

THE LUDLOW MASSACRE

Workers still face problems

Re: "A day of rest, a day of remembrance," Sept. 1 Perspective article.

While the working people in Colorado may not face the obvious difficulties endured by those at Ludlow or Cripple Creek, we now face legislative sneak attacks that attempt to thin out our paychecks, which makes financial hardships in our home life. One of those legislative attacks is nicely titled "right-to-work." Many people call this bill that comes up every year in our state house by its more appropriate title, "right-to-work for less."

Although some of our more conservative state representatives and our governor are convinced that this bill is meant to give "freedom" to unionized workers, statistics from the Department of Labor show what this law does to all workers, union and non-union alike. In light of the facts on right-to-work, the definition attached to "freedom" by Bill Owens and his close allies in the statehouse must include lower wages for the workers and a tighter corporate stranglehold on our state capitol. Out of the 10 states with the lowest average income in America, seven are right-to-work states. Not one right-to-work state was at or above the average U.S. wage in 2000. Only four of the 22 right-to-work states saw annual wages grow from 1999 through 2000 at a rate higher than the U.S. average.

We don't face bullets, batons or bombs anymore to keep us at low wages and inadequate benefits. However, workers in this state are still confronted with covert legislative offensives backed by hard-lobbying corporate groups such as the Colorado Association for Commerce and Industry and the National Federation of Independent Business in an attempt to stifle our pay and benefits.

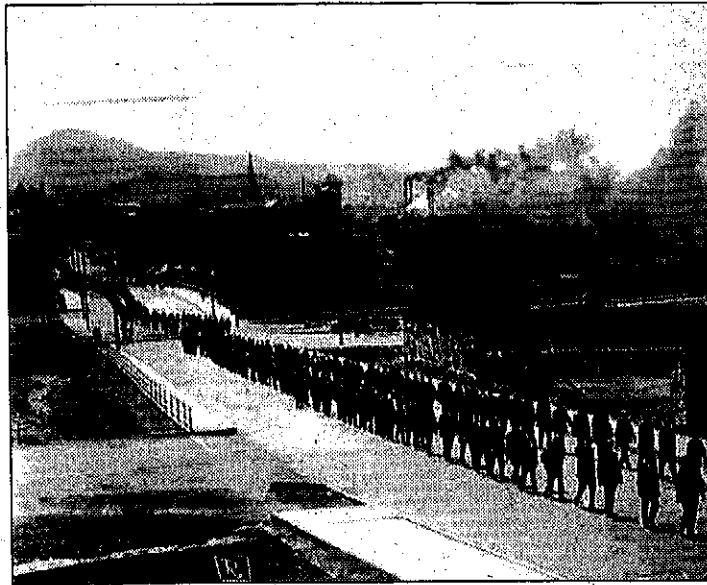
DOUGLAS CHAMPINY
Denver

Lessons from history

As co-director of a University of Denver archaeological project researching the everyday lives of the Ludlow strikers, I want to thank Douglas Kinnear and The Post for the Sept. 1 article about the Ludlow massacre.

As Kinnear notes, it is important to use the occasion of Labor Day to reflect on the origin of our taken-for-granted workplace rights and the history of a ten-blooded struggle that generated them. But a more sustained effort is also required to show Ludlow's continuing relevance for the struggles of contemporary life.

This year's revelations about corporate greed and its ties to campaign financing indicate America hasn't yet figured out how to regulate the relationship between corporate and government power



Special to The Post / Denver Public Library

On April 27, 1914, coal miners marched in a Trinidad funeral procession for Ludlow Massacre victim Louis Tikas.

er so as to minimize the risk to working people.

The conditions of work for laborers in third-world sweatshops and American corporate complicity in reproducing those conditions routinely draw attention, outrage and debate. The recent mining accident in Pennsylvania, although it ended happily (unlike last September's explosions in an Alabama coal mine that took 13 miner's lives), nonetheless reinforces serious, long-standing questions about mine safety.

Thus, we do well to not only remember the Ludlow massacre, but also to actively teach and internalize its deeper lessons.

Several Colorado institutions have been helping us to do just that. The Colorado Historical Society/State Historical Fund has generously supported five years of archaeological excavation at the Ludlow Tent Colony. We are using this research to develop new interpretive displays about Ludlow's history and legacy for visitors to the massacre memorial near Trinidad.

We are currently working with the Colorado Bar Association to develop a state-wide, high-school Mock Trial Competition case built around Karl Linderfelt's assault on Louis Tikas. The Colorado Endowment for the Humanities has helped us offer Labor History Summer Teacher Institutes that allow Colorado high-school and college teachers to explore ways of incorporating the Ludlow story into classroom lesson plans.

And we currently have available to classroom teachers across Colorado a student-friendly traveling history trunk of Ludlow photographs, artifacts, videos, music, and curriculum ideas.

April 20 is a date that resonates for Coloradans in more ways than one. Remembrance is important in the effort to forestall such tragedies, but so, too, is hard, publicly engaged intellectual work on the relationship between history and the problems of contemporary life.

DEAN J. SAITTA
Associate Professor of Anthropology
University of Denver