

“Tell Him I will Meet Him in Hell”: Andrew Carnegie, Henry Frick and the Homestead Steel Strike

Read the following description of the Homestead Steel Strike of 1892 and create a timeline with the five of the major events from the strike. As you create your timeline, consider the causes, course, and consequences of the strike.

Andrew Carnegie, one of the wealthiest capitalists in American history, was born in Scotland and immigrated to the United States in 1848. Carnegie grew up in a poor family who believed that the British working class should vote and run for Parliament to improve workplace conditions. This belief made an impression on Carnegie early in life and later Carnegie claimed to support the working class and unions. However, he was also a businessman and knew that successful business practices did not always favor employees or union activities. Therefore, he did not always conform to the union's demands and even cut his workers' wages.

Henry Clay Frick was born in Pennsylvania to a poor family. However, he became very wealthy by manufacturing Coke (not the beverage) and by using harsh strike-breaking strategies. In 1881 he decided to undergo a merger with Carnegie. Frick soon lost control of his company's stock to Carnegie. Friction continued to develop as Carnegie tried to express his pro-labor sentiment in opposition to Frick's strike-suppressing beliefs.

The 1800s were a time of many labor conflicts and an uncertain economy. Many labor conflicts ended in violence as employees tried to make their voices heard by both their employers and the general public. The conflict at Homestead arose at a time when the fast-changing American economy had stumbled and conflicts between labor and management had flared up all over the country. In 1892, labor declared a general strike in New Orleans. Coal miners struck in Tennessee, as did railroad switchmen in Buffalo, New York and copper miners in Idaho.

Carnegie's mighty steel industry was not immune to the downturn. In 1890, the price of rolled-steel products started to decline, dropping from \$35 a gross ton to \$22 early in 1892. In the face of depressed steel prices, Henry C. Frick, general manager of the Homestead plant that Carnegie largely owned, was determined to cut wages and break the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, one of the strongest craft unions in the country.

The city of Homestead, on the Monongahela River just east of Pittsburg, wanted to remain unionized with favorable working terms and conditions. Even though Homestead depended on the steel industry for its livelihood, the employees were willing to fight to the death for their union. The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers had about 750 members out of the 3,800 steel mill workers, but when Frick insisted that he negotiate independent contracts with the employees, about 3,000 of the steel members voted to strike. This vast number of employees prevented strikebreakers from guarding the steel mill.

The steel workers' contract, tied to a sliding scale wage based on the price of 4 x 4 standard Bessemer steel billets, expired in 1892. At the same time, Andrew Carnegie was on vacation in Loch Rannoch, Scotland, where he communicated only with Henry Clay Frick. Frick first offered the employees a pay cut and later said that he would not negotiate with the union. Instead he would negotiate with individual employees. The employees refused to negotiate without the union and Frick responded by surrounding the steel mill property with a solid board fence with rifle ports and topped with barbed wire. The steel mill compound soon became known as "Fort Frick". Frick began to shutdown operations on June 28, 1892. Although deputy sheriffs were sworn in to guard the property, they were ordered out of town by the workers. Because the employees felt that they had a right to work, they began guarding the steel mill.

