

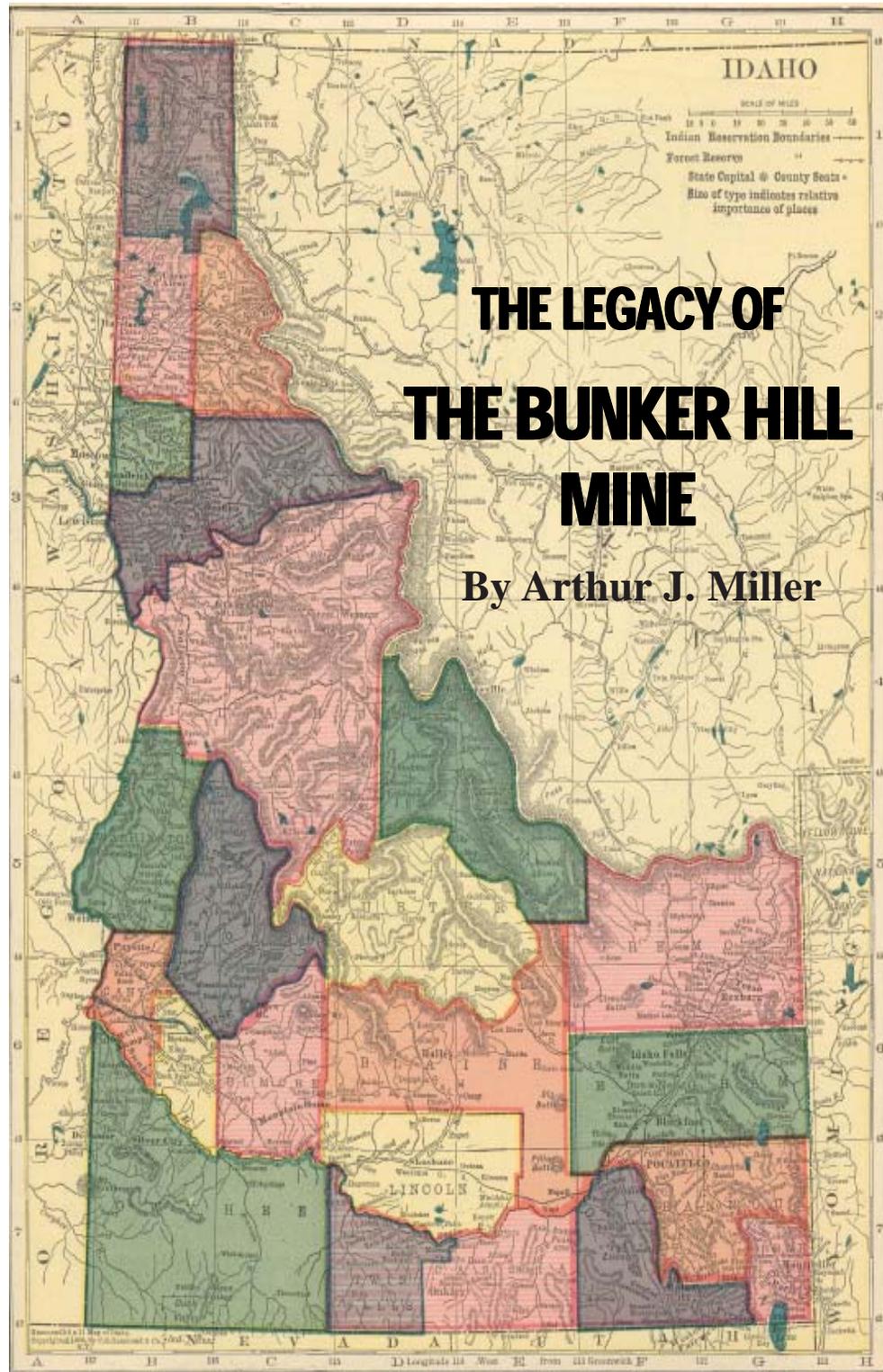
deaths of workers, poisons children, fouls Mother Earth, they are allowed to live their lives in the luxury gained by their crimes. When I speak of class struggle, it is not some ideological philosophy, but rather a struggle for survival and the hope that someday we can make the worst criminals in history pay for their crimes against us.

The lessons to be learned from the legacy of Bunker Hill are many, a book could be written on that alone. But the heart of the matter is very simple—we, the workers, the oppressed and exploited people, cannot find any justice or ethical values from any bosses, politicians, judges or so-called labor leaders. We can only find such things among ourselves. And we, organized as a great power, are the only ones who can put an end to this historical human tragedy called capitalism. Our power should be delegated to no one, for we can trust no one but ourselves.

After researching this writing, I pulled out my old Steel Workers card and looked at it. It seemed not a thing of pride and honor, but a thing of shame — a card of union betrayal. I have always been a card carrying union man. And I attend to continue to be one until my body is placed into the ground of Mother Earth. But I also know how the Steel Workers got control of Bunker Hill, and how the pie cards sought to cover-up a great crime. I then burned my card in honor of the Coeur d'Alene Nation, in honor of the long miner's struggle, in honor of the workers who died because of corporate greed, in honor of the 91 miners who died in the Sunshine Mine, in honor of the poisoned children, and in honor of Mother Earth.

**About the Author:** Arthur J. Miller has been an Anarchist since the late 1960s. As an anarchist writer he has been published in anarchist newspapers in North America, South America, Asia and Europe. He has been the editor of the Anarchist Journal Bayou La Rose for over 26 years. And he has been devoted to prisoner solidarity work including working for Leonard Peltier for over 25 years. He has worked as a farm worker, wildcat oilrig roughneck, a zincstripper in the hard rock mining industry, a long haul truck driver, and a shipyard pipefitter. Arthur has been a member of the Industrial Workers of the World since 1970.

