THE AMERICAN RAILWAY UNION
AN EARLY EXPERIMENT IN INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

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By

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INTRODUCTION

The form of labor organization known as industrial unionism is familiar to twentieth century Americans. The Congress of Industrial Organizations, less than a score of years old, has proven the practicality of this type of labor unionism in modern industry. It has brought labor affiliation to millions of workers who previously had stood on the sidelines watching the game, wishing they had a team of their own, and it has given a satisfactory home to those who were dissatisfied with the slower moving American Federation of Labor.

But in the era before organized labor was universally accepted as a necessary adjunct of American industrial society, industrial unionism encountered determined opposition from organized capital. Only in isolated instances were unions organized along industrial lines prior to 1935.

The first field in which all workers in one industry were organized into one order was the brewing industry. The brewer's national union became an industrial union in 1887, when it took those employed
on the periphery of the industry into its ranks. During the eighties and nineties coal miners had limited success with this form of organization in certain localities, but it was not until 1898 that the United Mine Workers adopted industrial organization as a settled policy.¹

In some respects the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor also embodied some of the principles of industrial unionism, although organization by industry represented rather a step backward from its professed goal - the solidarity of all the laboring classes.²

Almost all leaders of successful labor organizations before the turn of the century had accepted the idea that the unity of labor was a desirable goal. For practical reasons, however, they believed it could be best attained by internal disposition to harmonize rather than external agreement upon certain forms. Such a point of view was often expressed by

². Ibid, 337-38.
the leaders of the American Federation of Labor, and
of the Railroad Brotherhoods, representatives of the
craft union principle.³

Heterodox thinkers, however, never ceased to
flirt with the idea that increasing centralization
of industrial control called for some corresponding
centralization of labor organization. One of these
men was Eugene V. Debs, an idealistic man of action
rather than a thinker, whose grand plan for the in-
dustrial organization of railroad workers was launched
in a social and economic milieu not favorably disposed
toward this type of organization and in an industry
which to this day has exhibited craft unionism in its
most successful and highly developed form.⁴

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the
short history of this early experiment in industrial
unionism - the American Railway Union - with the view
of determining the reactions toward it of organized

³. American Federation of Labor, Report of Proceedings,
1894, 59; Letter from officers of the Brotherhood
of Locomotive Firemen in American Federationist I
(September, 1894), 154-55.
⁴. Frederic L. Paxson in American Historical Review,
XLVIII (1943), 830, calls the American Railway
Union "the creative effort...to launch industrial
unionism before its time...."
labor, railroad capital, the Federal Government, the press, and the public. It will be shown that the Union's friends were few, its enemies many. The reasons for the almost universal disapproval of the American Railway Union and its principles of organization varied from group to group, however, and efforts will be made to indicate these differences and the reasons for them.

5. There is no evidence that the term "industrial union" was current in the 1890's.
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THE AMERICAN RAILWAY UNION: AN EARLY EXPERIMENT IN INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

CHAPTER I

THE AMERICAN RAILWAY UNION: ITS CAREER AND ITS PRINCIPLES

On June 15, 1897 a tall, balding man stood speaking to a small audience in a Chicago meeting hall. "There is no hope for the toiling masses of my countrymen," he said, "except by the pathways mapped out by the Socialists, the advocates of the cooperative commonwealth."¹ Eugene V. Debs was preaching the funeral sermon of the American Railway Union. His noble experiment in industrial unionism was a corpse, killed by one strike and the Federal Government, and Debs, undaunted, was beginning his long and controversial career as a Socialist.

The American Railway Union had lived but a short time. The story of its career is never-

theless a highly significant chapter in the history of American labor.

Conditions were hardly auspicious for building a labor organization when the A.R.U. was founded in the spring of 1893. These were the dark days of Homestead and Couer d'Alene. The "new industrialism," struggling in the quick-sands of depression, was not oriented to understand or sympathize with the pleas or demands of organized labor. Nevertheless, it was in the face of these unfavorable industrial and ideological conditions that the American Railway Union was founded on June 20 by Eugene Debs, George W. Howard, and several other railroad labor leaders who had been invited to participate in the new movement.²

The American Railway Union was to be an order composed of all classes of railroad workers, skilled and unskilled, engineer and section hand alike. Membership was open to any "railroad worker," which was defined by the union as being any man of white parentage who worked for a company owning or operating trackage or railroad equipment,

². Railway Times, January 1, 1894, 1.
no matter how remote from actual railroading that company's function might be.\textsuperscript{3}

The union operated within the framework of a democratic constitution. As few as ten workers could form a local union by petitioning the national organization for a charter. The only membership fee regularly demanded by the "General Union," or national organization, was a one dollar annual assessment. District conventions were to be held yearly in each state and territory, and a national convention convened quadrennially in Chicago. The national assembly was to elect an Executive Board, which comprised the government of the General Union in the interim between national conventions. The national officers of the union were chosen by and directly responsible to the Executive Board.\textsuperscript{4} It can be discerned, therefore, that the president could not easily impose his will arbitrarily upon the organization.

The American Railway Union, in its statement of principles, expressed the belief that strikes

\textsuperscript{3} United States Strike Commission Report, Senate Executive Document No. 7, 53rd Congress, 3rd Session (Washington, 1895), xxxiii.
were avoidable, and declared that these would be resorted to only when all possible avenues to amicable adjustment of disputes were blocked. Strikes could not be called without the approval of a majority of the membership of local unions on a given road. Only in matters of general concern did the entire organization work as a unit.\textsuperscript{5}

This democratic order, organized without regard to the particular skills of railroad workers, was launched because its leaders were dissatisfied with the existing railroad labor organizations. These unions, the four Railroad Brotherhoods, were organized along craft, or trade lines and their membership was made up of relatively skilled, specialized, and highly paid workers. Possibly as a consequence of this, they were moderate in attitude and conservative in method. They refused, in most cases, to join with other organizations or with each other in collective attempts to coerce employers, and stood for what they called "business methods" of collective bargaining: collective bargaining with elaborate machinery and trade a-

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Ibid}, 57.
greements, characterized by a somewhat sanctimonious regard for the sacredness of contract. Brotherhood leaders exercised considerable personal authority and attempted to impose strong discipline within their organizations.

In most cases the Brotherhoods enjoyed large treasuries and also offered a highly developed insurance program which was compulsory upon all members. They exhibited little or no consciousness of a working class interest and were, for the most part, middle class in viewpoint, exclusive, and self reliant.6

Germane to the general discussion of the Brotherhoods is the fact of the unusual hierarchy of skills in railroad labor. Those railroad workers who were organized into Brotherhoods in the 1890's -- Engineers, Firemen, Conductors and Brakemen,7 -- representing a more or less picked class of unusually skilled workers, were, without a doubt, accorded a favored position as work-

men. They were, as a consequence of this status, able to enjoy relative economic stability when less skilled workers suffered from the vagaries of the price level.  

It was in opposition to some of the alleged shortcomings of the Brotherhood system, that the A.R.U. was formed. Although George W. Howard, the new union's Vice-President, may have been the first to put forward a definite plan for the mass organization of the railroad workers, Eugene Debs, its President, had been aware for several years of the shortcomings of the Railroad Brotherhoods. Without his participation the A.R.U. would never have been organized and with all credit to Howard, Debs should be considered its founder and its guiding spirit.

Debs had worked as a Brotherhood official for

8. An interesting study, by a sociologist, of these conditions in the railroad industry is W. Fred Cottrell's The Railroader (Stanford University, California, 1940).
fifteen years before the A.R.U. was founded. In 1878 he was chosen Associate Editor of the Locomotive Firemen's Magazine, and two years later elected Editor-in-Chief of that publication as well as Secretary and Treasurer of the union that published it -- the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. He served in this dual capacity until he resigned thirteen years later to organize the A.R.U.

Beginning about 1885 Debs began to toy with a plan of federation for the Brotherhoods and after four years of agitation, the Supreme Council of the United Orders of Railway Employees was formed by leaders from three of the four Brotherhoods. The Supreme Council disintegrated, however, when a strike on the Chicago and Northwestern Road in the spring of 1891 was wrecked because one Brotherhood conspired with the railroad company to replace strikers with members of its own order.10 As a result of the failure of the Supreme Council, Debs became convinced that federation of the existing Brotherhoods for unified action was a practical

Debs resigned his position with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen in July of 1892. Its members at first refused to accept his resignation, but he insisted and issued the following statement which emphasized the growing opposition he felt to the futility of craft unionism in the railroad industry:

A life purpose of mine has been the federation of railroad employees. To unify them into one great body is my object, but I don't believe it can be done on the present lines. Now the men are enrolled in classes for distinct departments. Class enrollment fosters class prejudices and class selfishness....With the present differences in organization and differences among Grand officers, federation is impracticable and impossible.12

Taken together, the reasons for founding the A.R.U. put forward at one time or another by Debs and his associates constitute a grave indictment of the Railroad Brotherhoods.13 In addition to the alleged shortcomings mentioned above, two or

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11. Ibid, 91.
13. In a Speech at the first A.R.U. convention in June 1894, Debs said: "we start out with the declaration...that all the organizations of railway employees hitherto known have been dismal failures." Railway Times, June 15, 1894, 3.
three others were brought up during the union's lifetime and deserve consideration.

Debs took as his fundamental proposition a conviction that the interests of all railroad laborers were essentially the same, regardless of the position held. He believed that the highest paid men tended to look down upon the lowest paid, forgetting that they were both employed by a great corporation. His observations had led him to conclude that these men were dependent upon one another and should present a solid front to the railroad companies. In his opinion, such a united organization would be able to gain advantages which could not possibly be obtained under the atomized Brotherhood system. As he told the United States Strike Commission in 1894: "Management ... confronted with an organization representing practically all of its employees will treat more considerately a complaint than if confronted by a

14. Ibid, February 15, 1894, 1. Taken from account printed in the World-Herald (Omaha) of a speech by Debs in that city.
Furthermore, he believed that a small amount of power in the hands of a labor union was valueless, but a large amount of power, growing out of unification, would not only gain the respect of management, but would serve to prevent strikes. As his compatriot, George W. Howard, remarked: "When our organization is perfected ... there will never be another strike on a railroad in the United States .... One of the objectives of the association is to bring about intelligent arbitration." In order to put into effect this principle of unified action, one big union was necessary, for Debs felt that a lack of unity, a feeling of enmity and jealousy, and the desire to build up one organization at the expense of another had made practical federation impossible. In addition to bringing about a marriage of those already organized, Debs also planned to bring within the protective fold of his union the

16. Ibid.  
17. Quoted in *Railway Times*, February 15, 1894, 4.
850,000 unorganized railroad workers of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. He believed that if organization were feasible for 150,000 of the more skilled in the railroad industry, it was equally practical for the remaining workers. An organization "covering the whole ground" would be eminently more satisfactory, he declared, because "nothing short of complete consolidation could survive permanently."19

This union of all skills, Debs felt, would have the salutary effect of erasing the hated class lines so much in evidence within the ranks of railroad labor. The aristocrat of railroad labor would be faced with the confirmed fact that he was dependent upon all workers associated with him, and in addition to this, jurisdictional disputes between existing organizations would become a memory. Debs was at war with this stultifying condition in the field of railroad labor. He once remarked that he could not have conscientiously remained in the

20. Ibid, April 15, 1894, 1.
Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen because that organization's enrollment of engineers as well as firemen tended to foment the development of friction between Brotherhoods. This was evidently a widespread malfunction of craft unionism in the railroad industry. The Trainmen, for instance, also enrolled Brakemen; the Brakemen enrolled Trainmen and Conductors, only the Engineers remaining aloof from the consequent bickering.21

It also seemed to Debs that industrial conditions in the United States necessitated the creation of strong, unified, labor organizations. "Conditions in the Railway world have changed wonderfully," he declared early in 1894, "changed to such magnitude that organized railway labor must necessarily change to be in a position to meet this change."22 He was, of course, referring to the increased consolidation of railroad systems that had taken place since the early 1880's.

