

The Bisbee Deportation

by W. LANE ROGERS

During the summer of 1917, some 2,000 men, hastily deputized by verbal accord, roused at gunpoint an equal number of striking miners and others from their homes, boarding houses, and places of business. The captives were marched—at gunpoint—to a staging area some two miles distant. There, 1,186 men—those who would not swear loyalty to Bisbee’s cooper mine owners—were herded, at gunpoint, into railroad cars. Then, in the dark of night, the captives were dumped, at gunpoint, into the New Mexico desert.

History has attached the name *deportation* to this extreme bit of unpleasantness. The word is, at best, a misnomer; at worst, an outright falsehood. In fact, what has come to be called the Bisbee Deportation was the largest mass kidnapping in American history. And it went unpunished. Not a single individual who participated in this illegal and unconscionable act ever saw the inside of a jail. No one—certainly not the mine owners who instigated the kidnapping, nor the county sheriff who orchestrated it—was ever brought to justice.

The Bisbee Deportation has waddled through history under the oppressive weight of anger and anguish. Despite the passage of nine decades, the incident remains as controversial

today as it was in 1917—particularly for Arizonans and others whose family members were on one side of the fence or the other.

It is difficult to comprehend how some 2,000 men—men who otherwise were hard-working husbands and fathers, sons and brothers and, presumably, law abiding members of their community—could involve themselves in such an inhumane, extra-legal activity. Therefore, a search for context is necessary.

In 1917, copper mining was not simply Arizona’s largest industry, it dwarfed all other industries combined. That year, \$200-million worth of copper was extracted from Arizona’s underbelly. Phelps Dodge Corporation, the largest by far of the state’s copper giants, turned a profit in excess of \$24-million dollars—a staggering sum in those days of token taxes.

“Today [Bisbee] is the richest copper camp in the southwest,” noted a contemporary journalist, adding that, “it will soon be...the richest copper camp in the world.”

Thousands of “boys” in General John J. Pershing’s American Expeditionary Force were mired in the trenches of France. Copper was vital to the war effort, and war hysteria—it was carefully orchestrated by the White House—decried as treasonable the acts of men who dared defy the copper companies.

The forces that played out on that hot summer day in Bisbee were manifold: World War I and Woodrow Wilson, and the president’s obsession with galvanic anti-German propaganda. A nation of immigrants whose inherent *otherness* made them suspect in the eyes of the government. Miners whose wages were sucked up by spiraling inflation, and who objected to a floating wage scale based on the price of copper. The International Workers of the World—the notorious IWW—and its alleged obstructionism of wartime industry. Obscenely wealthy industrialists endowed with unbridled power, and infused with a monomaniac commitment to

shatter the spine of organized labor in Arizona. And a popular county sheriff possessed of a messianic complex—and a machine gun.

In 1916, President Wilson campaigned for re-election with the pithy slogan, “He kept us out of war.” Then, with assurance of another four years in the White House, he promptly declared war on Germany. It was not a declaration met by harmonious jubilation. In fact, there was considerable discord.

More than a few German-Americans were reluctant to send sons into combat against relatives and friends. A large Irish-American community had no interest whatever in helping Britain, who brutally suppressed an attempt at Irish independence in 1916. As a matter-of-fact, some Irish thought the United States ought to declare war on England.

To suggest, as many historians have, that the United States was largely isolationist, if not pacifist, is a bit of a stretch. Certainly, however, a large segment of the public opposed American involvement in a conflagration it regarded as exclusively European. North Carolina Congressman Claude Kitchen spoke for that segment of the public when he characterized the war as “one vast drama of horrors and blood, one boundless stage upon which will play all the evil spirits of earth and hell.”

It was that tone of rhetoric, and that kind of mind set that convinced the Wilson administration of the necessity to mobilize public opinion in favor of the war, and to crush any hint of dissent. To that end, Wilson created the US Committee on Public Information—disinformation would have been more accurate—and named George Creel, a muckraking journalist with a questionable reputation, to head the committee. Creel’s mandate was this: use the CPI to unify American thought so that everyone would think and speak according to the committee’s definition of patriotism.

