

Thrilling Story of Dynamite and Bull Pen Days of Idaho

CONNOR MALOTT, city editor of the Spokane Review, contributes an article to the Seattle Times in which he reviews the history of the labor troubles in the Coeur d'Alenes. In an introductory note the Times says: "Mr. Malott was employed on the local staff of the Spokane Review at the time of the great Coeur d'Alene riots in Idaho. He was an eyewitness of the destruction of the Bunker Hill and Sullivan mines, and reported in detail the many dramatic incidents which followed, including the celebrated 'Bull Pen' trials. Later he went to Washington City, where he was one of the main witnesses in the so-called 'Bull Pen' investigation. The following story of this great chapter in western history, particularly apropos at this time in view of the assassination of ex-Gov. Steunenberg by one of the Black Hand, was written by Mr. Malott exclusively for the Times." Mr. Malott's article follows:

With the assassination of ex-Gov. Steunenberg of Idaho, another murder has been added to the bloody list of crimes laid against the "Inner Circle" of Coeur d'Alene dynamiters.

The little group, numbering about 30 men, picked from the worst rascals among the miners of northern Idaho, is closing its fourteenth year of terrorism and crime. Its record, including the destruction of two great mine plants, armed rebellions, murder and petty crimes innumerable, have been achieved with rare and masterful genius.

All the power of the martial law has been exhausted in trying to discover the secrets of the gang. Whole communities were arrested and thrown in the "bull pen" back in 1899 in the hope that some weak-kneed brother in crime might be induced to tell what he knew about this society of the "Black Hand." Calajory, bribes, threats, imprisonment—even the prospect of death—failed to break the silence that surrounds the bloody crew. Either through loyalty to the gang or through fear of a swift and terrible punishment for treachery, the men who know of the Coeur d'Alene crimes have kept their lips sealed in spynx-like muteness.

When Earllet Sinclair assumed command of the Coeur d'Alene during the '99 riots, as personal representative of Gov. Steunenberg, he confidently—eagerly—looked forward to the speedy conviction of the ring-leaders in that city of crime who blew up the Bunker Hill & Sullivan mine. After sending federal troops, who arrested every union miner in the district, he herded his prisoners in boxcars, and in a big barn near Wardner, and then commenced his inquisition. One by one to 800 prisoners were brought before him.

SINCLAIR'S EFFORT FRUITLESS.

Mr. Sinclair, in star chamber session, with negro troops for his bailiffs and guards, brought those prisoners to tell what they knew of the conspiracy that resulted in the blowing up of the Bunker Hill mine. He is a brilliant southerner, and he combined pleading and bulldozing, eloquence and threats of death, in his efforts to secure some information. Failing in that, he turned the prisoners over to the coroner's jury, provided over by Dr. Hugh France, company physician for the Bunker Hill & Sullivan mine. Dr. France, who was specially appointed coroner for that work, was assisted by Judge Curtis Lindsey of San Francisco, the principal attorney for the Bunker Hill. The coroner's jury, like Mr. Sinclair's star-chamber inquisition, was attended by a guard of negro soldiers. Week after week these proceedings dragged on, and if the combined power of martial law and negro troops, and specially constituted coroner's inquests, resulted in the 140 dynamiters who blew up the Bunker Hill mill, I have yet to hear the facts.

The attack on the property was planned by the Inner Circle, who had armed branches in each of the mines



THE FAMOUS BUNKER HILL AND SULLIVAN MILL

unions throughout the district. The Bunker Hill & Sullivan was particularly odious to the unions, because the management steadily refused to "recognize" the organization, and also because it paid its "muckers" \$2.50 a day, and its miners \$3 a day, while the union scale in other camps was \$2.50 for all classes of men working underground.

OPERATED AS RED FLAG.

The operation of the Bunker Hill with a non-union crew was a red flag in the eyes of the "dynamiters." They ordered all men working there to join the union, and at the same time they ordered the company to increase its pay to \$3.50 a day all around. The employees refused to join and the company refused to have anything to do with the union, although it raised the wage scale 50 cents a day.

