

'Fort Frick' and the Amalgamated: The Homestead Lockout of 1892 in Historical Perspective

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'Fort Frick' and the Amalgamated: The Homestead Lockout of 1892 in Historical Perspective

John N. Ingham

Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 1992).

David P. Demarest, Jr., ed., *"The River Ran Red": Homestead 1892* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 1992).

ON 6 JULY, ONE HUNDRED YEARS to the day from the outbreak of the great Homestead Strike in 1892, I was privileged to participate in a symposium at Homestead sponsored by the United Steelworkers of America and other bodies in commemoration of that event. What I encountered during those three days was a series of images and incidents that will long remain with me, and which say much about the road we have travelled over the past century.

The most searing, dramatic, image is the memory of angry, disgruntled steelworkers at the symposium. Dressed in black t-shirts which said "1892 — The Pinkertons — 1992 — USWA International — The NEW Pinkertons," they made it clear that their anger was directed not at management of the steel mills, but at their own union, and most especially at its president, Lynn Williams, and several of his colleagues. Williams and others had, according to these men, sold them out — bargained away the jobs of rank and file steelworkers — in order to obtain preferential treatment for themselves. The unemployed steelworkers further objected that the symposium merely "celebrate[s] and glorify[ies] the landing of the Pinkertons!" instead of dealing with the reality of suffering of unemployed steelworkers of the present day.

Part and parcel of that image is an even more upsetting and depressing one — the rusting, vacant hulks of what once were the magnificent Homestead Works of Carnegie Steel and later United States Steel. The great mill was closed in 1986, the victim of the profound dismantling of America's great industrial heartland. Once the works were the very heart and soul of the milltown of Homestead. Well into

John N. Ingham, "'Fort Frick' and the Amalgamated: The Homestead Lockout of 1892 in Historical Perspective," *Labour/Le Travail*, 31 (Spring 1993), 329-40.

the 1960s the plant provided nearly all of the employment in the town, most of its taxes and many of its services. The company also controlled the town's politicians, police and social organizations. Homestead's workers, largely Slavic immigrants in the early years, and the sons and grandsons of these immigrants in later years (in 1951, more than 40 per cent of its employees were father-and-son combinations), had made a Faustian bargain with the company. In return for economic security and high wages, they tolerated hard work, long hours, danger, death, and a form of corporate control that pervaded their lives in a myriad of ways.

The most amusing image I retain occurred at a dinner capping the proceedings of the symposium. There were speeches and presentations by union leaders and academics. Then there was entertainment: a group played a number of labour songs from the 19th century. Seated at our table was the austere and aristocratic director of Clayton, the home and museum of Henry Clay Frick, Carnegie's partner and mastermind of management strategy during the strike. This gentleman was quite contemptuous of the proceedings and most particularly sneered at the labour songs. It was something obviously well removed from anything he had ever experienced at the Duquesne Club or Fox Chapel Golf. As the final event of the evening, however, the musicians struck up "Solidarity Forever," and the entire audience stood to sing along (including Frick's great-granddaughter). He was the only one left seated, and, slowly, grudgingly, the man got to his feet and proceeded to sing also. It was, indeed, a night to remember, and perhaps, just perhaps, old Henry Clay Frick rolled over in this grave that evening.

The events of 6, 7, and 8 July 1892 which were being commemorated that weekend can be briefly reiterated here. Carnegie Steel's Homestead plant, which had been acquired from a consortium of old Pittsburgh ironmakers in 1883, had long been plagued (at least from management's point of view) with labour problems. The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers had several powerful locals in the plant, as did the Knights of Labor. These problems had played a major role in undermining the ability of the former owners to run the mill in the manner they wished, as a major strike in the works in 1882, in which management was soundly thrashed by the union, led to the sale.

Andrew Carnegie, like most steelmakers, preferred to run a non-union shop, but was generally quite pragmatic on labour issues. He therefore did not directly confront the union. But there were a number of technological determinants that were affecting the situation. Homestead, like Carnegie's earlier Edgar Thomson Works, was a Bessemer plant, and Bessemer steel, unlike older wrought iron production, had the potential of greatly increasing management's control of the factory. In acceding to the union's victory in 1883, however, Carnegie surrendered much of the control he believed was rightly his to organized labour. He began at that point, however, to quietly undermine the skilled worker's position by a series of technological changes.

