
Political Lessons of the Pullman Strike

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The lessons taught by what is known as the "Pullman strike" are manifold. They are industrial, financial, and commercial lessons, and naturally, as the component elements of air or water, blend and constitute a political lesson which all men of intelligence are now studying with profound solicitude. Contemplating the strike from such a point of observation, it may be regarded as a national blessing rather than a national calamity.

It may not be impossible to discuss political questions without reference to political parties, but such is not the American habit. Political parties are the natural result of free speech and while there is even a remnant of this right remaining in the country, men will divide and group themselves into parties. To deprecate political parties involves hostility to free speech and the abandonment of all hope of reform.

The "Pullman strike" has aroused national solicitude. It has vividly defined political issues. If, on the one hand it has made prominent the power of the government by the use of such instrumentalities as its courts and armies, it has on the other hand given, if possible, more conspicuousness to conditions, which injunctions, however despotic, and bullets, however quieting, cannot, in the nature of things, improve; but which, under the application of such Russianized methods, must proceed continually from bad to worse, until revolution rescues free institutions from the grasp of corporate anarchism, or they lie crushed and dead in the python coils of a triumphant despotism.

I do not overcolor the situation. As I write national scorn is concentrated upon Congress, where the sugar trust, and the whiskey trust, by the persuasive power of money, humiliated the American

people in the presence of the nations, and now we behold the party responsible for the abandonment of right, truth, justice, and all things of good report among men, with an impudence sufficiently brazen to make the devil himself blush for what the President terms perfidious dereliction of duty, asking the American people to renew its lease of power. In doing this, the party that won eternal infamy by yielding to the power of the sugar trust and the whiskey trust, arraigns the other great party for having been guilty of legislating in the interests of trusts and corporations for more than 30 years, and against the interests of the people, and what is more important still, it introduces irrefutable testimony to sustain the indictment.

The "Pullman strike" has, in connection with other agencies, served the important purpose of attracting attention to chronic delinquencies of the two old parties, and is impressing upon the mind of multiplied thousands of voters the necessity for another political party.

Afro-American chattel slavery was the national curse and crime which a half century ago burned into the American conscience the necessity for a new party. Agitators, who fanned the divine spark into a flame, were pelted with storms of vulgar epithets, scurrility, and maledictions, to the extent of the resources of the English language. They were confronted with mobs, driven from platforms, and free speech was cloven down; the courts were invoked and decisions rendered which, even yet, are regarded as monumental infamies, and all along those gloomy years the government, in all of its departments, kept high advanced the national ensign symbolizing liberty, but at the same time floating above slave pens and slave blocks, slave whips and shackles, making the United States darker than the "Dark Continent," and extorting the cry, "Haul down the flaunting lie!"

The agitation proceeded. The demand for a new party became yearly more pronounced; the signal fires of reform burned fiercer and higher; men rallied to the new standard and the new party, which had its origin in agitation, mobs, riots, and death, and finally overwhelmed all opposition and in 1860, after 40 years of struggle, was victorious, and, later on, amidst the smoke and carnage of war, and at a fearful cost of life and money, 7 million slaves stood forth unfettered and free, and the stars and stripes for the first time in 86 years floated over a land in which there were no slaves.

Since that period of vanquishing wrong and the enthronement of the right, a system of wage-slavery has been introduced. Warmed into

life in the womb of greed, and fostered by laws and legislation as unholy as that which legalized slave stealing and the breeding of human beings, like swine, for the market, it has gained power and prestige until wage-slaves, under the domination of the money power, acting through trusts, syndicates, corporations, and monopoly-land stealing, capitalization, railroad wrecking, bribery, and corruption, defying proper characterization, we are confronted with conditions bearing the impress of peonism, infinitely more alarming than was African slavery in its darkest days.

Under such circumstances, what, I ask, is more natural, within the entire realm of human duties, than that wage-men should organize, agitate, and strike for their rights?

The "Pullman strike," confessedly more far-reaching in its sweep and significance than any other struggle the continent has witnessed, will pass into history as having been the one thing needful to arouse the nation to the perils which the money power has spawned upon the country.

The American Railway Union, having from the first discountenanced violence and deplored the destruction of property may, I think, suggest that the "Pullman strike," notwithstanding such unfortunate features, has its compensations. No one will deny that the "Pullman strike" has aroused the government from its stupor to a sense of its obligations to ascertain the cause of the phenomenal disturbance, and the work of investigation, once begun, the hope and the belief may be entertained that it will be prosecuted until foundation infamies are discovered and dragged forth for the enlightenment of those, who, in the absence of such information, find it profitable to apply the epithet of "anarchist" to those whose courage created the necessity for investigation, which, if honest and thorough, as indications warrant, the inevitable conclusion will be reached that men who strike against starvation wages and for the protection of those who are dependent upon them against corporate and plutocratic spoliation, represent the true American spirit and courage, which, once destroyed by the rapacity of heartless employers of the Pullman strike, aided by United States courts and United States troops, would foreshadow calamities which it would be difficult to exaggerate. If, through the agencies of investigation and legislation, the curse of wage-slavery disappears, or is so modified as to produce greater contentment in the armies of labor, fruitful of the hope that at no distant day full emancipation shall be secured by wise legislation, the American Railway

Union will expand to colossal proportions of organized philanthropy such as the ages have not witnessed, because the lesson it will have taught legislators and courts, Presidents and Governors, and men in command of military machines is that the majesty of truth and justice rather than the tyranny of injunctions, aided by the persuasive power of powder, must preserve our free institutions if they are to be perpetuated. Never since the colonies were rescued from the grasp of King George has man's capacity for self-government been so confessedly on trial as in these closing years of the century. Thoughtful Americans are adopting the views expressed by Lord Macaulay, that Americans are not qualified to perpetuate the government the fathers founded. On every hand is heard applause when a court, in the spirit of a tsar, lays its hands upon workingmen, and as whim may dictate, deprives the victims of its authority of property and liberty, and rejoicings, rising to peans, are heard when in obedience to military commands wage-men demonstrate, as they fall bleeding and gasping, that ours is a "strong government." Macaulay thought that we should be able to preserve a government and civilization, but that liberty would be sacrificed.

Under the reign of the two great parties that have dominated the government, many years will not be required to fulfill Macaulay's prophecy — indeed, only a semblance of liberty remains, when courts and the military put forth their unrestrained power. Such facts are taught by the lesson of the "Pullman strike," but, fortunately, still other lessons are inculcated, among which is the lesson that the time has come for a new party to take the reins of government and bring it back to pristine purity, and that now is the time for workingmen and all who are animated by the spirit of patriotic devotion to liberty to unify to perpetuate the liberties of the people, to the end that government by the people, of the people, and for the people, may not perish from the earth.

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