

The POLITICIANS
& *the* EGALITARIANS



The Hidden History of American Politics

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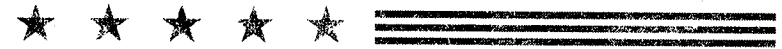
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1854, and he had helped mightily in shaping the outcomes. The seemingly democratic idea of "popular sovereignty," invented and touted by partisans of what was still called the Democracy, were not democratic at all, he charged, but a shill, an evasion of the Constitution intended not to secure the people's will but instead to spread slavery. The idea of a proslavery democracy was an oxymoron; secession, while claiming to be resistance to tyranny, was in fact an anarchic repudiation of democracy. No political question, no matter how divisive, could fail to be settled justly by the tribunal of the American people. Anyone who doubted the despotic character of the self-declared republic of slavery had only to listen hard to some of its adherents propound every conceivable curtailment of popular government, up to and including hereditary monarchy.

The exigencies of secession and civil war had deepened the crisis of American democracy, which was a crisis for democracy the world over. In that deepening, the separate strands of Lincoln's thinking about liberty, equality, and democracy had pulled together, ever tighter, and reached full circle. Undemocratic secession had severed the Union; reclaiming that Union would require crushing an ever more despotic threat; repulsing that threat would come to require, in time, military emancipation of the slaves, whose status as human property had been the fundamental reason behind undemocratic secession. By the autumn of 1863, the war for the Union had become a radicalized war of liberation, and from that Union and that liberation would come the salvation of democracy. This was the point of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

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The Steel Town and the Gilded Age

THE LOCKOUT AND STRIKE AT THE CARNEGIE STEELWORKS in Homestead, Pennsylvania, in 1892 was a culminating event of the Gilded Age. The stakes were enormous, in a fight that pitted the world's mightiest steel corporation against the nation's strongest trade union. Several of its episodes—the workers' pitched battles with the Pinkerton strikebreakers, the arrival of the Pennsylvania state militia, the shooting of Henry Clay Frick by Alexander Berkman—these are set pieces in the history of the American labor movement.

Not that the Homestead strike was the only dramatic labor upheaval of its time, or anywhere near the bloodiest. The nationwide railroad strike fifteen years earlier had far greater economic repercussions and cost many times the number of lives. After 1877, factories and mines across America became armed camps, as industrial strife reached levels unmatched anywhere in the world in the nineteenth century. In 1892 alone, state militias intervened in twenty-three separate labor disputes, from the docks of New Orleans to the iron mines of Minnesota. Labor turmoil would not reach its peak for another two years, with coal miners' strikes and the Pullman strike and boycott, in which railroad management, the nation's judiciary, and federal troops

ordered by President Grover Cleveland combined forces and dealt organized labor a lasting defeat.

Still, the Homestead strike stands out as one of the most dramatic and bitter industrial conflicts of the era, a parable of the bewildering economic and political forces that were rapidly expanding corporate authority over American life. On one side were the skilled, relatively well-paid members of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, who had long-established rights as industrial craftsmen and a large degree of control at work. The Amalgamated also had the support of thousands of other Homestead workers, including hundreds of immigrant laborers who had recently arrived from Central Europe filled with high expectations of the New World.

On the opposite side were Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick, determined to eradicate the union in order to gain complete control of the Homestead Works and affirm the principle that the property rights of a United States corporation were absolute. In this aim, they asked for, and got, the powerful backing of county authorities, the state courts, and some of Pennsylvania's leading elected officials, thus forging an alliance between government and capital that would shape the politics of industrial America for decades to come. "Never heretofore," one labor journalist concluded after the union's defeat, "has civil authority permitted itself to be employed as a tool to a corporation so palpably." Whatever the view, it became clear to observers that something alarming had happened at Homestead.

Because of the intensity of public reaction, the Homestead struggle left an unusually rich documentary record. "*The River Ran Red*", edited by David P. Demarest and first published to commemorate the strike's centenary, collects newspaper clippings, sermons, photographs, cartoons, and other contemporary sources, all testifying to the shocking effect the events had on the nation. Dozens of out-of-town journalists and sketch artists were on the scene. Committees of both the House and the Senate began convening hearings into the causes of the lockout and strike even before the five-month battle was over.

