

Colorado Coalfield War 1913-14

The Colorado Coalfield Strike was one of, if not the, most violent strike in U.S. history. The Colorado coalmines were notoriously unsafe, among the most dangerous in the nation, second only to Utah. Between 1844 and 1912, 1,708 workers were killed in the Colorado mines. By 1912, 60% of the workers were immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. In 1913, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), which had secretly organized in the area, announced a strike in response to the operator's refusal to meet the worker's list of 7 demands (see below). Approximately 90% of the workers participated in the strike and those who lived in camps were evicted. The UMWA supplied tents and ovens and organized the strikers into the tent colonies. Ludlow, which had about 200 tents holding 1,200 miners and their families, was the largest of these colonies. The operator's retaliation was brutal. They initiated a campaign of harassment against the strikers and their families that included playing high-powered search lights over the colonies at night, murders, beatings, and the "Death Special", an improvised armored car that would periodically spray selected colonies with machine-gun fire. The strike reached its most violent point is what is known as the "Ludlow Massacre." On April 20, 1914, the Colorado National Guard and the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company camp guards attacked the Ludlow colony. 25 people were killed including 2 women and 11 children. The UMWA finally ran out of money and called off the strike on December 10, 1914. The strikers ultimately failed to obtain their demands and the majority lost their jobs. The primary sources listed below

Worker's 7 Demands (<https://www.du.edu/ludlow/cfhist2.html>)

WAGE SCALE ADOPTED BY SPECIAL CONVENTION, COLORADO MINE WORKERS, AT TRINIDAD, COLO., SEPTEMBER 16, 1913.

We, the representatives of the mine workers of district 15, after repeated efforts to secure a conference with the operators for the purpose of establishing joint relations and a fair wage agreement, and having been denied such a conference—the operators ignoring our invitation entirely—and believing as we do that we have grievances of great moment that demand immediate adjudication, we submit the following as a basis of settlement:

First. We demand recognition of the union. (State law on this subject, but not complied with.)

Second. We demand a 10 per cent advance in wages on the tonnage rates and a day-wage scale which is practically in accord with the Wyoming day-wage scale. (The present Colorado scale is the lowest paid in any of the Rocky Mountain States. Wage advance is justified.)

Third. We demand an eight-hour workday for all classes of labor in or around the coal mines and at coke ovens. (State law on this subject, but not complied with.)

Fourth. We demand pay for all narrow work and dead work, which includes brushing, timbering, removing falls, handling impurities, etc. (Scale for this work in all other States.)

Fifth. We demand checkweighman at all mines to be elected by the miners without any interference by company officials in said election. (State law on this subject but not complied with.)

Sixth. We demand the right to trade in any store we please and the right to choose our own boarding place and our own doctor. (State law on this subject but not complied with.)

Seventh. We demand the enforcement of the Colorado mining laws, and the abolition of the notorious and criminal guard system which has prevailed in the mining camps of Colorado for many years. (State laws on these subjects but not complied with.)

If you believe in the enforcement of law and a living wage, you will support the miners in this strike.

We're Coming Colorado (The Colorado Strike Song)

Lyrics by Frank J. Hayes

(http://www.historycolorado.org/sites/default/files/files/Educators/Educators_Ludlow_resource_set.pdf)

This song by Hayes expresses hope for the future, faith in collective struggle, and, above all, a commitment to the justness of “fighting for our rights” and “fighting for our homes” against even the most daunting foes.

We will win the fight
today, boys,
We'll win the fight today,
Shouting the battle cry of union;
We will rally from the coal mines,
We'll battle to the end,
Shouting the battle cry of union.

CHORUS:

The union forever, hurrah, boys, hurrah!
Down with the Baldwins, up with the law;
For we're coming, Colorado, we're coming all the way,
Shouting the battle cry of union.
We have fought them here for years, boys,
We'll fight them in the end,
Shouting the battle cry of union.
We have fought them in the North,
Now we'll fight them in
the South,
Shouting the battle cry of union.
We are fighting for our rights, boys,
We are fighting for our homes,
Shouting the battle cry of union;
Men have died to win the struggle;
They've died to set us free,
Shouting the battle cry of union.