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"YOU CAN END IT"

William Randolph Hearst's Open Letter to President Roosevelt Asking Him to End the Coal Famine

William Randolph Hearst on January 8 devoted a whole page of the New York American to an open letter addressed to President Roosevelt, asking him to end the coal famine. The letter tells the whole story—but will Roosevelt act? Mr. Hearst said:

To Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States.—Sir: On October 4, more than three months ago, I had the honor of addressing a letter to you, informing you that I had petitioned your attorney general for permission to furnish him with conclusive proofs of the existence of a coal trust.

At the request of your attorney general, I submitted my proofs to General Burnett, United States district attorney for the southern district of New York.

Those proofs demonstrated, over the hands and seals of the corporations constituting the trust, that a combination of coal-carrying railroads absolutely controls the country's supply of anthracite and fixes its price to the consumer.

In the judgment of lawyers whose professional competency is quite as undisputed as that of your attorney general, those proofs if presented in court would suffice to dissolve the coal trust and subject its members to the civil and criminal penalties provided by law.

Continuously since the submission of those proofs the coal trust has robbed the people, extorting famine prices for coal, a prime necessity of industrial and domestic life, yet no action against this trust has been taken by your attorney general for the enforcement of the laws and the relief of the public.

So remarkable has been the lethargy of your attorney general in the face of a condition of things which reaches the gravity of a widespread public calamity that in both houses of congress a resolution has been introduced calling upon him to disclose the evidence submitted by me through my attorneys in October last.

These proofs aside, sir, neither you nor any other well informed citizen can doubt the existence of the coal trust, nor be ignorant of the organized brigandage which it has practiced and is practicing.

You have but to consult the final report of the industrial commission to learn that the eight lines of railroad comprising the trust own nine-tenths of the anthracite deposits and mine three-quarters of the yearly product. From the same report you can ascertain that in order to crush out competition these railroads have charged extortionate freight rates. Compared with the charge per ton per mile on bituminous coal the rate for carrying anthracite is so high that, in the language of Industrial Commissioner

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Phillips, the excess charge "is greater every year than the interest on our national debt," and is "made possible by the railroad monopoly, now euphemistically called 'community of interests.'"

The fact that the coal trust exists is notorious, and its character is universally understood.

A former attorney general of the United States, Richard Olney, on October 11 last, in a public address at Boston, said that the members of the trust are the "most unblushing and persistent of law breakers," and he thus specified:

"For years they have defied the laws of Pennsylvania, which forbids common carriers engaging in the business of mining.

"For years they have discriminated between customers in the freight charges on their railroads, in violation of the interstate commerce law

"For years they have unlawfully monopolized interstate commerce, in violation of the Sherman anti-trust law."

Senator Spooner of Wisconsin, a member of your own party, high in your confidence, in last Monday's debate on the Jones resolution directing the attorney general to transmit to the senate the evidence presented to him by me proving that a conspiracy in restraint of interstate trade exists, said:

"I have been of the opinion that probably there is such a conspiracy." And he added that "if there be such a conspiracy it is one that should be prosecuted as one absolutely wicked in its character and far-reaching in its deleterious effects. . . . If one does exist it is a very merciless one, violating the laws of the United States and most harmful in every way."

You, Mr. President, can have no doubt of this conspiracy, but, if there should chance to remain in your mind any such doubt, I suggest that you remove it by personally examining the evidence which I placed in possession of your attorney general in October.

Sir, these men of the coal trust, enormously rich and politically influential as they may be, are criminals. They swell their great fortunes daily by deliberate law-breaking.

And while your attorney general has remained so strangely quiescent these opulent and politically influential criminals have adopted an old trust device for the double purpose of further plundering the public and laying the basis for a fraudulent defence against the evidence now in the hands of the attorney general should he begin proceedings against them. A pretended division between them and the so-called "independent" operators has been arranged, whereby these so-called "independents," who are utterly in the power of the trust, shall seem to compete with the trust, and so prepare the ground for the false contention that the trust is not a monopoly, but a legitimate business organization subject to competition. As the immediate result of this counterfeit rivalry the price of coal has been doubled.

As a citizen regardful of the public welfare, Mr. President, I respectfully represent to you that the law officer of your administration has been, and is, remiss in his duty in not proceeding against the coal trust on the evidence of its unlawful character supplied by me to him last year.

By that failure in duty he has encouraged the coal trust to take advantage of a situation largely of its own creation, not merely to persist in its customary pillage of the people, but to enormously increase the scale of its extortion.

The submission of evidence to your attorney general and my appeal to him to apply the law to the coal trust having up to this time resulted in no

action on his part, I turn from him to you.

In your public speeches and messages, Mr. President, you have often declared your conviction that the great combinations of capital commonly known as trusts should be subjected to the fullest publicity and brought within the regulating control of the law, to the end that the public, while profiting by the concentration of capital in business, may be protected against the incidental evil effects of that concentration.

I submit, sir, that there is no other combination of capital in the country more contemptuous of law than the coal trust. And I further submit that the most effective method of subjecting it to publicity is to bring it into court to answer for its illegal offences.

The attorney general of the United States is your servant. He must obey your commands or give way to a successor who will do so.

I appeal to you, therefore, Mr. President, to command your attorney general to proceed against the coal trust, both civilly and criminally, on the evidence of its unlawful acts laid before him by me, or explain to the people of the United States his reasons for not doing so, if reasons suitable for public avowal he has.

The people of the United States, President Roosevelt, have a right to expect action from you against the trusts in general and the coal trust in particular. No conspicuous public man of your party has so vehemently as yourself expressed a desire to protect the public from spoliation at the hands of combinations of predatory capital. And you have well said that "words are good when backed up by deeds, and only so."

What better proof of your sincerity could you give, what better deed in support of your words could you do, than by moving at once upon this insolent lawbreaker and wholesale robber of the people, the coal trust?

As a citizen I have done my duty in supplying evidence for the attack to your attorney general. As a citizen I do my duty in turning from him to you when time has shown his invincible reluctance to act.

The coal trust continues to exist and continues to plunder because the laws are not enforced.

For that non-enforcement of the laws, Mr. President, your attorney general is responsible to you, and if you shall uphold him in his refusal to act against the coal trust you will be responsible to the American people. Respectfully,

WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST.

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