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## THE LEGACY OF THE BUNKER HILL MINE

Deep within the mountains of the panhandle of Idaho is a valley that white people named Silver. This valley is the heart of what became known as the Coeur d'Alene Mining District. The Bunker Hill Mining complex, situated from the west end of the town of Kellogg and through the town of Smelterville, includes a silver, lead and zinc mine, a smelter, a zinc plant and a rail yard.

Bunker Hill has had a turbulent history spanning over 100 years. Though Bunker Hill is now closed down (hopefully for good), the final story cannot be written, for the effects will linger on for generations to come. Many histories are written in such a way that they seem distant in time and place, but the story of Bunker Hill has a personal aspect for me because I once worked there.

Back in 1972, I wandered into the town of Kellogg with my stake, built while picking fruit in Oregon, nearly exhausted. I made my way down to the main drag where I found the employment office for the Bunker Hill Mining Company. The place was old and run down, and gave you a feeling of stepping back in time. Once inside they had me fill out a few papers, and without reading them, and no questions asked, I was told that I would begin work the following day. Because of my youth I was assigned to the cellroom of the zinc plant where I was to be a zinc stripper.

After being handed a few papers and being told to report for the graveyard shift the next day, I decided to scope out the town and find a place to camp until I made enough to pay some landlord for a flop. From the get go I could tell that there was something different about the people, something that I had never seen before. I guess you could say there was a haunting feel about them—a sense of tragedy, a hurting look in their eyes, something that you can't quite put into words. I knew the reason for what I saw. Five miles to the east of town 91 miners had died in the Sunshine Mine only a short time before. The date of that great fire, May 2, 1972 will always live on in the memory of those that live in the Silver Valley.

The Sunshine Mine was a maze of over 180 miles of tunnels reaching a mile below the surface. Old tunnels in the worked-out areas of the mine were not sealed off and were full of dried-out timber. Like the other hard rock mines in the area, the Sunshine Mine was what is called a "hot mine" Down in the hellish tunnels the temperature would exceed 100 degrees and the air was very dry. The timber would dry out and any source of ignition or sometimes even spontaneous combustion will set the timber burning.

Once the fire gets going smoke and carbon monoxide gas rapidly fills the mine's air stream and ventilation system. Once the smoke and gas reaches the miner's, there is only a minute or two before they lose consciousness. The fire started at the 3,700 foot level, trapping the miners below and forcing those above to flee for their lives. Though the law calls for two ways out of a mine, this one had only one. The miners rode an elevator down to their job sites, and this hoist was operated by workers from above.

Some of the hoist operators died at their posts trying to get their fellow workers out. Once the operators were overcome by smoke and gas there was no way out for the miners below. One operator later testified that "The men were choking, down on their

5) The South Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River and many streams were found to be repositories for lead, cadmium and zinc. Fish that found their way into these waters were killed. An estimated 72 million tons of mine tailings remain in these waters, and an estimated ton of heavy metals are washed down the river every day. The EPA says that cleaning up this mess in these waterways is beyond the Superfund capabilities.

6) The problem is yet to end, for heavy metals are still coming out of the portals of the mines.

I wish I could take pity on you dear reader, and tell you that this corporate crime was confined to the Silver Valley, but it is not. The Coeur d'Alene River feeds into the Coeur d'Alene Lake, which is full of toxic sediment and from there it goes down the Spokane River which feeds into the Columbia River. The toxic sediment collects behind dams and washes all the way down the Columbia River to the ocean. Adding to this problem has been clear-cut logging, road building and commercial development. All this adds to runoff from rain and melting snow, which picks up the toxins from the ground and washes it into the rivers. This also increases the amount of flooding in the area. In years of great flooding toxic sediment is dispersed throughout the flooded area.

The federal government and the state of Idaho, take the attitude that over a long time that once the toxins are washed away, that new clean sediments will cover over the toxic sediment in the waterways and flood grounds and be sealed in.

Who will pay for the cleanup, and what happened to the corporate criminals? Keeping the crime a secret allowed Gulf to sell Bunker Hill and take their assets to New Zealand where they cannot be touched. They then filed for bankruptcy in the U.S. This gets them out of paying for the cleanup or other law suits by poisoned people, and leaves Bunker Hill workers without their pensions and medical benefits. The new owners were able to profit from the cover-up of the truth and the slow action by the EPA, and ran the mine for a while; they then closed it down and sold off contaminated equipment and rail ties. They then diversified their assets to the point that there was no company left.

This story of the Silver Valley comes to an end where the history began, with the Coeur d'Alene Indian Nation. They are suing eight mining companies still left in the area, the Union Pacific Railroad (because of the uncovered railcars that went through their land and the toxic material that blew off them) and the state of Idaho to force a cleanup of the waterways, flood grounds and along the rail line. The Coeur d'Alene Nation's land is downstream from this dreadful mess. This is the first such suit by a Native Nation.

A mine owners association has recently "fixed" the blame for the closing of Bunker Hill on "environmental extremists, the Coeur d'Alene Indians, and disgruntled miners who exaggerated the harmful effects of (toxic) materials from mining." And to show just how sick some people can get, there are those who want to create a Bunker Hill National Park to honor Bunker Hill's great history.

