



Running the Railroad



**Rail workers
organize and the
intersections of race
and class**



Introduction

- A railroad is not just steel rails, machinery, and locomotives.
- A railroad serves human communities.
- A railroad is operated, maintained and built by people.



In 19th century
America, the great
subject for
editorialist and
street corner
agitators is:



“The Labor Question.”

Work was transformed in the 19th century

- Large enterprises grew
- More impersonal work
- Artisan skills lost
- Workers autonomy threatened



Is capital accumulation compatible with democracy?

- Did great wealth threaten democracy?
- How does a worker express his or her voice?
- Are large businesses controlling politics?
- These were all serious and often-debated questions in the 19th century.

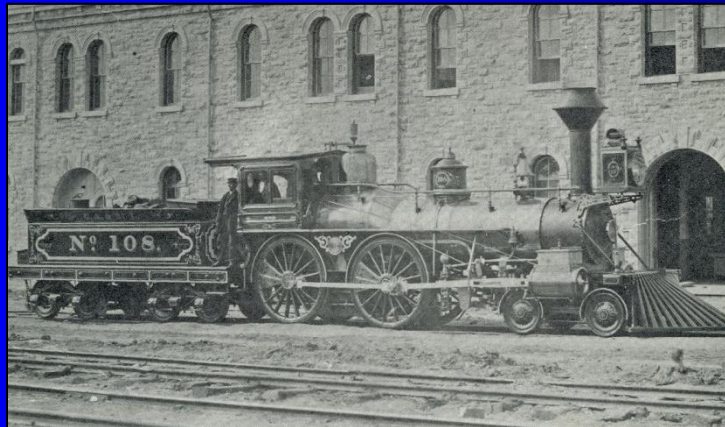
Railroads open Illinois

- 1850s railroad development spurred settlement and Illinois industrial development

1852 Illinois Railroad mileage: 97

1856 Illinois Railroad mileage: 2,761

1882 Illinois Railroad mileage: 13,130



Challenges to Railroad building

- Railroads are capital intensive
- Needed materials distant
- Intensive hand labor
- Mass labor force

