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207 West 140 Street

June 12 - 1934.

OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

His Excellency Franklin D. Roosevelt  
The White House  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

Reports in the Press seem to indicate that the Congress will adjourn the last of this week, and that the labor bills will fail of passage.

This, I assure you, is not only a source of discouragement to the Pullman Porters and Maids, but has engendered and fostered in their hearts a deep feeling of bitterness and a sinister and sullen sense of resentment against those charged with the responsibility for providing the legislative privilege of the workers to exercise the right of self-organization, and the selection and designation of representatives of their own choosing.

Because of the long, hard fight the porters and maids have made, covering a period of some nine years to organize a union of their own, free from intimidation, interference and coercion by the Pullman Company, they looked forward to your pronouncements that the principle of workers' self-organization as set forth in Clause 7 A of the National Recovery Act, and the Emergency Railroad Transportation Act as a definite ~~and~~ promise and assurance of relief from the notorious and vicious ~~industrial~~ industrial slavery fastened upon them by the Pullman Plan of Employee Representation or Company Union.

But, they have looked in vain. Yes, they have looked in vain, for the Pullman Porters and Maids are the victims of SPECIAL-DISCRIMINATION. The porters and maids are beginning to believe that they are the victims of both RACE and CLASS DISCRIMINATION.

Strangely or naturally enough, this belief has some semblance of fact and truth for the Pullman Porters and Maids, are the only workers on the railroad who neither come under N R A or E R T A. When the porters

and maids raised their case to the Coordinator of Federal Transportation, they were told that they (the porters and maids) are not under the jurisdiction of the former because the Pullman Company is a carrier and not under the latter because IT IS NOT A CARRIER by railroad.

Now, Bill S 32 66 and Bill H R 9689, to amend the Railway Labor Act approved May 20, 1926, and to provide for the prompt disposition of disputes between carriers and employees, will establish jurisdiction over the Pullman Company, and is is upon these bills upon which the porters and maids are depending to insure and safeguard their rights of collective bargaining through a national labor organization which they maintain and control.

If these amendments to the Railway Labor Act are not passed by this Congress, the porters and maids will be utterly without any means of redress of their grievances, since the existing Railway Labor Act is ineffective, which is the only reason for the proposed amendments.

The porters and maids have noted that by executive proclamation, you have extended the life of the Emergency Railroad Transportation Act, which would have died June 16, another year. Other railroad workers, because the carriers, on which they work come under the jurisdiction of E R T A, have definite means for adjusting their grievances, at least, until the Act expires next June 16, 1933. Bill S 2411, introduced by Senator C. C. Dill and a similar bill in the House introduced by Congressman Crosser will correct this condition by amending the Emergency Railroad Transportation Act, so as to include the Pullman Company and thereby bring the porters and maids under its jurisdiction.

But this Bill, according to Congressman Crosser has little chance of passage this session because the administration measures have the right of way. If this Bill has no chance in the present sessions of Congress, and the amendments to the Railway Labor Act don't go through because of the lack of support by yourself, WHAT ARE THE PORTERS AND MAIDS TO DO?

You have stated to the great satisfaction of the workers, and especially the porters, that you will not permit the rights of the workers to be chiselled away by employers.

Permit me to in form you that the Pullman Company is committing flagrant violations of the rights of the porters and maids to organize a trade union of their own as free American citizens and workers.

In every instance upon which the porters and maids have attempted to meet with the management of the Pullman Company directly to adjust their grievances, they have been refused a conference, although the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, through which they have sought conference, embraces the large majority of the porters and maids in the service.

The porters and maids have sought the service of the United States Mediation Board, but to no avail. They have taken their case to the Interstate Commerce Commission, but this Commission decided by a majority vote in 1928, that the case of the porters and maids did not come under its jurisdiction, but properly falls under another arm of the government, the Mediation Board which had just failed to adjust the dispute between the porters and maids and the Pullman management.

Our next effort was to secure a petition from the Federal District Court to enjoin the Pullman Company from maintaining and operating the Plan of Employee Representation or Company Union. Judge Charles E. Woodward of Chicago, whom the House Judiciary Committee in a vote of 15 to 5, voted to recommend his impeachment for improper conduct as a Judge, handed down a decision against the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, declaring that the Plan of Employee Representation, though financed by the Pullman Company, printing the ballots for the annual elections in its own printer shop, and holding said elections on its property, paying officials of the plan, which does not allow the porters and maids to select anyone to serve as their representative to adjust grievances unless he is a porter in the employ of the Company, is not a Company Union.

We therefore have no other recourse but to appeal to you to either put Bill S 3266 and H S 9689 on your "MUST PASS" ~~xxx~~ list, permit and require that Bill S 2411 with its counter part in the House to come to a vote, or the porters and maids must avail themselves of the most drastic means in their power to win the right you have declared all workers possess, under your labor policy, namely, to organize and collectively to bargain as free workers.

Every Government agency, to which the porters have carried their case, has given them the "run around", until there is widespread suspicion and distrust of both officials and the law. Officials have proven to be vague, uncertain, indefinite and timid before the power of the Pullman Company, on whose Board of Directors sit, J. Pierpont Morgan, R. K. Mellon, George Whitney, George F. Baker, Alfred P. Sloan, Harold S. Vanderbilt, the high and mighty monarchs of industry.

As for the laws, experience has proven to the porters and maids that they, the laws, ~~xxx~~ never mean what they say, and

adroit and clever corporation lawyers, twist, distort and contort them, together with ambiguous, Janus-faced, judicial decisions, to mean almost anything, except in the interest of the porters and maids.

Naturally, to the porters and maids, the question arises, "IS THE PULLMAN COMPANY MORE POWERFUL THAN THE GOVERNMENT?" Are they (the porters and maids) to be included in the New Deal? Will the government permit the largest single group of Negro workers in any industry to be the victims of legislative discrimination, while they serve as faithful, efficient and necessary employees of an interstate carrier, which is the beneficiary of Federal Law, has no funded indebtedness, and boasts of having never passed paying a dividend, even during this depression, an unheard of and unprecedented record in world financial history.

It is this very Company which compels the public to pay a part of the porters wages in tips, which by the way, have fallen since the beginning of the depression over 75 per cent. It forces the porters, underpaid as they are, to buy shoe-polish, to shine passengers' shoes. Porters, according to a survey made by the Labor Bureau, Inc., of New York, are required to pay out as occupational expense, including uniforms, meals on cars, insurances, \$33.62 a month, out of a monthly wage, if they make a month, which is seldom done, of \$72.50.

It is this Company, too, Mr. President, which despite your effort to reduce unemployment by reducing hours of work, forces the porters and maids now to work nearly 400 hours a month. As a consequence of these long, inhuman, stretch-out, sweat-shop-hours, thousands of porters and maids are furloughed and put on the extra board.

Without the right to organize a union of their own, it is impossible for the porters and maids to correct this condition.

Unless the porters receive your aids they shall rely upon such forces they themselves can mobilize to free themselves from Pullman Company Union tyranny, even if it means to STRIKE

Respectfully yours,

A. Philip Randolph,  
National President.