

# The Pullman Strike of 1894

## Background

In 1880 George M. Pullman, manufacturer and promoter of the fabulously successful Pullman Palace Sleeping and Dining Cars, announced his intention to build a model industrial community on the shores of Lake Calumet just south of the city of Chicago. In an age anxiously concerned about the rising spiral of violent conflict between capital and labor and alarmed by the social evils and degraded conditions appearing in the slums of the expanding cities, Pullman's experiment stimulated eager and hopeful expectations. Visions of utopia - a pragmatic, efficient and productive utopia - dominated many perceptions of Pullman's model industrial community.

By the beginning of the 1880s, George Pullman had already made his mark in the business world through his superb organizing and competitive skills and through his sense of what the public wanted. He had overcome competitors partly by opting to build more expensive, luxurious cars and then by capitalizing on the well-to-do public's willingness to "pay a premium" for extra beauty and luxury. He had experienced little problem with ill-use and defacement of his cars, Pullman was proud to point out, because the emphasis on beauty and luxury had imbued travelers in his cars with a certain awe of their surroundings and had thus promoted their orderly and appreciative behavior. Pullman had also prospered through the early use of ingenious promotion measures to gain attention for his cars and create a strong "corporate image." He had forced a large number of railroads to adopt uniform management systems with respect to the use of his cars on their roads. The service on the Pullman cars themselves was publicized and noted for its conformance to absolute order and uniformity.

During the first four months of 1880, the Pullman Palace Car Company quietly bought up some four thousand acres of land south of Chicago near Lake Calumet and close to a number of railroad lines. Pullman planned to expand his manufacturing operations into the area of freight-car manufacturing. He wanted a large and efficient plant located in an area where land prices were cheap and where the evil influences of city conditions would not affect his workers. He needed a large number of highly skilled workmen. He hoped to attract skilled and reliable workers and to further improve their moral character by creating housing immediately adjacent to the plant that would be conducive to self respect, orderly living, and contentment.

The result was the town of Pullman, soon hailed throughout much of the world as a model of enlightened industrial and civic leadership. Visitors to the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893 often made a special trip down to Pullman to visit what had, in over a decade, become a great American landmark indicating the possibility of harmonious labor-management relations away from the evil atmosphere of the festering cities - of which nearby Chicago offered a glaring example.

The year 1893, however, brought not only the World's Fair and its temporary economic stimulus to the Chicago area, it also brought the onset of the most severe depression in American history up to that time - an economic crisis that soon began to have an impact in the Chicago area after the temporary effects of the World's Fair receded. George Pullman's actions in meeting the crisis of the depression brought about a confrontation with his workers. Pullman drastically reduced wage rates in his factories, but he did not reduce the rents his workers paid to live in his company town. Other long-standing grievances about conditions in Pullman and on the job may have also played a role in the conflict. By May, 1894, the nation's model industrial city was in the throes of an intensely contested strike, one that soon assumed nationwide proportions. The American Railway Union, with which the Pullman workers were now affiliated, called on its railroad workers everywhere to boycott the Pullman Cars, refusing to attach them to trains or to serve on trains to which they were attached. Eventually, the boycott brought retaliation and lockouts by the combined railroads under the General Managers Association, the calling out of special guards and militia, court injunctions against the American Railway Union, mass violence in Chicago with hundreds of railroad cars burned on various lines and several rioters and others killed, a Presidential order sending in federal troops to protect the mails on the railroads, the crushing of the strike and boycott by federal troops, and the arrest of Eugene Debs, the leader of the American Railway Union for contempt of court and interference with the U.S. mails. This "Chicago Strike", a direct outgrowth and expansion of the Pullman strike, became one of the major labor battles of the late nineteenth century and contributed to middle class fears of a rising tide of labor radicalism, to the radicalization of Eugene Debs of the American Railway Union, who emerged from his term in jail as a Socialist (later to run five times for President on the Socialist Party ticket), and to the eclipse of the image of George Pullman as the discoverer of an answer to the problems of industrial society.

