

The
Pullman Porter

Issued by the
BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS
2311 Seventh Avenue, New York

1926

FOREWORD

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters presents this pamphlet for the information of the public.

We have made no attempt here to "propagandize" our cause, but have set down, in as brief and convenient fashion as possible, some well authenticated facts about the wages and working conditions of the Pullman porters. These facts are drawn largely from an extensive survey of their work carried on over a period of months by the Labor Bureau, Inc. They form a part of the argument to be presented to the United States Railway Mediation Board in the porters' fight for recognition of their union and adjustment of their grievances.

The public has had little opportunity to discover any facts about porters before the organization of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. A general feeling has prevailed that "porters get rich from their tips and own their own homes and businesses." Nobody has supposed that the courteous, smiling porter had any "grievances."

But the porter suffers some distinct injustices. Not only does he work long hours for low wages, but he is subject to many petty abuses which the Employee Representation Plan, controlled by the Pullman Company, entirely fails to correct. A real labor union, independent of Company control, is the only agency which is capable of making those adjustments in the relations between employer and employed which will permit the men to carry out their work and voice their needs without fear.

We feel that the public is entitled to know something about the Pullman porters' case. The public pays a yearly tribute of \$7,000,000 in tips to Pullman porters to eke out the scanty wages paid them by the Pullman Company. This must be counted as a \$7,000,000 saving on the wage bill of the Pullman Company, which emphasizes the courtesy and efficiency of its porters as an integral part of the service it sells. The porters' demand for a living wage from the Pullman Company which would permit the abolition of the tipping system deserves the consideration of the traveling public.

The significance of this movement to the organized labor movement of America should not be overlooked. This is the first successful effort of Negro labor to organize itself. It is being carried on in the largest single group in America—the key group of the unorganized Negro workers of this country. Success in this struggle against the largest and most powerful employer of Negro labor will mark an epoch in the fight of all workers to organize the unorganized, to strike down the company union, and to carry forward a militant movement for the cause of the workers.

HISTORY OF THE BROTHERHOOD

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was organized August 25, 1925, in New York City.

General dissatisfaction with the Employee Representation Plan began to crystallize among the porters as a result of a speech on trade-unionism delivered to the Porters Athletic Association by A. Philip Randolph, editor of the *Messenger Magazine*, and well known as a leader and speaker. W. H. Des Verney, A. L. Totten, and Roy Lancaster, all of them porters and two of them officials in the Employee Representation Plan, met with Mr. Randolph shortly thereafter and discussed the possibility of organization. Articles in the *Messenger Magazine*, setting forth the grievances of the porters, aroused their interest throughout the country.

On August 25, 1925, a mass meeting was held in New York City, the Brotherhood was formed and its demands were formulated, and A. Philip Randolph was elected its General Organizer.

Randolph was chosen to head the new Brotherhood because he was generally known as a consistent advocate of the cause of labor; because he was the editor of a publication which could be used to spread the propaganda of the Brotherhood's cause; because he was known to be fearless and independent; and because he was not a Pullman porter, and therefore had nothing to fear from the Pullman Company. Subsequent developments which resulted in the discharge of Lancaster and Totten and the resignation of Des Verney from the service, proved that organizers who were porters had reason for disquietude.

Frank R. Crosswaith and S. E. Grain were added to the force of organizers, and Roy Lancaster was elected Secretary-Treasurer by an Executive Committee. Formal election of officers awaits the time when a convention can be held without fear of reprisals from the Pullman Company.

Since the work of Pullman porters is nation-wide, it was necessary to establish organizations in other cities. After only a year of organizing, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters has been able to create a national labor union, with active groups in Chicago, St. Paul and Minneapolis, Omaha, Kansas City, Wichita, St. Louis, Denver, Portland, Seattle, Los Angeles, Oakland, New Orleans, Washington, Boston, Detroit, Buffalo, and other cities—the principal termini for porters in the United States.

WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The minimum wage paid porters is \$72.50 a month. This wage is based on a mileage system by which porters must cover 11,000 miles, or complete almost 400 hours of road service during the month, before it is possible to make any overtime pay.