Fifteen years later, teams of sociologists from the Pittsburgh Survey, a pioneering social research project funded by the Russell Sage Foundation and other progressive organizations, descended on Homestead to gather information about the strike's impact and consequences. Some of the frenzied, confidential cables and memoranda from 1892 that historians later discovered in the Carnegie and Frick papers are also included in the anthology.

Building on these sources, Paul Krause's *The Battle for Homestead*, also published in 1992 and still the most thorough historical study of the conflict, examines Homestead from the bottom up, and particularly through the testimony of numerous, now forgotten labor leaders, local politicians, and Homestead workers. More deeply than any previous account, Krause's explores the political ideas of the period and the cultural assumptions of the town's polyglot workers. Krause's command of European history and his fluency in Slovak—rare among American historians of the immigrant experience—are an enormous help here, giving him access to testimony that had before been closed. Although he is entirely on the union's side, Krause's treatment of Carnegie, Frick, and their political allies seems fair. One can debate some of his historical judgments, especially about the workers' political ideas, but his book is the most reliable account available so far of how Homestead happened, and why it had so powerful an effect on the country.

The ostensible cause of the lockout and strike was a dispute over wages, but everyone in Homestead knew that the roots were deeper. Twenty years earlier, when iron was still the industrial metal of choice, skilled workers virtually controlled production. Puddling the molten iron and rolling the finished product required a mastery of arcane craft lore and enormous physical strength, along with an ability to lead crews of up to sixteen men through their tasks. There were only a few ways to do the work correctly in these mills and foundries. The skilled workers knew what these were, management did not, and power over day-to-day operations was distributed accordingly. In the

1860s and 1870s disputes arose over wages and working conditions, but the ironworkers managed to sustain their craft unions, which merged in 1876 to form the Amalgamated, a union of nearly four thousand members—strong enough to force their employers to take them seriously. The puddlers, who stood at the apex of the labor hierarchy, referred to the iron industry as “our trade” without much fear of being contradicted. Manufacturers, they believed, were free to sell their products at whatever prices they pleased, but they had no right to set the price of labor.

Power began to shift in the 1870s and 1880s, when the Bessemer process and the open-hearth furnace revolutionized the industry. By changing the chemistry of metal-making, the inventors of these new processes vastly improved the methods for removing impurities from iron and mixing the purified product with alloys in order to make steel. They then perfected the technology required to apply their discoveries and produce industrial steel far more cheaply than iron. A new generation of steel manufacturers, particularly the young Scottish immigrant Andrew Carnegie, invested heavily in the new equipment. Having made a small fortune in railroad and iron investments in the 1860s, Carnegie steadily acquired new Bessemer facilities and, in the mid-1880s, built the nation's premier open-hearth furnace at Homestead.

Much of the savings in the switch from iron to steel involved labor: the new technology allowed manufacturers to replace highly skilled workers with machines tended by newcomers with indifferent skills. Open-hearth steelmaking eventually eliminated puddling altogether. By the end of the century, the president of the Carnegie Steel Company, Charles Schwab, would boast that he needed only six weeks to turn a raw farm boy into a competent melder, and melding was one of the few skilled jobs by then remaining.

The changes affected much more than wage bills and profit margins. By transforming the work process, the new steel methods also undermined the skilled workers' monopoly on expertise, and thus enabled management to assert its control over the work rules as well as

over wages. Henceforth, the owners and managers expected to dictate all the industry's decisions, which the workers would either have to accept or lose their jobs.

Once management installed the new machines, the first step for the new regime was to cripple or destroy the craft unions. And here, once again, Andrew Carnegie was expert. In 1876, Carnegie had broken a strike at his immense Bessemer steelworks in Braddock, Pennsylvania, and ousted the local chapter of the newly united Amalgamated. When in the 1880s labor organizations (first the Amalgamated, then the Knights of Labor) tried to reestablish a foothold at Braddock, Carnegie was powerful enough to prevent it.

It was the Carnegie plant at Homestead, however, that posed the ultimate test of the new managerial power. After he purchased the already technologically advanced Homestead steelworks in 1883, Carnegie made it the jewel of his growing corporate empire: the American answer, he believed, to the gargantuan Krupp plants at Essen. By the end of the decade, Carnegie had added the latest in open-hearth technology, built new finishing mills (including an enormous and sophisticated department for manufacturing armor plate), and pushed overall production to unprecedented levels. Spread out over some ninety acres of land beside the Monongahela River, and manned, in 1892, by 3,800 workers, the Homestead Works was an industrial marvel where the latest machines required only a minimum of skilled labor. To visit the place, astonished trade journals reported, was to see steelmaking's future.