After the Pullman strike, Debs made the categor-

22. Interview in Terre Haute Express, reproduced in Railway Times, January 1, 1894, 1.
cal statement that the centralizing tendencies of the railroad companies constituted the primary reason the American Railway Union was founded.

"The railroad companies" he told the United States Strike Commission, "have been consolidated, have been merged, have been getting closer and closer together as far as the employers are concerned until they are practically united under one management. It is this that inspired the formation of the American Railway Union."23

In case this seems a refutation of some of Debs's earlier stated reasons for founding the A.R.U., it might be pointed out that he made this statement after his union had become the subject of almost universal attack as the result of the Pullman Strike.

In summary, the American Railway Union was created (1) to eradicate the class lines within the railroad industry, (2) to organize the hundreds of thousands of railroad workers for whom there had previously been no collective bargaining agency, (3) to put an end to the stultifying

jurisdictional disputes which had so long characterized relations between the Brotherhoods, (4) to meet the challenge presented by the increased centralization of railroad control which had made craft organization anachronistic and, (5) to make possible closer cooperation and the creation of a solid front against these behemoth corporations.

With these principles in mind, and with five energetic aides, Debs had remarkable success in organizing. He and his co-workers had brought eighty-seven local unions into the new organizations by November 1893 and five months later could boast of more than 150,000 members. Members of the Brotherhoods were invited to join the A.R.U. without resigning their Brotherhood affiliations, but the older unions prohibited this on pain of expulsion and, as a consequence, the new order could claim few engineers, conductors, or firemen among its members.24

In March, 1894, less than a year from its foundation, the A.R.U. had an opportunity to

prove its mettle as an effective labor organization. When the Great Northern Railroad cut the wages of its employees more than they felt the hard times justified, and James J. Hill refused to arbitrate the ensuing dispute with an A.R.U. committee, the locals situated on the Great Northern voted to cease work. Although the Union had succeeded in organizing only a fraction of the Great Northern workers, practically all trains stopped running. It was an orderly and well administered strike, there was a clear cut grievance, and when the issues were presented to the good offices of a group of Minneapolis businessmen, Hill was advised to capitulate to the demands of the union.

The strike was settled with a minimum of bad feeling on either side and was hailed as a great victory by the infant union.\textsuperscript{25} An apparent success, the Great Northern strike was nevertheless unfortunate in one respect. The rank and file of the new union, not realizing that there may have been unique factors modifying the nature of the

\textsuperscript{25} Railway Times, May 1, 1894, 1.
Great Northern victory,\textsuperscript{26} grew too confident and over-optimistically embroiled the union in an industrial dispute that was too much for it, and from which it never recovered.

This strike - the Pullman strike\textsuperscript{27} - grew out of a local dispute involving an A.R.U. local at the Pullman, Illinois plant of the Fullman Palace Car Company. Pullman, a town owned, operated, and dominated by the company for its workers, had many good characteristics, but by the early spring of 1894 Pullman workers were growing acutely dissatisfied with the feudalistic domination of the Pullman Company. After repeated efforts to obtain satisfaction from the company, the Pullman workers in desperation voted to go out on strike, which began on May 11. The A.R.U. local which precipitated this action had been warned by its national officers to take no drastic steps. Times were bad and not at all auspicious for a strike. How-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} See Gompers, \textit{Seventy Years of Life and Labor}, I, 403 ff.
\item \textsuperscript{27} The best and most complete account of the Pullman strike is Almont Lindsey, \textit{The Pullman Strike, The Story of a Unique Experiment and of a Great Labor Upheaval} (Chicago, 1942).
\end{itemize}
ever, no opportunity for reconsideration arose; the Pullman works were promptly closed down and its officials settled back to wait, stating brusquely that "there is nothing to arbitrate."

The American Railway Union, holding its first national convention in nearby Chicago, began its meetings four weeks after the Pullman works were closed. During the convention Debs visited Pullman, talked to strikers, and reported that conditions were indeed bad. Despite his sympathy with the Pullman workers' grievances, he used every persuasive effort to check precipitous action on the part of the A.R.U. convention, but after some emotional pleas by poverty stricken Pullman workers the convention voted almost unanimously to instruct A.R.U. members not to switch or handle Pullman Cars on any road. The union members by the use of this indirect strategy hoped to coerce the Pullman Company to come to terms with its striking employees. This action was taken only after a committee representing the convention had failed in attempts to discuss the issues with representatives of the Pullman Company. The Convention was obviously disposed to treat the
Pullman difficulty as a matter of general concern. This was, as ensuing developments illustrated, a heroic, but disastrous step.

It was disastrous because in attempting to enforce a boycott on the roads on which A.R.U. locals were organized, the Union came face to face with the General Managers Association, an extra-legal association composed of representatives of all the twenty-four roads having terminals in Chicago. The General Managers Association determined policy for all these roads as to wage scales, rates, loading facilities, and car servicing. Although voluntary and unincorporated, the organization was in a position to function smoothly and efficiently during times of crises.

The roads represented by the General Managers Association stated that their contracts with the Pullman Company were inviolable, and began discharging workers taking part in the boycott, whereupon the boycott of Pullman cars became a full scale strike against all the roads affiliated with the Association.

As a result of alleged disorder of a violent
nature in Chicago and outlying areas and somewhat questionable charges that United States mails were being stopped, President Cleveland, on the advice of his Attorney-General, Richard Olney, dispatched federal troops to Chicago. A sweeping injunction issued by the Federal District Court in Chicago, and the subsequent incarceration of Debs and other A.R.U. officials for contempt of court, stripped the strike of its leadership, and it was smashed.

Debs was eventually sentenced to a six months jail term by the Federal Court, and the American Railway Union failed to revive after the shock of its Pullman Strike defeat. After limping along for three years, the shattered remains of the Union were incorporated into the Social Democratic Party. Debs had become convinced, as a result of the Pullman strike, that economic action for the amelioration of labor's lot was doomed to frustration. He emerged from prison a Socialist, his experiment in industrial unionism a failure.

The last decade of the nineteenth century was

characterized by its many dramatic and bitterly contested industrial disputes. None was more widely discussed by the public press or more charged with significance than the Pullman strike. This was true not only because the strike against a score of major railroad systems played havoc with what is called "the public interest," but also because one of its protagonists represented a new type of labor organization in the railroad industry - industrial unionism.

The American Railway Union, it has been shown, was conceived and founded because of certain shortcomings believed to be manifest in the existing Railroad Brotherhoods which made them in effect, "tools of the corporations." They served a very real function as they were, but it was thought that they were less aggressive than they might have been and, in fact, were little deserving of the name "labor union." The American Railway Union came upon the scene protesting its aversion to extreme action, yet within one year

29. "The several unions of railway employees, considered in any militant sense, are not labor unions at all." Debs, "You Railroad Men," in Debs: His Life, Writings, and Speeches (Girard Kansas, 1908), 211.
of its founding, took part in two strikes. Here was a "labor union," in the militant tradition.

It is recognizable then, that the A.R.U. meant the initiation of one phenomenon into the field of railroad labor - industrial unionism - and the recrudescence of another - aggressive principles of action. As it happened, the reaction of certain sections of American society toward the American Railway Union, as well as the response of that nebulous quantity called "the public," was conditioned by both of these factors.

Some were able to see the union for what it was - an industrial union. Others chose to see only the aggressive action and what this was believed to imply.

As might be expected, only organized labor consistently debated the merits of the American Railway Union as an industrial union. And here, as in other institutional areas, self interest played as important a part in determining attitude as any other factor.
CHAPTER II

ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE A.R.U.

Union labor in 1894 reflected widely varying attitudes towards the existing social order. Some organizations were extremely conservative, as the Railroad Brotherhoods, while others sincerely believed revolutionary political action to be the only sure road to success. There was no better representative of the latter group than the Socialist Labor Party, ably led by the brilliant and mercurial Daniel DeLeon. It is to be expected that these groups, representing widely divergent points of view, would differ in attitude toward the American Railway Union. The new union, representing a radical departure in railroad unionism, enjoyed the approval of other labor groups in direct proportion to the orthodoxy each of these exhibited.

The Railroad Brotherhoods, confining their organization to a selected class of relatively skilled workmen, eschewing political action and avoiding disruptive conflict as much as was possible, could hardly have been expected to welcome with open arms and hearty
approbation an organization whose fundamental objective constituted a distinct threat to their own vested interests. If they had resisted the blandishments of the American Federation of Labor, another trade conscious, moderate group, it is hardly surprising that they were even less amenable to the persuasions of the American Railway Union. They were, in fact, openly hostile.

Debs and his associates never stated that they planned, or even desired, the extinction of the Brotherhoods. They attacked and ridiculed them, but always at the same time declared that a railroader could belong to both his old Brotherhood and the A.R.U. But the ridicule heaped on the Brotherhoods by the A.R.U.'s leaders and newspaper did not serve to ingratiate the union in the minds of the leaders of the Brotherhoods. When Carroll D. Wright, United States Commissioner of

1. The Brotherhoods were, during the seventies and eighties, almost purely beneficiary organizations. This carried over into the nineties and helps explain their aloofness from the A. F. of L. Commons, et al, History of Labour, 309-10.
Labor, asked P. H. Morrissey, Grand Master of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, just why his organization was unfriendly toward the A.R.U., the latter replied:

The American Railway Union came into existence with the declaration that the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and kindred organizations were weak, ineffective and, in a word, playing nothing short of a confidence game on the men they assume to represent. The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen has for a long time been representing certain classes of men in the train service...as effectively as could be done under trade union principles or as a labor organization. When we failed it was a subject of ridicule by the lecturers of the American Railway Union. That naturally produced bitterness.

