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A BLOW TO LABOR: THE HOMESTEAD STRIKE OF 1892

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In late nineteenth-century industrial America, the conflict between business and labor was still evolving. A growing union movement had enjoyed relative success despite resistance from the nation's businessmen and, at times, the government. In the steel industry, an industry so necessary for industrialization and modernization that its production is often used as a benchmark to compare the economic progress of developing nations, unionization was slowly gaining ground in the country's mills. However, the steelworkers' union met formidable opposition in the form of the Carnegie Steel Company. An inevitable showdown between company and union occurred at Homestead, Pennsylvania in 1892. There, the Carnegie Steel Company won a near complete victory both for itself and the institution of American big business in general. The once powerful Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers was effectively destroyed; labor organization in the steel industry was eliminated for the next forty-five years, and the vulnerability of unionism in conflict with corporate interests was revealed.

Labor organization in the iron and steel industries officially started in 1858 when a group of Pittsburgh puddlers (one of

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several skilled occupations in the iron industry), dismayed over a wage reduction following the panic of 1857, joined together to form the industry's first labor union, "the Sons of Vulcan."[1] With the prosperity afforded the industry from the Civil War, other ironworkers were able to follow the puddlers' example and unionized, as well. By 1875, heaters, rollers, and puddlers had all formed national organizations and convened in Pittsburgh to decide the future of labor unions in the metal industry. There, the three groups voted to join forces and, a year later, formed the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers.[2]

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the Amalgamated Association had become one of the giants of trade unionism in America. Despite a serious setback in the early 1880s, the union had enjoyed success in the 16 years following its inception. At its peak in 1891, membership had grown to 24,000,[3] up fifty percent from its 1882 total of 16,000 members.[4] The union was especially powerful in the iron industry in which the Amalgamated Association had achieved virtual omnipresence. Practically all iron mills in the metal-producing Mecca of the country, Allegheny County Pennsylvania, were unionized, and nearly all manufacturers had agreed to union contracts.[5] At the time, it was the biggest iron and steelworkers' union in the world.[6]

Beyond its own industry, national labor organizations were fully aware of the power of the AAIS (Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers). In the 1880s, the union was quickly becoming the most influential trade union in America. Recognizing the value and importance of the AAIS, the Knights of Labor had pursued its enrollment for years. During a failed 1882 strike, the Knights had given considerable financial support to the Amalgamated Association. In 1886, Terrence Powderly, the leader of the Knights, ardently courted the membership of the AAIS. Powderly proclaimed, "With the aid of the Knights of Labor...your numbers will be increased and your power to regulate the iron and steel business of the United States will be increased in a corresponding degree."[7] Though the Knights continued to woo the Association, it rejected their advances. The persistence of the

Knights of Labor illustrates the influence and power that the Association wielded at the time. Instead of joining the Knights, the AAIS played a crucial role in the creation of the American Federation of Labor. It was one of five trade unions represented in the 1885 "Philadelphia Conference" that would give rise to the AFL, and it joined the newly formed Federation in 1888. Its membership was considered so central to the AFL that the Association's secretary, William Martin, was chosen as a member of the Executive Council. The Association at its peak was truly, as described by one historian, the "most powerful trade union in the United States,"[8] and perhaps, as described by the *Pittsburgh Post*, "beyond question the most powerful independent labor organization in the world."[9]

