
The Pinkertons at Homestead

by Eugene V. Debs

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From time to time for years past the *Firemen's Magazine* has devoted such space as was required to the discussion of Pinkertonism as one of the phases of our plutocratic Christian civilization. In this regard the *Magazine* has not failed in doing its duty to the great brotherhood it represents.

We have sought to draw a line between *capitalist* and *capital*. We have at all times endeavored to demonstrate that workingmen have no *grievance* against capital, nor yet against honest, fair-minded capitalists; that only the heartless, soulless, inhuman capitalists, the robber gang of capitalists, the venal villains who wield the power of capital to rob and degrade workingmen are those who excite the loathing and enmity of wage workers.

The four thousand employees of Carnegie & Co. at Homestead, Pennsylvania, have been engaged for years in pouring capital into the laps of capital, content if they could build for themselves humble homes, obtain the necessities of life, rear their children as become American citizens, and save a few dollars for a "rainy day," for sickness and old age, and secure for themselves a decent burial.

By virtue of their brain and brawn, their skill and muscle, their fidelity to duty, Homestead grew in importance. It obtained a world-wide fame. The chief proprietor, Andrew Carnegie, a Scotchman by birth, an aristocrat by inclination, and a Christian with Christ omitted, waxed fat in wealth while the men toiled on. The works spread out, area expanded, buildings and machinery increased, night and day the forges blazed and roared, the anvils rang, wheels revolved, and still Carnegie grew in opulence. Taking his place among the millionaires of the world he visits his native land and sensation follows sensation as he dazzles lords and ladies, dukes and dudes, by the display of his wealth in highland and lowland.

All the while four thousand or more of the hardy sons of toil keep the machinery at Homestead in operation. The Monongahela [River] is not more ceaseless in its flow than are Carnegie's workingmen in their devotion to his interests. Suddenly Carnegie, to use a phrase, "gets religion," and begins to blubber about the duty of rich men to the poor. He out-Phariseed all the Pharisees who made broad they phylacteries and made long prayers on the corners of the streets in Jerusalem that they might be seen of men, while they were "devouring widows' houses" and binding burdens upon the backs of men grievous to be borne,¹ for Carnegie, bent on show and parade, seeking applause, ambitions of notoriety, concluded to bestow a portion of his plunder to build libraries bearing his name to perpetuate his fame.

This Andrew Carnegie, in 1889, began to preach is "Gospel of wealth," the purpose of which was to demonstrate that wealth creates "rigid castes,"² not unlike those that exist in India among the followers of Buddha, the Carnegies being the priests and the workingmen the pariahs, and this buddhism of wealth being established, Carnegie, the author of the "gospel," lays back on his couch of down and silk and writes, this condition "is best for the race because it insures the survival of the fittest."³

Andrew Carnegie, who for a quarter of a century has coined the sweat and blood and the life of thousands into wealth until his fortune exceeds many times a million, proclaims "that upon the sacredness of property civilization itself depends."⁴ This Carnegie, a combination of flint and steel, plutocrat and pirate, Scotch terrier and English bulldog, rioting in religious rascality, attempts to show that he is

¹ Allusion to *Matthew*, chapter 23, verse 14: "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.*"

² Reference to a widely read 1889 article in which Carnegie wrote: "*We assemble thousands of operatives in the factory, in the mine, and in the counting-house, of whom the employer can know little or nothing, and to whom the employer is little better than a myth. All intercourse between them is at an end. Rigid Castes are formed, and, as usual, mutual ignorance breeds mutual distrust.*" Carnegie, "Wealth," *North American Review*, vol. 148, no. 391 (June 1889), pg. 654.

³ From Carnegie, "Wealth," pg. 655: "*...while the law [of competition] may be sometimes hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department.*"

⁴ From Carnegie, "Wealth," pg. 656: "*One who studies this subject will soon be brought face to face with the conclusion that upon the sacredness of property civilization itself depends — the right of the laborer to his hundred dollars in the savings bank, and equally the legal right of the millionaire to his millions.*"

animated “by Christ’s spirit,”⁵ and remembering that when Christ wanted “tribute money” to satisfy Caesar, He told Peter to “go to the sea and cast a hook, catch a fish and in its mouth the required funds would be found;”⁶ Carnegie and his Phipps⁷ and Frick,⁸ wanting cash wherewith to pay tribute to Mammon, have cast hooks into the sea of labor and securing from five thousand to ten thousand bites a day, have hauled in that number of workingmen and taken from their mouths such sums as their greed demanded wherewith to enlarge their fortunes and enable them, with autocratic pomp and parade, to take the place of Jumbos in the procession.⁹

Under the influence of his “gospel of wealth,” Carnegie, having prospered prodigiously, having millions at his command, concluded the time had arrived for him to array himself in purple and parade before the people of Great Britain. He was ambitious of applause. He wanted to sit in an open carriage drawn by a half dozen spanking high-steppers and hear the roar of the groundlings as the procession moved along the streets. In the United States Carnegie was not held in much higher esteem than

Robert Kidd as he sailed.¹⁰

⁵ Carnegie, “Wealth,” pg. 661.