But Homestead also had the best-organized work force in the industry: the Homestead branch of the Amalgamated, which kept pace with industrial expansion by enrolling additional skilled and semi-skilled workers and enlarging the number of local lodges, or chapters, from six to eight. Although the national body tended toward cautious craft unionism, dedicated exclusively to serving the interests of the more skilled and better-paid men, the Homestead Amalgamated, in defiance of the national union's policy, enlisted unskilled Slovak immigrants on the eve of the lockout, in order to solidify its bargaining position. All told, in 1892, about one quarter of all the

steelworks' employees were members of the Amalgamated, while a local assembly of the less powerful Knights of Labor was also admitting laborers as well as skilled men from Carnegie's mills, and from the nearby Homestead Glass Works.

Homestead's organized workers denied they were aiming to obstruct the steelmaking revolution or to force the company to preserve redundant jobs. Repeatedly, the union proved tolerant of technological replacement. The Amalgamated's national president, William Weihe, asserted that the skilled men considered themselves industrial innovators of a sort and welcomed the new methods, believing "in the American idea that the genius of the country should not be retarded." So long as the Amalgamated's lodges controlled the work rules and looked after the membership's wages, the men appeared satisfied.

This is not to idealize conditions in the Homestead Works, or in the town generally. The mills never closed, and most employees worked either a ten- or a fourteen-hour shift. The heat from the converters and furnaces was so intense that the men's tobacco spittle sizzled when it hit the floor. The Pittsburgh Survey later reported that Homestead employees reached their peak at thirty and were worn out at forty. The men often labored in a state of exhaustion, continually scorched by cinders, their throats parched by the tiny particles of steel that filled the air. Not surprisingly, horrifying accidents were commonplace: on payday at the plant gate, the men on their way home would pass groups of ex-workmates begging with cups and carrying signs that explained exactly how they had been mutilated.

But the men of the Amalgamated were able to tolerate these conditions, largely thanks to the union. The local lodges were authentically democratic and enjoyed considerable autonomy. Individual workers could depend on their elected leaders—steelworkers like themselves—to hear their complaints and present them to management effectively.

In 1889, Carnegie himself and his company chairman, William Abbott, decided to test the union's strength with a lockout, only to discover how formidable the union was. With almost military preci-

sion, and with the support of nonunion men and their families, the Amalgamated sealed off the town to outsiders, scared away sheriff's deputies and scab black and immigrant steelworkers brought in by train to work the mills, and forced Carnegie's representatives to negotiate a new three-year contract. The eventual compromise settlement that was reached included wage cuts, according to a sliding scale that pegged the skilled men's rates to the market price of steel. But it also recognized the Amalgamated as the workers' bargaining representative; it kept the skilled men's wages one-third higher than those in neighboring mills; it tied laborers' rates to the skilled men's wages; and it preserved the union's control in directing work operations on the mill floor. Amicably or not, labor and capital were still partners, each side dependent on the other.

There were plenty of other reminders of labor's strong position in Homestead. Living in a tightly enclosed community, bordered on one side by the Monongahela and by the hills that overlooked the back end of town, everyone in Homestead not employed by Carnegie was connected in one way or another with the steelworkers, either by family or friendship. The Amalgamated, the Knights of Labor, and a number of other working-class fraternal associations and church groups were the town's cultural centers, coordinating dances, picnics, and funerals for members and their families. Local politics, not surprisingly, were pro-labor, and municipal officials tended to be well disposed toward the men. In 1890, a year after the abortive lockout, the citizens of Homestead elected one "Honest" John McLuckie, a veteran steelworker and union champion, as their burgess (or mayor) almost unanimously. As the incumbent in 1892, McLuckie would be important to the unionists when Andrew Carnegie again tried to break the Homestead Amalgamated.