Overtime pay is on the basis of 60 cents for every 100 miles in excess of 11,000 miles. "Doubling-out" is paid for at the same rate. Allowance for delays after the first hour are paid for at the same rate on the basis of 30 miles an hour.

AVERAGES COMPILED FROM A QUESTIONNAIRE RETURNED BY
673 REGULAR PORTERS AND 104 EXTRA PORTERS
(LABOR BUREAU, INC.)

Regular Porters

The average monthly mileage was 10,402.8, less than the 11,000 miles on which overtime would be based.

The average wage was \$78.11.

Tips averaged \$58.15 a month, or \$7.56 per run.

Occupational expenses, including cost of uniforms, shoe polish, meals during runs, sleeping quarters at termini when provided by porters themselves, averaged \$33.82.

The net income of regular porters on the average was therefore found to be only \$97.43 per month.

Extra Porters

The porters who have no regular runs but are sent out on substitute and extra duty receive no pay unless they happen to be sent out on a run. Therefore their income is more irregular, contains less opportunities for making tips, and is very low, according to the replies of 104 extra porters. They represent such irregularity that it is difficult to summarize them.

Maids

There are about 200 maids in the employ of the Pullman Company. They receive a minimum wage of \$70, with the same overtime basis, and their opportunities to earn tips are necessarily limited. The Pullman Company provides no sleeping quarters for them at outlying termini. In many cases they are allowed shorter rest periods than porters on the same runs.

Comparison of Pullman Wages with Another Service

The Minneapolis, St. Paul, Sault Ste. Marie Railroad Company, often called the "Soo" Line, maintains its own sleeping-car service. The rates now in effect for porters on its cars compare as follows with those now paid by the Pullman Company.

Service	"Soo" Line Monthly Wage	Pullman Monthly Wage
Sleeping car	\$80.40	\$72.50
Parlor car	90.40	72.50
Porter in charge (doing work of conductor)	95.00	84.50

The Porter as a Worker

The Pullman Company has made its porter service a closed industry. There is no chance for advancement beyond the rank of porter into any service that pays better wages. Even salary advance for length of service is only at the rate of about \$1.30 a year—\$10 in 15 years. Nevertheless, the Company has professed itself as anxious to "attract the best elements of the Negro race," and by its requirements does draw a high type of worker to its service.

The complexity of the porter's task makes it evident that he must be a responsible and capable person. The book on instructions for porters issued January 1, 1925, lists 217 matters to which he must give attention—matters pertaining to care of linen, blankets and pillows, to the preparation of berths, to the handling of baggage, to the guarding of cars, to the care of cars and equipment, to heating and lighting, to the maintenance of sanitation, etc.

The Pullman Company has frequently recognized its debt to the porter as an integral part of its service. George M. Pullman, founder of the Company, once declared, "You would have to go a long way to find a finer body of men than the Pullman porters." Edward F. Carry, President of the Company, said in his report to stockholders in 1925, "Without the efficient help given by its loyal employees the Pullman Company could not have made the splendid record it did in the year just closed." L. S. Hungerford, Vice-President and General Manager, has said, "The reputation of the service depends as much upon the efficiency of the employees as upon the facilities provided by the Company for the comfort of its patrons."

THE DEMANDS OF THE BROTHERHOOD

Wages

The union demands minimum wages of \$150 a month instead of the \$72.50 now in effect. This would make it possible to abolish the tipping system.

Hours

The union demands a month's service of 240 hours instead of nearly 400 hours. The Pullman conductor's working month is 240 hours.

Preparatory and Terminal Time

The union demands pay for preparatory and terminal time. *Example:* Porters now receive no pay for time spent in preparing cars and receiving and discharging passengers. A porter leaving New York at 12:30 midnight for Washington is required to report for duty at 7:30 p. m. Although he works 5 hours for the Company preparing the car to depart and receiving passengers, his time does not begin until the train leaves the station. The porter receives about 25 cents an hour from the Company. Thus the 5 hours spent in preparatory time represent \$1.25 for one run, and he makes his trip twelve times a month. Therefore, over a period of a year the porter has contributed \$180 to the Pullman Company in free labor—quite an item to a worker whose yearly wage is only \$870. When it is considered that every one of the 10,000 porters contributes preparatory time in the same way, it is easy to estimate what a great saving the Company derives from this practice.

