Reply to John Mitchell

By

EUGENE V. DEBS

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The fifteenth annual convention of the United Mine Workers of America met at Indianapolis, Ind., January 18th and continued in session to and including January 27, 1904. The regular convention was followed by a special session, (from March 5th to March 7th inclusive) made necessary by the failure of the regular convention to effect a satisfactory renewal of the interstate agreement with the operators which expired March 31, 1904.

For a time a strike seemed imminent, there being intense opposition to the wage-reduction which the operators declared to be their ultimatum.

The convention rejected the ultimatum of the operators, but the matter was finally referred to the local unions, and the latter, yielding to the importunities of the national officers, voted to accept the terms of the operators and the threatened strike was averted.

A few days later Eugene V. Debs wrote the following letter in reference to the matter which appeared in the Social Democratic Herald of Milwaukee, Wis., in its issue of April 9, 1904:

**MR. DEBS.**

Terre Haute, Ind., March 31, 1904.

To the S. D. Herald:

Now that the threatened coal strike has ended in a tame surrender, and a two years'
scale at a reduction of wages has been virtually forced upon the miners by a coalition of their leaders with the operators, a certain small and obscure press dispatch—a mere word to the wise, yet sufficient at the time—takes on immense significance.

The delegates to the late Indianapolis convention of miners whom I had occasion to address, will no doubt remember my words, and those who were angered because I told them in plain terms what has since come true almost to the letter, will perhaps be willing to forgive me.

But to the dispatch. Here it is just as it was sent out by the Associated Press from Pittsburg under date of March 6, and just as it appeared in the morning dailies of that date:

"Pittsburg, Pa., March 6.—The Post tomorrow will say:"

"There was by no means a hopeless spirit among the returning coal operators from the Indianapolis convention with the miners which closed Saturday with a disagreement.

"From the best of authority the Post was informed yesterday that the break in the negotiations between the two interests is not a permanent one and that by March 21, another meeting of joint sub-committees will be held quietly. The whole matter will again be discussed among them and a solution to the present difficulty sought. It was further said that there was every reason for believing that the ultimate end of the whole matter would be the acceptance of the lower rate by the miners, or the 85 cents a ton base for pick mining, for the next two years."

Here we have it that operators knew in advance that there would be no strike and that the miners would accept the reduction, and this they knew notwithstanding the fact the convention, by a solid vote at the states, had refused to accept the reduction and virtually declared for a strike.

Let us examine the situation a moment. The
joint convention of miners and operators adjourned sine die March 5. No agreement had been reached. All negotiations were ended. A strike, so the papers declared, was inevitable. Only a miracle could prevent it.

The miners and operators returned to their homes. Preparations began for war. It was at this juncture that the above dispatch went out from Pittsburg. It was doubtless intended as a "tip" to the capitalists and stock gamblers of the country, and was issued immediately upon the return of the Pennsylvania operators from the Indianapolis convention.

Pittsburg, be it remembered, is the home of President Robbins of the Pittsburg Coal Co. and floor leader and spokesman of the operators in all joint conventions with the miners. It is quite evident, therefore, that "the best of authority" quoted in the above dispatch was none other than Robbins and it is equally evident that he knew what he was talking about, for his prediction of surrender, made in face of the fact that the national convention had virtually declared for war, was fulfilled to the letter.

The question is, did Robbins, chief of the operators have an understanding with Mitchell, president of the miners? It must be admitted that it looks that way. Proof may be lacking, but the circumstances combine to make that conclusion almost inevitable.

When the miners first met in convention President Mitchell and the other leaders were quite aggressive. They were going to sweep all opposition before them and get what they wanted for they had an organization that could and would carry the day.

A set of demands, including increased wages, was at once formulated and the performance began, Mitchell, taking the floor for the
miners, proved by the facts and figures that they were asking only what was reasonable, that the financial reports of the coal companies showed large increases in profits over the preceding years, that the operators could well afford to make the concessions and that they, the miners, were "terribly in earnest" and that the United Mine Workers of America would under no possible circumstances "take a backward step."

As the fight progressed the leaders of the miners made one concession after another until they had finally surrendered everything. But the operators were not satisfied. They had come with love in their hearts and a made-to-order, warranted-to-fit reduction of wages in their grips, just because they were all in the same economic class and their interests were therefore identical, and to prove it they permitted their own leaders to scale down the bulging wages of the opulent coal diggers.

But the delegates, having given up everything, balked at last. Even Mitchell's "masterful effort" in behalf of the operators fell flat.

The reduction would not go down.

The convention voted to fight and the delegates went home to prepare for hostilities.

Now read the dispatch again in the light of what followed.

As soon as the convention adjourned, the leaders of the miners began to work upon the rank and file, very many of whom are so pitifully ignorant that they look upon a union official as a Chinaman does upon his Joss.