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CARNEGIE WAS RANKLED BY THE FAILURE of his lockout in 1889, and he was well prepared for what he expected would be a

showdown. But he wanted to get his way without unduly damaging his considerable public reputation. The son of a Scottish weaver and democratic activist, and himself an enemy of aristocratic privilege, Carnegie was a complex man, widely thought of as an enlightened employer, a robber baron of the best sort. His endowments of libraries and other philanthropies had already set him apart from other industrial magnates, and he had recently written a political tract, *Triumphant Democracy*, which celebrated the blessings of popular, democratic government. He loved praise and was addicted to celebrity. He had grand literary aspirations, and he also had talent. In 1886, he went so far as to publish two articles in *The Forum* that extolled the mutual interests of labor and capital and defended the trade unions' right to exist.

But Carnegie's idea of a democratic union was a compliant union working in the company's interests, not an independent organization like the Amalgamated. Such unions, with their work rules and strike threats, were, in his view, undemocratic fetters on production, relics of the bygone age of iron that restricted progress—"a tax on improvements," as one of his partners later remarked. After the debacle of 1889, Carnegie was convinced of the necessity of ridding his company of the Amalgamated, and he took careful note of strategic errors in order to avoid them in future. He would not, as he had in 1889, allow orders to pile up on the eve of a lockout, lest his customers' complaints add to the pressure for a quick settlement. Above all, he would have a shrewd and implacable commander in charge of implementing company policy. In 1892, the year the 1889 Homestead contract was about to expire, the Carnegie Steel Corporation had been reorganized, with Carnegie's old associate Henry Clay Frick now chief executive—the ideal man to take on a union.

If the union men distrusted Carnegie as a hypocrite, they regarded Frick as single-minded and unscrupulous. Krause, perhaps in the interest of fairness, tends to understate the hatred Frick inspired. The son of a poor Pennsylvania farmer, Frick in his youth was determined

to amass half a million dollars before he died. On his thirtieth birthday he estimated that he was worth twice that sum, thanks largely to his benefactor, Thomas Mellon, the patriarch of the Mellon banking clan, who had helped him make some brilliant investments in the coke industry, which supplied the iron and steel companies with their all-important fuel. Soon thereafter, Frick became the King of Coke, and merged his holdings with those of Carnegie, the King of Steel, to create an unusually cohesive industrial combination. Whereas Carnegie was gregarious, with an instinct for public relations, and still loosely identified with his radical background, Frick was a solitary man, an autocrat who had a nearly obsessive hatred of trade unions. Indeed, Carnegie's conciliatory writings on organized labor angered Frick and placed a strain on their partnership. In the late 1880s and 1890s, Frick suppressed union organizing in the coke fields, using hired gunmen and strikebreakers, and endured criticism without a sign of embarrassment.

Carnegie hoped that the Homestead Amalgamated could be destroyed peacefully, but he gave Frick total authority to make sure that it was done, and left for his annual grouse-hunting holiday in Scotland. Frick assumed from the start that there could be no peace and erected a wooden wall topped with barbed wire around the Homestead Works, with twelve-foot searchlight towers and slots which, the workers feared, would permit Frick's men to fire on any troublemakers. When negotiations began, management reiterated its terms to the union representatives, a complicated formula that would drastically lower the minimum wage rates and asserted management's right to enforce wage reductions throughout Homestead's workforce. In his careful account of the baffling contract talks, Krause convincingly shows that management's offer was not really serious. Frick intended to make his terms so odious that the union would not accept, creating an impasse that would allow him to lock out the workers, and then break the Amalgamated.

As had been expected, the union turned down Frick's offer. On

June 25, Frick announced that the company would no longer deal with the Amalgamated, and that each employee would now have to negotiate individually. Three days later, management shut down one of Homestead's open-hearth departments and the entire armor plate mill, and started laying off the men. Almost immediately an undisclosed number of laborers in the steelworks—many, Krause believes, affiliated with the Knights of Labor—struck in support of the locked-out workers. On July 29, the company closed the entire plant.

An elected executive board of all the Homestead Amalgamated lodges, known as the advisory committee in deference to the union's declared democratic structure, reacted methodically, relying on many of the same techniques that had been successful three years before. After a mass meeting which rejected Frick's ultimatum, the committee's leader, a highly respected Irish immigrant steel roller named Hugh O'Donnell, announced that the men wanted no violence and would "very gently, but very firmly" push back the scabs, whose arrival seemed imminent. Still, after Frick's ominous fortification of the steelworks, the committee had no choice but to organize, as O'Donnell put it, on "a truly military basis."