Delayed Arrivals

The union demands adjustment of pay for delayed arrivals of trains. On the present basis the porter is paid about 14 cents an hour for time spent in delayed arrivals of trains, this being a little more than half pay, for work performed during the time assigned for a rest period. Pullman Car conductors are paid on a basis of time and a half for overtime, and receive about 96 cents an hour for this same service.

Doubling-out

A porter who has returned from his regular run, however long, may be "doubled out" on another run without a rest period and at a lower rate of pay than if he were on a regular run. The union demands adjustment of the doubling-out system. *Example:* A porter who has a western run from New York to Chicago may be required to double out to Philadelphia. This short run takes a total of five hours and would command about \$2.97 from the Pullman Company if a regular porter filled it. But doubling-out is paid for at the rate of 60 cents for every 100 miles. Therefore the porter who is doubling from his Chicago run, on his own rest time, can make only 90 cents. When he returns from Philadelphia he may be out of line and must lay over until his regular line is again due out. By losing his long run and laying over without pay while he waits for it, the porter may lose nearly \$5 from his month's wages, excluding the loss in tips, by doubling only once. If he refuses to double he may be discharged.

Doubling-out is not only detrimental to the health of the porters, who are thus forced to work without adequate rest. It is also an inefficient and dangerous practice to send out tired porters, who have already been two or three days without sleep, to guard the comfort and safety of passengers and render that "efficient and courteous service" to the public upon which the Company places so much emphasis.

Sleep

The union demands 4 hours' sleep the first night out and 6 hours' sleep the second and third nights for the porters. The question of sleep is one of the most pressing in the working lives of the porters. The conductors secured an adjustment of their hours of sleep while on the road; therefore the porter believes that the Pullman Company is able to provide for regular rest for the porter. *Example:* On the New York to Key West, Florida, and return run, the conductor and the porter leave New York together for 4 days and 4 nights of work, the length of this run. On the first night the porter is allowed a maximum of 3 hours' sleep and the conductor a minimum of 5 hours. On the second night the porter is allowed no sleep at all, while the conductor is relieved and sleeps all night. On the third night the same conditions prevail. On the fourth night the porter is again allowed 3 hours and the conductor 5 hours. Therefore, on a run of 96 hours (less the few hours spent in Key West) the porter is allowed a total of 6 hours' sleep, whereas the conductor is allowed two full nights and 10 hours.

When the two return to New York the porter is allowed 4 rest days and the conductor 5. The old jest about a "sleepy porter" is seen to have its basis in an inhuman fact.

Conductor's Pay for Conductor's Work

The union demands conductor's pay when the work of a conductor is added to that of a porter. There are several thousand "in charge" porters in the service who, in addition to their own work, must do all work required of a conductor. For this extra work the porter receives an extra pay of \$10 a month. The minimum wage for a conductor is \$150 a month. The Company, therefore, saves \$140 a month on each "in charge" porter. There is a Company rule that porters "in charge" of two cars may receive a minimum conductor's pay, but since the conductor's union requires the employment of a regular conductor whenever two cars are sent out, no porter ever receives this wage.

Extra Porters

When porters first join the service they are not assigned to regular runs, but are sent out as substitutes on runs not filled by regular porters or on extra cars. They must report for duty regularly but receive no pay unless there happens to be a vacant run. Since extra porters are necessary to maintain the service, the union demands that they receive a flat rate of pay.

Equipment

Porters are required to buy the shoe polish and equipment for shining passengers' shoes. They are penalized if they should refuse to shine shoes or if they should mention to a passenger that they do so at their own expense. Polish and equipment cost the porter nearly \$20 a year, an annual bill of \$200,000 that porters must pay.

Porters are required to buy their own uniforms until they have been in service for 10 years. This involves an outlay of about \$60 a year.

Porters must buy all their own meals on the road. They are served at half price in the diner, but custom requires that they must tip the waiter at every meal. The cost of their meals en route averages about \$23.65 per month.

The working expenses which the porter must incur in order to serve the Pullman Company thus amount to \$33.82 on the average per month, and must be subtracted from their income in determining what actual income porters derive from their work.