## Set A: May 12, 1894

Chicago Times	Chicago Tribune
<p data-bbox="354 352 678 384"><b>PULLMAN MEN OUT</b></p> <p data-bbox="256 426 776 604"><b>Nearly 4,000 Throw Down Their Tools and Quit Refuse to Work Till Wrongs are Righted Firing Three Men Starts It</b></p> <p data-bbox="256 646 776 1129">Almost the entire force of men employed in the Pullman shops went out on strike yesterday. Out of the 4,800 men and women employed in the various departments there were probably not over 800 at work at 6 o'clock last evening. The immediate cause of the strike was the laying off of three men in the iron machine shop. The real but remote cause is the question of wages over which the men have long been unhappy.</p> <p data-bbox="256 1171 776 1465">The strike of yesterday was ordered by a committee representing every department at the Pullman works. This committee was in session all night Thursday night, and finally came to the conclusion to order a strike 4:30 o'clock yesterday morning.</p> <p data-bbox="256 1507 776 1759">The position of the company is that no increase in wages is possible under the present conditions. The position of the men is that they are receiving less than a living wage, to which they are entitled.</p>	<p data-bbox="938 352 1182 384"><b>PULLMEN OUT</b></p> <p data-bbox="881 426 1239 457"><b>LAY OFFS THE CAUSE</b></p> <p data-bbox="833 499 1287 573"><b>Committeemen Laid Off and Their Comrades Act</b></p> <p data-bbox="800 615 1304 909">Two thousand employees in the Pullman car works struck yesterday, leaving 800 others at their posts. This was not enough to keep the works going, so a notice was posted on the big gates at 6 o'clock saying: "These shops closed until further notice."</p> <p data-bbox="800 951 1304 1570">The walk-out was a complete surprise to the officials. Mr. Pullman had offered to allow the men the privilege of examining the books of the company to verify his statement that the works were running at a loss. When the men quit work at 6 o'clock Thursday evening none of them had any idea of striking. But the <b>Grievance</b> Committee of Forty-six held a session until 4:30 o'clock in the morning. . . . One department at a time, the men went out so that by 10 o'clock 1500 men were out. Only 800 came back after lunch.</p> <p data-bbox="800 1686 1125 1759"><b>Vocabulary:</b> Grievance—complaint</p>

## Set B: June 26-28, 1894

The following articles were written during the first week of the national railway boycott.

Chicago Times	Chicago Tribune
<p data-bbox="272 485 748 552"><b>NOT A WHEEL TURNS IN THE WEST</b></p> <p data-bbox="261 596 756 701"><b>Complete Shutdown of All Roads in the Territory Beyond the Missouri River</b></p> <p data-bbox="250 743 764 810"><b>It May Be the Biggest Tie-Up in All History</b></p> <p data-bbox="250 854 756 1367">All the western half of the United States has begun to feel the paralysis of the American Railway Union's boycott of Pullman. At every important division point in the west, southwest, and northwest there are trains blockaded because the American Railway Union men will not run them with Pullman cars attached. Some roads are absolutely and utterly blockaded, others only feel the embargo slightly, but it grows in strength with every hour.</p> <p data-bbox="250 1409 756 1772">The six o'clock train on the Great Western started out with two Pullman sleeper cars and one Pullman diner. The conductor rang the bell, the train stopped, the whole crew got down and cut off those three cars. The train pulled out without the Pullmans. It was the most decisive thing the boycotters have done yet.</p>	<p data-bbox="873 485 1224 512"><b>DEBS IS A DICTATOR</b></p> <p data-bbox="792 556 1305 623"><b>His Warfare on the Railroads is Waged Effectively</b></p> <p data-bbox="792 667 1305 1066">The American Railway Union became aggressive yesterday in its efforts to force a settlement between Mr. Pullman and his striking employees. Its freight service was at a standstill all day and the same is practically true of other roads. In no case, however, did the strikers prevent the departure of any regular passenger trains from Chicago.</p> <p data-bbox="792 1108 1305 1367">Deb's master stroke, however, occurred at midnight, when every employee on the Santa Fe belonging to the American Railway Union was ordered out. Whether the men will obey the order will be learned today.</p> <p data-bbox="792 1409 1305 1583">So far no marked violence has been attempted. Chief Brennan says he has 2,000 men who can be gathered at any point inside of an hour.</p> <p data-bbox="792 1703 1305 1772"><b>Vocabulary:</b> Dictator— leader with total power</p>

