



53 minutes / B&W and Color / 16mm / 2002

# AN INJURY TO ONE

Directed by Travis Wilkerson  
An Icarus Films Release

"The anti-Ken Burns." -Alice Lovejoy, *Film Comment*

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## SELECTED FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

Big Sky Award, 2004 Big Sky Documentary Film Festival  
2004 Society for Cinema & Media Studies Film Series  
Screening Committee's Choice for Narrative Integrity, 2003 Ann Arbor Film Festival  
2003 Sundance Film Festival  
2003 Full Frame Documentary Festival  
2002 Margaret Mead Film Festival  
Gold Prize, 2002 Big Muddy Film Festival

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

AN INJURY TO ONE reconstructs the unsolved murder of union organizer Frank Little in Butte, Montana, and provides a corrective - and absolutely compelling - glimpse of a particularly volatile moment in early 20th century American labor history.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

One of the most important labor films ever made, Travis Wilkerson's fascinating documentary AN INJURY TO ONE provides a corrective - and absolutely compelling - glimpse of a particularly volatile moment in early 20th century American labor history. It chronicles the mysterious death of labor organizer Frank Little, a murder whose grisly details have taken on a legendary status in the state. Much of the cased evidence is inscribed upon the landscape of Butte and its stunning Montana surroundings.

Butte's history was shaped by the Anaconda Mining Company, producers of ten percent of the world's copper from the town's depths during World War I. War profiteering and the company's indifference to the safety of its employees (mortality rates in the mines were higher than in the trenches of Europe) led to Little's arrival. The desperate, agonized miners overwhelmingly supported his ideas, including the abolishment of the wage system and the establishment of a socialist commonwealth.

In August 1917, Little was abducted by unknown assailants who hung him from a railroad bridge. Pinned to his chest was a note that read 3'-7'-77", the standard dimensions of a Montana grave. His funeral drew 8,000 people attendees, the largest in Butte's history.

Little's murder provides AN INJURY TO ONE with a taut, suspenseful hook, but it isn't the only story in Wilkerson's film. Through his story and the story of Butte, viewers learn about the graphic history of the American left, the rise of McCarthyism, the beginning of the environmental movement, and even the birth of the detective novel. (Former Pinkerton detective Dashiell Hammett was allegedly involved in the murder, and later depicted it in his celebrated book Red Harvest.)

Archival footage, intertitles, and traditional mining songs are accompanied by music from contemporary musicians including Will Oldham and Jim O'Rourke to produce a moody, effulgent, and timeless soundtrack. The result is a unique film hybrid that combines painterly images, incisive writing and meticulous historical research to produce one of the most potent historical American films of all time.

## FILM CREDITS

Direction, Script, Photography, Editing, Sound, Narration:	Travis Wilkerson
Producer:	Susan Fink
Total Running Time:	53 minutes
Production Year:	2002
Country:	U.S.A.
Photographed on:	16mm
Exhibition Formats:	16mm, DVD
Composer (Music Score):	If Thousands
Composer (Music Score):	Dirty Three
Featured Music:	Jim O'Rourke
Featured Music:	Will Oldham
Production Company:	Up Front Films

## DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY



Director Travis Wilkerson makes films in the tradition of the "Third Cinema," in which politics and political action are indivisible from a film's form. His films have screened at scores of festivals worldwide, including Sundance, Toronto, Rotterdam, Vienna, Yamagata, the FID Marseille and the Musée du Louvre. He was named one of the top 50 avant-garde filmmakers of the decade by the *Film Comment* critic's poll.

His films include AN INJURY TO ONE (2003), an agit-prop essay on the lynching of Wobbly Frank Little; ACCERLATED UNDERDEVELOPMENT (2003), WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN? (2005) and the NATIONAL ARCHIVE SERIES. In 2007, he presented his performance piece PROVING GROUND, a live multi-media rumination on the history of bombing, which was described by critics as "one of the most daring experiments in the history of Sundance." His latest feature, DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS (2011), premiered in the main competition at Cinéma du Réel, where it was awarded a jury prize.