The most important of these was the installation of the open hearth system of steelmaking at Homestead in 1886. This allowed a couple of significant changes:

first was the ability to make steel suitable for structural beams and for armor plate for the US Navy. Second, it allowed the plant to move increasingly toward the continuous system of production. In train with the open hearth furnaces, Carnegie installed vastly improved systems of material-handling, like overhead cranes, hoists, charging machines, and buggies. All of this greatly speeded up the process of steelmaking, and allowed the production of far vaster quantities of the product. By 1892, virtually all of the mills at Homestead were mechanized and continuous. This greatly reduced the need for skilled and experienced workers to handle the material. Yet, the AAISW's contract from 1882 mandated the continuation of an older system of work rules. Carnegie was not happy about that.

Meantime, other changes were taking place. In 1888, Carnegie broke the union at the Edgar Thomson plant in Braddock, and at about the same time, Henry Clay Frick, who brought with him the rabidly anti-union traditions of the coke fields, became chairman and manager of the vast Carnegie operations. That set the stage for a confrontation between management and union at the Homestead plant in 1889. Management of the plant, led by William L. Abbott, demanded a 25 per cent reduction in wages, and insisted the entire plant be put on a 12 hour day. Finally, the company would sign contracts with the workers only as individuals, and the union would not be recognized as a bargaining agent. When the workers and their unions rejected these demands, management locked them out. In the end, however, fearing violence in the town and plant, Abbott accepted a compromise agreement, whereby the company accomplished many of its goals, but the AAISW remained a recognized bargaining agent. Control of the great steelworks still rested in the hands of the union. Soon after, Abbott was fired and Frick determined that he would control future labour-management negotiations himself. A few months later, Frick negotiated the purchase of Duquesne Steel Works, a marvel of modern technology that used the latest continuous production techniques. Carnegie and Frick had two massive non-union plants now, and, in their eyes Homestead was simply awaiting the destruction of the union to become a full partner in the Carnegie empire. They just had to wait until the three year contract expired in 1892.

When Frick and the union began negotiating in June of 1892, there were some substantive issues concerning wages on the table, and there was also a demand by Frick that future contracts expire in January rather than June. The winter date was a slack time in steel, when the company would be better able to withstand a strike. The real goal of the company, however, was to eradicate union influence in the vast plant, and the Amalgamated was well aware of that. To reinforce this, the company announced that it would treat workers as individuals unless an agreement was reached by 28 June. The men were locked out of the plant on that date, and on the morning of 6 July, a group of 300 Pinkertons that Frick had hired earlier, came up the Monongehela on barges. Members of the Amalgamated had been prepared for this, and had lined the river bank. Someone fired a shot, and a pitched battle ensued in which six workers and three Pinkertons died. Finally, the Pinkertons surrendered,

and were forced to march a "gauntlet" of screaming, angry workers and their families.

This violence served as the pretext for Frick to ask that the state militia be called in to protect the plant, which had already been fortified to such an extent that it was referred to by the workers as Fort Frick. With the arrival of the troops, Frick was able to import strikebreakers to run the plant, and although the lockout dragged on until November, it had been clear for some time before that the union was dead there. That most dramatic event during this period was when Alexander Berkman, an anarchist who sympathized with the strikers, burst into Frick's office and shot him. Although seriously wounded, the tough steel and coal man survived. Workers straggled back over several weeks to sign "iron clad" contracts which stipulated they were not members of a union. It was a stunning defeat for the Amalgamated and for organized unionism generally.

The public reaction to the events at Homestead was electrifying. Newspapers and magazines, both in the United States and abroad, gave extensive coverage to the incident. As a result, there were two congressional investigations, and much editorial invective. Public opinion was harsh with Frick, and even with Carnegie, but this tended to be overshadowed by condemnation of the treatment of the Pinkertons by howling mobs of strikers (the actions of women in this seemed to be of particular concern), and the shooting of Frick. Both incidents tended to discredit the aims of the workers and their union, perhaps leaving the impression that if the strikers had "behaved" they might have been "deserving" of victory.

The Homestead strike or lockout has had an almost totemic significance for American labour and industrial historians. Prior to that event, labour unions had a powerful presence in the nation's iron and steel industry, and by extension, were a factor to be reckoned with in the merging system of heavy industry in the United States. The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers had locals in virtually every other iron and steel plant in the country. On the eve of the strike it was called "the most powerful independent labor organization in the world" by the *Pittsburgh Post*. Its defeat in the Homestead strike signalled what historian David Brody has called the "non-union" period in the nation's steel trade, and in heavy industry generally. This situation was not substantially altered until the rise of the CIO during the 1930s.