President Mitchell, from being "terribly in earnest" in behalf of the miners, became the special pleader of the operators.

Oh, what a transformation!
Mitchell, the labor leader, and Robbins, the labor exploiter, pooling issues and joining hands to force down the wages of the mine slaves!

Oh, what a spectacle!

With all possible haste the national and state leaders made their rounds among the faithful. The “dangerous” locals and districts were all visited and mass meetings held to save the operators.

The slaves had instinctively rebelled against the wage cut, and the rebellion must be put down by their own leaders if they expected the plaudits of the capitalist exploiters and the “well done” of the pulpit, press and public.

Alternate pleas, warnings and threats were turned on until the fires were put out and the day was saved for the operators.

Only a little while ago Gompers warned the capitalists that reductions of wages would not be tolerated and solemnly enjoined his followers to resist to the last.

Mitchell, Shaffer and other lieutenants of Gompers are the active allies of the capitalists in enforcing reductions.

Watch the developments!

To conclude: The United Mine Workers of America has been struck by lightning.

Eugene V. Debs.

This letter was answered by Mr. John Mitchell and his colleagues in a communication which appeared in the same paper on May 21, 1904, as follows:

MR. MITCHELL AND HIS COLLEAGUES.

Indianapolis, Ind., May 7, 1904.
Editor Social-Democratic Herald:

In your issue of April 9th you publish an
article over the signature of Eugene V. Debs containing a mass of misstatements with the apparent purpose of making your readers believe that the officials of the United Mine Workers of America, and particularly President Mitchell have betrayed the trust reposed in them by their constituents by using their official position for the benefit of the employers instead of for the welfare of the employes.

Mr. Debs' knowledge of mining affairs is limited, by virtue of his lack of time and opportunity for personal investigation, and must of necessity be general and superficial. He has not sufficient knowledge of the mining industry to be a competent critic of our trade politics, and yet, if he had confined himself to a criticism of those policies, they might have passed unchallenged, so far as we are concerned. But when, without investigation of the facts, he takes an Associated Press dispatch, distorts it to suit his own purpose and jumbles it up with a number of other things that never existed except in his own diseased imagination, in order to prove that the officials of the United Mine Workers are dishonest, we believe that justice to ourselves and the organization we represent demands that his statements shall be refuted and his purpose laid bare.

Men of experience in the labor movement usually pass by, unheeded, the insinuations circulated by the paid agents of capital for the purpose of destroying their influence and weakening the power of resistance of their organization, but, when those insinuations are uttered and circulated by a man who for years has leaned upon the sympathies of the wage workers as the crucified martyr of a lost
cause, the halo of glory he has painted about himself cannot shield him from the contempt of honest men. What is this wonderful press dispatch around which Mr. Debs' imagination has built such a magnificent net work? We reproduce it from his own article:

"Pittsburg, Pa., March 6, 1904.

"There was by no means a hopeless spirit among the returning coal operators from the Indianapolis convention which the miners closed Saturday with a disagreement.

"From the best authority the Post was informed yesterday that the break in the negotiations between the two interests is not a permanent one and that by March 21st, another meeting of joint sub-committees will be held quietly. The whole matter will again be discussed among them and a solution to the present difficulty sought. It was further said that there was every reason for believing that the ultimate end of the whole matter would be the acceptance of the lower rate by the miners, or the 85 cents a ton base for pick mining, for the next two years."

"Here," says Mr. Debs, "we have it that the operators knew in advance that there would be no strike." That statement is false. The dispatch does not assert that the operators knew there would be no strike and nothing but a warped mind could so construe it. The United Mine Workers' convention on March 7th passed a resolution submitting the acceptance or rejection of the ultimatum of the operators to a referendum vote of the members affected. The vote was taken on the afternoon of March 15th. It was sent by the local tellers in sealed envelopes to national headquarters, and these envelopes were not opened until the national tellers opened them on March 17th. It would have been impossible for the Pittsburg correspondent, Frank Robbins, John Mitchell, or even the versatile and prophetic Mr. Debs to have known on
March 6th what the result of that vote would be.

That is misstatement No. 1 refuted.

In a subsequent interview in the Terre Haute Sunday Tribune Mr. Debs dares anyone to put his finger on a single word that is not true or deny a single allegation. There is scarcely a truthful statement in the entire article. Let us be specific. The joint convention of Miners and Operators adjourned sine die March 5th. No agreement had been reached, but negotiations were not broken off as asserted by Mr. Debs. When it became apparent that the operators would not move from their final proposition of five and fifty-five one hundredths per cent. reduction, and the miners must either accept that proposition or strike, the sub-scale committee, composed of two delegates from each of the four states represented, selected by the representatives from those states, and eight operators selected in a similar manner, publicly withdrew from the conference for a few minutes and held a consultation. As the miners had not yet decided upon their line of policy and might not be able to do so for some time, it was decided that the scale committee should re-convene on March 21st at which time the operators would be notified whether the miners had decided to strike or not. Consequently negotiations were continued.

