



In September 1913, angered by a series of mine explosions and the feudal conditions of the mining camps where they lived, 11,000 miners went on strike. Evicted from their hovels in the mine canyons, they trekked with their wives and children and belongings to the tent colonies set up by the United Mine Workers. They were challenging the power of the mine operators, especially the Colorado Fuel and Iron Corporation, owned by the Rockefeller family. The mine owners hired the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency to attack the tent colonies with rifles and Gatling guns. When the miners still held out, the governor called out the National Guard. On April 20, 1914, two companies of the National Guard were stationed in the hills above the largest tent colony at Ludlow, which housed a thousand people. They began pouring machine-gun fire into the tents, killing a number of miners, including a young boy. Then they moved down from the hills and set fire to the tents. The next morning, a telephone linesman going through the burned tents found the charred bodies of eleven children and two women who had been trapped in a pit under one of the tents. This became known as the “Ludlow Massacre.” The miners reacted furiously with violent attacks on mine property and then the federal government sent troops into the area. The strike was lost. Thirty-three years later, Woody Guthrie told the story in a dark, haunting song.

Woody Guthrie, “Ludlow Massacre” (1946)⁷

It was early springtime when the strike was on,
 They drove us miners out of doors,
 Out from the houses that the Company owned,
 We moved into tents up at old Ludlow.

I was worried bad about my children,
 Soldiers guarding the railroad bridge,
 Every once in a while a bullet would fly,
 Kick up gravel under my feet.

We were so afraid you would kill our children,
 We dug us a cave that was seven foot deep,
 Carried our young ones and pregnant women
 Down inside the cave to sleep.

That very night your soldiers waited,
 Until all us miners were asleep,
 You snuck around our little tent town,
 Soaked our tents with your kerosene.

You struck a match and in the blaze that started,
 You pulled the triggers of your Gatling guns,
 I made a run for the children but the fire wall stopped me.
 Thirteen children died from your guns.

I carried my blanket to a wire fence corner,
 Watched the fire till the blaze died down,
 I helped some people drag their belongings,
 While your bullets killed us all around.

I never will forget the look on the faces
 Of the men and women that awful day,
 When we stood around to preach their funerals,
 And lay the corpses of the dead away.

We told the Colorado Governor to call the President,
 Tell him to call off his National Guard,
 But the National Guard belonged to the Governor,
 So he didn't try so very hard.

Our women from Trinidad they hauled some potatoes,
 Up to Walsenburg in a little cart,
 They sold their potatoes and brought some guns back,
 And they put a gun in every hand.

The state soldiers jumped us in a wire fence corners,
 They did not know we had these guns,
 And the Red-neck Miners mowed down these troopers,
 You should have seen those poor boys run.

We took some cement and walled that cave up,
 Where you killed these thirteen children inside,
 I said, "God bless the Mine Workers' Union,"
 And then I hung my head and cried.