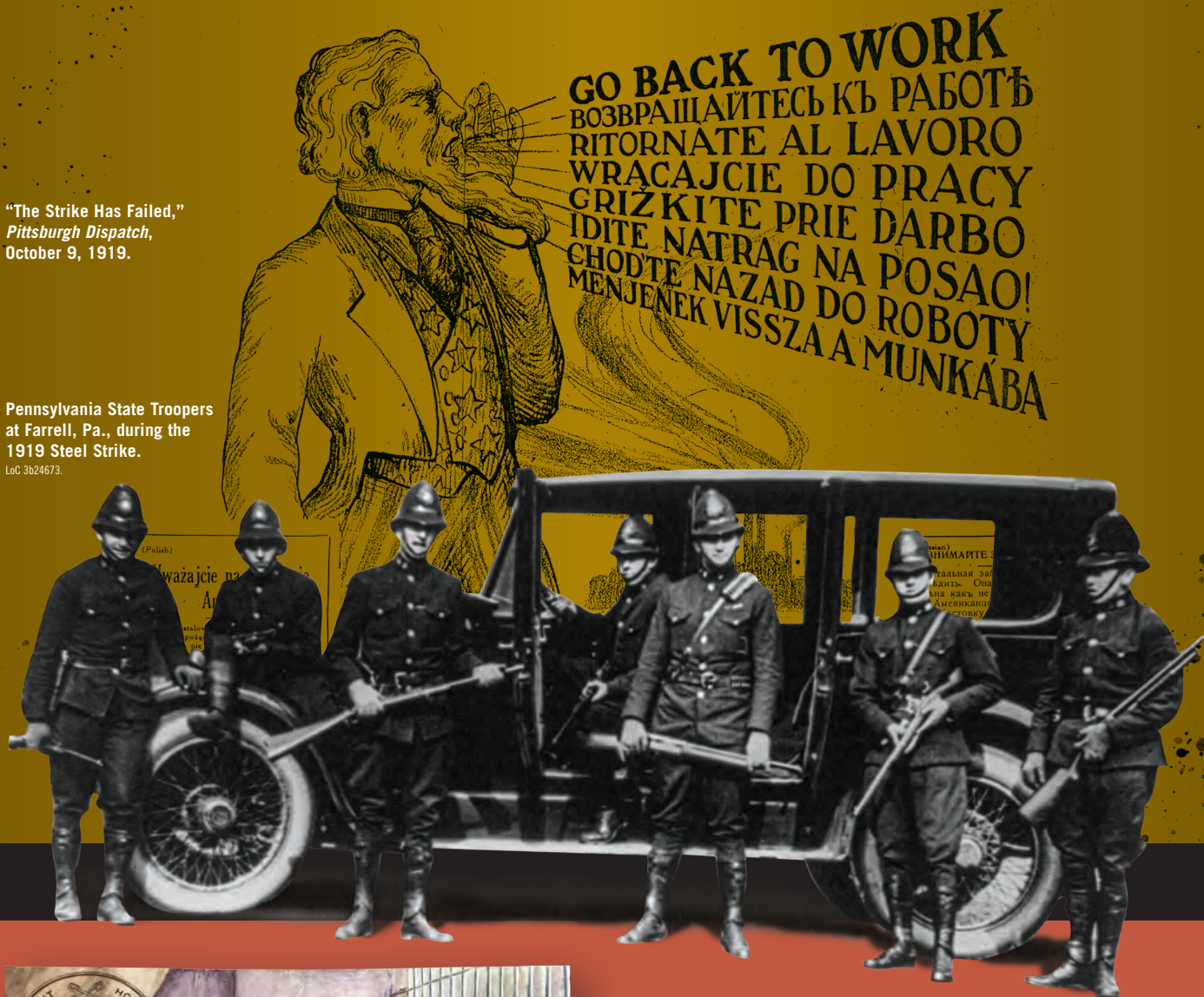


# The Strike Has Failed

"The Strike Has Failed,"  
Pittsburgh Dispatch,  
October 9, 1919.

Pennsylvania State Troopers  
at Farrell, Pa., during the  
1919 Steel Strike.

LoC 3b24673.



Fannie Sellins, painting by Jennifer Rempel.

A century ago, many steelworkers toiled 12 hours a day (and a 24-hour shift every two weeks) in hot, noisy, dangerous conditions. Western Pennsylvania was home to not only major innovations in the production of steel and other industries but also to landmark events in the long crusade to organize and protect its workers.

In fall 1919, a coalition of American Federation of Labor craft unions led by William Z. Foster organized a nationwide strike of 150,000 steelworkers, known as the "Hunky Strike" for its largely foreign-born workforce—mainly from the Austro-Hungarian Empire of Central and Eastern Europe. The Pittsburgh region was the scene of the most severe repression of civil liberties to the foreign-born and union organizers. Local newspapers attacked the patriotism of the immigrant strikers, and the effort failed in its 15th week.

That same summer, coal miners were striking when labor leader Fannie Sellins stepped in to help. Sellins, a widow with four children, became a union organizer well-known for helping poverty stricken mothers and children exploited by industry. She was aiding the families of striking miners up the Allegheny River on August 26 when she saw guards beating Joseph Starzeleski. When Sellins intervened, guards beat and shot her; a coroner's picture of her crushed head was hung in union offices as an inspiration to workers. At the Union Cemetery in Arnold, Pa., union mine workers erected a monument to honor the memory of both Sellins and Starzeleski.