

# The Truth About THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

## When Organized

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

## Who Organized It

As a result of a speech by the writer at the Pullman Porters' Athletic Association, the porters of New York were aroused. Immediately thereafter, Mr. W. H. Des-Verney interviewed the writer on the matter of organizing the porters. He called a meeting at his home at which Messrs. Roy Lancaster (at the time, recently discharged), A. L. Totten and the writer, were present. The question of organization was discussed and the grievances of the porters told the writer. Upon the facts received in that conference, an article was written in the Messenger Magazine on the case of the Pullman porter. It stirred the porters throughout the country. It was followed up with another article, more comprehensive.

## Why the General Organizer Was Elected

First, because he was generally known as a consistent advocate of the cause of labor; second, because he was not a Pullman porter and consequently had nothing to fear from the Pullman Company. It is a matter of common knowledge that porters have been fired who were merely suspected of being active in organization work. Third, because he was the editor of a publication which could be used to spread the propaganda in the interest of organization; fourth, because he was known as being fearless and independent.

The right of employees to select any one they desire to represent them whether working for their employer or not, is recognized by the United States Railroad Labor Board in decision No. 218, Docket 404. It reads: "The Labor Board also holds that the employees may vote for representatives who are not employees of the carrier, if they so desire, just as the carrier may select a representative who is neither a director or a stockholder."

## Why Organized — Wages

1. To get a living wage.

- (a) The present wage is \$67.50 a month. It is graduated upward over a period of 20 to 30 years to \$90.00.

## Preparatory Time

2. Pay for preparatory time.

- (a) By preparatory time is meant time spent in making ready the car and receiving passengers before the departure of the train.

(b) Example: A porter leaving New York at 12:30 midnight for Washington, D. C., reports for duty at 7:30 P. M. Although he works five hours for the Company preparing the car to depart, his time does not begin until the train leaves the terminal station. Upon a basis of his monthly wage of \$67.50 he receives 25 cents an hour. Thus five hours spent in preparatory time represent \$1.25, which the Company deprives the

porter of every time he makes this trip. A porter on this run makes the trip twelve times a month, which means that he enriches the Company at his expense to the extent of \$15.00. Over a period of a year, this represents a loss of \$180. This is quite an item to a worker whose yearly wage is only \$810, or, according to the United States Department of Labor, \$1,278 below the income which is required of the average family in order to live according to a decent American standard. A porter running out of Omaha, reported for duty at 3 P. M. and worked until 2:30 A. M. the next morning before his train departed or his time or wages began. When it is considered that this is being done by thousands of porters throughout the country, it is easy to estimate what a great profit the company derives out of this practice.

3. Conductor's pay for conductor's work.

- (a) There are what is known as "in charge" porters or porters who do conductor's work and porter's too. "In charge" porters are in complete charge of the car. They do the same clerical work of a regular conductor. But they only receive \$10.00 additional pay for said work. Therefore, on each "in charge" porter, the Company saves \$145 a month, since the minimum conductor's pay is \$155 a month. The rule is that when a porter has two cars, he should get the minimum conductor's pay, but the custom is that when there are two cars to be handled, a conductor is there to take charge. The conductor's union protects them to this extent. There are several thousand "in charge" porters in the service. But estimating on only one thousand, it is clear what a great advantage the Company reaps by paying them only \$10.00 additional instead of the minimum conductor's pay of \$155. On one thousand such porters, the Company saves \$145,000 every month or \$1,740,000 every year.

## Hours — Delayed Arrivals

4. Pay for delayed arrivals.

- (a) At present the average porter's train may be late several hours every trip during the month, but he receives no pay for hours spent on duty beyond his regular scheduled hour's run because the hours he is late are required to be put in his accumulated mileage column and since he must make 11,000 miles or nearly 400 hours each month, he makes no overtime by being late.
- (b) Example: A porter is running on parlor car from New York to Washington, D. C. The porter makes 13 round trips or 26 trips per month. The mileage from New York to Washington is 227 miles or 454 miles for a round trip. Now 13 round trip times the round trip mileage of 454 equals 5,902 miles.

The minimum mileage required for a porter to make a month for \$67.50 before over-time is paid is 11,000 miles.

The specified lay-over is from the time the train is due to arrive to the time the train is due out.

The rule reads: Road service performed on specified lay-over to be paid as doubles at 60 cents per 100 miles.

The porter running to Washington is due to arrive at 6 P. M. who arrives at 9 P. M. must put late arrival of three hours in accumulated mileage column. If he is three hours late at New York and Washington each trip during the month, he will be late 78 hours. Now 78 hours times 30 miles, the mileage hour rate of the train will equal 2,340 miles. Add 2,340 to 5,902, the mileage between New York and Washington, a porter makes during a month, and it totals 8,242 miles. Subtract 8,242 from 11,000, the minimum mileage a porter is required to make and the remainder is 2,758 miles, the porter is yet required to make before he is paid overtime.

