in the city are the very rich and the very poor. All one needs to do is take a long walk through any large city in the United States, to affirm the fact that we are indeed a class society.

True, this is not unique to America. Everywhere you go in the world you see class societies. But there is one fact peculiar to the United States; we are the one country in the world that has no excuse for such contrasts of affluence and misery, because we are so enormously wealthy. One economist has noted how puny are the gestures we make, in our most generous moments, toward change:

"A society whose gross income rises by $40 billion a year may even find the heart to give an annual increment of $1 billion for the most unfortunate of its poor. In the general structure of society and politics, this charity changes nothing." 18

I have thrust quickly into the colonial picture and into the contemporary one to find a fact common to this country at its birth and in its maturity—the unjust distribution of its resources. I use the word "unjust" based on two criteria. One is the unheard-of wealth of this nation. The other is that modern ideal of equality, whether expressed in the Jeffersonian phrase that "all men are created equal" in the right to pursue happiness—or the Marxian idea that men should receive from an affluent society "according to their need." The perception that all the lauded progress toward the welfare state has done little to alter that basic historic inequality might spur us to more radical solutions.

5

The Ludlow Massacre

In their scholarly history of the labor movement, we find this terse statement by Selig Perlman and Philip Taft: "On April 20, 1914, the Colorado coal strike was brought to the attention of the entire country by the gruesome burning of eleven children and two women in the Ludlow tent colony." 1

The event they describe became known as the Ludlow Massacre. It was the culminating act of perhaps the most violent struggle between corporate power and laboring men in American history. Despite five thousand pages of testimony, taken at the time by Congressional investigating bodies, it remains an obscure event, rarely mentioned in textbooks on American history. 3

I recall it now, but not for its dramatic particulars, which might, in their uniqueness, be seen as a set of events happily submerged in the new welfare state. Rather, I find in it a set of suggestions

* That testimony is the basic source of this essay. It consists of Senate document No. 415, which is the last three volumes of the nine-volume report issued by the Industrial Relations Commission, pp. 6347–8903. (U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, Report and Testimony, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1916); and a two-volume report by the House Mines and Mining Committee, Conditions in the Coal Mines of Colorado, (Government Printing Office, Washington, 1914). The House testimony (except for the Appendix) was taken just before the Ludlow Massacre, the Industrial Relations Commission testimony shortly afterward.

about the relations between people and government which, stripped of their particularity, are still alive (so that, in place of miners, we might see blacks; in place of unions we might see student movements or welfare rights organizations). I find, from 1914 to 1969, a continuity of governmental behavior which is easily forgotten if one is distracted by the intricately embroidered veil of words and gestures, or by the specificities of the Colorado countryside: the mining canyons, the strange and unrepeatable sounds, colors, tones, of that time, that place.

I would point to several elements in that continuity, and let the reader judge, from the facts of the Colorado events, from what we know of contemporary America, whether I am concluding too much from too little:

1. The firm connection between entrenched wealth and political power, manifested in the decisions of government, and in the machinery of law and justice.

2. The team play of the federal system, in which crisis action by local police on behalf of the rich and powerful is modified—especially after resistance develops—with a more masked but still biased intervention by the national government.

3. The selective control of violence, in which government power is fumbling and incompetent in dealing with corporate and local police violence, sure and efficient in dealing with the violence of protest movements.

4. The somewhat different style of the national government (without difference in substance) in dealing with those outside its bounds who are helpless to resist and impotent as an internal political force—that is, with foreigners (Mexico, 1914; Dominican Republic, 1965). The style there is more like a local police force dealing with the locally powerless.

5. The opiate effect of commissions and investigations.

But let us turn to Colorado, 1913–1914.

Formed under the enormous weight of the Rockies, soft coal was found in Southern Colorado not long after the Civil War. Railroads moved south from Denver, north from New Mexico. Settlers, coming down the old Santa Fe trail, converged on the banks of the Purgatory River, just east of the Rockies and about fifteen miles north of the New Mexican border, and built the town of Trinidad.* The great Colorado Fuel and Iron Corporation, along with smaller companies, sank shafts into the hillsides, advertised for immigrant labor, and lowered workers into the earth to remove the coal.

In 1902, Colorado Fuel and Iron was purchased by John D. Rockefeller. Then, in 1911, he turned his interests (about 40 percent of the stock, more than enough to control) over to his son, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who made major policy decisions from his office at 26 Broadway in New York City.

Two hundred and fifty feet, three hundred, four hundred feet below the surface—in blackness so complete it seemed alive, grotesque—men hacked away at the face of the coal seam with hand picks. Their helpers shoveled the coal into waiting railroad cars, which were drawn through tunnels by mules to the main shaft, and lifted to the surface to the top of the tipple, the coal then showering down through the sorting screens onto flat cars. The average coal seam was about three feet high, so the miner worked on his knees or on his side. The ventilation system depended on the manipulation of tunnel doors by “trapper boys”—often thirteen- or fourteen-year-old children being initiated into mining.