Creel’s committee unleashed a barrage of exhortations to patriotism, sacrifice and 100-percent-Americanism. Millions of pamphlets outlining the duties of Americans during wartime were distributed across the nation. Countless posters were tacked up from shore to shore, and newspaper ads admonished workers to conduct surveillance of other workers, and to organize “Loyalty Leagues” among the foreign-born to encourage Americanization and ensure loyalty. As historian Nell Irvin Painter points out, the goal was to encourage “conformity and its companion, bigotry.”

Creel agreed with Wilson utterly that there could be no doubters, no dawdlers. Pacifists were radical subversives whose utterances—in public and in print—must be suppressed. And if the First Amendment presented obstacles to the wholesale crushing of dissent, the Sedition Act would prohibit “disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language” directed at the flag, the United States government, and uniforms of the armed services—under penalty of a \$10,000 fine and up to 20 years in prison. Putting it bluntly, anyone who disagreed with anything the Wilson administration said or did was subject to severe punishment.

Wilson’s Espionage Act was equally insidious. Some 1,500 people went to prison under its provisions, and it made Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson one of the most powerful men in the nation. The act empowered him to determine what could and could not pass through the mails. By war’s end, the Post Office Department had denied mailing privileges to some four hundred publications, including, briefly, the *New York Times*. Foreign language publications were especially vulnerable after Creel organized a group of college professors to search out material it considered subversive. More than a quarter million members of a nativist organization called the “American Protective Association” were hired by the Justice Department to spy on immigrants.

All domestic manifestations of pride in German culture and heritage—the German-language press, German fraternal societies, German history taught in schools, German music—must be eliminated. Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms became undesirable subversives—part of the enemy within.

Dr. Karl Muck, a remarkable musician of German lineage and Swiss citizenship, built the Boston Symphony from a local organization into a world class orchestra. But never mind the conductor’s achievements, he ran afoul of the government. When a local women’s group suggested that he open each concert with the Star Spangled Banner, Muck made clear that he would not mix serious music with patriotic gestures. Should that not be sufficient to make him suspect, he refused to eliminate Beethoven from his programs.

The Justice Department investigated and determined Muck was guilty of “pro-German sympathies.” Arrested, the conductor was jailed as an enemy alien and, in quick time, Muck was deported to Switzerland.

He was one of many.

Meantime, George Creel was running amuck. Under his instructions, the motion picture industry addressed the war by slandering all things German. An example of Creel’s excess was *My Four Years in Germany*, a film loosely based on a memoir by a former ambassador. As the first reel began, a subtitle announced, “Fact, Not Fiction.”

“Facts,” then, portrayed the Kaiser as a man with the intellectual capacity of a six-year old child who rode a hobby horse as he formulated plans to invade Belgium. The German general staff was introduced by a series of superimposed images comparing each officer to a wild animal. In a montage of bloody gore, doughboys decimated clumsy Germans in hand-to-hand combat. When a young soldier bayoneted a German, he turned to his buddy and said, “I

promised Dad I’d get six.”

Another sensational thriller was *The Kaiser: The Beast of Berlin*. Kaiser Wilhelm was portrayed as gloating over the butchery of civilians and chuckling over ships torpedoed to the deep six. Subtitles encouraged the audience to “hiss the Kaiser” each time his image appeared on screen.

The *New York Times* ran afoul of the White House when it criticized the movie as “a travesty of war and America’s serious purpose in it.”

While the list of Creel-inspired vulgarisms is lengthy, *Heart of Humanity* is a film that stayed long in the collective memory of Americans. In it, a German officer raped a Red Cross nurse. When a baby in a nearby cradle annoyed the rapist, he tossed the infant out the window.

Not content to leave his bloody contrivances to fictional films, Creel assigned technicians to chop the celluloid into bits and pieces and offer carefully selected gore to newsreel producers as actual war footage.

