

# California History

The Magazine of the California Historical Society

spring 1979



# CRUSADE OR CIVIL WAR ?

## The Pullman Strike in California

---

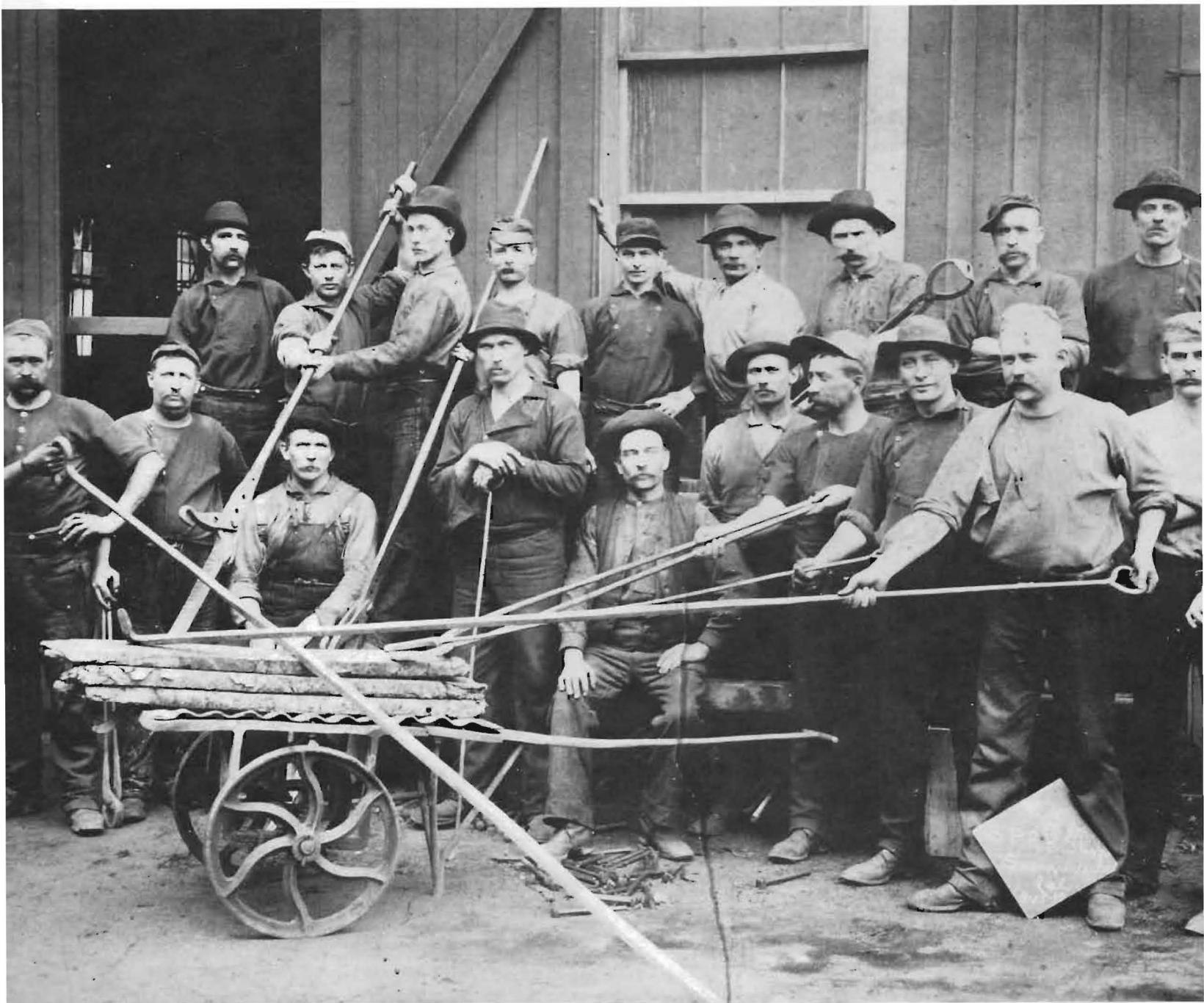
Captivated by the emerging prominence of union leader Eugene V. Debs and a midwestern drama of violent confrontation between strikers and federal troops, historians of the Pullman strike of 1894 have failed the West. Understandably, they have looked at important factors contributing to this most important and disruptive strike of the late nineteenth century: severe nation-wide economic depression; deteriorating living conditions among factory workers in the "model" Pullman company town just south of Chicago, Illinois; the meteoric rise and collapse of the American Railway Union, sponsor of the strike; and the maelstrom of events following use of federal injunctions and troops which resulted in the deaths of over a dozen participants. Modern-day historians have also examined the economic, political, and legal aftereffects of the strike, including precedence for use of injunctions in labor disputes and the new stature gained by Debs, who subsequently became the foremost leader of the socialist movement in the United States.

Missing the trees for the forest, few historians have given attention to regional problems and responses to the nationwide strike. The events of the Pullman conflict varied considerably from place to place, and in many western states the dispute assimilated other highly charged issues which greatly influenced the strike's local impact. The consequences of this phenomenon proved particularly notable in California.

In the golden state the initial boycott of Pullman-manufactured railroad cars and the ensuing strike posed a unique dilemma. Since the 1860's the overbearing presence of the Central Pacific-Southern Pacific Railroad had embittered many Californians, and they, with much of the press, sympathized with Deb's American Railway Union (ARU) and its struggle against the rail-

---

William Ray, a native Californian, has worked in curatorial and administrative capacities in several museums and historical agencies in California. He is currently Director of Museums for Hillsborough County (Tampa), Florida.



*Blacksmiths at the Sacramento shops of the Central Pacific/Southern Pacific c.1890, some of the city's several thousand unskilled workers who supported the American Railway Union strike.*

*Luxurious interior of a railroad car manufactured in George Pullman's "model" town south of Chicago. Workers refused to service Pullman cars after he cut his employees' wages.*



road. On the other hand, surging labor militancy had recently resulted in violent confrontation in such places as Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, Haymarket Square in Chicago, and steel plants in Pennsylvania. Viewed in conjunction with these events, many people suspected that the Pullman boycott was part of a workingmen's conspiracy to gain economic and political power.