Wilkerson is active in the US anti-war movement, and is contributing to FAR FROM AFGHANISTAN, an anti-Afghanistan war omnibus film, to be released virally on the 10th anniversary of the US invasion of that nation. He is co-founder of the artist/activist front [Creative Agitation](#), which focuses on revolutionary street art and direct action

## SELECTED PUBLICITY AND REVIEWS

"Wilkerson's austere technique radically responds to the paucity of contemporaneous documentary accounts, performing a powerful act of historical archaeology and reclaiming for the working class its status as subject, not a footnote, of historical events. Wilkerson makes these ghostly historical agents palpable and vocal, asserting the relevance of their story to struggles of today and tomorrow." - *Sundance Film Festival*

"A deft, ambitious exercise in old-school socialist agitprop crafted with the precise multimedia flair of a corporate Powerpoint presentation, Travis Wilkerson's AN INJURY TO ONE retells the gritty class struggles of the previous century through smoothly contemporary digital means."  
- *The Village Voice*

"Its avant-gardism is as old-school as '20s Soviet auteur Dziga Vertov; its impact highly accessible." - *Variety*

"The most exciting documentary of the season. Passionate, persuasive, and beautifully designed, AN INJURY TO ONE is a model of coherent political filmmaking as convincing in its liberalism as its formalism." - *The New York Sun*

"[AN INJURY TO ONE is] an astonishing document: part art and part speculative inquiry, buzzing with ambition and dedication. Takes us from the 19th century to the eve of the 21st, from Butte as land of frontier promise to Butte as land of death and environmental destruction. He wields avant-garde graphics and archival ephemera like a lasso, and his shots of modern-day Butte are allusive still-lives that defy time and place. This is stirring, must-see stuff." - *The Austin Chronicle*

"AN INJURY TO ONE manages to be both startlingly beautiful and distressing at the same time, the counterpoint of the firm, almost dispassionate voice and the plaintive and elegiac cinematography." - *Harvard Film Archive*

"Using simple guitar music, photographs, cutouts, and voice-over narration, he creates a film that combines strong elements of artful design with a political message." - *The Globe and Mail*

"Avant-garde filmmakers can tell stories if they want to, and few do it more compellingly than Travis Wilkerson in AN INJURY TO ONE." - *Toronto International Film Festival*

"Exceptional [and] monumental!" - *Reverse Shot*

**THE VILLAGE VOICE**  
**LABOR'S LOVE LOST: STEALING BUTTE**  
**BY ED HALTER**  
**JULY 15, 2003**

A deft, ambitious exercise in old-school socialist agitprop crafted with the precise multimedia flair of a corporate PowerPoint presentation, Travis Wilkerson's AN INJURY TO ONE retells the gritty class struggles of the previous century through smoothly contemporary digital means. It chronicles the saga of environmentally devastated Butte, Montana, by focusing on the murder of Frank Little, spiffire World War I-era Wobbly organizer. Via Wilkerson's parade of archival data—photos, songs, landscapes, quotations, text, and charts—the Little affair grows into a metaphor for the greater course of American and global capitalism. Injury's back-and-forth motions track Butte from a tiny gold-mining outpost to a copper-mine boomtown (thanks to the advent of the electricity age) soon monopolized by the Anaconda Mining Company, which grew fat from WWI profiteering as thousands of workers perished in unsafe mines. In 1917, the already notorious Little arrived to press Butte's masses into action. Referred to simply as "the agitator" by corporate accounts, Little concluded his career at the wrong end of a noose, strung up by unprosecuted anti-union goons. Anaconda continued as a closed shop; when the company left Butte in the 1980s, it had made billions. Its legacy is a former mining pit, now a massive toxic lake.

Wilkerson could not have found a more convenient case study against the excesses of capitalism, with Manichaeian protagonists worthy of Chomsky and pro wrestling: The muscular Anaconda crushes the Little guy. Historical tangents and coincidences provide illustrative excursions. Pinkerton detective Dashiell Hammett, who may have been involved in the murder, later transformed his Butte sojourn into the 1929 proto-noir crime novel *Red Harvest*, renaming the town "Poisonville." In a commie-baiting roundup of Butte unionists, one of the detained miners was named Joseph McCarthy. Little is portrayed as not simply a rabble-rouser but a breed of visionary artist. His speeches, Wilkerson argues, attempted "to describe an image of a different kind of world."