This is misstatement No. 2 refuted.

Mr. Debs says, "The miners and operators returned to their homes. Preparations began for war. It was at this juncture that the above dispatch went out from Pittsburg."

The dispatch was sent out from Pittsburg March 6th. The miners' convention did not
adjourn until March 7th and the delegates could not have been at home preparing for war at the time alleged.

That is misstatement No. 3 refuted.

Again Mr. Debs says, "Pittsburg, be it remembered, is the home of President Robbins of the Pittsburg Coal Co. and the floor leader and spokesman of the operators in all the joint conventions with the miners. It is quite evident, therefore, that 'the best authority,' quoted in the above dispatch, was none other than Mr. Robbins." When the joint convention adjourned on March 5th the miners immediately went into convention to outline their policy. It did not finish its work until the afternoon of March 7th. A delegation of operators remained in Indianapolis awaiting the result. Frank Robbins was one of that delegation. He did not leave Indianapolis until the evening of March 7th and could not, therefore, have been the returning coal operator quoted in the dispatch.

That is misstatement No. 4 refuted.

We quote further from Mr. Debs, "The national convention had (on March 5th) virtually declared for war" and further on he says: "The convention voted to fight and the delegates went home to prepare for hostilities." It had done nothing of the kind. Mr. Debs knows as well as any man that the declaring of a strike does not always mean success to the strikers. His experience in 1894 is conclusive proof of that fact. A repetition of the strike of 1894 would have been as disastrous to the United Mine Workers of America as that strike was to the American Railway Union. Many of the delegates believed that it would be better for the miners to accept the reduction offered than to take the chances of war, es-
pecially when the employers had selected the battle ground, but they were bound by instructions and could not violate them. When the officials were approached by these delegates they advised them to obey their instructions. To meet this situation the convention on March 5th selected a committee composed of two members from each district to formulate plans to meet the crisis. The committee reported on March 7th and recommended that the ultimatum of the operators be submitted to the miners affected for their acceptance or rejection, the vote to be taken between the hours of one and six P. M. of March 15th, and the mines to be idle that afternoon in order to give every member an opportunity to vote who desired to. The officials supported that proposition and it was agreed to by the convention. It will thus be seen that there was no virtual declaration of war on March 5th and that the convention had not voted to fight.

That is misstatement No. 5 refuted.

These are the alleged truths upon which Mr. Debs builds his flimsy insinuations and attempts to destroy the reputation of honest men. We have refuted them. Every delegate who attended the convention knows our statements are true. There was no secrecy about these actions. If Mr. Debs had wanted to know the truth, a simple investigation would have revealed it to him. It is very evident that he was not seeking for the truth. The innuendoes used by Mr. Debs clearly prove this assertion. Here are some of them:

"The question is, did Robbins, chief of the operators, have an understanding with Mitchell, president of the miners?"

"But the delegates, having given up every-
thing, balked at last. Even Mitchell's 'masterful effort' in behalf of the operators fell flat."

"As soon as the convention adjourned the leaders of the miners began to work upon the rank and file, many of whom are so pitifully ignorant that they look upon a union official as a Chinaman does upon his Joss."

"Mitchell, the labor leader, and Robbins, the labor exploiter, pooling issues and joining hands to force down the wages of the mine slaves. Oh, what a transformation!"

There is some more along the same line, but that is the gist of it. Neither Mr. Debs nor any other person ever heard Mr. Mitchell make a "masterful" or any other kind of an effort in behalf of the operators. Every effort he has ever made has been in behalf of the wage workers. The miners have something substantial to show for these efforts in directing their organization. Even after the reduction they have accepted has been taken off they have over seventy per cent. higher wages than they had in 1897, from two to four hours per day less labor, improved conditions in the mines, and the privilege of expressing their opinion on all social, political and religious questions without fear of discharge. We doubt very much if Mr. Debs with all his organizing ability, dynamic energy, prophetic vision and brilliant oratory can show results for his labor equivalent to these for the present generation of men. If higher wages, shorter hours, healthier and safer conditions of employment and greater freedom of speech is the result of "pooling issues with Robbins, the labor exploiter," it would seem to be a very profitable pool for the wage workers. But Debs knows that no such pool exists. He knows, or at least ought to know, that these
results have been obtained through a strong organization intelligently directed. If we were disposed to use the same methods as Mr. Debs we could with perfect propriety assert that “Proof may be lacking, but the circumstances combine to make the conclusion almost inevitable” that he is being paid by the operators to destroy the United Mine Workers in order that the operators may dominate the miners as they did prior to 1897. We would not be mean enough to even insinuate such a thing. Debs asserts that many of the miners are so “pitifully ignorant that they look upon a union official as a Chinaman does upon his Joss.” He knew that statement was wrong when he made it. There are degrees of intelligence amongst miners as there is amongst all classes of people. Taken as a whole their intelligence will compare favorably with any class of our citizens, rich or poor. They are men that cannot be led about by the whims of anybody. Any proposition presented to them for consideration must appeal to their intelligence before they will support it, and they do not hesitate to take issue with a union official whenever in their judgment the union official is wrong. Some of them undoubtedly love and respect their officials, but not one can be found who looks upon them as a deity or as a Chinaman looks upon his Joss.

