

## **Homestead Strike Timeline**

**Where:** Homestead, Pennsylvania

**Union:** Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers

**Company:** Carnegie Steel Company

**1876** – The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, a labor union representing iron and steel workers, formed.

**1881** – Andrew Carnegie put Henry Clay Frick in charge of the Homestead factory.

**1882 and 1889** – Amalgamated Association won two big strikes against the Carnegie Company. After the strike in 1889, the union had a very strong union contract set to expire in 1892.

**February 1892** – During negotiations, Amalgamated Association asked the company for a wage increase. Frick responded with a wage decrease.

**June 29, 1892** – The old contract was set to expire without the two sides reaching an agreement. Frick locked the workers out of the plant, using a high fence topped with barbed wire.

**June 30, 1892** – Workers decided to strike, and they surrounded the plant to keep strikebreakers, recruited by Frick, from entering.

**July 6, 1892** – After the local sheriff was unable to control the strikers, Frick sent hired guards from the National Pinkerton Detective Agency, or “Pinkertons,” to secure the factory so that strikebreakers could enter. The agency provided private detective and security services and had previously been involved in conflicts against labor unions.

The Pinkertons arrived by boat in the middle of the night, hoping to surround the plant unnoticed. However, the strikers knew they were coming and, along with strike sympathizers in town, organized to protect the plant.

When Pinkertons attempted to disembark the boats and come ashore, violence broke out. Accounts vary on which side is responsible for firing first after the Pinkertons landed (though strikers had fired shots at the boats prior to landing). During the battle that ensued, seven strikers and three Pinkerton agents were killed.

## Document A: Emma Goldman (Modified)

*Emma Goldman was an anarchist who fiercely supported workers' rights. This document comes from her autobiography, written in 1931, in which she describes her reaction to the Homestead strike, thirty-nine years later.*

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News announced that trouble had broken out between the Carnegie Steel Company and its workers organized in the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers—one of the biggest and most efficient labor unions in the country, consisting mostly of Americans, men of decision and **grit**. ... Andrew Carnegie, president of the Carnegie Company, had temporarily turned over management to Henry Clay Frick, a man known for his **enmity** to labor.

Wages were arranged between the company and the union, according to a sliding scale based on the current market price of steel products. The agreement was about to expire, and workers called for an increase in wages because of the higher market prices and increased output of the mills.

Frick declared the sliding scale would end. The company would make no more agreements with the union. In fact, Frick would not recognize the union at all. ... He would close the mills. ... It was an open declaration of war.

The sympathy of the entire country was with the steel-workers.

The steel-workers would insist on their right to organize. Their tone was manly, ringing with the spirit of their rebellious forebears of the Revolutionary War. ...

Then news flashed across the country of the slaughter of steel-workers by Pinkertons. In the dead of night, Frick sent a boat packed with **strike-breakers**, under protection of heavily armed Pinkerton thugs, to the Homestead mill. The steel-men had learned of Frick's move and stationed themselves along the shore. When the boat 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.

**Source:** Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, 1931.

### Vocabulary

grit: determination

enmity: fierce opposition

strike-breakers: people brought in to work in place of striking workers

## Document B: Henry Frick

*In this newspaper interview in the Pittsburgh Post on July 8, 1892, Henry Clay Frick explains his opposition to the union's demands.*

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I can say as clearly as possible that under no circumstances will we have any further dealings with the Amalgamated Association as an organization. This is final.

The workmen in the Amalgamated Association work under what is known as a sliding scale. As the price of steel rises, the earnings of the men also rise; as the prices fall, their wages also fall. The wages are not allowed to fall below a certain amount, which is called the minimum. Until now, the minimum has been \$25 per ton of steel produced. We have recently changed the minimum to \$23 instead of \$25. We believe this is reasonable because the Carnegie Company has spent a lot of money on new machinery that allows workers to increase their daily output, and therefore increase their earnings. The Amalgamated Association was unwilling to consider a minimum below \$24, even though the improved machinery would enable workers to earn more. We found it impossible to arrive at any agreement with the Amalgamated Association, so we decided to close our works at Homestead.

The Amalgamated men surrounded our property and blocked all of the entrances and all roads leading to Homestead. We felt that for the safety of our property, it was necessary for us to hire our own guards to assist the sheriff.

We brought our guards here as quietly as possible; had them taken to Homestead at an hour of the night when we hoped to have them enter without any interference whatever and without meeting anybody. All our efforts were to prevent the possibilities of a confrontation between the Amalgamated Association and our guards.

We have investigated and learned that the Amalgamated men and their friends fired on our guards for twenty-five minutes before they reached our property, and then again after they had reached our property. Our guards did not return the fire until after the boats had touched the shore, and after three of our guards had been wounded, one fatally.

**Source:** Henry Frick, *Pittsburgh Post*, 8 July 1892.

## Guiding Questions

### **Document A: Emma Goldman**

1) (Sourcing) Who was Emma Goldman?

How might her position influence her account of the strike?

2) When was this account published?

How might affect the reliability of her account? Explain.

3) What position do you expect her to take on the strike? Explain.

4) (Close Reading) How does Goldman portray the workers?

How does Goldman portray Frick?

5) What or who does Goldman think is to blame for the strike turning violent?

6) Is this account a strong source for learning about why the Homestead Strike turned violent? Why or why not?

### **Document B: Henry Frick**

1) (Sourcing) Who was Henry Frick?

How might his position influence his account of the strike?

2) When was the account published?

How might that affect the reliability of his account? Explain.

3) How do you expect his position on the strike will compare to Goldman's in Document A?

4) (Close Reading) How does Frick portray the union workers?

How does this compare to Goldman's account of the workers?

5) What or who does Frick think is to blame for the strike turning violent?

6) Is this account a strong source for learning about why the Homestead Strike turned violent? Why or why not?

### **Final Questions**

1) How are Goldman and Frick's claims about the Homestead strike similar?

How are they different?

2) Whose account is more believable? Why?

3) Why did the Homestead Strike turn violent? (Use evidence from the Documents to support your claim.)