A slow-twang soundtrack by Low, Will Oldham, Jim O'Rourke, and others dovetails with the director's own voice as narrator. Wilkerson's patter flows in rich, clear, quick tones, occasionally primed into restrained punctuations of righteous anger. The overall emotional palette—melancholy evocations arranged on the cold platter of reality—is of a generational piece with similarly political works by Jem Cohen, while the film's post-cinematic structure owes a debt to recent experimental video essays: the show-and-tell aesthetics of artists like, Matt McCormick, or Elisabeth Subrin. What the pining sense of loss and fallen-ness says about contemporary attitudes toward social change poses a greater question in itself. While Injury draws parallels between then and now (corporate and government collusion in war, resulting in free-floating McCarthyism), it's the gap between past and present political realities that swells the void of somber sadness. Today, global markets make local action less effective. The actual American working class largely resides in China, Mexico, India, and elsewhere. The sordid histories of post-WWI socialist states need no mention. In a sense, Injury pines for a simplified version of the past it critiques: an unambiguous time, with evil villains and heroic martyrs, before the events of the 20th century shattered the retroactively innocent ideals of socialist revolution.

## **FILM COMMENT**

**DISCOVERY: TRAVIS WILKERSON**

**DETERMINED TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT: THE ANTI-KEN BURNS**

**BY ALICE LOVEJOY**

**JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2003**

The Industrial Workers of the World's Preamble begins: "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people, and the few who make up the employing class enjoy all the good things of life." So, too, begins Travis Wilkerson's AN INJURY TO ONE, a 53-minute nonfiction film that chronicles the troubled history of Butte, Montana, connecting the 1917 lynching of Wobbly organizer Frank Little with the town's economic and environmental devastation and the history of labor relations in the U.S. It might seem like a throwback to late Sixties/early Seventies militant cinema, but the film's upfront politics are a welcome change from the television-ready films, a la Ken Burns, so prevalent in American documentary cinema today—a sort of filmmaking Wilkerson has no use for. "I make my views clear to people," he says, "and they can position themselves easily with regard to it. They can say, you are crazy, you are an idiot, you are a fanatic, whatever they feel."

It's no surprise that this gentle, soft-spoken 33-year-old filmmaker should open a film with such uncompromising words, given that his mentor and primary influence was Cuban agitprop filmmaker Santiago Alvarez. Wilkerson met Alvarez during a 1995 trip to Cuba, and his influence was immediate and deeply felt (the aging Communist died three years later). Wilkerson's first film, Accelerated Development: A Film in the Idiom of , Santiago Alvarez (99), uses Alvarez's films, recut and integrated with his own footage, to narrate a history of Cuba since the Fifties. The 54-minute film suggests an apprenticeship in a style of political filmmaking committed to community, social change, revolution. By way of Alvarez, it establishes several central elements of Wilkerson's style: the use of text as a didactic and graphic tool, chapters as structuring devices, and music as a primary narrative element. Wilkerson's time in Cuba also proved central to the theoretical bent of his later films: "As soon as I arrived," he says, "it was evident to me that everything I had been taught about Cuba was completely distant from the truth.... There was a massive gulf between what had been described and articulated to me and what I was experiencing. I remember standing on the walls of the Moro castle, looking over at Old Havana, and feeling almost overwhelmed with emotion, thinking, 'What else is a lie that I take for truth?' And so in every project, that's what I'm interested in exploring."