While the Association had grown considerably in the two decades after its inception, it never achieved the same prominence or enjoyed the same success in the steel industry that it had had in the older iron trade. Even at its height, the AAIS never included more than half of American steel workers.[10] Partially, this was due to the greater length of time that unionism had existed in the iron industry. However, mostly it was the efforts of steel manufacturers to exclude the union from their mills that had hindered the growth of the Amalgamated Association into the steel trade. Furthermore, the AAIS had made a crucial error in excluding unskilled workers from its membership. Out of prejudice against the often newly immigrated unskilled workers, the AAIS refused to accept over a third of the working force into its union. Instead, the union hoped that the unskilled would follow the lead of their skilled superiors in times of labor disputes. However, while mechanization of the industry progressed, this body of unskilled laborers would become a major factor in the disputes between producers and employees. In the eyes of the labor historian David Montgomery, "The failure of the steelworkers' struggle for control of their conditions of work through amalgamation underscored the shortcomings of an attempt to forge working-class unity under the hegemony of skilled craftsmen."[11] The union's relative weakness in the steel industry was evident in its limited influence on the Carnegie Steel Company, by far America's largest producer. The company ran three mills used exclusively for the production of steel: Edgar Thompson, Duquesne, and Homestead. However, by 1890, only the Homestead Mill was unionized. The Amalgamated Association had yet to win a significant battle in the steel industry ensuring the protection of its branches. At Homestead, the Association would need this elusive victory in order to defend its existence.

The Homestead Mill, vital to the Carnegie Company, was a keystone of the Amalgamated Association. Unionized in 1881 (only one year after the mill had been opened), the Homestead Mill had had a growing influence from the AAIS throughout the 1880s. Its four AAIS lodges in 1887 grew to six lodges in 1889 and eight in 1892.[12] The survival of the Homestead union was especially remarkable given the fate of organized labor at other Carnegie plants. At the Edgar Thompson Mill in Braddock, Pennsylvania, the oldest and largest of the Carnegie plants, an extended conflict between union and company had ended a short reign of the union at the plant. The installation of new machinery and the subsequent removal of approximately three hundred workers at the Braddock mill had made the men fearful of losing their jobs. In 1885, hoping to gain favor with the company, many had withdrawn from the union or simply refused to join it. However, the union had persisted at Braddock until 1887, when Carnegie formally ended unionism by forcing all employees to sign agreements restricting their right to organize.[13] At the Duquesne Mill, the other massive Carnegie plant, efforts to organize the men had been even less successful; the company had squashed all attempts to unionize and had kept the mill nonunion since acquiring it.

Nevertheless, the Amalgamated Association at Homestead not only escaped extinction but also acted productively for the Homestead workers. In 1887, the union won recognition from the management and negotiated a wage scale that would be set every June rather than January. It also enacted the eight-hour day; a twelve-hour day was typical in the industry. In 1889, the company tried to slash wages, change the contract renewal date back to

January, and insist on individual contract agreement (thereby undermining any power of unionism which was reliant on collective bargaining). Enraged, the Amalgamated Association organized a successful strike. Through the efforts of the local sheriff, both sides agreed to negotiate. A contract, favorable to the workers, was agreed upon that would expire in June of 1892.

The strike in 1889 and the condition of unionism in other Carnegie mills served to put the strike of 1892 in context as one of several battles between company and union. Essentially, the points of contention in the 1889 strike and 1892 strike were identical. (This will become more apparent when we examine the conflict preceding the 1892 strike.) The issues of wage reductions and contract extension were central to both conflicts. In many ways, the 1892 strike was actually a continuation of the struggle started in 1889. While the union presumably believed it had scored a significant victory in 1889, it had only delayed the real battle over unionism at Homestead for another three years. Clearly, the success of the company in the destruction of organized labor in other mills also contributed to the company's attack on labor at Homestead. The ease with which the company destroyed unions at Edgar Thompson and Duquesne had set a precedent for a non-union policy in Carnegie works. Furthermore, without serious threat to lose its entire steel producing capability, as union supported strikes at Edgar Thompson and Duquesne would have done, the company took little risk in attempting to break the Homestead union. So when the Amalgamated Association's contract renewal came up in 1892, the Carnegie Company was poised to break the union.

Negotiations over the new wage scale and contract extension for the Homestead branch of the Amalgamated Association commenced in January of 1892. By May, after several unproductive conferences and a clear unwillingness for compromise, the company issued an ultimatum announcing that an agreement would have to be reached by June 24 or contracts would be negotiated individually. The actual dispute over the contract extension was raised over three issues in the company's proposed contract.