Certainly, the most visible unit of the CPI was Creel’s Four Minute Men, a loose organization of some 75,000 volunteer speakers who invaded—literally—motion picture theatres nationwide. Given a captive audience, the speakers commandeered whatever platform was available—stage, rostrum, soapbox—and for four minutes they spat out a stream of anti-German venom. At the conclusion of his harangue, the speaker would remind listeners that part of their duty was “informing on neighbors who uttered disloyal remarks.”

Vapid as his ethics were, Creel was an expert at influencing public opinion, and Woodrow Wilson got what he wanted from the CPI. The “House of Truth,” as its leader called it with unbridled cynicism, was an extraordinarily sophisticated operation for its day. It was a publicity apparatus that, in scope and conception, had no equal. And its mandate extended far

beyond the manipulation of films.

To sell the war to Americans, to “guide the mind of the masses, every moment of human attention had to be mobilized,” Creel wrote in a memoir. “The printed word, the spoken word, motion pictures, the telegraph, the wireless, posters, signboards, and every possible media should be used to drive home the justice of the American cause.”

So successful was George Creel’s propaganda effort, that some years later a man named Paul Joseph Goebbels, who held the title Minister of Propaganda, used the CPI as a model by which to fashion Hitler’s insidious program of Nazi propaganda.

The United States is, and has always been, a nation of immigrants. But despite the idealistic prose of Emma Lazarus attached to the Statue of Liberty—“*Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore....*”—more than a few Americans were nativist xenophobes who wanted nothing to do with “wretched refuse.”

Acclaimed inventor Samuel F.B. Morse asked rhetorically, “Can one throw mud into pure water and not disturb its clearness?”

With each influx of foreign-born, Americans expressed fear, disgust, and hostility. Around the turn-of-the-century a religious magazine twitterpated about preserving the nation’s “ethnic purity” wrote, “the floodgates of intemperance, pauperism and crime are thrown open by immigrants, and if nothing [is] done to close them, they will carry us back to all the drunkenness and evil of former times.”

Prior to the 1880s, less than three percent of the foreign-born population of the United States emigrated from eastern or southern Europe. Immigration was dominated by people from northern and western Europe. Those folks were acceptable because they met, at least

theoretically, the blue-eyed, blond-haired stereotype cherished by Americans, and some even spoke English.

However, during the 1890s, the pattern began to reverse itself. By the first decade of the twentieth century, about 70% of all immigrants came from the less desirable east and south of Europe. These new immigrants were more “foreign” than the old ones. Consequently, they were feared and disliked. They were considered culturally deficient and incapable of assimilation. They were biologically and inherently inferior, and would never become “one-hundred percent American”—or so the reasoning went.

In 1910, just seven years before the unpleasantness at Bisbee, Edward Alsworth Ross, a noted educator, made it clear that even a brilliant mind could twist itself around utter nonsense. Considered a giant in the science of sociology, Ross wrote these words about Italians coming ashore:

“Behold the new immigrants as they walk down the gangplank. They possess a distressing frequency of low foreheads, open mouths, weak chins...skewed faces, small or knobby crania and backless heads.” They “[are] obviously of low mentality [and lack] the power to take rational care of themselves.” Ross concluded this bit of idiocy, suggesting that Italians “clearly” belonged “in [animal] skins [and twig] huts at the close of the... ice age.”

A man even better known than Ross, former president Theodore Roosevelt, railed against what he called “hyphenated Americans.” The nation, he said, was becoming little more than a “poly-glot boarding house” for undesirable aliens.

Rarely does one think of Arizona in terms of an industrial melting pot akin to such cities as New York or Pittsburgh—it does not fit the Wild West stereotype embraced by much of the country. Nevertheless, Arizona’s mining industry attracted immigrants from all over the world,

and Bisbee—the state’s third largest city in 1917—was as ethnically mixed as any city in the United States. As ethno-historian Tom Sheridan notes, “The rest of Arizona might speak English, Spanish, or Apache, but in Bisbee...the Babel that was then reshaping cities like Cleveland and Chicago could often be heard.”

