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Ludlow victims made of flesh, stone Union members vow repairs to ease pain of vandalism to slain miners' monument

BYLINE: Cate Terwilliger , Special to The Denver Post

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LUDLOW - Labor leaders pledged more than \$ 10,000 toward the restoration of the vandalized Ludlow Massacre Monument on Sunday during an emotional gathering that was equal parts memorial service and union rally.

'This is our Vietnam Veterans Memorial, our Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, our Lincoln Memorial,' United Mine Workers of America president Cecil Roberts told a cheering crowd. 'There is no question whatsoever that a this monument will be restored.'

Nearly 400 people - many wearing union slogans - packed the annual commemorative service at the memorial 14 miles north of Trinidad, rivaling the largest turnout in memory. Many were moved to attend after learning vandals had desecrated the 85-year-old monument, which pays homage to mining families killed by state militia on April 20, 1914, during a bitter coalfield strike.

Two figures that anchor the 20-foot-high gray granite sculpture - a miner and a woman cradling a child in her arms - were decapitated sometime between a caretaker's rounds on the evenings of May 7 and May 8. The woman's arm, which was attached to her head, also was removed; the figure of the child was not harmed.

A search for the missing pieces turned up nothing, and Las Animas County Sheriff James Casias confirmed Sunday that investigators have no solid leads in the case, despite a \$ 5,000 reward. There is no evidence to suggest anti-union sentiment motivated the crime, Casias said.

Still, many union members say the mutilation of such a poignant symbol of workers' rights feels like a pointed - and personal - assault.

'I hope whoever did it rots in hell,' said UMWA District 22 president Fred Lupo, prompting applause from the crowd.

Pueblo steelworker Mike Rodriguez acknowledged the damage might be the mindless mischief of garden-variety vandals. 'Still,' he said, 'that's what you feel in your heart - that it's anti-union.'

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About 100 steelworkers attended Sunday's service, marching with a 'United We Stand' banner and chanting 'Remember Ludlow!' They donated \$ 2,000 toward yet-to-be-determined restoration costs for the monument; other union groups followed suit with checks ranging from \$ 200 to \$ 5,000, the latter from UMWA headquarters.

Union archives show the monument, dedicated in 1918, was made by a Springfield, Ill., company from granite mined in Vermont. Union officials have sent documentation and photographs of the memorial to a California stone conservator, who is expected to do an on-site assessment and present a budget for restoration.

Union chief Roberts assured the crowd that the monument would again be made whole. Describing the Ludlow dead as 'American heroes' and 'freedom fighters,' he urged solidarity and perseverance during what he and other speakers characterized as a grave time for American workers struggling to preserve jobs and benefits.

University of Denver anthropologist Dean Saitta told the crowd, 'It's always the best and most powerful monuments that are targeted for destruction, because they function so superbly in the struggle for hearts and minds,'

Saitta and other scholars are leading an archaeological project to recover artifacts from the Ludlow site, where strikers and their families spent the bitter winter of 1913-14 living in a tent colony. The monument's desecration is "a reflection of the state of the country right now, an assault on organized labor," Saitta said.

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GRAPHIC: PHOTOS: Denver Post photos/John Leyba Marchers and vehicles make their way down the road to the Ludlow Massacre Monument near Trinidad for the 89th annual commemoration of that dark event in labor history. The mood was darker still this year because the monument to the striking miners and their families has been vandalized. Labor leaders vowed to fix it. Jim Diaz, followed by Wilfred Benitez, steps into a cellar preserved from the time of the massacre. The striking miners had dug the cellars under their tents. When troops opened fire and burned the tents, two women and 11 children died in the cellar.

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