- (c) The Brotherhood demands 240 hours or less in regular assignment as the basis of the porter's monthly wage. This provision will regulate preparatory time, station duty and delayed arrivals.

The Pullman conductors have the 240 hour month.

### Doubling

5. Doubling is injurious to the health of the porter. Doubling means leaving for another point immediately after the porter's arrival off a run, however long. It is injurious to his health. It throws a regular porter out of line and he earns less.

(a) Example: A porter operating a line car between New York and Chicago. From the 1st of October to the 25th, he makes five trips with lay-over period which expires on the 25th day. At the rate of \$67.50 per month, he earns \$56.25. It happens, however, that on his arrival at New York, on the night of the 23rd, he is required to double out to Boston on the night of the 24th, and consequently is not able to cover his run on the 25th day.

By doubling to Boston, he is placed on the mileage basis and only earns \$1.44, which is less than his day's pay or 60 cents times 240. He returns from Boston in service on the night of the 25th, and arrives in New York on the morning of the 26th, and earns another day's pay of \$2.25 which expires on the night of the 27th.

He is now out of line, and has to lay around until the 30th, when his line is due out without pay. He then leaves New York on the 30th and arrives in Chicago on the 31st and earns \$2.25, another day's pay. His total month's wages by doubling equals \$64.44. \$56.25 is the pay received for time put in from October 1st to 25th, \$1.44 is amount received for doubling to Boston, and \$6.75 for three days put in thereafter at \$2.25.

Now if he did a full month's work in regular line, he would earn \$67.50. But by doubling he only gets \$64.44 or \$3.04 less than his monthly wages. By one month's work in regular assignment, he, on a 31 day's month, covers 11,532 miles, an excess of 532 miles over the monthly mileage, a porter is required to make before he is paid for over-time. When 532 miles are multiplied by 60 cents, the rate allowed for excess mileage, one gets \$3.18. Thus if the porter had

stayed on his regular run, he would have earned \$67.50, his monthly wage plus \$3.18 pay for excess mileage, or \$70.68. By doubling he loses the difference between what he makes, \$64.44 and what he would have made if he had not doubled, \$70.68 or \$6.24.

Porters should receive adequate rest before they are to double out. They should not be required to double out during their lay-overs, except where necessity is very pressing. At present, a porter running from St. Louis or Chicago to New York, is often required to double right out to Boston or to some other point, before he sees his family, gets anything to eat, freshens himself up or changes his clothes. During rush periods such as holidays, he is given bad hot coffee and buns. This is palpably against the health of the porter.

### Conditions

6. Sleep.

(a) Example: A porter leaving Boston at 6:10 P. M., en route to Chicago, a run of 23 hours, gets three hours sleep on the run; whereas a Pullman conductor on the same train, gets off at Buffalo, a run of 11 hours, and gets four hours sleep during that run.

(b) Porters are never assured of sleep since they are always subject to a call by the passengers.

(c) No provision is made for the porters sleeping unless supper No. 1 is not taken. If it is taken he must steal naps in the smoking room in the glare of the lights. Nor can he take those naps until every passenger has retired.

(d) Special provision should be made for the sleep of the porters. This could be arranged through a system of relief porters.

### Extra Porters

7. Extra porters are not paid if they report for duty and there is no line for them to be sent out on. This is obviously unfair. Extra porters who are required to report at the yard for duty should be paid whether they are sent out or not. They are required to report regularly or be put off the list. An extra porter is one without a regular line.

### Regular Porters

8. Regular porters who miss their line as a result of having doubled out, are not paid during the time they are lying around waiting to catch their line. This is unjust. They should be paid for this time spent waiting for their line since they were thrown out of line accommodating the Company.

Example: If a regular porter running from New York to Chicago is doubled out from New York to Atlantic City upon his return from Chicago to New York, his home district, he will miss his line when he returns from Atlantic City to New York. Hence he must lie around for one or two days until his regular line returns. He is not paid during that time. A regular porter is only paid when he reports for duty and is not sent out if he is in a foreign district, that is, not in his home district.

### Shoe Polish

9. Porters are required to buy the polish and equipment for shining the passengers' shoes. If he does not shine their shoes, he is given 15 or 30 days on the street, and if he shines them and requests pay for same, he is penalized. Polish and equipment should be supplied by the Company.

### Maids

10. Maids don't receive the same lay-overs as porters. Having the same run they are entitled to the same lay-overs.

### Lay-Overs

11. Whenever a porter is compelled to report for investigation, he does so on his own time. Facilities should be so provided that a minimum of time is lost, since the lay-overs of the porters are their rest periods, and the time for attending to their personal business.