The mine owners, the politicians, the U.S. government, the state government of Idaho and the pie-card leaders of the United Steel Workers were all partners in the crime that took place and the long cover-up of their misdeeds. If a poor person steals a loaf of bread to eat, that "criminal" is hunted down as a threat to humankind. If a rich person causes the

4) Over 5,000 people have been exposed to the lead fallout. In 1974 the Center for Disease Control tested children for blood lead levels and found that all the children living in Smeltonville had unsafe levels, as did 99 percent of children in Kellogg and 93 percent of children in Pinehurst. This came to nearly 600 children known to have been poisoned by corporate greed at that time that was documented by the government. No one knows how many other children in the area were poisoned. The government left it at that and did nothing until 1980, six years later, when they found that 75 percent of the preschool children (not even having been born yet at the time of the great exposure) were poisoned. No follow-up studies were done to see if this was a continuing trend, to determine the long-lasting health effects on the children known to be poisoned, and no testing was done on the adults. Again this information was not released until years later, and nothing was done to stop the continuing poisoning of children. It was not until 1994 that another test was done on children, and it found one-fifth of the children had blood-lead levels greater than the harmful level.

Are there words to really tell you how I feel about all this? Even saying that this was premeditated mass murder seems not to be sufficient. To knowing cause deaths of workers, to knowing cause the great suffering of little children with their twisted bodies, and to knowing allow this to continue year after year, there are just no words in any language strong enough for such a crime. No matter how many years past, this crime haunts my very being, it sickens me. With the mixed emotions of sorrow for the victims and immense rage for the profiteers and the government, I will carry this with me to my dying day.

Through a conspiracy by the federal government, the state of Idaho, the courts and Gulf, the people of the area did not know about how badly they had been poisoned until 16 years later. The only action that was taken was by the Public Health Service, which went into the schools and would put on puppet shows to teach children how to play (among the effects of lead poisoning is reduced mental ability).

In 1985 Bunker Hill became the second largest Superfund site in the country, covering an area of 21 square miles. The following is but a small sampling of what was found at the site:

1) Trees, grass and other vegetation would not grow in much of the area because of toxic metals in the soil and high soil acidity caused by sulfur dioxide emissions.

2) The smelter contains at least 36,500 tons of toxic heavy metals including lead, zinc, cadmium, mercury, cobalt, copper, beryllium, arsenic, asbestos, antimony, selenium and PCBs. If all the buildings were to be demolished the hazardous debris from that alone would fill 22,500 dump trucks.

3) The Central Impoundment Area, a level dike of smelter waste piled over 70 feet high and extended for a mile, contains 20 million tons of highly toxic mine tailings. When the wind blows, "fugitive dust" blows into the surrounding towns. Until recently, the town of Kellogg, not knowing of the toxins in the waste, would crush slag off these piles and spread it on icy streets.

4) The yards, playgrounds, schools and even the rugs inside of homes were found to contain lead and other toxic material.

knees." When the last hoist came up, "all the miners in it were lying on the floor—either dead or unconscious." He collapsed but was saved by a fellow miner. Nine days later the last of the 91 dead miners were found. On that same day came news of five more miners' bodies found in another mine fire in Farmington, West Virginia, where 78 miners had died and it had taken three years to find the last bodies.

Figures from the Federal Bureau of Mines show that before the fire, the Sunshine Mine had an injury rate five times the average for metal mines, and that the fatality rate was twice as high. Mining inspectors found 35 violations just two months before the fire. And that was in the areas they could inspect, the worked-out areas were too cluttered with old timber and other debris to be inspected. There had never been any fire drills in the mine, no fire escape plan, and the portable respirators were old, rusty and mostly unusable (and the miners had no training on how to use them).

Seven days after the tragedy, Irwin P. Underweiser, Chairman of the Board of the Sunshine Mining Company, spoke the following words to an Associated Press business editor. "In spite of the shutdown, we may make a profit on the closure. Insurance will cover cost of a shutdown of up to six months, although we don't anticipate such a lengthy closure. Also keep in mind that the Sunshine Mine is our nation's largest single silver producer. I wouldn't be surprised if the closure might put a crimp on the silver supply, forcing prices to go up in the ten percent neighborhood." And people wonder why I think the bosses are the scum of the earth. A few months later the Sunshine Mine was up and running again and it is still in operation today.

After I found a place to camp, I made my way over to the Sunshine Mine. Along the way I was picked up by an old-timer who had lost his only son in the mine. He told me that he often drove up to the mine just to think about his son and try to understand why all those miners had died. He showed me where the families had stood their 24-hour vigil for nine days. Right behind that area still stood a sign that read; "This is the first day of the rest of your life. Live it safely." Not far away was the old exhaust stack that billowed out smoke from the fire over the weeks it took before it was put out.

He told me of being a "gypo" miner for over 36 years before mine dust had destroyed so much of his lung tissue that he had to retire. He said the mine owners just didn't give a damn about the miner; it was only the ore they cared about. I asked him how the other miners in the area reacted. In a voice trembling in both grief and anger, he said, "A little bit of every miner died that day. But every miner knows that they carry a death sentence just waiting to be carried out. If they are not killed down in the mine, then the mine dust will kill them slowly."

He did say that a mine east of there, the Lucky Friday Mine, had a wildcat strike 20 days after the fire when the owners refused to allow a union safety inspection team permission to accompany a Bureau of Mines safety inspection team in a tour of the mine.