By mid-1894, as the Pullman strike took effect, crippling California economically and isolating it from the East, most citizens were so resentful either of the railroad's past arrogance or the workers' audacity that they made hasty and uncompromising judgments. Magnifying the railroad's culpability or fearing the merging of

unionism with anarchy, virtually every citizen and institution in the state took sides in the dispute. With the lines drawn, the strike assumed the character of a crusade—or of a civil war: labor against capital, poverty against wealth, citizen against monopoly corporation, anarchy against democracy. That the "crusade" was in fact a desperate attempt by unskilled railroad workers to secure the rights and protections of union membership is a sober after-assessment made over the distance of years. In the nineties, the issues led to confrontation which spawned violence, a situation easily equated with civil war in the fearful disquiet of the times.<sup>1</sup>

Like a chain of falling dominoes, the business depression following the Panic of 1893 had seriously curtailed trade on the nation's railroads.<sup>2</sup> Railroad companies reacted to hard times, among other ways, by reducing orders for the opulent Pullman Palace Sleeping Cars. George M. Pullman, railroad car-builder supreme, attempted to reverse his decline in sales by lowering the price of his equipment. He accomplished this expedient by cutting his workers' wages, the largest cost incurred in producing the elaborate cars. Unabashedly he ordered several wage cuts in one year—one of which amounted to a 30 percent reduction. Coupled with high rents charged for company houses and Pullman's declaration of a normal 8 percent stock dividend shortly after the most severe wage cut, his actions caused a walkout which closed the huge Pullman factory outside of Chicago.<sup>3</sup> For more than a month workmen attempted to arbitrate their differences with Pullman, but the puritanical industrialist refused any concessions. In desperation, the striking workmen appealed to Eugene V. Debs and his new American Railway Union (ARU) for assistance in bringing Pullman to terms.

Barely a year old, Debs' new union was virtually untested and little known nationally. A new concept in labor organization, it aimed to develop a union which represented all railway workers, including the skilled railroad craftsmen already unionized in railway brother-

hoods. In reality the infant union drew most of its members from the ranks of the unskilled, but if successful in its goal, it would have become the single most powerful union in the United States. To move ahead, the ARU needed publicity, recognition, and members. Involvement in the Pullman strike offered just such an opportunity, and although this move was a big gamble for a new organization, the prize was possible control of unionized railroad labor.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, on June 27, 1894, Debs ordered ARU members between Chicago and the Pacific Ocean to boycott the use of Pullman sleeping cars and to prevent their employment in regular train service. Debs' instructions reached California by telegraph, bringing with them the first labor dispute of national importance to affect the state. The decision also brought a direct attack on the state's largest employer, its most vital transportation link, and some would say, its biggest headache: the Central Pacific-Southern Pacific Railroad. Despotism or cornerstone of state prosperity, the railroad was the most controversial and dominant force in California's "Gilded Age."

Actually, there was little gilding on the harshness of life in 1894. Roaring boom years were a tarnished memory, and claims that California was a "Garden of Eden" seemed blatantly fraudulent. Extending the railroad to California had brought industrialization, urbanization, and many of the same pressures which already faced society in the East. Labor agitation, unemployment, fear of immigration, corporate monopoly, and corruption surfaced in the depression years following the Panic of 1893 as manifestations of frightening trends within developing industrial capitalism.

Surprisingly, by the 1890's California was the most industrialized and one of the most urbanized states in the nation.<sup>5</sup> Only one-fifth of the state's population lived on California's large mechanized farms (one-half the national rate), and new immigration contributed to one of the highest urban growth rates in the country.<sup>6</sup> The

---

*By the 1890s California was the most industrialized and one of the most urbanized states in the nation.*

---

Southern Pacific added to this phenomenal growth by providing the major communications, service, and transportation connections to the East. Population and commerce naturally concentrated at distribution and junction points along the railroad. Consequently, the railroad strike not only paralyzed transportation, but it also seriously affected the heart of the state's economy and the routine life of its cities and citizens as well.

In the then pre-eminent urban areas of California—Sacramento, San Francisco-Oakland, and Los Angeles—sympathies and actions on all levels of society were tempered and shaped by consideration of the struggle between the Southern Pacific and labor. People living in areas acutely concerned with the railroad monopoly, such as Sacramento and Oakland, made a sometimes awkward choice which generally favored the laborers. In Los Angeles, on the other hand, a city "blessed" with a competing railroad and a notoriously anti-labor press, the ARU received little, and at best, uninspired, support. Strike-related events in these three areas ran the spectrum of emotion, attitude, and violence. The strain brought by the confrontation and the public's reaction exposed important aspects of the communities' structures and revealed both the strengths and frailties in the Southern Pacific's economic and political power.

The strike's impact was heightened in California by its uniqueness, for railroad-labor relations in the state had largely been maintained on an amiable level. In fact, until the Pullman conflict there had never been a serious labor dispute in the history of the Southern Pacific Corporation. The established railway brotherhoods had en-

*Company C of the national guard was among the units called up to quell the strike situation in Sacramento.*

joyed the almost unprecedented confidence of the Southern Pacific, the press, and the public—a confidence that was fostered by a prevailing anti-strike sentiment, high wage rates for skilled employees, a disinterest in the closed shop, and union brotherhood insistence upon loyalty to the railroad company.<sup>7</sup>

Concerned with maintaining the status quo, railroad managers and brotherhood leaders were alarmed by the ARU and its goal of unifying railroad workers into one irrepressible organization. Naturally, the Southern Pacific feared the bargaining potential of this kind of union, while the brotherhoods felt their autonomy threatened. Especially frightening was the ARU's successful solicitation of unskilled workers, common laborers, and other railwaymen who were outside the organizing sphere of the railway craft unions.

Supported by the prestigious Brotherhoods of Locomotive Engineers, Conductors, Telegraphers, Dispatchers, and Trainmen, the Southern Pacific moved swiftly and decisively to prevent the ARU from gaining a foothold in California.<sup>8</sup> But, in common with most railroad companies, the Southern Pacific was unable to control the dynamic growth of the ARU.

**T**he first California chapter of the ARU was organized at Los Angeles on November 28, 1893, with membership solicited from employees of the Southern Pacific and Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroads. Both railroads refused recognition of the new union, and they dismissed and blacklisted known ARU members. Many of the blacklisted union men then went underground and secretly distributed circulars and information about the ARU around the state. In this way they were instrumental in organizing ARU locals in Northern California. By January, 1894, as the national strength of the

union increased unprecedentedly and despite attempts by the railroad to suppress its growth, ARU chapters were chartered openly in Sacramento, San Francisco, and Oakland, with a total membership of several thousand workers.<sup>9</sup>

As a result, on June 28, 1894, only one day after the ARU had instituted its nationwide boycott of the use of Pullman sleeping cars, Southern Pacific operations ground to a halt in California. Strikers took control of most stations and railroad yards (including the main terminals at Sacramento, Oakland, San Jose, Fresno, and Los Angeles, as well as many way-stations) and brought normal activities to a stop. Rails were greased or removed, tracks were blockaded with engines and cars, and in one instance a trestle was burned to prevent the railroad from operating trains manned with brotherhood workers. The ARU had caught the railroad unawares, but its demands that the railroad voluntarily join the Pullman boycott—in which event all other railroad operations could be continued—were promptly denounced by Southern Pacific officials. As a result regular train operations were discontinued and, along with them, the mails, freight, and overland passenger travel.<sup>10</sup> Finally out in the open, the “irresistible” force of ARU imperatives was pitted against the “immovable” prerogatives of railroad management—an explosive situation during the hot California summer of 1894.

