

## Part 2: The strike of 1913-14

# Remembering the Ludlow Massacre

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In 1912, the number of Colorado coal miners per 1,000 who were killed in accidents was twice the national average. Wages were as low as they were a decade before, and company scrip and closed company towns were still the main practice. Workers had still not won the 8-hour workday.

The deep anger felt by working people across Colorado in response to decades of exploitation continued to fester. As East Coast capitalists like John D. Rockefeller, Jr. consolidated power over the Colorado mining industry, workers recognized that their hard labor was making a small layer extremely wealthy.

The United Mine Workers (UMW), which had successfully organized coal miners stretching from Pennsylvania through the Midwest, had now moved in to organize the Colorado. In mid 1913, Rockefeller's Colorado Fuel and Iron Co. (CFI) refused to negotiate with a fairly moderate set of demands from the UMW that called for an 8-hour work day, the elimination of company guards in company towns, and payment for "dead work," like laying railroad track, cutting wood, etc.

The UMW sent a handful of miners to attend the State Federation of Labor convention in Trinidad, Colorado, held in mid-August. One, Gerald Lippiatt, was shot and killed on the streets of Trinidad by two agents in the employ of Baldwin-Felts, a private security outfit of spies and thugs. The two were not arrested, and fury amongst miners spread. Non-union miners in northern Colorado announced that they would strike with the southern workers if a call was issued.

The UMW held a special convention on September 15. The legendary labor organizer "Mother" Mary Harris Jones—a veteran of organizing coal miners in West Virginia, as well as in the Colorado Labor Wars of 1903 and 1904—advocated passionately in favor of a mass strike action, rousing workers to their feet in a raucous standing ovation. Workers overwhelmingly approved a strike for the next week.

The demands that came out of the convention were more

radical than those originally proposed by the UMW. A seven-point plan included the abolition of the company towns, the establishment of a pay scale, payment for dead work, the presence of a union-elected "weighman" at all times, an 8-hour workday for all laborers, full enforcement of Colorado labor laws, and union recognition.

The strike began on September 23, 1913. CFI promptly evicted from company towns all striking miners, who were forced to set up tent cities using resources provided by the UMW. Soon 12,000 miners, or 85 percent of all coal workers in Colorado, were on strike. Strikers wore red bandanas around their necks and referred to them as "badges of courage." Production was shut down almost entirely.

Violence began in early October, when striking miners running away from a rifle-toting company marshal shot and killed him. Retaliatory skirmishes between company spies, marshals and workers broke out. The company agents began a practice that they would maintain throughout the strike: armed men would ride near strikers' tent cities, shining floodlights across the tents and firing random rifle shots indiscriminately through tent walls, constantly terrorizing strikers and their families, and occasionally killing.

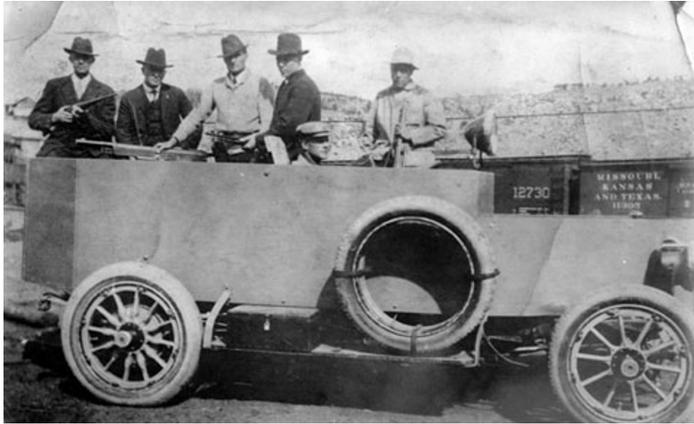


Camp Beshoar

On October 18, a group of strikers had gathered outside of the Forbes tent colony to discuss what to do about the

nighttime attacks. Officers gathered near them in a police car, and one amongst their number approached the workers. After speaking with the workers for a moment, the officer turned and ran towards the other officers, who commenced to open fire in an obviously planned-out maneuver. One striker, Luke Vehernic, was hit in the face and killed.

Shortly after, the company thugs and police unveiled the “Death Special,” an armored car rigged with a Gatling gun. On its first trial, company agents shot at strikers and hit a young boy in the legs. He was left in a ditch for four hours before officials allowed strikers to attend to him.



Death Special

On October 24, three strikers were shot by agents in cold blood on Seventy Street in Walsenburg, approximately 12 miles north of Trinidad. In retaliation, strikers tore out the track of the Colorado and Southern Railroad—also owned by CFI. One mine guard died in the skirmish that ensued. The same week armed strikers began to attack mines at Tabasco, Hastings, Berwind, and Delagua.

On October 28, after miners successfully turned away a Colorado & Southern train full of thugs and ammunition, Governor Ammons agreed to dispatch 1,000 National Guardsmen under General John Chase. The CFI provided the National Guard with furnished homes, cars, and free company credit. When the Guard arrived in the coalfields, however, very few workers surrendered their arms. Out of 1,200 people in the Ludlow camp, for example, only 37 men gave up their weapons.

After arriving, General Chase put in place martial law. Assembly was forbidden in streets and in public. The courts were largely relinquished of their power to try prisoners. This power now rested solely with General Chase and his army. Los Animas and Huerfano Counties now belonged to the CFI, the smaller mining companies, and their two armies—the National Guard and the company mine guards.

In November, Governor Ammons and Wilson’s Secretary of Labor, William Wilson, proposed a deal that did not address any of the grievances of the strikers, did not recognize the union, and did not include any wage increases. The strikers rejected the measure overwhelmingly, despite the freezing cold temperatures and the constant terrorism by company thugs, Death Special and the National Guard.

Mother Jones—then a frail but fierce 82 years old—returned to Trinidad to support the striking workers. Immediately, on January 4, 1914 National Guardsmen arrested the old woman and sent her on a train back to Denver. One week later Jones returned and was promptly put under arrest at San Rafael Hospital.

On January 21, hundreds of local women—some strikers, some supporters—marched through Trinidad in support of Mother Jones. When they turned down Main Street towards the hospital, they found that Gen. Chase had formed a cavalry blockade across the street. As troops pressed forwards against the women, Chase’s horse bumped against a young girl. The horse bucked, throwing Chase to the ground. The women roared with laughter, and the furious Chase rose and yelled for his troops to “ride down the women.” The cavalry attacked the women with their sabers and gave several deep sword cuts.

*To be continued*



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