The next day I made my way up past the mine and smelter to a little box canyon where the zinc plant lay hidden from sight. As I walked up the canyon I noticed that the hills around it were barren off all plant life. At the front gate stood a sign that said the plant had gone 30 days without lost time due to accidents. I was later told that a few

years back, when those 30 days was accumulated, they stopped updating the sign. The zinc plant was an old, dilapidated place with rotting walls and floors, in which one had to step with some care so as not to step into a hole. The place had a sulfuric smell to it, with a few other unidentifiable aromas mixed in so that one's nose would never grow accustomed to the stench.

The cellroom was where the zinc from the mine was poured into large vats of sulfuric acid and was then charged with 15,000 volts of electricity. The zinc strippers were all young; nobody over the age of 30 was allowed to work in there. We all wore rubber boots and rubber gloves, and our clothes were patched together with rubber patches. The zinc crystallized on plates, which we had to climb up onto the vats and pull up with a hook that looked like a longshoremen's hook with the point, cut off. We placed the plates on a cart and then we stripped the zinc off in another area. There were 40 plates to a cartload, and we had to do eight cartloads in a shift. That meant that if you wanted a break or lunch you had to bust ass. If you missed your quota twice you were fired.

From time to time you would hear a popping sound, like a firecracker going off, from bad electrical connections. Once, when I was there, a whole bank of plates started popping and smoking, as if a full room of fireworks was going off at the same time. As I ran I could see other workers running in every direction through the dense smoke and sparks. Two workers were injured and carried off, then back to work we went to make our quotas.

It goes without saying that our working conditions were atrocious, and our pay was low. The parasitic union that held the contracts, ruled by the iron law of "union jurisdiction", was worse than worthless. While I was there rank-and-file zinc strippers held a number of meetings with the idea of forming their own union. There was always much talk of their resentment and distrust of the union, the United Steel Workers of America.

There was no love for this union that was forced upon them and cared not for the workers of the district. Though the thought of this little group of young zinc strippers taking on the sellout piecard I.W. Abel and the right wing USWA warmed my Wobbly heart, I knew there was no chance of success. At the first meeting I sat there not saying a word. For I had learned from past experience that a true labor organizer first listens before they open their trap. At the second meeting I spoke just once, and that was to say that the only way we could restore true unionism was to reach out to our fellow workers throughout the district.

Though nothing came of all this, other than a banding together of a number of young rebels to vent their frustration, it was interesting to see history making a full circle. For the union movement began with small groups of workers coming together against incredible odds.

Back in 1882, placer gold deposits were found along the banks of the Eagle and Prichard creeks. At this time, the U.S. government was forcing a treaty upon the Coeur d'Alene Indian Nation. The Coeur d'Alenes signed the treaty that forced them to live on a reservation, and the government agreed not to wipe them out. The treaty was sent

other children, that she had "three walking dead babies." In 1975 Bill Yoss went to see an attorney in Spokane to see what could be done. While he was away he was fired. The Yoss family filed suit against Bunker Hill. The information gathered for the suit told a story of corporate crime almost beyond comparison. Bunker Hill settled with the Yoss family and the families of 35 other children in 1981. All records and information gathered was sealed by the court, and it was not until 1990 that the records and the story that the suit revealed of the poisoning of the people of the Silver Valley became known.

Within the unsealed documents was found a two-page memo in which the vice president of Gulf Resources and Chemical Corp. (the company that owned Bunker Hill at that time) calculated an estimation on how much Gulf would have to pay if it continued to expose children to lead emissions rather than shut down the smelter and repair the baghouse. His estimate came to \$6 to \$7 million for poisoning 500 children. He also examined the possibility of discrediting the doctors who warned of the dangers of lead poisoning. At the time, prices for lead ore were high, so Gulf decided that the profits were far greater than the "costs" of poisoning children. That year Gulf raked in \$25.9 million from lead ore. Some of the costs to the workers and community included:

1) The lead pollution was so bad that the State of Idaho was measuring it by tons per square mile. A reading in Kellogg showed in excess of 30 tons of lead per square mile in the year after the fire. Smelterville was put at 25 tons per square mile. "I had pictures I took at 2 p.m.," Bill Yoss said. "It was so dark you had to have your headlights on." The residents of these communities were exposed to mega-doses of lead greater than any other community anywhere else in the world throughout history.

2) The hazardous threshold of lead, back then, was 1,000 parts per million. Sediments along the riverbank were measured at 40,000 to 50,000 parts per million. And by 1987, when they were finally measured, 75 percent of the yards in Kellogg and 81 percent of the yards in Smelterville exceeded safe levels.

3) In a study of workers who had worked at the smelter between 1940 and 1965, found that deaths from kidney disease was four times higher than expected based on U.S. death rates. Deaths from kidney cancer were nearly double, and deaths from strokes were one-and-a-half times higher than expected. After the fire 56% of Bunker Hill workers have come down with kidney disease, including myself. It was not until the 1990s that this information was made public. Kidney disease takes a while to hit you after your exposure. Many workers, like myself moved on to other jobs, and thus cannot prove that their illness was caused by exposure to lead at Bunker Hill. They cannot even prove that it is job related. Thus, the figure of 56% has to be a low figure. How they came up with that figure was to track workers by their Social Security numbers and records, medical claims and the National Death Index. How many workers like me that are not included in that 56% no one will ever know. Maybe I will be included when I die. Like many other workers, working with the pain of kidney disease is hard. I had to quit my last job because of it. I have no medical coverage, no on going medical treatment, I keep myself going with roots, herbal teas, lots of cranberry juice and pain killers that I have to go up to Canada to get. Even as I write these words, I am struggling with pain to do so. Even the workers who stayed at Bunker Hill lost their medical insurance because Gulf went bankrupted.

