

The Independence Depot Bombing: A Case of Capitalist Infernalism (June 25, 1904)

If the railroad platform recently blown up at Victor, Colorado, resulting in the death of a score of workingmen, was the result of a deliberate plot to commit murder, I will stake my reputation that it was instigated by the mine owners or their hirelings.¹ To me the case is clear as daylight. Of course, the mine owners are too foxy to be connected with the crime in any way that could be proved, but it is safe to assume that their hirelings understood what they were engaged for and earned their pay by performing their hellish duties.

When murder is committed in the dark the first question is always: Who benefited by it? The question is peculiarly applicable to this case. Who benefited by this crime? The mine owners, of course. At whose expense? The strikers, of course.

The mine owners had everything to gain; the strikers everything to lose. The very instant the explosion occurred hell broke loose against the strikers.

This was a foregone conclusion. Not a question was allowed. No ifs or ands or explanations. Wipe out the Western Federation of Miners and crush the strikers to the earth! That is what the explosion was plotted for, and to conceal their tracks the mine owners and their lickspittle Citizens' Alliance at once force the sheriff and other officers of the law to resign and by violence took the machinery of law into their own hands so that they might conduct the investigation, cover up the corporation criminals, and convict innocent union men.

They will have any number of paid character assassins on the ground to swear to anything that may be necessary to carry out their diabolical program. But it will fail! No matter how cunningly devised or how skillfully they do their work, the truth will out at last and the real conspirators will come to light. It has been so in the past and it will be so again.

All the powers of Peabody, Bell,² and the horde of bloodthirsty labor exploiters they represent, all the powers of hell and capitalism cannot prevail against the truth.

During the Pullman strike hundreds of instances occurred to prove the allegations herein contained. In California the sleuth-hounds of the Southern Pacific laid a net and caught a weak-minded member of the ARU to join a plot to wreck a train. The ARU member was caught, of course, and sentenced. The capitalist press howled down the ARU and the whole state arose in arms against it, even the members of the order being misled, many of them turning upon their former associates who remained loyal in spite of the criminal conspiracy to destroy the organization.

In Utah the Union Pacific detectives got a couple of members of the ARU drunk and hauled them out of town to a point along the line where they found some tools and set to work to pull up a rail about the time a train was due. But the whole thing was so carefully arranged that before the rail was lifted the train came to a stop and at the same moment the sheriff and his deputies stepped out from the bushes and placed the alleged train wreckers under arrest.

Of course the press had screaming headlines an hour later, announcing the fiendish conspiracy of the ARU and demanded that all the powers of the state be invoked to crush it out of existence. Of course, the politicians and preachers and other patriots (?) all joined heartily in the chorus, with the result that the strike was broken up, the order disrupted, and the poor devils sent to the penitentiary.

In due time their innocence was admitted by the decent people of Salt Lake City, including officers of the law, and they were pardoned.

Were it necessary I could tell of hundreds of instances, and produce absolute proof, where detectives and spies and spotters and sneaks in the service of the corporations instigated violence, set fires, and committed numberless other crimes to make strikers appear as rioters, incendiaries, and murderers that injunctions might be issued against them to restrain them of their liberty, that soldiers might be called out to massacre them, and that the people of the country might turn upon them as if they were monsters seeking to devour their fellow beings instead of half-starved workmen mildly protesting against the crimes they could no longer bear.

The union miners of Colorado are not guilty. I will put my word against that of Sherman Bell, who has already announced, according to the press dispatches, that 40 or 50 of them would swing for the crime. He has unmasked his animus and revealed his spirit. He has given his case away.

In the exultation of the moment he has laid bare the plot to fasten the guilt of crime upon union men before they have been tried.

Just at this moment he has the power of a petty despot, but he would better beware. If he and his law-defying, crime-inciting pals bring innocent men to the gallows they may live to feel the noose around their own necks and they certainly will live to see the blood of these victims of capitalist robbery and military anarchy washed away in a torrent of retributive justice.