The boycott of Pullman cars and the ensuing strike could not have occurred at a more difficult time for California. The depression had been wrecking economic havoc for months. The state and the nation were on nerve's edge about the activities of Coxe's Army in April and May and a possible world-wide anarchist conspiracy (the president of France had been assassinated in June).<sup>11</sup> In California, summer harvest time was at hand, and the railroad was vitally needed to transport produce to the East. To these tensions and economic crises was now added the inconvenience and violence of the Pullman boycott.



As the hub of the Central Pacific-Southern Pacific network, Sacramento was immediately affected by the boycott. Although agriculture, especially wheat farming, dominated the life of the Sacramento Valley, the city itself was a key supply and distribution point. The Southern Pacific maintained its main shop facilities and one of its largest terminals in Sacramento and employed over 3,000 men out of a total urban population of approximately 30,000. Perhaps one-fifth to one-fourth of the city's population was dependent upon the railroad payroll, with merchants and other businessmen also in its economic sphere.<sup>12</sup>

Over 2,100 shopmen and hundreds of other railroad workers rallied to the ARU in Sacramento. Because of the shops, large engine terminal, and maintenance-of-way operations, the Sacramento work force was dominated by men who were not eligible for brotherhood membership, and consequently, the city quickly became a bastion of ARU strength. Reflective of their numbers, the strikers also received the moral support of the city's

mayor, sheriff, merchants, and what appears to have been a sizeable proportion of the citizenry. Southern Pacific's management demanded the arrest of strikers who interfered with its trains, but local officials declined to act, citing their responsibility to the community, not just the railroad.<sup>13</sup> When local authorities made no move against the union, railroad lawyers from many affected companies urged federal officials to make an unprecedented move to break the deadlock. Claiming that interstate commerce and the US mail service were being interrupted—although often the railroads themselves refused to attach mail cars to trains boycotting Pullman cars—the government determined to force the strikers to return to work.<sup>14</sup>

Acting on July 2 on the orders of President Grover Cleveland, United States Attorney General Richard Olney issued instructions to federal attorneys in California and across the country to use injunctions against the ARU. In Sacramento notification of these injunctions was given to the ARU's mediation committee by US

*Regular army troops were brought into Sacramento from San Francisco when national guardsmen broke ranks and joined the strikers and sympathizers.*





Marshal Barry Baldwin and Southern Pacific General Superintendent J. A. Fillmore. But to their surprise, ARU strength was so secure in the area that even a force of federal marshals could not succeed in escorting a mail train out of the yards on July 3. Thwarted by the strikers, Marshal Baldwin appealed to Governor Henry E. Markham for assistance from the national guard. Markham responded quickly and ordered the national guard to furnish whatever aid was necessary to control the situation.<sup>15</sup>

Lack of adequate logistical preparation, equipment, food, and transportation arrangements for the nearly 1,000 guardsmen who were quickly activated caused confusion and bitterness among the troops as they were moved into Sacramento on the night of July 3. The presence of large groups of strikers, holiday crowds, and orders to take possession of the Sacramento railroad terminal forced the ill-prepared guardsmen into hasty action on July 4. Hampered by the press of people, the military had difficulty acting, and the ARU used the situation to its best advantage. Strikers harranged the troops to throw down their arms, and the confusion was heightened when it became apparent that many of the guardsmen from Sacramento and Stockton were employees of the railroad, and ARU members too. Some broke ranks and marched off with strikers and sympathizers from the crowd. The remaining guardsmen, hungry and sweltering in the 105° heat of the day, stood their ground while Marshal Baldwin pleaded with the crowd to disperse. Many troopers fainted from heat prostration.<sup>16</sup>

The ineffectual, and some said mutinous, behavior of the national guard caused Marshal Baldwin to request regular army troops for use in Sacramento. A force of 500 soldiers was dispatched from San Francisco and arrived on July 11 after a cautious trip on a heavily guarded troop train.<sup>17</sup> Between July 4 and July 11 the ARU had maintained firm control in Sacramento, and strikers were fed and sheltered by merchants and townspeople. Al-

---

*Major railroad centers were firmly in the hands of strikers, but military presence was building rapidly.*