⁶ From *Matthew*, chapter 17, verse 27: “Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.”

⁷ **Henry Phipps, Jr.** (1839-1930) was a co-founder and the second largest shareholder of Carnegie Steel Co. Like Carnegie, Phipps was not an active manager of the company at the time of the Homestead strike.

⁸ **Henry Clay Frick** (1849-1914) was, to use an anachronistic title which lends clarity, the Chief Executive Officer of the Carnegie Steel Company from its formation through merger in 1892. Frick was himself a magnate in the production of coke, a key component of the steelmaking process, and was involved in a miners’ strike which led to the April 1891 Morewood Massacre, in which 9 striking miners were shot and killed by National Guard troops. In July 1892 Frick survived an assassination attempt by anarchist Alexander Berkman, an attack which only built public sympathy for Frick’s militantly anti-union position.

⁹ **Jumbo** was a captive African elephant brought to America from the London Zoo as a feature attraction by P.T. Barnum in 1882. The elephant died in a Canadian rail yard accident in 1885.

¹⁰ Apparently a reference to a popular children’s song of the late 1830s, which included the line “His name was Robert Kidd, as he sailed.” **William Kidd** (1654-1701), an executed Scottish pirate who, legend had it, used the alias “Robert Kidd” while on the water engaging in larceny.

Indeed, the freebooter never robbed as many men as Andrew Carnegie, though their methods were somewhat different. Kidd never wrote a “gospel of wealth.” He never played the role of hypocrite. When he struck a rich prize on the high seas, captured the valuables, killed the crew, and sunk the ship, he did not go ashore and bestow his booty to build a church or found a library, but like Carnegie he was influenced by a “gospel of wealth” which was to get all he could and live luxuriously while he lived and then, like the rich man spoken of in the New Testament, go to “hell.”

Kidd had heartless lieutenants, cold blooded villains, but it is to be doubted if he had one equal to H.C. Frick, into whose hands Carnegie, when he left home for his triumphal march through Scotland, committed all power over the Homestead workingmen. The fellow Frick proposed to reduce the wages of these men from 15 to 40 percent, and average of 27½ percent, and this reduction, whatever it may amount to, is sheer robbery, unadulterated villainy. It is an exhibition of the methods by which Christless capitalists rob labor, and this is done while the brazen pirates prate of religion and the “Spirit of Christ,” who plunder labor that they may build churches, endow universities, and found libraries. Is it required to say that hell is full of such blatherskites?

But direct and immediate robbery on the part of these plutocratic Pharisees is not the only purpose they have in view, nor perhaps, the chief purpose. They have in view the abolition, the annihilation of labor organizations. This purpose, on the part of the fellow Frick, is now openly avowed. It was the Order of Amalgamated Iron Workers¹¹ that antagonized the reduction of wages from 15 to 40 percent. The men would not submit to robbery. They comprehended the intent of Carnegie’s “gospel of wealth.” They knew it to be a gospel of piracy rather than of peace. They saw Frick’s operations to transform the Homestead steel works into a fort. They saw the murderous devices perfected to kill by electricity and scalding water. Carnegie’s gospel was finding expression in numerous plans for wholesale murder. But the workingmen were not intimidated. They saw the shadows of coming events but their courage did not desert them. They themselves had built the steel works. From their toil had flowed a ceaseless stream of wealth into the coffers of Carnegie and his associates. Around these works they had built their cottages and had hoped

¹¹ Actually, the **Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers** (AAISW).

to live in them the remainder of their days. They made no unusual demand for wages. It was the same old "scale." There was no good reason for its change. Still they were willing to concede something to the greedy capitalists. They were willing to make some concession in the interest of peace. Having done this they resolved to stand by their rights and to resist oppression and degradation.

What is the plea of Frick? By virtue of the capital these workingmen had created Carnegie had been able to introduce new machinery, whereby it was claimed the men could make better wages, and it was resolved that the men should not be the beneficiaries of improved machinery; only Carnegie & Co. should pocket the proceeds. Such was the teaching of the "gospel of wealth." The pariahs were to remain pariahs forever.

The day of the lockout came, July 1, 1892. The steel works at Homestead were as silent as a cemetery. The working men were remanded to idleness. Their offense was that they wanted fair wages — the old scale — and that they were members of a powerful labor organization, created to resist degradation, to maintain fair prices.

