

Citation: Protest of Downtown Local Unemployed Council, January 14, 1935. CF 145851.
Comptroller Files, 1802-01, Seattle Municipal Archives.

DOWNTOWN LOCAL UNEMPLOYED COUNCIL

Seattle, Washington
January 14, 1935

SUBJECT:- Forced Labor on the Relief Line
TO :- The City Council, City of Seattle

Gentlemen:

The thirteenth article of the U.S. Constitution declares slavery or involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime, shall not exist within the boundaries or possessions of the U.S.

The one argument used by the reactionaries is of course, that no one can be compelled to work, but neither are the Relief Authorities under any obligation to furnish meal tickets that is relief, to the unemployed.

Their argument is a weak excuse, however, as we intend to prove in this letter.

It is not the fault of the unemployed as a class, that they are unable to secure employment at a wage commensurate with present living standards. The government protects the owners of the machinery of production, who, through the economic system in use, known as the "profit system", have because of the inherent contradictions of such system, thrown millions of workers out of employment. Since the government and its implements, the Army, Navy and police are used to prevent the workers who are the majority in number of the population, from producing and exchanging commodities that are necessary for the welfare of this numerical majority, that this government is responsible for the present situation and the government cannot, without repudiating the Constitution, demand that the workers labor without pay.

The government is, or should be, for the solving of this economic condition, if it cannot or will not, it has misrepresented its ability. If the government assists in the attempts to force workers to work for nothing except their board and clothes it is sponsoring slavery, regardless of the amount of work performed, and therefore it is using its power to drive the workers into slavery.

We oppose this in principle because our class interests are involved. If we work for nothing but our board and lodging, sooner or later the entire laboring class will be forced to do the same.

We, therefore, stand on this declaration; We will perform no work for less than Union wages, paid in cash. We also state that any worker who does accept employment at less than union wages, is actually helping to cut wages and aiding and abetting the policy of forced labor which is being inaugurating by the Relief authorities.

While such a worker may not be termed a "scab", during periods of comparative peace between employers and employees, in lines of work where labor is not organized, they are "scabs" when given the opportunity to organize, and refuse to do so.

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We demand, therefore, that the City Council send resolutions to the Relief authorities in Seattle and Olympia for the action taken on their part of trying to force workers to perform involuntary labor.

We also demand, that the city council recognize our right to strike and peacefully picket all forced labor projects without police intimidation.

We demand all work relief to be the thirty hour week six hour day steady work at trade union rates of pay. For those not employed, under the above conditions, unemployment and social insurance at the expense of the government and the employers.

Signed *H. W. Smith*
Chairman
Downtown Local Unemployed
Council
Room 217, Mutual Life Bldg.

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FORCED LABOR UNCONSTITUTIONAL.

Workers! **NOTICE!** Workers!

Do you know that forced labor in the U.S.A. is unconstitutional?
Below, is an exact reproduction of Article 13, of
THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION U.S.A.

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime of the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

BELOW IS AN EXACT REPRODUCTION OF THE FORCED LABOR TICKETS HANDED OUT TO MEN AT THE SEATTLE RELIEF STATION:

WORK ASSIGNMENT
Wash. Emergency Relief Admin.

It is understood by both parties that any work is without compensation except board or lodgings. These conditions, I hereby accept.

Signature, _____ # _____

Date 7734

A.M. P.M.

One worker refused to sign this card on Friday, Jan. 11th until the sentence; "These conditions I hereby accept" were scratched off. He was then forced to sign the work ticket before getting his meal ticket. The man issuing the ticket asked; "Do you refuse to do any work?" The worker answered, "I am willing to work for Union Wages, I will work but only under protest, I am against forced labor!" He was then asked, "Do you think I am getting Union Wages?" The worker answered, "Well if your'e not, why don't you quit scabbing?"

Mr. Moore, Relief administrator in Seattle made this statement to the "Times" on January 10th, 1935; "Men who recieve their meals from the W.E.R.A. restuarant are given food tickets, which may be denied because of a persiantant refusal to do a minimum amount of work." Thus we have forced labor! In another paragraph he states, "A small cash allowance is made weekly to all homeless men." This is a lie! Workers do not recieve any cash allowance for work performed as the above ticket proves, excepting a few who receive \$1.00 a week for steady work and these are special cases.

Workers refuse to sign these work tickets! But if you are forced to sign these tickets, cross out these lines; "These conditions I hereby accept," This work therefore becomes, Involuntary Servitude. Then if you are forced to work, or lose your ticket, bring the work ticket to the Grievance committee of the Unemployment Council,

WORKERS!- Organize and demand union wages for all work performed! Cooks, waiters, shoemakers, barbers, and all other workers on the relief form committees of action and send delegates to room 217, The Mutual Life Bldg. Thursday evening at 6.00 P.M.

PREPARE TO STRIKE! Demand Cash payment at union rates, no work for less than 50 cents an hour.

STRIKE DELEGATE CREDENTIAL:
Name-
Occupation-
No. of men represented-

Signed Committee _____

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