First, the new contract would include an indirect wage reduction. Since the success of the 1889 strike, the men had worked under a system known as a sliding scale. When the price of steel billets rose, wages were augmented to a corresponding figure. Likewise, when the price of steel plummeted, wages were reduced with a minimum price of $25 per ton against which wages could be set. Theoretically, the wage scale prevented strikes since it was assumed that the company and workers "were practically in partnership," and as profits increased so would salaries.[14] The new agreement would decrease the minimum market price on this sliding scale from $25 to $22. The company contended that because the market price of steel frequently decreased below $25 per ton, it would be unfair for the workers to benefit while the price of steel rose, since there was no maximum price against which wages were set, but not for them to suffer when the price of steel declined. In fact, in June of 1892, the price of steel was depressed to $23.75, but prior to that year, steel prices had consistently remained above the $25 minimum.[15] The workers insisted that since they had no say in setting the price of the steel, the $25 minimum served as protection against company manipulation of the market. The company's ability to mass produce steel billets, flood the market, and undersell competition at the expense of the Homestead men had made workers unwilling to make concessions on the minimum. Furthermore, the McKinley Tariff's aberrant lowering of duties on steel billets (the very commodity that determined the men's wages), despite increases on other industrial products, had convinced Homestead workers that the company was in collusion with the government against them.[16]

The second dispute dealt with a change in the expiration date of the contract. The new contract, as proposed by the company, was slated to end in December rather than June. On the surface, this seemed a relatively minor issue but was probably more harmful to the workers than either of the other concessions. For the union, a winter expiration date made protesting a new contract nearly impossible. With higher living expenses and cheaper labor, the winter severely limited the workers' ability to strike and made layoffs all the more devastating. In defense of the change in expiration date of the contract, H.C. Frick, the temporary chairman of the company, contended that the change "would permit us to take our estimate upon the wages we must pay during the year, beginning January 1, so that we would be able to make contracts for the year accordingly."[17] Frick's defense of the proposed change only masked the company's true goal to limit the power of the union.

Lastly, the company proposed wage reductions for workers at furnaces with recently implemented technology. Here the company insisted that the addition of machinery had come at cost to the company, increasing steel output with no apparent additional expense or effort to the men. Since wages were paid per amount of steel produced rather than hourly, the men were being paid for work they hadn't done. The union countered that the new technology created unemployment, so the company could raise wages with no loss of capital; the raise in wages was only a fraction of the departed men's salaries. Furthermore, the men insisted, the new machinery required greater skill and expertise to operate.

While the official dispute focused on the wage scale, the underlying issue of the strike was the existence of the union itself. The union feared any compromise with the company, because it believed that the company would stretch any concessions into total domination or destruction. Already aware of the fragility of their organization and highly suspicious of the company, the workers had become convinced that their stance was completely necessary. In fact, the workers may have been better off accepting the new scale. The wage cuts proposed were actually rather insignificant. The decrease in wages as a result of the decrease in minimum price on the sliding scale would not have totaled more than 7 percent.[18] And the wage reduction for workers at improved furnaces would have had only minimal consequences for most men. Of the 3,800 odd workers at Homestead only 325 would actually be affected by the pay cuts, and the reductions would come out of what were already abnormally high wages.[19] Meanwhile, the company viewed union opposition as a perfect opportunity to destroy the Amalgamated Association at its mills, a goal that the company had held for some time. Following the 1889 Strike, Andrew Carnegie expressed regret over dealing with the union and an intention to end negotiations with the Amalgamated Association. In a letter to an associate dated August, 1889, Carnegie wrote, “The great objection to the compromise is of course that it was made under intimidation—our men in other works now know that we will ‘confer’ with law breakers [the AAIS]...the present system at Homestead must be changed.”[20] As mentioned earlier, opposition to unionism at Edgar Thompson and Duquesne was another sign of the company’s resentment of the AAIS, and Carnegie himself solidified the company’s position in a notice directed:

> TO EMPLOYEES AT HOMESTEAD WORKS. These Works having been consolidated with the Edgar Thompson and Duquesne, and other mills, there has been forced upon the Firm the question Whether its Works are to be run ‘Union’ or ‘Non-Union.’ As the vast majority of our employees are Non-Union, the Firm has decided that the minority must give place to the majority. These Works therefore, will be necessarily Non-Union after the expiration of the present agreement.[21]

Whatever doubts remained about the company’s vehement opposition to the union and its explicit intention to end unionism at the Homestead plant were erased after the strike began. Following the start of the strike, F.T. Lovejoy, the secretary of the Carnegie Company, bluntly stated the purpose of the lockout: to ensure that “No trade union will ever be recognized at the Homestead Steelworks hereafter.”[22] The overwhelming evidence lead one historian to the obvious conclusion that “The labor difficulties that precipitated the Homestead Lockout had less to do with quantifiable matters such as wages and wage scales than with the politics of the workers’ claim to franchise within the mill—that is, the legitimacy, authority, and power of the union.”[23]

It is very possible that the company never intended to negotiate with the union in the first place. Its actions prior to the start of the strike suggest that the company was preparing for a violent and prolonged struggle with the union. In May, Carnegie embarked on an opportune and lengthy vacation in Scotland and left the notoriously anti-union Henry Clay Frick in charge of the company. The two executives had clearly anticipated the hostility of the union towards the proposed contract and were preparing for conflict. Carnegie telegraphed Frick on June 10, 1892 (several weeks before the start of the strike), to say, "The chances are, you will have to prepare for a struggle, in which case the notice [i.e. that the works would be run non-union] should go up promptly on the morning of the 25th. Of course you will win, and win easier than you suppose, owing to the present condition of the markets."[24] Even before Carnegie's telegram, Frick already requested aid in the form of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, a private business that often operated as a mercenary army for the use of industrialists. The employment of the Pinkertons was a common method of strike breaking, and Frick was well aware of this. According to Arthur G. Burgoyne, a journalist who covered the strike, Frick had frequently employed the agency in campaigns against labor. In previous strikes against Frick's holdings, "armed watchmen of the Pinkerton detective agency...were pressed into service as the occasion demanded, and the shedding of blood and sacrifice of human life resulted on more than one occasion."[25] In keeping with his traditionally tough methods for labor conflict, Frick had requested "300 guards for service at our Homestead mills as a measure of prevention against inteferrence [sic] with our plan to start the operation of works on July 6, 1892.[26] Even with the services of the Pinkertons already ensured, Frick made further preparations for pitched battle against the men. Surrounding the mill with a barbed wire and a high wooden fence, complete with openings for rifles, Frick practically announced the company's intention of violent opposition to the union. In Burgoyne's eyes, "one of King John's barons could not equip his feudal castle with more elaborate offensiveness than this nineteenth century ironmaster displayed in fortifying the mill."[27] With preparations in place, the company needed only an excuse to start its assault on organized labor.

On July 2, 1892, the Homestead strike, or, more accurately, the Homestead lockout, began. On June 28, after a frenzied three days of incredible production, the company shut down its armor plated mill and open-hearth department, locking out 800 workers in the process. A day later the Amalgamated Association enlisted the support of the unskilled workers, who had previously been denied admission to the union. When all 3,800 workers of the Homestead Mill walked out of the plant on June 29 and superintendent Potter and chairman Frick were hung in effigy, the company began firing workers en masse. By July 2nd, the mill had ceased to be operational and the Homestead workers were officially out of work. The union responded to the company's challenge with efficiency and poise. An Advisory Committee of union members was elected to lead the strike. Hugh O'Donnel, a competent but conservative heater (a skilled workman) at the mill, was appointed chairman of the Committee and immediately took charge. The Committee assumed virtual military rule in the town of Homestead. The town's burgess (mayor), already a member of the Amalgamated Association, helped enact measures to aid the strike. Saloons were prevented from dispensing alcohol after 8 p.m. to control disorder and rowdiness, and a signaling system and network of reconnaissance were created to alert strikers of any company attempt to reopen the mill. With both sides in nervous preparation, the stage was set for battle.[28]