The entire expression is an insult to men who are the equals of Mr. Debs physically, morally and intellectually. He speaks about the prophecy made in his speech at Indianapolis during the Mine Workers’ convention. What was that prophecy. He asserted that we had reached the crest of the wave of so-called industrial activity, that the turn of the tide was downward, and no matter how strong
our organization might be, we would be compelled to accept reductions in our wages. This prophecy was made while negotiations were pending with the operators and they were still insisting upon a reduction of fifteen per cent. If Mr. Mitchell had made a public utterance of that kind at the time Mr. Debs made it, the miners would have been compelled to accept a fifteen per cent reduction instead of a five and one-half per cent. The public can judge for itself who is the person that betrayed his trust, whether it was Mr. Debs, who announced that the miners must accept a reduction when the operators were clamoring for fifteen per cent off, or Mr. Mitchell, who fought the issue until the last possible penny had been obtained. Mr. Debs apparently assumes that as a friend of the miners it was his duty to inform them of the perfidy of their officials. What a wonderful friendship his must be. The position of Mr. Mitchell and his associates was expressed in the miners’ convention of March 5th and was carried by the afternoon papers of that date. The dispatch which he quotes was published in the morning papers of March 6th. On March 7th the mine workers’ convention decided to submit the acceptance or rejection of the proposition to the miners themselves, and instructed the national officials to send a copy of their recommendation to every local union. If Mr. Debs was the friend of the miners that he pretends to be, and if he had any proof of dishonesty on the part of the officials, or of collusion between them and the operators to reduce the wages of the miners, he should have furnished them the evidence of it before the vote was taken. Mr. Debs had no such proof and we know that it did not exist.

From the Library of
THEODORE DEBS
When the bituminous miners of Indiana in convention at Terre Haute, knowing the facts, passed a resolution condemning the action of Mr. Debs, he immediately began to whine. In the interview published in the Terre Haute Sunday Tribune, above referred to, he asserts that "Labor may always be relied upon to crucify its friends." What a woeful wail coming from the lips of a man who started the cry of "crucify them" against Mr. Mitchell and his associates.

Much more might be said in reply to the falsities contained in his article, but enough has been told. Whether he is alone in this attack or is merely carrying out a preconcerted plan to destroy the trade union movement we do not know. He may succeed in injuring us personally, but the trade union movement is based upon eternal principles of evolutionary development and he can no more destroy it or divert it from the fulfillment of its destiny, than he can destroy the waters of the Mississippi with a stone or change its channel with a Chinese chopstick.

JOHN MITCHELL.
T. L. LEWIS.
W. B. WILSON.

This was followed by the reply of Mr. Debs in the issue of the Social Democratic Herald of June 4th and republished in the issue of June 25th, as follows:

MR. DEBS.

Terre Haute, Ind., May 28, 1904.

To the S. D. Herald:

The brief article I had in the Herald of April 9th in reference to the wage reduction forced upon the coal miners by the mine owners, as
sisted by the national officers of the United
Mine Workers, has not been ignored as Mr.
Mitchell said it would be when it was first
brought to his attention. It required Mr. Mit-
chell to summon the aid of his colleagues, six
weeks of time and several columns of space to
point out the "misstatements," and so hope-
less did they find the task that they had to con-
fess failure in vulgar resort to personal
detracti0n.

The alleged reply consists wholly of words.
From first to last it is a quibble over minor
points. Every material fact is evaded; every ir-
relevant detail is brought out and made to do
duty in the circular procession.

The essential truth of my statement has not
and will not be denied. It can not be answered
by personal abuse, nor extinguished by a de-
luge of meaningless words.

Suppose I were foolish enough to pose as a
"martyr," what has that to do with the case?
Does it alter the fact that Mr. Mitchell, Mr.
Wilson and Mr. Lewis used all the power of
their official positions to help the operators re-
duce the wages of the miners, and this after
Mr. Mitchell had proved conclusively that the
reduction was "unwarranted" and after he had
declared he would never consent to it?

Never mind about the "diseased imagination,"
the "crucified martyr," and the particular hour
of adjournment. Is the above statement true
or is it false?

