

## The Anniversary of Class War in Colorado (June 25, 1904)

Almost a year has passed since the strikes were precipitated in Colorado.

What caused them and who is responsible for the consequences?

Let the naked facts be stated.

The legislature of Colorado passed an eight-hour law in 1899 exactly like the eight-hour law of Utah, which the United States Supreme Court had declared constitutional.

The Supreme Court of Colorado, owned bodily by the Mine Owners' Association and Smelter Trust, declared the law unconstitutional.

In 1902 a constitutional amendment was submitted to the people of the state, commanding the legislature in express terms to pass an eight-hour law. *This was carried out by a popular majority of more than 40,000 votes.*

The legislature met and was bought outright by the mine and mill owners with scarcely an attempt to conceal the damnable crime. The members of the legislature, with the gold of the capitalists bulging in their breeches, refused to pass the law demanded by a majority of over 40,000 of the people.

These are the absolute facts. No one can deny them. These foul facts caused the present strike.

The mine, mill, and smelter workers, inhaling the poison fumes and gasses which undermined their health and destroyed their lives struck only after the mine and mill owners had debauched the Supreme Court, bought the legislature, and trampled roughshod over the legally expressed will of the people.

The miners struck for their lives.

They struck as the very last resort.

Who are the criminals, the lawbreakers, the killers of men, the corruptors of the body politic, the debauchers of the nation?

Who but the capitalist anarchists who compose the Mine Owners' Association, the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, and the American Smelting and Refining Company?

These are the brazen brigands who have the flint face to talk about law and order.

“To hell with the constitution” has been their murderous motto from the start and their trail is red with the blood of the working class.

The latest crime in their desperation to crush the Western Federation of Miners was the blowing up of the depot platform at Victor,<sup>1</sup> filled with workingmen. Note that not a mine owner, nor any other capitalist, or member of the Citizens’ Alliance, or detective, or other corporation hireling was on the platform. Only poor, dumb workingmen were blown up to cover up the crimes of capital and bring down the wrath of the nation upon the union miners.

The mine owners charge the union miners instigated the crime.

It is a foul and damnable lie.

if these capitalist conspirators, these dressed-up footpads, were not substitute of conscience as cobras, this vile and abominable lie would stick in their throats, turn their faces black, and strangle them to death.

They will have character assassins in plenty to swear away the lives of men their blood-blotched gold could not buy.

Sherman Bell has already announced they would swing — this without evidence and before being tried — and this in the name of law and order.

Who benefited from the crime? The mine owners. Who are its victims? The union miners.

Who compelled the sheriff and other officers of the law, under threat of hanging, to resign their offices and filled them with corporation hirelings? The mine owners. Who were bound and gagged and clubbed and bullpenned and deported and shot dead without a hearing? The union miners.

Let them dare hand one of these innocent men and by the gods of retribution hell will crack about their own ears before the curtain falls on the last scene of their gory revelry.

In 1859 the slave owners of Virginia hung old John Brown, the criminal agitator.

In 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected president of the United States.

In 1861 the earth shook beneath the tread of armed legions and millions were singing:

John Brown’s body lies a moldering in the ground,

But his soul goes marching on.

In 1863 the proclamation of emancipation was issued.

In 1865, less than six years after John Brown was murdered, as the mine owners of Colorado now threaten to murder union leaders, the slave owners were annihilated and chattel slavery was wiped from the earth in a storm of iron and a deluge of blood.

Then it was chattel slavery. Now it is wage-slavery. Then it concerned a few Negroes. Now it embraces all the workers of the world.

“Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.”<sup>2</sup>

The gods made the slave owners mad and smote them to death.

The gods are making the Colorado capitalists mad and in their blind fury they are rushing to their doom.

Let them hand an innocent union man in Colorado. Let them sow the wind! Let them put their own necks in the nooses!

They will reap the crop they are sowing to the smallest seed of injustice.

And now a vital question: Why are the capitalists of Colorado and the nation waging a war of extermination upon the Western Federation of Miners and the American Labor Union?

Why? Why?

***Because they declared for socialism.***

That is the reason — the only reason.

Their assault, therefore, is not upon labor unionism, but upon socialism.

This makes it our fight — the fight of the whole working class.

Let us recognize this fact and support our comrades in Colorado to the bitter end.

We see our comrades in the Rocky Mountains murdered in cold blood by hired mercenaries, driven from home, forced out of the state and dumped on the desert to die like lepers, crowded like cattle in festering pens and fed on vermin; bludgeoned, bayoneted, insulted, and outraged in a thousand other ways.

We see the governor as the servile tool of the mine owners, the Supreme Court their fawning sycophants, and the legislature their bought-and-paid-for lickspittles.

We see President Roosevelt smiling serenely upon this bloody scene, as Peabody blows out the constitution and Sherman Bell struts the state an

armed bully. Would Roosevelt lack the power to act if Moyer and Haywood were in the roles of Peabody and Bell?

Not a word from Roosevelt. Not a word from Judge Parker, from Gorman, McClellan, Hill, or Hearst. Not one. Not one.

These are the national representatives of the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. Their silence proclaims their attitude. They and their parties are with the capitalist anarchists of Colorado who are strangling law and assassinating labor.

The Socialist Party alone is the party of the union men of Colorado. The mine owners are well aware of this and their hostility to the union is but the pretext for their determination to stamp the Socialist Party out of Colorado.

*That is the issue.*

The mine owners understand it clearly and all the capitalists are lined up accordingly.

Let us face the issue and fight it out.

They may win the skirmishes. The ultimate victory is ours. We can stand ten thousand defeats. The working class cannot be vanquished.

The capitalist mine owning class have got to go. The working class are bound to come.

And now for action! We, the socialists of America, should appoint a Colorado Day to hoist aloft the banner of revolt.

The National Committee of the Socialist Party, it is suggested, should issue a proclamation to all the socialists of the land. Let the first Sunday in August or some other suitable day be appointed as Colorado Day and celebrated throughout the land as the anniversary of the class war in the Rocky Mountains in which our comrades are so valiantly engaged.

Let the socialists rally in every village, town, and city. Let them gather outdoors and tell the story of the struggle of the people.

Let them recite the crimes of capitalism in Colorado and indict the ruling class at the bar of justice.

Let them proclaim the principles of Socialism and point the way to freedom.

Let them also appeal to each and every listener in every audience to add his mite to the collection, make it large as possible, and send the amount to William D. Haywood, National Secretary, Western Federation of Miners, 625 Mining Exchange Building, Denver, Colorado.

If immediate steps are taken the day can be made memorable in the annals of the class struggle. The people are already aroused and a thousand socialist orators can move them to action.

Let us unite from end to end of the land and across the Canadian border in celebration of the anniversary of the Colorado class struggle, and on that day the mine owners of Colorado and the coupon-clippers fo Wall Street and the exploiters of labor everywhere will distinctly hear the rumblings of the social revolution.

Published as “Debs on Colorado!” in *Social Democratic Herald*, vol. 8, whole no. 308 (June 25, 1904), p. 1.

---

<sup>1</sup> The bomb was actually detonated in the neighboring town of Independence, killing strike-breaking miners waiting to board an arriving train for their return home to Victor.

<sup>2</sup> A line assigned to Prometheus in “The Masque of Pandora” (1875) by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882).