## Set C: July 7, 1894

The following articles were written after federal troops had been in Chicago for three days.

Chicago Times	Chicago Tribune
<p data-bbox="272 541 769 575"><b>MEN NOT AWED BY SOLDIERS</b></p> <p data-bbox="302 617 737 684"><b>MOST OF THE ROADS AT A STANDSTILL</b></p> <p data-bbox="261 726 773 798"><b>Railway Union is Confident of Winning Against Armed Capital</b></p> <p data-bbox="261 835 769 1167">Despite the presence of United States troops and the mobilization of five regiments of state militia, despite threats of <b>martial law</b> and total extermination of the strikers by bullet, the great strike begun by the American Railway Union holds three-fourths of the roads running out of Chicago.</p> <p data-bbox="261 1209 760 1612">If the soldiers are sent to the southwest section of the city, bloodshed and perhaps death will follow today, for this is the most lawless part in the city. But the <b>perpetrators</b> are not American Railway Union men. The people engaged in this outrageous work of destruction are not strikers. The persons who set the fires yesterday are young hoodlums.</p> <p data-bbox="269 1692 461 1726"><b>Vocabulary:</b></p> <p data-bbox="269 1730 630 1764">Martial law—military law</p> <p data-bbox="269 1768 740 1835">Perpetrator—person committing an act, often a crime</p>	<p data-bbox="889 541 1224 575"><b>YARDS FIRE SWEEPED</b></p> <p data-bbox="812 617 1305 756"><b>Hundreds of Freight Cars, Loaded and Empty, Burn Rioters Prevent Firemen from Saving the Property</b></p> <p data-bbox="802 798 1312 1276">The yards from Brighton Park to 61st Street were lit on fire last night by the rioters. Between 600 and 700 freight cars have been destroyed, many of them loaded. Miles and miles of costly track are in a snarled tangle of heat-twisted rails. Not less than \$750,00—possibly \$1,000,000 of property—has been sacrificed to the mob of drunken Anarchists and rebels. That is the record of the night's work by the Debs strikers.</p>

## Set D: July 15, 1894

The following articles were written as the strike was coming to an end. On July 10, Debs and other American Railway officers were arrested for violating a court order. They were held for several hours until posting \$10,000 bail.