With the support of Burgess McLuckie, who was also a member of the advisory committee, the union posted scouts at lookout points along the river, took control of the local utilities, and sealed off the town. The men—skilled and unskilled American-born Protestants and Slovak Catholics—were remarkably united, and began to win support from neighboring steel towns and from the other inhabitants of Homestead. Frick's aggressive measures proved a unifying force: in Homestead, local businessmen helped the strikers' families; barkeeps stopped selling liquor and opened their doors to union meetings; even cooks and waiters in the local hotel joined the strike by refusing to serve food to management. Critics have often assailed recent writing in labor history for sentimentalizing working-class solidarity; Krause shows that, at least among the Homestead strikers and their supporters, the solidarity was genuine.

Krause also believes that the protest at Homestead exemplified a distinct American working-class republicanism, rich in political associations with the American Revolution. It is not always easy to follow this part of his argument, for Krause tries to assimilate disparate ideas and traditions to a singular republican point of view: a neoclassical civic humanism derived from Machiavelli and James Harrington, the democratic republican ideas of Thomas Paine, the labor republicanism of the Jacksonian era, a "Christian republicanism" he never adequately defines, combined with the Slovak notion of *za chleбом* (which, roughly translated, means the right to one's daily bread). Too often, Krause deploys republicanism as the all-purpose antonym of acquisitive self-interest, making the labor movement sound almost saintly, a view more appropriate for monks than for hardbitten trade unionists.

Yet if Krause misreads labor's goals as selflessly virtuous, there is abundant evidence that Homestead's workers, like other workers, throughout the country during the Gilded Age, understood their individual self-interest as part of a larger, collective, democratic ideal and an American egalitarian tradition. Above all, they believed that, in a democracy, productive labor should be a guarantee of dignity and economic security, and much of this belief was a direct legacy of the Civil War. Krause quotes one Homestead steelworker from 1882, reacting to his anti-union employers: "Just think of it, my fellow workmen living in a land where not twenty years ago we had a war against slavery . . . that we . . . would go in our right minds and sober senses and sign away our rights as free-born American citizens." To such men, the war had destroyed the slave system, with its bondage and its arrogant elite of wealth and power, and had upheld the principle that one was entitled to the fruits of one's labor. But their employers had a different view of autonomy, endorsing a universal submission to what one union newspaper called "the empirical and cruel law of supply and demand." Since Carnegie and many of his friends had made their original fortunes from the Civil War, it seemed especially outrageous that they were considering violent means to crush anyone who now

THE ESSENCE OF THE ARGUMENT

stood in their way. At Homestead, the word that the future of American equality and democracy was at stake helped to bolster resistance throughout the strike, with tragic results.

Sometime between 1 and 2:30 AM, on July 6, nine days after the company began its lockout, union scouts spotted two barges on the Monongahela, packed with Winchester rifles and with three hundred uniformed special guards from the Pinkerton Detective Agency on board. The Pinkertons had acquired notoriety as thugs for hire. In 1888, Carnegie had employed them in a strike at the Braddock works; Frick had used Pinkerton men in the coke fields with offhand efficiency. Their presence seemed again an invitation to bloodshed.

The scouts' alarm brought thousands of strikers and other Homesteaders to the river, carrying rifles, pistols, dynamite, even fireworks left over from the Fourth of July, as well as two artillery pieces, one of them an old Union army cannon that was said to have been fired at the battle of Antietam. Throughout the day, thousands more workingmen began arriving as reinforcements from the surrounding Carnegie steel towns. For nearly fourteen hours, workers and Pinkertons traded gunfire, as the workers, crouched behind steel beam barricades, pinned down the detectives at the water's edge. The strikers attempted, unsuccessfully, to slaughter the invaders in their barges, by the use of various flaming contraptions filled with oil. By the time the exhausted Pinkertons, themselves mostly unemployed workers and college boys from the large eastern cities, surrendered to union officials and Burgess McLuckie, three detectives and seven workers lay dead or dying.

Krause describes what happened next as a "carnival of revenge," a phrase he lifts from a contemporary journalist's dispatch. He cannot resist interpreting this "carnival" in the anthropological way currently fashionable among historians, as a violent acting out of social reversals followed by an expected restoration of the established order. The analogy, with its nod to Mikhail Bakhtin and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, seems strained. Homestead's workers and their friends were angry beyond the breaking point and certainly wanted revenge, but

their actions seem very different from the contrived, ritualistic anarchy normally associated with carnival. In a spontaneous eruption of hatred, mixed with the relief and satisfaction of victory, a six-hundred-yard-long gauntlet of Homesteaders beat the disarmed Pinkertons and pulled off their blue-and-white uniforms. Women assaulted the guards with rocks, sticks, umbrellas, whips, and anything else close to hand. A group of Central Europeans, shrieking with grief over the body of a worker, called for a general massacre, a not unpopular position in the crowd.