There was undoubtedly good reason for the Brotherhood's assuming a defensive attitude as regarded the A.R.U., for while a leader of the new union might say in one sentence: "There has been no antagonism on the part of the A.R.U. toward any of the older Brotherhoods..." he would frequently continue in this manner: "for we realized...that we

2. Wright was the chairman of the three man United States Strike Commission appointed by Cleveland after the Pullman strike to investigate its origins and nature, and to make recommendations leading toward the avoidance of such disputes. Lindsey, Pullman Strike, 35ff.
could easily outstrip all of them in a year and could convince the progressive and thinking members...that they could not hope for anything in the way of bettering conditions under the old regime."4

The Brotherhoods were, however, opposed to the A.R.U. for reasons more fundamental than the one mentioned above. The A.R.U. was unpopular because it represented a type of organization feared and disliked by the Brotherhood leaders. As E. E. Clark, Grand Chief Conductor of the Brotherhood of Railway Conductors replied when asked the reason for his union's settled aversion to the A.R.U.: "It is founded in the fact that we believe in an entirely different method and in entirely different principles than is advocated by them."5

This is a clear cut statement, but no more concise than that of Grand Chief Morrissey of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, who said: "The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen believes in the extension of union among railway men and a closer bond of feeling

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4. Ibid., Testimony of George W. Howard, 12-13.
5. Ibid., 186.
and unity between them. But it disagrees with the A.R.U. as to the plan of organization, and as to the methods employed to bring about the results desired.\textsuperscript{6}

Although there was unanimous antipathy toward the A.R.U. among the Brotherhoods' spokesmen, there were differences in interpretation as to what the union stood for. The editor of the \textit{Railway Conductor}, for instance, failed to discover in the A.R.U. any idea different from that upon which the older organizations were based except an effort to establish an organization by ruining others, in the hope of building from and upon the ruins. The A.R.U. offers nothing in the line of policy, principles or propositions that is new. There is not a feature of the old organizations which is assailed by the advocates of this association as causes or sources of weakness that cannot easily be remedied by amending the laws of the old organizations if the membership generally believed that such amendments should be made.\textsuperscript{7}

Few Brotherhood leaders, however, were as candid as P. M. Arthur, Grand Chief of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, who compared the A.R.U. to the Knights of Labor, stating that it was too stupendous

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 182.
\textsuperscript{7} Quoted in \textit{Review of Reviews}, X (1894), 190.
in its undertaking since it took in anyone who wished to join, no matter whether he was a one-dollar-a-day laborer or a six dollar engineer. It was Arthur who was most often the target of the A.R.U.'s invective and abusive sarcasm. He was referred to as a tool of the corporation and an enemy of labor. Furthermore, it was charged that Arthur ordered strikes when it was impossible to win, and prevented them when it was possible to succeed. By always opposing any scheme of federation with other bodies it was also said that he helped the companies to win any strike that involved other organizations.9 One current magazine believed that Arthur's reason for opposing the union was the one of most contemporary significance. An editorial in The Outlook contended that the A.R.U. was unpopular with the Brotherhoods essentially because it had organized the lower levels of railroad workers.10 This was, as can be seen, Arthur's position in a nutshell.

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10. The Outlook, I (July 7, 1894), 9.
In the opposition of the Brotherhoods to the A.R.U., actions spoke louder than words. For in the case of both the Great Northern strike and the Pullman boycott, the Brotherhoods refused official sanction to the A.R.U.'s activities. This fact was fully understood by the American Railway Union's leaders. "Treachery!" said the Railway Times when some of the old Brotherhoods attempted to force their men back to work on the Great Northern.\textsuperscript{11}

During the Pullman strike, Chief Arthur of the Engineers ordered his men to proceed as usual and boasted of this fact to John Burns, British labor leader, who rebuked Arthur publicly for his arrogance.\textsuperscript{12} Attorney-General Olney in a memorandum written shortly after the strike noted one of the most striking manifestations of Brotherhood opposition to the A.R.U. He referred to Grand Master S. E. Wilkinson of the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen when he wrote:

The strike was greatly hampered by the ac-

\begin{footnotes}
11. \textit{Railway Times}, May 1, 1894, 2.
\end{footnotes}
tion of (Wilkinson's) organization which, as such, declined to join the Debs movement. Wilkinson himself shaved off his whiskers so as not to be recognized and shouldered a musket against the rioters. After the collapse of the strikers, his organization disciplined as many as twenty thousand members... by suspension or expulsion for having joined in the strike contrary to the decision of the Brotherhood.13

Reasons other than a fundamental dislike of the union involved probably caused the Brotherhoods' inaction during the Pullman strike. The strike was a sympathetic action; grievances against the roads were important, but admittedly secondary. It is understandable that the conservative Brotherhoods would refuse to sanction it under such circumstances. But the Brotherhoods were not passive; they worked actively against the strike, as Wilkinson's activities suggest, and evidently wanted it to fail. The reasons for this desire are plain enough: to wreck the strike was to destroy the A.R.U.

13. Olney, "Memorandum," quoted in Henry James, Richard Olney and His Public Service (Boston 1923), 63. Also statement by Wilkinson quoted in Public Opinion, XVII (July 12, 1894), 332.
Some Brotherhood leaders stated openly that the failure of the strike would increase the prestige and strength of the Brotherhoods. 14 Things evidently did not work out in this way, however, for at least one organization, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, suffered heavy losses. As the leader of the organization stated some thirty years after the strike:

"Thousands of our members deserted their engines, violated their agreements with railroad companies, and lost their employment. Years...were required for the rebuilding of the organization." 15 This not only points up the losses of the Brotherhood, but indicates the evident difficulty the leadership encountered in maintaining discipline while it was in progress. There were obviously sound reasons for the Brotherhoods' fearing the A.R.U., for the clean-shaven Wilkinson also had serious difficulty keeping his men on the job.

This much is obvious, then: the Railroad Brotherhoods were opposed to the American Railway Union not only because it was another union in the field, but

15. Quoted in Harvey Middleton, Railways and Organized Labor (Chicago, 1941), 40.
because the new union's form of organization was such that if it were successful, the Brotherhoods would face extinction. Chary of any change that threatened the favored position they enjoyed, the Brotherhoods opposed the A.R.U.'s attempt at "leveling" within the field of railroad labor. The upper classes of railroad labor, feeling no "working class" consciousness, were unwilling to make possible sacrifices to better the lot of yard workers and switchmen.

The Brotherhoods, representing highly developed trade or craft unionism could not coexist, they believed, with the American Railway Union. Because of this conviction they attempted more or less openly to undermine the A.R.U., not only refusing their members permission to join the union, but working against it during its periods of greatest need—when on strike.

With the arch-exemplars of American craft unionism—the Railroad Brotherhoods—opposed to the American Railway Union, it is not surprising to find Samuel Gompers, the leader of the era's most stable trade union—the American Federation of Labor—assuming the same position. With the exception of one year,
1895, Samuel Gompers was President of the A. F. of L. from 1886 until his death in 1924. His guiding principle as a labor union leader was his firm belief in the craft union as the best possible form for a labor organization. As he wrote in his autobiography:

I am willing to subordinate my opinions to the well being, harmony, and success of the labor movement; I am willing to sacrifice myself upon the altar of any phase or action it may take for its advancement; I am willing to step aside if it will aid our cause; but I will not and cannot prove false to my convictions that the trade unions pure and simple are the natural organizations of the wage workers to secure their present and practical improvement and to achieve their final emancipation.\(^\text{16}\)

It is difficult to explain the tenacity with which Gompers held on to his trade union ideal. Any attack upon a craft union, no matter whether it be a member of the Federation or not, was considered by Gompers to be reprehensible, for he thought efforts to displace trade unionism in any field to be attempts to destroy, indirectly, the American Federation of Labor.

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Quite consistent with his belief in craft unionism was Gompers' conviction that dual unionism was heresy. As the spokesman for the American Federation of Labor, confident that history justified the craft union form, he believed that rival groups claiming jurisdiction in any craft must ultimately destroy each other. He felt sincerely that the Railroad Brotherhoods and the American Federation of Labor were consanguineous, and what could be more uniform to his fundamental faith than to distrust the American Railway Union, an organization that not only threatened the Brotherhoods, but espoused industrial unionism for railroad workers as well. Gompers resorted to what might be called petulance when he wrote in his autobiography:

No one can organize a successful movement without stimulating desire in others to do otherwise (likewise?). For years my life was a relentless fight to maintain cohesive forces within the Federation against disintegrating tendencies. In addition I had to combat organized movements to destroy. At first this phase of the work was con-

cerned chiefly with overcoming the dual activities of the Knights of Labor. The first attempt to displace the principles of the trade union came with the American Railway Union.\textsuperscript{18}

When George W. Howard requested aid from Gompers in 1891 in launching his projected mass organization of railroad workers, Gompers firmly refused. In addition to warning the future vice-president of the A.R.U. that his plan had little chance for success, Gompers moralized that it would be wrong to try to undermine the Brotherhoods, for that was what he felt the plan amounted to.\textsuperscript{19} Gompers believed it best to allow the Brotherhoods to correct their own shortcomings, if they wished, and was steadfast in his conviction that "dual organization" was a crying evil. When told that Debs had formed an alliance with Howard and undertaken the leadership of the union, Gompers was "shocked".\textsuperscript{20} He remarked later that beginning with his affiliation with the A.R.U., Debs "loomed on the horizon as a

\textsuperscript{18} Gompers, \textit{Seventy Years of Life and Labor}, I, 403. It is significant that the chapter in which these remarks are written is called "Efforts to Disrupt the Federation."

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, 405.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, 403.
leader of irregular movements and lost causes.²¹

Gompers' biographer states that the Federation leader felt the A.R.U. to be on the side of progress and opposed that union only because it attempted to break down what was already in existence, that is, the Brotherhoods.²² This interpretation implies that Gompers subordinated his adherence to the craft union principle to his aversion to dual unionism. Possibly the two concepts are so interrelated as to be inseparable, but it does not seem credible that Gompers, whose verbal assaults on industrial unionism were fierce and frequent, was moved to oppose the A.R.U. only because it represented an attack on the jurisdiction of the Brotherhoods. It is more probable that he was motivated by both of these deep seated convictions. Gompers adjudged craft unionism to be "the soundest base yet laid for every project that gives promise to the working class for a firm and solid

²¹. Ibid., 405.
²². Rowland H. Harvey, Samuel Gompers (Stanford University, California, 1935), 79.
advance"23 and furthermore, he thought that labor should only attempt "step by step" advances. The American Railway Union, he believed, attempted a lusty, but misguided, leap toward labor's millenium, and because such visionary escapades were predestined to failure, threatened the future of all organized workers.

Debs believed all his life that Gompers had worked actively against the A.R.U. during the Pullman strike. "Gompers did everything he could to break the strike," Debs told his friend David Karsner in the 1920's, "and was then...hand in glove with the employers so far as any actual freedom of the workers was concerned." Debs went on to say that the attitude of the Federation toward the great strike was identical with that of the Railroad Brotherhoods. "He (Gompers) was an apt scholar," Debs concluded, "of P. M. Arthur, Grand Chief of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen..."24 In Debs mind identification with Arthur

automatically committed a labor leader to obloquy.

It appears, however, that Debs' position was an extreme one. Although opposed to dual and industrial unionism, Gompers was sympathetic towards all attempts to "cope with the great power of concentrated wealth." In this respect his attitude was not as narrow and restricted as that of the Brotherhood leaders. He did not believe that the Pullman strike could possibly succeed, for the American Railway Union was poorly equipped for sustained industrial conflict, but he sympathized sincerely with the end sought by Debs and his co-strikers.