Chicago Times	Chicago Tribune
<p data-bbox="272 520 743 594"><b>DEBS SURE HE CAN WIN Says the Battle is But Begun</b></p> <p data-bbox="248 632 760 810">More than 1,000 railroad men held an enthusiastic meeting yesterday afternoon, the speakers were President Debs and Vice-President Howard.</p> <p data-bbox="248 852 764 1329">President Debs then told the men the situation was more favorable than it had been at any time since the men went on strike. He said that telegrams from twenty-five points west of the Mississippi showed that the roads were completely tied up. Debs said, "I cannot stop now . . . I propose to work harder than ever and teach a lesson to those bigoted idiots. The managers refuse to work for peace."</p> <p data-bbox="248 1371 764 1623">"There are men who have returned to their work, but they are traitors. We are better without them. We must unite as strong as iron, but let us be peaceful in this contest. Bloodshed is <b>unwarranted</b> and will not win."</p> <p data-bbox="256 1707 654 1770"><b>Vocabulary:</b> Unwarranted—unnecessary</p>	<p data-bbox="833 520 1255 625"><b>WITH A DULL THUD The Strike Collapses with Wonderful Rapidity</b></p> <p data-bbox="833 667 1255 699"><b>DEB'S WILD ASSERTIONS</b></p> <p data-bbox="808 741 1287 804"><b>He is Still Defiant While His "Union" Crumbles About Him</b></p> <p data-bbox="784 852 1304 1287">Eugene V. Debs's statements were like the last flicker of a candle that is almost burned out. The men who first answered his calls for help deserted him. Those who followed his banner of revolt and lost their positions also <b>denounced</b> him. The very fabric of the American Railway Union was falling upon his head and support was rapidly slipping from under his feet.</p> <p data-bbox="784 1329 1304 1581">He said "The Northwestern will not be turning a wheel tonight." At midnight every wheel on the Northwestern had turned. The Northwestern people are inclined to look at Mr. Deb's declaration as a huge joke.</p> <p data-bbox="784 1623 1174 1770"><b>Vocabulary:</b> Rapidity—speed Assertion—statement Denounce—speak against</p>

# MANY SUFFER WANT

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Great Destitution Exists Among Residents of Pullman.

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PAY CHECKS CUT DOWN; RENT, GAS, AND WATER BILLS STAY UP.

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Employees Afraid to Complain for Fear of Dismissal.

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Families of Workmen Who Are Employed by the Big Company After Having Their Dues for House Room and Water Deducted by Their Employer Have So Little Left that They Are Unable to Buy Stoves or Furnish Fuel When They Have Them—Officially, According to the Officers, There Is No Destitution in the Town—Inofficially the Charitable Societies Not Under the Influence of the Firm Find More than They Can Do Supplying the Wants of the Needy—What It Costs to Live There—Household Goods Ruffed to Find Means to Get Away.

**DOCUMENT A**

**MANY SUFFER WANT**

**Great Destitution Exists Among Residents of Pullman.**

**PAY CHECKS CUT DOWN, RENT, GAS, AND WATER BILLS STAY UP.**

**Employees Afraid to Complain for Fear of Dismissal.**

**Families of Workmen Who Are Employed by the Big Company After Having Their Dues for House Room and Water Deducted by Their Employer Have So Little Left that They Are Unable to Buy Stoves or Furnish Fuel when They Have Them—Officially, According to the Officers, There Is No Destitution in the Town—In reality the Distressable Societies No: Under the Influence of the Firm Find More than They Can Do Supplying the Wants of the Needy—What It Costs to Live There—Household Goods Barred to Find Means to Get Away.**

**DOCUMENT B**

**PULLMAN CAR WORKS**

Name No. *995* Pullman Car Company, No. 58015  
 Roll No. *40*  
 Chicago, Ill. AUG 31 1933