July 6th, 1892, is the most famous date of the Homestead strike. The events of that day achieved instant notoriety and created national interest in the strike as well as sympathy for the strikers. At 4 a.m. that morning, the alarm in Homestead was sounded. Two barges packed with Pinkerton detectives, hired by the company, were spotted moving up the Monongahela River adjacent to the steelworks. For the most part, the Pinkertons were college students, ex-convicts, and others in need of money. They were only marginally interested in the cause but would become embroiled in the bloody and controversial conflict that would make the Homestead Strike famous. Strikers gathered on the riverbanks, protecting "their" mill and preventing the disembarkment of the Pinkertons. Foolishly the Pinkertons attempted to land on shore and fighting broke out. Both sides exchanged fire and casualties ensued. Under heavy fire from the shore, the tugboat used to pull the barges escaped from the scene carrying the wounded and leaving the two barges stranded in the middle of the river. While the Pinkertons, fearful for their lives, remained passively entrapped in the water, the strikers experimented with methods for exploding the barges and dislodging the Pinkertons. After a day of stalemate and failed attempts to destroy the barges with cannon, dynamite and burning oil, the Pinkertons negotiated a surrender with O'Donnel. The Pinkertons were disarmed and stripped of supplies while the barges themselves were looted and burned. Despite guarantees for a safe exit out of the town, the captured Pinkertons were badly beaten in the day following their surrender. Luckily, Hugh O'Donnel regained control of the situation and had the Guards escorted to the railroad and returned home by the next day. By the affair's end, 9 strikers and 7 Pinkertons had died on account of the July 6th violence and scores of others remained wounded.[29]

The battle immediately grabbed national headlines. For the most part, the media sympathized with the workers, criticizing the use of the Pinkertons and the apparent brutality of the company. Notably, a July 7th headline in New York's *World* read "WHILE BLOOD FLOWED FRICK SMOKED,"[30] and a popular song "Father Was Killed by the Pinkerton Men" condemned the use of Pinkertons. Even the editorial staff of *The Nation*, conservative and anti-Union, conceded that "the Homestead laborers have obtained the sympathy of the classes socially above them" and that "the employers receive at the most a rather grudging recognition of their legal rights, while the strong support of an earnest public opinion is denied them."[31] In the Senate, as well, a pro-worker sentiment prevailed. Senator John Palmer of Illinois maintained that the Homestead men "were conducting themselves in the line of their rights."[32] Hence, if only for a brief while, the strikers had gained the attention and sympathy of the nation.

On July 23, Alexander Berkman, a 21-year old Russian immigrant, walked into Henry Frick's office. After much hesitation and several missed opportunities, Berkman had scheduled an appointment with Frick under a pseudonym and the pretext of providing cheap laborers. Ignoring the instructions of a secretary who told him to wait in the anteroom, Berkman entered Frick's office, raised his ancient and rusty revolver, and fired into Frick's neck. After fighting off the vice-chairman of the company, John Leishman, with whom Frick was in conference, Berkman fired a second bullet into Frick's already damaged neck. When it became apparent that Frick was still not dead, Berkman wrestled him to the floor and stabbed him several more times before being subdued by a carpenter who happened to be working in the building. Berkman was taken to the central police station and incarcerated. Meanwhile, Frick miraculously survived, underwent minor surgery without anesthesia, and spent the rest of the day assuring others that he was all right.