Mr. Mitchell virtually admits it and his ex-
planation places him in the attitude of a gen-
eral on a field of battle, first assuring his
soldiers that their cause is just and that they
must face the enemy like men, and then, on
the eve of the fight, turning about and saying
to the same soldiers who had so lustily cheered him: "I have been in conference with the general on the other side and he has convinced me that we are taking desperate chances of being whipped, and so I advise that you accept the terms of the enemy and retreat from the field without a fight."

As to the personal insinuations which are supposed to serve where argument fails, I regret as much as Mr. Mitchell seems to enjoy the meagerness of my service to the working class, but little as that service may amount to, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is not of a quality to inspire the capitalist press to assure me that I am "the greatest labor leader on earth."

And little as I may claim, as compared with Mr. Mitchell, there is yet enough to include an almost fatal sunstroke, sustained on a public highway, the only place allowed me under a federal injunction, while rallying a body of coal miners to unite in the fight for an increase of wages and join the United Mine Workers of America.

Mr. Mitchell claims that I accused him of dishonesty. I deny it. No such charge was made by me. I am concerned with acts and facts and not with motives. Mr. Mitchell's honesty is not the question. Let that be conceded. Results remain the same.

Now what are the questions in controversy?

First—In my article of April 9th I incorporated a press dispatch sent out by the Pittsburg Post on March 6th, saying that it, the Post, had it upon the "best of authority" that there would be no strike, that the miners would accept the reduction and that a two years' contract would be signed.
The dispatch was sent out after the convention of miners at Indianapolis had turned down the ultimatum of the operators, and a strike seemed so imminent that the press uniformly declared that "only a miracle could prevent it."

The prediction made in the dispatch came true to the letter. There was no strike, the reduction was accepted and the contract was made for two years.

The dispatch was undoubtedly sent out on the "best authority." It was true prophecy. Now, the question is, who is the "best authority" as to whether the miners will strike or not? Did the Post speak upon such authority? The outcome verifies it. Again, did the Post have such authority, or did it lie? The Post is friendly to Mr. Mitchell, will he say it lied? Will he have the Post name its "best authority?"

I inferred that the Post's "best authority" was Mr. F. L. Robbins, leader of the mine owners, who lives at Pittsburg, where the Post is published, and then I asked, "Did Robbins, leader of the operators have an understanding with Mitchell, president of the miners," and I answered, "It must be admitted that it looks that way."

This is the point that excites the wrath of the union officials. I now repeat it, To me it looks that way. I cannot avoid that conclusion.

The only error I made was in the date of adjournment. The convention adjourned March 7th, not the 5th. Upon this point I stand corrected, but it is wholly immaterial. The convention refused the ultimatum of the operators on the 5th, the press reports saying "the vote was cast in the face of the opposition of Presi-
dent Mitchell and the other national officers." Next day the Post sent out its prophetic dispatch. That is the point at issue, the action of the convention and the Post's prophetic announcement next day. The date of adjournment does not alter the fact in the smallest degree.

"But," says Mr. Mitchell, "Mr. Robbins had not returned to Pittsburg and therefore could not have given the Post the information—that disposes of the 'misstatement.'" Not quite. The Post had a representative at Indianapolis and there are telegraph wires between there and Pittsburg.

When I said that in my opinion there was an "understanding" between Robbins and Mitchell I simply meant what I said. The men are on friendly personal terms. There is nothing wrong about that. When "they shook hands in the presence of the delegates and engaged in earnest conversation and were loudly applauded by the convention," there was no objection to that.

But the miners voted down the operators in spite of Mitchell's protest. That is a fact, is it not?

And when the operators were voted down, Mitchell and the national officers of the union appealed to the referendum.

Would they have resorted to the referendum if the delegates had voted to accept instead of rejecting the reduction?

The national officers also had themselves authorized by the delegates to "explain the situation" to the local unions in sending out the vote, and this "explanation" took every form that could be devised to whip the rank and file into submission to the operators.
As an instance of this "explanation" the speech of Mr. Lewis at Linton was a shining success. He was given full credit by the capitalist press for having turned defeat into victory and carrying the day for the reduction and against the strike.

But to complete the evidence. When the operators were turned down by the miners' convention and a strike seemed inevitable, the Pittsburg Post coolly declared that it had it upon the "best authority" that there would be no strike, that the miners would give in; and then it went on to state precisely what the basis of final settlement would be and that the contract would be signed for two years. Less than two weeks later all these things came to pass to the very letter.

Now this "best authority" was doubtless Robbins speaking through the "returning operators" mentioned in the dispatch, who knew that the matter would go to the local unions, and had the assurance that Mitchell and the national officers would use all their influence in favor of the reduction and that with the national officers on their side the referendum vote would defeat the strike and enforce the reduction.