At the edge of the mountains, in steep-walled canyons, were the camps where the miners lived, in sagging, wooden huts, with old newspapers nailed to the walls to keep out the cold. Nearby were the mine buildings and the coke ovens, with clouds of soot clogging the air. Behind the huts was a sluggish creek, dirtyyellow, laden with mine slag and camp refuse, alongside which the children played.

The mining camps were feudal kingdoms run by the coal corporation, which made the “laws”; curfews were imposed, suspicious strangers were not allowed to visit the homes, the company store must be patronized, the company doctor used. The laws were enforced by company-appointed marshals. The teachers and preachers were picked by the company. By 1914, Colorado Fuel and Iron owned twenty-seven mining camps, and all the land, the

*Michael Beschloss, All About Trinidad and Las Animas County. Stearns Printing House, Denver 1882. See also House Mines and Mining Committee, Conditions in the Coal Mines of Colorado p. 7.
houses, the saloons, the schools, the churches, the stores. Company superintendents, in charge of the camps, were described once by a corporation employee as "uncouth, ignorant, immoral, and in many instances the most brutal set of men. . . . Blasphemous bullies." *

At first the miners were Welshmen and Englishmen, who had gained experience in their home countries. But in the 1880's and 1890's, the new immigration brought Italians, Greeks, Poles, Hungarians. There were also many Mexicans and Negroes. **

Colorado Fuel and Iron became unmistakably the major political force in Colorado. A letter from C.F.&I. Superintendent Bowers to the secretary of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., written in May 1913, summed up the situation: ***

The Colorado Fuel & Iron Company for many years were accused of being the political dictator of southern Colorado, and in fact were a mighty power in the whole state. When I came here it was said that the C.F.&I. Co. voted every man and women in their employ without regard to their being naturalized or not; and even their mules, it used to be remarked, were registered, if they were fortunate enough to possess names.

Bowers told Rockefeller that the company, in the 1904 election campaign, had contributed $80,605, and that it "became notorious in many sections for their support of the liquor interests. They established saloons everywhere they possibly could." A sheriff elected with company support became a partner in sixteen liquor stores in the mining camps.

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* Statement by Rev. Eugene S. Gaddis, Superintendent of the Sociological Department of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Corporation during the strike, to the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, May 19, 1915. For descriptions of life in the mining camps see George Korson, Coal Dust on the Fiddle, Folklore, 1965; also McAlister Cleman, Men and Coal, Farrar & Rinehart, 1943.

** In 1901, out of 7500 employees of C.F.&I., 500 were Negroes. Sterling Spero and Abram Harris, The Black Worker, Atheneum, 1968.

*** George P. West, Report on the Colorado Strike, Government Printing Office, 1915, p. 46. This is the official summary of the report of the Commission on Industrial Relations.

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The Ludlow Massacre

Apparently, Bowers’ entrance onto this scene did not change the situation. Company officials continued to be appointed as election judges. Company-dominated coroners and judges prevented injured employees from collecting damages. Polling places were often on company property. In Las Animas County, John C. Baldwin, a gambler, bartender, and friend of Colorado Fuel and Iron, was jury foreman in 80 percent of the county cases. During the strike, Governor Ammons was questioned about civil liberties in the state of which he was chief executive, and his interviewer, Rev. Atkinson, reported this exchange: 

Rev. Atkinson: Have you no constitutional law and government in Colorado?

Gov. Ammons: Not a bit in those counties where the coal mines are located.

Rev. Atkinson: Do you mean to say that in large sections of your state there is no constitutional liberty?


One Colorado official told the House Committee investigating the strike: "It's very seldom you can convict anyone in Huerfano County if he's got any friends. Jeff Farr, the sheriff, selects the jury and they're picked to convict or acquit as the case may be."  

In early 1913, the United Mine Workers, which had unsuccessfully led a strike in the southern Colorado coal fields ten years before, began another organizing drive. It asked the mine operators to negotiate. The operators refused and hired the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency. The governor sent his deputy labor commissioner to Trinidad to investigate what seemed a growing tension. Hundreds of deputies were sworn in by the sheriffs of Las Animas and Huerfano Counties.

On the evening of August 16, 1913, a young United Mine Workers organizer named Gerald Lippiatt arrived in Trinidad by train, walked down the main street through a Saturday night crowd, exchanged angry words with two Baldwin-Felts detectives who had recently been deputized, and was shot to death.