In fact, as technology advanced and sophisticated mining equipment was put into use, the demand for skilled workers steadily declined. Consequently, “new” immigrants who were largely unskilled and spoke little English began to arrive in Bisbee in large numbers. Prejudice and discrimination were rife among ethnicities competing for the same dollars, and Bisbee became a segregated community.

Walter Douglas, vice president of Phelps Dodge, pulled no punches when he called Bisbee a “white [man’s] camp.” Chinese, for example, were allowed to sell vegetables in town, but they were not allowed to own businesses or live in Bisbee.

There existed a small community of blacks, but none were permitted to work in the mining industry. Not unlike their counterparts nationwide, they worked as shoe-shiners, waiters, janitors and chauffeurs.

Mexicans and Mexican Americans, when hired at all, were used exclusively in above-ground work. Higher paying subsurface mining positions were the white man’s domain. But “white” was a nuanced term with multiple definitions and arbitrary application. Ethnic segregation was rigidly enforced.

Timber men, responsible for building and maintaining the infrastructure of underground shafts, received the highest pay—and all were of Anglo descent. Next in the pay scale were the actual miners, who generally were Irish, Welsh, Cornish, Scotts, German, or American-born. They were followed by muckers, who loaded ore and shoveled waste, and were largely Finns,

Italians, Serbians, Poles, and Montenegrins. So were trammers, who worked the underground ore carriers and were paid at the same rate. Virtually all foremen, engineers, and mechanics were, however, American-born, or were English-speaking immigrants from the stereotypically acceptable countries of northern and western Europe.

Never mind that Bisbee was populated largely by immigrants trying to carve a place for themselves on difficult terrain, they were the kind of folks Theodore Roosevelt would like to have tossed into an Atlantic tide. They were the kind of folks who unwittingly threatened Woodrow Wilson’s digestion. They were the kind of folks whom the Justice Department asked neighbors to keep tabs on. George Creel, America’s preeminent xenophobe, no doubt would like to have seen Bisbee’s entire population lifted from the Sonoran Desert and dumped onto the Sahara.

Other elements at play put Bisbee in the eye of the needle. Located within spitting distance of the Mexican border, on again-off again revolutions rent havoc in northern Sonora. On more than a few occasions, bloodletting spilled over the international boundary, creating tense moments in US-Mexican relations. John J. Pershing—the general then leading the American Expeditionary Force in France—had recently returned from a Punitive Expedition which sought, but failed, to punish Pancho Villa.

Within this atmosphere of apprehension and distrust came a startling development. Five months prior to the unpleasantness at Bisbee, President Wilson instructed the State Department to release to the press the contents of a telegram intercepted by British intelligence. The sender was German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann and the recipient was the Mexican government. Zimmermann proposed that Mexico ought to align itself with Germany. The inducement was this: after the United States was defeated, Mexico’s former territory—Texas,

New Mexico and Arizona—would be returned to its former owner

Never mind that Mexico rejected the proposal, outrage—much of it misdirected at our southern neighbor—simmered from sea to shining sea.

Then, to make matters worse, Representative Charles B. Miller of Minnesota, read to the House what he claimed was a suppressed paragraph from the Zimmermann telegram. Here is what it said: “Agreeable to the Mexican government, submarine bases will be established in Mexican ports, from which will be supplied arms [and] ammunition....All [German] reservists in the United States are ordered into Mexico. Arrange to attack all along the border.”

The State Department claimed the newly discovered paragraph was poppycock, and inferred that more than a few cards might be missing from Representative Miller’s deck. Nevertheless, tension increased along the border. Mexicans and Mexican Americans had, unknowingly, joined European immigrants on the government’s list of potential subversives.

Like those in hundreds of cities nationwide with immigrant population densities, it is fair to say that countless Bisbee residents lived on the edge of government-induced fear—waiting for the guillotine to slice away their lives. Finally, it did. And when it did, all hell broke loose.

In 1917, George Wharton James authored a book titled *Arizona: The Wonderland*. Arizona gained statehood just five years previously, and James’ book was typical of the kind of boosterism written during that period. He waxed eloquently about the copper industry, praised Arizona’s copper moguls and pointed out that, “The wages paid [in Bisbee] are the highest of any camp in the United States....”