THE TIPPING SYSTEM

One of the principal demands of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters is for a "living wage" from the Pullman Company sufficient to do away with the tipping system. Some of the evils of the system are apparent, but there are many ways, both direct and indirect, in which the custom of tipping militates against the interest of the porters. Therefore an extensive inquiry has been made into this situation, the results of which are briefly condensed here.

The actual net income on the average from tips has been shown to be about \$25 a month (subtracting the occupational expenses which the porter must pay in order to hold his job). The questionnaire showed that \$58 was received in tips, while \$33 was paid out in occupational expenses. But the amount of tips varies greatly according to the run and to the season, and the consequent uncertainty of income is one of the evils objected

to. For instance, 376 porters reported tips of less than \$50 a month, while 245 earned more than that amount. Five porters earned less than \$15 a month from this source, while two earned more than \$200. Yet each porter had approximately the same duties, spent nearly equal time on the road, and rendered service on "poor" as well as "rich" runs. Thus the unequal distribution of tip income makes it highly unsatisfactory.

The tipping system has been utilized time and again to hinder the porters from obtaining improved working conditions. Their desire for shorter runs and a shorter basic month have been met by the argument that "it would work detrimentally to the porter since it would result in cutting their runs down to a point where they would be cut off at intermediate points and lose very largely upon the tips in consequence."

The social aspects of the system are quite as important as the economic aspects. For the porter is a Negro. The tipping system, wherever employed, creates a peculiar relation between the tipper and the man tipped. On the one hand we attain a sensation of power and patronage, and on the other we have a possibility of obsequiousness and dependence. But when to this we add the fact that the man tipping is usually white and often imbued with a spurious sense of racial superiority, while the man tipped belongs to a race that is even now struggling to a recognized social status, we aggravate all the inherent social evils of the tipping system. The Brotherhood feels that it must be clear why it asks for the porters and maids, "a living wage and no tips."

The Pullman Company stands to gain a good deal from the tipping system. In the first place, it saves on its wage bill, even at the present low income of the porter, about \$7,000,000 a year, which the public is paying in tips to the Pullman porters.

The Company is able to avoid responsibility for the bad working conditions—the long working month, insufficient rest, long runs, etc.—by always using the argument that "porters wish to follow tips to their destination," and so would not welcome shorter hours of labor. The Company also makes further savings by basing all its insurance and pension payments upon the wage rates of the Company rather than upon the total income of the porter.

THE EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATION PLAN

The Employee Representation Plan, a euphemistic name for a Company union, was given to the porters on October 1, 1920. Its workings have been a constant source of dissatisfaction to the porters. The Plan provides for local Grievance Committees

composed of an equal number of representative porters elected annually, and of members chosen by the Company, usually from the supervisory force. The local Committees elect representatives to Zone Committees, of which there are 8. Here also there are an equal number of porter and Company representatives.

All grievances needing adjustment are presented first to the local Committee. If the Committee fails to come to a decision, they go to the Zone Committee, and finally to the Bureau of Industrial Relations, which is composed of management officials, and, since August, 1926, *one porter*.

The very composition of the Plan explains why it has been a failure from the point of view of the men it is supposed to serve. A Grievance Committee, half of whose members are appointed by the Management, is not likely to inspire confidence.

There is no provision within the Plan itself for machinery by which wage rates are to be established. The Joint Conference formulates the wage rates for the entire service. This Conference is composed of 20 representative porters and 20 Company votes, held in proxy by 4 or 5 Company officials. The Conference can be called only upon petition of the majority of the votes in the last Joint Conference (including the Company votes) or upon petition from the majority of the employees.

Since there is no machinery provided for the employee petition, and the porters are widely scattered, a Joint Conference is never called without the consent of the Company through its delegates to the Conference.

The equal division of Company votes and porters' votes militates against the interests of the porters, for the meetings can be adjourned and the porters threatened with no wage increase at all if they attempt to vote as a unit and deadlock against the Company's wage plans.

Dissatisfaction with the Employee Representation Plan is grounded, not only upon its structural weaknesses, but upon its lack of accomplishment for the porters. A comparison of the accomplishments of the Order of Sleeping Car Conductors, organized only two years before the Employee Representation Plan, and the Company Plan are proof enough of the porters' need of a real labor union.