Homestead was recognized as a labour disturbance of transcendent importance, and yet, over the years, relatively little of an academic nature was written about it. Just after the strike, there was a spate of articles and other treatments which were sharply critical of Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, and the heavy-handed management tactics used. The best, and most famous, of these treatments was by Arthur Burgoyne in 1893, but several other treatments also caught the public's eye.¹

¹ Arthur G. Burgoyne, *The Homestead Strike of 1892* (Pittsburgh 1979, reprint of 1893 edition). See also, Edward Bemis, "The Homestead Strike," *Journal of Political Economy*, 2 (June 1894), 369-96; G.T. Curtis, "The Homestead Strike: A Constitutional View," *North*

Virtually all of these accounts focused upon the most dramatic elements of the confrontation — the Pinkertons and their humiliating treatment by the strikers, the gun battles, the degree to which the union was totally defeated by the massed forces of management and the state, and, by extension, the utter hopelessness of unionism in turn-of-the-century industrial America. They were largely liberal, pro-worker, anti-Carnegie accounts, but did little to enhance the prestige of unionism at that time.

The next extensive treatment of the strike came in 1903, when James H. Bridge published his *Inside History of Carnegie Steel*.² Bridge devoted four chapters to the conflict, and two elements were significant in his treatment. The first was an attempt to rehabilitate Frick and to correspondingly lay more of the blame at the feet of Carnegie. Second, he gave a very useful background of labour/management relations in the industry, allowing the Homestead strike to be placed in a somewhat clearer context. Then, in 1910 came the famous Pittsburgh Survey. As a result of that monumental investigation, two important volumes were published which focused on Homestead. One was John Fitch's *The Steel Workers*, and the other was Margaret F. Byington's class *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town*.³

Fitch's book was a history of unionism in the steel trade, and featured an intensely focused look at the labour relations and the resultant Homestead strike. Its primary emphasis, though, was on the fate of the non-unionized steelworker by the early 20th century. Byington's book barely mentioned the strike, but gave a graphic view of the life of Homestead's steelworkers and their families during the non-union era, since her focus was primarily upon the family budget, rather than labour relations. These two books caused a great stir, but, ironically, was the last time the Homestead plant and town was the subject of rigorous examination for the next half century.

The revival of academic interest in the Homestead strike came in 1952, when Henry David provided an in-depth analysis of the incident.⁴ This was, by far, the

American Review, 155 (September 1892), 364-70; Hamlin Garland, "Homestead and Its Perilous Trades: Impressions of a Visit," *McClure's Magazine*, 3 (June 1894), 3-20; "L.W.," "Homestead as Seen by One of Its Workmen," *McClure's Magazine*, 3 (July 1894), 163-9; W.C. Oates, "The Homestead Strike: A Congressional View," *North American Review*, 155 (September 1892), 355-64; Terence V. Powderly, "The Homestead Strike: A Knight's of Labor View," *North American Review*, 155 (September 1892), 370-75; Myron R. Stowell, "Fort Frick," or the *Siege of Homestead* (Pittsburgh 1893); Carroll D. Wright, "The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steelworkers," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 7 (July 1893), 400-32.

²James Howard Bridge, *The Inside History of Carnegie Steel: A Romance of Millions* (Pittsburgh 1991, reprint of 1903 edition.)

³John A. Fitch, *The Steelworkers* (New York 1910); Margaret F. Byington, *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town* (Pittsburgh 1974, reprint of 1910 edition).