The politics of Wilkerson's films seem to lie in this "gulf in exploring the limits to knowledge, whether inherent or artificial. National Archive: V1, a 15-minute film Wilkerson produced in 2000 while he was in the CalArts graduate filmmaking program, is constructed from "gun camera" archival footage of American air attacks over North Vietnam. Each round of bombing, though duly labeled ("Water Buffalo," "VC in Trees," "Rice Paddy"), is practically indistinguishable from the next—the footage is degraded and jittery, the ghostly circle of a gun sight veering in and out of frame. Braced by Jim O'Rourke's slowburn acoustic guitar soundtrack, the discreet dissonance between titles and footage builds to a quiet crescendo that evokes the senselessness of the American campaign in Vietnam—and, inevitably, its present-day sequels. In its simplicity, National Archive might be Wilkerson's most powerful and most beautiful film, and its power is heightened if you know that his political discourse is informed by a personal narrative: his father was an army pilot who served in Vietnam in 1966-67, returned to the U.S., and joined the anti-war movement.

AN INJURY TO ONE also has deep personal roots: Wilkerson lived in Butte during his high school and early college years, immediately after the closing of the copper mines that had sustained the town for nearly a century. It uses the formal elements introduced in Development—chapters,

text, and music-but Wilkerson's style now seems more refined and mature. His use of music is particularly effective, especially in the films instrumental versions of miners' songs, their lyrics reproduced in captions over images of Butte today. Like National Archive, the new work addresses the boundaries of recorded history. Wilkerson says of the film, "In my research I was digging much deeper, but in terms of images, I was limiting myself to what traces are readily available." Available evidence, in this case, was sparse and often contradictory-- the mining company's official history, Dashiell Hammett's account of his own possible involvement in the murder, and the patchy governmental and union records of Little; involvement with the Butte miners. Few records remain of the Wobbly's presence in Butte, and so those that do (in particular, a photograph of Little, the only surviving image of the activist) are reiterated and repeatedly refrained. As a result, the film becomes something of a metahistory, a narrative about the process of creating historical knowledge. If unequivocal truth is located anywhere, it is in the fact that Butte is slowly being poisoned by a massive toxic lake and former mine pit. But the restricted scope of Wilkerson; imagery also serves as an antidote to contemporary documentary's predisposition to delusions of omniscience: there are some things, it asserts, that we just can't know.

Wilkerson's next project will bring him home again. After he finishes his current film, SUPERIOR ELEGY, a record of a 25 hour song performed in Duluth, Minnesota, to commemorate the life of a murdered 25-year-old resident of the town (there will be both a full 25-hour version and an hour-long edit), he and his wife, filmmaker Susan Fink, will set up shop in Butte for four months. Wilkerson plans to establish a micro-cinema and concert space to bring alternative cultural events to the town; he also aims to create a genre-less film using local residents as actors, and invite musicians to compose their own musical responses to the town in an abandoned-mine-yard-cum-- recording-studio. The project as a whole will be an ad hoc experiment in what happens when a film is conceived, produced, and distributed in a single community, when the producers become the audience. To the same end, the couple has founded Extreme Low Frequency, a distribution company for formally innovative political films. So far, besides Wilkerson's own work, they've acquired Thom Andersen and Noel Burch's 1995 video *Red Hollywood* and John Gianvito's *The Mad Songs of Fernanda Hussein*-and will likely acquire a number of works by Santiago Alvarez. A fitting homage to an agitprop filmmaker and mentor: revive his films, make them available, and wait for the world to respond.

**REVERSE SHOT ONLINE**  
**BY SAUL AUSTERLITZ**  
**DECEMBER 15, 2003**

In this, the summer of our discontent, the gods of film have but rarely smiled down upon us. Trudging through the reloaded matrices, boys behaving poorly, and the like, little of note, apart from the hype machine, has truly taken root in the consciousness of moviegoers. The hype machine, working at peak capacity, has managed to convince otherwise well-balanced individuals, week after week, that they would like to do nothing more than see the latest poorly written, abysmally directed remake of a 1970s TV show, or sequel to a movie no one had liked in the first place. In addition, summer saw the very limited release, here in New York, of the most exceptional film of the year (also a doc, natch): Travis Wilkerson's monumental AN INJURY TO ONE.

Wilkerson's superb film breaks the Gordian knot that had rendered so much of American filmmaking utterly immobile: the difficulty of locating a politically committed American cinema. While there have been isolated pockets of activity in the past few years (the superlative work of Jim McKay comes to mind), Hollywood has left the political to the ham-fisted likes of Oliver

Stone. According to the industry, politics is what closes on Saturday night. The independent filmmaking world has been even more disconnected, relentlessly choosing Freud over Marx, time and again, as their guiding avatar, continually depicting the dysfunctional family without ever documenting the dysfunctional society.