In fact, James may have been correct. Bisbee enjoyed a reputation for paying its workers higher than average wages. But there were considerations James failed to note—items that rarely surface when labor discord at Bisbee is analyzed.

Between July 1914 and July 1916, the price of copper nearly doubled from 13.4 cents per pound, to 26.5 cents per pound. Extraction costs recorded by Phelps Dodge in 1916 were 9.5 cents per pound. That figure constitutes a 218 percent increase in net profits over the previous year—from slightly less than \$11-million, to slightly more than \$24-million—a fabulous sum on money in that day.

In March 1917, four months before labor trouble erupted in Bisbee, the price of copper skyrocketed to 35.74 cents per pound, an increase in profit of almost 10 cents per pound. Extraction costs remained static at 9.5 cents. For all practical purposes, Phelps Dodge was a money machine.

While the company patted itself on the back for paying wages slightly higher than its competitors, mine workers eked out an existence. And in reality, even with a wage increase in 1916, concurrent increases in the cost of living were whittling away paychecks.

Between 1913 and 1917, consumer prices rose almost 40 percent while wages increased just 14 percent. Between January 1916 and January 1918, food costs increased 52 percent; rent 10 percent; clothing 44 percent; heating fuel and electricity 31 percent.

Greed, then, was not the motivating factor when Bisbee miners objected to a floating pay scale by which wages fluctuated according to the market price of copper; when they demanded that wage discrimination based on race and ethnicity cease; when they insisted that underground blasting be halted in areas where men were working.

However, greed may well have been a motivating factor when mine owners told employees that they could rot in hell before another penny would be paid them. The notion that organized labor could dilute corporate power by giving miners a voice in their destiny was simply unacceptable.

With varying success, and more failure than not, organized labor had attempted to gain a foothold in Arizona’s mining industry since 1884, when a union was organized at Globe. That same year, soldiers from Fort Huachuca were sent to Tombstone to put down a wildcat strike protesting reduced wages and increased working hours.

When wages were reduced at Globe in 1896, a strike was called by the Western Federation of Miners (WFM). It was suppressed by law enforcement authorities.

In 1903, a pay cut caused miners to walk off the job at Clifton-Morenci—where there was no union. Mine owners convinced the governor to send in the Arizona Rangers, and the governor convinced President Theodore Roosevelt to dispatch federal troops from Forts Grant and Huachuca. The strike was effectively halted.

In 1907, the WFM called a strike at Bisbee and 3,000 men walked off the job. Refusing to recognize the union, the mine owners fired 1,600 men, imported strike-breakers, and over a six-month period replaced virtually all of the striking miners.

1915 saw strikes at Miami, Clifton-Morenci, and Metcalf. When mine owners became huffy, perennial Governor George W.P. Hunt intervened as negotiator and the strike was settled five months later.

And so it went.

There was violence, there was bloodshed. But, by comparison to hotbeds of labor agitation across the land, Arizona strikers survived their forays relatively unscathed. Just three years prior to the incident at Bisbee, the bitter struggle of organized labor in Western mining camps reached a dramatic crescendo at Ludlow, Colorado.

A strike at the Rockefeller-owned coal mines ended tragically in April 1914. Company-hired strikebreakers, hastily deputized vigilantes, and national guardsmen soaked the strikers’

tent colony with coal oil and set the tents ablaze. As people ran screaming—some with their clothing aflame—machine gun and rifle fire cut them down. Thirty-nine strikers and their families, including a dozen women and children, were slaughtered in cold blood. Not a single perpetrator—certainly, not John D. Rockefeller—was punished for this ghastly massacre.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, when the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner was the fashionable ideology of American industry, labor unrest in the United States was rampant. In 1917, more than 4,000 strikes were called nationwide. There were twenty in Arizona. All were against mining companies.

This, then, was the juncture at which the Industrial Workers of the World, the IWW, the Wobblies—perhaps the most despised labor organization ever to exist in the United States, entered the drama.

