
Pullman

by Eugene V. Debs

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The term "Pullman," has become at last the synonym of almost anything odious that heartless, crushing, degrading monopoly suggests to the minds of honorable men. "Pullman" means "purple and fine linen, sumptuous living — silks, satins, diamonds, palaces, and a herd of cringing, fawning, lickspittles, who do the bidding of King Pullman, submit to kicks, cuffs, and such other degradations as are known and practiced in dominions of tsar, sultan, shah, or khedive. In Pullman's realm, there is no independence for workingmen. The decrees of the ruler are as autocratic as are known in benighted lands where men prostrate themselves, then heralds shout, "The King is Coming."

King Pullman owns towns, he owns houses, highways, parks, ponds, churches, school houses, rinks; he has under his sway morals, education, religion, and amusements: he is all powerful in his little seven by nine territory up in Illinois, the land of Lincoln and Douglass. Talk about dukedoms and earldoms, and principalities, Pullman, the car-builder, whose real name is as wide as sleep, and whose palace cars outnumber all the equipages of all the potentates of Europe and Asia combined, to say nothing of American codfish, coal oil, and bucket shop snobs, whose appearance excite ineffable contempt. We say Pullman, the palace car nabob, enjoys a dictatorial power, which lays them all in the shade.

But it is not so much of Pullman in his little principality in northern Illinois that we write, or care, as it is of Pullman, on all the iron highways of the country. Highways chartered by states and built with money of the people, and supported by the money of the people, and protected by the laws enacted by the people. It is on these public highways where Pullmanism reaches the extreme limit of all that is infamous in the industrial enterprises of the country.

The Pullman “sleepers” have conductors and porters. These men, half-paid, are subjected to ceaseless surveillance. Spotters are forever on their track, and it is charged that porters and conductors combine, to filch in some way from passengers, enough to make up the difference between fair wages and starvation pay which Pullman allows his overworked men.

The *New York Times*, in a recent issue, exposes the unspeakable infamy of the Pullman policy by which he increases his wealth, regardless of right and justice, and in a way the legitimate fruits of which are fraud and wide spread demoralization.

The article referred to, based upon information from one who knows, bristles all through and all over with such atrocities as must excite universal indignation. Men are overworked and underpaid. Pullman, the conscienceless employer, by his policy, says in effect, “I know I am an unjust man, I am pursuing a course well calculated to make my employees thieves, and to guard my coffers I will put spotters, always scoundrels upon their track. I will employ men innately villains, to watch men who in my employment and by virtue of their meanness, are liable to become thieves.”

The public has a right to know all about the Pullman iniquities practiced on men who attend to the “sleepers.” A conductor on a Pullman car receives \$70 a month and pays 75 cents a day for his meals when on the road. He is requested to purchase not less than two full uniform suits a year at a cost of \$44. On each train the conductor is held responsible for the three cars on his train and the porters under him. If the porters divide their “tips” with the conductors as waiters do with head-waiters in several New York restaurants, the company is presumed to know nothing of it. A conductor’s salary is supposed to be sufficient for all his personal needs and his expenses in the service of the company. Allowing \$20 a month for meals bought on the road, and \$4 a month for his uniform, a conductor does well if he can get \$50 a month for his family out of his salary. But owing to the system of inspection and fines to which the Pullman men must submit, the chances are that the conductor will not get anything like that sum.

The conductors and porters are under the constant surveillance of “spotters,” as the train hands call them, or “special agents,” as they call themselves and are called on the company’s payroll, who report at division headquarters the slightest infringement on the rules of the company. As a general thing, the Pullman conductor can no more tell

a spotter from an ordinary passenger than the horse-car conductors in the city can single out the company spies who are sent around to see that they do not knock down on registered fares. Is it possible to conceive of a more humiliating position than that of a conductor or porter on a Pullman car? Everything is in the line of degradation. Suspicions of scoundrelism begin with the beginning and are never relaxed. To make matters still worse, to reduce pay, and increase temptations to steal, Pullman instructs his spotters to be ceaselessly on the alert for mistakes, called in all cases "misdemeanors." These can be multiplied at the will of the spotter, being himself a villain and ready and willing to lie to maintain his place since the more he can reduce the pay of conductors and porters, the better it is for him. "A conductor," says the *Times* article, "considers himself lucky if he gets off with \$6 in fines in ten months out of twelve. This makes a big hole in his salary. He has no chance to explain or to contradict the charges. The spotter is believed and the conductor must submit, or leave the service.

In addition to this, says the *Times*, "on nearly any full train with three or more Pullman cars that run over the trunk lines between New York and Chicago a special detective is employed to watch for graver misdemeanors, which may be considered outside the bailiwick of spotters." Conductors handle some money and the detectives are on the alert to see that stealing does not occur, and if there is no theft perpetrated, a mistake answers the purpose, as, "if a conductor makes an error in his diagram, a thing likely to occur at any time when passengers are dissatisfied with berths selected and desire transfers, he is fined for it, and if the offense becomes too frequent he is liable to suspension."

Such is the history of the Pullman reign on the road, and if anything can be brought to light more detestable, it has yet to occur. It is such detestable practices that breed the unrest and vindictive spirit abroad in the lands that furnish anarchists and socialists with the raw material for their diatribes against law and social order and keep alive the cry that there is an irrepressible conflict between capital and labor, when the conflict is between right and wrong. The press of the country, if true to its high privileges, will follow the lead of the *New York Times* and expose such hateful practices as are expressed by Pullman.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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