

# Welcome from the Wobblies of Colorado



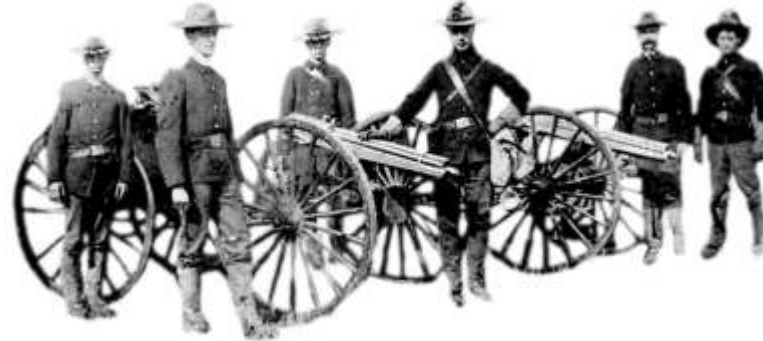
**Industrial Workers  
of the World**  
Denver General  
Membership  
Branch



## Colorado Labor Wars

### Western Federation of Miners

In the 1890s, hard rock miners in Colorado and surrounding states saw the need for a union to protect their rights on the job. The **Western Federation of Miners** was born. Gold miners in the Cripple Creek District went on strike to support smelter workers' demands for union. The governor of Colorado called on the National Guard to crush the union.



### Gatling Guns at Cripple Creek

With gatling guns and bayonets, the militia suspended civil rights in the Cripple Creek District. National Guard officer Thomas McClelland declared, "To hell with the Constitution, we aren't going by the Constitution." Guard General Sherman Bell, a former mine manager, was quoted, "I came to do up this damned anarchistic federation." When a district judge held a hearing on writs of habeas corpus for four detained union men, Bell's response was caustic. "Habeas corpus be damned," he declared, "we'll give 'em post mortems."

The National Guard suspended the Bill of Rights. Union leaders were arrested and thrown in the bullpen, or banished. Prisoners who won habeas corpus cases were released in court and then immediately re-arrested. Freedoms of speech, assembly, and bearing arms were not allowed. In 1904 the Guard criminalized "loitering or strolling about, frequenting public places where liquor is sold, begging or leading an idle, immoral, or profligate course of life, or not having any visible means of support." An entire newspaper's staff was locked up for not supporting the occupation, and printer's apprentice Emma Langdon published the paper by herself. In an atmosphere of repression and fear, violence erupted.

Provocateur Harry Orchard, best known for assassinating

an ex-governor of Idaho, took credit for dynamiting strike-breaking miners for the union. On the witness stand, he admitted to having been a Pinkerton agent, and accepting money from the mine owners. The explosion was used as a pretext to drive the union out. National Guard troops laid siege to the WFM hall in Victor, their steady barrage of gunfire forcing the miners to surrender.

### WFM Hall in Victor

*The union hall in Victor (B on the map) still stands, and bullet holes can still be seen on the brick exterior. The building needs restoration, and can only be seen from the outside. Victor is a beautiful mountain community with a nice hotel, and a rich history. From Denver, the trip is 2.5 hours one way. For Victor walking tours contact Marilyn Fay, 303-781-2643 or 719-689-2736. Cripple Creek has gambling.*

victorcolorado.com



# More Colorado History

## United Mine Workers

In 1913, Colorado's coal miners went on strike. Evicted from company housing, they established tent colonies near the mines. Within weeks the tent colonies were raked by machine gun fire from the *Death Special*, an armored car operated by company gun thugs.



Ludlow Monument

The trip to Ludlow (B on the Ludlow map) takes just over three hours. The monument is beautiful and sacred. A mile west is the tiny Victor American memorial marker, commemorating the deaths of 121 miners in 1917.

[rebelgraphics.org/ludlow.html](http://rebelgraphics.org/ludlow.html)



The Death Special protected Rockefeller's interests

The Colorado National Guard was mobilized. Lieutenant Linderfelt declared that the miners should think of him as "Jesus Christ on horseback." A machine gun and kerosene torch attack against one tent colony resulted in the deaths of two women and eleven children in what came to be called the Black Hole of Ludlow. The United Mine Workers erected a monument that is revered throughout the world.

## Industrial Workers of the World

The IWW (the *wobblies*) led a strike of Colorado's coal miners in 1927. Twelve thousand miners walked out. More than a hundred mines were closed. North of Denver, every mine closed except for the Columbine Mine in the company town of Serene. The Columbine became a focal point of protests.

The authorities began to arrest strike leaders on vagrancy charges. With their leaders locked up, strikers looked to the coal communities for leadership. A nineteen year old woman, dubbed "Flaming Milka" by the press, marched to unstruck mines in a bright red dress, and called out the miners. They laid down their tools by the hundreds. Milka was jailed, and was offered her freedom if she renounced the strike. She preferred jail.

At the Columbine Mine, the Colorado State Police set up machine guns. When the strikers arrived at the mine on Monday morning, the machine guns opened up. Six were killed, and possibly as many as sixty were injured.

*The graves of 5 of the 6 miners were unmarked for 62 years. In 1989 a coalition of historical societies, wobblies, and other unions put up a monument (C on the Columbine map) in the N.E. corner of Lafayette Cemetery, and a highway marker (B on the map) near the former site of Columbine Mine. The highway marker is on Highway 7, a mile west of Interstate 25. A do-it-yourself Columbine Mine Massacre memorial tour encompasses two sites, and is 2 or 3 hours round trip from Denver.*



[rebelgraphics.org/columbinestory.html](http://rebelgraphics.org/columbinestory.html)

## The Wobblies

We're a union of workers who believe that we, the working people should control our own work lives. We do job site organizing, immigrant worker organizing, global labor outreach, and we support the anti-war movement. In Denver, we have a General Membership Branch, an IWW print shop, and a Job Branch at Free Speech TV, the television network. We've also organized the staff at FRESC, a research organization associated with the AFL-CIO.

For information:

**Bread and Roses Workers Cultural Center,  
23rd and Clay in Denver, 303-433-1852**