

The Indiana Coal Miners (circa November 30, 1897)

The statement from Judge Terhune,¹ special agent for Governor Mount, of Indiana, that 8,000 families are literally starving to death in Indiana coal fields is not over drawn.

It is the haggard truth. The trouble is, the people will not believe it. They refuse to realize the appalling calamity, even though the groaning victims are at their very doors. The miners have been steadily ground down until the starvation point has been reached. This condition prevails over the entire mining region.

It has been suggested that the governor compel the operators to concede living wages. This cannot be done. While the mines are private property, the owners will insist on operating them to suit themselves. Nor would any good result from a settlement in Indiana. The men must cover the whole competitive field.

The greed of the large operators will eventuate in the collective ownership of the mines. Man has no more right to private ownership of the coal mines than of the sea or the sun.

But something should be done now. There is a condition akin to war upon the country. The nation's defenses are going down in the battle against starvation. War measures are in order. The President of the United States can act. Let him issue a proclamation calling on the operators to meet and allow the miners living wages within 48 hours, under penalty of having their mines seized by the government and operated in the interest of the people.

That would settle the matter in an instant. Something has got to be done, and done quickly. If Indiana allows the families of 8,000 luckless laborers to be tortured by starvation, she will not escape the penalty, and the same is true of all other states and the country at large.

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¹ Thomas J. Terhune (1848-1926) was an ex-circuit court judge from Boone County, Indiana. In July 1897 he was appointed by Governor James A. Mount as a special commissioner to investigate the conditions and grievances of striking coal miners in Indiana.