

## **Homestead Strike (1892)**

The Homestead strike, in Homestead, Pennsylvania, pitted one of the most powerful new corporations, Carnegie Steel Company, against the nation's strongest trade union, the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers. An 1889 strike had won the steelworkers a favorable three-year contract; but by 1892 Andrew Carnegie was determined to break the union. His plant manager, Henry Clay Frick, stepped up production demands, and when the union refused to accept the new conditions, Frick began locking the workers out of the plant.

On July 2 all were discharged. The union, limited to skilled tradesmen, represented less than one-fifth of the thirty-eight hundred workers at the plant, but the rest voted overwhelmingly to join the strike. An advisory committee was formed, which directed the strike and soon took over the company town as well. Frick sent for three hundred Pinkerton guards, but when they arrived by barge on July 6 they were met by ten thousand strikers, many of them armed. After an all-day battle, the Pinkertons surrendered and were forced to run a gauntlet through the crowd. In all, nine strikers and seven Pinkertons were killed; many strikers and most of the remaining Pinkertons were injured, some seriously.

The sheriff, unable to recruit local residents against the strikers, appealed to Governor William Stone for support; eight thousand militia arrived on July 12. Gradually, under militia protection, strikebreakers got the plant running again. Frick's intransigence had won sympathy for the strikers, but an attempt on his life by anarchist Alexander Berkman on July 23 caused most of it to evaporate. Meanwhile, the corporation had more than a hundred strikers arrested, some of them for murder; though most were finally released, each case consumed much of the union's time, money, and energy. The strike lost momentum and ended on November 20, 1892. With the Amalgamated Association virtually destroyed, Carnegie Steel moved quickly to institute longer hours and lower wages. The Homestead strike inspired many workers, but it also underscored how difficult it was for any union to prevail against the combined power of the corporation and the government.