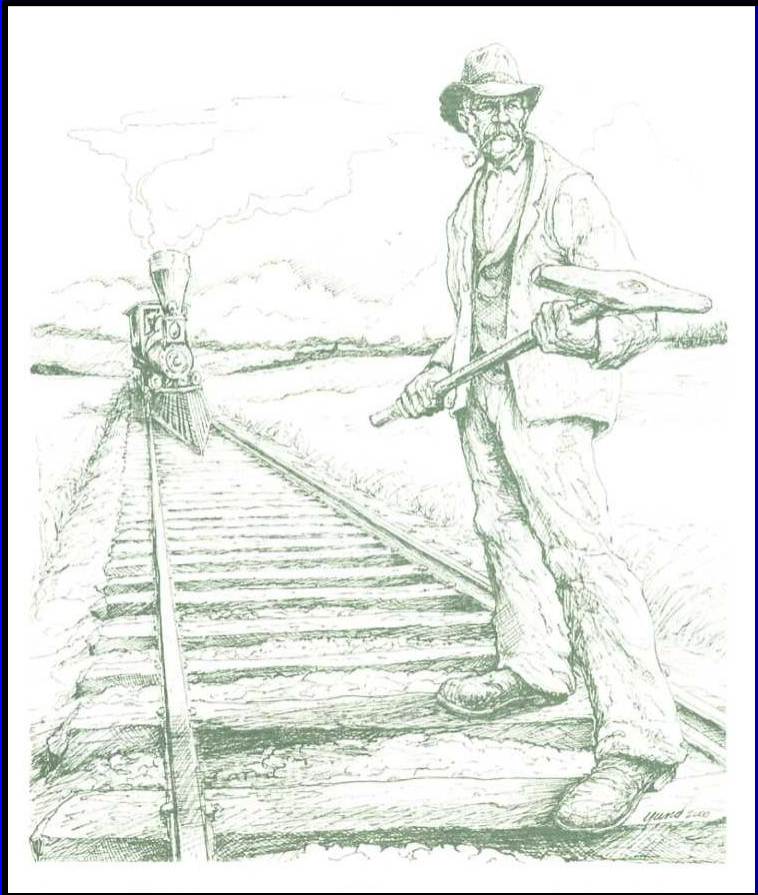


Building the Illinois Central Railroad, 1854



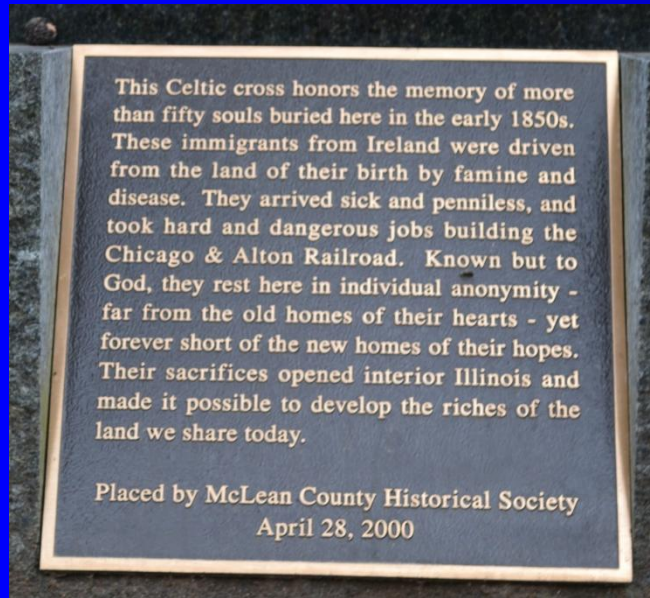
Building the Illinois Central 1968 painting by George Parrish

Finding workers – Irish immigrants



- Potato famine exodus
 - Coincided with great labor needs
 - Quick and available jobs
 - Track laying, canal digging
 - required no training
 - An opportune moment:
 - An emerging new industry
 - meant opportunities.