**Pullman Loan and Savings Bank**

*Pay to the order of J. M. Little*  
*Twenty Dollars*  
 in full for *invested*

NOT GOOD IF ISSUED FOR A GREATER AMOUNT THAN ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS

*J. M. Little* SECRETARY

**DOCUMENT C**

**NO MAN IS A SLAVE.**

**Strikers Had a Right to Quit Work.**

**Debs May Have Been Impracticable, but He Was Not Criminal.**

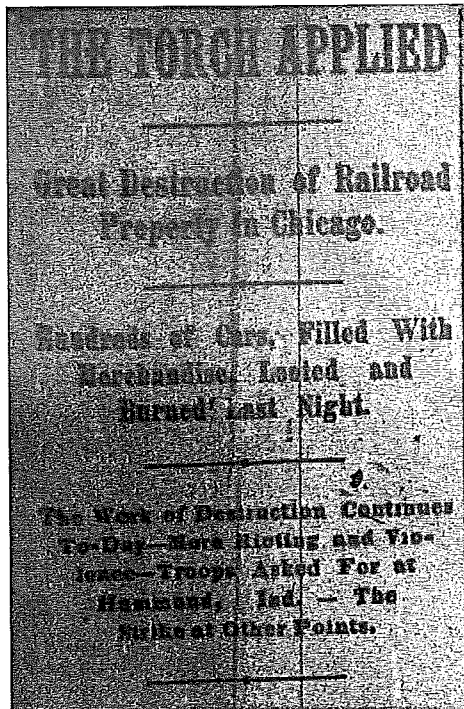
**Document D**

**From a statement by George Pullman, founder and president of the Pullman Corporation, before the U.S. Strike Commission, August 1894**

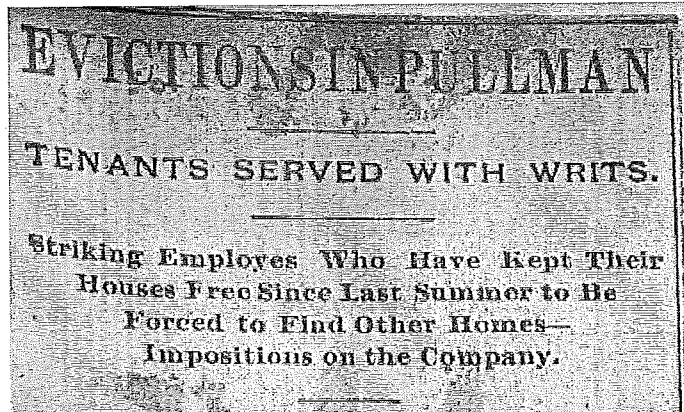
The object in building [the town of] Pullman was the establishment of a great manufacturing business on the most substantial basis possible, recognizing as we did, and do now, that the working people are the most important element which enters into the successful operation of any manufacturing enterprise.

We decided to build, in close-proximity to the shops, homes for workingmen, of such character and surroundings as would prove, attractive as to cause the best class of mechanics to seek that place for employment in preference to others. We also desired to establish the place on such a basis as would exclude all baneful influences believing that such policy would result in the greatest measure of success, both from a commercial point of view, and also, what was equally important, or perhaps of greater importance, in a tendency toward continued elevation and improvement of the condition not only of the working people themselves, but of their children growing up about them.

**DOCUMENT E**



**DOCUMENT F**





### Document A (Modified)

Congress has the power; under the Constitution, to pass an 8-hour work-day. We ask it; we demand it, and we intend to have it. If the present Congress will not give it to us we will send men to Congress who will give it to us. . . .

We do not propose to bring an industrial confusion or a state of anarchy, or to precipitate revolution or a state of anarchy, or to start revolution in this country.

We are peaceable citizens, husbands, fathers. We are citizens of the State and law-abiding men. . . . The working classes simply seek to improve their condition. This is a natural feeling, and I cannot say that there is anything unnecessarily criminal in such a desire. We simply want less work and more pay, knowing that only through short hours and high wages can our condition be improved. We know this, and so we struggle for it. We wish to get at it by degrees. . . .

**Vocabulary**

**Precipitate**—bringing about suddenly

Source: The document above is from Albert Parsons' testimony to the House of Representatives Select Committee on Causes of the General Depression in Labor and Business, 1879.

Albert Parsons

### Document B (Modified)

What, then, is our offense, being anarchists? The word anarchy is derived from the two Greek words *an*, meaning no, or without, and *arche*, government; hence anarchy means no government. Anarchy means a society which has no king, emperor, president or ruler of any kind.

The purpose, the only purpose of capital [business owners] is to take away and murder. Government enslaves the wage-workers. The origin of government is for slaves; free men govern themselves. . . .

