
“The Hour Has Struck to Call a Halt” :
Call for the St. Louis Convention of Coal Miners
(August 23, 1897)

Terre Haute, Ind., Aug. 23, 1897.

To the Social Democracy and all Lovers of Liberty and Fair Play,
Greeting:—

A mass convention will be held at St. Louis, Monday, August 30th [1897], in the interest of the striking, starving coal miners. The official call has been issued by the Executive Board of the United Mine Workers and endorsed by the executive heads of the American Federation of Labor and the Knights of Labor.

I understand that this convention is called not to pass idle resolutions, but to take prompt, vigorous, and united action, and this being the case, I appeal to the Social Democracy and to all lovers of liberty and humanity to meet at St. Louis on the day named to lend a hand to the stricken, suffering miners of the country.

The injunction has again done its deadly work. Constitutional liberty has been bludgeoned to death and labor has been bound and gagged for the perpetual exploitation of corporate capital.

There is no relief in the courts. We have tried them all, from the bottom to the top, and they are all against labor. So far as I am concerned we will appeal no more. We will now appeal to the American people.

Judges, the creatures of the plutocracy, rule the country by injunction. From justice of the peace to justice of the Supreme Court, the injunction has full sway. American citizens are forbidden to open their lips or to walk on the public highway.

Sheriffs, marshals, and other petty officers issue proclamations and then proceed to shoot and club workingmen if they are not as servile and obedient as if they were so many savages off their reservation.

That there has been no violence and bloodshed in the miners' strike is simply because the judges and sheriffs and deputies have been unable to provoke an outbreak. The miners have patiently, meekly submitted to the most flagrant insults and abuses.

The hour has struck to call a halt. The cowardly, brutal, and wholly un-American reign of injunctional government has got to end. A vast army of miners are famishing, their wives and children are dying. The calamity cries to heaven.

We do not ask the courts or the authorities to help these perishing toilers, but we do demand that they take their cruel clutches from the throats of the workingmen and allow them to help themselves in lawful ways.

The Pittsburgh operators have declared that they will open their mines if they have got to do it with Gatling guns. No injunction has been issued and no soldier has been called out to restrain them from executing their murderous designs.

Injunctions, soldiers, marshals, deputies, thugs, and jails are for the exclusive benefit of the workingmen.

Under the rule of the money power, labor is plundered until the starvation point is reached and then its emaciated body is shot full of holes. It is notoriously true that the American miners have been robbed in countless ways, and now that they are hungry, it is proposed to murder them.

The horrors of Siberia are not of greater enormity.

Every atom of American manhood revolts against the spectacle.

Judges by the usurpation of power, playing the role of tyrants, have annihilated the constitution, abrogated the right of trial by jury, forbidden free speech, suppressed peaceable assemblage, and transformed our republic into an absolute despotism.

They are guilty of judicial treason and should be made to answer at the bar of an outraged people.

The issue has been forced upon us and we have retreated before it to the verge of slavery. Let us now meet it as it would have been met by the patriots of 1776.

Eugene V. Debs.