about the so-called Communist infiltration in the U.S. Included in that was the claim of Communist control of some labor unions, including the Mine Mill Workers. To back this up they pointed to the expulsion of Mine Mill Workers from the CIO ten years earlier. With the help of some teachers, the Chamber of Commerce, the American Legion and the Shoshone County Anti-Communists Association a large number of high school kids organized the "I Am An American Youth Movement", and a large anti-Communist march and rally in Kellogg. The anti-Communist hysteria grew to the point that union miners found their own kids turning against them. Later even a group of miner's wives organized an anti-Communist group. The anti-Communists issue a rather interesting list of words used by "Communist" that included, working class, ruling class, capitalist, tyranny, class struggle, demonstration, character assassination, stool pigeon, coexistence, scabs, big money interests, freedom loving people, democratic action, democratic majority, world peace, and the workers. They stated that "by their words ye shall know them". And asked, "How many have you heard locally?"

The striking workers stood strong threw the summer and then the reactionaries tried something different. A petition for decertification was started up and those that signed on were called Blue Carders. Later it was revealed that a new "American" union, the Northwest Metal Workers, was behind this with the help of the local media that printed their lies and decertification forms in their papers. The Blue Carders got enough signatures for a NLRB decertification election. By the time the election was held in December many of the workers were broken down by the anti-Communists campaign (it was said that only Communists would vote for Mine Mill Workers), some of their kids and wives turning against them and the "Back to Work by Christmas Committee" of the Northwest Metal Workers. This committee had such emotional pleas printed in the local paper such as a little girl looking up at her father saying, "Will you be back to work by Christmas, daddy?" And "Please, God! for Mommy's sake let daddy go back to work by Christmas." Also, the schools in the Kellogg area stopped the school lunch program saying that it was helping the strikers by feeding their kids. The company union, the Northwest Metal Workers won the election by 51 votes.

Thus closed out the years of the Mine Mill Workers at Bunker Hill. The Metal Workers quickly gave the Bunker Hill bosses the contract that they wanted. A few years later the United Steel Workers took over the Bunker Hill contract along with all the other Mine Mill Worker's contracts in the district. And that is how I came to hold a card in the United Steel Workers a few years later.

This story does not end here, for in 1973 a fire badly damaged the baghouse, where smelter emissions were filtered through cloth bags before being released into the air. Rather than close down the smelter and repair the damage, the jackasses ran the smelter bypassing the baghouse and the built-up lead rained down upon the surrounding towns. The families, and most tragically the children, were poisoned with lead.

The family of miner Bill Yoss, who had worked underground for 25 years at Bunker Hill, was tested by doctors from the Center for Disease Control. His daughter, Arlene, was found to have more than four times the threshold then considered dangerous. The lead had settled in her bones and her legs grew twisted. Only hot soaking baths would ease her continuous pain. Her mother was told, after the tests on Arlene and her two

to Congress, but they did not ratify it because the news of the finding of gold reached them. So the government forced the Coeur d'Alenes to give up all land in the Silver Valley.

The Northern Pacific Railroad exploited the situation by issuing their infamous "Circular No. 6" which made wild claims of gold in the valley and triggered a gold rush. Mining towns appeared almost overnight, but little gold was found. The Northern Pacific made a killing off transporting gold-crazed prospectors and supplies to the district. Though dreams of gold faded, it was the discovery of silver that made the valley the major metal production district in Idaho. Some gold was mined in the area later along with lead, zinc, copper and other metals.

In 1884, at prospector by the name of Noah S. Kellogg came into the district. For many years he had been a prospector in such places as the Boise Basin in southern Idaho, the fields of northern Montana, the Kootenay district of British Columbia, and in the Cascade mountains. In 1885, Kellogg obtained a grubstake and a jackass from two businessmen to prospect for gold in new areas of the valley. When his grubstake was exhausted he returned unsuccessful and gave back the jackass. He formed a second partnership and went looking once again. Somehow the jackass had gotten loose and Kellogg and his new partner came across it. As the legend goes, the jackass, when found was standing on a mineral outcropping of galena (lead sulfide) on a hill above Milo Creek. The story has it that the jackass was gazing across the canyon at another outcropping of galena. This was the discovery of what became the Bunker Hill & Sullivan mines.

The first partners sued and a judge ruled, "From the evidence of the witness, this Court is of the opinion that the Bunker Hill Mine was discovered by the jackass, Phil O'Rourke and N.S. Kellogg." Since the jackass belonged to Kellogg's first partners, they got half the mine. So through the years the story has been told of the jackass that discovered Bunker Hill, owned Bunker Hill, and operated Bunker Hill. Any time the miners were up against it with the boss, they would say, "there's that jackass again." There was an old dancehall song about the jackass that went: "When you talk about the Coeur d'Alenes, and all their wealth untold, don't fail to mention Kellogg's jack, who did the wealth unfold." In the town of Kellogg a sign was erected that stated; "Kellogg, the town discovered by a jackass and still inhabited by its descendants!" That old jackass is held in a place of honor in these parts, there is a Jackass Mountain, Jackass Creek, Jackass Flats, Jackass Point, and Jackass Ski Bowl. One old miner said to me once, "did you know that the president came from Kellogg?" I said really? And he said, "yea, there's a jackass in the White House."

