

David A. Wolff. *Industrializing the Rockies: Growth, Competition, and Turmoil in the Coalfields of Colorado and Wyoming, 1968-1914*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003; 320 pp., cloth, \$34.95.

Winner of the Mining History Association's 2005 Clark Spence Award for Excellence in Mining History, David Wolff's *Industrializing the Rockies* examines labor relations in the coal mining industries of Colorado and Wyoming in the era before World War I. In Wyoming the Union Pacific Railroad dominated coal mining through its subsidiary Union Pacific Coal Company, nearly monopolizing the industry until the establishment of Kemmerer Coal Company and Diamond Coal and Coke at the end of the nineteenth century.

In Colorado the situation was more complex. Some railroads sought to achieve the UP's level of control for consumption and sale, while others were much less interested in market domination or even in mining coal at all. Colorado's coal industry was more geographically dispersed and economically diverse than Wyoming's. Wolff concentrates his attention on Colorado's Northern or Denver Field, located on coal seams northwest of that city, and its Southern Field, centering around Walsenberg and Trinidad. Coal mining that occurred around Cañon City, Redstone, and Crested Butte receives secondary attention.

Denver Basin coal mainly served the population centers of the northern Front Range. Mines in that region were usually small and independent until Northern Coal and Coke Company partially consolidated the field beginning in 1897. Southern Field coal was largely consumed by the steelmaking Colorado Fuel and Iron Company at Pueblo, which also dominated coal mining in that field, the state, and the region. CF&I's most significant rival in the south was the Victor-American Fuel Company, organized in the 1890s.

For each of these companies market fluctuations, competitive pressures, and financial limitations combined to produce almost continual turmoil. As in most nineteenth-century industries, competition was fierce, instability a way of life, and insolvency a constant threat. Coal companies sought to counter these hazards by increasing resources and reducing competition through consolidation. They also tried to lower costs through mechanization, rationalization, and reducing operating expenses, the greatest of which was labor. But regimenting labor and reducing its cost collided with coal miners' cultural expectations and economic ambitions and exacted its own price in disaffection and violence.

Wolff organizes his study around two of the most infamous incidents of violence in the coal mining West: the September 1885 murder of twenty-eight Chinese miners by their rioting white counterparts in Rock Springs, Wyoming, and the striking miners' battles with the Colorado National Guard that peaked with the Ludlow Massacre of April 1914. The author does not devote much attention to these events per se; each is described in one dispassionate paragraph. Rather, he uses them as pivots, seeing both incidents as points where each side reassessed labor relations in western coal mining, and where those relations changed significantly.

After the Rock Springs riot, Union Pacific's management began to much more systematically organize and control all of the elements of coal mine production, including labor. The Ludlow Massacre culminated thirty years of industrial warfare in western coal mining and led heavily-criticized managers to seek industrial peace through what came to be known as welfare capitalism. *Industrializing the Rockies* seeks to determine if something about CF&I and Union Pacific Coal caused the Rock Springs and Ludlow violence, and whether those incidents have any connection.

In his meticulous review, Wolff recounts

the transformation of coal mining from craft work into unskilled labor, its ethnic diversification, and its economic instability, all of which undermined the power, status, incomes, and solidarity of its workers. As in metal mining, coal mine labor organization evolved and fractured in the years before World War I. Some unionists saw labor-management relations as class warfare and sought revolution rather than reform, while the majority, whom Wolff terms "market unionists," sought and willingly accepted incremental concessions from management. Other fissures opened between local, regional, and national union objectives, first with the Knights of Labor and later with the United Mine Workers of America.

In many ways this is classic labor history—miners versus management, capitalists oppressing proletarians—albeit leavened with a sophisticated and modern understanding of the importance that ethnicity played in these conflicts, and of the constraints that market forces and general economic conditions imposed upon both labor and management. Wolff describes a labor-management relationship that was almost completely adversarial. Few areas of compromise or mutual interest existed between labor and management in the coal fields of Colorado and Wyoming.

While this focus on labor-management warfare is certainly compelling and appropriate, given the industry's legendary self-destructiveness, other elements were

also in play. A discussion of outside forces at work upon the contending factions—especially public opinion and politics—would have been useful. Of Populists and Progressives and their influence on coal mining's industrial relations, if any, Wolff makes no mention. Even that old devil Colorado Governor James H. Peabody, the object of so much of labor's wrath for his role in defeating the 1903-1904 strikes, appears only incidentally.

It also might have helped to have extended the narrative beyond the Ludlow Massacre of 1914 and the introduction of the Rockefeller Plan of welfare capitalism the following year. A concluding chapter carrying the discussion forward into the 1920s could have indicated how significant a turning point in coal mining's labor-management relations Ludlow really was. One wonders, given the killings during the Columbine Mine strike at Serene, Colorado, in 1927.

These suggestions aside, *Industrializing the Rockies* is a valuable addition to the literature on coal mining in the West. This is a subject often subordinated to the study of metal mining, but if settlers came west to mine the metals, their settlements depended upon coal mining. This carefully-crafted and handsomely-illustrated study ably recounts the often-tumultuous early history of coal mining in the Rockies.

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