Between July 1st and the morning of July 6th unrest was universal; excitement increased with every pulse beat. The workingmen had charge of Homestead. Frick was in exile, but he was not quiet. He wanted possession of the steel works. His purpose was to introduce scabs to man Fort Frick; to get his dynamos to work and send streams of electricity along his barbed wire, to touch which was death. He wanted to have seas of hot water to be sent on its scalding, death-dealing mission if a discharged workman approached the steel works. He wanted the muzzle of a Winchester rifle at every porthole in the fence, and behind it a thug to send a quieting bullet through the head or the heart of any man who deemed it prudent to resist oppression.

What was the scheme? To introduce Pinkerton thugs armed with Winchester rifles, a motley gang of vagabonds mustered from the slums of the great cities; pimps and parasites, outcasts, abandoned wretches of every grade; a class of characterless cutthroats who murder for hire; creatures in the form of humans but as heartless as stones. Frick's reliance was upon an army of Christless whelps to carry into effect Carnegie's "gospel of wealth."

Oh, men, who wear the badge of labor! Now is the time for you in fancy, at least, to go to Homestead. You need to take in the picture of the little town on the banks of the Monongahela. You peer through the morning mists and behold the Frick flotilla approaching, bearing

to the landing 300 armed Pinkertons, each thug with a Winchester and all necessary ammunition to murder Homestead workingmen. The plot of Frick was hellish from its inception. There is nothing to parallel it in conflicts labor has had since Noah built his ark. No man with a heart in him can contemplate Frick's scheme without a shudder.

The alarm had been sounded. The Homestead workingmen were on the alert. They were the "minute men," such as resisted the British troops at Concord and Lexington in 1775. The crisis had come. Nearer and nearer approached Frick's thugs. Four thousand workingmen are on guard. Now for Carnegie's "gospel of wealth." In quick succession rifle reports ring out from the "model barges," and workingmen bite the dust. Homestead is now something more than the seat of the Carnegie steel works. It is a battlefield, and from Thermopylae to Waterloo, from Concord to Yorktown, from Bull Run to Appomattox there is not one which to workingmen is so fraught with serious significance.

Amidst fire and smoke, blood and dying groans, the workingmen stood their ground with Spartan courage. It was shot for shot, and the battle continued until Frick's thugs surrendered and left the workingmen of Homestead masters of the field. A number of the thugs were killed, others were wounded, and the remainder, demoralized, were glad to surrender and return to the slums from which they were hired by Frick.

Rid of the gang of mercenary murderers the workingmen proceeded to bury their dead comrades, the gallant men who preferred death to degradation, and who are as deserving of monuments as was ever a soldier who died in defense of country, flag, or home. Of these there were 10 who were killed outright on the morning of the battle.¹²

The fiend Frick, of coke region infamy, is the man directly responsible for the Homestead tragedies, and the blood of the murdered men are blotches upon his soul which the fires of hell will only make more distinct, and still this monster simply represents a class of Christless capitalists who are now engaged in degrading workingmen for the purpose of filching from them a portion of their earnings that they may roll in the luxuries which their wealth purchases.

¹² The final toll of the July 6, 1892 "battle of the barges" included 7 strikers and 3 Pinkertons killed. More than 100 strike leaders and active participants later faced an array of charges, including murder, conspiracy, and treason.

Carnegie wires from his triumphal march through Scotland that he has no word of advice to give, and constitutes Frick the Nero of Homestead, consenting thereby to the employment of Pinkertons to murder his old and trusted employees.

It would be easy to reproduce here the arguments pro and con, showing the underlying causes which led to the murder of workingmen at Homestead. But we do not care to introduce them here, except in so far as the fact is brought out that the country has a class of capitalists who conduct vast industrial enterprises and who, not content with honest dividends upon honest investments, are ceaselessly seeking to rob labor of its legitimate rewards, and the better to accomplish their nefarious designs are determined to break up, if possible, labor organizations, the one barrier that keeps them from accomplishing their purpose.

The Homestead slaughter of workingmen must serve to remind the armies of labor of what is in store for them if the Carnegies, the Phipps, and the Fricks can, by the aid of Pinkertons, come out victorious.

It occurs to use that the Homestead tragedies will serve to bind labor organizations in closer union. If not, then the blood of workingmen as it calls from the ground, exhorting the living to emulate the courage of the men who fell at Homestead, might as well call upon a heard of "dumb, driven cattle."¹³

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote of the first shot at Concord and Lexington on the 20th of April, 1775, as "The Shot Heard Round the World." The first shot of the Pinkertons at Homestead has been heard around the world, and its reverberations ought to continue until the statutes of all the states make the employment of Pinkerton thugs murder in the first degree.

It required Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill to arouse the colonies to resistance, and the battle of Homestead should serve to arouse every workingman in America to a sense of the dangers which surround them.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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¹³ Allusion to "A Psalm of Life" (1838), by **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow** (1807-1882), the fifth stanza of which reads: "*In the world's broad field of battle / In the bivouac of Life, / Be not like dumb, driven cattle! / Be a hero in the strife!*"