The two detectives, George Belcher and Walter Belk, were released on $10,000 bond, while a coroner's jury was formed. On it were six Trinidad men: the manager of the Wells Fargo Express
Company, the cashier of the Trinidad National Bank, the president of the Sherman-Cosmer Mercantile Company, the manager of the Columbia Hotel, the proprietor of a chain of mercantile stores, and John C. Baldwin, gambler and saloonkeeper, who acted as foreman.6

There were conflicting reports to the jury on who fired first, how many shots were fired, and what was said between Lippiatt and the detectives. The only details on which all witnesses agreed was that Lippiatt walked down the street, encountered Belcher and Belk, exchanged gunfire with Belcher, and was killed. The first man to reach Lippiatt, a miner named William Daselli, said Belk reached for his gun, Belcher pulled his gun and fired, and Lippiatt fell, fired from the ground, wounding Belcher in the thigh, then fell for the last time. When Daselli raised Lippiatt’s head, he said, Belk’s gun was still trained on him.*

The jury’s verdict was: justifiable homicide.

The pace of union organizing in the mining canyons now quickened. Secret meetings were held, in churches, at picnics, in abandoned mine workings hidden in the mountains. A convention was called for mid-September in Trinidad, and delegates were elected at hundreds of meetings.

Meanwhile, the Baldwin-Felts Agency was importing hundreds of men, from the saloons and barrelhouses of Denver, and from points outside the state, to help break the impending strike. In Huerfano County, by September 1, 326 men were deputized by Sheriff Jeff Farr, all armed and paid by the coal companies.6

The miners’ convention, with 280 delegates, opened in the Great Opera House of Trinidad. For two days, rank-and-file miners registered their complaints: that they were robbed of from 400–800 pounds on each ton of coal, that they were paid in scrip worth ninety cents on the dollar (a violation of Colorado law), that the eight-hour law was not observed, that the law allowing miners to elect checkweighmen of their own choice was completely ignored, that their wages could only be spent in company stores and saloons (where prices were 25–40 percent higher), that they were forced to vote according to the wishes of the mine superintendent, that they were beaten and discharged for voicing complaints, that the armed mine guards conducted a reign of terror which kept the miners in subjection to the company. Their average daily wage was $1.68 for eight hours, $2.10 for ten hours.7

Casualty rates were twice as high in Colorado as in other mining states.

The high point of the Trinidad convention was the appearance of Mary Jones (the fabled Mother Jones), eighty-year-old organizer for the United Mine Workers, just back from a bitterly fought strike in the coal fields of West Virginia. Mother Jones represented a radical view (she had been one of the founders of the IWW) inside the rather conservative United Mine Workers (which had, for instance, supported Governor Ammons and the Democratic Party in 1912 against Progressive and Socialist candidates).* Mother Jones’ speech deserves to be quoted at length: *

The question that arises today in the nation is an industrial oligarchy... What would the coal in these mines and in these hills be worth unless you put your strength and muscle in to bring them...?

I went into the state of West Virginia... There I saw women that had been beaten to death and a babe of the coming generation was beaten to death and murdered by the Baldwin-Felts thugs in the womb of her mother. That is in America, my friends, and I said “I will never leave the state until the Baldwin thugs leave too” and I didn’t...

Three thousand men assembled in Charlestown and we marched up with banners, with demands upon those banners, and we walked into the state house grounds, for they are ours, and we have a right to...

* Michael Beshoor wrote: “John Lawson and his miners were naive on the subject of politics. They invariably regarded the Democratic Party as the champion of the downtrodden, a position that could not have been sustained had they had the experience to draw obvious conclusions from the party’s record in the state.” (Out of the Depths.) Beshoor was a grandson of Dr. Michael Beshoor, a physician friendly to the miners in early Colorado history.
take possession of them if we want to. . . I called a committee and I said, "Here, take this document into the governor's office and present it to him. Now don't get on your knees. We have got no kings in America. Stand on both your feet with your head erect" said I, and present that document to the governor, and they said "Will we wait?" and I said, "No, don't wait, and don't say your honor," said I, because very few of those fellows have any honor. . . .

And there was that meeting. I would give the United States Treasury if I had it, boys, if there had been someone there with a pen who grasped the sociology of that meeting—he would have paralyzed the world with it. . . . Men came from the mountains with toes out of their shoes, with stomachs empty. . . . Fifteen hundred men came there, the militia was there, the Baldwin thugs came there. . . . When I was about to close the meeting I said, "Boys, let Mother tell you one thing." And they said, "What, Mother?" And I said, "Liberty is not dead, she is only quietly resting, waiting only for you to call!" and that voice of fifteen hundred men rang the air, reached to Heaven, and they said, "Oh God, Mother, call her, call her now!" . . .

Sure we'll get in the bullpen. There is nothing about that. I was in jail. God Almighty, what if you do, you built the jail! I was jailed . . . and tried in Federal court and the old judge said "Did you read my injunction?" I said I did. "Did you notice that that injunction told you not to look at the mines and did you look at them?" "Certainly," I said. "Why did you do it?" the judge said. "Because there was a judge bigger than you, and he gave me my eyesight, and I am going to look at whatever I want to."