Not always a pleasant story

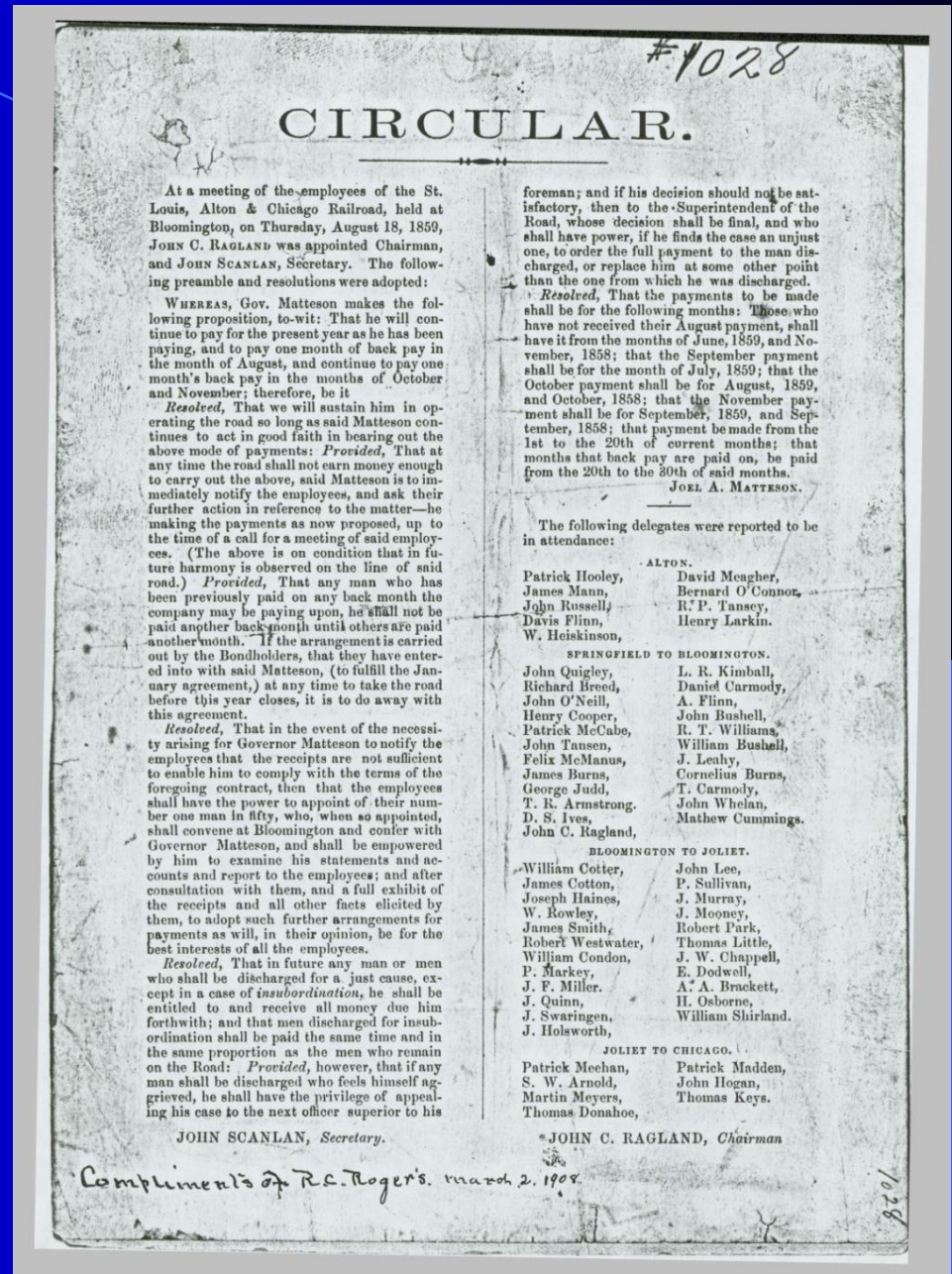


Irish Rail Workers Monument, Funk's Grove



Early organizing & resistance

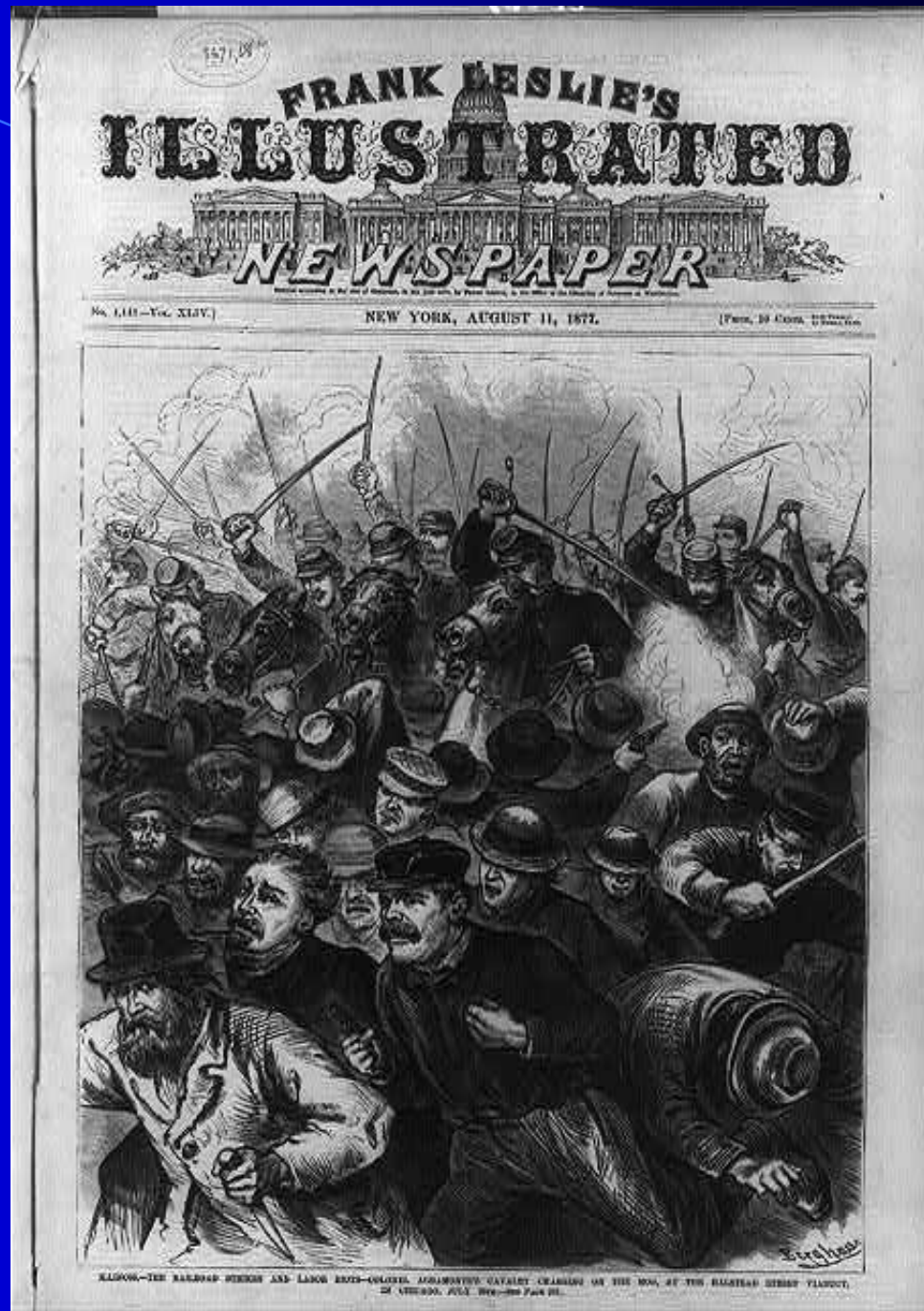
August 1859 petition
to the Governor
Chicago, Alton & St.
Louis Railroad.



