

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 13, NO. 338.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, JUNE 3, 1913.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

PENNSYLVANIA VS. WEST VIRGINIA.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE Philadelphia *Evening Times* came out, very much in time to encourage and revive the hope that redress would come to the workers of West Virginia, in particular, to bleeding civilization in that state, in general.

At a time when Gov. Hatfield, his Chiltons and his Goffs, seemed to be having things all their own way, the *Evening Times* published, May 5, two interviews with Pennsylvania coal operators, that did more than help illumine the situation in the benighted bailiwick of Gov. Hatfield. The interviews were and continue to be an earnest and positive help.

One interview told the story of how, when the mine operators first began exploiting the rich, soft coal fields of West Virginia, they invited the rugged mountaineers of the region into the mines. Approximately 46 per cent. of the miners located on these fields to-day are direct descendants of the original miners. The operator first gained control of a vast acreage of mountain territory, difficult of access. He then organized a corps of mine guards, recruited from the slums of the cities of the east, from the penitentiaries, and very largely outlaws. The operator's third step was to perfect his "company store" system which his employes were compelled to patronize. The force wherewith to encompass that was the corps of mine guards. The miners thus became serfs and the "company stores" developed into means of ruthless taxation and extortion. The prices were so exorbitant that the "company store" crowded the mine as a source of revenue. This semi-feudal system once established, the operators grew into local despots. The slightest remonstrance was treated as rebellion; the rebel was called an "agitator" and run out of the region; telegrams were censored, and the postoffice was turned into a company office.

The second interview explains the frankness of the first. So far as the picture is

concerned that it draws of the West Virginia coal fields, it is the same, and is summed up as “a rule of absolute despotism, worse, if possible, than feudalism.” The feature of the second interview is that it sets forth the sympathy of the Pennsylvania coal operators with the feudalized West Virginia miner, and candidly explains the reason for the sympathy. The Pennsylvania soft coal operator sees in the rebellion of the West Virginia miners his opportunity to drive the West Virginia operator out of the lucrative soft coal trade at tidewater points, in which the latter has “too long enjoyed an unfair advantage.” The freight, which, owing to the greater distance, is higher from the soft coal fields of Pennsylvania to Norfolk than from West Virginia to the same port, in itself gives the West Virginia operator an advantage. But that would not be enough to cut out Pennsylvania soft coal. To the advantage of less freight, the West Virginia operators add the advantage of huge profits from the “company” or pluck-me store. With higher wages prevailing in West Virginia, and the pluck-me store abolished, West Virginia soft coal could not so readily undersell Pennsylvania.

The pictures of the situation are luminous; the admission of the reason for Pennsylvania’s soft coal operators’ throwing the weight of their influence on the side of the West Virginia miners renders the situation still more luminous. It is the old, fated, fight of bourgeois against feudalists. It was seen in Great Britain when the bourgeois pushed the Corn Laws through. It is now seen repeated in the posture of Pennsylvania, towards the feudality of West Virginia. The bourgeois social status being the further advanced, feudal West Virginia is bound to lose. Pennsylvania’s vote in Congress will go against West Virginia. The latter’s loss will be civilization’s gain—and the miners’.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded August 2015

slpns@slp.org