O, workingmen of Colorado, this is the supreme hour of your lives. You have been tried by fire and sword, by dungeon and by devils. You have not lowered your colors and I appeal to you not to lower them now. They have done their worst and you have stood it all, and you can and will stand the rest.

Stand solid as a granite wall in this fight and you will render the cause of labor a service that generations yet unborn will thank and honor you for.

Don't surrender! Die rather!

They can no more crush out the spirit of unionism than they can expel the mountains or snuff out the sun.

You are fighting for humanity and every day of the struggle hastens the day of liberation.

If they deport you, return again and again and again.

You represent an internal principle that they will battle against in vain.

Their petty temporary victories will but hasten the day of their own crushing and everlasting defeat.

It is the class struggle you are engaged in. You are the workers, they are the capitalists; you are the producers, they are the parasites; you are the victims, they are the robbers.

You are in the majority, overwhelmingly. Unite! Close up the ranks!

Every true man is with you. Swear that by the eternal you will hold your ground to the bitter end.

This year you have your supreme opportunity. The national election gives you your chance.

Strike, I appeal to you, a blow on election day that will shake the capitalists of Colorado and the nation out of their boots.

Would you strike terror to the craven souls of the class who are murdering and starving you? Would you have all opposition to unionism withdrawn and have those who now smite you smile fawningly upon you?

Would you restore law and order and go back into the mines as union men? Would you strike a blow in the interest of the working class that will be felt throughout the length and breadth of the land? Would you see Peabody cower in abject fear and Sherman Bell turn pale as the victims of his military hyenaism? Would you revive hope in the breasts of despairing toilers, cheer their desponding wives, and comfort their terror-stricken children? Would you strike at the black heart of tyranny, rebuke its murderous minions, repudiate its cringing apologists, and have the handwriting blaze upon the wall where every capitalist and every coward may read their inevitable doom? Would you assert your own manhood, hold your head erect, and feel the throb of coming freedom?

If you would see these things and more to follow along the same lines you have one thing to do. In November next march to the polls from end to end of the state in one solid phalanx and deposit a round hundred thousand votes for revolutionary socialism.

One hundred thousand votes at least for the Socialist Party and emancipation. This will strike terror to Peabody and raise hell in Wall Street.

Do it and you will have answered the challenge of the mine owners on their own ground.

Do it and you will vitalize and inspire the labor movement of America and the world.

Do it and you are triumphant and the enemy will disappear before your march like chaff before the cyclone.

Do less than this and you are defeated, broken, humiliated, in the dirt with the spurred heel of a military satrap on your neck.

If after what you have seen and felt and suffered under a capitalist administration; a Democratic governor in Idaho, a Republican governor in Colorado; injunctions, soldiers, bullpens, deportations, and numberless crimes committed everywhere under Republican rule and Democratic rule, the twin rule of capitalist tyranny; if after all this you go to the polls and vote the Republican ticket or the Democratic ticket you ought to be damned and you will be as surely as servile submission to slavery has always been damned throughout all the centuries of the past.

But you will not be guilty of such foul treason to principle, such cowardly betrayal of your class. You will be men and you will do your duty while the world looks on and awaits your revolutionary verdict.

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¹ During the evening of June 6, 1904, a railway platform in Independence, Colorado, occupied by strikebreaking miners from the Deadwood mine awaiting a train to return them to home in Victor was destroyed by a bomb, killing 13 and wounding 9 others, at least one of whom subsequently died. The bomb, which was estimated to contain between 150 and 300 pounds of black powder, was detonated by the report of a revolver attached to the powder, the trigger of which was pulled by a long wire. Historians and popular writers continue to dispute the identity of the bomber and his motivation.

² Brigadier General Sherman M. Bell was adjutant general in command of the Colorado National Guard during the labor wars which swept the state in 1903 and 1904. The former Roughrider Bell has been described by one historian as “an arrogant megalomaniac who thought that all labor problems involving the WFM were susceptible to a military solution.” See: George G. Suggs, Jr., *Colorado’s War on Militant Unionism*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972; p. 81.