

Railroad labor disputes;: The beginnings of Federal strike policy

Gerald G Eggert



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Fascinating and scholarly examination of the often erratic development of federal policy towards railroad labor unrest. The strike against the Baltimore & Ohio in 1877 triggered a wave of violent nationwide protests that precipitated the use of federal troops to restore order, one of many decisions -- some blundering, some enlightened -- that the government would make over the next few decades. The author examines the backgrounds, interests and ambitions of those who shaped federal policy, the lack of congressional leadership, and the often erratic planning by the executive branch, all of which often pulled the courts into a larger role than might otherwise have occurred. Particularly in times of crisis, he argues, chance and accident played as much a role in setting policy as reason and forethought. Covers the Burlington Strike, Coxey's Army and the Great Northern strike, and the Chicago Railway Strike (Pullman) Strike of 1894 in detail. "Riots" and "insurrections" were quelled by troops; injunctions were used to fight "conspiracy to obstruct the mails" and the hampering interstate commerce, and strikes were even deemed violations of the Sherman Antitrust Act. It was not until after the Pullman Strike of 1894 and passage of the Erdman Act that the government accepted the principle of collective bargaining. Later, many of the procedures worked out during railroad strikes were used in labor disputes in the coal, steel and automobile industries and still influence government policy today. 313 pages with index.

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