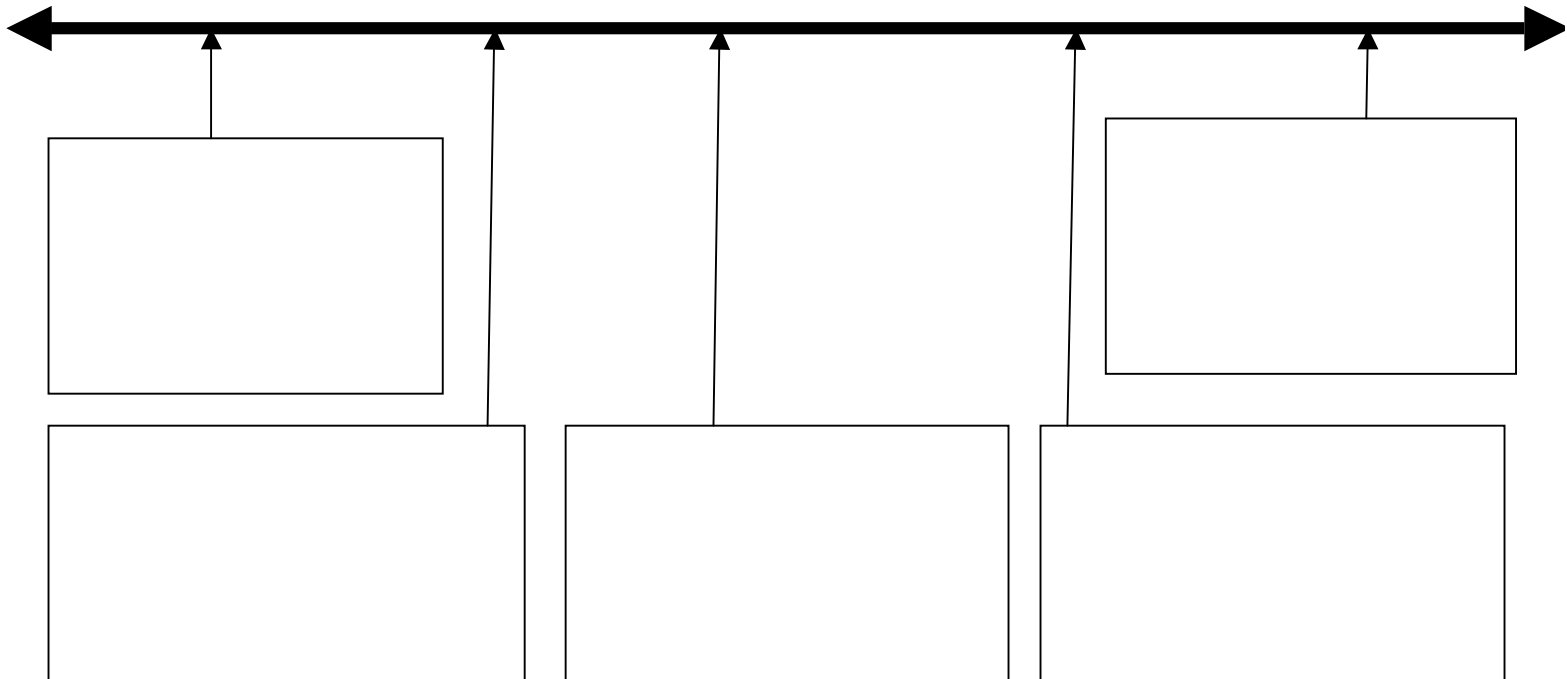
Frick then called the Pinkerton's National Detective Agency of New York and requested 300 strikebreakers to protect the company property and equipment. However, the workers were alerted by employees stationed at the river and quickly rushed to prevent the Pinkertons from coming ashore. The workers exchanged gunfire with the Pinkertons, rolled freight train cars on fire at the barges of

Pinkertons, tossed dynamite, and pumped oil onto the Monongahela River. For about 14 hours, the workers tried to set fire to the river. The death toll rose as the fight wore on, and the Pinkertons eventually gave up. The Pinkertons were forced to run through a gauntlet formed by the workers and their families. Three Pinkertons and seven employees were killed during the fight. Six days later 8,500 members of the Pennsylvania National Guard were ordered into Homestead under the orders of Governor Robert E. Patterson. A very small percentage of employees returned to work after the union called off the strike, but by this time most of the employees and all of the strike leaders had been black-listed.

National attention became riveted on Homestead when, on July 23, Alexander Berkman, an anarchist, gained entrance to Frick's office, shot him twice in the neck and then stabbed him twice with a knife. Berkman was convicted of attempted murder and sentenced to 22 years in prison. Frick was not killed, but the attack was considered by many to be linked to the strikers.

The governor of Pennsylvania ordered state militia into Homestead. Armed with the latest in rifles and Gatling guns, they took over the plant. Strikebreakers who arrived on locked trains, often unaware of their destination or the presence of a strike, took over the steel mills. Four months after the strike was declared, the men's resources were gone and they returned to work. Authorities charged the strike leaders with murder and 160 other strikers with lesser crimes. The workers' entire Strike Committee also was arrested for treason. However, sympathetic juries would convict none of the men.