Berkman, a devoted anarchist, had planned the assassination for weeks, hoping to aid the strikers and believing that Frick was "a murderer." However, Berkman's attempted assassination did little to help the workers or the cause of "Labor" for which he was willing to sacrifice so much. If anything, Berkman reinforced a growing suspicion of labor unions as anarchist, socialist and foreign organizations and made Frick even more hostile towards the AAIS. The *New York Times* identified him as a one of "Many of the members of this union [the typographical union with which Berkman was affiliated]" who "are radical Socialists or out-and-out anarchists," confirming the fears of many Americans that labor unions were instruments of radicalism.[33] *The Nation* connected Berkman to the Homestead strikers: "The attempt to assassinate Mr. Frick is a natural result of the attitude taken by the Homestead strikers."[34] A biographer of Berkman's chief accomplice and fellow anarchist Emma Goldman later wrote about the effect of the assassination attempt, "Far from inspiring the workers at Homestead or anywhere else, as Berkman had hoped, his act was almost universally condemned, even by many anarchists. It did not break the strike, as has sometimes been claimed; instead it blurred the important issues that had been dramatized by the battle of July 6 and deepened the association between anarchism and terrorism."[35] As could be expected, the event did not sway Frick into sympathy or compliance with the workers. Frick coldly assured the press that "this incident [the assassination attempt] will not change the attitude of the Carnegie Steel Company toward the Amalgamated Association."[36] For the strikers, reliant on favorable press and donations, the attack was a crippling blow. Some, like Hugh O'Donnel, were so fearful of the effects of a negative impression that they contemplated capitulation. O'Donnel was even willing to concede to many of the company's demands; he announced, "This attempted assassination of Mr. Frick, you know, has created a bad impression all over the country, and for the sake of the men, I would recommend an almost unconditional surrender."[37] In all, the assassination attempt had wholly negative effects for unionism and anarchism across the country. As one historian put it, "The net result of Berkman's moronic act was to brand anarchism and nihilism, once and for all, in the eyes of all reasonable citizens as philosophies akin to lunacy, to harm both Frick and himself, to stain (unfairly) the image of the Amalgamated and to make Mr. Frick even less amenable to a strike settlement than before."[38]

The Berkman incident began a steady decline of the strike. The Pennsylvania National Guard, which had arrived on July 12, restored order to the area. Slowly, scabs began infiltrating the mill so that by early August about a thousand men were working and living in the mill. Under constant legal attack in the courts from the company's vigilant and highly competent attorneys, and with only minimal contributions from the Knights of Labor and the AFL, the funds of the Amalgamated Association were running low. As early as mid-July, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported, "Many of them [strikers] are said to be without the necessaries of life."[39] So, as the strike dragged on into October and national interest waned as the presidential election approached, hunger among the workers, especially unskilled workers, became a persistent problem. Meanwhile, despite sympathy strikes at Duquesne and a Carnegie iron mill in Pittsburgh, the Upper Union Mill, the company showed no signs of backing down. When the militia left the town in mid-October, the mill had returned to nearly 2 / 3 its production with about 2,000 replacement workers in place.[40] Under legal assault from the company and physical pressure from the government (in the form of the National Guard), the union could not hold out for much longer. On November 18, the unskilled workers voted to return to work, and a day later the union decided to dissolve the strike.

With its greater resources and government support, the Carnegie Company had successfully starved the strikers into submission and broken the union. The role of the militia should not be overlooked. The support of the troops (along with increased mechanization and an abundance of labor) allowed the company to replace many of its workers with farm hands or immigrants. In effect the government had branded the strike as illegal and asserted the company's right to replace the striking men. However, the true defeat of the union was pure economics. While the men had sustained a loss of $2 million worth in wages, the Carnegie Company had seen profits dip by only $300,000.[41] By all accounts the company had won a decisive victory, the union had been beaten into submission while the cost in capital had been relatively small.