As more and more mines opened up, miners throughout the west began to pour into the district. And with them they brought their union experiences. The first western miners' unions were started in 1867 in Virginia City, Nevada, and Leadville, Colorado. The following year miners in Butte, Montana set up a union. Small independent unions spread throughout the mining camps of the west due to the fact that the mine owners gave no concern for the safety of the miners who were dying in these mines, and their pay was low. In a number of mining camps the miners were not paid in money, rather they were issued "scrip" that could only be used in company stores. So you had a situation in many camps where the miner was exploited in the mines, little if any expense was given to

safety, the wages were low, rent was paid to the owners for living space, and scrip was given to be used in company own stores that made a profit off that also. The mine owners were making great profits, and all the miners could do was to organize and try to fight back.

One of the things that is consistent throughout the hardrock mining industry was the injury and deaths of the miners. The most common injuries came from falling objects. The chambers of the underground mine always contained loose rock. It takes little to cause this loose rock to come falling down upon the miner. Even with the safest of support timbers being used this is still a problem. But in many mines, taking the time for safety meant less profit for the bosses. One of the most dangerous parts of the mine is the open shafts because objects there can fall a long distance. Even a small object falling down from the top of the shaft can cause serious injury or death. There is one case where a rat fell two thousand feet down a shaft and struck a miner killing him. As more and more machines were added to the mines and operated within the shafts, the danger increased. In one mine falling objects combined for more than 50 percent of all injuries and fatalities. Falling was another major problem. Rather than the bosses providing proper scaffolding across shafts and ore chutes, the miners had to use mine timbers as bridges. These were not anchored down and there were no handrails, thus the slightest slip or the misjudging of footing in the dark, would send the miner plunging into the depths.

Drilling and loading holes and the storage of explosives was another source of injuries and death. Even common sense was not all that common in the boss's pursuit of fast profit. At one mine the dynamite was stored in the blacksmith shop of all places, and was detonated by a spark touching off the blasting caps, blowing the place up and killing the workers inside. The most common accidents from drilling and loading holes came from: 1. Sparks igniting the charge before the blaster was ready. 2. Premature explosions due to misjudging how fast a fuse burned. One of the causes for this was that fuses were not made in a standardized manner. 3. Overloading a hole. Remember that the miner was forced to work quickly and for very long hours and by making the mistake of overloading a hole would bring the ceiling down upon him. 4. Misfired holes, the blaster would set 12 charges at a time and if there were not 12 that detonated that meant misfired holes. Some times the charge dud not misfire but had a slow burning fuse (again lack of uniform quality) and when the blaster would check on it the tardy charge would go off. Reloading a hot hole was also very dangerous. Sometimes in haste a loaded hole would be missed and in the dark the pick or shovel of a miner would hit the missing loaded hole and set it off. 5. The drilling of the holes often would send bits of rock or steel snapping back striking the miner, often putting out eyes.

Cages that were used to lower the miners down the shaft, buckets; mine cars, giraffes and electric trains were another source of injuries and deaths. Like all things in a mine the equipment was the cheapest that the boss could get away with, additional safety equipment was not used, the equipment that they did have was not maintained as it should have been, equipment was pushed passed its limits, and the great speed that the workers were forced to work caused mistakes. Because of these things many a miner were injured or died.

moment the resisted Talf-Hartley. Even with all this going on, Mine, Mill Workers was able to pull off some of the largest post-war strikes in the country. But after a while they were worn down by the attacks from every direction on them. On Jan. 16, 1967, the United Steel Workers took over the Mine, Mill Workers, and the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers was no more, except for one local in Sudbury, Canada that refused to change its name. Thus the legacy of the WFM died a very inglorious death. One can only speculate as to what a major difference there would have been to miners and the labor movement, had Moyer not sold out and forced the WFM out of the IWW.

After the brutal repression of the 1899 strike, the Coeur d'Alene District went through a number of years without any unions. This was aided by blacklists and the Idaho state government that issued a proclamation that forced miners to get a permit from the state to work. To get a permit a miner had to renounce membership in any organization (the union) that was involved in the 1899 struggle. Also any miner who was involved in that strike was refused a permit to work. In the '20s and '30s the Mine Mill Workers made slow inroads back into the district. This first important strike came about on August 2, 1937 at the Sunshine mine. With 216 miners picketing the mine some of the other mines (including Bunker Hill) that were still nonunion told their workers to quit work for the day and go to the Sunshine mine and put on a counter demonstration against the strike. Though they all took the day off with pay, only a small handful joined the counter demonstration. The press carried wild tails of violence, a tipped over buses set on fire, burning cars blocking the main highway and many injuries. The fact is that none of this had happened. It was only a campaign by the press to try to turn people against the strikers. The company fired all the strikers and hired scabs to take their place. Since the firing of workers involved in a legal strike was against the law, the fired workers did get back pay after a number of years of court battles, which the other mine owners helped with Sunshine's legal expense. The union miners were blackballed and could not get jobs in the other mines.

It was not until 1942 that unionism return to Bunker Hill with a contract with the Mine mill Workers. By 1946 most of the district was again under union contact. But unfortunately the unity of the district was broken by a right wing element. In the contract negotiations of 1947 one of the three locals broke away from the other two and signed their own contract, with was for less than the master contract signed in time by the other two locals. When the 1949 negotiations were taking place the same local broke away again and signed as contract that was the same as before with no changes. The difference this time was that the other locals went out on strike. The right wing element had also infiltrated one of the other locals and forced an early settlement at Bunker Hill. This break in unity forced a settlement for far less than was being struggled for in the other mines. There was another strike in 1955 with about the same disunity and a settlement for less than they could have gotten. After this the locals went their separate ways and there were no more district wide Mine Mill strikes.

