

---

# The Gunmen and the Miners.

by Eugene V. Debs

Published in *The International Socialist Review*, v. 15, no. 3 (Sept. 1914), pp. 161-162.

The time has come for the United Mine Workers and the Western Federation of Miners to levy a special monthly assessment to create a GUNMEN DEFENSE FUND.

This fund should be sufficient to provide each member with the latest high power rifle, the same used by the corporation gunmen, and 500 rounds of cartridges.

In addition to this every district should purchase and equip and man enough Gatling and machine guns to match the equipment of Rockefeller's private army of assassins.

This suggestion is made advisedly and I hold myself responsible for every word of it.

If the corporations have the right to recruit and maintain private armies of thieves, thugs, and ex-convicts to murder striking workingmen, sack their homes, insult their wives, and roast their babes, then labor unions not only have the right but it is their solemn duty to arm themselves to resist these lawless attacks and defend their homes and loved ones.

To the miners especially do these words apply, and to them in particular is this message addressed.

Paint Creek, Calumet, and Ludlow are of recent occurrence.

You miners have been forced out on strike, and you have been made the victims of every conceivable method of persecution.

You have been thrown into foul dungeons where you have lain for months for daring to voice your protest against these cruel outrages and many

of you are now cold in death with the gaping bullet wounds in your bodies to bear mute testimony to the efficacy of government by gunmen as set up in the mining camps by the master class during the last few years.

Under government by gunmen you are literally shorn of the last vestige of liberty and you have absolutely no protection under the law. When you go out on strike, your master has his court issue the injunction that strips you of your power to resist his injustice, and then has his private army of gunmen invade your camp, open fire on your habitations, and harass you and your families until the strike is broken and you are starved back into the pits on your master's terms. This has happened over and over again in all the mining states of this union.

Now the private army of gunmen which has been used to break your strikes is an absolutely lawless aggregation.

If you miners were to arm a gang of thugs and assassins with machine guns and repeating rifles and order them to march on the palatial residences of the Rockefellers, riddle them with bullets, and murder the inmates in cold blood, not sparing even the babes, if there happened to be any, how long would it be before your officials would be in jail and your unions throttled and put out of business by the law?

The Rockefellers have not one particle more lawful right to maintain a private army to murder you union men than you union men would have to maintain a private army to murder the Rock-

efellers.

AND YET THE LAW DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH THE ROCKEFELLERS WHEN THEY SET UP GOVERNMENT BY GUNMEN, AND HAVE THEIR PRIVATE ARMY OF MANKILLERS SWOOP DOWN ON A MINING CAMP, TURN LOOSE THEIR MACHINE GUNS, KILL WITHOUT MERCY, AND LEAVE DEATH, AGONY, AND DESOLATION IN THEIR WAKE, AND THEREFORE IT BECOMES YOUR SOLEMN DUTY TO ARM YOURSELVES IN DEFENSE OF YOUR HOMES AND IN DRIVING OUT THESE INVADING ASSASSINS, AND PUTTING AN END TO GOVERNMENT BY GUNMEN IN THE UNITED STATES.

In a word, the protection the government owes you and fails to provide, you are morally bound to provide for yourselves.

You have the unquestioned right, under the law, to defend your life and to protect the sanctity of your fireside. Failing in either, you are a coward and a craven and undeserving the name of man.

If a thief attacks you or your wife or child and threatens to take your life, you have a lawful right to defend yourself and your loved ones, even to the extent of slaying the assailant. This right is quite as valid and unimpaired — in fact it is even more inviolate — if the attack is made by a dozen or a hundred, instead of only one.

Rockefeller's gunmen are simply murderers at large, and you have the same right to kill them when they attack you that you have to kill the burglar who breaks into your house at midnight or the highwayman who holds you up at the point of his pistol.

Rockefeller's hired assassins have no lawful right that you miners are bound to respect. They are professional mankillers, the lowest and vilest on earth. They hire out to break your strike, shoot up your home and kill you, and you should have

no more compunction in killing them than if they were so many mad-dogs or rattlesnakes that menaced your homes and your community.

Recollect that in arming yourselves, as you are bound to do unless you are willing to be forced into abject slavery, you are safely within the spirit and letter of the law.

The constitution of the United States guarantees to you the right to bear arms, as it does to every other citizen, but there is not a word in this instrument, nor in any United States statute, state law, or city ordinance, that authorizes the existence of a private army for purposes of cold-blooded murder and assassination.

*"Mine guard" is simply a master class term for a working class assassin.*

Let the United Mine Workers and the Western Federation of Miners take note that a private army of gunmen is simply a gang of outlaws and butchers and that THEY HAVE NOT A SOLITARY RIGHT AN HONEST WORKING-MAN IS BOUND TO RESPECT!

Let these unions and all other organized bodies of workers that are militant and not subservient to the masters declare war to the knife on these lawless and criminal hordes and swear relentless hostility to government by gunmen in the United States.

Murderers are no less murderers because they are hired by capitalists to kill workingmen than if they were hired by workingmen to kill capitalists.

Mine guards, so-called, are murderers pure and simple, and are to be dealt with accordingly. The fact that they are in uniform, as in Colorado, makes them even more loathsome and repulsive than the common reptilian breed.

*A "mine guard" in the uniform of a state militiaman is a copperhead in the skin of a rattlesnake, and possible only because an even deadlier serpent has wriggled his way into the executive chair of the state.*

It remains only to be said that we stand for peace, and that we are unalterably opposed to vio-

lence and bloodshed if by any possible means, short of absolute degradation and self-abasement, these can be prevented. We believe in law, the law that applies equally to all and is impartially administered, and we prefer reason infinitely to brute force.

But when the law fails, and in fact, becomes the bulwark of crime and oppression, then an appeal to force is not only morally justified, but becomes a patriotic duty.

The Declaration of Independence proclaims this truth in words that burn with the patriotic fervor the revolutionary fathers must have felt when they rose in revolt against the red-coated gunmen of King George and resolved to shoot king rule out of existence.

Wendell Phillips declared that it was the glory of honest men to trample bad laws under foot with contempt, and it is equally their glory to protect themselves in their lawful rights when those who rule the law fail to give them such protection.

Let the unions, therefore, arm their members against the gunmen of the corporations, the gangs of criminals, cutthroats, woman-ravishers, and baby-burners that have absolutely no lawful right to existence!

Let organized labor, from one end of the country to the other, declare war on these privately licensed assassins, and let the slogan of every union man in the land be **DOWN WITH GOVERNMENT BY GUNMEN AND ASSASSINATION IN THE UNITED STATES.**

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

*Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.*