In other words, the operators felt certain that the union officials could and would swing the vote of the organization and the prophecy that was fulfilled was made accordingly.

But even if Mr. Mitchell gave the operators no single word of assurance, his actions and utterances were sufficient and the fact remains unchanged. They knew his position and counted on his influence, and he did not disappoint them.

Notwithstanding this more than 67,000 members of his organization, representing its high-
est intelligence, voted against the reduction, rejecting his advice and impeaching his leadership, and I happen to know that a large proportion of them heartily approve and are ready to stand by every statement contained in my article.

Here are a few lines just received from a member of the Miners’ union: “I want to thank you for telling the truth about the settlement. The operators beat us with the help of our own officers. Six months ago a man would have been mobbed if he had said a word about Mitchell in this neighborhood. Now you can hear him condemned everywhere. You have more friends among the miners here today than John Mitchell.”

The four alleged “misstatements” Mr. Mitchell claims to have disposed of in his attempted denial are in fact one and the same, and hinge upon the simple error in the date of adjournment, which, as I have shown, is utterly inconsequential and has no bearing whatever upon the material facts of the statement which stand as wholly unimpeached as when they were first written down.

To sum up, here is substantially what I stated: That Mr. Mitchell led the miners in their conference with the operators; that he said: “This year the demands of the miners referring to the absolute run of mine basis and the present wage scale must be met or the mines will cease to produce coal,” that he demanded a uniform wage for all inside and outside labor and a 7 cent differential; that he advised his followers to stand firm; that he declared he would never yield; that the United Mine Workers would take no backward step; that the reduction proposed by the operators was unwarranted and would not be accepted; that
last year’s earnings of the Pittsburg Coal Co. were $20,000,000, showing a large increase in profits; that he and the miners were “terribly in earnest,” etc., etc.

I have the reports before me and the proof that this was his attitude and these his utterances is simply overwhelming.

What next? Why, a few days later, we hear him saying to his followers: “Your national officers want you to accept this cut.”

What do you think of it, Mr. Mitchell?

Would it be possible for an enemy to place you in a more unfavorable light than you are placed by your own official words and acts?

You said all these things and did not mean them. You yielded one point and then another, after declaring you would not yield; finally when you had surrendered all your demands you declared that you would insist upon the old scale, and that you would not recede from it. But you did recede from it. You not only yielded everything you originally demanded, but you agreed to a reduction. Not only this, but you did all in your official power to enforce that reduction.

Are these facts or are they falsehoods, and if they are facts, they accord perfectly with your capitalistic philosophy that “there is no necessary conflict between capital and labor.” It is only necessary for labor to have leaders with the civic federation label upon them and peacefully submit to slavery and degradation.

What right has Mr. Mitchell to talk about the capitalist press as the “paid agents of capital?” Is it not the capitalist press that has poured out its fulsome eulogy upon Mr. Mitchell and heralded him as the greatest leader of labor in all history?

It is my right, Mr. Mitchell, to arraign that
press, as the enemy of labor, but not your right, for you are a prime favorite with that press and the class who own that press, and when you denounce it you are guilty of ingratitude to the power that largely made you what you are.

Is it a sure sign that I am trying to destroy the Miners' union because I am opposed to the reduction of the Miners' wages? Is this the best specimen of pure and simple labor union logic these gentlemen have to offer?

What I am really trying to destroy is the mine owners' influence in the mine workers' union. To that I plead guilty and there I draw the line. The operators know it and hate me accordingly. The mine workers, most of them, do not, as yet, know it and they share the hatred of their masters. But I can wait.

It is true that the district convention of miners, held here, denounced me; it is also true that I said in reference to such action that "labor may generally be relied upon to crucify its friends." This Mr. Mitchell is pleased to call a "whine." These words were used to characterize the action of the men who said, "we have got to denounce Debs to set ourselves right with the operators." They understood me and this is sufficient. And mark me, Mr. Mitchell, and don't forget it, that body of miners, or their successors, will rescind those resolutions, and when they are finally directed where they properly belong, you may have less occasion than you fancy you now have, even with the operators on your side, for self-congratulation.

In the meantime I have no resentment but entire sympathy for those who denounced me. They acted for their masters and simply emphasized their own wage slavery.
REPLY TO JOHN MITCHELL

Mine owner Robbins was wise when he said to the miners' delegates: "The union between the operators and miners has been a partnership for several years that I have been proud of."

There is a whole volume in that paragraph. And there is another in the utterance of Vice President T. L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers when the strike seemed certain; "If Senator Hanna had lived there would have been no strike. His influence would have been powerful enough to force the operators to listen to reason."

What a commentary upon the United Mine Workers and its leaders!

