

EDITORIAL

LIGHTING THE HARBOR.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ALMOST no harbor is approached in a straight line. The entering mariner must follow a devious line of lights and signals before he can safely make port. Such a line of lights and signals, beaconing the wage working class to the harbor of Emancipation, is contained in Bulletin No. 90 of the U.S. Bureau of Labor, on "Fatal Accidents in Coal Mining."

On page 449 this official document gives the total of coal miners killed in this country from 1889 to 1908—29,293.

Page 447 presents a table of the number of mine workers killed in 13 different countries over a ten-year period, a table which it sums up with the statement: "According to this comparison . . . the risk of fatal accident in the coal mines of North America is decidedly more serious than in any other important coal field of the world."

On page 448 appears a tabular Summary of the Fatal Accidents in the Coal Mines of North America, 1889 to 1908, which tabular summary is followed by the comment: "During the first 11 years the rate (of deaths) never attained to 3 per 1,000 per annum; during the last 9 years it has never fallen below this point. There is no parallel for this anomaly in the coal mining history of {any} other country in the world."

Page 453 glows with the statement that "No full account is rendered of the fatal accidents and their occurrence in many of the States. . . . It has not been possible, after a most painstaking effort extending over many years, to secure a full account of all the fatal accidents which have occurred in the different mining states."

Slightly beyond, on page 455, appears the declaration that "of all the fatalities 46.6 per cent. were the result of conditions inherent in all coal-mining operations."

Taking up a particular cause of mine fatalities, page 458 states that "Badly

guarded shafts and openings are probably responsible for the majority” (of this special class).

And finally, on page 472 we come to the statement quoted from the State mine inspector of Colorado—“I feel safe in stating that the strength, speed and durability of men working under extremely unfavorable conditions of ventilation are impaired to an extent that their normal working capacities are reduced on an average of at least 20 per cent.”

Every one of these pages cited is a glowing beacon, which, taken together with all the other beacons, points Labor only one way to go. They show, first, that the number of coal miners killed in this country is an appalling one; second, that it is the worst in the world; third, that it is continuously growing worse; fourth, that even at that the figures don’t tell the whole terrible tale; five, that deaths are “inherent” in coal mining as to-day carried on; six, that it is the companies themselves who are to blame; and seven and last, that even if the mine owners do try to improve conditions, it will be done solely with an eye to increasing productivity and hence profits, and no eye at all to the real welfare of the miner.

Following the channel mapped out for it by these brilliant beacons, Labor can do nothing else than recognize the futility of expecting betterment under capitalism, and bend with a will to the task of total emancipation, through the joint forces of the Socialist Labor Party and the bona fide industrial Union.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded December 2011

slpns@slp.org