There were sporadic troubles between union men and the Bunker Hill crew, but in a few days the outbreak settled down into an ominous calm. On the morning of April 23 word came by telephone to Manager Burbridge that the miners in the union camps at Mullian and Gem and Mass and Burke, masked and armed, had stolen a train and were coming down to Wardner to wipe out the Bunker Hill. The purpose was obvious, as the rioters had stolen 3,000 pounds of dynamite from a mine warehouse up the canyon. Twice before—in July, 1894, and in May, 1896—efforts had been made to destroy the Bunker Hill with dynamite, though fortunately neither attempt was successful. On receipt of the phone message, Manager Burbridge decided that it would be useless to attempt a defense against such a force, and the plant was abandoned while the employees took to the hills.

The train arrived at Wardner at noon. There were 800 or 1,000 miners on foot, but the bloody business of the fatal day was to be done by the 140 men of the Inner Circle. They planned the infamous job. They stole the train. They called the union meetings where the rank and file of the members were herded together like sheep to come along. The presence of the latter served two purposes. It gave a formidable appearance of strength to the attacking mob, and it disciplined the lay members in scenes of bloodshed and crime, so that they

might the sooner be qualified for admission into the wicked circle of third degree dynamiters.

A FEARSOME CREW.

It was a fearsome crew that tumbled pell-mell off the train when it arrived at the station. Each wore a piece of white cloth in buttonhole or on sleeve as token of sign and recognition among the rioters. The 140 of the Inner Circle were masked and disguised most hideously. Some had bandana handkerchiefs over their faces, with holes for nose and eyes. Others were concealed behind masks of yellow buckskin, whose sallow hue made them look like corpses brought to life again. With 2,000 pounds of dynamite, some had their coats turned inside out. Others wore coarse sack over their clothing. They were armed with rifles and shotguns of every conceivable sort—Winchesters, sawed-off shotguns, Mausers and even Springfield rifles, stolen bodily from the state militia long before, in anticipation of need for such rebellion.

One of the mysteries surrounding the attack was delay in appearance of the leader. The men, after the arrival of the train, waited for nearly an hour before making a move. At last the crowd turned instinctively to a big masked villain near the pile of dynamite and he rose to the occasion. "Burke," he called sharply, and at the order there was a movement among the masked riflemen as a resolute group pushed forward around the commander.

"Wardner," he shouted. Evidently some of the Wardner thugs held back terrified at the bloody task they were called to wreck upon their fellow-townsmen. But a huge Swede, passed through the crowd, pushing forward such masked riflemen as he suspected of belonging to the local Inner Circle. It was after 10 minutes delay, the attacking army was ready. A few minutes later and sergeants took their places beside the little regiment, as it moved forward, two by two, in the attack upon the mill.

THE BATTLE OPENS.

It was a march of half a mile down the country road from the station to the Bunker Hill mill. Scouts and pickets made a flank movement along a

low hill to route out any defenders. There was a flash of fire suddenly, and the attacking party found they

were firing on their own scouts, concealed in the brush along the hillside. Not a sound from the mill. It had been long deserted.

With a whoop the rioters rushed back for their dynamite, and brawny arms packed the big boxes down to the mill where it was stored away in the immense concentrating machinery. Though the attack was made by the 140 of the Inner Circle, the rank and file of the rioters were put into service in packing the dynamite down to the mill, and it was with willing hands that they took up the task.

When all was ready the leaders lighted the long fuses and the mob rushed back to the hills for safety. A little later the great plant was blown high into the air, in a series of three tremendous explosions, that were heard 20 miles away.

After the explosion it was found that one of the rioters named Jack Smith had been killed in the cross-firing between the pickets. Later on some of the rioters fell in with James Cheyne, an employee of the Bunker Hill and Sullivan, and he was murdered in cold blood.

When the masked crew left the station to march on the hill, I followed closely after until I was captured by some union pickets, who held me prisoner on a little knoll. There I fell into conversation with an unmarked miner named Willis, who told me he was working in the morning mines at Mullen, Idaho. He was a decent sort of a young chap, and we sat on a log together while the mill blew up. He seemed to be a bystander who had come along on the excursion to "see the fun."

Later Willis was arrested in one of the Bartlett Sinclair raids on union pickets. I saw him in the bull pen and remembering his kindly treatment of me when I was a prisoner, I besought Mr. Sinclair to turn him loose.

and was sent back to the bull pen.

