

The Warning Shot in 1911 None Heard

By Steve Frangos

PART TWO

History is not simply written by the victors; it is closely monitored by their descendants. The 1911 shootout at the Independent Coal and Coke Company (ICC) of Kenilworth, UT offers as near-perfect a case of in which fabricated company propaganda substitutes for objective journalism as one can find.

Called "advices" in the language of the day (we call them press releases now) the overwhelming majority of the national and international press reports presented ICC president C. N. Strevell's version of the events. Wire services, where feature stories (or more often sections from a fuller text) were sold over the telegraph to sub-

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scribers, were the mass media of the early 1900s. By shifting through dozens of published accounts that drew on those services, can we surmise what was selected out of Strevell's original "advice" for local publication.

This is not an exercise in discovering obscure Greek-American historical events. Were this simply a matter of bad reporting, one could perhaps ignore it, but far more is at stake: these news reports have become history. Considering what happened to some 200 or more Greek immigrants the first two weeks of February, 1911 is nothing less than an example of how we can reclaim our own histories.

"On Saturday, 4 February 1911, violence erupted at Kenilworth. Some of the workers alleged that the company was 'short-weighing' coal. This was denied by the company officials and the complaining 'foreigners' were fired. Two men were killed: Elias Jackson, a deputy sheriff and a watchman for the company, and a Greek rioter, Steve Kolozakis." (<http://www.carbon-tgenweb.com/story.html>) Since short weighing coal was a constant practice of all the mining companies and thus a reoccurring feature in the vast majority of the labor disputes from after the Civil War until World War II, one would think this specific incident at the ICC mine would have been so presented on the internet. Why, then, is this well-documented white collar crime missing from our generally available histories? Who is continuing to protect these white collar criminals?

A quote from Cicero is apt for all Greeks in North America to consider: "To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?" Moreover, it is necessary to recognize that the writing and publishing of labor history in this country is remains a volatile subject.



After two days of extended disputes on February 4, 1911, Greek miners approached ICC Superintendent Thomas Bell: "the Greek miners complained that discrimination was shown in the weighing of coal in favor of Americans. A proposal from the mine superintendent that they appoint their own weighers failed to give satisfaction." (Winnipeg Free Press, February 8)

"The Greek leaders of the strike declare that the scales which the company uses has long been out of commission - 'were no good at all,' they say - and that the white men who did the weighing for the fuel company

only guessed at the weight (Salt Lake Tribune February 7)." The Greeks insisted this meant "that they made only \$50 to \$70 a month, out of which they had to spend \$20 or more on powder, while Americans were paid" more (Staunton Spectator, February 10).

Evidently, the miners had to provide their own blasting powder, but what is omitted is that they had to buy the explosive material and everything else they needed from the ICC company store at prices far higher than to be found elsewhere.

In 1910 the ICC was so proud of its tippie, the automatic weigh-

STORY

The Shootout in Kenilworth in 1911



ABOVE: Photograph of the old ICC company store as it is today in Kenilworth Utah. This is the store the Greek miners were forced to purchase all their supplies from. Once the the mining company was closed down the building was sold. **TOP LEFT:** The Bulletin Board in front of the Company store would have been a place all miners, including Greeks, would have gathered to learn company news and announcements. **LEFT:** The opening of the Kenilworth mine.

ing and coal processing machine, that it was special part of an all-day tour by prominent local businessmen. Aside from weighing and sorting the grades of coal, the tippel also loaded it into the waiting train cars. So why would a profitable company like the ICC have its primary sorting, weighing and loading machine in a state of disrepair?

After leaving Superintendent Bell's office, about 150 Greeks left the mine refusing to work. Later the same day a committee representing the strikers "went to Price for an attorney where an agreement was drawn up formulating their demands in legal terms, and then the crowd returned to the camp. The officials of the company had the demands of the Greeks under consideration during Sunday, all was quiet at the mines, only about fifteen Japanese and white miners re-

maining at work." (Salt Lake Tribune February 7) That evening, the Greeks bought guns from merchants in nearby Helper, UT and the company knew they had made these purchases.

On Monday, around 6 AM a party of six armed company men led by Thomas Elias Jackson, a Welsh immigrant, left the township going into the mountain reaches. These men had all been sworn in as special deputies, presumably by Carbon County Sheriff Keller, in anticipation of trouble. Approximately 50 to 75 Greeks were camped on these heights. A subtle point, not raised by available news accounts, is that since Kenilworth was a company-owned town; if you did not work for the ICC you could not live in the town.

As next reported in the Salt Lake Tribune, "the little company of officers commanded the Greeks

to put up their hands and, the Greeks declare, opened fire before the miners were able to comply with the demand. The company officials, on the other hand, state that while the party of officers was approaching the miners, it was fired upon by the Greeks, who then took to the hills." Three hours of crossfire followed. When Henry Kallos and John Matsos were wounded, the Greeks became enraged and sometime just before 9AM struck out and Jackson was killed by two shots to the chest. Another special deputy Chris Sandberg, a Swedish miner, was wounded. The exchange of gunfire continued unabated with the only difference being the Greeks had come down from the mountains firing into the area immediately around the mine. A real fear existed "that the Greeks in a body, might march armed against the comparatively undefended camp."

Around noon, Sheriff Keller arrived in Kenilworth and immediately went into action. First, Keller placed a telephone call to the Salt Lake City police requesting assistance. Next, he armed all the Americans he could. Finally, he gathered trusted men to make an assault along the mountain-side. In the gunfire that ensued Steve Kolozakis, one of the Greek strikers, was shot in the head and killed. With a reported 100 to 200 Greeks firing down into the ICC mine area, the Americans remained pinned down until the next day when reinforcements arrived. When Keller's forces ventured forth the next day, all the Greeks had left.

A flurry of news reports appeared all across the country, and even in Canada and Australia. Such reports worried that "further fighting is expected [simply] because the Greeks are armed." Why did the officials at the ICC automatically assume that to be the only possible outcome? Why did the editors of all these dozens of newspapers accept that this was a logical possibility? Why are the Greeks still depicted as the "rioters" and the company officials still just innocents assaulted by foreign criminals?