

American Legal History – Russell

"THE REBELLION AT HOMESTEAD," Harper's Weekly (New York City, July 16, 1892), 674, 675.

Society and civilization are at bay in an important town of Pennsylvania, and no one can foresee how far the future of the commonwealth will be determined by the success of its government in meeting this crisis. An armed mob has overthrown the rule of law, usurped the possession and control of property, superseded the guardians of the peace, and proclaimed its own will as supreme. It has forbidden the owners of land to occupy it, and their working-men to enter on it and work for wages on pain of death. It has defied the county and the State, and when men employed by the owners of the buildings now held by trespassers have approached them for the purpose of entering, the mob has shot down some, forced the surrender of the rest under pledge of safe conduct, and then stabbed, stoned, blinded, cudgelled, and in various ways maimed its unarmed and unresisting captive with a brutality rarely heard of in our times. Yet the only offense charged against these victims of the mob was that they were supposed to come in order to protect honest working-men in earning their wages.

To this state of lawlessness and sovereignty of an armed rebellion it appears that the government of the county and that of the State acquiesced for eight days with scarcely more than a mild protest. At last, on Sunday, the sheriff declared his helplessness, and the Governor called for the militia to preserve order. It will appear hereafter, when passion has cooled and all the facts are known, how far this delay has been unavoidable; but its present effect is most unfortunate. The whole nation knew a week ago that a strong mob had been organized and armed, by determined leaders, for the purpose of interfering with property rights, and hindering the peaceful employment of labor; and had threatened death to any man who should assert the rights they wished to destroy. In any other civilized land these acts constitute treason as well as rebellion, and are the highest crimes known to the law. Their criminality is none the less that they are aimed at the sovereignty of the republic and not of a king. Doubtless Pennsylvania had the moral and physical force within reach to restore order and reinstate law. It is probable that a simple declaration of a

purpose to exert this force would have sufficed. But it was not made, and the slaughter and cruelty of last Wednesday were the natural result.

The only aspect of the entire situation which demands attention now is that law is overthrown, and a mob is in control. In any civilized land this fact constitutes a supreme emergency, and the existence of society must be held as at stake until the mob is crushed. It is a disgrace to the nation that the public discussion of the affair by the press and by legislators has complicated and obscured the real question at issue. The spirit of the demagogue, who is afraid lest voters or readers be made foes if he dare call murder and robbery by their right names, has been too manifest. The journal or the public man that approves the lawless mob of Homestead or its leaders insults the working-men of the nation by assuming that they are at heart robbers and murderers too. No sympathy can be too deep for laborers and their families who are called to face the loss of livelihood, nor for misguided men who, in the sincere belief that they are asserting their own rights, destroy themselves in attacks on the rights of others. But personal sympathy with individuals must not affect our judgment upon a crisis in which civil government and the order of society are at stake.

We give no credence to the rumor circulated on Monday by many journals that the Governor of Pennsylvania, while calling out the troops to re-establish the dethroned and trampled laws, was in communication with the chief conspirators who have instigated the riot. This is impossible. To advise with them as to the conduct of their campaign against the law would be to abdicate his office. Governor Pattison may lack the force to be equal to a great emergency, but he has not hitherto shown himself a demagogue or a coward.

THE HOMESTEAD RIOTS p. 678

One of the most serious and disastrous riots that has ever occurred in America happened on the 6th of July at Homestead, Pennsylvania, where are located the mills of the Carnegie Steel and Iron Company, of which Mr. Andrew Carnegie is the chief owner. This company, through its president, Henry C. Frick, arranged a scale of wages some time ago, and announced that the workmen of the company must agree to this scale by the 24th of June. It was decided by the workmen that the scale, which was a serious reduction of rates, was unfair, and they refused to accede to it. In this determination they

were backed up by the powerful labor organization, the Amalgamated Society of Steel and Iron Workers. Anticipating this refusal on the part of the workmen, Mr. Frick and his associates caused the works at Homestead to be enclosed by a high fence, on the top of which were placed several lines of barbed wire, and these lines were connected with the electric-light plant, so that a high current of electricity could be passed through them. Search-lights were also put in position at various places in the works, so that even in the dark the approach of any body of men could be noted. These preparations for defense greatly angered the workmen, who had been shut out of the mills after declining to accept the reduction of wages.

The workmen announced that not only would they not themselves work at the proposed wages, but that they would prevent, by force if necessary, any other men from taking the places they had left vacant. Homestead is a few miles from Pittsburg, on the Monongahela River, and all the men who live there are employed in the Carnegie mills. The feeling, therefore, in regard to this labor question was universal. If the mill managers should succeed in employing other hands than those that refused to work under the new conditions, the population of Homestead would be entirely changed, for those now living there would be obliged to move away. The situation in this regard was somewhat different from that in an ordinary labor trouble, and the feeling was much more intense.

A collision between the working-men who refused to work and any that the mill managers might employ from elsewhere seemed to the people in Pittsburg a foregone conclusion. Since the expiration of the time set by Mr. Frick when the men employed in the mills must sign an agreement to the changed scale, he has persistently refused to discuss the subject farther with the representatives of his former employees or with officers of the Amalgamated Society. Mr. Frick's refusal to discuss the matter at length angered the people of Homestead to such a degree that the whole population became a mob.