In the 1959 into 1960 negotiations at Bunker Hill the company took a hard line against the union and broke off all talks. On May 5, 1960 the workers at Bunker Hill went out on strike. This strike was to be different than in the past, for the reactionary and business communities mobilized against the union workers like never seen before in the district. The first important part in this happened in the schools. The school kids were taught

The IWW was the logical next step in the struggle of working people. An organization built out of the direct experiences of the working class, with the purpose of doing away with the exploitation of the working class by using the two greatest weapons the working class has. First, the power of production, and second, universal solidarity. And with these two weapons the IWW sought to take industrial control away from the parasites and place it in the hands of those who do the useful work in society, the workers, and to put an end to the age old conflict between the employers and the workers.

These ideas were seen as a danger to not only the employing class, but also to those who sought the power of the working class for their own selfish reasons. The so-called labor politicians that wanted working people to delegate their power to them with the unkept promise that they would act in their interest, and the union “piecard” leaders who feared worker control would mean the loss of their power and fleecing of working people. Both of these types of scoundrels did all they could to try to destroy the IWW. After three years the treacherous piecard Charles Moyer, through underhanded manipulation, was able to withdraw the WFM from the IWW, which they had a major part in creating. Eventually Moyer was expelled from the miners’ union for corruption. Though the IWW was able to go on and produce a massive labor struggle, the fact that the IWW did not become what it could have been was a direct result of so-called labor ‘leaders’ who sold-out the cause of working people for their own personal power and greed. Maybe one day working folks will learn who their true enemies are (all of them) and rebuild the IWW, the hope of such a thing happening is still alive today.

In 1916 the WFM changed its name to the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, or the Mine, Mill Workers, as they were called. In the depression years there was considerable growth in the Mine, Mill Workers and in 1936 they were one of the eight founding unions of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). After the Second World War, Mine Mill Workers fell victim to the postwar, anti-labor and anti-communist hysteria. Like a number of other unions (including the IWW), they resisted the Taft-Hartly Act. They found themselves labeled subversive by the Subversive Activities Control Board. A number of their leaders were indicted, but they were cleared by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1956. Later, 14 more Mine, Mill Workers were indicted for conspiracy and were finally cleared again by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1968. Throughout the '50s and early '60s numerous Mine, Mill members found themselves arrested on state charges, including, in 1959 union vice-president Asbury Howard, who was jailed, beaten and sentenced to the chain gang for the crime of urging Blacks to register to vote in Alabama.

The opportunistic, reactionary piecards in the CIO saw their chance to drive out of the CIO the more radical elements in the post-war madness. On Feb. 15, 1950, the Mine, Mill Workers were expelled from the CIO along with the Fur & Leather Workers Union, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America and the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union. This clearly showed that the ideas of the IWW, of creating a labor organization outside of the conservative, piecard controlled labor organizations was correct. For what use is there in “boring from within” when at any given opportunity the reactionaries will stab you in the back?

The CIO then handed all Mine, Mill Workers’ jurisdiction over to the United Steel Workers. The Steel Workers had been violently raiding Mine, Mill Workers since the

Gas was another common source of danger. As the blasters would blast out new holes, from time to time they would hit pockets of gas. If the gas did not explode causing a far larger explosion than the blaster counted on, it would fill up that part of the mine killing all workers in that area.

Silicosis, or as the miners called it, “the con”, is a lung disease, like Asbestosis, Black and Brown Lung disease. It comes from Silica that is the world’s most abundant mineral. In mining operations, such as blasting and drilling, great clouds of dust are created and within that dust is Silica. In the old days the bosses made no effort to keep the dust down. Once a miner got “dusted” as they called catching “the con”, the miner did not last long. It starts out with a shortness of breath and slowly the miner suffocates to death. There is no real treatment for silicosis, other than to stop working in the mines at the first symptoms. But since most miners were trapped in their line of work, they would keep on working until they could not carry on any longer. Then most of them would slowly die along and penniless. In later years, as the result of a bitter struggle for safety, water hoses were connected to the jack-legs (drilling machines) that would cut down on the dust. Though this did prolong the lives of the miners, it did not eliminate “the con” all together.

Rock bursts is a source of many deaths and injuries of miners. Rock bursts are caused when the ground is blasted loose in one area of the mine, causing stresses to build up in the surrounding rock. When the rock can no longer withstand the stress it bursts out in a shower of rock and dust. Sometimes the burst is so great that the whole mine shakes like an earthquake. There have been some big rock bursts that were so great that they showed up on regional earthquake monitoring equipment. Rock bursts can split or even cause to crumble of even the best timbering supports. Miners can be buried or hit by flying rock. Those not in the direct area will be hit by an air blast, which they, unaffectionately call “a visit from Mr. Air Blast.”

No miners ever doubted the inhuman greed of the mine owners. They knew that if they were injured, sick or killed, some other poor soul would take their place.

These early miners’ unions had a lot of community support, not only because the miners made up a lot of these communities, but also because the mine owners callously endangered these communities for the sake of profits. The best example of this was in Butte where the city passed an ordinance prohibiting the open roasting of copper ore. This process had covered the town with noxious sulfurous fumes. In December of 1891 the Boston and Montana Company disregarded this ordinance and began roasting its ore in the open. Within 48 hours there were 15 deaths and many within the community were sick and confined to their beds.

The first miners’ union was organized in the Silver Valley in 1887, but little about this union is known for its members and activities were all secret. Organizing at Bunker Hill was hard, and anyone thought to be sympathetic to unions, or rose their voice about anything was fired. It was not until the winter of 1887-88 that the union was able to lead its first strike at Bunker Hill. On New Year’s Day of 1891 a central union organization for the Coeur d’Alene District was set up called the Central Executive Committee of the Miners’ Union of the Coeur d’Alenes. Throughout 1891 and 1892 Miners’ union halls were built in every mining town in the district.