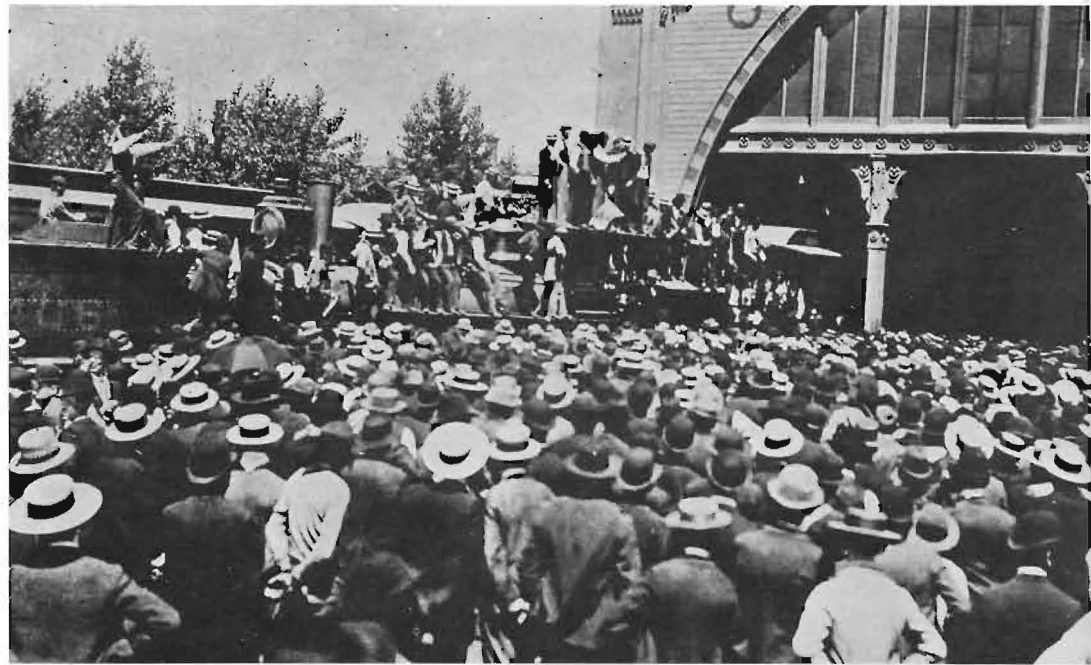
---

though on July 10 President Cleveland had ordered strikers throughout the United States to cease their boycott or face arrest and imprisonment, this order had no immediate effect in California. National guard troops were largely confined to camps established on the lawns of the state capitol where they engaged in much needed training exercises. In the only significant maneuver during this week, guardsmen, reinforced by naval reservists, succeeded in regaining control of the San Jose depot and yards. Otherwise, the major railroad centers in California were firmly in the hands of strikers, although the military presence was building rapidly.<sup>18</sup>

On July 11, national guard troops anxious to redeem their reputations and the newly arrived army soldiers in Sacramento were ordered to capture the Southern Pacific depot which was still held by strikers. But the ARU was one step ahead. Anticipating that the federal soldiers meant business, being advised by their attorney that resisting the army constituted treason, and believing that they could continue to impede train service because they controlled other stations down the line to Oakland, the ARU had abandoned the Sacramento terminal during the night of the tenth. When the troops arrived on the eleventh, they found the station deserted, and they quickly occupied the buildings and yards.<sup>19</sup>

During the next month of federal occupation in Sacramento, seven persons were killed either by sabotage blamed on the ARU (five people died when a troop train was derailed) or in incidents attributed to vengeful soldiers. The press and Sacramento's board of city trustees condemned the military for over-reacting to the

*Standing atop a Pullman car, US Marshal Barry Baldwin harangued strikers at the Sacramento depot to allow a mail train to leave the yard.*



situation in their city, and this denunciation found favor with that portion of the population which continued to support the ARU. The military forces, however, had succeeded in breaking the ARU's control of Sacramento and in re-opening the Central Pacific's transcontinental line.<sup>20</sup>

With Sacramento's urban labor force dominated by railroad employees, most of whom were members of the ARU, it was not surprising the union received strong support in the city. Most railroad employees in Sacramento were shopmen who eagerly sought the benefits of ARU organization because they lived at the most vulnerable employment level. This fact undoubtedly contributed to the fervor of community support and the tenacity of the union's efforts. Unlike the Southern Pacific's managers, Sacramento's railroad workers had roots in the community which strengthened their power during the strike.

Many people also found a link between the ARU

strike and their outspoken hatred for the tyranny of the Southern Pacific monopoly. In fact, the popular support for labor evidenced in Sacramento reflected an anti-railroad campaign that had been waged in California for years. During the strike the Southern Pacific was repeatedly accused of hindering mail shipments to purposely incite government involvement in the strike.<sup>21</sup> The charge cannot be substantiated, but the Southern Pacific's lack of community influence was illustrated by the refusal of local authorities to act against the strikers. Thus, the railroad's clearest option lay in forcing government action against the ARU, and whether by necessity or design the union was repressed by federal forces. A potent force of economic life, the Southern Pacific was often the arbiter and manipulator of events in California. But in this instance, Sacramentans seemed willing to suffer the strike's deprivations as long as the railroad suffered at the same time.

Throughout the initial weeks of the boycott when the

ARU dominated activity in Sacramento, rail traffic was also disrupted in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area. Approximately 2,000 ARU strikers took control of the Oakland Mole terminal and yards, and large demonstrations erupted at Southern Pacific headquarters in San Francisco. Southern Pacific's ferries and commuter trains on both sides of the Bay were halted, and mail, freight, and passenger service to all points was severed. But in spite of these inconveniences, residents of the Bay Area, like those in Sacramento, generally blamed the railroad for the disruption caused by the boycott.<sup>22</sup>

**M**uch of the support for the ARU came from the Bay Area's large and well-organized labor force. The strike was particularly popular among workers who disliked the powerful Southern Pacific and felt a common bond with the struggling ARU. The San Francisco Labor Council, the Workingmen's League, the local chapter of the Knights of Labor, and the Socialist Labor party all supported the strikers, and members of these groups often bolstered attendance at ARU meetings. The San Francisco press was also busy producing anti-Southern Pacific propaganda, offering almost unanimous support for the union effort.<sup>23</sup>

In Oakland, the mayor refused to order city police to move against the strikers, and many merchants supported the ARU in order to protest the Southern Pacific's control of the city waterfront. In other gestures of support, a ladies relief organization established a hospital for strikers, while a group of non-railroad workmen formed a "militia" company to aid the ARU.<sup>24</sup>