Gompers' only direct connection with the Pullman strike came about as a result of his having been called to Chicago during the strike to meet other labor leaders to decide upon the advisability of unified action against the railroads. The Federation's Chicago Building Trades Council had early gone out on sympathetic strike and the impulse for the meeting came from this source.25 According to Gompers'

report to the 1895 A. F. of L. Convention, Debs spoke at a meeting of the council outlining what he thought the group could do. "When Debs made his proposition," Gompers reported, "every member of the conference accepted it as a declaration on his part that the strike had failed..."26 Evidently Debs next stated that he planned to present to the General Managers an offer whereby the strike would be terminated if the workers were guaranteed their former positions. If this move was not favorably received, then Debs asked that the labor leaders present declare a general strike.

In Gompers' words, he and the others at the meeting then answered Debs by declaring "that it would be unwise and disastrous to the interests of labor to extend the strike any farther than it had gone..." Accordingly all other unionists then out on sympathetic strike were directed to return to work.27

In giving this order the labor leaders appended the following statement: "In making this declaration we do not wish it understood that we are in any way

26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
antagonistic to labor organizations now struggling for right or justice..."\textsuperscript{28} This statement should stand as having been issued with sincerity, there being no evidence that leads to a contrary conclusion.

The A. F. of L. convention accepted the President's report unanimously, deeming it "the right and proper course (to have) followed, notwithstanding that their sympathies must have run counter to their judgment..."\textsuperscript{29} It is significant that Gompers was the author of a long letter to President Cleveland condemning his sending federal troops to Chicago, and the sentiments expressed in this letter were seconded firmly by the convention.

Although one historian of the strike asserts that its \textit{coup de grace} was delivered by Gompers, who was, he implies, actuated only by his opposition to the A.R.U.,\textsuperscript{30} this appears to be only a superficial

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{28} Gompers, \textit{Seventy Years of Life and Labor}, I, 413.
\end{thebibliography}
interpretation. In view of Gompers' stout denunciation of President Cleveland's action and Debs's subsequent indictment by a federal court, 31 it appears that he was motivated primarily by a desire to get his men out while the getting was good. Unless one takes the extreme position that Gompers scuttled the Pullman strike indirectly by refusing outright sanction of it, it would seem fair to say that although he disapproved of the American Railway Union and what it stood for, nevertheless he was not vindictive. He did not work against the strike; rather, his action was determined by the exigencies of the hour.

Gompers realized that the step taken by his organization in preventing a general work stoppage had worked to the ultimate advantage of the Brotherhoods. He wrote in his autobiography that

The course pursued by the Federation (during the strike) was the biggest service that could have been performed to maintain the integrity of the Railroad Brotherhoods. Large numbers of their members left their organizations to join the

A.R.U. If meant, if not disruption, weakening to a very serious extent.\footnote{32}

This statement, written in retrospect, hardly seems, however, to merit the categorical conclusion that Gompers was motivated by a desire to aid the Brotherhoods at the expense of the A.R.U.

Gompers was opposed to the A.R.U. on two counts. First, it represented a much despised "dual union" and, second, it stood for a form of organization which he felt unworkable and premature. The position in the American labor movement accorded to Debs by Gompers is interesting as an expression of Gompers' basic antagonism to industrial unionism.

The genial 'Gene Debs' with much avowed idealism, tried to fit the labor movement into a different shape from that into which it naturally developed. It is hard for the reformer to realize that the labor movement is a living thing and that it must develop by passing through the normal stages of growth. It is not transformed by any dictum or overnight resolution, but it must grow into something different. When Debs began to discount his judgment in favor of his emotions, he ceased to play a constructive part in the labor movement.\footnote{33}

\footnote{32. Gompers, \textit{Seventy Years of Life and Labor}, I, 414.}
\footnote{33. \textit{Ibid.}, 406}
Although Gompers' position in the above respect appears to be vulnerable in some ways, the fact remains that it was his theory of the labor movement, and as stated, this was the very antithesis of the theory given life by Debs in the form of the American Railway Union.

Thus far, this chapter has been concerned with unions that were, within their self-imposed limitations, forceful and firmly grounded labor organizations. This cannot be said for the two remaining to be discussed. The Socialist Labor Party, only a quasi-labor union, was forceful but not firmly grounded. The Knights of Labor was neither.

After reaching their peak of membership and effectiveness in the mid-1880's, the Knights of Labor began a retrogression which had almost run its course to extinction by the time of the Pullman strike. By 1894, they were able to generate little more than noise, for economic action had been erased from the organiza-

34. For example, why could not the A.R.U. have represented a "normal stage of growth?"
tion's program and replaced by visionary panaceas that served to make it a subject of derision when it had once been feared. Contrasted to its peak membership of 700,000, only 75,000 workmen, farm reformers and rootless dreamers were now affiliated with the once "noble order."\(^{35}\)

James R. Sovereign, an Iowan, became President of the order in 1893 and from that time on it moved from attempts to adjust wages to concern with abolishing the wage system and the establishment of a cooperative industrial system. It perhaps bode ill for the A.R.U. that from its inception the Knights of Labor was its staunchest defender and firmest friend.

In some respects the Knights of Labor and the A.R.U. were similar. The "mixed assemblies" of the Knights - regional groups of laborers, including unskilled workers - exhibited a similarity to the broad organizational plan adopted by the A.R.U. Whereas the Knights sought as an ultimate goal complete labor unity, the mixed assemblies representing a transition

\(^{35}\) Foster Rhea Dulles, Labor in America, A History (New York, 1949), 147-149.
stage toward that goal, the A.R.U. aimed only at the unification of railroad labor. Nevertheless, both of these plans were more or less in fundamental opposition to the pragmatic ideal of trade unionism.

The Knights openly applauded every step taken by the A.R.U. and stated frankly the reasons for this approval. The Journal of the Knights of Labor, in an article lauding the nascent Railway Times, had this to say:

There is none of the conservative cringing in its columns so often characteristic of labor organs seeking to represent a labor union and afraid to admit the difference between the five-dollar-a-day engineer and the dollar-and-a-half yard laborer.36

The Knights openly affiliated with the A.R.U. at the time of the Pullman strike and its publication was used to drum up support for that doomed cause. President Sovereign, testifying before the Strike Commission, said that although his organization and the A.R.U. differed in that one was a secret, ritualistic, organization and the other not, still they were friendly because of the

36. Quoted in Railway Times, March 1, 1894, 1.
similarity of their fundamental structures of organization. "The affiliation of the A.R.U. with the Knights of Labor was brought about," Sovereign testified, "because the union was organized on the broad basis of brotherhood, and gives the same recognition to the man on the section (as) it does to the man on the cab, which is radically different from the old-line brotherhood." 37

The Knights of Labor backed up its favor of the A.R.U. with action during the Pullman strike. As the organization's publication asserted at its most critical point: "We are glad the American Railway Union is fighting the Pullman Palace Car Co. with every weapon at its command. Knights of Labor are glad of it and will join with them at every opportunity." 38

Sovereign was reported to have tried to persuade other labor leaders to join in a general strike with the Knights. Samuel Gompers reported that Sovereign urged him to do just this. Evidently Sovereign did

38. Journal of the Knights of Labor, in Public Opinion, XVII (July 12, 1894), 332.
call all members of the Knights out on general strike, but Gompers asserted that none of them complied.39

This may or may not have been true, but the important facts are that spokesmen for the Knights were full of praise for the American Railway Union and that attempts were made by these men to consolidate the forces of labor against capital at the time of the Pullman strike.

But intemperate statements of spokesmen for the Knights may have worked to the disadvantage of the A.R.U. during the strike by contributing to the near hysteria generated in some quarters by the conservative press. "It might as well be understood now," wrote the editor of the Journal of the Knights of Labor, "that the contest between monopoly and labor is war to the knife, industrially and politically, and the organized labor forces intend to use every legitimate weapon at hand to win the battle."40 Remove two or three key words from this paragraph and

39. Gompers, Seventy Years of Life and Labor, I, 414.
40. Quoted in Public Opinion, XVII (July 12, 1894), 332.
you have a real revolutionary polemic. Such statements as these were widely disseminated through the public press and possibly helped create the unfavorable atmosphere in which the strike was viewed.

As one of the representative groups of the several existing Socialist organizations, the Socialist Labor Party also viewed the A.R.U.'s experiment in industrial unionism with approbation.

Daniel DeLeon, the leader of the S.L.P. and the editor of its newspaper, detested trade unionism. His tongue and pen were as sharp as a freshly honed razor when directed at an enemy. Samuel Gompers was his favorite foe and some of DeLeon's choicest invective was slung at the American Federation of Labor. "The pure and simple have been found out," wrote the fiery socialist, "some are ignorant, others are corrupt, all are unfit for leadership in the labor movement. To civilize them and unite them is out of the question. The social revolution must march over the bodies of
each and everyone of them."41

Any form of labor organization working counter to a craft union would have without a doubt received the plaudits of DeLeon. Eugene Debs was not at this time a doctrinaire socialist and the A.R.U., although class conscious, was not a revolutionary organization. Despite this shortcoming, the A.R.U. won the approval of DeLeon. "From the deliberate or instinctive recognition of the class interests of all the railroad employees," he wrote, "golden fruits may be expected; it (the A.R.U.) is a step in the direction of clasping hands with the whole working class..."42

The Socialists were particularly pleased by the new union's casting off the pretensions of the railroad caste system. The People, the Party's official organ, pointed out that the old craft unions, the Railroad Brotherhoods, were organized for the few. The costs of membership were thought to be excessively

41. The People, August 13, 1893, in Reed, Labor Philosophy of Samuel Gompers, 32.
high, tremendous power was seen to be relegated to the chiefs, and their political and economic conservatism was of course reprehended.\textsuperscript{43} This analysis of the Brotherhoods' shortcomings was markedly similar to that of Debs.

Again in the case of the Socialists, as with the Knights, the aid of this organization might possibly have worked to the disadvantage of the A.R.U. during the Pullman strike by suggesting to an already frightened public that much abhorred word - revolution.

Bill Haywood, later the leader of the Industrial Workers of the World, but at this time a young man hopping trains throughout the west, wrote of his sympathy for the latent power of the A.R.U. "Here," he said, "was a great power. It was not the fact that produce was removed from the trains...The big thing was that they could stop trains. It was a lesson of the Knights of Labor, an echo of the voice of the Chicago Martyrs."\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 187.
\textsuperscript{44} William D. Haywood, \textit{Bill Haywood's Book} (New York, 1929), 53.
Debs had reason to wish that his union had not been placed in the radical tradition. A radical form of organization did not necessarily imply a proclivity for radical action. Too many contemporaries tended to equate the two.

But not everyone associated with the labor movement who sympathized with the American Railway Union was a radical or a visionary. One of the most perspicacious commentators on labor questions in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was John Swinton. He had worked as an editorial writer both for Henry Raymond's New York Times and Dana's New York Sun. In addition to both of these highly respectable positions he had edited his own personal journal - John Swinton's Paper - which was primarily concerned with labor problems and questions of social reform. Swinton was a man of unblemished character and gained the respect of both the representatives of labor and capital45 and his

comments on the A.R.U. and the Pullman strike are worth more than passing notice.