It was a miracle that no additional detectives were killed: by the time Hugh O'Donnell, the head of the advisory committee, restored calm, the battered Pinkertons resembled, according to one eyewitness, the most degraded of the immigrants who passed through Ellis Island. At last, before dawn, a train arrived to carry them back to the safety of Philadelphia and New York.

Having routed the barges, the Homestead strikers had reason to be confident. They had no way of knowing fully about the continuing consultations behind the scenes of Frick, the Carnegie Steel Company's chief lawyer, Philander Knox, and the principal political leaders of Allegheny County, including the Pittsburgh Republican Party boss, Christopher Magee. At first Frick and Knox had demanded that local officials keep the works open to strikebreakers; it was when the county sheriff and his deputies failed to do so that Frick sent in the Pinkertons. Meanwhile, Magee (who was also a business associate of Frick's) pressed Governor Robert Pattison to dispatch the state militia.

Pattison, a Democrat in normally Republican Pennsylvania, had been elected two years earlier with important help from Magee, who crossed party lines in order to undo one of his GOP rivals. Pattison had run reasonably well in labor districts, and he was aware that if he sent in the soldiers he would lose thousands of votes. On July 8, two days after the Pinkertons were repulsed, a union delegation from Homestead traveled to Harrisburg, the state capital, conferred, and departed, convinced that the governor would not send in troops. But

on July 10, after the local sheriff reported that the situation was out of control, Pattison yielded.

Eight thousand five hundred well-drilled soldiers set off for Homestead. The union leaders, sensing impending disaster, hastily prepared a patriotic brass band reception, in the frail hope that a friendly public demonstration might persuade the militia to remain neutral. But the commanding officer, General George Snowden, rejected the union's welcome: "I do not recognize your association, sir," Snowden curtly informed O'Donnell, before announcing that, as "master of this situation," he intended to reopen the works and restore law and order. The Homesteaders could barely believe their eyes when, on July 15, the first streams of smoke curled up from the Carnegie furnaces, manned by scab labor. Worse news came three days later, when several prominent Homesteaders, including O'Donnell and McLuckie, were charged with murder.

Alexander Berkman's attempt to assassinate Frick on July 23 was another blow to the workers. Berkman, an anarchist, had emigrated from Vilnius to the United States in 1888, and at the outbreak of the Homestead strike was running a lunchroom and ice cream parlor in Worcester, Massachusetts, with his lover, the young Emma Goldman. For several days before he arrived in Pennsylvania, rumors were spreading of an impending anarchist attack. European anarchist terrorism was then at its peak, and memories of the Haymarket bombing and the anarchist scare in Chicago six years earlier remained fresh. Although radical influence on the Homestead union was negligible, known anarchists from Pittsburgh were distributing crude handbills in the town calling for an insurrection.

Still, Berkman was acting on his own when he took a train to Pittsburgh, gained admission to Frick's office, and started shooting, in the belief that his bravery would arouse the masses. Incredibly, Frick survived and was back at his desk the same afternoon. Instead of igniting a revolution, Berkman managed to win public sympathy for the man who, in the previous six weeks, had become the most hated employer in the country. (Convicted, Berkman spent fourteen years in

prison, after which he resumed his anarchist work with Goldman, was imprisoned again, and, in 1919, was deported to Russia. In 1925, he wrote *The Bolshevik Myth*, a denunciation of the Soviets' use of terror and repression of fellow revolutionaries.)

Once the steelworks resumed limited production, the strike was doomed, but it took four months before the workers gave in. Hugh O'Donnell was alarmed at the public reaction to Berkman's deed and secretly approached that year's GOP vice presidential nominee, Whitelaw Reid, to act as an intermediary with the company and reopen negotiations. Reid, himself no friend of labor, saw that the conflict at Homestead would cost the incumbent Republican President, Benjamin Harrison, votes in the autumn elections, and he sent Carnegie a cable advising him to negotiate. But Carnegie, like Frick, saw O'Donnell's mission as the sign of a split in labor's ranks and rejected further negotiations.

