullman Company in Chicago has spread to a general railroad strike involving over 125,000 workers from the Midwest to the Pacific Ocean. The national welfare is threatened, and as president I must take action. Chicago and Pullman remain at the center of the conflict and any solution to this crisis must begin there.

This is not the first time that Chicago has been the flash point for these growing conflicts between businessmen and workers. Just eight years ago, the city erupted in chaos over the Haymarket Affair. It is past time to resolve this issue so that the country can move forward as a prosperous nation.

How can this problem be most effectively resolved? What is the proper role for the federal government to play in disputes between employers and employees?

I know that many in Chicago have sympathy for the strikers and the way they have been treated by Mr. Pullman. Both the Civic Federation of Chicago and the mayor of Chicago have offered to mediate the dispute, but Mr. Pullman turned them all down. Should I have the federal government step in as a mediator to negotiate a settlement between the two sides?

My Attorney General claims that only the federal government can bring order to this situation. He has already obtained a court injunction prohibiting union leaders from encouraging the boycott or even communicating among themselves about the strike. Should I wait to see if arresting those who refuse to obey the injunction is enough to end this crisis? Or can we wait even another day as this unrest grows?

Attorney General Olney has asked that I immediately send federal troops to Chicago to stem escalating civil disorder and threats to commerce. If I send in troops and blood is shed, will it make the situation worse? On the other hand, if I do not firmly put down this violation of law and order will I encourage wider incidents of mob violence and disrespect for property rights?

However, Governor Altgeld states that things aren't that bad and that federal intervention is a not needed. He argues that sending troops would be a violation of state's rights. Can I afford to leave such a serious matter to local and state officials to solve? Would I violate the Constitution if the state has not asked for federal assistance?

What should I do?

- Bring the two sides together to negotiate a settlement to the strike
- Arrest those who violate the injunction and wait to see what happens
- Send in federal troops immediately
- Leave it to local and state officials to solve