⁴Henry David, "Upheaval at Homestead," in *America in Crisis*, Daniel Aaron, ed., (Hamden, Connecticut 1971, reprint of 1952 edition), 132-70. It should be mentioned that David's

best of the various essays to deal with the strike. Unlike virtually all previous accounts, David made some attempt to go beyond a relatively few selected incidents to provide a fuller description of the happenings of these few days in July 1892. The next major analysis of the Homestead strike came in 1960, when David Brody published his magnificent *Steelworkers in America: The Non-Union Era*.⁵ Brody, somewhat like John Fitch before him, did not focus specifically on either Homestead or the strike, but did analyze its impact within the broader iron and steel industry. It was Brody, as much as anyone, who implanted the image in present day historians of the Homestead strike as a transforming event — one which initiated a new, non-unionized, era of labour relations in the industry. Historian Herbert Gutman later expanded upon that theme, saying: “The really critical year, I think, was 1892. If you locate events that tell us something about essential changes that shaped and reshaped the consciousness of working-class leaders and radicals, of trade unionists, on a time continuum, then 1892 was a big year.... In the late 1880s and early 1890s there was a growing awareness among workers that the state had become more and more inaccessible to them and especially to their political and economic needs and demands.”⁶

Just five years later Leon Wolff published what was by far the most detailed account of the Homestead incident.⁷ Although well written and dramatic, Wolff’s book was roundly condemned by many labour historians. The criticism has centered on at least two elements. As Herbert Gutman pointed out in a review, Wolff’s account was deficient in any kind of relevant context. Wolff attempted to place the conflict into the “times” of the Gilded Age, but largely misread what was going on. He viewed workers as totally helpless pawns in thrall to industrial capital and without the support of the public in an America completely imbued with an individualist, capitalist ethic. Wolff’s misreading came largely from the fact that he had not consulted the various labour publications available, nor had he looked at local Pittsburgh newspapers.⁸ Going a step further, sociologist Linda Schneider years later castigated Wolff and others who provided “popular histories” of the event: “There has been no scholarly work produced about Homestead which adequately unifies a narrative of events with discussion of the economic and

work was preceded in the mid-1940s by the largely unpublished work of J. Bernard Hogg, “The Homestead Strike of 1892,” PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1943, and “Public Reaction to Pinkertonism and the Labor Question,” *Pennsylvania History*, 11 (July 1944), 171-99.

⁵David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Non-union Era* (New York 1960).

⁶Mike Merrill, “Interview with Herbert Gutman,” in *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*. Edited by Ira Berlin (New York 1987), 329-56.

⁷Leon Wolff, *Lockout: The Story of the Homestead Strike of 1892 — A Study of Violence, Unionism, and the Carnegie Steel Empire* (New York 1965).

⁸Herbert Gutman, review of Wolff in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 90 (1966), 273-6.

ideological underpinnings of the strike. Instead several popular labor histories have regaled readers with the dramatic tale of the Homestead battle."⁹

It was clear to many by the end of the 1970s that the Homestead strike, long recognized as a seminal event in Labour history, was badly in need of reinvestigation and reinterpretation. As a result, beginning in the early 1980s a number of scholars have shown increased interest in the strike.¹⁰ Each of these contributions in important ways advanced our understanding of the union, the workers, the town, and the strike, but none of them provided an overall, integrated analysis called for by Linda Schneider. It is that daunting task Paul Krause sets for himself in the work under review here.

Krause's book is based upon his 1987 dissertation at Duke University.¹¹ The present effort, substantially revised, provides what is by far the most complete and comprehensive view we have of not only the Homestead strike itself, but also its relationship to worker's ideology and unionism in the steel industry. As such, it is profoundly important book. The work is divided into six parts. Part One, "The Battle for Homestead," gives a brief overview of the tragic events on July 1892, and their significance for the direction of American history and the fate of the labour movement. Part Two, "Captains of Steel, Captains of Culture," deals with the way in which wrought iron was produced, and how Bessemer steelmaking changed all of that.

The third part of the book, "Labor Reform in Pittsburgh, 1867-1881..." deals with important labour ideologies of the period, and the manner in which they were expressed in several important labour-management confrontations in the iron and steel industry — most notably the lockout of the iron puddlers in 1874-75 — which helped bring about the creation of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel

⁹Linda Schneider, "Citizen Strike: Worker's Ideology in the Homestead Strike of 1892," *Labor History*, 23 (1982), 47-66.