In late September, the chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court announced another round of indictments, charging nearly three dozen of the strike leaders with treason—thereby equating alleged crimes against Andrew Carnegie's property with crimes against the commonwealth. Few of the accused ever stood trial and those few were not convicted, but for a critical three weeks, the union's leaders were effectively cut off from the membership. The strikebreakers—many of them black men, the hated "nigger black sheep" brought in by a cynical management—restored production to acceptable levels, filling, among others, government military orders. Racism, provoked by Carnegie and Frick, redirected the desperate workers' fury, and the solidarity of the strike's early phases degenerated into attacks on the blacks, including a riot on November 13 that left several men badly wounded. A week after the riot, the unionists, penniless and demoralized, voted to end the walkout and return to work on the company's terms. Only about one-fifth of the old workforce was reinstated, and the union leaders were banned from every mining and metal firm in the country.

The Amalgamated's collapse in Homestead sealed the union's fate

→ throughout the industry. When the rising young writer Hamlin Garland visited the town in 1894, he found it a squalid and brutalized place, its residents resigned and miserable, "urged on by necessity, blinded and dulled." An elaborate spy system was in place to detect any incipient organizing. Andrew Carnegie, who had wired Frick his encouragement during the lockout, returned to America to face public disapproval and expressed his sadness at what had happened in his absence. But over the next few years, Carnegie, free of the union, increased his empire's productivity while steadily lowering wages. In 1899, he confided to a friend, "Ashamed to tell you profits these days. Prodigious!" Two years later, still voicing regret over the way management had handled the strike, Carnegie sold the company to J. P. Morgan for \$480 million, then devoted himself wholly to philanthropy, endowing libraries and other charities, including a relief fund for Homestead employees.

Carnegie's exultation testified to the liberated prospects of American big business at the end of the nineteenth century. With the events at Homestead, a new American economic and political order was born, founded on a new alliance between industry and the national government. Among the contracts filled by the Homestead plate department was one for sheet armor for the United States Navy, designed for state-of-the-art battleships and cruisers—proud emblems of the nation's resurgent military might. (Six years later, one of the battleships already outfitted by Carnegie, the *Maine*, exploded and sank to the bottom of Havana harbor, ushering in the Spanish-American War.) The new corporate order of the 1890s eventually brought spectacular technological innovations and greater national output, visible everywhere from the great urban skyscrapers to the swell of mass-produced consumer goods. It also brought new social dislocation and suffering to industrial workers, who had lost any measure of power in the workplace.

General Snowden, the militia commander, accurately described the Homestead strikers when he exclaimed in his official report that it was

hard to appreciate their audacity: "They believe the works are theirs quite as much as Carnegie's." It was not until half a century later, when the CIO began organizing during the New Deal, that Homestead's steelworkers regained a durable union presence. In 1941, the local CIO dedicated a granite monument in Homestead in memory of the slain strikers, as if to mark the successful completion of a hard decades-long battle. Unionized by the United Steelworkers of America, the Homestead Works, absorbed into U.S. Steel, remained a keystone of the American steel industry and the envy of the world into the late 1950s. It looked as if it would go on forever.

But the historical memory of the Homestead strike faded as smoke-stack capitalism gave way to yet another America, where organized labor and its principles were severely hobbled. Beginning with a bitter strike in 1959, during which the Eisenhower administration invoked the anti-labor Taft-Hartley act, the United Steelworkers fell on the defensive, and steel imports from abroad began steadily to rise. A century after the Homestead strike, William Serrin, the former labor reporter for the *New York Times*, eloquently recounted in his book *Homestead: The Glory and Tragedy of an American Steel Town* how the steel industry, amid corporate buyouts and mergers, adversarial financial conditions, foreign competition, and plant closings, reorganized yet again in the 1970s and 1980s and abandoned the Monongahela Valley. Brave resistance by community groups and the unions proved futile—a harbinger of what awaited the labor movement generally in the early twenty-first century. Like Garland in 1892, Serrin recorded voices of bitterness and resignation, as a different reality and a different symbolism attached themselves to labor's old battleground. Today, about all that is left of the Homestead Works are a couple of preserved water pump buildings and some modest historical monuments. The great steel mills, demolished in the early 1990s, were replaced in 1999 by a shopping mall.