1877 – the Great Uprising

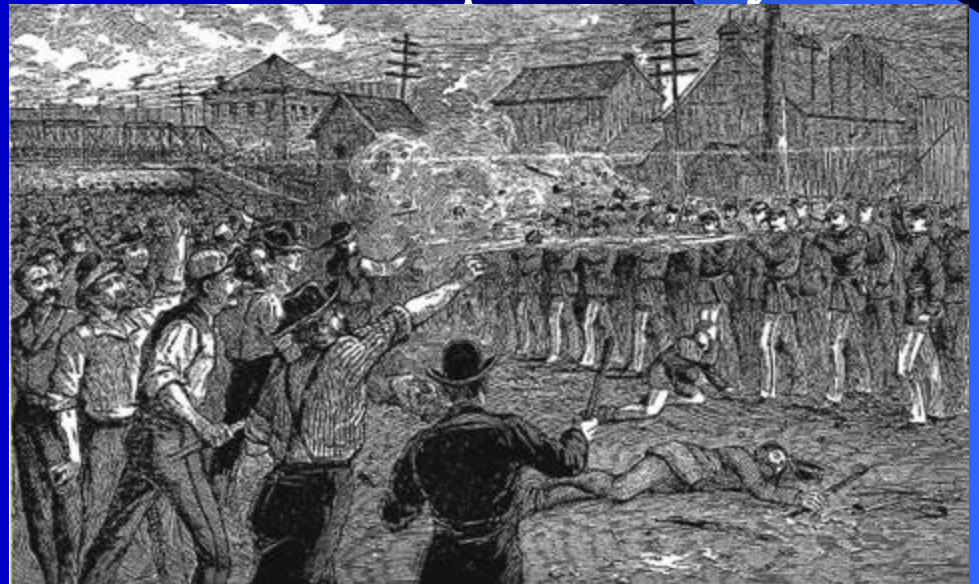
- Spontaneous strikes throughout the Eastern U.S.
- Began July 14 on the B&O railroad in Martinsburg, W.Va., with worker anger over longer trains & reduced pay; spreads to Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Louis and East St. Louis.

Illinois actions in
Chicago, Aurora,
Bloomington,
Decatur, Peoria,
Urbana and East
St. Louis.
Sympathy
strikers by
miners in
LaSalle,
Braidwood,
Springfield and
Carbondale.