The miners at Bunker Hill struck for a second time over the bosses' trickery in an election over health care. The company had agreed to hold the election, but when the miners looked at the ballot they found it only had the company supported options on it and left off the union supported Miners' Hospital. The strike not only won the Miners' Hospital, it also raised miners' pay to that of other union mines in the district.

Later that year the mine owners and the railroad began to fight with each other because the railroad had raised their shipping rates. That winter the Mine Owners' Association shut down most of the mines to try to force a reduction of the rates. A settlement was reached in March, but before the owners would let the miners go back to work they had to agree to a reduction in wages. Thus, the first district wide lock-out/strike came to be.

The owners brought in scabs to work the mines, leading to furious battles between union miners on one side and scabs, deputy sheriffs, gun thugs and the despised Pinkertons on the other side. The owners went to the state court and got an injunction against the union, and the governor ordered the miners to "disperse all unlawful assemblages and to cease interference with the mine owners." Miners fought back any way they could, for this battle was not over just wages and the ideas of unionism — if the union was broken the effect of that would be counted in dead and crippled miners. Gun battles were fought, mills were dynamited, people died on both sides of this class war.

The mine owners tried to bring in scabs from Missouri and Michigan by train, but armed union miners met the trainload of scabs and forced them to turn back. On July 11, armed union miners confronted scabs and gun thugs at the heavily barricaded Frisco mine. After a firefight the union miners loaded an ore car full of dynamite and sent it down the incline toward the mine, but it blew up short of its goal. Then they tried again and blew up the four-story wooden structure in front of the mine. After that the scabs and gun thugs surrendered under a white flag. After that firefights broke out at other mines and a short time later all the scabs were run out of the district.

Miners took possession of a number of mines, including Bunker Hill. Over 1,500 Federal and state troops were brought in on the side of the mine owners on July 14th. Hundreds of miners were imprisoned in bullpens without formal charges or trials. This allowed the mines to reopen with scab miners.

Though the mine owners had their scabs and an overwhelming armed force, they lacked one thing — real miners. The scabs were nothing more than incompetent class traitors, and in time they drifted away from the hard work in the mines. The owners were then forced to bring back the union miners and the union was re-established in all the mines.

The Coeur d'Alene district struggle, along with other struggles of western miners, showed the need for stronger organization. At a convention in Butte of independent miners' unions a new federation was created on May 15, 1892. It was named the Western Federation of Miners (WFM). The WFM fought a number of bitter miners strikes in the next few years, including one in the Coeur d'Alene District in 1899.

This strike turned out to be as bloody as the last one. There was an intense reign of terror against the miners and their families. Idaho governor Frank Steunenberg, who had been elected with WFM support the year before, called in troops to put down the strike.

Once again hundreds of miners were placed in bullpens, some for over a year. Several miners were sent to the federal prison in Leavenworth, Kansas. Out of anger several hundred union miners seized a train in the town of Burke, loaded it with dynamite, and aimed it at the Bunker Hill mill and remodeled its decor into a smoldering scrap heap of twisted metal and splintered wood.

A few years later, in 1905, Steunenberg was killed by a bomb. A petty criminal named Harry Orchard, who had been a paid spy for the Mine Owners' Association, confessed to the killing. Though it later came out that he had his own economic reasons for the bombing, he said he was hired by three WFM leaders — Big Bill Haywood, George Pettibone, and Charles Moyer. All three were illegally kidnapped to Idaho. Haywood was the first to go on trial. After a very dramatic trial he was found not guilty. Later Pettibone was acquitted and then the charges were dropped against Moyer.

It did not take the WFM long to realize that they needed to be a part of a labor federation beyond their industry, so they joined the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1896. The AFL turned out not to be what they were looking for, and they withdrew from it the following year. The AFL was biased against any worker who was not what they viewed as a "skilled" worker. Their views on workers and their trade union structure was based on the old craft guild system which divided workers on the job and throughout industry. Also, the AFL lacked worker solidarity and gave the WFM no support in their strikes. What the WFM wanted was a federation of industrial unions, and the year after discarding the AFL as a waste of time, they created the Western Labor Union. Seeing that their organization had to extend further than just the west, they changed its name in 1902 to the American Labor Union.

Still this was not enough — the WFM and other unions wanted a labor organization that was not just a federation of affiliates, but an industrial organization that would organize the working class to its greatest possible extent, for they had learned that the labor struggle was not a battle with individual bosses, but rather a class conflict between the employing class and the working class.

A small handful of unionists held a meeting in November of 1904 to talk about the direction that the labor movement needed to go. They decided to call a secret conference for January of 1905 of veteran unionists to "discuss ways and means of uniting the working people of America." This conference was attended by representatives from the WFM, ALU, United Metal Workers, the Brewery Workers, United Mine Workers, the International Musical Union, the Bakers Union, the Switchmen's Union and the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance. Out of that meeting they drew up an Industrial Union Manifesto, which called for a new type of labor movement that would unite and organize all working people into an effective organization to do battle with the employing class. With the Manifesto was a call for an Industrial Union Congress to be convened in Chicago on June 27th. At that congress it was decided to create a new revolutionary organization of industrial unions. At first they were only thinking about a national organization, but with the input of some Canadian unionists it was decided that this organization would be international. This new organization became the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).