Operator Robbins and labor leader Mitchell and his colleagues, Governor Peabody and President Gompers, David Parry and Sherman Bell all belong to the same capitalistic political party that supports the same capitalist administration that assassinates eight-hour and anti-injunction bills and treats labor like a galley slave.

To me it seems not only like sarcasm, but positively tragic to hear Mr. Mitchell and his colleagues boast of the "great benefits" that have come to the miners and the "substantial" things they are now enjoying in the face of the fact that thousands of them are totally idle, that those employed in the coal fields of Indiana today do not average above two days of work a week, that they are in debt, housed in shacks and eke out a miserable existence as the coal digging victims of wage slavery.

These miners get 85 cents for digging a ton of coal for which the people in that immediate vicinity pay $3.50. The operators, of course, get rich; the miners, of course, stay poor. Truly, an ideal arrangement.
Small wonder that the “interstate movement” perfectly suits the operators, that the United Mine Workers under the leadership of Mitchell, Wilson and Lewis is so satisfactory to them that they agree to collect its dues, by deducting them from the wages of the miners, without which the union would go to pieces; and this is one of the reasons why Mr. Mitchell did not dare to break with Mr. Robbins, and why Mr. Mitchell helped Mr. Robbins to force the wage reduction upon the miners.

Mr. Mitchell has profound regard for the good will of the capitalist and great consideration for his feelings, interests and general importance, so great that he issues a proclamation to the miners of the country calling upon them to refrain from work while a capitalist is being buried, with not the remotest thought of showing such extreme respect to the memory of the dead when instead of a rich capitalist it is only a hundred and eighty poor coal diggers, stark and mutilated, blown up in a mine through the criminal negligence of the capitalist owners for whom they were digging up profits.

Mr. Mitchell sees “no necessary conflict between labor and capital.” Then why the United Mine Workers? What excuse has it to exist? Its whole record is one of conflict, honorable conflict, waged under difficulties and involving hunger, rags and death, and every page of it tells in harrowing phrase of the necessary conflict between the capitalist and the wage worker, the exploiter and his victim, the master and his slave.

If there is no “necessary” conflict, why any at all? Why do not the operators raise wages, instead of lowering them? What have the miners been striking for all these years? Is it
not because they had to fight tooth and nail for every particle they have ever received? Has all this been unnecessary? Does Mr. Mitchell draw salary as president of the Mine Workers to continue this "unnecessary" conflict, or to put an end to it by letting the operators control his union and advising the miners to thankfully accept what the operators see fit to allow them.

It is doubtless because he sees no "necessary" conflict between capital and labor that Mr. Mitchell is a Republican in politics. He also claims to be a friend of President Roosevelt—and so is Sherman Bell.

Mr. Mitchell's friend Roosevelt hasn't the power as chief executive and commander-in-chief of the nation to prevent the snuffing out of the state constitution, the brutal banishment of Mother Jones, the burial alive of that real labor leader, C. H. Moyer, and the murder and mobbing of miners in Colorado by the military criminals in authority.

Grover Cleveland served the capitalist by invading the state of Illinois and Theodore Roosevelt serves them just as loyally by keeping out of Colorado.

President Roosevelt may be your friend, Mr. Mitchell, but he is not the friend of the exploited class you are supposed to stand for. He is not my friend, nor do I belong to the same party or stand for the same principles.

Mr. Mitchell says "there is no necessary conflict between capital and labor." I say there is no possible peace between them. Every hour of truce is at the price of slavery. This is Mr. Mitchell's fundamental error. From this all others spring and he has yet to face their consequences.

Personally, I have not the slightest feeling
about the matter. There was a time when I admired and applauded Mitchell’s leadership. I thought I saw the coming of a man. But alas! Little by little I have seen him succumb to the blandishments of the plutocrats. He is today their beau ideal as a labor leader.

The man was never born who can honestly serve both capitalist and wage worker, both master and slave.

Time will tell!

There is a mass of evidence and other matter I have had to omit. Space will not allow its use and I have already exceeded proper bounds. I have a proposition:

Messrs. Mitchell, Wilson and Lewis allude to themselves as “men who are the equals of Mr. Debs physically, morally and intellectually.” Good! Now then, I want the truth and shall assume that these gentlemen want the same. There is not space in a paper for full discussion of this question, nor is such discussion satisfactory or final. I aver that the essential facts set forth in my article in the Herald of April 9th are true and can be maintained by overwhelming proof. Mr. Mitchell says there is scarcely a truthful statement in the entire article. He also says “there is no necessary conflict between capital and labor.” I challenge Mr. Mitchell to meet me upon these issues before the members of his own organization, the miners of Illinois, his own state, and of Spring Valley, the city in which he lives. Mr. Mitchell may have both Mr. Wilson and Mr. Lewis to help him.

Let the case be presented to the miners whose union I am charged with attempting to destroy and let them render the verdict.