The effect of the Homestead Strike was devastating for the Amalgamated Association. Its membership, which had peaked just prior to the strike, decreased dramatically. From a total of just over 24,000 men preceding the strike, the union's numbers dipped to only 10,000 by 1894.[42] The Homestead disaster was compounded when a severe depression hit the country a year after the strike. While steelworkers tightened their belts and hoped to rescue their jobs during the Panic year of 1893, producers *en masse* declared crusades against the union. Following Carnegie's lead, who had used the Homestead Strike as an excuse to break the union at all his mills, steel manufacturers throughout the country de-unionized their mills. In Allegheny County, with the exception of a few small plants, both iron and steel mills refused to allow labor organization in the years immediately following the strike. Illinois, the other major steel-producing area of the U.S., was de-unionized by 1900. However, the deathblow to the crumbling Amalgamated Association came with the consolidation of the steel industry into the massive U.S. Steel Corporation in 1901. The Corporation dominated by the former Carnegie Company adopted a staunch anti-Union policy. Immediately upon its inception, the corporation proclaimed, "that we are unalterably opposed to any extension of union labor."[43] Despite feeble attempts by the AAIS to gain recognition from the Corporation in both 1901 and 1909, the Corporation never relented. The Amalgamated Association slipped into the obscure production of sheet metal and tin and eventually faded from existence. Its influence in the steel industry was not easily replaceable. Even a massive strike in 1919, organized by the AFL and totaling as many as 370,000 steelworkers, did not bring unionism into the industry. Not until 1936, with the necessity created by the depression and the protection from the New Deal government, was the steel industry once again unionized. Hence, the Homestead Strike began the destruction of a giant among the trade unions and created a 45-year absence of labor organization in the steel industry.

Without the protection of the union, working conditions and wages in the steel industry declined both under Carnegie and in the U.S. Steel Corporation. When one historian called "an average steelworker the most underprivileged member of the United States working class,"[44] his estimation was not far off. In 1919, steelworkers worked far longer hours than any comparable profession. While an average coal miner worked 52 hours per week, a railroad man 48 hours per week, and a construction worker 44, more than 50% of steelworkers worked 72 hours per week and 75% worked at least 60 hours.[45] In Homestead itself, where only 1,300 of the 3,800 men who had gone on strike were rehired, working and living conditions became nearly unbearable. The company scrutinized all union activity and acted; in 1895, 35 workers were fired for attempting to reorganize the mill and a year later 14 others were also fired. Excepting unskilled workers who had never been part of the union and therefore had always worked at bare minimum, wages were severely cut. A roller who had earned $1.48 an hour before the strike, earned $.70 fifteen years later, and a heater who had earned $1.02 now made only $.60.[46] Commenting on the wage reductions following the strike, a former president of the AAIS said, “Men were never so persecuted in any other strike.”[47] Indeed, Homestead became a town of abject poverty; a reporter visiting the town two years after the strike wrote of the miserable situation:

> The streets of the town were horrible; the buildings were poor; the sidewalks were sunken, swaying, and full of holes, and the crossings were sharp-edged stones, set like rocks in a river bed, everywhere the yellow mud of the street lay kneaded into a sticky mass, through which groups of pale, lean men slouched in faded garments, grimy with the soot and grease of the mills.[48]

The rest of the steel industry had also been suffering. In 1918 and 1919, it was determined that 72% of all steelworkers were earning less than was necessary for the minimum comfort level (clothing, insurance, and some recreation) and 38% of the workers did not even earn enough for minimum subsistence (“simple animal well-being”).[49] (Standards of living were determined by the Commission of Inquiry of the Interchurch World Movement.) Meanwhile, aided by reduced wages and freed from the annoyance of the union, steel producers were enjoying unparalleled profits. The Carnegie Steel Company, which had recorded $27 million in profits in the 17 years prior to the strike, made $106 million in the nine years following it. Carnegie was so jubilant that he could only be “Ashamed to tell you the profits these days. Prodigious!”[50] With slashed wages and improved machinery, Carnegie had reduced the production cost to $12 per ton and increased the manufacture of steel to a frenetic pace. Carnegie’s disciples in the industry continued the accumulation of almost incalculable wealth. In the early part of the century, profits for the U.S. Steel Corporation soared well over $150 million per year, as the industry capitalized on the opportunity of the First World War. The disparities in growth of income following the Homestead Strike illustrated the effect of unionization on industry. While the union had existed, the workers were protected from such injustices in wages and hours, but after the failure of the Strike, they found themselves at the mercy of an often-ruthless company.