Wilkerson, a CalArts-educated filmmaker who lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, has crafted a cinematic poetics uniquely his own. *AN INJURY TO ONE* documents the history of Butte, Montana, focusing on the death of union organizer Frank Little, murdered by Pinkerton detectives hired as strike-breakers. Little, an organizer for the International Workers of the World, came to Butte in 1917 to assist mine workers striking against their brutal employers, Anaconda Mining Company. Extending and deepening the brutality of their treatment of the miners, Anaconda's Pinkerton thugs kidnapped and lynched Little, pinning a mysterious, threatening notice on his body: 3-7-77. These numbers would have been familiar to all Montanans of the time as the dimensions of a standard-issue Montana grave. In choosing this little-known tragedy from America's long-forgotten radical era, Wilkerson is positioning himself as a cinematic brother to Howard Zinn, chronicler of the secret histories of American life.

Wilkerson shoots in black-and-white, and intersperses brief color interludes with music as a pause in the film, a chance for his viewers to digest what they have been shown. *AN INJURY TO ONE* has found its way out of the box of boring, talking-head documentaries; no narration by Martin Sheen here, and no interviews with tweedy professors of labor history. *AN INJURY TO ONE* is as auteurist as a film can get: written, directed, photographed, and narrated by Wilkerson, it is less a film than a direct broadcast from his skull. While Wilkerson owes a debt to Marker and Santiago Alvarez, *AN INJURY TO ONE* is one of the freshest American films of the past 20 years, bursting with vitality even at its most embittered. *AN INJURY TO ONE* honors none of the accepted bromides of filmmaking, crafting a mode of filmmaking that, while owing something to Marker and Santiago Álvarez, is a prototype for a previously unimaginable brand of American documentary. Wilkerson creates a poetic evocation of the past's hold on the present, with the landscapes of the interludes a key image—the future, while partially damned by the past's mistakes, remains as yet unformed and empty.

These interludes are decorated with instrumental music, and the words of old-time union songs appear on screen, in time with the music. No singing, however, is heard. Listen closely enough, though, and the energy of collective song can be heard—the song of the ghosts, from Frank Little to the anonymous miners, forgotten to history, who struggled for what was rightfully theirs. Wilkerson's mournful, empathetic, angry, politically astute film is an elegy to the lost political radicalism of early 20th century American life; it is also a blueprint for a future American art that looks to reclaim the political.

#### **World Socialist Web Site**

#### **Toronto International Film Festival 2002/Interview with Travis Wilkerson, director of *AN INJURY TO ONE***

**By David Walsh**

**October 4, 2002**

*AN INJURY TO ONE*, directed Travis Wilkerson, centers on a significant episode in American labor history, the murder of Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organizer Frank Little in Butte, Montana in August 1917. The film provides the historical background to the event, the decades-long exploitation of the region and its workers by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. The company's Butte operations provided 30 percent of the US copper total, and 10 percent of the world's, at a time when the need for the metal exploded thanks to its role in electrification. In



1917, provoked by low wages, dangerous conditions and reports of Anaconda's war profiteering, Butte's copper miners, organized in the Metal Mineworkers Union, walked off the job en masse. Socialist and left-wing tendencies had strong support within the city's working population.

Obviously a remarkable figure, Frank Little—born to a white father and Cherokee mother in Oklahoma in 1879—had been a longtime activist for the left-wing IWW. As *AN INJURY TO ONE* explains, shortly after his arrival in Butte, Little addressed 6,000 miners, denouncing the capitalist system and proposing a program of worldwide revolution by the working class. Ten days later he spoke to another meeting of 6,500, during which he termed President Woodrow Wilson a “lying tyrant,” and called on workers to “abolish the wage-system and establish a socialist commonwealth.”