¹⁰Steven R. Cohen, "Steelworkers Rethink the Homestead Strike of 1892," *Pennsylvania History*, 48 (April 1981), 155-77; Paul Krause, "Labor Republicanism and 'Za Clebom': Anglo-American and Slavic Solidarity in Homestead," in *"Struggle a Hard Battle": Essays on Working-Class Immigrants*, edited by Dirk Hoerder (DeKalb, IL 1986), 143-69; Irwin Marcus, Jeanne Bullard, and Rob Moore, "Change and Continuity: Steel Workers in Homestead, Pennsylvania, 1880-1895," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 111 (January 1987), 62-75; Curtis Miner, *Homestead: The Story of a Steel Town* (Pittsburgh 1989); and Linda Schneider, "Citizen Striker." See also, William Serrin, *Homestead: The Glory and Tragedy of an American Steel Town* (New York 1992), which carries the Homestead story up to the present day, and Staughton Lynd, "The Genesis of the Idea of a Community Right to Industrial Property in Youngstown and Pittsburgh, 1977-1987," in *The Constitution and American Life*, edited by David Thelen (Ithaca NY 1988), 266-98, and "Resisting Plant Shutdowns," *Labor History*, 30 (1989), 294-300, which looks at the problem of steel mill closings generally, as does John P. Hoerr, *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry* (Pittsburgh 1988).

¹¹Paul Krause, "The Road to Homestead," PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 1987.

Workers, and brought the Knights of Labor into the area's iron and steel mills. Part Four, "Tried and Faithful: Homestead Defies the Assault," concentrates on the formation of the town and mill in Homestead, along with an analysis of the first strike at the Homestead Works in 1882. Part Five, "Labor in Greater Pittsburgh During the 1880s," examines a number of related issues — labour reform and selected reformers in Homestead and Pittsburgh, the rise of Andrew Carnegie, and the Homestead Lockout of 1889. Finally, in Part Six, Krause returns to the Homestead Strike of 1892, assessing it in greater detail as to its significance for the future of the town of Homestead and its workers, to the Amalgamated Association and the unionization of the steel industry, for concepts of property rights, democracy and republicanism in America, and assesses the role of some "forgotten participants" in the strike, East Europeans and women.

Besides the points mentioned above, the significance of Krause's book lies in a number of areas. He makes very clear the degree of sympathy for the strikers that existed among the townspeople of Homestead, and, for that matter, with many of the working class in Pittsburgh itself. This was a form of labour solidarity of fundamental importance, and was noted to a certain extent by Brody and others in the mill towns of the steel valleys. It is also something that has been developed by Gutman and others with respect to strike situations generally in the late 19th century.

In a similar manner, Krause develops clearly the extent to which class issues and class relations pervaded much of the political discussion of local politics in Homestead and Pittsburgh, and how this was also applied to the plant level, at least in Homestead. The split between workplace and home, which Ira Katznelson and others have developed as an explanation for "American exceptionalism" does not stand up in Krause's analysis.¹² By the same token, then, Krause views American socialism as a far more viable political ideology for 19th century Americans than has been the case with many commentators. The conservatism and accommodationism that came to characterize the American labour movement and working class was not, according to Krause, a result of ethnic or racial splits in the workforce, or of the acceptance of American values of individualism and mobility. It was quite literally the result of the power of the massed forces of capitalism — a power that was demonstrated all too forcefully in the Homestead strike and several other labour-management confrontations in the 1890s.

To that end, Krause also portrays clearly and graphically the political intrigue employed by Carnegie, Frick, William L. Magee, and others in acquiring their wealth, and in using the forces of the state to defeat workers' attempts to establish a "worker's republic" in Homestead and elsewhere. And Krause makes clear that this is what tipped the balance in the Homestead lockout of 1892. Workers there had defeated the earlier owners in 1882 and Carnegie in 1889, and were fully

¹²Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (New York 1981).

prepared to repeat their victory in 1892. Thus, the massing of townspeople to stop the landing of the Pinkertons who would have been used to protect the use of strikebreakers in the mill, the sealing off of the town by the town burgesses, nearly all of whom were workers and union members, the virtually complete control of the town by the Homestead Advisory Committee of the workers — all pointed to the substantial power of the workers, the union and the labour movement in Homestead. Only the extralegal activities of Carnegie and Frick, more particularly getting the governor to send in the militia on the pretext that the union leaders were committing treason to the state, was able to break the back of the strike and the union. The result was by no means a foregone conclusion.