As a result of the strike, all the strike leaders were blacklisted. The Carnegie Company successfully swept unions out of Homestead and reduced it to a negligible factor in the steel mills throughout the Pittsburgh area. In addition, Carnegie refused to hire union workers, and the steel industry in general failed to effectively unionize until the 1930s



Notes:

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On July 9th, 1892, during the middle of the Homestead Strike, a reporter for the *Post-Dispatch* of London arrived at Andrew Carnegie’s Scotland estate. While waiting to meet with Carnegie, the reporter noted a copy of the *London Times* on Carnegie’s table with a story detailing the Homestead Riot circled in pencil. Twelve strikers and nine Pinkertons reported dead by the times, and the reporter was still holding the paper when Carnegie entered the room.

“Did Mr. Carnegie have anything to say regarding these troubles at his mills,” the correspondent inquired?

Carnegie gave the reporter a scathing look. “I have nothing whatever to say,” he responded. “I have given up all active control of the business, and I do not care to interfere in any way with the present management’s conduct of this affair.”

“But do you still exercise supervision of the affairs of the company?” the reporter persisted.

“I have nothing whatever to say on that point. The business management is in the hands of those who are fully competent to deal with any question that may arise.”

“Have you heard from Homestead since the riot occurred?” asked the reporter.

“I have received several cables and among them several asking my interference with the parties in control.”

“But you must have an opinion....” The reporter tried.

“No sir. I am not willing to express any opinion. The men have chosen their course and I am powerless to change it. The handling of the case on the part of the company has my full approbation and sanction.”

With that, Carnegie turned and left the room...

From: *Meet You in Hell: Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick and the Bitter Relationship that Transformed America.*

“Tell Him I will Meet Him in Hell”: Andrew Carnegie, Henry Frick and the Homestead Steel Strike

Source	Source Subtext	Frick was Responsible	Carnegie was Responsible
“Father Was Killed by the Pinkerton Men”	A popular folk song sung by radical members of the labor movement		
“I Will Kill Frick”	Emma Goldman as the girlfriend of Alexander Berkman (the man who tried to assassinate Henry Clay Frick) and was a dedicated labor agitator and Socialist radical.		
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“Father Was Killed by the Pinkerton Men”

'Twas in a Pennsylvania town
not very long ago
Men struck against reduction
of their pay
Their millionaire employer
with philanthropic show
Had closed the works till
starved they would obey
They fought for home and right
to live where they had toiled so
long
But ere the sun had set some
were laid low
There're hearts now sadly
grieving by that sad and bitter
wrong
God help them for it was a
cruel blow.
CHORUS:
God help them tonight in their
hour of affliction
Praying for him whom they'll
ne'er see again

Hear the orphans tell their sad
story
“Father was killed by the
Pinkerton men.”
Ye prating politicians, who
boast protection creed,
Go to Homestead and stop the
orphans' cry.
Protection for the rich man ye
pander to his greed,
His workmen they are cattle
and may die.
The freedom of the city in
Scotland far away
'Tis presented to the
millionaire suave,
But here in Free America with
protection in full sway,
His workmen get the freedom
of the grave.
(CHORUS)

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“I Will Kill Frick”: Emma Goldman Recounts the Attempt to Assassinate the Chairman of the Carnegie Steel Company during the: Homestead Strike in 1892 by Emma Goldman

It was May 1892. News from Pittsburgh announced that trouble had broken out between the Carnegie Steel Company and its employees organized in the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers...The Carnegie Company, on the other hand, was a powerful corporation, known as a hard master. It was particularly significant that Andrew Carnegie, its president, had temporarily turned over the entire management to the company’s chairman, Henry Clay Frick, a man known for his enmity to labour.

Wages were arranged between the company and the union, according to a sliding scale based on the prevailing market price of steel products. The current agreement was about to expire, and the workers presented a new wage schedule, calling for an increase because of the higher market prices and enlarged output of the mills.

The philanthropic Andrew Carnegie conveniently retired to his castle in Scotland, and Frick took full charge of the situation. He declared that henceforth the sliding scale would be abolished. The company would make no more agreements with the Amalgamated Association; it would itself determine the wages to be paid. In fact, he would not recognize the union at all. He would not treat with the employees collectively, as before. He would close the mills, and the men might consider themselves discharged. Thereafter they would have to apply for work individually, and the pay would be arranged with every worker separately. Frick curtly refused the peace advances of the workers’ organization, declaring that there was “nothing to arbitrate.” Presently the mills were closed. “Not a strike, but a lockout,” Frick announced. It was an open declaration of war.