Eugene V. Debs.
Supplementary to the above the following and final letter of Mr. Debs appeared in the same paper, July 2, 1904:

MR. DEBS.

Terre Haute. Ind., June 24, 1904.

To the S. D. Herald:

Some time ago I said that John Mitchell, president of the United Mine Workers, and Francis L. Robbins, president of the Pittsburg Coal company, understood each other perfectly in reference to the settlement of the threatened coal strike which reduced the miners' wages; and that Mr. Robbins and the operators had the assistance of Mr. Mitchell in enforcing the reduction and were able to predict it with accuracy long before it was finally agreed to by the rank and file of the miners. Mr. Mitchell denied it over his signature and Mr. Robbins, according to the Pittsburg Labor World, said it was a "contemptible lie."

The Pittsburg Dispatch of June 7th has an extended account of an incident that may not be corroborative, but it is certainly significant, and like the proverbial straw, shows which way the wind blows.

Mr. Mitchell has gone to Europe and it is not my purpose to attack him in his absence, but simply to put this incident on record for future reference.

The article in question is headed with a five column cut of an elaborate banquet scene, the guests consisting of mine owners, mine workers and capitalistic politicians. At the table of honor are Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Robbins, with Patrick Dolan, district president, between them, as the central figure and toastmaster of the evening.
Mr. Dolan's boast is that he has never read a book on economics and he proves it daily in his works. In a recent action for libel brought against a local paper by a couple of organizers for the Socialist Labor Party, Mr. Dolan testified for the defendant. In answer to a question he said that Socialism and anarchy were one and the same thing. Asked how that was, he said: "They are both against the flag." If the rearmost straggler in the rank and file were as far advanced as Mr. Dolan, his leader, the darkness would be complete and the cause of labor all but hopeless.

Such a leader is conclusive evidence that there are vast stretches between his followers and daylight.

What Mr. Dolan does not know about labor makes him hate Socialism and fits him to preside at a banquet where workers are used as dummies to renew allegiance to the reign of their masters.

The Dispatch article has the following double head-lines:

"MINERS START A BOOM FOR COMBINE LEADER"—"F. L. ROBBINS APPROVED FOR UNITED STATES SENATOR AT DINNER IN HONOR OF LABOR OFFICIALS"—"THEIR GRACEFUL COMPLIMENT."

The account in part follows:

"In the presence of the recipient of the honor, coal operators and organized coal miners of western Pennsylvania formally proposed Francis L. Robbins, president of the Pittsburg Coal company, for the United States senate at a banquet last night at the Henry hotel. The banquet was in honor of John Mitchell, president of the United Mine Workers, and District Secretary William Dodds, to wish the two godspeed on a European tour they are about to make in the
interest of their organization. Even Mitchell joined in the tribute to Robbins, which was taken up by others."

"Although hailed as the next senator from Pennsylvania, Mr. Robbins confined his remarks to a eulogy of Mitchell and Dodds."

* * * *

"Mitchell and Dodds were presented with diamond mementoes of the esteem of the operators and miners."

"Secretary Dodds started the Robbins movement. Dodds is secretary of a district of 37,000 organized miners. He formally proposed Mr. Robbins for United States senator. The coal president was cheered for several minutes. He said he attended the banquet to do honor to two friends."

"The presence of operators and miners," said Mr. Robbins, "defines the proper relation between capital and labor, employer and employed. One thing has led up to the present state of affairs: Miners recognize that conservative men must be placed at the head of their organization." * * *

"If the future shows a change it will be because labor does not continue to put conservative men at the head of their organization."

"THE ONLY MENACE TO ORGANIZED LABOR NOW IS SOCIALISM, AND SOCIALISM MUST BE RELEGATED TO THE REAR."

"Mr. Mitchell then spoke and among other things is reported as saying that:

"He believes harmonious relations between organized capital and organized labor can be obtained without labor surrendering any of its rights or capitalism surrendering its rights."

The foregoing appeals strongly for comment, especially the statement of Mr. Robbins, coal baron and labor leader, that Socialism is a menace to organized labor, but I will only say that Mr. Robbins knows quite well that Socialism is a menace only to the class suggested by his name and that this prompts him to assail it while he places diamond decorations upon the "conservative" leaders of his coal-digging wage-slaves.
The fact that Mr. John Mitchell, labor leader, sees nothing wrong in accepting a diamond badge from the rich and designing exploiters of his poor and pilfered followers; that he evidently has not the least conception of what such a testimony really symbolizes, may serve sufficiently in mitigation to shield him from merited contempt and condemnation.

Eugene V. Debs.

The editions of the Herald containing the letters were speedily exhausted, and as there seemed to be an increasing interest in the controversy, it was finally concluded to publish the correspondence in pamphlet form to supply the great demand.