While the Homestead Strike had immediate, short-lived effects on the government and politics of the day, it produced no enduring change in the attitude of the government towards labor. 1892 was a presidential election year, and like many of the elections in the later part of the nineteenth century, the 1892 contest between Grover Cleveland, a Democrat, and Benjamin Harrison, the incumbent Republican, was extremely close. The Democrats presented themselves as the party of the workers, and milked the negative press against capitalism to the fullest with parades in support of the strike and attempts to link Carnegie to the Republican Party. In November, Cleveland carried every industrial state in the East and won the presidency by a narrow margin. Many Republicans blamed their defeat in the election on the strike. One leading party member said, "The Homestead strike was one of the most important factors in the Presidential contest, and led to the creation of a distinct issue in the campaign. It happened at a crisis and injured us irremediably for it raised the cry, of which Democratic orators availed themselves at every opportunity."[51] However, state legislatures only skirted the issues raised by the Homestead Strike. Only in Pennsylvania and the Populist-controlled Colorado did the state government respond at all to the strike, and both dealt with the popular but superficial topic of Pinkerton Detectives. Both barred Pinkertons from operating in future labor conflicts but enacted no laws affirming the right to unionize. The Senate also dealt with the Pinkerton issue, but released an ambiguous and wholly ineffectual statement saying, "It would be best if Pinkerton agents were not employed in labor disputes," but assured businessmen that "it was perfectly legal, however, to employ them."[52] Even Cleveland, despite his supposed appeal as a candidate of the workingmen, proved hardly more sympathetic to the workers' causes than his predecessor. In the Pullman Strike, two years later, Cleveland supported government intervention, in the form of the National Guard, to crush the railroad insurgence. Hence, the strike had only limited political effects favorable to labor, and the government soon returned to its pro-business policies.

In the end, the Homestead Strike produced no enduring achievement for the cause of American labor. It did not unalterably change the national perception regarding labor organizations or the government's response to labor disputes, nor did it raise the standards of living among the nation's steelworkers or even those in the town of Homestead itself. Instead, the Homestead Strike illustrated the weakness of unaided labor organization in conflict with big business during the Gilded Age. The AAIS, without tricks or strategies, attempted to bring the Carnegie Company to its knees, and it failed. The strike set a precedent of violent opposition and failed strikes during the decade and left large corporations in sounder positions than before it had begun. The strike did little to help the already pitiful situation for many workingmen in America (and the world) and served as a warning to aspiring trade unions. Despite the power of the union and the national attention the strike received, the Homestead Strike was a victory for American big business, and one that, in the steel industry, would not be reversed for nearly half a century.

[1] John A. Fitch, The Steel Workers (New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1911; Reprinted New York: Arno and the New York Times, 1969) pp. 77-78

[2] Ibid., p. 86

[3] David Montgomery, The Fall of the House of Labor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p. 35

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Martin Amis, *Koba the Dread* [Stalin]
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But the worst prison is better than the best camp. In the camps such words (*dear, human*) are used facetiously or contemptuously or not at all; the future tense is never heard; and for the zek, more generally, the "natural desire to share what he has experienced dies in him" (Solzhenitsyn); "He has forgotten empathy for another's sorrow; he simply does not understand it and does not desire to understand it" (Varlam Shalamov). Thus there was nowhere to turn but inward. Speculating on the "astounding rarity" of camp suicides, Solzhenitsyn writes:

> *If those millions of helpless and pitiful vermin still did not put an end to themselves—this meant that some kind of invincible feeling was alive inside them. Some very powerful idea. This was their feeling of universal innocence.*

Because they were all innocent, the politicals. None of them had done anything. On arrest, the invariable response was *Zachto? Why? What for?* When she heard that a friend had been picked up (this was in the early 1930s), Nadezhda Mandelstam said: *Zachto?* Anna Akhmatova lost patience. Don't you understand, she said, that they are now arresting people *for nothing*. Why, what for? That was the question you asked yourself each day in the gulag archipelago. And we must imagine this word carved on the trunk of every tree in the taiga: *Zachto?...*

There are no names for what happened in the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1953 (although Russians refer, totemically, to "the twenty million," and to the *Stalinschina*—the time of Stalin's rule). What should we call it? The Decimation, the Fratricide, the Mindslaughter? No. Call it the *Zachto?* Call it the What For?