
Homestead and Treason

by Eugene V. Debs

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October 1, 1892, the news was wired over the country that a number of the members of the Advisory Committee of the Homestead strikers had been arrested for treason against the great state of Pennsylvania. Those arrested, says the dispatch, were Chairman Thomas J. Crawford, William Bair, George Royland, John Direken, and T.W. Brown. "The informations," says the dispatch, "were made by County Detective Belzhoover before Chief Justice [Edward H.] Paxon, of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania." The petition "charges Hugh O'Donnell, Thomas J. Crawford, John McLuckie, and thirty others, all members of the strikers' advisory committee, with treason. It states that the defendants, who are inhabitants and residents of the commonwealth of Pennsylvania, did ordain, prepare, and levy war against the commonwealth of Pennsylvania to the end that the constitution, laws, and authority were defied, resisted, and subverted; and that the said defendants on July 1 [1892], with hundreds of others, armed and arrayed in warlike manner — that is to say with guns, revolvers, cannons, swords, knives, and clubs — did unlawfully, maliciously, and traitorously assemble in the borough of Homestead and hen and there, with force and arms, did falsely and traitorously and in hostile and warlike manner array themselves in insurrection and rebellion against the commonwealth of Pennsylvania, contraries to the duties of allegiance and fidelity of the said defendants."

The foregoing is an unexpected and a novel proceeding — and it will be well if the workmen of the United States give it as clergymen would say, "prayerful attention." Carnegie, Frick & Co. have their backs up and their blood is hot. They have sought by every method at their command to get back into their mills the locked out workmen of Homestead. They have failed. In their place is a number of unskilled, conscienceless scabs, vagabond creatures, and the mills have made a show of work, but it is understood they are

making no money, the business is going to the everlasting bow wows, and hence, the anger of the millionaire proprietors, and hence also, the trumped up charge of treason.

It is well, under the circumstances, to understand, as fully as necessary, what the crime of treason consists. The highest authority upon the subject, so far as the United States is concerned, is its constitution. The language of the constitution is as follows:

“Treason against the United States shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort.”

We do not know what language is used in the constitution of Pennsylvania to define treason against that state, but presume, as in the constitutions of other states, the language is similar to that used in the constitution of the United States, that is, “levying war against the state, or adhering to its enemies.”

The reader will not fail to observe that the charge of treason as made against the Homestead strikers is simply that of “assault and battery with intent to kill,” and the question arises, who did the Homestead strikers assault, with “swords, guns, knives, and clubs?” The state of Pennsylvania? Not at all; only a gang of hired mercenary thugs, armed to the teeth for the purpose of committing murder, and instructed to commit murder by the Carnegie concern — hence, if anyone committed treason it was Frick and his pals — and not the strikers, who defended their homes against an invading band of cut-throats.

However, this phase of the affair does not particularly concern us at this writing; on the contrary, our purpose is to point out the desperate methods organized capital has adopted to intimidate and crush workingmen and compel them to submit to the “plan of degradation” now clearly defied by millionaire employers. Again, referring to the constitution of the United States, we have the following:

“A well organized militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.”¹

Hence, it will be observed, that the Homestead strikers had a constitutional right to have swords, guns, knives, clubs, and revolvers, and they had a constitutional right to use them to beat down the murderous gang of Pinkertons who invaded their homes for the purpose of killing them and who did kill them.

¹ Second Amendment to the United States Constitution.

It will be noticed that Carnegie & Co. have on their side the Supreme Judge of Pennsylvania — that is to say, that high official, so far as is known at this writing, favors the Frick theory of treason, and it is therefore not surprising that the Homestead strikers, say 5,000 workmen, who defended their homes against an invading gang of thugs, are somewhat depressed. In tis connection, the dispatch says:

The borough is yet quivering from the shock of last night's bombshell. Business is practically suspended and anxious groups stand at every corner discussing this latest coup. "What does it mean?" That is the query on every tongue. The thought of the states of Pennsylvania interfering in the struggle is frightening to the sturdy workers. They would accept with derision riot, murder, or conspiracy suits brought by the Carnegie Steel Company, but to be arrested by the state, and on a charge of treason — that is different; it is unknown danger and therefore ominous. What the result will be no one here attempts to predict but what the effect is is visible on every face — desperation. Men Soberly propose to their fellows that they secure a band and flags, and marching to Pittsburgh, apply en masse for admission to jail, to save further uneasiness and to end at once all suspense. Incident with this fear in the minds of the Homesteaders, is another passion which may yet dominate: it is anger.

The question here arises, if the Homestead strikers are becoming "desperate" and "angry," what will be the condition of millions of workingmen throughout the United States as they contemplate the spectacle of their fellow toilers persecuted, throttled, manacled, imprisoned, and degraded because they dared to resist a horde of armed mercenaries, hired and equipped to murder them? Are all workingmen to become desperate and angry and continue in this frame of mind and peacefully continue to carry forward the industries of the country while listening to the clank of the iron shackles of their fellow toilers as in felon's stripes they march to and from their tasks behind prison bars? Is it not possible that Carnegie, *et al*, are carrying their devilish methods of intimidation too far for a peaceful solution of the labor problem?

This latest movement by the infamous Frick, if workingmen can be aroused, means trouble. They behold capital, scabs, the military, and the courts in alliance to subject them to conditions which arouse desperation and anger, and things which provoke trouble are beginning to move at a rapid pace.

The Homestead strikers need money to feed and clothe them during the inclement season. Let the flow of money be quick, full, and continuous. The Homestead strikers need cash to enable them to employ the most eminent legal ability on the continent to defend them against the charge of *treason*. Who, of the millions of workingmen of America, will decline to contribute their mite? Money talks. If it is supplied as the workingmen of America can supply it the trial of the Homestead workingmen on the charge of treason may be made the most notable event for labor that has occurred since skill and muscle built the seven or the seven hundred wonders of the world. If there is a Demosthenes, a Cicero, a Burke, or a Webster living let his talents be secured, let his voice be heard in the trial of the Homestead workingmen on the charge of treason.

The nations are coming to America to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America. Is the spectacle in reservation for them of seeing Carnegie and Frick driving their workingmen to dungeons? It looks that way. Organized capital is now stabbing organized labor. In certain localities men may contemplate results, and if resistance to wrong is to be adjudged treason by the courts the army will do whatever remains to be done to accomplish the purpose of organized capital.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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