

Statement to the Press on the McKees Rocks Strike (September 1, 1909)

There is a situation at McKees Rocks unlike any other strike situation in American history.¹ The great plant employing 5,000 workmen is a vast stockade — more properly, a slave pen. The company owns not only the works, but the stores, houses, and all other things, including private jails in which they incarcerate their employees at will.

Years ago the plant sent its agents abroad to scour the countries of the Old World for the cheapest kind of labor, with the result that 16 separate nationalities are represented among the employees, the least of which is the United States. But a very few of the number can speak the English language, a great mass of them are illiterate and are practically the peons of the corporation.

The most striking feature of this great strike is that there is not a union man in the entire body. They were brought to this country for the purpose of destroying unionism and lowering the standard of living to abject slavery. It cannot therefore be charged that the strike is due to mischievous agitation on the part of any labor leader.

It is this that is remarkable about the McKees Rocks strike. It is not the result of unionism, or of any concerted action on the part of employees to raise wages or better their condition but a spontaneous revolt of 6,000 wage serfs whose terrible condition was no longer tolerable even to themselves.

The entire public sympathy is with the strikers and some of the most powerful papers in Pittsburgh are openly pleading the cause of the employees. But in spite of all this, the corporation with its \$25 million of capital and its fabulous resources is holding the entire community in contempt.

Such a situation is bound to open the eyes of the people to the tremendous and irresponsible power concentrated in the hands of a few industrial despots and is certain in the end to be fruitful of good results to the people.

¹ Debs arrived in Ardmore, Oklahoma to address a socialist encampment near that city at Lorena Park. He spoke briefly prior to departing for that meeting with a journalist from the *Ardmore Morning Democrat*.