...The sympathy of the entire country was with the men. Even the most conservative part of the press condemned Frick for his arbitrary and drastic methods. They charged him with deliberately provoking a crisis that might assume national proportions, in view of the great numbers of men locked out by Frick’s action, and the probable effect upon affiliated unions and on related industries.

Labor throughout the country was aroused. The steel-workers declared that they were ready to take up the challenge of Frick: they would insist on their right to organize and to deal collectively with their employers.

...I caught the large headlines of his paper: “LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN HOMESTEAD — FAMILIES OF STRIKERS EVICTED FROM THE COMPANY HOUSES—WOMAN IN CONFINEMENT CARRIED OUT INTO STREET BY SHERIFFS.” I read over the man’s shoulder Frick’s dictum to the workers: he would rather see them dead than concede to their demands, and he threatened to import Pinkerton detectives. The brutal bluntness of the account, the inhumanity of Frick towards the evicted mother, inflamed my mind.

Sasha [Alexander Berkman] was the first on his feet. “Homestead!” he exclaimed. “I must go to Homestead!” I flung my arms around him, crying out his name. I, too, would go. “We must go tonight,” he said; “the great moment has come at last!” Being internationalists, he added, it mattered not to us where the blow was struck by the workers; we must be with them. We must bring them our great message and help them see that it was not only for the moment that they must strike, but for all time, for a free life, for anarchism.

A few days after our return to New York the news was flashed across the country of the slaughter of steel-workers by Pinkertons. Frick had fortified the Homestead mills, built a high fence around them. Then, in the dead of night, a barge packed with strike-breakers, under protection of heavily armed Pinkerton thugs, quietly stole up the Monongahela River. The steel-men had learned of Frick’s move. They stationed themselves along the shore, determined to drive back Frick’s hirelings. When the barge got within range, the Pinkertons had opened fire, without warning, killing a number of Homestead men on the shore, among them a little boy, and wounding scores of others. The wanton murders aroused even the daily papers. Several came out in strong editorials, severely criticizing Frick. He had gone too far; he had added fuel to the fire in the labor ranks and would have himself to blame for any desperate acts that might come.

We were stunned... Words had lost their meaning in the face of the innocent blood spilled on the banks of the Monongahela...“Frick is the responsible factor in this crime,” Sasha said; “he must be made to stand the consequences... A blow aimed at Frick would re-echo in the poorest hovel, would call the attention of the whole world to the real cause behind the Homestead struggle. It would also strike terror in the enemy’s ranks and make them realize that the proletariat of America had its avengers.

“We sat down, Sasha between us, holding our hands. In a quiet and even tone he began to unfold to us his plan. He would perfect a time regulator for the bomb that would enable him to kill Frick...

“I will kill Frick,” Sasha said...”

Source: Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1931) 83–88.

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TYRANT FRICK

In days gone by before the war
All freemen did agree
The best of plans to handle slaves
Was to let them all go free;
But the slave-drivers then, like now,
Continued to make a kick
And keep the slaves in bondage tight,
Just like our Tyrant Frick.

CHORUS:

Of all slave-drivers, for spite and kick,
No one so cruel as Tyrant Frick.

The brave Hungarians, sons of toil,
When seeking which was right,
Were killed like dogs by tyrants’
hands
In the coke districts’ fight.
Let labor heroes all be true—
Avenge the *bloody trick!*
Be firm like steel, true to the cause,
And conquer Tyrant Frick.

CHORUS:

Of all slave-drivers, for spite and kick,
No one so cruel as Tyrant Frick.
The traitorous Pinkerton low tribe,
In murdering attack,
Tried hard to take our lives and
homes,

But heroes drove them back.
O! sons of toil, o’er all the land,
Now hasten, and be quick
To aid us, in our efforts grand,
To down this Tyrant Frick.

CHORUS:

Of all slave-drivers, for spite and kick,
No one so cruel as Tyrant Frick.

The battle of “Fort Frick” is stamped
On page of history,
And marked with blood of freemen
true,
Against this tyranny!

The sons of toil, for ages to come,
His curse will always bring;
The name of *Frick* will be well
known—
The Nigger driver King!