Official Butte was outraged by Little's activities. On August 1 a gang of vigilantes, none of whose identities were ever learned, abducted the IWW organizer from his hotel room, drove outside of town and, after dragging him behind their car, hung him from a railway trestle. They pinned a note on him that read “3'-7'-77”,” the dimensions of a grave in Montana. No one was ever arrested or convicted for Little's brutal murder.

Wilkerson's film also examines the present state of Butte, a much-decayed industrial city of some 32,000 people, blighted by the largest body of contaminated water in the US, the Berkeley Pit. This is the legacy of Anaconda, which abandoned the town decades ago. The company reportedly had extracted \$25 billion worth of copper by that time.

Detective story writer Dashiell Hammett presumably based his fictional “Poisonville” in *Red Harvest* on Butte. Hammett, who worked as a Pinkerton detective from 1915 to 1922, claimed in interviews in later life that he had been offered \$5,000 to take part in the murder of Little, a claim treated by many with skepticism.

The strength of Wilkerson's film, which suffers from occasional bouts of self-consciousness, is its seriousness and intelligence in the examination of a history that is almost entirely concealed by official sources. It is an unusual and sometimes quite moving effort. We spoke in Toronto.

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David Walsh: Could you tell me something about your background?

Travis Wilkerson: I grew up in the West. I was born in Colorado, lived there till I was 12 or 13, then my family moved to Butte in 1982. It was an interesting time to move to Butte. We moved into town when everybody was moving out of town. The mines had been slowing for years, but 1982 was really when the bottom was falling out, so it was a very depressed time. Although it's not really much better now.

I went to high school in Butte, which was a fascinating, weird experience for me. As you can imagine, it's a fairly insular town at this point, so I was treated with a certain amount of suspicion, but over time I felt pretty comfortable there and liked it a lot. When you're just a kid you probably don't appreciate the history as much as you should, but I've come to love it.

DW: By the time you began making films were you already aware of the Frank Little story or did you study it at that point?

TW: A little of both. The story of Frank Little is something of an urban legend in Butte. People all know it, sort of, they know he was lynched, they know he was there. It's very unclear what people's attitudes toward him are. I think most people would say, Dashiell Hammett killed him.

DW: That was entirely new to me.

TW: It's a kind of legend that Hammett encouraged. It played a role in his persona. I don't think it's very likely actually. Some sources say he was there. But he was 18 or 19 at the time, and the idea that Anaconda would have entrusted him to carry out something like this seems very unlikely. Others say he wasn't even there at the time and that he didn't even arrive there till 1918 or 1919. I've always felt that Frank Little was on the margins of Red Harvest. The events are very elusive. There's no description at all of mining or miners.

I was there and didn't realize how extraordinary Butte was, and I think that's what Hammett did. He was there and he only realized later that he was present during this incredible and fascinating time.

So in terms of the research, when I was in college I started doing research because I was simply curious about it, and there's very little information available. There's a few articles in Western history journals, out of print journals, by Arnon Gutfeld, who was a scholar of American history and wrote a lot of material about Montana. His pieces are very good. A lot of the things he's citing as primary sources I can't discover any more, I don't know what's happened to them in the years between when he wrote his material in the early 1960s and the present day. They seem to have disappeared.

For example, Gutfeld cites a good deal from the daily strike bulletin, a radical daily, which became known as the Butte Bulletin. William Dunne was the editor. It was one of the most radical dailies in the history of US journalism. But I can't locate it anywhere.

I began to do the research. It's an amazing story, I feel like I've only scratched the surface of it. There is more there. I would love to discover more about Little's history, it's very elusive. The extant evidence is terrifyingly miniscule. I think I found enough.

According to the strike bulletin, there was a film made of the funeral. That's my Holy Grail. It was shown on the one-year anniversary of his murder. The film of course has disappeared. No one knows anything about it.

DW: I think anyone interested in the history of the working class and left-wing politics is drawn to that history. It has a certain romanticism to it also, which perhaps needs to be dispelled. What is the connection between this past and the present? What sort of issues would you like to raise in the mind of a spectator?

