

APPENDIX I

THE COLORADO STRIKE

By HIS EXCELLENCY ELIAS M. AMMONS, GOVERNOR OF COLORADO
(Extracts from an article in the North American Review for July, 1914)

Much has been said and much written about the troubles in Colorado arising from the strike of the coal-miners. The parties involved have hurled statements back and forth, and contradictions and denunciations more or less intemperate have found their way into public prints to such an extent that, despite the importance of the subject, the public seems to have no clear conception of what has happened. So far as I know, the State itself has not spoken, nor has anyone in authority as yet properly analyzed the conditions in Colorado. It is, therefore, my purpose to give here an impartial portrayal of the conditions as they have existed in the past and now exist, and which at present are so generally misrepresented and misunderstood.

For four years an industrial struggle, which only recently reached its most acute development, has been going on in Colorado. The economic problem, serious enough in its beginning, has reached a tragic climax of nationwide importance. During these four years much bitterness has been engendered, and the dispute, which involved an economic question between capital and labor has finally become political, between the State, on the one hand, and those who deny its authority, on the other. Riot has assumed the proportion of rebellion, focusing the attention of the whole American people upon Colorado.

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The troops of the state were able to enforce peace. But it was a sullen and unwilling peace. The mine guards were disarmed and sent away. The strikers promised to surrender their arms, but they did not do so. Similarly, a recent promise of the leaders to surrender these arms to the United States troops was unfulfilled. In the mean time and after military occupation had begun, I continued unceasingly my effort to adjust or settle the strike. Conferences with both sides aroused my hopes of a settlement. For thirty days after the calling of the troops I prevented the importation of new workmen, and held the situation in abeyance, hoping thus to bring about a termination of the strike, which I felt would be more difficult after the striker's places in the mines had been taken by other workmen.

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The demands of the strikers were considered and discussed. The Secretary of Labor and myself had been led to believe that the point of the recognition of the union was to be waived. At this conference it was agreed that I should make suggestions of settlement which were to be acceded to.

I was much elated at this apparent success, and with the assistance of Secretary Wilson I prepared and forwarded to both sides the agreed suggestions. The strikers were to waive the recognition of the union and the mine-owners were to concede every other point demanded. Within a few hours I received a letter from the mine-owners unqualifiedly accepting the terms of the proposed settlement. The striking miners, however, rejected the proposal. The conference came to nothing, and the Secretary of Labor returned to Washington. I was afterward told, confidentially, by the strike members of the conference, that they had been instructed in the first place not to accept anything but the recognition of the union.

Upon this miscarriage of our plans of settlement, I directed that all men who desired to work in the mines, and who had full knowledge of the strike and conditions of employment, should be permitted to work and be protected in so doing. A large number of men were then brought in to work in the mines. They were given military protection in going to the properties and in remaining at work therein. This is the circumstance which caused the strikers to look upon the National Guard as being in league with their adversaries. They saw their places in the mines taken by others whom they called "scabs". They felt the restraint imposed upon them by the State's troops. They could not prevent the working of the mines by these new laborers either by intimidation or by persuasion. Ignorant, and, I am afraid, disposed to lawlessness, these strikers felt that in protecting the non-union workmen the National Guard was causing their strike to fail. From restlessness their feeling toward the State's troops grew into impatience, and, as days went by, to fury. In this feeling their leaders shared. The fight began to be waged not merely against the coal-operators, but against the troops and the State itself. Day by day the notion that an unholy alliance existed between the State authorities and the coal-mine owners was disseminated throughout the State and country by the efficient press bureau of the labor organization. Every argument was used to substantiate that idea. Its utter lack of foundation will go without saying. An incident occurring during the military occupation will illustrate the point. When trouble broke out in Routt County, a district remote from the seat of the main trouble, the citizens arose enmasse and announced their intention of forcibly expelling the strike leaders from the county. An appeal was made to me for protection against this body of citizens by the strikers' organization. It was promptly met. I sent troops at once into Routt County, protecting the strikers and their leaders from the aggressions of the populace. I had to give military protection to a newspaper in Trinidad, the organ of the strikers, to save the plant from a feared demolition at the hands of the citizens, who felt themselves outraged by its utterances. These and many more such incidents occurred at a time when the strikers' leaders and the strikers' press were proclaiming that the military arm was being used solely in aid of their antagonists.

In the middle of April, after the troops had enforced a six months' peace and when they were almost four months in arrears of pay, it was felt that they must be withdrawn. It was hoped that the peace thus established would continue. It was feared that it would not. The most earnest protests were made to me by citizens of all classes against the withdrawal. It was felt and generally predicted that as soon as the military restraint was removed the stored-up wrath of this alien population would flare out in some malignant way. Within six days after this withdrawal the eruption came. It was general throughout the coal-mining regions of the State. A widely extended uprising had been carefully planned. The storm broke at Ludlow. Much has been made of Ludlow. It was seized upon as a means of inflaming the minds of men and justifying the acts of treason and murder that followed. The facts in connection with Ludlow have been distorted, and in various forms spread broadcast throughout the land. It has been described as a massacre. It is given out that the National Guard, servile hirelings of the great coal companies, mercilessly shot and burned defenseless women and children in the Ludlow tent colony. On the miserable untruth and injustice of such a story I shall comment presently. However, it was believed, and may still find credence among a great number of the American people who have not the facts and have no reason to believe otherwise. Riot became rebellion. Under the blinding glare of the story of Ludlow, as given to the world, the leaders co-related and organ-

ized the outbreaks which were smoldering and ready to burst forth into a determined, well-administrated, and financed rebellion against the constituted authorities of the State. Ludlow was an incident, not an event. The battles and crimes that were committed during the following ten days would doubtless have occurred had there been no Ludlow incident.

