
The Lattimer Massacre (September 12, 1897)

Terre Haute, Ind., Sept. 12 [1897].

Now that he realized the enormity of his crime and the popular indignation it has aroused Sheriff Martin is beginning to explain how he and his deputies came to fire upon a body of peaceable and defenseless miners on the road leading to Lattimer and committing wholesale murder.¹

The Sheriff's explanation simply does not explain, and such of it as would furnish a shadow of a justification is proven to be false. Instead of preserving the peace and upholding the law the Sheriff and his murderous deputies provoked disorder and then deliberately shot down the victims of their conspiracy.

Were I not unalterably opposed to capital punishment I would say that the Sheriff and his deputy assassins should be lynched. Each of them is guilty of murder in the first degree, and as they totally defied the law they were sworn to uphold in striking down their victims, they have forfeited all rights to protection under the law.

Shot Like Rabid Dogs.

The men who have been shot down in cold blood are Pennsylvania miners. For years they have been robbed in countless ways by the combines and companies which employed them, and now that they have been reduced to famine and rags they are murdered in the public highway, as if they were so many rabid dogs.

I have been among them and know by personal observation all about their wretched condition. Even now, I can see the marching miners pursuing their endless journey. They are hungry and the hot sands blister their shoeless feet. Their hovel habitations are the abodes of despair. Wives and half-naked children are in the grasp of starvation.

If by some magic the American people could look upon the scenes in some of the Pennsylvania mining regions, the bloody incident at Hazleton would precipitate a revolution.

Sheriff Not Responsible.

The responsibility does not rest entirely with the Sheriff and his deputies, as they are but tools in the hands of the real murderers, for whom we must look higher. As a general rule, the public functionaries in the mining regions are spineless and subservient creatures of companies. They issue proclamations, read riot acts, and commit murder when ordered to do so by their masters.

The miners who were murdered in the name of law and order were perfectly peaceable. They were quietly walking on the highway, when the assassin authorities stopped and bullied and attacked them.

Suppose a man of wealth, a coal operator, were stopped and killed under the same circumstances. The whole country would be around in an instant and the newspapers, supported by the Christian clergy, would demand in thunder tones that all the powers of the government be invoked to crush out the whole body of workingmen.

Wholesale murder has been committed at the behest of corporate capital by the public authorities in the name of law and order. No amount of jugglery or sophistication can obscure the indictment.

Is this an attack on government, or is it government?

Is it an assault on "Old Glory," as they declared when the Pullman strike was on, or is it what the old flag now symbolizes?

Governor Hastings² has ordered out the troops. Is it for the purpose of shooting the murderers or murdering more miners?

The crime is so revolting that it is difficult to keep within the bounds of moderate statement.

Bloody Graves a Text.

The 20 or more bloody graves of these murdered workingmen loom up before us.³ What a text for the Christian ministry! Will they raise their voices in a solemn protest as if the strikers were the murderers instead of the victims of the authorities?

When I think of these hard-worked, half-starved coal miners lying in the dirt of the highway, the blood coming from their ragged bodies, and then think of the hovels in which wives and children are awaiting their

return my heart melts in compassion and my whole being revolts against the satanic crime.

It is worthy of remark that the massacre occurred in a state that boasts of a majority of 280,000 in favor of protection of American labor.⁴

Government by injunction is bearing fruit. We will soon have government by murder.

The Pennsylvania horror is a blot upon the state, a disgrace to the Republic, and a blistering reproach to our civilization. It is sufficient to shock all Christendom, and it is to be hoped that the American people will wake up.

Eugene V. Debs.

Published as “Satanic Crime” in the *Buffalo Express*, vol. 52, no. 206 (Sept. 13, 1897), pg. 2.

¹ On September 10, 1897 Luzerne County sheriff's posse under the authority of Sheriff James F. Martin fired on a crowd of striking immigrant coal miners outside the Lattimer mine near Hazleton, Pennsylvania after they refused orders to disperse. Nineteen were killed and scores more injured in the bloodbath, many of whom were shot in the back.

² Daniel H. Hastings (1849-1903), a Republican, was Governor of Pennsylvania. Hastings was formerly a high ranking officer in the Pennsylvania State Militia.

³ The official death count was 19.

⁴ Reference is to the majority of Pennsylvania voters casting ballots in favor of the Republican Party and its “protective” tariff.