The right to live, to equality of opportunity, to liberty and the pursuit of happiness, is yet to be acquired by the workers. . . . Capital and government stand or fall together. They are twins. The liberty of labor makes the government not only unnecessary, but impossible. When the people—the whole people—become the government, that is, participate equally in governing themselves, the government ceases to exist. . . .

Anarchy, therefore, is liberty; is the negation of force, or compulsion, or violence.

Anarchy would strike from humanity every chain that binds it, and say to mankind: "Go forth! you are free! Have all, enjoy all!"

**Vocabulary**

**Negation**—absence

Source: In this article, written in 1887, Albert Parsons explains what anarchism means to him. The article appears in a book called *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis*, as Defined by Some of its Apostles.

Albert Parsons

### Document C (Modified)

The anarchists were indeed fond of dynamite, then a recent invention. Its main ingredient, nitroglycerin, had been around since the 1840s, but not until Alfred Nobel found a way to stabilize it, by mixing it with an inert filler, did it become safe enough for widespread use.

"If we would achieve our liberation," Parsons had told a crowd of protesters in April of 1885, "every man must lay by a part of his wages, buy a Colt's navy revolver, a Winchester rifle, and learn how to make and use dynamite."

"Dynamite is the diffusion of power," Parsons explained at the trial. "It is democratic; it makes everybody equal."

**Vocabulary**  
Diffusion—spreading out

Source: The excerpt above is from a review of James Green's 2006 book, *Death in the Haymarket*.

### Document D (Modified)

The Anarchists' Trial  
New Witnesses Strengthen the Prosecution  
Testify to the Incendiary Speeches

At the Anarchist trial this morning a newspaper reporter testified that Parson in his speech said: "What good are those strikes going to do? What do you think you are going to gain by them? Do you think you are going to gain your point? No, you will have to go back to work for less wages than you formerly received. . . . It is. . . the system that ought to be destroyed."

Detective Cosgrove also testified about Parsons's speech. He estimated the crowd at 2,000 and said it was very unruly and excited. Parsons near the close of his speech frequently cried "To arms," which served to greatly increase the excitement.

Source: The article above was published in the *New York Times* on July 28, 1886.

Albert Parsons

### Document E (Modified)

Cook County, Bastille, Cell No. 29,  
Chicago, August 20, 1886.  
My Darling Wife:

Our verdict this morning cheers the hearts of tyrants throughout the world.

There was no evidence that any one of the eight doomed men knew of, or advised, or abetted the Haymarket tragedy. But what does that matter? The privileged class demands a victim, and we are offered a sacrifice to appease the hungry yells of an infuriated mob of millionaires who will be contented with nothing less than our lives. Monopoly triumphs!

Well, my poor, dear wife, I, personally, feel sorry for you and the helpless little babes.

My children—well, their father had better die in the effort to secure their liberty and happiness than live contented in a society which condemns nine-tenths of its children to a life of wage-slavery and poverty. Bless them; I love them unspeakably, my poor helpless little ones.

Ah, wife, living or dead, we are as one. For you my affection is everlasting. For the people, humanity, I cry out again and again in the doomed victim's cell: Liberty! Justice! Equality!

Albert R. Parsons

**Vocabulary**  
Abetted—encouraged or supported  
Appease—calm or satisfy

Source: Parsons wrote the letter above to his wife while in jail. He was awaiting trial for his role in the Haymarket Riot.

Albert Parsons

## Document F (Modified)

"When I judged that Mr. Parsons was about to end his speech I went over to the station, spoke to Captain Bonfield and decided to go home, but instead of going immediately I went back to hear a little more; stayed there about five minutes longer and then left. Within about twenty minutes from the time that I left the meeting I heard the sound of the explosion of the bomb at my house. . . .