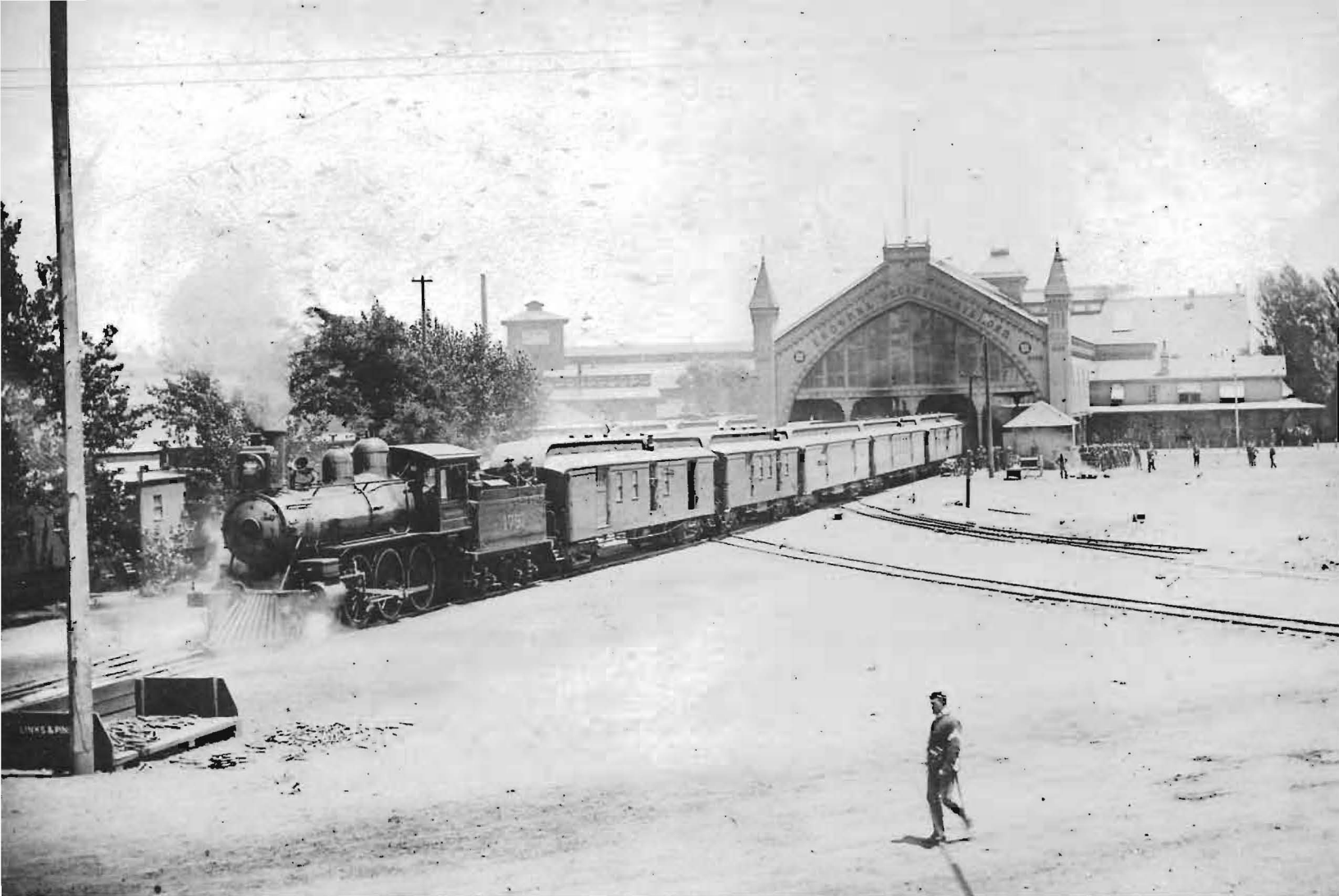
It was apparent from the beginning of the strike that its consequences in San Francisco-Oakland paled in comparison to its effects in Sacramento. Certainly the potential for serious violence existed, and tensions and tempers frequently flared, but the situation never reached

the proportions it did in the capital city. As the principal terminal of the Southern Pacific system, Sacramento was the natural focal point of ARU activities. In fact, by cutting transcontinental and northbound traffic at Sacramento, the rail line from Sacramento to Oakland became insignificant. Only after troops displaced strikers holding the station in Sacramento did the ARU attempt to consolidate its gains in San Francisco-Oakland, but its tardy efforts were too late.

By the time the limelight shifted to the Bay Area, the public had wearied of the lack of normal train and ferry service. An abundance of water transportation somewhat eased the problems of carrying on business, and antipathy toward the railroad held strong, but merchants and travelers around the Bay were anxious to restore rail operations after a month of inactivity. Although the ARU made an attempt to maintain control of the rail lines, it lost hope when other labor organizations discontinued their support activities. With the handwriting clearly on the wall, strikers in the Bay Area yielded Southern Pacific property amid a flurry of die-hard sabotage and angry recriminations which hurt their cause.

The ARU possessed neither the financial backing nor an established organization necessary to withstand a prolonged strike. While union officials had hoped for a quick victory in the controversy, each additional day worked to the railroad's advantage. With vigorous public support of the kind received in Sacramento, the ARU was able to operate in spite of union shortcomings. In the Bay Area, however, the ARU was only a small segment of the labor force, and strikers had no significant community ties to bolster their cause. Demoralized by union defeats, attempts to raise support for ARU efforts failed, and the boycott rapidly collapsed.

The least dramatic but most unique strike events in California occurred at Los Angeles. With a population of approximately 100,000 in 1894, Los Angeles was the only major city in the state to boast two transcontinental



railroads: the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe. As in Sacramento, the mainstay of the region was agriculture, the city boasted little industry, and the regional economy was dependent on railroad service. More in common with the Bay Area, however, was the diversity of Los Angeles' labor force which was not dominated by railwaymen. The city's competing railway lines also removed it from the mercy of one rapacious company.<sup>25</sup>

Although the first California chapter of the ARU had been chartered in Los Angeles, it was immediately suppressed by the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroads. The ARU organization in Los Angeles was just rebuilding itself at the time the Pullman strike was called. Perhaps 1,500 to 2,000 Southern California employees of both railroads were active in the ARU during the boycott of Pullman cars, but their discipline and organization did not match that maintained in the Northern California chapters. Furthermore, there was less com-

elling reason to strike in Los Angeles because the depression of 1893 had not notably affected the area. In fact, when the ARU went out on strike in July, Los Angeles was in the midst of a prosperous recovery after the economic collapse of 1889-1890.<sup>26</sup>

While Angelenos had no love for the Southern Pacific, particularly for its attempt to monopolize harbor facilities, the existence of another railroad and the benefits resulting from railway competition were enthusiastically accepted. However, wild rumors and hysterical overreaction to the boycott resulted in flares of excitement.

Because both of Los Angeles' railroads were embroiled in the ARU strike, civic authorities believed serious violence might erupt. The Chamber of Commerce and many merchants feared the strike would jeopardize Los Angeles' economic recovery, and the *Los Angeles Times* fanned the fires of hysteria about anarchist conspiracy. When the US marshal for Southern California devel-

*The first train left Sacramento's Southern Pacific depot on July 11 after the national guard recaptured the station abandoned by ARU strikers.*

oped a serious illness and proved unable to discharge his duties, local officials demanded prompt action. In response, US Attorney General Olney prevailed upon President Cleveland to order troops into Southern California. On July 1, marching orders for federal soldiers were issued before overt violence or large demonstrations of any kind had occurred.<sup>27</sup>

Rumors about armed ARU resistance resulted in six infantry companies being dispatched to Los Angeles in heavily guarded troop trains. Arriving in warm and tranquil Los Angeles on July 4, the soldiers encountered a calm which prevailed for the remainder of the boycott, marred only by insignificant vandalism. Fears that 5,000 strikers had armed themselves to resist the army proved absolutely unfounded.<sup>28</sup> The notoriously anti-labor *Times* attributed this lack of serious trouble in Southern California to the unequivocal use of troops and to the wisdom of the local population.<sup>29</sup> While the troops may have had a moderating effect, it is more likely that the unprepared ARU organization and the anti-labor suspicions of the Los Angeles community kept the strike from reaching serious proportions.