Chicago – July 1877

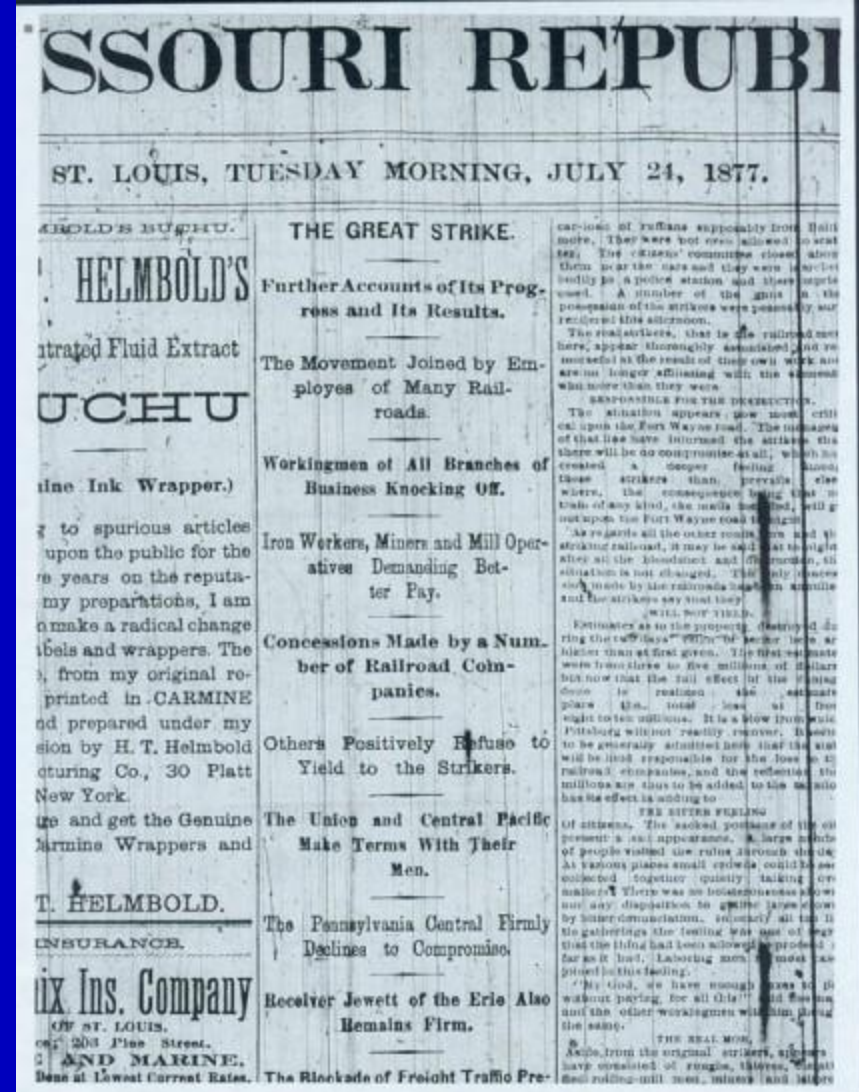
- Spontaneous actions by the unemployed attack railroad yards, July 24.
- 5000 vigilantes summoned by the Mayor
- Confrontations between federal troops and city police leave 20 dead.



East St. Louis

July 21-28

A workers' government or "Commune" is established in East St. Louis. 3,000 federal troops & 5,000 deputies battle strikers, 18 killed.



Which track to take?

19th century labor and its choices

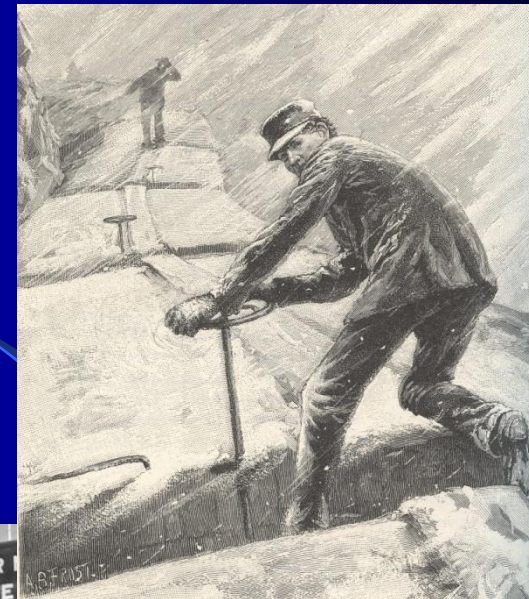
- Workers organize for self-protection
- Safety concerns
- Falling wages
- Spontaneous strikes ineffective



Two choices for workers

Craft unionism

- Industrial unionism



Craft union tradition

- Organize workers according to their trade.
- Worker must meet craft standards.
- Internal, not external, solidarity.
- Accepting, not challenging to capitalism.
- Partner with management.
- Political neutrality.
- A “white man’s club.”

Industrial Unionism

- “An injury to one is an injury to all.”
- Unite all workers.
- Seeks allies outside of the workplace.
- Political activism.
- Less concerned with race and gender divides.
- Distrustful of capitalism, socialist or utopian in its vision.