Despite these fine and important elements in Krause's work, there are a number of other areas in which I have profound disagreement. Krause and I have looked at similar issues dealing with the American iron and steel industry, and the nature of its labour relations in the late 19th century, arriving at remarkably different conclusions. Although the evidence on either side is not sufficient to be conclusive, I feel it is necessary to briefly put forward my objections to Krause's analysis. In essence, Krause views labour relations in the iron and steel industry of the late 19th century as one characterized by intense hostility towards unions, and a nearly obsessive desire on the part of iron and steel mill owners to economize by driving unions out of the mills and reducing the wages of workers. This was tied to a similar desire by the millowners to recapture control of the shopfloor from the workers and their representatives. Krause's ideas on this score are fairly standard fare among labour historians, but they represent a serious misunderstanding of the nature of the industry during this time.

In my own recently published analysis, I have put forward the idea that labour relations in the wrought iron industry differed enormously from that in the Bessemer steel end of the trade, and that the introduction of the open hearth method, although altering these relations somewhat, did not work a profound transformation.¹³ Krause, along with virtually every other scholar, tends to conflate the iron and steel industry, assuming that by the 1890s steel was totally dominant in Pittsburgh and elsewhere. Further, he and others make the assumption that older iron makers, along with crucible steel producers and those who made structural shapes from open hearth steel, adopted the same "psychology" of steelmaking as the Bessemer producers.

Several facts are salient here. First of all, even by 1901, after the formation of US Steel, sixty percent of the iron and steel production was by independent mills (including Crucible Steel and Jones and Laughlin). Of these, only Jones and Laughlin produced Bessemer steel. The majority were involved in the production of open hearth steel, but there were eleven firms on the Pittsburgh scene which still produced nothing but puddled iron, along with a couple of others producing both

¹³ John N. Ingham, *Making Iron and Steel: Independent Mills in Pittsburgh, 1820-1920* (Columbus, OH 1991).

iron and steel. Although Krause and others pronounce puddled iron "dead" by the 1890s, this was not quite the case. Second, the vast majority of makers of open hearth steel were not caught up on the same technological imperative as Bessemer producers. Few of these open hearth producers moved to the stage of mass production, preferring to make specialty steels for niche markets. They therefore never had quite the same zeal for reducing costs and eliminating unions, although many certainly did when the Amalgamated was severely weakened after 1892.

What I found was that a relatively amicable system of labour relations existed in the broader iron and steel industry in Pittsburgh from the 1860s to the 1890s. Virtually all the wrought iron and crucible steel plants were unionized, and when open hearth operations were added to these plants, they were generally unionized also. Certainly mill owners would have preferred to have run their plants without union interference, but the great majority appeared to have accepted labour organizations as a normal part of doing business during these years. Krause continually presents these iron manufacturers as rabidly anti-union, and as being motivated by the ideas of Frederick Overman in a metallurgy text published in 1854.¹⁴ Overman urged iron manufacturers to develop mechanical techniques to eliminate puddlers, thereby gaining control of the production processes from their workers. Yet, Krause provides no clear evidence that Pittsburgh's ironmasters followed these dictums; it is simply asserted.

My research into iron mill operations indicate that there was certainly an interest in developing an alternative technique to the labour-intensive puddling process, but when one was finally developed in the 1930s, the puddlers were not fired; they were simply transferred to new duties at their old pay. All earlier attempts to replace puddlers simply failed. Similarly, Krause relies upon the *National Labor Tribune*, a labour newspaper, to provide him with insight into the mill owner's ideology. This is tantamount to trying to discern labour ideology by reading an iron manufacturer's journal. *Iron Age* was the bible of the iron trade in the late 19th century, and particularly during the years it was edited by Joseph Weeks did not advocate destruction of the union, but rather promoted the Amalgamated as a desirable alternative to wildcat strikes by unorganized workers. Finally, Krause often uses a quotation from an iron master taken in the heat of a strike, claiming that this represented the normal views of owners. Investigation of several strikes in the late 1870s and early 1880s, however, show a common pattern. Workers reused a management offer and either went on strike or were locked out. The mill owner then made provocative statements, often matched by similar statements from union leaders. Then, often within four or five days, the labour disturbance was amicably settled, usually on terms favorable to the workers, and all returned to normal.

¹⁴Frederick Overman, *A Treatise on Metallurgy, Comprising Mining and General and Particular Metallurgical Operations* (New York 1854).