A lickspittle of the court comes up, and he says, "You must say your Honor, this is the court, His Honor on the bench." Yes, that was His Honor on the bench, the fellow behind the counter with the mustache . . .

You have collected more wealth, created more wealth, than they in a thousand years of the Roman Republic, and yet you have not any. . . .

When I get Colorado, Kansas, and Alabama organized, I will tell God Almighty to take me to my rest. But not before then!

The convention, rebuffed by the company again on requests to negotiate, voted to call a strike for September 23, 1913.

The Ludlow Massacre

On that day, an epic scene took place in the coal districts of Southern Colorado. Eleven thousand miners, about 90 percent of the workers in the mines, gathered their families and their belongings on carts and mules and on their backs, and marched out of the mining camps to tent colonies set up in the countryside by the union.* One observer wrote: 

All the tents had not yet arrived and the elements seemed to be in league with the operators. For two days it rained and snowed. There was never a more pitiful sight than the exodus of those miners fortunate enough to get wagons for their household goods. It rained all day Tuesday, and there streamed into Trinidad from every road miners with their wives and kids, crowded up on top of pitifully few household things.

Mother Jones testified later that twenty-eight wagonloads of personal belongings came into the Ludlow tent colony that day, on roads deep in mud, with the horses weary, and mothers carrying tiny babies in their arms. Tents and mattresses were wet, and the children had to sleep on those mattresses that night.10

The largest of the tent colonies was at Ludlow, a railroad depot eighteen miles north of Trinidad, on a direct line to Walsenburg, at the edge of Colorado Fuel and Iron property. There were four hundred tents here, for a thousand people, including 271 children. In the course of the strike, twenty-one babies were born in this colony. Later a National Guard officer, reporting to the governor, said of the Ludlow colony: "The colony numbered hundreds of people of whom only a few families were Americans. The rest were for the most part Greeks, Montenegrins, Bulgars, Servians, Italians, Mexicans, Tyroleans, Croatsians, Austrians, Savoyards, and other aliens from the Southern countries of Europe." **

Violence began immediately. The Baldwin-Felts Agency constructed a special auto, steel-armed, with a Gatling gun mounted

** Edward Boughton, Report to the Governor (Denver, 1914). Boughton headed a military commission asked to report to the governor on the events of April 20, 1914.
on top, which became known as the Death Special. It roamed the countryside, and on October 17, attacked the tent colony at Forbes, killing one man, leaving a ten-year-old boy with nine bullets in his leg. Around the same time, two rows of armed guards marched forty-nine miners to Trinidad, with the Death Special crawling along to the rear, its guns trained on the strikers' backs. When G. E. Jones, a member of the Western Federation of Miners (the militant miners' union which helped form the IWW) tried to photograph the armored car, Albert Felts, manager of the Baldwin-Felts Agency, beat him unconscious with the butt of his pistol. Jones was then arrested for disturbing the peace.

That same month, a steel-clad train manned by 190 guards with machine guns and rifles, headed for the Ludlow colony. It was intercepted by a detachment of armed miners, and a battle took place in which one mine guard was killed. The New York Times commented, after this first small victory for the union: "The situation is extremely critical tonight. More than 700 armed strikers are reported to be in the field against the mine guards."

By this time there had been at least four battles between strikers and guards, and at least nine men had been killed—mostly strikers. The tent colonies were in a state of siege, with machine guns and high-powered searchlights perched on inaccessible ridges, constantly aimed at the tents.

On October 28, 1913, Governor Ammons declared martial law, issued an order forbidding the import of strikebreakers from outside the state, and ordered General Chase of the Colorado National Guard, to move his troops into the strike district. It was one of those "balanced" political moves, in which the concession to one side (the ban on imported strikebreakers) is unenforced, and that to the other side (the reinforcement of the mine guards by government troops) effectively carried out. Some of the pressures behind Ammons' calling of the Guard are explained in a letter written by Vice-President Bowers of C.F.&I. to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in New York: "

You will be interested to know that we have been able to secure the cooperation of all the bankers of the city, who have had three or four interviews with our little cowboy governor, agreeing to back the State and lend it all funds necessary to maintain the militia and afford ample protection so our miners could return to work. . . . Besides the bankers, the chambers of commerce, the real estate exchange, together with a great many of the best business men, have been urging the governor to take steps to drive these vicious agitators out of the state. Another mighty power has been rounded up on behalf of the operators by the getting together of fourteen of the editors of the most important newspapers in the state.

After five weeks of terror organized by the mine operators' private army, the striking miners were ready to believe that the National Guard, representing the government of the United States, had come to restore order. At the Ludlow tent colony, pennies and nickels were collected to buy a large American flag, to greet the Guard. A thousand men, women, children, gaunt from lack of food, lined up on the road from the railroad station to the Ludlow colony, dressed in their Sunday best, the children in white, waving little American flags, a hastily assembled band, dressed in faded Greek and Serbian army uniforms, playing "The Union Forever." From the station marched the first troop of cavalry, with General Chase himself on a prancing white stallion, then a small detachment of field artillery, then two regiments of infantrymen, in wide-brimmed hats and yellow leggings. The miners and their wives and children shouted greetings and sang until the last troops had disappeared past the colony, down Berwind Canyon.