The American Railway Union and Eugene V. Debs had no greater friend than the outspoken Scot, who approved heartily both of the Pullman strike and the union which staged it. Furthermore Swinton, who had always held himself aloof from any one labor organization, saw the A.R.U. as a sign of progress. He recognized clearly those characteristics of the old Brotherhoods that made it next to impossible for them to work together and in analyzing the ineffectiveness of the Brotherhoods, he wrote:

These separate bodies had failed to act harmoniously; one of them had been played off against another; they had hardly ever been able to cooperate in negotiations with the companies when any object was to be gained, or any grievances redressed, or any reduction of wages resisted; the interests of any one of them might not seem to concern the rest, and the wrongs of one might not be suffered by another. Many evils had to be endured on account of this state of things, though, as a matter of course it was very acceptable to the employing companies, which could deal more easily with the separate bodies than it could have dealt with a federation of
them, acting in harmony.46

It will be noticed that there is a remarkable similarity between these observations and the reasons forwarded by Debs for founding the A.R.U. Swinton, incidentally, had never met Debs, and reached his conclusions independent of the persuasions of anyone.

Recognizing the inadequacies of the Brotherhoods, Swinton further remarked that "many of the battles of labor have been lost through the jealousy and selfish rivalry of leaders who ought to have stood shoulder to shoulder."47 He knew that "shoulder to shoulder" action was a requisite in the railroad industry, if consistent gains were to be realized. The more cohesive a group was, he concluded, the greater were its prospects of success against such overawing combines as the General Managers Association. "That association," he wrote, "could not have done what it did in July of 1894 if the great strike...had been backed up by the officers and 90,000 members" of the

47. Ibid., 144.
Swinton believed that the Union's plan of organization was worthy of the highest praise and Debs, as its leader, was recognized as a man of extraordinary ability and insight. "The prime conception of the union," he wrote, "gave proof of the breadth of Brother Debs's thought; the planning and organizing of it involved rare practical skill; the building up of it revealed a man of extraordinary energy; the high principles upon which it was founded betokened a spirit higher yet..." 49

John Swinton, a detached observer who was neither a revolutionary nor a dreamy-eyed visionary, a man who Henry J. Raymond said was "the only man I ever knew who had no axes of his own to grind," 50 saw the American Railway Union as a stride forward. He felt that the union had been badly needed, "that multitudes had awaited its formation," and that, as he wrote, "it gave a prime exemplification of the practical fraternity

48. Ibid., 144.
49. Ibid., 149.
of labor...."51

Swinton sincerely thought that railroad workers would eventually be impelled to join the American Railway Union, which he felt would survive and grow despite its defeat in the Pullman strike.52 In this respect he was wrong, but his cogent observations seem prophetic when it is noted that railroad labor's accomplishments were few until the less skilled were organized and workable federation became a fact.

Swinton's attitude, as well as that of the Knights of Labor and the Socialist Labor Party, was representative of only a negligible fraction of American labor. Although there are evidences that a considerable disparity existed between the opinions of conservative labor's leaders and the rank and file affiliated with these organizations, the fact remains that the bulk of organized labor was opposed to the American Railway Union because it was an industrial union. Craft unionism was the safest, and, most labor leaders felt, the only feasible plan for the organization of labor.

52. Ibid., 152.
CHAPTER III

THREE ENEMIES OF THE UNION:

THE GENERAL MANAGERS ASSOCIATION, THE
PULLMAN COMPANY, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

John Swinton, whose favor of the American Railway Union was outspoken indeed and who had found much to deprecate in the attitude of craft unionists toward that organization, had no kind words for the Union's adversaries in the Pullman strike. These were the General Manager's Association and the Federal Government. He wrote, with characteristic vigor:

At the opening of the strike the only enemy in front was the General Managers Association, representing a number of railway companies, which very soon increased to as many as twenty-seven.

Presto chango!

On the ninth day of the strike...there was brought into it a new feature of supreme importance, by which all the conditions of it were fundamentally changed. It then became manifest that all the power, the machinery, and the resources of the Federal Government were to be turned against the strike with remorseless ferocity. 1

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1. Swinton, A Momentous Question, 103.
Eugene Debs had no quarrel with Swinton's statement that the actions of the association and the Government were ferocious, but he was unwilling to concede that these were perpetrated without reason. Debs was firmly convinced that the Association, at least, set out deliberately to destroy the A.R.U. When the strike was being investigated by the United States Strike Commission, he testified that

it was currently reported that the General Managers Association resolved to exterminate the American Railway Union; that they had seen from the Great Northern victory that it was a menace to the railroad companies of the country, and it was the purpose to crush the A.R.U. in its incipiency.\(^2\)

Historians, in writing of the Pullman strike and the A.R.U., tend to take this and other statements by Debs and his sympathizers at their face value. Debs' continual reiteration of his belief that the General Managers Association was determined to crush the union, is almost convincing in itself. There was no equivocation in statements such as the following, written after the Pullman

\(^{2}\) U. S. Strike Commission Report, 137.
strike.

I need not remind you, comrades of the American Railway Union, that our order in the pursuit of right, was confronted with a storm of opposition such as never beat upon a labor organization in all time. Its brilliant victory on the Great Northern and its gallant championship of the unorganized employees of the Union Pacific had aroused the opposition of every railroad corporation in the land.

To crush the A.R.U. was the one tie that united them all in the bonds of vengeance; it solidified the enemies of labor into one great association which, by its fabulous wealth, enabled it to bring into action resources aggregating billions of money and every appliance that money could purchase.3

Unfortunately, not one of the records of the General Managers Association is available to test this thesis and overt statements by railroad managers concerning the union are conspicuous by their absence.4 As a consequence, it is difficult to demonstrate conclusively that the companies sought to crush the A.R.U. because of its form of organization. Debs' firm statement above is written with self-assurance and an air of certainty, but

3. "Proclamation to American Railway Union" in Debs, Writings, 292.
4. See Lindsey, Fullman Strike, 115.
in discussing the attitude of the railroad companies toward the new union, it must be kept in mind that their actions, and not their words, were the only evidences of the intensity of their antagonism to it.

Big business in the 1890's was disposed to view organized labor with relative good-will when it showed no proclivity to act. The railroad companies for instance, were admittedly well satisfied that there were such organizations as the Brotherhoods, who not only caused little trouble but provided insurance for certain classes of workers, thereby solving the problem presented when injured laborers asked the company for help.

The American Railway Union, however, was different. This upstart organization not only brought within its ranks those workers whose interest had heretofore been sacrificed to keep the Brotherhood members sleek and fat, but it was professedly out to ameliorate labor's lot by coercing the compan-

5. See U. S. Strike Commission Report, xlviii; Railway Times, January 15, 1894; Lindsey, Pullman Strike, 108.
ies into raising wages and improving working conditions. Furthermore, it was intent on breaking down the class lines in railroad labor that had worked so effectively to make united action against capital impossible. This was an organization which might be dangerous.

The A.R.U. was only ten months old when it undertook its first aggressive action - the Great Northern strike. This dispute raised next to no comment on the part of the railroad companies and it was apparently not noticed at the time that the union involved differed from the conventional railroad craft union. Not for some weeks did any event foretell what Debs was convinced was the determination of the railroad companies to destroy it. Then, abruptly, the Rock Island Railroad began discharging members of the older Brotherhoods who joined the A.R.U., and a number of companies whose workers had set up A.R.U. locals refused to accord to the new union's officials privileges usually given to union officers. For instance, free transportation was customarily given to Brotherhood

leaders for the effective work they were doing in promoting good will between the companies and the men. The denial of this courtesy to officers of the A.R.U.\(^7\) indicates that there was a more or less general cognizance on the part of the railroad companies that the American Railway Union was something different, and that it constituted a distinct threat to their power to arbitrarily determine working conditions and wage scales.

Up to the time of the Pullman strike this much had become evident: the railroad companies knew about the A.R.U., and they must have known of its victory on the Great Northern system.\(^8\) The union's members had suffered from discrimination and had even been dismissed from their jobs. But these were only defensive measures utilized by the companies to offset the Union's attempts to organize.

Then came the Pullman strike. An opportunity

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7. Ibid., 137.
had presented itself; the issue was now joined. The General Managers Association was confronted by this new union, 150,000 members strong, and organized so as to act as a unit. The steps it now took had active direction and purpose.

As is well known, the General Managers Association fought the Pullman Strike with every weapon at its command. Certain aspects of the Association's attitude towards the strike are of especial significance, however, because they indicate that a mere strike victory was not considered sufficient. The Union had to die with the strike or the victory would be only half won. For example, at no time was the Association willing to negotiate with the union, nor would it agree to arbitrate the dispute or make any concession in the interest of settling it. In fact, it even refused summarily to receive communications from the Union. Mayor Hopkins of Chicago, interested in bringing about a cessation of hostilities, consented, at Debs's request, to carry a communication from the Union to the Association...
tion asking for arbitration. 10 This note, alluded to earlier in connection with the part played by Samuel Gompers in the strike, suggested as the only condition for arbitration a promise by the companies to reinstate all strikers not convicted of a crime. It was ignored and not so much as opened. 11

The Association's refusal to arbitrate came in the face of the fact that the union's plea for mere reinstatement of strikers admitted, for all practical purposes, defeat of the strike. The companies by this time had successfully solicited the aid of the Federal Government and were secure in their conviction that the strike was as good as won. Aware that victory was in the bag, their policy now would appear to demonstrate beyond question that they wanted to destroy the union that preached and practiced industrial unionism on the railroads.

Blacklisting of certain A.R.U. members after

11. Ibid., 146-47, 255-56; additional efforts were made to get the Association to make a settlement of some kind. The Chicago Board of Aldermen, Mayor Hopkins of Chicago and Mayor Pingree of Detroit all made unsuccessful attempts to bring about arbitration. Ibid., 350.
the strike was but a logical continuation of the policy begun while it was in progress. 12 Actually not all A.R.U. members were refused their positions when the hostilities were over; only those who had taken an active part in the strike and who were known to be agitators found it impossible to find a job. 13 Nevertheless this difference in degree does not becloud the intent of the companies, which was to rid themselves of troublesome employees who would be dissatisfied with the status quo ante bellum.

Statements such as the one following, made by Everett St. John, General Manager of the Rock Island Road, indicate that the railroad companies knew well what sort of organization they were dealing with in fighting the A.R.U. "As I understand it," he said, "the American Railway Union is an effort to combine within its own order all branches of organized labor upon the various railroads... and I think there is no necessity for an organization of that kind. We have always gotten along

12. Ibid., 6, 23, 72; Railway Times, November 15, 1894, 1.
13. Lindsey, Fullman Strike, 337.
comfortably with the old orders as they exist." No statement could be more expressive of the companies' attitude toward organized labor -- unions were fine so long as they did not function as unions.

