
Open Letter and Call for Miners' Day (July 28, 1897)

The conference of labor representatives convened by President Gompers at the request of President Ratchford has adjourned, and the result of the deliberations has been given to the country.¹ The proceedings were harmonious and the action taken eminently satisfactory. The delegates realized the gravity of the occasion and acquitted themselves with becoming credit. All feeling was left on the outside. The ruling purpose was to help the struggling miners.

The declaration and appeal issued by the conference is an admirable presentation of the grievances of the strikers and those seeking to aid them. It is the voice of united labor. If nothing else results from the conference, the unity born of the needs of the hour will be a mighty boon.

All differences were forgotten, and in the desire to help the miners, common ground was found. The representatives of the American Federation of Labor, the Knights of Labor, and the Railway Brotherhoods met in harmonious cooperation in the common cause. This is distinctively a victory for labor, and gives promise of better things for the future. It is to be hoped that this is but the first step toward the complete unification of the hosts of labor.

Thursday, August 5, has been set apart as "Miners' Day." It is to be the red letter day of the great strike. In every hamlet, village, town, and city throughout the nation labor is to assemble in solemn conclave. From a thousand rostrums labor's protest against oppression must be voiced.

The right of peaceable assemblage and free speech, which has been suppressed by injunction in West Virginia and elsewhere, will be demanded in thunder tones. The time has come to call a halt on injunction rule. Let the masses everywhere come forth on August 5 and reaffirm their inalienable rights and swear that they shall be preserved. The laborers, the mechanics, the farmers, the common people of all classes must pour out to make the demonstration continental and monumental.

There must be a veritable uprising of the masses. Peaceable and orderly must be the protest, but nonetheless solemn and emphatic. The uplifted, tear-stained faces of suffering children supplicate for relief and

release. The millions are bound by all the considerations of perishing humanity to come to the rescue. Who shall shirk this sacred duty?

Miners of America, the people are with you in your tragic struggle against rags and famine. You are cursed and your hearts are sore with anguish, but your cause is not without hope. The night is black, but not endless. Take heart of hope, for help is near, and soon you will behold the glories of the sunrise.

Eugene V. Debs.

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¹ At the request of President M.D. Ratchford of the United Mine Workers' Union, a one day conference of American labor leaders was held at Wheeling, West Virginia, in a last ditch effort to bring coal miners from that state out in support of the ongoing coal strike in Pennsylvania and elsewhere.