

Monstrous Falsification:
Letter to the Editor of the *New York Times*
(May 16, 1907)

Girard, Kans., May 16, 1907.

Editor, *Times*,
New York.

Dear Sir:—

The *Kansas City Journal* of May 11th and other papers in the West have copied an editorial from a recent issue of your paper entitled “Undesirable Citizens.”¹ Allow me to say that this editorial consists of a maze of outright falsehoods, half-truths, and whole perversions of statement. For instance, I quote as follows: “It is the organization which procured the dropping of a cage containing fifteen non-union workmen down a shaft 1400 feet deep, whereby all fifteen died.”

It is befitting this falsehood that after stating that the men fell 1400 feet the startling announcement should be made that they died! As a matter of fact no such thing ever occurred at any time or anywhere. It is a cut-to-order falsehood, a part of the warp and woof of the conspiracy of the capitalist press to blacken the character of honest men who would not betray and deliver their fellow workers and must therefore be put to death. I challenge you to show where and when this alleged calamity which you charge upon the Western Federation of Miners occurred. Read the report of Carroll D. Wright, national labor commissioner, who investigated the affair and you will find the fact you so viciously falsify honestly stated, but you will not find even a hint that the Western Federation of Miners had anything to do with this appalling calamity. It was a mine accident due to capitalist cupidity in not providing proper safety appliances, and no one connected with the affair ever dreamed of charging it to any other cause.

What do you think of a great, powerful metropolitan daily that resorts to such monstrous falsification to prejudice the public mind and send three workingmen without taint of wrong upon them to the gallows?

Quite true it is that in the fearful war between capital and labor in the Rocky Mountains crime has been committed, but our cool assumption that

capital is spotless as a saint and that labor is the monster of iniquity will no longer deceive the thinking American people.

Men's lives are hanging in the balance here, and the farmers of Boise valley entertain a proper appreciation of the gravity of the situation. It is almost 18 months since Governor Steunenberg was blown to destruction, and passion and prejudice have been largely supplanted by sober sense and reason.

The one break during an otherwise monotonous week occurred yesterday, when Judge Wood, taking judicial cognizance of the published interviews with Harry Orchard, and some comments by Governor Gooding touching upon Orchard's relations to the state, referred the matter for investigation to Prosecuting Attorney Koelsch. Judge Wood made it plain to the state's attorneys that he would not tolerate any interference, by the governor or anybody else, with the course of the trial, and this position of the court lost none of its effect even though the report of Koelsch filed at adjournment today dismissed the incident with a finding that neither the governor nor the newspaper men was actuated by improper motives in the premises.

While it is early to speculate upon the relative advantages gained by either side, it is accepted that the defense scored a point in bringing to the attention of the entire venire the questionable character of evidence such as Orchard is expected to give. One talisman acknowledged that he would be unable to give credence to anything that Orchard might testify to. Following his declaration, at short intervals, two other prospective jurors expressed themselves in similar terms. The state's attorneys were visibly disturbed at the turn, and the fact that they have had continual encounters with jurymen who advance conscientious scruples against accepting circumstantial evidence in capital cases adds to their annoyance.

There was a time when your capitalist press had the power to send honest men to the gallows whose only crime was their refusal to stain their souls in the service of Mammon, but that power is broken forever. You remember John Swinton.² He once did honorable service on the *Times*. I had the honor to count this grand man as my personal friend to the day of his death. It was he who coined the phrase, "The Satanic Press." He knew the press as few others did and he told the truth about it as no other could.

Just at this time the capitalist press is flooding the country with pages of illustrated calumnies upon Moyer and Haywood to poison the public mind against these men that they may be sent to the gallows as felons to

expiate the crime of having been true to their fellow workers and having spurned with contempt the bribes of corporate power.

The mine and smelter trust, the lumber trust that has been stealing the timber lands of the western states, and other thieving combinations, backed by the Standard Oil Company, have complete sway in Idaho and Colorado except for the Western Federation of Miners, and being unable to corrupt its leaders, as it has done the politicians of both parties, it kidnaps them and decrees that they shall pay the penalty with their lives. That is the program and every honest man who knows the facts is up in arms against it and if it should be carried to a successful issue and these workmen “never leave Idaho alive,” as Governor Gooding, the degenerate tool of the Mine Owners’ Association and the lumber trust, has declared, it will be the saddest day that ever dawned for the capitalist class of the United States.

Eugene V. Debs.

Rejected by the *New York Times*, having been received about two weeks after the editorial’s publication. Published as part of “Debs Arraigns the Editors of the Times and the Telegraph of New York” in *Miners’ Magazine*, May 23, 1907, undetermined page.

¹ The editorial in question appeared in print on May 3, 1907. It declared that regardless of the guilt or innocence of Charles Moyer and Bill Haywood in their Idaho trials, “whether they are undesirable citizens is a closed question,” as their only public status was as officials of the Western Federation of Miners — “a criminal organization, an organization of men who made a business, not merely of murder, but of massacre.” See: “Undesirable Citizens,” *New York Times*, vol. 56, whole no. 17,996 (May 3, 1907), p. 6.

² John Swinton (1829-1901) was an editorial writer for the *New York Times* during the decade of the 1860s and for the *New York Sun* from the second half of the 1870s. In 1883 he launched a labor paper in New York City, the eponymous *John Swinton’s Paper*, which terminated for financial reasons in 1887. He would subsequently return to the editorial staff of the *Sun* as well as write an early monograph on the Pullman strike, a project which provided the vehicle for his becoming personally acquainted with Debs. See: John Swinton, *Striking for Life: Labor’s Side of the Labor Question*. (New York: Western W. Wilson, 1894). Reissued as: *A Momentous Question: The Respective Attitudes of Capital and Labor*. (Philadelphia: Keller Publishing Co., 1895).