Although the ARU received the support of the Los Angeles Council of Labor and other groups, it waged a fruitless battle in Southern California. Labor organizations in general were viewed with skepticism by many residents and certainly by the influential *Times* and other newspapers. During the boycott the *Los Angeles Evening Express* seriously implied that all ARU supporters were anarchists, while the *Times* labeled the strike open rebellion between capital and labor.<sup>30</sup> The anti-railroad sentiments which served to forge a bond with the ARU effort in Northern California were fearfully or contemptuously directed against the union in Los Angeles.

Once military forces had gained control in Sacramento and Los Angeles, troops were quickly placed at nearly all stations along the Central Pacific-Southern Pacific lines. By July 20, with military forces protecting railroad property throughout the state, ARU officials

---

*Rumors about armed ARU resistance resulted in six infantry companies being dispatched to Los Angeles.*

---

recognized defeat and instructed their men to return to work. The railroad quickly restored service, but troops were kept at their stations for another month in California, longer than in any other part of the United States.<sup>31</sup>

The Pullman strike was over, but its dramatic and often tragic events served to highlight the despair felt by many Californians in the nineties. Involving more than an isolated segment of society, the boycott raised fears and frustrating questions about the nation's social inequalities.

With railway brotherhood benefits limited to a select and highly skilled minority of craftsmen, the unskilled worker's motivation for ARU membership and support was clear. First, skilled railroad workers' wages reacted less to the downward trend caused by the depression of 1893 than those of unskilled workers who already lived close to the margin of subsistence and who were placed in jeopardy by the slightest reduction in wages or amount of work.<sup>32</sup> Second, the gulf between wages paid to the skilled brotherhood worker and the common laborer was cavernous. Although the Southern Pacific did not make wage cuts as drastic as other railroads during the depression, the wages of its skilled brotherhood employees were held constant while the unskilled laborers and trackmen faced importunate reductions. The Southern Pacific was also slow in meeting its payroll due to depression-induced stringencies, and it dismissed some employees to trim expenses.<sup>33</sup> All of these actions proved devastating to unskilled and unorganized workers and drove them to seek the protection of the ARU.

The ARU established itself and carried on its strike in urban areas with major concentrations of railroad labor. In Sacramento, where unskilled railway workers formed the majority of industrial wage earners, the organizational efforts of the ARU were particularly successful. Backed by considerable popular support in the state capital, the ARU developed a strong membership and prosecuted the Pullman strike with discipline and grim determination. In San Francisco-Oakland and Los Angeles, where railroad laborers did not exercise as significant a social influence, the effects of the Pullman strike were noticeably less dramatic. In the Bay Area, support from labor organizations and a sympathetic public contributed to the early successes of the ARU but faded as the strike progressed. The ARU floundered hopelessly in Los Angeles where labor unions were viewed with suspicion and the government acted swiftly against them.

**N**evertheless, rancorous hostility toward the Southern Pacific was a strong ally of the ARU throughout the strike. Except in Los Angeles, the railroad was often considered a bigger threat than the ARU, or at least a more familiar enemy. The boycott intensified the almost traditional enmity Californians felt for the Southern Pacific and, in the examples of Sacramento and Oakland civic officials, often revealed surprising weaknesses in the railroad's local power and influence.<sup>34</sup> Even the national guard proved unreliable when first called to duty in Sacramento, and only federal officials, anxious about the national consequences of the Pullman disorder, gave the Southern Pacific the support it wanted and needed.

The impact of the 1894 Pullman strike in California was enormous. For the first time, cities resorted to using state and federal troops to maintain law and order.

Widespread violence killed seven persons and wounded scores of others. Railroad workers lost an estimated \$1,000,000 in wages during the heart of a depression, while the Southern Pacific lost approximately \$545,000 in net revenues.<sup>35</sup> The effects on state and urban economies and on business, farmers, and families were too great to be determined. Perhaps most importantly, repercussions of the boycott and other railroad controversies dominated state politics well into the twentieth century.

While public opinion during the boycott was influenced by many things—amounts of inconvenience and violence, for instance—the results of the 1894 state and local elections offered strong evidence of the nature of popular sentiment. The Populist party, made up largely of farmers who were especially at the mercy of railroad transportation, actively supported the ARU during the strike, expecting the railroad workers to vote the People's party ticket in 1894. Populists organized mass meetings, raised money, and further denounced Governor Markham for activating the national guard to suppress the strikers.<sup>36</sup>

The Populists gained their greatest ally when Adolph Sutro agreed to run for mayor of San Francisco on the Populist ticket which urged nationalization of the railroads. However, leaders of all the major parties advocated anti-monopoly platforms, and despite platform inconsistencies which the Populists readily pointed out, the impact of the Populist campaign was diminished. The emotional reaction created by the strike and other railroad issues nevertheless swept Sutro into office in the fall of 1894 and gave Populists sixty-two victories in county races.<sup>37</sup> Although many important positions were not captured by Populist candidates, an anti-railroad Democratic governor was elected, and there was not a single state or congressional race in which the Populist vote, added to the Democratic tally, would not have been victorious. In San Francisco, Alameda, and Sacramento counties, Populist and Democratic showings

*Spikes were removed from the rails in Yolo County, causing this train wreck.*



were particularly impressive. Even in Los Angeles, where Republicans held their greatest plurality, a combined Populist-Democratic vote would have won handily. In sum, the results of the elections of 1894 revealed the magnitude of anti-Southern Pacific sympathy, but the splitting of votes between Democrats and Populists resulted in victory for relatively few anti-railroad candidates. The railroad-supported Republican party, on the other hand, gained firm control of the state legislature.<sup>38</sup>

The year 1894 marked a turning point in the Southern Pacific's political policy. For many years prior, W. W. Stow, Collis P. Huntington's political

strategist, had shifted railroad support to whichever political party had the best chance of electoral success and offered the most accommodating relations with the railroad. Stow retired in late 1893, and just months prior to the Pullman strike William F. Herrin was chosen as his successor. Believing that Stow's approach would not work in the increasingly complex politics of the 1890's, Herrin opted to consolidate an unassailable base of power through control of one party. He created the political bureau as part of the Southern Pacific's Legal Department and attached the incredible financial resources and power of the Southern Pacific to the ascend-

*Armed troopers escorted trains down the lines after the opening of the Central Pacific line.*





ing dominance of the Republican party.<sup>39</sup> The success of his political operations was strikingly evident in the legislative control established in the election of 1894 and by the Republican dominance of state politics that lasted for the next forty years.

