

Remember Ludlow!

Julia May Courtney

1914

“REMEMBER LUDLOW” the battle cry of the crushed, downtrodden, despised miners stifled at Calumet, in West Virginia, in Cripple Creek, has echoed from coal camp to coal camp in southern Colorado, and has served again to notify the world that Labor will not down.

Peaceful Colorado, slumbering in her eternal sunshine, has been rudely awakened. And her comfortable citizens, tremendously busy with their infinitely important little affairs, have been shocked into a mental state wavering between terror and hysteria. And the terrified and hysterical community, like the individual, has grabbed for safety at the nearest straw. The federal troops are called to the strike zone in the vain hope that their presence would intimidate the striking miners into submission, and the first spasm of the acute attack has subsided. But the end is not yet.

In September the coal miners in the southern Colorado district went out on strike. Immediately the word went forth from No. 26 Broadway, the Rockefeller headquarters in New York City, and the thugs and the gunmen of the Felts-Baldwin agency were shipped from the Virginia and Texas fields and sent by the hundreds, into the coal camps. With their wives and children the miners were evicted from their huts on the company's ground, and just as the heavy winter of the mountains settled down, the strikers put up their tents and prepare for the long siege. It was then that the puerile, weak kneed Governor Ammons, fawning on the representatives of the coal companies, at the request of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Co., called out the militia to “keep order.”

And the climax came when the first spring winds blew over the hills and the snows melted from the mountain sides. On the 20th of April the cry was heard “Remember Ludlow!”—the battle cry that every workingman in Colorado and in America will not forget. For on that day the men of the tent colony were shot in the back by soft-nosed bullets, and their women and children were offered in burning sacrifice on the field of Ludlow.

The militia had trained the machine guns on the miners' tent colony. At a ball game on Sunday between two teams of strikers the militia interfered, preventing the game; the miners resented, and the militia—with a sneer and a laugh—*fired the machine guns directly into the tents*, knowing at the time that the strikers' wives and children were in them. Charging the camp, they fired the two largest buildings—the strikers' stores— and going from tent to tent, poured oil on the flimsy structures, setting fire to them.

From the blazing tents rushed the women and children, only to be beaten back into the fire by the rain of bullets from the militia. The men rushed to the assistance of their families; and

as they did so, they were dropped as the whirring messengers of death sped surely to the mark. Louis Tikas, leader of the Greek colony, fell a victim to the mine guards' fiendishness, being first clubbed, then shot in the back while he was their prisoner. Fifty-two bullets riddled his body.

Into the cellars—the pits of hell under the blazing tents—crept the women and children, less fearful of the smoke and flames than of the nameless horror of spitting bullets. One man counted the bodies of nine children, taken from one ashy pit, their tiny fingers burned away as they held to the edge in their struggle to escape. As the smoke ruins disclosed the charred and suffocated bodies of the victims of the holocaust, thugs in State uniform hacked at the lifeless forms, in some instances nearly cutting off heads and limbs to show their contempt for the strikers.

Fifty-five women and children perished in the fire of the Ludlow tent colony. Relief parties carrying the Red Cross flag were driven back by the gunmen, and for twenty-four hours the bodies lay crisping in the ashes, while rescuers vainly tried to cross the firing line. And the Militiamen and gunmen when the miners petitioned “Czar Chase” and Governor Ammons for the right to erect their homes and live in them.¹

[...] for the first time in the history of the labor war in America the people are with the strikers—they glory in their success. The trainmen have refused to carry the militia—entire companies of the National Guard have mutinied—nearly every union in the State has offered funds and support of men and arms to the strikers—and the governor has asked for federal troops.

The federal troops are here—the women who forced the governor to ask for them believe they have secured Peace—but it is a dead hope. For Peace can never be built on the foundation of Greed and Oppression. And the federal troops cannot change the system—only the strikers can do that. And though they may lay down their arms for a time—they will “Remember Ludlow!”

¹ Part of the text missing here

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Retrieved on March 20, 2012 from en.wikisource.org
Originally published in *Mother Earth* magazine in May of 1914 (Vol. IX, no. 3), in response to
the Ludlow massacre.

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