### Deadheading

12. Example: A porter was assigned to a dead-head car, that is to say, a car not in line service. He carried no passengers and had no opportunity to receive tips while en route. When assigned to the car, however, he was told by the clerk that said car was going to some other destination, to return in service. His car was cut off at some station near Rhode Island where there is no Pullman district or agency. He could not plead shortage of funds or refuse the car, because in doing so, he would violate the instructions contained in his rule book and would be subject to immediate dismissal for insubordination of duty.

He was held at this place three days and had no way with which to obtain food or to wire his superintendent. He was hungry, his car was cold, and he felt miserable. The rule says he must remain with his car, but starvation forced him to desert it, hence, he took the first dead-head train back to his district, and reported the condition under which he was made to suffer. The assistant superintendent was indifferent. He took undue advantage of his official capacity to assail him unnecessarily in very harsh terms. The porter was not able to defend himself in a diplomatic way. The effort is to make the porter bow his head, and usually he does.

Finally the porter was required to accept a penalty which must be acknowledged by his own signature. Thirty days suspension was the verdict and this penalty appears against his record, for the rest of his term of service. He refused, and asked permission to see the superintendent or local supervisory officer. The assistant superintendent hastened to the office of the superintendent and presented his side of the dispute. The porter was then called in only to find the superintendent was inclined to uphold the action of his assistant. He explained his case to no avail.

The superintendent recommended his dismissal or suggested that he resign from the service. In the latter case, he refused and was told that he could not go out on the road. Under the Plan of Employee Representation, he has the right to take his case before the Committee on Grievances. But the local officials felt that he had no grievance. They blocked his efforts to adjust his case by means of delay. He went repeatedly to the office only to find it hard to interview them. Weeks passed and he was out of work.

Finally he got a hearing and was permitted to take his case to the Committee on Grievances. He discovered that the same official who was in the first part of the dispute was also a member of the Committee. With him were four others, as against an equal number of porter representatives. The result was dismissal from the service.

Note another concrete instance of how the Employee Representation Plan works against the interests of the porters receiving justice.

### The Case of A. L. Totten

The dismissal of Mr. A. L. Totten from the Pullman Service as a porter is one of the latest evidences on the part of the Pullman Company to deal unfair with its employees.

Mr. Totten was an active and able worker on the Employee Representative Plan, and a national character among Pullman porters. He was the only member of the committee in the New York District who sought to make the plan function. His sole ambition was to win at least one case for the porters which would give them faith in the plan.

Wholly because of his determination to seek justice for the men, who always voted for him to represent them on the committee, he was despised by the management and singled out as a dangerous character. The true story which comes from Mr. Totten himself is as follows:

"On the morning of October 1st, a porter was dismissed from the service, and feeling that he was unjustly treated placed his case in my hands, asking that he be given a hearing before the committee on grievances, which is under the plan of employee representation. I asked him to explain his side of the case, and felt that if all he said was true, he should be given the privilege of a fair opportunity to defend himself.

I discovered from the outset an inclination on the part of the chairman of the committee to accuse the porter of being under the influence of whiskey when he applied for his grievance blank, a condition that did not exist at the time. This action on his part stimulated me with great interest to seek justice for the porter who had just been married and was the father of a baby a few weeks old.

I have never felt satisfied with the mode of procedure in these committee meetings, because whenever a case is brought before that body there is always an attempt on the part of the management to withhold the facts, and deny the representatives of the defendant a fair chance to make a thorough investigation of the charges preferred.

When on the morning of Oct. 15th, the committee met I was astonished to learn that the porter was dismissed on the charge of being boisterous at the Pullman porters' House in Chicago and for annoying the older men with his solicitations.

By reason of the fact that the charge as presented was rather weak and without any explanation as to what was meant by the term "solicitations," I took the attitude that the committee could not vote intelligently on it until we had investigated the custodian of the Porter's Home who should have some knowledge of the matter. According to the custom the management moved for the executive session and requested that the porter should leave the room and attempted to discredit him in his absence.

They showed his record card with four minor derelictions and based their contentions on the ground that his services were unsatisfactory. I found that some passenger whose name and address is unknown to the committee had written him up for unsatisfactory service.

The management insists that complaints from passengers be charged up as bad record against porters in absence of solid concrete facts. Another passenger wrote him up for being asleep for half an hour in the afternoon between 4 P. M. and 5 P. M., at a time when there were no beds available for passengers or anyone else for that matter.

He was also charged for smoking on duty, despite the fact that Pullman conductors and service inspectors steal their smoke when on duty. An inspector riding on his car reported that he had seen him wipe the hand rails with a pillow slip.

In defense of the last charge, I learned from the porter that he discovered the pillow slip tucked away in his stepping box and that it had been previously used for that purpose. He admitted however, that he used the precious rag for the accommodation of a lady passenger who wore white kid gloves at the time.