“If the IWW...gets busy in your neighborhood, kindly take the occasion to decrease the supply of hemp,” wrote a not-so-subtle Oklahoma newspaper editor, who echoed the sentiments of most industrial moguls. “The first step in the whipping of Germany is to strangle the IWW’s. Kill ‘em just as you would any other kind of snake... And kill ‘em dead! [This] is no time to waste money on trials.”

On June 27, 1917, the *Arizona Daily Star* pointed at Bisbee when it hit the newsstands with the inflammatory headline, *Strike Caused by Treasonable IWW*. A subhead read, *Sheriff Wheeler calls on Miners to Remember [that] Hindrance of [the] Copper Industry is [a] Direct Blow at [a] Nation at War*.

There are several points in that brief headline that demand scrutiny: The word *treasonable* was a slanderous—today libelous—editorial flourish that had no business in a legitimate newspaper headline.

The strike was not “caused” by the IWW. The strike was called by the Metal Mine Workers Industrial Union, a short-lived reorganization of the defunct Western Federation of Miners. The IWW, had little success organizing in Bisbee, and the Metal Mine Workers was a loose affiliate.

So long as no laws were broken, a labor strike was not the business of Cochise County Sheriff Harry Wheeler. And, certainly, it was not the county sheriff’s place to lecture miners about the necessity of copper to the war effort.

Perhaps most glaring about the headline was, however, what it did not reveal: the *Arizona Daily Star* was owned by Phelps Dodge. And so were the *Bisbee Daily Review*, the *Douglas International Gazette*, *Clifton’s Copper Era*, and the *Arizona Gazette* in Phoenix. And that’s not all. Considerable evidence supports the claim that Phelps Dodge controlled—largely through bribery—forty other small dailies and weeklies throughout Arizona.

To suggest, however, that Arizona’s copper-controlled press was unique, would be a fallacy. George Creel’s genius at whipping up war hysteria was manifest in tainted headlines nationwide. The *New York Times*, for instance, headlined, “Big Copper Strike Blamed on Germans.” The story was rife with the words “aliens,” “sympathizers,” “agitators,” “traitors,” and, of course, “Wobblies.”

And, so, the pieces fell together. The giant copper companies, with Phelps Dodge in the lead, became rabidly patriotic when threatened by a strike. Never mind that they were making money hand over fist because of the war, war hysteria was a convenient tool used to inflame the public against miners unhappy with a floating pay scale.

In the Phelps Dodge scenario, however, the miners were committed members of a radical labor organization—the IWW. And the IWW was, by its own admission, a subversive, often

violent, if not anarchistic, organization.

Of Bisbee’s mine workers, who numbered about 4,700, only three or four hundred were members of the IWW. But, no matter, they were largely aliens, and by Justice Department standards, aliens were subversive, if not anarchistic, if not collaborators with the enemy. It stood to reason, then—copper mogul reasoning, at least—that Phelps Dodge and the other copper companies were morally and patriotically obligated to rid the landscape of these enemies of democracy, so that copper production—and enormous profits—could proceed unimpeded.

On June 28, a day after the strike was called, Phelps Dodge and its Tucson newspaper brought pandering to a new low: On its editorial page, the *Star* asked rhetorically, “is [the strike] enemy plotting, disloyalty, treason, or rebellion?” Should the inference not have been sufficiently plain, the editor added that the strike “could not have been more pleasing to Germany had it ordered it in every detail.” The editorial concluded with the warning that “if the war is not won in Europe, it will be won or lost here, with all the attendant sufferings of invasion and persecution.”

After sixty-five percent of Bisbee’s miners walked off the job, Sheriff Wheeler had this to say to a reporter for the *Arizona Republican*: “I am more than ever determined to see this matter through to the best interests of the community and the nation. I have now between 500 and 600 loyal American deputies among the working men and the business men of the...district, and intend to bring this number to 1,000....”

Wheeler failed to mention why he needed a thousand “loyal American” deputies, or what he intended to do with them. There had been no incidents of violence; the strike had been relatively uneventful. It stands to reason, then, that the sheriff’s initiative was part of a larger plan. Phelps Dodge and its cohorts were using a controlled press in a calculated effort to gain

public sympathy and set the stage for an astonishing set of events. And Harry Wheeler was their sympathetic pawn.