In 1915, through the Industrial Relations Committee, the Pullman conductors were demanding virtually the same changes in wages and working conditions that the porters are asking for now. At that time they asked for a 240-hour basic month, pay for preparatory time and delays, shorter runs, more sleep on the road, decreased work expenses, control of "doubling-out," a living wage, and an independent union recognized by the Pullman

Company. These demands, which parallel those of the porters, have been secured, through their organization, the Order of Sleeping Car Conductors.

Wage Comparison

Date	Conductors	Porters
1915	\$ 70.00	\$27.50
1916	70.00	30.00
1917	77.00	30.00
1918	98.70	48.50
1919	125.00	60.00
1920	155.00	60.00
1921	155.00	60.00
1922	140.00	60.00
1923	150.00	60.00
1924	150.00	67.00
1925	150.00	67.00
1926	150.00	72.50

WELFARE WORK

The Pullman Company maintains several types of Welfare Work for its employees. The most important of these is the Pullman Porters' Benefit Association. Porters who affiliate with it pay an annual assessment of \$28 if they are less than 45 years of age and \$32 if they are more. In return the Association provides for members in time of sickness, incapacity, or death. The Pullman Company has at all times maintained a close connection with this Association, dominating its policies, paying some of its incidental expenses, and emphasizing to the men the fact that the Association is a Company Welfare Plan, although supported by the porters themselves.

It might be noted in passing that the Pullman Company has been able to effect a real saving through the Benefit Association, since it has discontinued paying a half month's salary to men who are sick, as was the practice before the Association was established.

The Pullman Company grants a pension, amounting on the average to about \$18 a month, to porters who have given at least 20 years of consecutive service and who have reached the age of 70 years.

During February, 1926, the Pullman Company announced that it would sell stock to its employees at reduced quotations on an installment plan. Each employee is entitled to purchase one share per year for each \$500 of his annual salary. Under the wage rates now current no porter could purchase more than one share of stock per year even if he so desired.

In addition to these Welfare plans the Pullman Company provides an employee magazine known as the *Pullman News*,

and has established various choruses, bands, orchestras, entertainments, and field days, designed to produce a "markedly beneficial effect upon the *esprit de corps* of these employees."

The Brotherhood feels that the welfare policies of the Pullman Company can never be offered in lieu of decent wages and working conditions, that the operation of these plans leaves much room for improvement, and that the porters would be able to provide such "amusement" plans for themselves if they deemed them necessary.

THE PULLMAN COMPANY

The Pullman Company has been operating with porters and maids since February 22, 1867.

During 1925 it paid over \$10,000,000 in dividends, according to its own report.

It is the largest single employer of Negroes in the United States. There are from 10,000 to 12,000 colored porters and maids in its employ.

The total cash investment of the Pullman Company up to 1924, according to its statements to the Interstate Commerce Commission, was only \$32,601,238.

The present capitalization is \$135,000,000, brought to that figure by reinvestment of surplus earnings and the issue of stocks as dividends and in exchange for property.

Since 1897 the Pullman Company has distributed \$245,675,000 in cash dividends and \$60,000,000 in stock dividends.

The Pullman Company is a strong vertical trust that manufactures the equipment from the operation of which it makes its final profits. It owns the entire capital stock of the Pullman Railroad Company, the Pullman Car and Manufacturing Corporation, 99 per cent of the stock of Mann's Boudoir Car Company, and entire control of the Union Palace Car Company and the Woodruff Sleeping and Parlor Coach Company.

The Manufacturing subsidiary, the Pullman Car and Manufacturing Corporation, pays a stated dividend of only 6 per cent to the Pullman Company, letting the balance remain in its treasury. Thus the \$3,566,996.22 which it earned and kept in its own treasury in 1925 does not appear in the reported earnings of the Pullman Company, although they are bona fide Pullman Company earnings.

An analysis of the assets and liabilities of the Pullman Company and its subsidiaries, as well as of market quotations of its stocks and its operating strength, shows that the net income of the Company for 1925 was \$19,340,000 in round numbers, as against the \$10,000,000 reported.