But the National Guard turned out to be no different than the Baldwin-Felts men, during that cold, hungry winter of 1913-14. In December, a teen-ager was accosted on the road near the Ludlow colony by Lieutenant Linderfeldt, a stocky, beribboned veteran of the Spanish-American War, and knocked unconscious by the lieutenant's fists. A women's parade in Trinidad in January was attacked by cavalry, and a frightened sixteen-year-old girl, trying to get away, was kicked in the chest by a man on a rearing white horse—General Chase. The leader of the Ludlow colony, a college-educated Greek man named Lou Tikas, was beaten by Linderfeldt and dragged off to jail.*

* These and the other instances of National Guard brutality cited in this essay are part of a 600-page compilation of eyewitness reports by the
The National Guard made 172 arrests that winter. A Welsh woman named Mary M. Thomas, mother of two, was held for three weeks in a vermin-ridden cell. One striker, forced to sleep on an icy cement floor, died after twenty-five days. A nineteen-year-old girl, pregnant, was dragged through an alley by National Guardsmen one night until she lost consciousness. One miner's wife, Mrs. Yankinski, was home with four children when militiamen broke into her home, robbed her money, and broke her little girl's nose with a kick. In the town of Segundo, a group of drunken Guardsmen forced some children to march about the city for two hours, prodding them with bayonets to keep them moving. Marro Zeni, a miner, was forced to stay awake in his cell for five days by soldiers, who threw water in his face, and jabbed him continually with bayonets.16

There was violence by the strikers. Strikebreaker Pedro Armijo was murdered near the Agualar tent colony. A mine clerk named Herbert Smith, scabbing in a Colorado Fuel and Iron mine, was brutally beaten near Trinidad. Strikers fired on the Forbes mining camp, where strikebreakers were living, and were dispersed by an infantry company. Four mine guards were killed at LaVeta while escorting a scab. And on November 20, 1913, George Belcher, the killer of Lippiatt, was leaving a Trinidad drug store, stopped on the corner to light a cigar, and was killed by a single rifle shot by an unseen gunman.*

Governor Ammons rescinded his order against out-of-state strikebreakers, and the National Guard began escorting strikebreakers to the mines. A trainload of such men from St. Louis, disembarking in the mine area, were protected by militiamen with unsheathed bayonets. A House committee heard testimony on the violation of federal peonage laws. “Salvatore Valentin, a Sicilian, told the committee that he had been brought from Pittsburgh

Colorado State Federation of Labor, which were the basis for a short report, Militarism in Colorado (published in Denver, 1914), by William Brewster of the Yale Law School.

2 The instances of miners' violence are reported in The Military Occupation of the Coal Strike Zone of Colorado, a report to the Governor by the Adjutant-General's office, 1914. The killing of Belcher was reported in the International Socialist Review, February 1914.

through deception, and forced to work in the Delagua mine. One of his fellow strikebreakers, he said, was shot and killed in the mines by an unknown person.”* 

Early in January 1914, Mother Jones came back to Trinidad, “to help my boys,” and was immediately deported by the National Guard. Eluding three detectives, she returned, but over a hundred militiamen stormed the Toltec Hotel in Walsenburg, and took her prisoner. She was held in prison for twenty days, with two armed sentinels outside her door. When women paraded in Trinidad to protest her arrest, eighteen were jailed.17 When General Chase reported later to the governor on the conduct of the National Guard, he wrote: “It is hoped that a just and discriminating public will in the end come to realize the disinterested service of these champions of the state's integrity and honor.”

As Spring approached in 1914, funds for the Guard began to run out. The payroll alone was $30,000 a month, and critics pointed to the disproportionate number of officers: 397 officers to 695 privates. The state was heavily in debt to the bankers. As it became unable to pay salaries, the regular enlisted militia dropped out, and their places were taken by mine guards of Colorado Fuel and Iron, now in Guard uniforms, drawing their pay from the company.

In early April, 1914, Governor Ammons recalled all but two companies of the National Guard, consisting now mostly of mine guards in the pay of C.F.&I. and under the command of Major Pat Hamrock, a local saloonkeeper, and Lieutenant Linderfeldt. They were stationed on a rocky ridge overlooking the thousand men, women, and children who lived in the tent colony at Ludlow.18

On Monday morning, April 20, two dynamite bombs were exploded in the hills above Ludlow by Major Hamrock's men—a signal for operations to begin. At 9 a.m. a machine gun began firing into the tents, and then others joined. Women, holding children, ran from tent to tent, seeking shelter, crying out wildly.

