

**You Are of One Class:
Speech to Pressed Steel Car Company Strikers,
McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania**

[excerpt]

(August 24, 1909)

There are fifteen nationalities represented here this morning, but you are of one class.¹ You are workmen, united in a single cause. You are wage slaves in the eyes of the corporation.² Though I cannot understand your language I can read your hearts and can make myself understood to you.

I, too, have suffered. I have been on strike and have become involved in riots. I know what it is to face a heartless power.

This desperate fight must be continued. The eyes of the civilized world and the eyes of all the laborers of the world are upon you. It is the greatest labor fight in all history. The laboring men in Pittsburgh particularly should stand by their fellow workers in this fight.

I want to warn you of traitors. Beware of spies. They circulate among you and talk your language. They pretend to suffer with you when in reality they are employees of the Pressed Steel Car Company. They are employed by parasites who are lounging in their summer retreats while you are suffering and starving. You make the money which the degenerate sons of these parasites squander on champagne.

They hold that the cheapest thing in the world is human flesh. Your blood means nothing to them. Because you have walked away from your work you are to be shot.

You are not responsible for the horrors that have occurred. It was precipitated through a minion of the corporation who was hired to assassinate workmen. I have seen the wage envelopes of some of the workmen since I came to Pittsburgh³ and the situation seems very similar to that of the Pullman Company, which likewise deducted the rent for the house and other charges from the pay of the men until there was nothing left.

This is a time for somber thought, for serious thought. It is not a time for violence. Be true to yourself. You were born in poverty. You have no opportunity. You have been reared in privation. You have had no

opportunity to develop minds with which to cope with the subtle methods which has wrested this enormous wealth from you. Your masters hold you in contempt, they take away your production for their own selfish use.

They do not go to your hovels and see how you live.⁴ They compel you to live in shanties which they would not use as kennels for their dogs, yet your children are reared among just such surroundings.

A wage worker who for the sake of employment sacrifices his wife is despicable. What infamy!

Published as "Debs Flays the Car Corporation" in *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 25, 1910, pp. 1-2.

¹ Defying threats of arrest or possible violence, Debs traveled by car to the Indian Mound at McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, where he addressed an estimated 2,000 striking workers for about 20 minutes.

² In July 1910, 40 riveters for the Pressed Steel Car Company of McKees Rocks, a suburb of Pittsburgh, walked off the job over a corrupt system of pooled payments and excessive rents for ramshackle company dwellings. When then attempted to return to work three days later, they were promptly fired. A massive strike of 5,000 workers at Pressed Steel Car, the second largest producer of railroad cars in the nation, followed in protest over these terminations. As was the case with the Homestead strike of 1892, the company attempted to import strikebreakers to its manufacturing facility via riverboat, which similarly came under gunfire and was forced to retreat. Deputy sheriffs and the Pennsylvania state constabulary was called in to maintain order. Strikers were forcibly evicted from company dwellings, with further inflamed the situation. On Sunday, August 22, just two days before Debs's arrival, rioting erupted, resulting in the death of about eleven people, including several state troopers. Martial law was imposed in the aftermath. The strike was ultimately terminated on September 8, with the adoption of an improved wage scale, the termination of strikebreakers, and the rehiring of striking workers.

³ Debs made a planned detour to Pittsburgh en route from a scheduled August 22 speaking engagement at a "Grand Labor Festival" in Boston and a return to speaking at various Socialist encampments in Oklahoma later that week.

⁴ Accompanied by socialist activist John Slayton, Debs had toured so-called "Hunkytown," the impoverished district occupied by striking immigrant workers, earlier that same day.