The railroad official quoted above clearly approved of craft unionism in the railway industry. This type of organization stood, as a general rule, for moderation and conservatism. For the railroad companies it meant, under existing conditions, that if Brotherhood members, or the more skilled workers, could be kept happy, the less skilled could be neglected with impunity.

The thesis that the railroad managers proposed to crush the A.R.U. because it was an industrial union is strengthened by evidence that it was the living antithesis of the Brotherhoods. By making a distinction between industrial unionism in general and industrial unionism in the railroad industry, (and it had certain unique characteristics in that field) such an equation can be made.

The A.R.U. was an organization which could not be manipulated to the corporation's advantage, an order which had given hope to unskilled workers, and one which threatened to absorb the only form of labor organization satisfactory to the companies. The new union, representing the principle of industrial unionism, constituted a danger to what was for the railroads a satisfactory state of affairs, and it was natural that they fought the concept of industrial organization, which threatened to upset a delicately contrived and deliberately effected balance between paternalism and independent labor.

Once the Pullman strike became a nationwide dispute involving the General Managers Association, the Pullman Car Company faded into the background, for the issues involved were far greater than the grievances of the Pullman plant workers. Nevertheless, the attitude evinced by the Pullman Company toward the American Railway Union is of some importance.

During the United States Strike Commission's
investigation of the causes and meaning of the 
Pullman strike, Thomas H. Wickes, a Vice-President 
of the Pullman Company was asked his company's 
policy with reference to labor unions. Wickes re- 
plied that the Pullman Company had objected to a 
labor union in only one instance - the case of 
the American Railway Union. George M. Pullman 
himself later corroborated his subordinate's 
testimony.

This would be of considerable significance if 
it were not for the fact that in subsequent testi- 
mony Wickes admitted that the basis of the Company's 
objection to the union was this: "Our objection to 
the union was that we would not treat with our men 
as members of the A.R.U., and we would not treat 
with them as members of any union. We treat with 
them as individuals and as men." 

The Strike Commission Report expressed the 
opinion that to admit the Pullman employees into 
the A.R.U. as members of the railroad service was 

15. Ibid., xxv-xxxvi. 
16. Ibid., 564. 
17. Ibid., xxvi. Italicics supplied.
an over-loose construction of the union's constitution. This seems to be a defensible position and could have been assumed by the Pullman Company with impunity. But the stand taken by the company as to labor unions meant that no union would be acceptable as a bargaining agent. Therefore an industrial union would theoretically be just as welcome as a craft union, provided that it restricted its activities to that of a debating society or fraternal organization. But the American Railway Union, by its very nature, was not such a group and because of this was subject to the disapproval of the Pullman Company. This proves little, however, except that a philosophy of action was enough to incur the enmity of some employers. It can only be suggested, not proved, that enmity on this account implies antagonism toward industrial unionism.

If the antagonism of the railroads and of the Pullman Company toward industrial unionism can only be shown by indirection, the attitude of the third

18. Ibid., xxvii.
protagonist in the Pullman strike - the Federal Government - presents a problem even more difficult.

Government aid to the strike-breaking, union-busting railroads was extensive, as the record shows. This is less important to the object of this thesis, however, than the motives that lay behind the government's action.

The government played a double role in the Pullman strike. First, the Federal courts were utilized to enforce the laws of the United States bearing on the strike, with the invocation of both the Sherman Act of 1890 and the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 as bases for injunctions enjoining A.R.U. leaders from contributing in any manner whatsoever to the continuation of the dispute.19 It was argued by government attorneys that the strike, as such, was in restraint of trade or commerce and, consequently, the action of strike leaders constituted a conspiracy declared unlawful by the

Sherman Act. 20 Debs and other union leaders were subsequently convicted by a United States Circuit Court on charges of contempt of this injunction. 21 On appeal to the Supreme Court, the conviction of the strike leaders was upheld, although the decision here was based not upon the Sherman Antitrust Act, but upon the much broader grounds that Federal authority is sovereign in the exercise of its constitutional prerogative to regulate interstate commerce and the transportation of the mails. 22 Whatever the constitutional and legal grounds utilized, which were in some respects highly questionable, 23 the strike was doomed once its leaders were stripped of their powers to direct it, 24 which fact, it appears, was fully re-

23. Edward Berman, Labor Disputes and the President of the United States (New York, 1924), 22.
cognized by government leaders.

The government, in addition to acting on the strike by the use of judicial processes, sent United States troops to Chicago, ostensibly to prevent disorder, keep the mails moving, and to enforce decrees of the courts. Federal troops can only be sent into a domestic insurrection by the order of the President. The responsibility for troops being sent to Chicago must rest, therefore, with President Cleveland. It appears, however, that the President was led to call out the troops in this case by his somewhat disingenuous Attorney-General, Richard B. Olney, who was the key figure in determining the activities of the government.25

It is not surprising that this man's sympathies lay with the railroads during the great strike. Before he became a government official, Olney had been one of the most prominent railroad lawyers in the country. Not only were numerous eastern roads his clients, but he had actually been a stockholder

in one of the roads involved in the strike. He was, in short, railroad-minded, and his frank purpose was not to enforce federal laws but to smash the strike. As he wrote to a government attorney in Chicago: "It has seemed to me that if the rights of the United States were vigorously asserted in Chicago, the origin and center of the disturbance, the result would be to make it a failure everywhere else, and to prevent its spread over the entire country." 

It was Olney who suggested the issuance of the most sweeping labor injunction on record and who actively solicited statements from United States marshals to the effect that federal troops were needed in Chicago. Both the federal troops and the court orders that they enforced were utilized to wreck the strike and, along with it, the American Railway Union.

26. Ibid., 615; Barnard, Eagle Forgotten, 286. Olney's biographer, James, is strangely silent on this point when discussing the Attorney-General's part in the strike.

27. Quoted in Cleveland, Presidential Problems, 90.

28. See James, Richard Olney, 47; Barnard, Eagle Forgotten, 287, 289, 290.
Among the more amazing of the Attorney-General's several startling acts was his appointment of a lawyer employed by an affiliate of the General Managers Association as Special Assistant Attorney-General. This man - Edwin C. Walker - was given authority superseding that of the regular government attorney in Chicago and his sole function was to direct the government's activities relative to the strike. This is only one example of the several unneutral acts committed by the Attorney-General whose duty was not to smash strikes, or unions, and who had sworn only to enforce the laws of the United States.

Olney was not opposed to the organization of labor in the railroad industry. Like the railroad managers, he was highly in favor of the Brotherhoods, whose existence, he felt, made strikes unlikely and almost impossible. He stated in a legal opinion sent to a federal judge several months after the Pullman Strike:

Men, deeming themselves aggrieved and seeking redress or relief, may easily unite

for the single purpose of a strike. In that view the brotherhood constitution and rules may well be regarded as operating in restraint of strikes. By compelling the question of a strike or no strike to be acted upon affirmatively by four or five different independent tribunals, they certainly tend to prohibit a strike that is rash or reckless, or for other than a weighty cause.

The Railroad Brotherhoods it followed, were legal organizations, and should be protected by the laws.30

Olney saw no danger in the Brotherhoods, for it was very unlikely that they would ever unite for a strike. This was the basis for his approval of them. It can be suggested, accordingly, that a union whose form of organization implied an ability to strike against the railroads at will would not merit Olney's approval.

As in the case of the General Managers Association, however, only a tenuous case can be made to the effect that in attempting to crush the strike, the government also sought to destroy the union behind it. One labor economist has written that the

30. "Letter to Judge Dallas" printed in Railway Times, December 1, 1894, 1, 3.
underlying assumption of the administration was that the strike as such violated the law. It may or may not follow that the union directing it was also considered to be unlawful. Attorney-General Olney, in his Annual Report for 1894, stated firmly that the origin or merits of the Pullman strike was not germane to a discussion of the government's part in it. This statement of detachment would be praiseworthy if it were not for the fact that the government was no more disinterested than was the General Managers Association. The power of the government was utilized not to bring about an amicable settlement of the dispute, but to cripple one of its protagonists - the union - so that its continuation would be impossible.

The way in which the injunction was used by the government is a case in point. An injunction technically is supposed to keep things in status quo - but the very purpose of a strike is most

31. Berman, Labor Disputes and the President, 22.
32. Quoted in James, Richard Olney, 45.
often to seek a change in a situation. Injunctions can obviously destroy the machinery for collective bargaining when directed solely at one party to a labor dispute. A union is nothing without the right to bargain with an employer and to call a strike in support of its position. The injunction issued by the federal court was designed not only to terminate the strike, but to emasculate the union.

Had the government made any attempt to bring about arbitration between the two parties to the dispute, its neutrality would be less questionable. There was on the statute books a law - the Arbitration Act of 1888 - designed for labor disputes on interstate railroads, which could have been invoked had the government been interested in settling the strike fairly. By this act, arbitration was applicable only when both parties were willing and even then with no assurance that an award of the government fact finding board would prove binding.33 In all probability the use of this statute would have been inadequate to bring about successful

33. Lindsey, Pullman Strike, 350.
arbitration, but even a token step by the government would have indicated a desire to see both sides of the dispute.

Those in close touch with Olney and Cleveland recognized well the intent of the government so far as the strike was concerned. "This is the most senseless strike ever inaugurated," said Secretary of State Gresham. "Olney and Lamont have it in hand and it will soon be ended."34 That the government should have taken a hand in putting down violence and in stopping an industrial dispute so seriously effecting the public interest would seem to have been a worthy undertaking, but the means it employed to do these things suggest that its motives were not so simple. A mere strike settlement was not considered adequate. Had the government recognized the American Railway Union as a valid bargaining agent, some consideration for its position in the dispute would have been evinced. As it was, the union was an outside party; the

34. Matilda Gresham, Life of Walter Quintin Gresham, 1832-1895 (Chicago, 1919), 418. Daniel S. Lamont was Secretary of War in Cleveland's cabinet.
government and the General Managers Association worked as one and with a similar end in view.

It has been pointed out that President Cleveland was perhaps less culpable than his Attorney-General in working to crush the strike. He merely acted upon the facts as they were presented to him by Olney, whose sense of fairness and impartiality left much to be desired. Yet Cleveland knew very well what he was doing and was equally aware of the type of union he perhaps unwittingly helped to destroy.

A few years before his death Cleveland wrote an explanation of the part he played in the Pullman strike. This is interesting because it shows clearly that the ex-President had no sympathy for the American Railway Union. Cleveland apparently knew that the A.R.U. was an industrial union, although he made some misstatements of fact in discussing it. For example, when he said that the A.R.U. was an order organized so as to make the grievances of any section of its membership a

35. Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 611.
common cause, he either lacked complete information or candor. 36 The Great Northern Strike was carried on by one section of the A.R.U.'s membership without its being determined a cause common to all. He also made subjective use of the Report of the United States Strike Commission, quoting out of context time and again so as to prove his case.

Cleveland utilized these questionable tactics to show that in throwing the power of the government against the union, he was grappling with anarchy itself. The American Railway Union and its strike had to be crushed, Cleveland implied, because of the disorders and violence, the defiance of law and authority, and the obstructions of national functions and duties which occurred...as a result of this labor contention, thus tremendously reinforced and completely underway. 37

Cleveland recognized that the power of the Gov-

36. Cleveland, Presidential Problems, 82. Cleveland appeared to imply that the union was organized so as to make any strike a general work stoppage.