William A Clark, a former United States Senator from Montana and the intractable owner of the United Verde mine at Jerome, vowed that if “his” miners voted to strike, he would have the organizers lynched and he would flood his mines.

Apparently he changed his mind. On July 10, after 400 miners walked off their jobs, Senator Clark saw to it that sixty-seven men—all said to be members of the IWW, and considered the ringleaders—were forced into company-owned cattle cars. With some fifty armed vigilantes guarding the captives, the locomotive steamed 160 miles across the desert and dumped the strikers at a lonely spot near Kingman.

Mayor J.J. Cain told a reporter that “Jerome citizens have demonstrated that they know how to deal effectively with an undesirable element.”

The following evening, Sheriff Wheeler met with Grant Dowell, manager of the Copper Queen Mine; John C. Greenway, manager of the Calumet and Arizona; and other mucky-mucks from Bisbee’s mining and business community. When Wheeler asked what he ought to do to enfeeble the strike, Greenway answered point blank: “Get a train and run the strikers to Columbus, New Mexico....”

To suppose that Clark and Greenway had not kept the Western Union wire hot between Jerome and Bisbee would be naïve. However, the following day, a Thursday, the telegraph office was silenced—by armed guards. So was telephone service in and out of Bisbee. And the sheriff commandeered the front page of the morning newspaper to warn women and children to stay off the streets.

It was July 12, 1917, when Harry Wheeler had his day of glory commanding some 2,000

armed deputies who, as the *New York Times* noted with marked sarcasm, “appeared as if by magic.”

In fact, Wheeler commanded a hastily assembled aggregation of vigilantes who acted outside of the law. It was a mob of non-striking miners and men sympathetic to mine owners. Some belonged to newly formed organizations with clever names: the “Workman’s Loyalty League,” and the Bisbee “Protective Society.” Many were imported from out of town.

At about 6:30 in the morning, these so-called loyalists commenced the task of rounding up some 2,000 “disloyal” strikers, largely immigrants lately accused of hindering the war effort. The early morning calm was shattered when they smashed through windows and broke down doors of sleeping residents. Miners were driven from their beds at gunpoint. Some were beaten, others were stripped of their possessions. Women and children stood helplessly by while husbands and fathers, sons and brothers were dragged from their homes—many without shoes or hats and some in their underwear.

Amado Villalovas was in a neighborhood store when “about ten gunmen all armed came in and told me to get out.” He asked if he could take the groceries he had purchased home to his family, but the vigilantes were not inclined toward niceties. Instead, “They dragged me out of the store, hit me and knocked me down.”

Striker James Brew was not enamored by the notion of five armed thugs breaking into his home, and he did what many people would do. He grabbed a pistol and sent “loyalist” Orson McCrae into eternity. McCrae’s cronies opened fire and Brew was shot to death.

Later, McCrae was praised as a hero who “died for a principle.”

Meantime, Wheeler’s vigilantes conducted their sweep with mean efficiency. By 7:30, hundreds of men from every nook and corner of Bisbee were gathered in mass on the streets

fronting the downtown post office.

After a sufficient number of men accumulated at this makeshift staging area, a forced march under armed guards commenced to yet another staging area—the baseball park at Warren, some two miles distant. The captives were herded three abreast and stragglers were shoved into their ranks. All the while, Sheriff Wheeler was riding the roads in a chauffeur-driven open touring car, nudging slow moving men from behind the trigger of a machine gun.

“What a study in faces as the procession ambled by,” penned a reporter in prose dripping with company bias. “Old offenders with sullen brows and smoldering eyes. Foreigners with heavy, stolid looks and bearded, unwashed faces. Young men who looked half-frightened and half-ashamed. Sorrowful, simple, soulless faces passed like a bad dream.”

It was a bad dream. Not for the reporter, but for some 2,000 men forced onto the diamond and into the grandstand at the Warren ballfield, where rifle-totting guards circled the perimeter.