CHORUS:

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“One would naturally suppose that if he [Andrew Carnegie] had a grain of consistency, not to say decency, in his composition, he would favor rather than oppose the organization of trade-unions among his own working people at Homestead. One would naturally suppose that if he had a grain of manhood, not to say courage, in his composition, he would at least have been willing to face the consequences of his inconsistency. But what does Carnegie do? Runs off to Scotland out of Harms way to await the issue of the battle he was too pusillanimous to share. A single word from him might have saved the battle—but the word was never spoken. Nor has he, from that bloody day until this, said anything except that he had “implicit confidence in the managers of the mills.” The correspondent who finally obtained this valuable information expresses the opinion that “Mr. Carnegie has no intention of returning to America at present.” He might have added that America can well spare Mr. Carnegie. Ten thousand Carnegie Public Libraries would not compensate the country for the direct and indirect evils resulting from the Homestead lockout. Say what you will of Frick, he is a brave man. Say what you will of Carnegie, he is a coward. And gods and men hate cowards”

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May 4--Letter to Henry Frick from Andrew Carnegie in Scotland

"One thing we are all sure of: No contest will be entered in that will fail. It will be harder this time at Homestead.... On the other hand, your reputation will shorten it, so that I really do not believe it will be much of a struggle. We all approve of anything you do, not stopping short of approval of a contest. We are with you to the end."

June 10--Telegram to Henry Frick from Andrew Carnegie in Scotland

As I understand matters at Homestead, it is not only the wages paid, but the number of men required by Amalgamated rules which makes our labor rates so much higher than those in the East. Of course, you will be asked to confer, and I know you will decline all conferences, as you have taken your stand and have nothing more to say.

It is fortunate that only a part of the Works are [sic] concerned. Provided you have plenty of plates rolled, I suppose you can keep on with armor. Potter will, no doubt, intimate to the men that refusal of scale running only as Non-Union. This may cause acceptance, but I do not think so. The chances are, you will have to prepare for a struggle, in which case the notice [i.e. that the works are henceforth to be non-union] should go up promptly on the morning of the 25th. Of course you will win, and win easier than you suppose, owing the present condition of the markets.

July 7--Telegram to Henry Frick from Andrew Carnegie in Scotland

"Cable received. All anxiety gone since you stand firm. Never employ one of these rioters. Let grass grow over works. Must not fail now. You will win easily next trial. Have not spoken, written, or cabled one word to anybody. Shall continue silent. Am with you to the end whether works runs this year, next, or ever. No longer a question of wages or dollars. ‘

July 9th—Telegram from Henry Frick to Andrew Carnegie

“Much pleased with your cable, never had a doubt but what you would thoroughly approve of every action taken in this matter when you would once be made acquaintance with all the facts.”

July 17--Letter from Andrew Carnegie to cousin

"Matters at home bad -- such a fiasco trying to send guards by Boat and then leaving space between River & fences for the men to get opposite landing and fire. Still we must keep quiet & do all we can to support Frick & those at Seat of War. I have been besieged by interviewing Cables from N York but have not said a word. Silence is best. We shall win, of course, but may have to shut down for months."

August 23—Telegram from Henry Frick to Andrew Carnegie

We have been having a rather exciting time for the last forty days, but I feel confident that we will be amply repaid for all our trouble in this world, and in the near future. We shall get closer to our men, and when they once become acquainted with us, they will find that we are probably the best friends they have in the world."

November 18--Telegram from Henry Frick to Andrew Carnegie at end of lockout

"Victory!"

November 21--Telegram from Henry Frick to Andrew Carnegie

"Strike officially declared off yesterday. Our victory is now complete and most gratifying. Do not think we will ever have any serious labor trouble again.... Let the Amalgamated still exist and hold full sway at other people's mills. That is no concern of ours."

Late November--Telegram From Andrew Carnegie to Henry Frick (sent from Italy)

"Life is worth living again -- Cables received -- first happy morning since July -- surprising how pretty Italia -- congratulate all around -- improve works -- go ahead -- clear track -- tariff not in it -- shake."

Late December--Letter to Henry Frick to Andrew Carnegie

"I am well and able to take an interest in the wonders we see.... Shall see you all early after the New Year. Think I'm about ten years older than when with you last. Europe has rung with Homestead, Homestead, until we are sick of the name, but it is all over now--So once again Happy New Year to all. I wish someone would write me about your good self. I cannot believe you can be well. Ever your Pard, A.C."