Within one month's time in 1894, a significant if obscure event in California's history unfolded. For most people the Pullman boycott was a costly experience, even a dismal failure. Perhaps the theory which suggests "power which is not legitimized tends to be either coercive or manipulative"<sup>40</sup> can account for the actions of both the Southern Pacific and the ARU during the Pullman conflict. Unable to exert social influence to match its economic power, the Southern Pacific sought, and won, government assistance in defeating the ARU and restoring operations. Furthermore, anti-railroad sympathies inflamed by the strike compelled the Southern Pacific to embark on a political strategy designed to solidify its position in future years, regardless of unfavorable public opinion.

Strikers were also forced to resort to coercive tactics in the pitched contest. Finding that their base of public support weakened as the inconvenient boycott wore on, ARU strikers chose violence and sabotage, or at least were unable to control it, and thereby jeopardized the union's tenuous ties with California's citizenry. After the strike collapsed, the ARU nearly disappeared, never again to play a role in railway union organization. While over 130 California union officials and strikers were arrested and subsequently blacklisted by the railroad, most strikers, if not strike leaders, eventually returned to their old jobs. In the end relations between the Southern Pacific and its employees returned largely to their pre-strike status.<sup>41</sup>

Although the ARU organization was mortally wounded, the leaders of the strike never publicly admitted defeat. Strike leaders had no hopes of regaining their former jobs, and local ARU chapters limped along in order to defend members who had been arrested. In

Los Angeles, six ARU members who were found guilty of interfering with the mails were sentenced to eighteen months in prison, but they were eventually pardoned by President Cleveland in 1896.<sup>42</sup> Of the nearly one hundred thirty strikers arrested in Northern California, two of the accused were arbitrarily selected for trial in San Francisco. The result of this lengthy trial was a hung jury, and they were released. The railroad's blacklist kept these strikers from gaining employment until 1896, when the state labor commissioner intervened with the railroad and the US attorney general to have both the charges and the blacklist dropped.<sup>43</sup>

The Pullman boycott, which began as a dispute of factory workers in Illinois, found its most fervent followers in the Golden State. In California railroad workers carried on the strike after it was ended elsewhere in the nation, and even after the Pullman workers had returned to their jobs. When Debs called a superfluous convention to end the strike in August, 1894, he was only able to muster fifty-three delegates, nearly all of whom were from California and other western states.<sup>44</sup> If the Pullman boycott was a crusade for the rights of unskilled workers, strikers had to be satisfied with minor Populist party victories in the voting booth. If it was a civil war between anarchists and upstanding citizens, the railroad and the government won by crushing the ARU. The basic causes of the workers' discontent—exploitation, poverty, and lack of effective organization and representation—were not resolved. These questions of social justice would await other remedies, just as Hiram Johnson and a reform government would later confront the lingering domination of the Southern Pacific railroad in California.

The photos on pages 21 and 34 are courtesy the Southern Pacific Company. Those on pages 26, 30, and 33 are courtesy the California Department of Parks and Recreation. The engraving on page 22 is from Charles Nordhoff's *California: A Book for Travellers and Settlers* (1872). The photo on page 28 is reproduced from *The "City Guard": A History of Company "B"* (1895). The photo on page 25 is from the CHS Library.

## Notes

1. The mood of fear that was engendered by socialist and anarchist movements at this time has been, perhaps, best examined by Barbara Tuchman in *The Proud Tower* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), pp. 109-110, 494-496.
2. Harold U. Faulkner, *American Economic History* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publications, 1954), p. 520; US Interstate Commerce Commission, *Eighth Annual Report for the Year Ending December 1, 1894* (Washington, D.C., 1894), pp. 68-69.
3. Readers are directed to the US Congress, Senate, *United States Strike Commission Report*, Sen. Doc. 7, 53 Cong. 3 sess. (1895), for details of the situation at the Pullman factory.
4. Almont Lindsey, *The Pullman Strike: the Story of a Unique Experiment and of a Great Labor Upheaval* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 110-2; Donald L. McMurry, "Labor Policies of the General Managers Association of Chicago, 1886-1894," *Journal of Economic History*, 11 (1953): 174.
5. Harvey S. Perloff, et al., *Regions, Resources, and Economic Growth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1960), pp. 168, 182-183.
6. *Ibid.*, 128; David B. Griffiths, "Anti-Monopoly Movement in California, 1873-1898," *Southern California Quarterly*, 52 (June, 1970): 97.
7. Grace H. Stimson, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955), pp. 161-163 (hereinafter referred to as *Labor in Los Angeles*); California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Seventh Biennial Report, 1895-6* (Sacramento, 1896), p. 148; Gerald G. Eggert, *Railroad Labor Disputes: The Beginnings of Federal Strike Policy* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 6 (hereinafter referred to as *Railroad Labor Disputes*); Ira B. Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935), p. 219 (hereinafter referred to as *Labor Movement in California*).
8. Eggert, *Railroad Labor Disputes*, 157.
9. Stimson, *Labor in Los Angeles*, 164-165; California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Seventh Biennial Report, 1895-6*, pp. 141-142.
10. A complete narrative record of the strike may be found in William W. Ray, "The Great Strike of 1894: The Pullman Boycott in California" (unpublished MA thesis, California State University, Hayward, 1972).
11. Walton Bean, *California: An Interpretive History* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1968), p. 251; *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, May 3, 1894, p. 2, and May 18, 1894, p. 1.
12. Joseph A. McGowan, *History of the Sacramento Valley*, I (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1961): 244; Myrtle S. Lord, *A Sacramento Saga: Fifty Years of Achievement—Chamber of Commerce Leadership* (Sacramento: Sacramento Chamber of Commerce, 1946), p. 7.
13. US War Department, *Annual Report for the Secretary of War for the Year 1894* (Washington, D.C., 1894), p. 112 (hereinafter referred to as *Annual Report, 1894*); McGowan, *History of the Sacramento Valley*, II: 100; *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, July 1, 1894, p. 1.
14. US Congress, House, *Report of the Postmaster General*, Exec. Doc. #1, Part 4, 53 Cong., 30 sess. (Washington, D.C., 1895), pp. 396-399; US Department of Justice, *Appendix to the Annual Report of the Attorney General of the United States for the Year 1896* (Washington, D.C., 1896), p. 17 (hereinafter referred to as *Appendix*). Eggert, *Railroad Labor Disputes*, examines at length the legal reasoning which led to the widespread use of injunctions and vigorous federal involvement in the Pullman strike.
15. *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, July 2, 1894, p. 3, and July 4, 1894, pp. 1, 3; Filmer, et al, *The "City Guard": A History of Company "B" First Regiment Infantry, N.G.C. During the Sacramento Campaign, July 3 to 26, 1894*, pp. 15-16 (hereinafter referred to as *City Guard*). For a fascinating record of Governor Markham's activities and thoughts during the strike, the reader is referred to the Huntington Library, Henry Markham Collection, Box XX, Ninety-Six Telegrams Relating to the Strike of 1894.
16. Filmer, et al, *City Guard*, 16, 26, 34-35, 64, 92; *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, July 4, 1894, p. 1, and July 5, 1894, pp. 3-4; US Department of Justice, *Appendix*, pp. 25-26. The *Sacramento Daily Record-Union* estimated the crowd, excluding strikers and military, to number approximately 5,000.
17. US War Department, *Annual Report, 1894*, pp. 111-112; *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, July 11, 1894, pp. 2-3.
18. Filmer, et al, *City Guard*, 77-78, 90-91; Samuel Yellen, *American Labor Struggles* (New York: S. A. Russell, 1956), p. 122; *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, July 10, 1894, p. 1.
19. US War Department, *Annual Report, 1894*, pp. 112-113; US Department of Justice, *Appendix*, p. 22.
20. US War Department, *Annual Report, 1894*, pp. 113-114; Yellen, *American Labor Struggles*, 131; *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, July 17, 1894, p. 1.
21. *Oakland Enquirer*, June 29, 1894, p. 2; *San Francisco Examiner*, June 28, 1894, p. 6; Eggert, *Railroad Labor Disputes*, 176; US Department of Justice, *Appendix*, 29, 33.
22. *Oakland Enquirer*, July 5, 1894, p. 5 and July 29, 1894, p. 1; Frank A. Leach, *Recollections of a Newspaperman* (San Francisco: Samuel Levinson, 1917), p. 267; US Department of Justice, *Appendix*, 25-26.
23. Robert E. L. Knight, *Industrial Relations in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1900-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 33 (hereinafter referred to as *Industrial Relations*); *Oakland Enquirer*, June 30, 1894, p. 8, and July 1, 1894, p. 1; US War Department, *Annual Report, 1894*, 114.
24. Leach, *Recollections of a Newspaperman*, 271; *Oakland Enquirer*, July 13, 1894, p. 1, Extra Edition; Griffiths, "Anti-Monopoly Movement in California, 1873-1898," p. 103.

25. Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles 1850-1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 67, 121 (hereinafter referred to as *Fragmented Metropolis*); Glenn S. Dumke, *The Boom of the Eighties* (San Marino: Huntington Library Publications, 1944), p. 270; Charles D. Willard, *A History of the Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles, California from its Foundation, September, 1888, to the Year 1900* (Los Angeles: Kingsley-Barnes and Neumer Co., 1899), p. 96 (hereinafter referred to as *Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles*).
26. Willard, *Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles*, 153-154; Fogelson, *Fragmented Metropolis*, 79.
27. US War Department, *Annual Report, 1894*, p. 111; US Department of Justice, *Appendix*, 19-20; Cross, *Labor Movement in California*, 277.
28. US War Department, *Annual Report, 1894*, pp. 111, 115; US Department of Justice, *Appendix*, 22-23.
29. *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1894, p. 1.
30. Stimson, *Labor in Los Angeles*, pp. 161, 167; "Southern California and the Strike," *Land of Sunshine*, 1 (August, 1894): 59; *Los Angeles Evening Express*, July 5, 1894, p. 4; *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 1894, p. 4 and June 30, 1894, p. 4.
31. US War Department, *Annual Report, 1894*, p. 116.
32. Whitney Coombs, *The Wages of Unskilled Labor in Manufacturing Industries in the United States, 1890-1924* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1968), p. 13; Carl C. Plehn, "Labor in California," *Yale Review*, 4 (February, 1896): 417; US Congress, Senate, *United States Strike Commission Report*, Senate Doc. 7, 53 Cong., 3 sess. (Washington, D.C., 1895), pp. 132-135.
33. Stimson, *Labor in Los Angeles*, 165; Plehn, "Labor in California," 416.
34. Griffiths, "Anti-Monopoly Movement in California, 1873-1898," 93, 102; Knight, *Industrial Relations*, 33; "The Situation in California," *Nation*, July 12, 1894, p. 23.
35. California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Seventh Biennial Report, 1895-6*, p. 149; Cross, *Labor Movement in California*, 220.
36. Griffiths, "Anti-Monopoly Movement in California, 1873-1898," pp. 102-104; Stimson, *Labor in Los Angeles*, 171; Alexander Saxton, "San Francisco Labor and the Populist and Progressive Insurgencies," *Pacific Historical Review*, 34 (1967): 425 (hereinafter "San Francisco Labor"); *San Francisco Voice of Labor*, March 23, 1895, p. 1; Donald E. Walter, "The Period of the Populist Party," in Royce D. Delmatier, et al., eds., *The Rumble of California Politics* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1970), p. 112 (hereinafter referred to as "Period of the Populist Party"); Michael P. Rogin and John L. Shover, *Political Change in California: Critical Elections and Social Movements, 1890-1966* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Corp., 1969), p. 17 (hereinafter referred to as *Political Change in California*).
37. Griffiths, "Anti-Monopoly Movement in California, 1873-1898," pp. 105, 107; Walters, "Period of the Populist Party," 113, 144, 116.
38. Rogin and Shover, *Political Change in California*, 18; California, Secretary of State, *California Blue Book or State Roster 1895* (Sacramento, 1895), pp. 150, 163, 254, 274; W. H. Hutchinson, "Southern Pacific—Myth or Reality," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 48 (December, 1969): 331.
39. Hutchinson, "Southern Pacific—Myth or Reality," 330-332; Saxton, "San Francisco Labor," 422.
40. Herbert Gutman, "Class, Status, and Community Power in Nineteenth Century American Industrial Cities—Paterson, New Jersey: A Case Study," in Frederic C. Jaher, ed., *The Age of Industrialism in America: Essays in Social Structure and Cultural Values* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p. 279.
41. Cross, *Labor Movement in California*, 220; California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Seventh Biennial Report*, 150.
42. *San Francisco Voice of Labor*, January 16, 1895, p. 7; Stimson, *Labor in Los Angeles*, 170.
43. Cross, *Labor Movement in California*, 220; California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Seventh Biennial Report*, 151-2.
44. Yellen, *American Labor Struggles*, 133.