John Greenway, whose mansion could be seen on a hillside looking down on Warren, cajoled the prisoners to recant their errant ways and swear loyalty to their respective companies. Throughout the morning the captives were harangued by a fusillade of verbiage, and about 800 abandoned the strikers’ ranks and fell in line with their employers. Whether they capitulated from fear of physical retaliation for themselves and their families, from fear of deportation back to their native lands, from sheer exhaustion, or from a company-induced epiphany went unrecorded.

About 11:00 o’clock, a steam locomotive bearing the logo of the El Paso and Southwestern Railroad—it was a Phelps Dodge subsidiary—chugged into the Warren station adjacent the ballpark. Behind the massive engine was a combination of twenty-three boxcars and cattlecars. Armed guards formed a human corridor and the strikers were led single-file to the

waiting train. In about an hour, 1,186 men—eighty percent of them were immigrants—were loaded into cars littered with manure. Nearly 200 armed vigilantes—one crouched behind a mounted machine gun—guarded them from atop the train.

By noon the locomotive was steaming across the southeastern Arizona desert and, later, across southwestern New Mexico. Heat inside the cramped cars was nearly unbearable, and the men’s discomfort was exacerbated by the stench of animal excrement.

Escape was a notion that came and went quickly. Armed vigilantes in automobiles followed the train on both sides of the tracks, and machine gun emplacements were set up at watering stops and stations along the way. The mine owner’s had left no detail unattended.

Someone in the Bisbee hierarchy, however, failed to anticipate the cold reception gotten at Columbus, New Mexico. In a fury of indignation, authorities refused to allow the vigilantes to unload their human cargo. Hence, the train backtracked seventeen miles to Hermanas, a village tiny enough that complaints could be ignored.

There, at 3:00 o’clock in the morning, men who had not eaten, had not had a drink of water, and had not seen the inside of a restroom in fifteen hours were dumped onto the desert.

New Mexico officials were livid. Even Woodrow Wilson was annoyed. He arranged for rations to be shipped from El Paso and he ordered the army at Columbus to set up a camp for the unexpected refugees—who were told, on pain of death, never to return to Bisbee.

The camp remained active for several months before permanent arrangements were made for some of the men.

Both the state of Arizona and the federal government investigated the kidnapping. For a time, it appeared that its instigators would be punished. They were not. In 1918, the Department of Justice indicted Phelps Dodge president James Douglas, Sheriff Wheeler, and eighteen others.

The case against them was thrown out of court by a federal judge in San Francisco. His decision was upheld two years later by the US Supreme Court.

In 1920, the state of Arizona put two hundred Bisbee residents on trial for kidnapping. Not surprisingly, the necessary number of jurors was difficult to find. The proceedings were a farce. Three months later, each defendant was acquitted.

Ninety years have passed since the so-called Bisbee Deportation. During those nine decades not a shred of evidence has emerged to connect any of the victims with acts of subversion, collaboration, espionage, or anarchy. The strikers were, by and large, hard working miners who thought they deserved a little more than they got, and got a lot more than they bargained for.

What we erroneously call the Bisbee Deportation was, in fact, an ugly instance of mine owner arrogance gone amuck.

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W. LANE ROGERS

AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

Acclaimed author-historian W. Lane Rogers is in his fifteenth year as a widely-read Phoenix newspaper columnist. He has written hundreds of articles for publications worldwide and has authored numerous books in Western history. Titles in the crime genre include *Ruthless Acts: The Utah Murders* and *Crimes & Misdeeds: Headlines from Arizona's Past*. Forthcoming are *The California Snatch Racket* and *Misbehaving: Crimes in California History*, each co-authored with respected California historian James R. Smith. A dynamic speaker, Rogers has appeared before a wide variety of organizations including the Arizona Historical Society. He lectures frequently in colleges and universities where his topics reflect the broad diversity of his writing--early 20th century crime in the West, labor unrest in Western mining camps, Mormon polygamy, World War I and the Jazz Age, the embryonic film and broadcasting industries, the Great Depression and the 1930s, and the modern Civil Rights Movement.



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