37. Ibid., 88. See also Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 625.
ernment had, in truth, been responsible for the demise of Debs's "already foredoomed movement," as he called it. He wrote:

On the tenth of July, Eugene V. Debs... together with (the A.R.U.'s) vice-president, general secretary, and one other who was an active director were arrested upon indictments found against them for complicity in the obstruction of mails and interstate commerce. Three days afterward our special counsel (E. C. Walker) expressed the opinion that the strike was practically broken.39

He commented further on the quartet's incarceration by stating that as an aftermath "reports came from nearly all the localities to which the strike had spread, indicating its defeat and the accomplishments of all the purposes of the Government's interference."40 Here is an overt admission by the Chief Executive himself that the government sought not simply to maintain law and order, but to crush the strike.

It is worth mentioning also that the conspiracy indictment found against the Union's officials (alluded to above by Cleveland) was not pressed by

38. Ibid., 108.
39. Ibid., 107.
40. Ibid., 109. Italics supplied.
the government. Neither the government nor the railroads would chance failure to make the criminal conspiracy charge stick, nor would they risk exhibiting and placing before the public the practices and means by which they had defeated the American Railway Union. Debs and his compatriots were eventually jailed after conviction of contempt of the injunction issued by the Federal Court. No discussion of the issues was necessary in this case, for the guilt of the Union leaders was obvious, although the justification for the injunction was hardly so. 41

Desire to win a strike does not necessarily indicate an abnormal desire to crush the union that stages it. It has been shown, however, that the General Managers Association, the President of the United States, and his Attorney-General all were able to identify the A.R.U. as an industrial union. Furthermore, it has been suggested, after an examination of the patterns of action of both

41. Lieberman, Unions Before the Bar, 38; Berman, Labor and the Sherman Act, 65-66.
the Federal Government and the G. M. A., that these
two examples of concentrated power desired to des­
troy the American Railway Union because of its
form of organization.

The alliance of the government and the rail­
road companies was not a simple coincidence. Most
collectors agree that the railroad corporations
resorted to sundry more or less dishonorable de­
vice to bring the A.R.U. into conflict with the
Federal Government. This was not difficult to do;
Richard Olney was only too eager to take up the
standard of the companies. The appointment of
Walker, a railroad official, to a key position
cemented the rapprochement between government and
business. The end they sought was the same, the
reasons for seeking this end were similar.

On the one hand the union threatened the rail­
roads' assumed right to determine labor policy with­
out regard to the wishes or permanent welfare of the
workers themselves. It represented aggression
where passivity was desired. On the other hand, it
stood for a powerful combination that appeared to
threaten law and authority, as interpreted by obviously partial judges - Olney, Walker, and to a limited extent, President Cleveland himself. To the Pullman Company the A.R.U. was also unacceptable because it symbolized complete cohesion, a condition which could not be tolerated by a firm which would treat with its employees only as "individuals or as men."

The Strike Commission report had this to say about the General Managers Association:

The Commission questions whether any legal authority...can be found to justify some of the features of the Association which have come to light in this investigation. The Association is an illustration of the persistent and shrewdly devised plans of corporations to overreach their limitations and to usurp indirectly powers and rights not contemplated in their charters...So long as railroads are thus permitted to combine to fix wages and for their joint protection it would be rank injustice to deny the right of all labor upon railroads to unite for similar purposes.42

Of the American Railway Union and its form of organization, the Report offered only these remarks:

A union embracing all railroad employees... is as yet a doubtful experiment. Such a union will have great difficulty in moulding itself to the complex character, nationalities, habits, employments, and requirements of its vast and varied membership.43

The Commission did not intimate in any way that the A.R.U. was dangerous, or that its acts were unlawful. It only concluded that industrial unionism was impractical.

43. Ibid., xxvii.
CHAPTER IV

THE ATTITUDE OF THE PRESS AND THE PUBLIC TOWARD

THE AMERICAN RAILWAY UNION

In December 1894, some six months after the Pullman strike, a noteworthy article appeared in the Railway Times entitled "The Blood Red Volume; The Last Desperate Effort to Crush the Order." This article was written in answer to a pamphlet published by the General Managers Association which included some selected newspaper and magazine estimates of the strike and the A.R.U. The colorful and caustic comments of the editor are worth quoting in part. "The quotations from the press," he wrote,

included the vituperative mouthings of twenty-one subsidized, plutocratic papers, the sycophantic, cringing, servile, parasitical organs of corporations and the money power, whose editors never drew a breath that was not contaminated with deep-seated hostility to the rights of labor. The false and malicious diatribes of these papers were flung into the arena of debate between the 2nd and 17th of July to arouse and intensify vengeance against the American Railway Union and its officers.¹

This tirade, extreme as it was, appears not to have been entirely unjustified, for there is little

¹. Railway Times, December 15, 1894, 1.
doubt that the press failed to examine the real issues involved in the Pullman strike. Only a negligible minority of American newspapers were guided by an objective standard at that time. As a result, few editors were in an intellectual position to comment upon the American Railway Union for what it really was.\(^2\)

So confused was the thinking of newspaper and magazine editors that the A.R.U. might be called "a mob" on one page of a powerful weekly magazine and on the following page "a powerful conspiracy."\(^3\) Contradiction was no embarrassment to the more hysterical journals. This representative selection from the pages of *Harper's Weekly* is no more extreme than many other statements found in contemporary periodical literature.

A powerful conspiracy is at work over large sections of the country striving to subvert the government of law and to impose on the nation the decrees of the conspirators. Its chiefs are open and defiant in declaring their purpose; they are already supported and obeyed by 200,000 misguided men and other hun-

\(^2\) Lindsey, *Pullman Strike*, 147.
\(^3\) *Harper's Weekly* XXXVIII (July 14, 1894), 651, 652.
dreds of thousands are wavering in their allegiance to the republic, and seem ready to join the rebels if any weakness is shown or mistake made by the authorities whom the people have intrusted with their protection. Eugene V. Debs and his fellow demagogues long ago avowed that they would unite in an association the railway working men of the country, so that all should obey a single will, promising that then a general suspension of traffic and intercourse ordered by its head would so evidently portend the utter ruin of the country that the mere threat of it would extort from every community and every employer of labor compliance with its demands. 4

This diatribe was captioned, appropriately enough, "Suppress the Rebellion," and is quoted in full to show the alarming lengths to which the conservative press was willing to go in order to crystallize public opinion against the union. It was felt that unions such as the A.R.U. disclosed a real danger to American institutions and even, as one publication asserted, "to civilization itself." 5

The American Railway Union, it was believed by some, stood for "Anarchy." The cover of an issue of Harper's Weekly published during the Pullman Strike, showed a thoughtful George Washington

4. Ibid., 650.
5. Chicago Herald, July 2, 1894, 6.
viewing a phantom so named. Beneath the picture was printed Washington's famous remarks after Shays' rebellion in 1787. "There are combustibles in every state which a spark might set fire to...etc." The conservative press, ever fearful of what it called "class violence" was evidently doing what it could to stir up a little of it.

It is impossible to say just where the cue to frenzy originated. The historian Allan Nevins attributes the initiation of much of this to the Chicago Tribune. As early as June 28 its front page bore the headline "Debs is a Dictator," on the 30th "Mob is in Control," and on July 1 "Mobs Bent on Ruin." There was absolutely no foundation for these wild stories. Yet, the Tribune's news accounts and baseless assertions quite possibly led an imposing array of newspapers and magazines to declare that the strikes were not fighting the Pullman Company or the General Managers Association, but the people and society.

Some publications, seeing clearly that the American Railway Union was an industrial union, could not condone this form of organization in the railroad industry. Said an editorial in the New York Times: "We are not opposed to rational and fair trades organizations...But their limits in the railway service are perfectly plain." This was so, the Times stated further, because the A.R.U. had raised the question of control of railroad property.  

This sentiment was echoed in a more extreme form by the Chicago Herald. "If the strike should be successful," said an editorial in that paper, "the owners of railroad property in this country would have to surrender its future control to the class of labor agitators and strike conspirators who have formed the Debs Railway Union."  

One newspaper, recognizing that the A.R.U. was an industrial union, stated that his fact would be the reason for its downfall. As an editorial in

9. Quoted in Public Opinion XVII (July 5, 1894), 306.
this paper, the *Boston Herald*, declared:

It may seem to President Debs and his associates of the American Railway Union that to draw tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands into their contest is a brilliant piece of combative strategy; but, as a matter of fact it makes the downfall of the movement not only inevitable, but in all probability much more speedy than would be the case if the strike was confined within narrow limits and the strikers could obtain sympathetic support in the way of funds from those who are steadily employed.\(^{10}\)

The staff of the *Herald* was evidently not well informed as to the generosity of the Brotherhoods.

Other newspapers were able to see that one of the new union's serious deficiencies was, as the *Herald* hinted, lack of adequate funds for carrying on an extended strike. The editor of the *New York Times* remarked that although the A.R.U. had numerical strength, it was young and could have very little money in reserve.\(^{11}\) Unfortunately, however, very few of the independent newspapers in the country took the trouble to examine the union or the strike this closely. Most saw the union as an unlawful

\(^{10}\) Quoted in *Ibid.*
\(^{11}\) *New York Times*, July 2, 1894, 4.
combination deliberately fomenting violence and insurrection.