I found no loss record, no insubordination; he was moral and honest, and I determined to defend the porter on what I believed to be a good case. After a lengthy discussion the management yielded to the opinion of the Porter representatives that the case be deferred for another meeting subject to the call of the chairman, and the secretary communicate with the supervisor at Chicago asking for a detailed report of the porter's conduct at the Pullman Porters' Home.

As a committeeman I have the right to delve into the facts contained in the charge preferred against the porters, and therefore intimated at the time that I would go to Chicago and interview the custodian of the Porters' Home.

Incidentally there were some other matters in connection with the rules governing this plan which I desired to take up with the supervisor and be benefited by his opinion. I desired to carry out this mission without the knowledge of the local officials whom I knew had good reasons to hinder me.

So on Monday, Oct. 19th, I wrote a letter of request to work a car to Chicago, leaving New York on Friday the 23rd, and it was granted me by their assistant superintendent at the yards. Immediately on arrival at Chicago, on the afternoon of the following day, two men grabbed me at the station and demanded that I take a train leaving immediately for New York.

I had worked twenty-three hours on the road and was without proper rest. To return immediately meant further loss of sleep and no opportunity to get a good meal. Besides I had come on a mission which was a matter of concern to the management if there is any honesty of purpose in their Employee Representation Plan. I argued that I was a representative of the plan, and I had the legal right under its ruling to stay and carry out my mission, and therefore questioned the authority of anyone who would thus try to bully me.

After the train had backed up to the yards, they attempted to use force to make me return to New York, denying me even a chance to get a cup of coffee. It was then that I decided to remain on solid ground in the capacity of a representative of the plan of employee representation and not as a porter.

After I had interviewed the persons whom I came to see and obtained the necessary information, I reported for duty and was handed discharge papers for unsatisfactory service."

#### **The Brotherhood Not Backed By Moscow**

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters is not backed by Moscow, nor has it any communistic connections, sympathies or interests; it is purely a Pullman porters' union, organized, controlled and financed by Pullman porters. The Pullman Company, through its hired agents, has attempted to create public sentiment against the union by falsely saying that it was a Communist proposition. But nobody believes this who either knows the General Organizer or the rank and file.

#### **Negro Government Official Hired By Pullman Company to Oppose the Movement**

Mr. Perry W. Howard, Negro Special Assistant to the United States Attorney-General, has been employed by the Pullman Company and is on its payroll for the purpose of preventing the Pullman porters from organizing lawfully to get a living wage. This is obviously a com-

mission of malfeasance of duty in office, inasmuch as it is utterly impossible for a public official to perform his duties to the best of his ability, as per his oath of office, and at the same time be a faithful employee of a private corporation. Besides it is absolutely unethical for a Department of Justice official who is charged with the duty of upholding the law to become the attorney of a corporation which may be a possible litigant against the government.

#### **Endorsers of the Movement**

The Brotherhood has been endorsed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People through its executive secretary, Mr. James Weldon Johnson; by Eugene Kinckle Jones, executive secretary of the National Urban League, and the Civic Club of New York, as well as a number of women's and ministers' organizations throughout the country.

#### **Moral Support**

The Brotherhood is receiving the moral support of the American Federation of Labor and the Big Four Brotherhoods. These groups have faithfully sent speakers to the porters' union whenever requested. Such speakers as Mr. Hugh Frayne, representative of the A. F. of L. of New York; John Fitzpatrick, president of the Chicago Federation of Labor; H. E. Wills, vice-president of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, etc., have rendered great service to the movement.

#### **Other Aims**

The Brotherhood aims to develop a higher type of porter and to render cooperation with the management effective in creating more efficient service for the traveling public. It does not counsel insubordination but efficient discipline. It makes mandatory on the part of the members, sobriety, honesty, reliability and industry. It seeks to relieve the porters of the stigma of relying upon the charity of the public, in the form of tips for a living for his wife and children.

#### **The Public**

Believing that the principles of the right to organize and the right to a living wage will meet and merit the approval of the American public, and realizing that these principles are sanctioned in both Federal and state statutes, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters have embarked upon the mission of lawfully achieving these ends for the benefit of the porters in particular and the Negro race in general, trusting that the public will stand by them.

Join today; don't delay. You have nothing to fear, nothing to lose, but everything to gain. Be men, stand firm, let us not lose strength or faith or courage or zeal or action. Truth and justice which are mightier than the legions of men are our Captains and we shall not fail.

Faithfully and steadfastly yours,

A. PHILIP RANDOLPH,  
*General Organizer.*

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so that you may get it direct through the mails and read about the fight it is making for YOU. Get copies and send to porters you know. Knowledge is power! The truth will set you free!

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