Another similar controversy involved the traumatic "Railway Riots of 1877." Krause asserts that Pittsburgh's iron manufacturers, along with all other businessmen in Pittsburgh and elsewhere, viewed it as the beginning of a violent revolution that needed to be crushed. There is much evidence to the contrary. Benjamin F. Jones, head of American Iron Company, one of Pittsburgh's largest mills, was generally sympathetic to the workers in his diary notations, even when his own hands joined the strike. Similar even-handed attitudes were displayed by James Park, Jr., whom Krause portrays as almost pathologically anti-union.

I also have some trouble accepting the pervasiveness of the labour republicanism and socialism that Krause presents. According to his own analysis, this republicanism seemed to exist primarily on the rhetorical level. Whenever the leaders attempted to translate that into electoral politics, as with the Greenback Labor Party, the vast majority of workers continued to vote for the mainstream parties. Similarly, even the leaders, with the seemingly singular exception of John McLuckie, all appeared to forsake socialism and labour republicanism to pursue their own "main chance," their dream of riches in capitalist America. Even the vaunted amalgamation of skilled and unskilled workers, of "Slavic" and "American" workers, and, most critically, of black and white workers, was generally tenuous at best.

Finally, I must say the Krause's book is not an easy read. It is long, some 548 pages of text, notes, and index. Worse, the organization makes it seem terribly repetitive. The reader is continually reading virtually the same thing about individuals and events time and again throughout the book. For example, Krause introduces us to Margaret Finch, the fascinating owner of the Rolling Mill Tavern on page 17. There we are given several comments about her from the newspapers. Essentially the same material and quotations are repeated on page 36 and again on page 324. The reader continually experiences *déjà vu* while plodding through the chapters.

The same criticism cannot be levelled at *"The River Ran Red"*, a scintillating collection of documents and short academic treatments. Although David Demarest's collection of materials does not have the scholarly significance of Krause's book, it is bound to be far more popular with the general public, and will probably find its way onto more course readings lists. Organized in a generally chronological format, the book is full of fascinating contemporary appraisals of the great controversy. This is abetted by short scholarly treatments of steel and coke making and the Amalgamated, along with accounts of the industry after 1892. There are also a number of fascinating pictures and documents reproduced. Although not as sensitive to the important issues raised by Krause, it does provide a marvellous "feel" of the industry, the strike, and the attitudes of the time.

In reading through Demarest's collection, one particular selection caught my eye. On a fall day in 1893, *McClure's* magazine sent the esteemed writer, Hamlin Garland, to Homestead to survey the town and its workers in the aftermath of the strike. He was appalled. He reported that, all in all, the place seemed "as squalid

and unlovely as could be imagined." He went on to point out that "The streets of the town were horrible; the buildings were poor; the sidewalks were sunken and full of holes." Remarking on the smoke that "rolls sullenly in slow folds from the great chimneys of the iron-foundries, and settles down in black, slimy pools on the muddy streets," Garland concluded that Homestead resembled a cancer.

One hundred years later, the great Homestead mill lies shuttered; there is no smoke, no belching chimneys. The closing of the huge mills has brought obvious personal devastation to the homes and families of Homestead. Vast numbers are unemployed or underemployed, and the population of the town, which was as high as 20,000 in 1930, is only about 4,000 in 1992. Yet it surprisingly is not a cheerless or depressing place. The homes are almost uniformly well-cared for. Lawns are trimmed, flowers are planted, fences are maintained and the houses are painted and repaired. On the streets there seems still a sense of optimism and vigour. Although some stores have been boarded up, more are still doing a decent business, and one sees no street people or homeless lounging on the corners or sleeping in doorways. It is a town a people who have been dealt a seemingly mortal blow, but who nonetheless have the fortitude and strength to keep going.

In the end, Homestead reminds me of what happened when Wisconsin Steel on Chicago's South Side closed in 1983. The authors of a study of the mill's closure reported about the mills: "There is an air of utter desolation about the place; it is hard to remember the days when it was abuzz with activity, hard to imagine that it could come alive again. But just a block from the main gate, there's a corner where the mills meets South Deering. On the corner is a shack, and on top of the shack, a community group has erected a Christmas tree.... The tree simply sways limply in the crisp winter air, its tinsel clinging desperately to its branches. Beneath it, a worn sign proclaims Seasons Greetings. The truck drivers drive by with hardly a glance, but the display isn't really meant for them. It's message is not for those who are passing through, but for those who have remained."¹⁵

¹⁵David Bensman and Roberta Lynch, *Rusted Dreams: Hard Times in a Steel Community* (Berkeley 1987), 235.