

Benjamin J. Salmon,  
St. Elizabeth's Hospital,  
Washington, D. C.,  
October 28, 1920.

His Excellency, Woodrow Wilson,  
President of the United States,  
Washington, D. C.

REGISTERED MAIL.  
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED.

--- C-O-P-Y ---

Dear Mr. Wilson:

On July 13, while still confined in the Fort Douglas prison, I went on a liberty or death hunger strike. For thirteen days I was allowed to starve. Then the authorities began to forcibly feed me. Forcible feeding has been continued ever since, altho on numerous occasions I have been allowed to go without food.

Today is the 107th day of my hunger strike. I still refuse to eat and will continue to refuse to eat. Since you will not release me, will you be kind enough to murder me outright? Forcible feeding does not solve the problem, it is murder on the installment plan, the little bit of liquid food is merely a torture, each day finds me a little weaker.

As you know, my only crime is a refusal to kill. The Washington Post of October 27th quotes Dr. Arthur P. Noyes, of St. Elizabeth's Hospital, as follows: "Salmon's objections to serving in the army was the result of his own study of the Bible and not because of the church of which he is a member." I am a member of the Roman Catholic Church. Father Joseph V. Molloy, one of the most learned among the Catholic clergy, now stationed at the Sacred Heart Rectory, Klamath Falls, Oregon, wrote to me a few days ago stating: "I pray for you. May God give you all the nerve and courage that you need. Tho all the small folks go back on you, Christ is with you; that is, if He meant those radical and pacifist words with which the pages of the holy Gospels are filled; and of course we know that He did mean every single word. He and His idea are still unknown to the world." I can quote many statements from Catholic priests to prove the fallacy of Dr. Noyes' asseveration, but the foregoing should be sufficient.

The government's attempt to brand me a lunatic has been foiled. I was railroaded to this insane asylum three months ago today because I had gone on a hunger strike. After more than two months' daily observation by the physicians followed by an examination before a Board composed of twenty-eight mental specialists with the head of this insane asylum as the principal interrogator, I was officially declared to be sane. It has been twenty-four days since I was declared to be of sound mind, yet I am still held in an insane asylum and confined in a building set aside for insane criminals; approximately 180 of this type are herein segregated.

Two issues are involved, one legal and one moral. I am illegally detained. Rule XIII of the Selective Service Regulations proves that I was illegally drafted, for at the time of my attempted induction into the military service I was at large on bail pending an appeal from a sentence of nine months in the Denver county jail for refusal to answer the Questionnaire. Being illegally drafted, a court-martial was powerless to try me, but "might is right" in

America so the court-martial tried me anyway. Nearly two years ago Judge Pollock of Kansas City denied a writ of habeas corpus, basing his denial upon the contention that I had violated the law in order to get a Fourth Class classification. The court-martial record shows, that, if I had not violated the law -- that is, if I had not refused to answer the Questionnaire -- I would have been put in Fourth Class because of a wife and widowed-mother being dependent upon me for support. My letter to the Local Board, which is a part of the record, informed the Board that altho I was legitimately entitled to exemption I would not hide behind skirts but face the issue squarely. A few days ago, Judge Bailey of the District Supreme Court in Washington refused a writ of habeas corpus on the same grounds upon which Pollock refused it. Judge Bailey is a very estimable gentleman, but time will prove, that, the upholding of Pollock's misinterpretation -- if the newspapers have correctly quoted Bailey -- was one of the most superb acts of moral cowardice that has yet besmirched the judiciary, for Bailey's attention was called to facts that Pollock may have been unaware of. Judge Bailey may not have intended to play the role of a coward, but the case is so simple and the facts are so plain that it is difficult to comprehend how a learned jurist could ignore them. The Camp Funston military authorities threw my case out of court, but the Camp Dodge officials were more audacious and tried me regardless of "law and order." Captain C. H. Richardson, a man with an excellent army record of several years service, formerly stationed at Camp Dodge, said: "One that had a chance to read your proceedings couldn't help but know you were innocent. Its a few things like the deal the military authorities gave you that has caused hundreds of thousands of men that were soldiers in this war, to spurn everything military like men do rattle-snakes. I possibly know as much about your case as any one man at Dodge. If the same rights had been given you by those men that sat on the court-martial that they declared for themselves, your case would have been kicked out of court the same as it was at Camp Funston."

Regarding the moral issue: In your speech at the funeral of the American sailors killed at Vera Cruz, you said: "I never was under fire, but I fancy there are some things just as hard to do as to go under fire. I fancy it is just as hard to do your duty when men are sneering at you as when they are shooting at you.....The cheers of the moment are not what a man ought to think about, but the verdict of his conscience." Mr. Wilson, I thot of the verdict of conscience, and I followed it. That my conscience did not err, is evidenced by the quotation from Father Molloy and by other Christian testimony. For more than 29 months I have been illegally held a prisoner for doing what you urged. I do not, however, seek mercy. Nor do I condemn you; on the contrary I respect you for many reasons. It is a clash of ideas. Truth will triumph. Do the courageous thing Mr. President, and, if you honestly believe that I should be imprisoned, then do not further belittle yourself by continuing this forcible feeding, for forcible feeding is merely death on the installment plan. Do the job right and starve me all at once. I do not seek death, but I am ready to die, and I would rather die than, thru the medium of continued imprisonment, morally support the satanic institution of militarism.

With every good wish for your personal happiness and success, I am,

Yours respectfully,  
(Signed) Benjamin J. Salmon