On Tuesday, July 5th, the sheriff of Allegheny County went to Homestead and ordered the mob to disperse. He was assured by the leaders of the mob that he had better return to Pittsburg and attend to less serious business. After attaching to the gate of the mill property a proclamation to the people to disperse and maintain order, the sheriff went back to Pittsburg and swore into service a number of special deputies. These he sent to Homestead. Upon their

arrival they were met by the mob, and told that if they remained, they would do so at serious peril. The deputies of the sheriff also returned to Pittsburg.

Meantime, Pinkerton's Detective Agency, of Chicago, had employed several hundred men to act as watchmen of the mill. These men, engaged in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, were taken quietly to Pittsburg, and not informed of the exact nature of the work expected of them or of the location of the property they were to watch. Having arrived in Pittsburg, these men were taken to boats that had been prepared for them. There were some two hundred and seventy of them.

As soon as they had embarked, the boats were towed away towards Homestead. This was Tuesday night. The people in Homestead had heard of the embarkation of men on boats for that place, and notwithstanding the secrecy of the movement under the direction of the Pinkertons, the men leading the mob knew when the boats might be expected. Every one in Homestead was aroused in the night, and long before daylight there was an armed mob of some five thousand men awaiting the boats' arrival. It was not known in Homestead that these men were merely watchmen, but it was generally believed that they were a contingent of mill-hands who were brought to operate the works. But this misapprehension was of no consequence, as a "Pinkerton," as these men are called, is as unpopular among laboring-men of the various organizations as a "scab."

The Homestead men had adopted a system of signals and had scouts stationed in every direction, so that the approach of a vessel, a train, or body of men could be told of there long before its arrival. They also had a little steamboat, the *Edna*, for use in scouting the river. At four o'clock Wednesday morning three horsemen galloped into Homestead, and immediately there was a cry heard throughout the town: "To the river! to the river! The Pinkertons are coming!"

The *Edna* also blew her whistle, signalling a confirmation of the news the horsemen had brought. Now there was a frenzy of excitement in the town, and the men, armed with pistols, muskets, rifles, shot-guns, and clubs, hurried to the river-front. There they saw the *Edna* approaching, followed by a steamer with two low-lying barges in tow. These were the vessels upon which the watchmen had embarked. The crowd, as soon as the vessels were perceived, rushed for the mill landing, which was within the enclosure before alluded to. The fence was torn down, and there was a race between the steamer and the

mob as to which should first reach the landing. The mob won this race by nearly a hundred yards, and before the barges were near the landing the river-bank was lined with armed and hostile men.

There was a brief parley between the men on the boats and the workmen on the river-bank. While this was in progress some one from the boat fired a Winchester rifle, and then a serious battle begun. The concealed arms of the Homestead people were now exposed, and the firing was spirited on both sides. The boats moved off and attempted to effect a landing at another place, but here again they were frustrated. At the first fire several men in the mob fell, killed and wounded, and there were casualties also on the boats, the leader of the Pinkerton watchmen being the first to be struck. The mob took out a hand-engine, and attaching it to an oil-tank, pumped oil into the river, and tried to set this afire. The oil was lubricating, not illumination oil, however, and the fire would not kindle. Had this effort succeeded, the two hundred and seventy Pinkerton men would probably have been roasted to death.

There was now a lull in the battle, and the men on the shore held a meeting. O'Donnell, one of the leaders, counselled moderation, and insisted that nothing could be gained by further bloodshed. The pilot of the steamer had been driven by the firing from his post, and so the barges could not be taken away. The crowd decided to hold the boats until the arrival of the sheriff, and then have the Pinkerton men arrested on the charge of murder. While the crowd of mill-hands were still discussing the situation, a white handkerchief was waved from one of the boats. This was a signal of surrender. The Pinkerton men stipulated for conditions, and asked assurances as to their safety in case they gave themselves up. These assurances were given by the leaders, and the boats were brought to the landing.

Then the Pinkerton men disembarked, and were placed under guard, and moved toward the jail. The leaders were in earnest in their promise to protect their prisoners, but they were powerless to do so. The progress toward the jail was like running the gauntlet. Men, boys, and women broke through the guards, and stabbed and clubbed the disarmed prisoners. Stones were thrown at them as they staggered hurriedly along. It was cruel and cowardly business this, and scarcely a single man of all those who surrendered escaped unhurt.

The jail was too small to hold the prisoners, and a neighboring hall was used both as prison and hospital. Later the sheriff took possession of the prisoners,

and had them conveyed to Pittsburg. The mob was left in charge of the works. During the day the sheriff telegraphed to the Governor of Pennsylvania, saying that he had not the power to maintain the peace, and asking for military assistance. The Governor replied that he would not call out the militia until all the resources of the local civil authorities had been exhausted. The sheriff called upon all good citizens to help him suppress the disorder, but not more than sixty men responded to the call.

It is not known certainly, when this paper goes to press, what the casualties amount to. But there were six working-men killed and seventeen wounded. Of the Pinkerton men two were killed and more than two hundred wounded. Mr. Frick, in behalf of the Carnegie Company, says that the company is taking no hand in the matter, but will hold the county responsible for any damage to property. The men employed by the Pinkerton agency were employed, however, for the Carnegie Company. Mr. Andrew Carnegie is in Europe, and was at Braemar, in Scotland, the day the fight occurred. He was said to be very much excited and distressed. The riot has been mentioned both in the United States Senate and House of Representatives. In the latter body a resolution was offered instructing a committee to investigate and report the cause of the trouble.

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