MAKES HIS ESCAPE.

Later on he was indicted with seven others for the murder of Jack Cheyne, and he would undoubtedly have been put on trial if the little group of prisoners had not secured enthusiastic release from the bull pen through the connivance of a sergeant of the guard, who was bribed by friends of the prisoners on the outside, to let them go. The prisoners took to the hills and nothing has since been heard of them.

I was fairly well familiar with the progress of the prosecution, and so far as I was ever able to learn, there was not a whit of evidence of any kind against Willis, except what was innocently given by me.

The state tried to secure his conviction on the theory—sound enough in law—that any member of the conspiracy was responsible for the murders that resulted from it.

I cite this case of Willis to show the straits into which the prosecution was forced in trying to secure convictions for the outrages.

Paul Concoran, secretary of the Burke Miners' union, was tried first of all for the murder of Cheyne. The evidence directly connecting him with the crime was indeed of a dubious sort. Yet he was found guilty and sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment. It is easily conceivable that in the excitement of those days, Willis, who sat beside me on the log, while the mill was blown up, might have been convicted of the murder with which he was charged.

Gov. Steunenberg was sick in bed at Boise at the time of the riots. He sent his state auditor, Bartlett Sinclair, to the Coeur d'Alene to take charge for him. Mr. Sinclair is one of the most cheerful performers I ever met in my life. Tireless in his enthusiasm, as firm as the pyramids in his determination to enforce the law, he took up the

piety fearlessly. He came and went among the sullen and infuriated dynamiters as if they were the kindergarten class in an orphan asylum, and he came out of it unscathed.

JAILS THE SHERIFF.

It was evident that any ordinary method of going about the prosecution of the cases would fail. Here were 1,500 miners, numbering most of the adult male population of the district who were engaged in rebellion and the destruction of the mill. The sheriff and county commissioners were in flagrant sympathy with the criminals. Sinclair promptly arrested the sheriff and the county commissioners and forced the county attorney to resign. He filled the offices with men of his own choice. Federal troops had been sent in to restore order, and Mr. Sinclair, as representative of the governor, took charge of the situation. He and Gen. Horner planned a campaign which was unique in America. Taking companies of troops they secretly encircled each of the mining towns from which the dynamiters had come on April 23 and they arrested practically every union miner in the district. At Burke, which is in a narrow mountain canyon, the soldiers were so energetic that they even cleaned up the postmaster, the merchants, and everybody else of voting age in the camp. The prisoners were taken to Wardner in box cars, where they were kept for days until the famous bull pen could be erected. It was a rough shed built in the form of a Mexican ranch house, with a hollow court in the center, and it was surrounded by a barbed wire fence, with soldiers on guard on the outside. There were 800 miners arrested altogether, without the shadow of a warrant. The cost of keeping them in box cars, where they were kept for days until the famous bull pen could be erected, was considerable, and day by day those who would prove that they were not connected with the outrages were released. It was maintained somewhere around that figure that the cost of the martial law, late in the fall, when those still held prisoners were released.

