
War and Hell or Peace and Starvation

by Eugene V. Debs

Published in *St. Louis Labor*, whole no. 578 (Aug. 14, 1915), pg. 1.

Because the workers have everything to lose, including their lives, and absolutely nothing to gain in war, it does not follow under the benevolent rule of capitalism that they have everything to gain and nothing to lose in peace. In Europe just now the workers have war and hell while in this country they are enjoying peace and starvation. That there may be no mistake about the latter condition I quote from the highest capitalistic authority, the Associated Press, which carries the following dispatch:

COLUMBUS, Ohio, July 26th, 1915.— Reports received here today from militia officers who have charge of the distribution of food supplies among destitute families in the Southern Ohio coal mining districts, prompted state officials to send out additional appeals for contributions to aid in the relief work.

The reports showed that a large number of these 10,000 families in the Hocking and Sunday Creek Valleys are dependent on outside aid for food. In describing conditions the word "pitiable" appeared frequently in the reports. There is no strike in these districts, but most of the miners are out of work owing to the shutting down of the mines.

There is much more to the dispatch, but this is enough. There is no war in this country and there is no strike in Ohio. Instead of war and hell such as they have in Europe they have peace and starvation in Ohio. The soldiers who are asphyxiated in the trenches have one advantage in war over their fellow-workers who are starving in the mining camps in peace — their agony is reduced to hours, perhaps minutes, instead of being prolonged into a lifetime. Blessed are they who are speedily reduced to wormfood, for they shall not see their offspring starve in the midst of plenty.

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It is not the misfortune of the miners that condemns them to see their wives and children starving before their eyes in a state bursting with riches they themselves produced; it is their folly and crime in common with the folly and crime of the people among whom they live.

The men who shut down the mines and locked out the miners and are now starving them and their families are not among those crying for relief. They own the mines and control the jobs and can shut out and starve the miners at will — by grace of the miners themselves, an overwhelming majority of whom belong to the same capitalist party their masters do and cast their votes with scrupulous fidelity to perpetuate the boss ownership of the mine in which they work and their own exclusion and starvation at their master's will.

Blessed be the private ownership of the mines, for without it the miners and their wives would lose their individuality, their homes would be broken up, their morality destroyed, their religion wiped out, and they would be denied forever the comfort and solace of poverty and starvation!

When the miners themselves control the mines, once they have learned how to control themselves, they will not lock themselves out and starve themselves and their loved ones to death. The bosses are very kindly doing this for them, but only because the miners themselves, by their votes and otherwise, have willed it.

The bosses lose their power and along with it their jobs when the workers find theirs.

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But I only meant to show that in peace as in war the workers are the losers; if they are not killed in war they are starved in peace; if they escape the trenches they are reserved for the slave pits.

The bosses are always the beneficiaries; the workers always the victims. The Rockefellers never lose and the [John R.] Lawsons never win. Such is capitalism and the workers who side with the bosses and support capitalism politically and otherwise, and are therefore responsible for capitalism, are also responsible for the hell they get in war and the starvation they suffer in peace.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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