

Homestead Strike Scene Card, 1892

PARTS

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. 3750 Striking workers | 5. 11 Sheriffs deputies |
| a. 750 members of Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers Union (multiple) | 6. Several thousand Homestead townspeople (multiple) |
| b. 3000 non-union workers (multiple) | 7. 300 Pinkerton agents (multiple) |
| 2. Andrew Carnegie | 8. Pennsylvania Governor Robert E. Pattison |
| 3. Henry Clay Frick | 9. 8500 National Guardsmen (multiple) |
| 4. Strikebreakers (multiple) | 10. Alexander Berkman |
| | 11. Narrator |

NARRATOR: Scene One: Carnegie Steel Mill, Homestead, Pennsylvania

In 1882 and 1889, the **Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (AA)** had won favorable labor contracts after strikes against Carnegie companies, becoming the strongest labor union in America. **Andrew Carnegie** and the manager of his Homestead, Pennsylvania plant, **Henry Clay Frick**, agree that they should break the power of the labor union. As the 1889 three-year contract nears its expiration date in 1892, Carnegie and Frick decide to take a strong stand against the union at Homestead. Carnegie leaves for an extended vacation in Scotland, making it clear that he supports any actions Frick decides to take. The union asks for a raise; Frick responds by cutting wages for **All workers** (union and non-union) without reducing the workers' rent or any other costs in the company town. He refuses to recognize the right of the union to negotiate for the workers, essentially telling employees, "Take it or leave it." He advertises for **Strikebreakers**, and builds a 10-foot high fence around the entire plant. The union refuses the new contract.

NARRATOR: Scene Two: Carnegie Steel Mill, Homestead, Pennsylvania, July 2, 1892

Frick completely closes down the plant and lays off All workers, announcing that he will reopen the plant with **Strikebreakers**. The **AA** holds an emergency meeting to develop their strategy against management. Even though only 750 of the plant's workers are members of the AA union, 3000 **other workers** agree to support them,

and all vote to strike. Striking workers march and picket to prevent **11 Sheriff's deputies** from entering the town. Frick hires 300 armed **Pinkerton agents** to protect the strikebreakers, guard the plant, and defeat the union.

NARRATOR: Scene Three: Carnegie Steel Mill, Homestead, Pennsylvania, July 5, 1892

An informant in a neighboring town reports to labor leaders that barges carrying the **Pinkerton agents** are making their way down the Monongahela River and should arrive under cover of darkness. Thousands of **Striking workers** and **Townpeople** meet the Pinkertons upon their arrival at about midnight. Strikers warn the Pinkertons not to step off their barges, but they disregard the warning. In the early hours of July 6, someone starts shooting. The battle continues until late that afternoon when the Homestead workers force the severely outnumbered Pinkertons back to their boats. Casualties of the battle include numerous dead and wounded on both sides. Sources differ regarding which side shot first and how many were killed. Frick asks Pennsylvania's governor to send in the National Guard to protect lives and property and to restore order.

NARRATOR: Scene Four: Carnegie Steel Mill, Homestead, Pennsylvania, July 12, 1892

Governor Robert E. Pattison sends 8500 **National Guardsmen** to keep the peace and crush the strike, but strikers hold control of the town for four more months, refusing to go back to work. By August the company has imported enough non-union **Strikebreakers** to restart the factory, though the lack of skilled workers continues to be a problem. Frick begins to lure skilled workers from other factories with false promises of increased pay and better working conditions. Across the country, the plight of the striking Homestead workers prompts many people to be sympathetic to their cause.

NARRATOR: Scene Five: Frick's office, Carnegie Steel Mill, Homestead, Pennsylvania, July 23, 1892

A Russian immigrant and anarchist, **Alexander Berkman**, enters Frick's office, intending to assassinate him. Berkman believes the Homestead workers will be able to win their strike and achieve better working conditions, and that downtrodden workers across the country will be encouraged if **Frick** were out of the picture. Berkman, who has never handled a gun before, shoots Frick in the shoulder and in the neck, then drops the gun in a scuffle with Frick. Berkman then stabs him three times with a dagger. Frick's injuries are not severe. He is handling correspondence from his bed the next morning, and he is back at work ten days later. Berkman is sentenced to 22 years in prison.

NARRATOR: Scene Six: Amalgamated Association meeting, November, 1892

By November it is clear that the **Striking workers** cannot hold out against the power of the company. The immigrant steelworkers, who are the lowest paid to begin with, have no further reserves to take care of their families. They must go back to work. The nation's sympathies are redirected after the Berkman attack on Frick. Even though the steelworkers union has no connection to radicalism of any kind, and has not requested or approved of Berkman's "help," press reports tended to increase public suspicion of labor unions. For many people around the country, strikes and labor unions are associated with dangerous violence and radical, "un-American" ideas. Over 100 union leaders are arrested and charged with murder of the Pinkertons (though they were eventually acquitted of the charges). In early November the remaining strikers hold a meeting, acknowledge that their strike is doomed, and vote to go back to work on Frick's terms. The steelworkers' union is destroyed, achieving the results that Carnegie and Frick had originally desired—running the Carnegie Company without interference from the workers. However, reflecting on the Homestead Strike, **Carnegie** writes in a letter, "the false step was made in trying to run the Homestead Works with new men. It is a test to which workingmen should not be subjected. It is expecting too much of poor men to stand by and see their work taken by others. . . The pain I suffer increases daily. The Works are not worth one drop of human blood. I wish they had sunk." In 1920, Carnegie wrote in his autobiography, "Nothing. . . in all my life, before or since, wounded me so deeply... No pangs remain of any wound received in my business career save that of Homestead."

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain the constitutional principles that are relevant to the Homestead Strike.
2. What social and/or economic problems are evident leading up to the Homestead Strike?
3. What methods to bring about social change are attempted in the events of the Homestead Strike? Evaluate the chances for success of each of the methods you identify.
4. To what extent and in what ways are First Amendment or other constitutional protections evident in the Homestead Strike, its causes and its consequences?