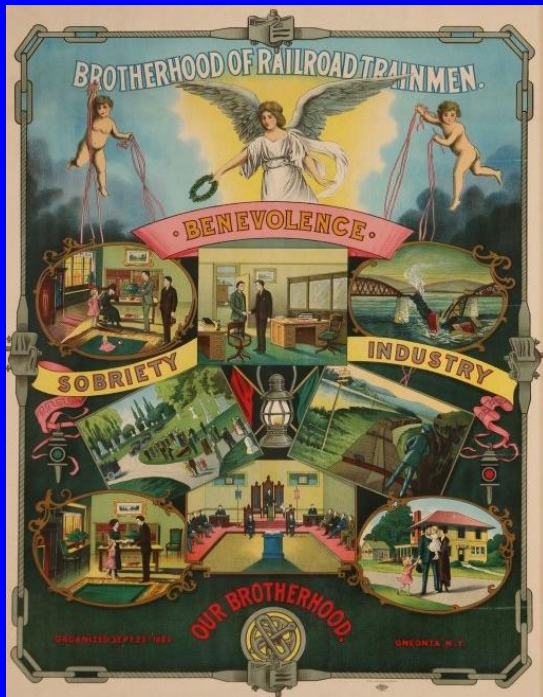


High accident rates pushed workers to organize

- *“Yearly railroad casualties exceed the losses by Wellington at Waterloo*

and Meade at Gettysburg.”

--Congressman Henry Cabot Lodge.



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Craft union goals

- Railroad brotherhoods first founded for mutual insurance purposes.
- Sought to elevate their professional status.
- Concern for injuries & death.
- Sought dialogue with management, but not necessarily confrontation.





The Big Four



- Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, 1863
- Order of Railway Conductors, 1868
- Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, 1873
- Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, 1883



These organizations were soon known as the “Big Four.”

Industrial Unionism on the Railroads



Shop workers, maintenance of way
often join these

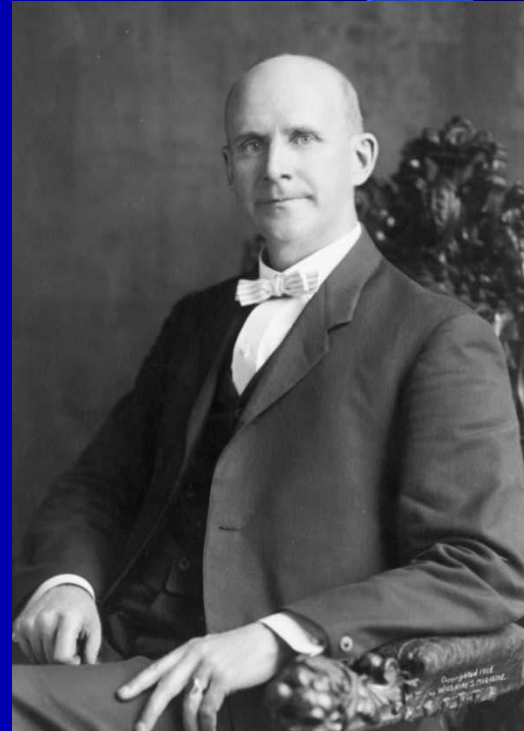
- The Noble Order of the Knights of Labor
- American Railway Union
- Industrial Workers of the World



American Railway Union

- Founded in Chicago in 1893, led by Debs.
- For all rail workers.
- After first victory, had more members than the “Big Four”
150,000/90,000.

Eugene V. Debs



The Pullman Strike & Boycott

- The model town –
- 1880 George Pullman buys 4000 acres
- Establishes model city
- Complete control by Pullman