Some managed to escape into the hills. Others crawled into the dark pits and caves which had been dug under a few of the tents. Miners left the tents to draw off the fire, flung themselves into deep arroyos (gashes left by old creek beds) and fired back. One eyewitness reported later: 10

The firing of the machine guns was awful. They fired thousands and thousands of shots. There were very few guns in the tent colony. Not over fifty, including shotguns. Women and children were afraid to crawl out of the shallow pits under the tents. Several men were killed trying to get to them. The soldiers and mine guards tried to kill everybody; anything they saw move, even a dog, they shot at.

The old feud between strike leader Tikas and Lieutenant Linderfeldt came to its end that afternoon. Tikas was in the big tent, finding shelter for women and children, helping the wounded, when a telephone, its wires amazingly intact, started ringing. It was Linderfeldt, up on the ridge. He wanted to see Tikas—it was urgent, he said. Tikas refused. The phone rang again and again. Tikas answered, said he would come.

Carrying a white flag, Tikas met Linderfeldt on the hill. The Lieutenant was surrounded by militiamen. The only eyewitness report is from a young engineer visiting Colorado with a friend, who saw the scene from a nearby cliff. They saw the two men talking, then Linderfeldt raised his rifle and brought the stock down with all his strength on Tikas’ skull. The rifle broke in two as Tikas fell, face downward. “As he lay there, we saw the militiamen fall back. Then they aimed their rifles and fired into the unconscious man’s body. It was the first murder I had ever seen. . . .” 20

Two other strikers, unarmed and under guard, met their deaths on the hill in a similar manner. The machine guns continued firing into the tents, and five people died in their fire. One of them was Frank Snyder, ten years old. His father told about it: 21

Frank was sitting on the floor . . . and he was in the act of stooping to kiss or caress his sister . . . I was standing near the front door of my tent and I heard the impact of the bullet striking the boy’s head and the crack . . . as it exploded inside of his brain.

The Ludlow Massacre

As the sun fell behind the Black Hills, the firing lessened. Now soldiers moved down the slopes into the shadows along the tent colony, drenched the canvas with coal oil, and set the tents afire. The visiting engineer later described the scene: 22

We watched from our rock shelter while the militiamen dragged up their machine guns and poured into the arroyos from a height by Water Tank Hill above the Ludlow depot. Then came the firing of the tents. I am positive that by no possible chance could they have been set ablaze accidentally. The militiamen were thick about the northern corner of the colony where the fire started, and we could see distinctly from our lofty observation place what looked like a blazing torch waved in the midst of the militia a few seconds before the general conflagration swept through the place.

While bullets whistled through the flaming canvas, people fled in panic from their tents and from the caves beneath. A dispatch to The New York Times reported some of the results: 23

A seven-year-old girl dashed from under a blazing tent and heard the scream of bullets about her ears. Insane from fright, she ran into a tent again and fell into the hole with the remainder of her family to die with them. The child is said to have been a daughter of Charles Costa, a union leader at Aguilar, who perished with his wife and another child. . . . James Fyler, financial secretary of the Trinidad local, died with a bullet in his forehead as he was attempting to rescue his wife from the flames. . . . Mrs. Marcelina Pedragon, her skirt ablaze, carried her youngest child from the flames, leaving two others behind. . . . An unidentified man, driving a horse attached to a light buggy, dashed from the tents waving a white flag, just after the fire started. When ordered to halt he opened fire with a revolver and was killed by a return volley from the militia.

The tents became crackling torches, and for hours the countryside shone in a ghastly light, while men, women, and children roamed through the hills, looking for others in their families. At 8:30 p.m. the militia “captured” the Ludlow tent colony, now a smoldering pile of ashes.
The Ludlow Massacre

Near Aguilar, the Empire mine was besieged, the tipple burned, the mouth of the slope caved in by dynamite explosions. Three mine guards were reported dead there, two mine shafts were in ashes, and the press reported that "the hills in every direction seem suddenly to be alive with men." Two hundred militia and company guards along the tracks at Ludlow were cut off from the rest of the district by "armed bands of strikers whose ranks are swelled constantly by men who swarm over the hills from all directions." At Colorado Springs, three hundred union miners quit work to go to the Trinidad district, carrying revolvers, rifles, and shotguns.25

The first legal move came from Pueblo, where a federal grand jury returned indictments against eight striking miners on charges of attacking the company post office at Higgins, Colorado.