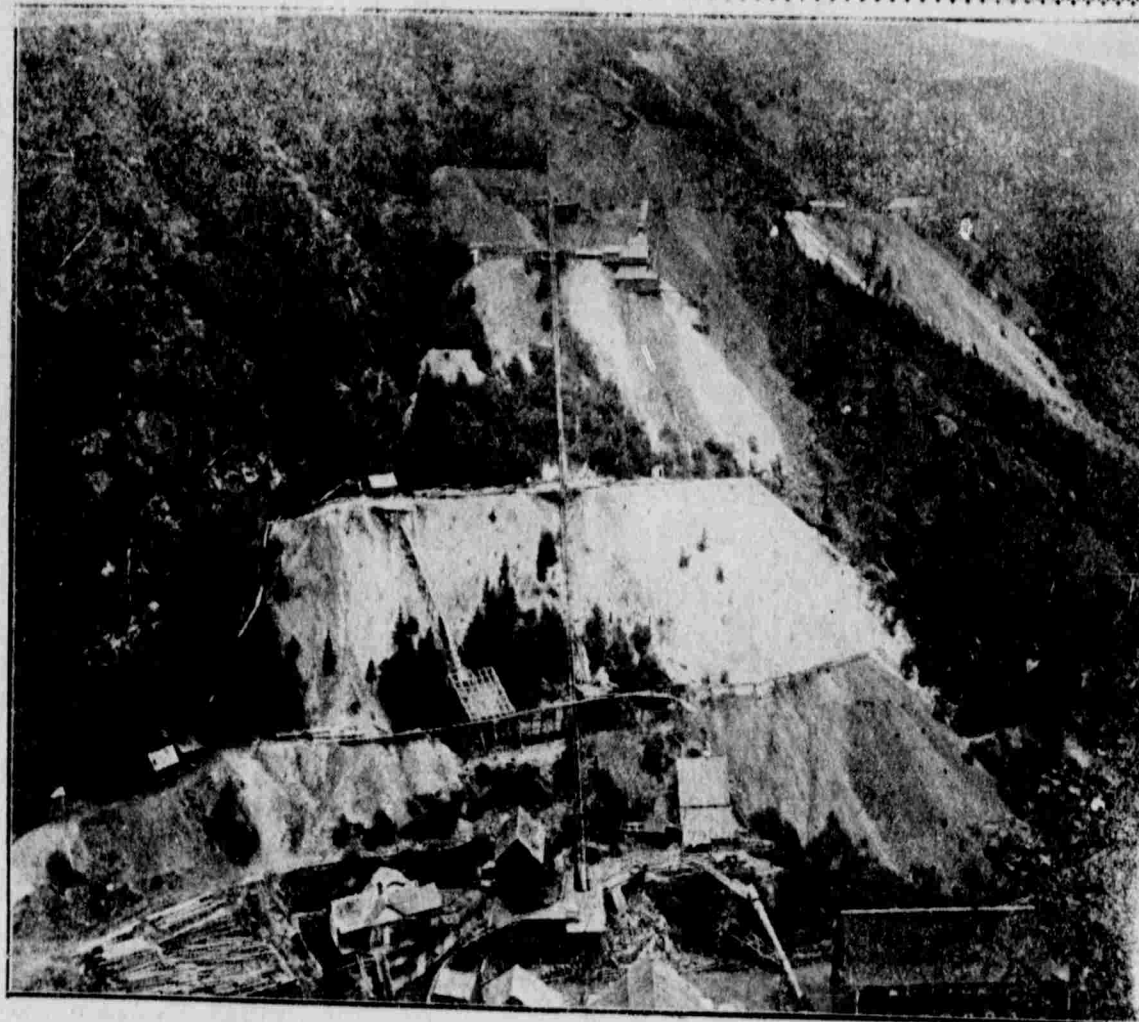
The thing that aroused the ire of the union men, next to the bull pen, was Gov. Steunenberg's policy in creating the permit system. He decided that order would never be restored in the Coeur d'Alene until the old crowd of rioters and miners was driven out. They had made a hell on earth of that district for seven years. Having decided to expel them, Gov. Steunenberg tackled the job with the thoroughness that characterized all his actions.

A proclamation was issued in his name by Mr. Sinclair, stating that no miner could be employed in the big properties unless he should first secure a "permit" to seek employment from several agents named by the state. These "permits," which the applicants were required to sign, set forth a belief that the outrages in the Coeur d'Alene were fostered and encouraged by the miners' unions, and the applicants were required to abjure all connection with them.

DECLINED TO SIGN.

The union miners, infuriated by this remarkable move, declined to sign, and many of them left the district. Non-union miners from Missouri were brought in. After the close of martial law, the "permits" were named by the state were no longer of any importance for, of course, it was only the power of the sword which gave Gov. Steunenberg the right to require miners to forewear an employment office, which hires their men. The employment agent he charged with the duty of keeping out any of the old crowd of dynamiters, and the system has worked so successfully that for six years the camp has experienced unprecedented peace. Some of the old union men are creeping back, and the unions have quietly been reorganized, but they are all quiet and inoffensive.

Until the recent assassination of Gov. Steunenberg the Inner Circle has been almost forgotten. But his murder shows that the gang is still at work, and no man can tell what fresh outrages may break forth at any time.



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