1893 Recession

U.S. in an economic downturn

Pullman cuts workers' wages

Pullman refuses to lower rents

Worker delegation rebuffed

Workers strike



*1893 strikers outside
Pullman works*

Pullman boycott & strike

1894 – ARU first convention in Chicago

Pullman workers appeal for support

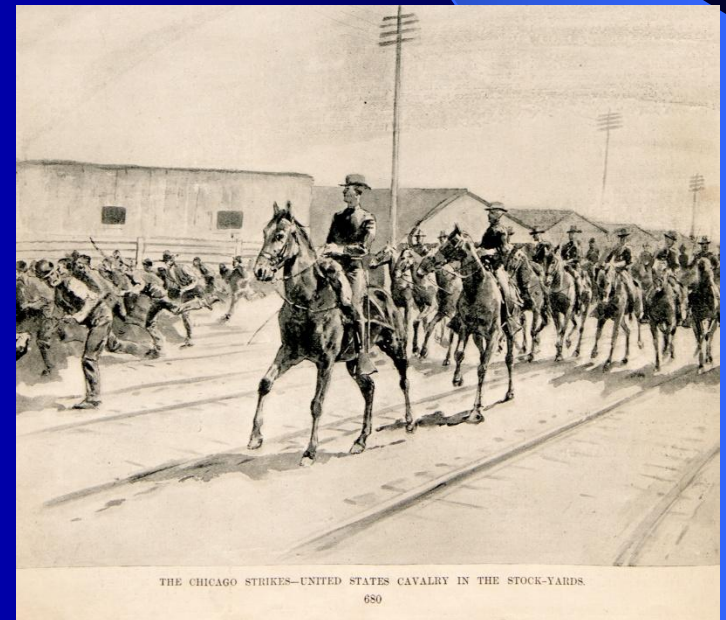
Delegates vote to boycott Pullman cars

Rail companies, through the General
Managers Association, put Pullman cars on
mail trains

Workers accused of stopping U.S. Mail

U.S. intervention

- Federal troops & marshals sent to move trains
- Huge protests, 30 killed
- Debs & other leaders sentenced on conspiracy charges



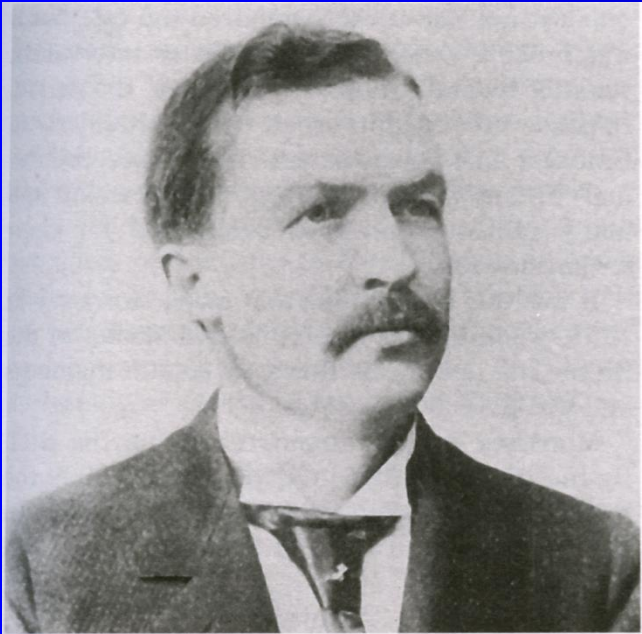
Who won the Pullman strike?

Craft unions.

- Railroad companies recognized the “Big Four.”
- Rail Brotherhoods as “mature partners” to industry.
- BLE contracts: 1902 (118), 1912 (243), 1916 (348).



P.H. Morrissey BRT



Patrick H. Morrissey (1862-1916)



Father an Irish immigrant track worker in Bloomington
Grand Lodge Chairman,
Brotherhood of Railroad
Trainman, 1895-1909; When he
assumed leadership, the BRT
was \$105,000 in debt and under
10,000 members; when he left,
the union had 120,000 members
and \$3.2M

Federal government intervenes



- 1888 - first federal rail arbitration law (non-binding).
- 1898 - Erdman Act, mediation & arbitration.
- 1913 - Newlands Act replaces Erdman Act, establishes permanent Board of Mediation & Conciliation.

Laws protect workers



1893 – Safety Appliances Act.

1906 - Employers Liability Act.

1907 - Hours of Duty Law (16 hours maximum work).

1911 - Illinois Workers' Compensation law.

Government regulations

- After the Pullman strike, the railroad industry is heavily regulated, both in its business activities(Interstate Commerce Commission) and its labor relations.
- Railroad workers enjoy federal protections unavailable to other workers.



Rail labor gains in WWI



- 1913 – U.S. Department of Labor, active mediator.
- 1916 – Adamson Act, 8 hour day on the railroads.
- 1918 – U.S. Railroad Administration.
- 100,000 women join the railroad labor force.
- Wages & hours set by the Railway Labor Board.