Governor Ammons reported an attack on Delagua and Hastings by the miners. An attack on Berwind mine was expected momentarily. Now the Trinidad mayor and Chamber of Commerce appealed to President Woodrow Wilson to intervene.26

President Wilson was busy at this time with Mexico. Several American sailors from a vessel which was blockading Mexico as an act of pressure against the Huerta regime on April 9, 1914, went ashore at Tampico and were arrested. The American admiral demanded that Mexico apologize, hoist the American flag, and give it a 21-gun salute. Wilson gave Mexico until April 19 to act. Meanwhile, twenty-two thousand men and fifty-two ships were ready.* The Mexican foreign minister responded that Mexico would exchange salutes with the United States, would even salute first, but would not salute unconditionally. The officer who had arrested the American sailors was under arrest, he said, and the Americans had been freed even before investigation. "Mexico had yielded," he said, "as much as her dignity will permit. Mexico trusts to the fairmindedness and spirit of justice of the American people." 27

On April 20th, Wilson asked Congress for the right to use armed force: "There can in what we do be no thought of aggression or selfish aggrandizement. We seek to maintain the dignity and

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* House Mines and Mining Committee, Conditions in the Coal Mines of Colorado, Vol. II, Appendix. The call was signed by John Lawson and other U.M.W. officials, and by Ernest Mills, secretary-treasurer of the Western Federation of Miners.

authority of the United States only because we wish always to keep our great influence unimpaired for the uses of liberty, both in the United States, and wherever else it may be employed for the benefit of mankind." 28

The New York Times carried an editorial on the Mexican affair: 29

Just as when we went to war with Spain there were those who insisted that we should ignore the destruction of the Maine . . . so there are now those who hold that Huerta is in the right and that he has given us no cause of offense. As to that, we may trust the just mind, the sound judgment, and the peaceful temper of President Wilson. There is not the slightest occasion for popular excitement over the Mexican affair; there is no reason why anybody should get nervous either about the stock market or about his business.

Without waiting for Congress, Wilson ordered American naval forces to act. On April 21, the day of the discovery of the death pit at Ludlow, American ships bombarded Vera Cruz, landed ten boatloads of marines, and occupied the city. Over a hundred Mexicans were killed.

Business men had been asking for intervention in Mexico ever since the Mexican Revolution of 1910 created a threat to American investments in Mexican oil, mines, land, and railroad—which totaled a billion dollars by 1913. Now there was enthusiasm for Wilson’s move. The Times reported: *

The five hundred or more business men who attended the luncheon of the Members Council of the Merchants Association of New York jumped to their feet yesterday when William C. Breed, the toastmaster, called upon those present to express their loyalty to President Wilson “to whatever course he shall determine necessary to restore peace, order and a stable government in the Republic of Mexico.”

It took President Wilson several days to turn his attention to Colorado. Meanwhile, the armed revolt of the miners was growing.

* New York Times, April 23, 1914. By July, Huerta was forced out of office. In November, the U.S. occupation forces withdrew from Vera Cruz.

there. A troop train leaving Denver to carry soldiers to the strike zone ran into trouble. Eighty-two men in Company C mutinied and refused to go to the district. “The men declared they would not engage in the shooting of women and children. They hissed the 350 men who did start and shouted imprecations at them.” 30

Five thousand people demonstrated in Denver, standing in a pouring rain on the lawn in front of the capitol. A resolution was read, asking that Hamrock, Linderfeldt, and other National Guard officers be tried for murder, that the state seize the mines and operate them. Governor Ammons was denounced as a traitor and accessory to the murder, and Colorado citizens were asked to arm themselves for self-protection. The Denver Cigar Makers Union voted to send five hundred armed men to Ludlow and Trinidad in the morning, and women of the United Garment Workers Union in Denver announced that four hundred of their members had volunteered as nurses to aid the Colorado strikers. 21

All over the country meetings and demonstrations took place in support of the Colorado miners. Upton Sinclair and others picketed Rockefeller’s office at 26 Broadway, in funeral garb. In front of the church where Rockefeller sometimes preached Sunday sermons, a minister was clubbed by police while protesting the Massacre. The usually mild Eugene Debs, angered by the Colorado events, wrote: 22

The time has come for the United Mine Workers and the Western Federation of Miners to levy a special monthly assessment to create a Gunmen Defense Fund. This Fund should be sufficient to provide each member with the latest high power rifles, the same ones used by the corporation gunmen, and 500 rounds of cartridges. In addition to this, every district should purchase and equip and man enough Gatling and machine guns to match the equipment of Rockefeller’s private army of assassins. This suggestion is made advisedly, and I hold myself responsible for every word of it.

With the National Guard in Colorado unable to control the marauding miners, with damages amounting to millions of dollars, and over twenty killed since the Massacre, pressure grew for President Wilson to restore order with federal troops. The formal re-
quest was made by Governor Ammons, but a powerful informal signal was flashed by The New York Times, whose reaction, representing important elements in business and political circles, deserves a moment's attention.