I did in fact take no action at the meeting about dispersing it. There were occasional replies from the audience as 'shoot him,' 'hang him,' or the like, but I do not think from the directions in which they came, here and there and around, that there were more than two or three hundred actual sympathizers with the speakers. Several times cries of 'hang him,' would come from a boy in the outskirts, and the crowd would laugh. I felt that a majority of the crowd were idle spectators, and the replies nearly as much were evidently bitter; they came from immediately around the stand. The audience numbered from 800 to 1,000. . . . There was no suggestion made by either of the speakers for the immediate use of force or violence toward any person that night; if there had been I should have dispersed them at once. When I went to the station during Parson's speech, I stated to Captain Bonfield that I thought the speeches were about over; that nothing had occurred yet or looked likely to occur to require interference, and that he had better issue orders to the police at the other stations to go home. I don't remember hearing Parsons call 'To arms! To arms! To arms!'

### Vocabulary

Dispersing—scattering; breaking up  
Guying—teasing; ridiculing

Source: Mayor Harrison of Chicago actually attended the demonstration, but left right before the violence erupted. He gave his testimony at the trial on August 2, 1886.

Albert Parsons

## Guiding Questions

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Document A

1. What words does Parsons use to describe the workers and their needs? How do these words make the workers sound? Why do you think he chose these words?
2. Parsons says, "We wish to get at it by degrees." Does this statement make him seem more radical or more moderate?
3. When was this document written? How many years before the Haymarket incident? Do you think it's a reliable account of Parsons' beliefs?

### Document B

4. How does Parsons define anarchism? Does it sound like a positive or negative thing? Who might disagree with this characterization of anarchism?
5. When was this written? Was it before or after the Haymarket incident?
6. What was Parsons' purpose in writing this document?

### Document C

7. According to Parsons, is dynamite a positive or negative thing? Why?
8. How might Parson's opinion of dynamite affect what people thought about him?

### Document D

9. According to Detective Cosgrove, what was the effect of Parsons' speech?
10. Do you think this is a reliable account of Parsons' speech? Why or why not?

### Document E

11. According to Parsons, why are he and the other defendants being tried?
12. What does Parsons mean when he claims "monopoly triumphs?"

13. Based on this letter, how would you describe Parsons?

### Document F

14. Was Mayor Harrison afraid of Parsons when he heard him speak? How do you know?
15. How does the Mayor's account differ from Detective Cosgrove's account in Document D? Which do you find more reliable—Document D or F?

Albert Parsons

# Labor Wars Response

- Attached to your posters, you should type a 3 paragraph argument considering the actions of the group (laborers or capitalists). Answer the following question:
  - “Can Crime ever be justified?”
  - Use evidence from the unit to support your answer!
  - your essay response should have:
    - Introductory paragraph with THESIS
    - Two paragraphs: **Topic sentence** and **evidence** to back up your thesis and link to the topic sentence
    - Evidence should relate back to what you learned about the labor wars and be historical. Do not use hypotheticals or recent events.

# Labor Wars *Wanted* Poster

# WANTED

Wyatt Earp aka "The Kansas Kid"



**For murder and pimping!**

For brutally killing the Clampert gang at the OK Corral and pimping ladies of the evening in Salina, Kansas.

*Wanted by the people of Tombstone, AZ, who are offering a reward of*

**\$1000**

Make a wanted poster for one of the following capitalists or labor organizers. Make the poster as if designed by his/her enemies.

**Requirements below:**

1. Name of the person & aliases
2. The "crime(s)" that the person is wanted for, including victims
3. When and how were crimes committed
4. Who wants them and reward and dangers
5. Mug shot of the person in question

# Labor Wars Wanted Poster Candidates

## The Labor Side

1. Albert Parsons
2. Lucie Parsons
3. Mikhail Bakunin
4. August Spies
5. John P. Altgeld
6. Terence Powderly
7. Sam Gompers
8. Eugene V. Debs

## The Capitalist Side

9. Alan Pinkerton
10. Andrew Carnegie
11. George Pullman
12. Nelson Miles
13. Marshall Field
14. J.P. Morgan
15. Grover Cleveland
16. The Chicago Police