Labor's wartime gains

- 60% of the nation's rail shops unionized.
- Brotherhood of Railway Clerks jumps from 51,000 to 186,000 members.
- Order of Railway Telegraphers, 25,000 to 48,700 workers.



Post-war reaction

- 1921: Railway Labor Board cuts wages, overtime benefits.
- June 1, 1922, 400,000 railroad shop workers strike nationally.
- Strike broken by federal action - 251 U.S. Marshals
- Troops in Clinton & Bloomington



*Illinois National Guard C&A Shops,
• Bloomington, July 1922.*

1920s-30s Rail Labor Politically organizes

- Bi-partisan effort
- Encourages voter registration and political activism
- Members run for office
- Legislation Becomes the prototype for Social Security and the National Labor Relations Board

Federal law protects



- 1926 Railway Labor Act.
- 1934 – National Mediation Board.
- National Railroad Adjustment Board.
- Railroad Retirement Act, 1934

Workers elected

- *1937 - Old Rail telegraphers now members of Congress. Washington, D.C., Jan. 9. Not so many years ago these two gents were both "pounding brass" on the Burlington. Now they are both members of Congress but still carry union cards in the Order of Railroad Telegraphers. Senator Ed Johnson, (left) new Democratic member from Colorado, and Rep. Lewis M. Long, new Democratic member of House from Illinois.*



Railroad Brotherhoods

- With legal protection, emphasis shifts to grievances and contract enforcement.

West Chicago, Illinois.
Officers of Albert Keep
Lodge, Number 364,
International Brotherhood
of Railway Trainmen. Left
to right: vice-president
E.H. Schlueter, a yard
engine foreman; treasury
and local chairman, F.C.
Ehredt, ticket collector
and assistant conductor;
legislative representative
Carl Berkes, passenger
brakeman and W.M.
Hoag, president, a yard
engine foreman. Jack
Delano photograph, 1942



African-Americans organize

- Porters only rail operating workers not unionized.
- Excluded by craft unions.
- “A million men named George.”
- Subservient relationship.



African-Americans organize – Sleeping Car Porters

- August 25, 1925 – Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters founded.
- Non-porter Asa Phillip Randolph leads.
- Milton Price Webster Chicago porter supporter
- 1927 – ill-fated strike call.
- Supported by AFL and Socialist groups.



A. Phillip Randolph

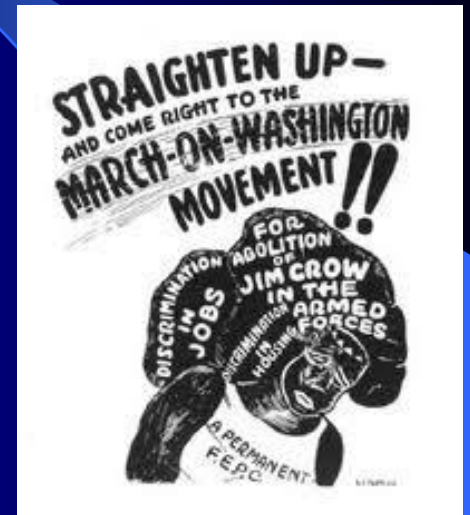
Porters win a contract

- 1935 – Railway Labor Act election.
- BSCP wins against the company
- union, 75% of the vote
- August 25, 1937, Pullman & BSCP contract signed.



Porters gain

- Hours reduced, 400 monthly to 240.
- Wages from \$60 to \$72 monthly
- Grievance procedure, rules against discrimination, rest time.
- “A fighting, militant piece of machinery” for the Civil Rights movement.



The rails hum - WWII



*Roundhouse Workers, C&NW
Jack Delano photo*

- The nation travels on the rails.
- Women again enter the rail workforce.
- Beginning of dieselization.

Post-war decline



Steve Smedley

- Railroad traffic decreases — competition from highways & airlines.
- Dieselization, mergers & bankruptcies cuts jobs.
- “Featherbedding” public issue.
- Racial discrimination clauses broken.

“One Big Union” again



- 1969 – United Transportation Union – Firemen, Trainmen & Conductors merge.
- 1980s - Transportation Communications Union – clerks, telegraphers, porters, carmen, supervisor, yardmasters.
- 2004 – BLE joins IBT.
- 2011 – UTU joins Sheet Metal





Today's issues

- Fatigue.
- Automation/new technology.
- Training.
- Crew size.
- More mature labor-management relations.



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