The Nation expressed the widely prevalent contemporary attitude very trenchantly, saying:

It is now universally recognized that such a strike as Debs ordered is a rebellion and the people of the United States will promptly suppress rebellion. There will always be men like Debs, greedy of notoriety and crazy to show their power, but this country will not stand any nonsense from such people in the future.12

The editorials in Godkin's Nation seemed to be designed to throw fear into the hearts of the so-called "respectable" elements of society and many other spokesmen for the conservative press were willing to go just as far. In the highly respectable North American Review, for instance, Harry P. Robinson, editor of the Railway Age, charged that the A.R.U. was organized to obtain control of the legislative and administrative machinery of the government.13 He believed that the Pullman strike may not have been a bad thing, for it gave the

12. The Nation, LIX (July 19, 1894), 4.
country a dress rehearsal, "of the part which organized labor proposed to play in the national drama, and which it will play...when the right time comes."14

It was in keeping with tradition that one man - Eugene Debs - was forced to bear the brunt of the press attacks on the union. The problem of the Pullman strike and the new industrial union was a complex one and slinging mud at Debs was only another of the American press's characteristic simplifications. Debs was characterized variously as a "Dictator," "Anarchist," "Demagogue," "This Masaniello15 of a day, drunk with power," and other less restrained epithets. As a result of the severe attack which he was forced to suffer, Debs issued the following statement, which only raised an additional uproar:

"Let it be understood that this strike is not ordered by myself or any other individual; nor is the strike inaugurated anywhere except by consent and authority

15. Masaniello was a native of Naples who led a revolt against Spanish tyranny in that area in the 17th Century. This particular tag was given Debs by Senator Davis of Minnesota.
from a majority of the employees themselves."16

One of the more fair minded and moderate of current magazines, The Review of Reviews, felt compelled to issue the following statement in defense of Debs and the Union: "The common assertion that Mr. Debs should be sentenced to a term of felonious incarceration as an example to mischievous inciters of industrial strife, involves a dangerous principle. On no strained construction of the doctrine of conspiracy ought Mr. Debs or his associates to be treated as criminals."17

On the whole, however, the more respectable journals steered clear of favorable comment for the Union and its leader. The A.R.U.'s scattered support came mostly from such left-wing journals as the Eight-Hour Herald (Chicago) which made these succinct remarks about current newspaper ethics:

The major portion of the Chicago press continues its insane policy of exaggeration and misrepresentation, inflaming the passions of the people and doing its level

16. Quoted in Public Opinion, XVII (July 5, 1894), 305.
17. Review of Reviews, 5 (1894), 134.
best to arouse class prejudices. From the first these papers have used every effort to magnify the difficulty, and to prevent every attempt at arbitration, conciliation, or peaceful settlement.18

Among conservative journals specifically emphasizing the character of the union was the Sun (New York), which declared that "not one man in a thousand can fail to understand the Pullman strike. It is an effort to test the A.R.U. and its particular brand of unionism." The editorial continued by stating that Debs and his cohorts were trying the union out to see if the time was yet ripe for a coup to obtain absolute power for the laboring classes.19

One important and widely read magazine recognized that the A.R.U. was founded because of the quiet innocuousness of the Brotherhoods. This quotation from the pages of Harper's Weekly throws considerable light on the attitude of the journalistic world toward industrial unionism.

There are labor organizations, especially among railroad employees, which

18. Quoted in Public Opinion, X (July 19, 1894), 361.
everybody recognizes not only as legitimate, but as extremely useful to their own interests as well as to their employers and to the public at large. Such are the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the Brotherhood of Trainmen, and others. These organizations have done infinitely more to advance the interests of the working man, to protect him against oppression, and to win for him general esteem and sympathy, than any or all of the loud-mouthed demagogues who dazzle and confuse the minds of their followers with grand but impossible schemes of emancipation and power....

One week later the magazine continued in this same vein, warning the working classes that men with ideas such as those held by Debs and his cohorts were dangerous enemies of labor. Organization according to common interests and under prudent leaders would insure labor a respected place in contemporary society, it said, but complete union could only mean renewed friction between labor and capital.21

A few nondescript periodicals, such as the Memphis Appeal - Avalanche, The Fort Scott Lantern and The Labor Signal, ventured to comment favorably

21. Ibid., (July 28, 1894), 698.
on the new union's experiment, but only a negligible fraction of the American press evinced any favor for the American Railway Union's principle of organization.

All in all, it appears that the vast majority of American newspapers and magazines were so orthodox in their economics that they were blind to any aspect of the new union except its similarity to class organization. Economic conditions in 1894 were bad and probably led to exaggerated fears and rumors. Accordingly, when the Pullman strike occurred - the culminating event in a series of ominous labor disputes - the upper and middle classes were prepared to believe the worst.

By shamefully distorting the facts and greatly magnifying unimportant incidents the press was able to stir up far more passion than the circumstances justified. It appeared to the organs of upper class domination that the Pullman strike was a challenging test of power between the forces of labor and capital. As such it was organized rebellion, deliberately perpetrated to wrest from the holders of property their sacred right to do
what they wished with it. The American people, schooled to accept a standard of success dictated by Andrew Carnegie, could search the Gospel of Wealth and find no chapter mentioning industrial unionism. The A.R.U. symbolized class unity. This was social heresy, for America was a classless society, notwithstanding that the distance from Pullman, Illinois to the sumptuous mansion of its founder was far greater in 1894 than it had been even five years before.

The secular press was firm in its belief that industrial unionism, as reflected by the A.R.U. and the Pullman strike, was not consistent with American traditions and ideals. Its counterpart in the religious world - the Protestant church press, at this time vigorous and thriving - took almost the same position. With the exception of the exponents of the Social Gospel, comprising a numerically small, but strongly vocal and influential minority, American Protestantism felt that the A.R.U. represented at best an unsafe manifestation of class soli-
The strike and the union were seen to be responsible for such sanguinary catastrophes as this episode, recounted with little feeling for accuracy by the *Augustana Journal*:

Hundreds of railway employees were clubbed and stoned to death..., the destruction of property gave thousands of boys lessons which will make them criminals for life..., in hundreds of thousands of cases men will lose their homes, the accumulated savings of a life time... Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of innocent victims will die if not already dead. Tens of thousands of others will be enfeebled for life... This is savage warfare...²³

A majority of American clergy would have probably stated that the causes of the strike could be collected into one simple, all embracing phase---The American Railway Union.²⁴ The union was thought to be dominated by the ideal of coercion and the subjugation of government, law, authority, and decency. As did their more worldly counterparts, the church press saved its strongest epithets for

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Debs, the evil genius responsible for the "insurrection."\(^{25}\)

The great body of American Protestant clergy-men were committed to the social and economic ethic called "The Gospel of Wealth." To these men, the three sacred pillars of that belief—the sanctity of private property, the free individual, and the stewardship of wealth—all were challenged in some degree by the A.R.U.\(^{26}\)

The American Railway Union was usually attacked on the grounds that its very nature implied an insidious usurpation of individual rights.\(^{27}\)

The A.R.U. was, furthermore, a class organization, and as such, was not consistent with the American ideal.\(^{28}\)

On this ground, it might be surmised that the churches would have approved of the Railroad Brotherhoods, whose form of organization symbolized anything but the solidarity of the laboring classes. There were, however, no direct statements

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 27.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., 34.
\(^{28}\) Ibid., 31.
to this effect.

In short, most religious writers and clergy-men were prone to assume an attitude toward the union conditioned by their preconceived ideas of social and economic doctrine. The Protestant clergy simply gave voice to its economic and social ideas, which were betrayed by what they thought were the objectives of industrial unionism.

The effect of the position taken by the great majority of the American press toward the American Railway Union is difficult to measure. There are evidences, however, that the press both mirrored and influenced popular attitudes toward the union.

In the halls of Congress, for example, Senator Cushman K. Davis was sure that the union and its strike constituted a conspiracy to overthrow the American way of life. "Everybody who is conspiring to put down modern civilization," shouted the Senator, "is now moving under the mask of this strike and taking life and destroying property in its name." Senator Davis charged further that the Pullman strike "took the American people by the
throat, and then grew into a riot, and thence from an insurrection which confronts the government today with all the dormant and latent powers of revolution."29

After these remarks, a Cushman K. Davis for President boom developed.30

The Pullman strike actually caused serious discussion of plans for enlarging the army.31 Oswald Garrison Villard states in his autobiography that he joined the militia simply because of the hysteria generated by the disturbance. He also remarked, significantly: "Like almost everyone else I was totally in the dark as to the merits of the Pullman strike...."32

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30. Public Opinion XVII (July 19, 1894), 359. In addition, Senator Peffer, the Kansas Populist, who had dared to praise the union, was subjected to severe calumny, and a near unanimous vote of confidence given to President Cleveland's activities relative to the strike.
31. Ibid., (July 26, 1894), 384.
A few scattered men, such as Lincoln Steffens, Governor Altgeld of Illinois, Clarence Darrow, and Brand Whitlock, approved of the strike, seeing through the obfuscations of fear and detecting the real issues involved. But although it would appear that they tacitly approved of industrial unionism by virtue of their approval of the strike, they said next to nothing about it. Only Governor Altgeld stated explicitly at a later date that he approved of the principle of industrial unionism. "Standing together is labor's only salvation," he wrote, "and so long as a portion of the laboring classes can be used as a club upon the backs of the remainder, just so long will there be no hope."\(^{33}\)

The favor of these men was of little value to the union, however, for none but recognized radicals and advanced thinkers were willing to take up the standard of industrial unionism. In a society where dissatisfaction was viewed as rebellion and labor unity as class organization, nothing else could be expected.

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CONCLUSION

The American Railway Union was founded and collapsed in a hostile world. To all but the railroad companies and the rest of organized labor it existed only within the context of the Pullman strike. In the eyes of these two groups, however, the union itself represented a simple but distinct danger. The railroad companies saw it as a threat to a policy of selective paternalism and as a reprehensible challenge to their assumed right to determine employee policies unhampered by the demands of an aggressive and unified labor organization. With the exception of a noisy but relatively unimportant minority, organized labor judged the A.R.U. to be an unwise and possibly disastrous departure from the settled principles of craft organization. The Railroad Brotherhoods, of course, feared the new union for more personal reasons as well: because it stood for a plan of organization which they felt would be potentially fatal to their own existence.

The Federal Government, on the other hand, concerned more with general principles of what it
considered right or wrong than with the principles of self interest evinced by the companies and labor groups, viewed industrial unionism in the railroad industry with fearful eye because it stood as a threat to vested corporate interest and what was construed to be the national welfare. A great majority of the press and of the general public, so far as these were concerned at all with the union apart from the Pullman strike, thought they detected in industrial unionism the shadow of rebellion against current social, economic, and political ideology.  

The attitudes reflected by the press and the public would seem to be of utmost significance in explaining the ultimate failure of the union's experiment in industrial unionism. The American

mind in the 1890's was perhaps conditioned to accept certain types of labor unions. These were, of course, craft or trade unions. Although organizations of this kind conspired, as did industrial unionists, to obtain more wages for fewer hours work under constantly improving conditions, they were innately conservative and, as in the case of the Railroad Brotherhoods, rendered virtually ineffective as aggressive labor associations by an inability or disinclination to work together. Furthermore, craft union devotees recognized only likeness of skill as being a sound basis for organization, and for varied reasons did not consider that they should rise or fall with their class as a whole.

The American Railway Union, however, in cutting across craft barriers, raised the ultimate issue of class solidarity, if only in its nascency. Americans were not intellectually acclimated to accept what seemed to Eugene Debs and his followers a confirmed fact; that individual or even craft effort against organized corporate power was predestined to failure. These men believed that economic individualism was no longer an adequate rationale for the working man and they believed that his group interests lay beyond
that of his craft or his personal skill. This was felt to be especially true in the railroad industry.

Where the public might have been prepared to accept such heterodox doctrine in an industry less connected with the public comfort and convenience, it would not stomach in the railroad field what was believed to be an intrinsically dangerous plan of labor cohesion. Such an idea was unpalatable to the great body of the American people, who were not yet awake to the changes effected by the "new industrialism" and could only fear what they did not understand - industrial unionism in the railroad industry.

In an age when indigency was thought to result from lack of initiative and the will to succeed, the public thought only in terms of revolution and anarchy when men saw fit to cast aside orthodox concepts of rugged individualism and throw their energies into bettering the condition of their class.

Labor unions, in order to succeed, must build upon the broad foundation of public approval. The American Railway Union began life with its back to the wall and could not cope with the compound pressure of public disapproval and the hostility of its most immediate adversaries - the railroad companies and the rest of its laboring brothers.
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