When the troops were withdrawn, thirty-four men were left upon police duty near Ludlow, the largest of the tent colonies. On April 20th these men were attacked by ten times their number of strikers. The objective was doubtless the villages two or three miles distant containing the non-union workmen and their families. The National Guard thus attacked defended themselves, and later put the strikers to flight and destroyed their colony. The women and children were all removed to places of safety before the attack save only those who were concealed in pits dug beneath the tents. From these pits the soldiers rescued over thirty women and children while the tents were burning. This rescue was made with distinguished bravery and under a heavy fire from the strikers themselves. One pit, almost hermetically sealed, escaped the notice of the rescuers, and thirty-six hours later was discovered and found to contain the bodies of two women and eleven children. These poor people died of suffocation in their subterranean prison, where they had been confined by their would-be protectors. Not a burn or a char or a bullet mark was found upon any of them. The oxygen contained in this closed chamber could not have supported their lives for more than two or three hours. One little boy was accidentally shot, apparently by a striker's bullet. With that exception no women or children were shot or burned or otherwise hurt during the day's fighting. *There was no massacre.* Men died on both sides; those of the strikers died with arms in their hands fighting against the State; the soldier, on the contrary, tortured and mutilated even before death, gave his life to his country in the discharge of his duty.

Two days later the labor leaders formulated a Call to Arms, which was published in the press and sent broadcast throughout the State. It was subscribed with the signatures of the leaders. I quote from this call as follows:

"Organize the men in your community in companies of volunteers to protect the people of Colorado against the murder and cremation of men, women, and children by armed assassins employed by the coal corporations, serving under the guise of State militiamen.

"Gather together for defensive purposes all arms and ammunition legally available. Send name of leader of your company and actual number of men enlisted at once by wire, phone, or mail to W. T. Hickey, secretary of State Federation of Labor.

"Hold all companies subject to order.

"People having arms to spare for these defensive measures are requested to give them to local companies, and where no company exists send them to the State Federation of Labor.

"The State is furnishing us no protection, and we must protect ourselves, our wives, and children from these murderous assassins. We seek no quarrel with the State and we expect to break no law. We intend to exercise our lawful right as citizens, to defend our homes and our constitutional rights."

This call was responded to. The arms that the National Guard failed to gather up were taken from their hiding-places and distributed among the strikers. Many more were purchased and placed in the hands of the strikers. During the winter the strikers had augmented their number by hundreds, if

not thousands, of idle men who never had been coal-miners. Colorado seemed to be a resting-place for bands of the unemployed. By this augmentation of numbers the force of men who could be armed against the State was truly formidable.

The National Guard was again called out and sent into the southern fields. Its going was heralded by telegrams warning these armed men of the approach of the troop train, and urging that its entrance be disputed. One leader who signed the call to arms was arrested while taking a large number of high-power rifles and quantities of ammunition to his people by automobile. In the northern field armed strikers imprisoned the sheriff in the Hecla mine and besieged him there until relieved by the National Guard. An armed band seized the Chandler mine in Fremont County, not without much fighting. By way of reprisal the refugees of Ludlow marched twelve miles from Trinidad to Forbes, destroyed that camp, killed nine of its defenders, and then returned to Trinidad and paraded the streets in triumph. Many of the smaller mines of the State were seized and their managers imprisoned or expelled. The mining villages I have referred to were attacked and many killed. The toll of death in these few days is known to have reached fifty, and I believe it to be much greater. The National Guard had to be divided and subdivided, hastening from county to county and occupying fields remote from one another. For nearly forty-eight hours a pitched battle was fought at Walsenburg with fifteen hundred armed men who responded to the labor leaders' call for volunteers.¹

During those red days my chief concern was to prevent further bloodshed. I went into conference after conference with the leaders of the strike to avert further public calamities and prevent the shedding of innocent blood. I was willing to waive for the time all consideration of treasonable practices. I besought the leaders co-operation with me in restoring order. Truce after truce was arranged between the soldiers of the State and their armed adversaries. Those truces were scrupulously kept by the National Guard but the labor leaders who agreed to them either could not or did not control their own people. The time came when the rebellion assumed such proportions that it could not be met with the greatly reduced force at my disposal, a force unpaid for months, and to pay whom for any further service there was no visible means or prospect of means. I called the Legislature of the State together in extra session to provide for this expense. At the same time I requested the President of the United States to take charge of the situation with Federal Troops. That request was honored. Upon the coming of the Federal troops, the National Guard was withdrawn from county after county. The name and power of the United States was freely invoked; the strikers and their sympathizers subsided, and peace and order were restored.

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The State has taken no sides whatever in this industrial conflict. I have used every means at my disposal to bring about a settlement and to avert civil war. A time came when I found the leaders of one side of this conflict heading an armed rebellion against the State. I cannot escape the belief that Colorado's experience is but a local expression of general conditions and, in that aspect, of vast importance to the people at large. The remedy for such conditions lies with the legislative and not with the executive branch of the Government. It is a Governor's duty to enforce the Constitution and laws of his State. The hundred of thousands of men lately in arms against the military forces of the State are still in Colorado, and so are their arms, hidden away, perhaps to await a future use. What the future holds, who can say?

ELIAS M. AMMONS.

¹ See Appendix J.