The Times' first account of the Ludlow Massacre was an inaccurate one. Its headline read: "Women and Children Roasted in Pits of Tent Colony as Flames Destroy It. Miners Store of Ammunition and Dynamite Exploded, Scattering Death and Ruin." The Times had been unsympathetic to the miners throughout the strike; now it expressed horror at the killing of women and children. However, it seemed to be most angry that the militia and the authorities had been stupid enough to create a situation on which the strikers might capitalize to their advantage. Here is the Times editorial following the Massacre:

Somebody blundered. Worse than the order that sent the Light Brigade into the jaws of death, worse in its effect than the Black Hole of Calcutta, was the order that trained the machine guns of the state militia of Colorado upon the strikers' camp at Ludlow, burned its tents, and suffocated to death the scores of women and children who had taken refuge in the rifle pits and trenches. . . . Strike organizers cannot escape full measure of blame for the labor war. . . . But no situation can justify the acts of a militia that compels women and babes to lie in ditches and cellars twenty-four hours without food or water, exposes them to cannon and rifle fire, and lets them die like trapped animals in the flames of their camp. . . . when a sovereign State employs such horrible means, what may not be expected from the anarchy that ensues?

Two days later, when the miners had taken up arms against the militia, the Times ran another editorial:

With the deadliest weapons of civilization in the hands of savage-minded men, there can be no telling to what lengths the war in Colorado will go unless it is quelled by force. The President should turn his attention from Mexico long enough to take stern measures in Colorado.

The indignation at the militia, such as it was, had lasted about a day. The Times had never, in the course of the long violent series of attacks on the miners, called for federal intervention to stop that. Once the miners took up arms, it became concerned for order. A week after the Massacre, another Times editorial criticized two clergymen, Rev. Percy Stickney Grant of Manhattan, and Rev. John Howard Melish of Brooklyn, who had denounced from their pulpits the actions of the National Guard against the strikers.

The Times said about the sermons:

These are sympathetic utterances and differ from cold impartiality. . . . There are those who think that infamy in Colorado consists in the fact that the militia are shooting workers. It may be contended that there is something like infamy in the opposition of workers to society and order. The militia are as impersonal and impartial as the law.

On April 29, Woodrow Wilson sent federal troops into Colorado to bring order. Secretary of War Garrison asked everyone to surrender their arms to federal troops. The commander of the federal forces prohibited the import of strikebreakers from other states, banned picketing, and protected scabs.

For the next seven months, the air was filled with talk of negotiations, peace offers, mediation plans. The governor appointed an investigating commission. The Mines and Mining Committee of the House and the Industrial Relations Commission of the Senate held hearings, while federal troops patrolled the strike area. Testimony for House and Senate added up to over five thousand pages. The strike petered out, was officially called off in December 1914. The Union had not won recognition. Sixty-six men, women, and children had been killed. Not one militiaman or mine guard had been indicted for crime.* Under the weight of volumes of words,

* On the contrary, John Lawson, the strike leader, was, a year later, tried and convicted of murder. He was accused of murdering John Nimmo, one of the army of deputies paid by the companies. No effort was made to prove Lawson fired the fatal shot; he was held responsible because he led the strike, was at the Ludlow tent colony the day of the battle. The judge, Granby Hiller, was a former attorney for Colorado Fuel and Iron and had helped prepare cases against the strikers. The jury was chosen by a panel selected by the sheriff of Las Animas County. Lawson's conviction was later overturned. West, Report on the Colorado Strike, p. 22.
suspended from the tips of bayonets, the miners' resistance was crushed.

How shall we read the story of the Ludlow Massacre? As another "interesting" event of the past? Or as supporting evidence for an analysis of that long present which spans 1914 and 1970. If it is read narrowly, as an incident in the history of the trade union movement and the coal industry, then it is an angry splotch in the past, fading rapidly amidst new events. If it is read as a commentary on a larger question—the relationship of government to corporate power and of both to movements of social protest—then we are dealing with the present. Then we see a set of characteristics which have persisted, not only in American history, but in the history of all nations, although the forms vary. Then we see the complex alternating techniques of brute force and innocent solicitude, and the rain of investigations, words, negotiations, commissions, denunciations—all adding up to inches of progress and the basic retention of power and wealth where it now resides. Of course things have changed; there are now larger portions of material benefits meted out to the underdog; there are now more subtle methods used by both government and business in dealing with resistance* and more modern weapons (gas, planes) when other methods fail. And one set of victims exchanged for others of different color, nationality, geography as their tolerance runs dry.

The story can be read as a problem in personal responsibility, which leads to a continuing, inane argument about blame. Shall we blame John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who testified after the Massacre that he and his company had been fighting to defend the workers' right to work? (A Congressman had asked him: "You'll do that, even if you lose all your money, and have all your em-

* Note the bewildering variety of government agencies and commissions to represent welfare and beneficence; note that Rockefeller, after the Colorado strike, hired Ivy Lee, the nation's leading public relations man, and how public relations has become a vital part of government and business operations; note that the Rockefeller Foundation, new at the time of the strike, stepped up its activities, and that foundations in general multiplied.

** I write this shortly after police in Berkeley, California, carried out the first aerial gas attack on a domestic demonstration (May 1969).