TW: The starting point would be to look at Butte and to see that Butte is a place that we constructed. Because there's a sense when people come to the town, because the devastation is so widespread—you come over this hill and there's this gaping hole, the pit looks as if it were two-thirds of the size of the entire city. In fact, it isn't, but it feels that way. And everywhere you look are these big things that are gouged out, there are tailings everywhere. It's a place that people going on vacations in Montana try to avoid or pass through as quickly as possible. One of the things that drew me to it was the desire to say, look, this is not an act of God. This is a human act. We destroyed this town. Well, I didn't, but some people did. And there's a reason for it. I wanted to first and foremost explore that. How did it get to be like this? And what I kept coming back to is this fascinating piece of history, that this one person was there and he proposed an alternative and he was murdered, and here's where we are. Which isn't to say that if Frank Little lived ... but we do know that it went this certain way and we're now faced with what we're faced with, which is this disastrous circumstance.

So the most important thing is just this idea that we constructed this and that we have the ability to construct our environment in all sorts of ways, the ability to construct our society in all sorts of ways, and we made certain choices, and this is a powerful example of what's gone wrong.

Another part of it is unearthing the history. I think there is a far richer radical history in America than almost anyone will acknowledge. I constantly get into arguments with people on the left who say, we have nothing, we have this pathetic history, we'll never achieve anything because of our history. Montana was the epicenter of a very exciting period in the radical history of this country.

In Butte a lot of the people later joined the Communist Party and went in that direction. And I can see why. I have every confidence that Little would have been one of those people as well. He certainly was politically heading in that direction.

All of my work ends up doing the same kind of thing, uncovering an unknown or under-appreciated history.

DW: What were some of the conscious influences that were at work during the making of this film?

TW: I think the most influential filmmakers for me have been these "Third Cinema" filmmakers, who I feel were the most successful at initiating a tendency which was destroyed very rapidly for a variety of reasons, which fused a kind of understanding of the relationship between form and content, finding forms that befitted new ideas and new forms of expression. We can't find new ways to apprehend reality unless we find new strategies, new cinematic strategies, new literary strategies. So I was drawn to that. [Santiago] Alvarez was an influence, I made a film about him, [Fernando] Solanas and [Octavio] Getino. Although their films are very hard to see. There is some work of Chris Marker's that I like and some I don't like as much.

It's not just documentary. I've been heavily influenced by narrative film, that's what I'm increasingly drawn to. Partly because of the problems with this film. I've shown the film here and I get all sorts of nice press, but in reality the audience is so limited and there's just no way to get the work out. There are only so many battles you can choose to fight.

We're entering this period in which the means of film production are available to us, but the means of distribution are totally unavailable to us, and that seems increasingly to be the most pressing issue facing progressive or radical filmmakers. How to get the work out there. It's proving more difficult than I imagined, the barriers are stronger. There's such resistance to political work. And people hear that it's about some event in Montana in 1917 and say, "That sounds tedious, like a Ken Burns film, only worse."

Butte has always been its own pocket of something. It's an industrial city in a rural state. I had some fascinating conversations with miners. It was interesting, every miner with whom I had a conversation about this history seemed to be to the left of me. When I would say, do you wish Anaconda were still here, with all the problems, at least you had the jobs?, they would say, Anaconda was a despicable company and it destroyed this town. One miner told me that in the 1960s they started bringing in these fairly inexperienced Mexican miners, and they were dying constantly. He remembers one shift he worked where three Mexican miners died and they didn't even halt production. They brought them out, they kept working. They didn't know what they were doing. There weren't enough people to speak Spanish.

There were a lot of different things that people hate about the company, they don't just hate it because it left a wasteland. For example, there was a beautiful amusement park, the pride of the town, and Anaconda systematically just took that area over and created the pit where that was. They only switched over to open pit mining in the 1950s, it was all underground prior to that. They simply destroyed this section of town, the most historic working class area, the park area. They continued destroying it virtually to the year they left. They completed the destruction and then they left.

DW: What's your view of the present political situation?

TW: It's very disturbing. The Bush administration seems set on this course of imperial aggression. There's a lot anxiety and unease. It reminds you a little of Weimar Germany. And the lack of opposition, or public opposition, is worrying. That may come, I hope it will.

### An Icarus Films Release

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