Background and Events Leading to the Riots

During the middle of December, 1849, Pittsburgh iron workers were informed by their employers that a forced 25 per cent reduction in wages would become effective the first of the year. Those living in company-owned houses had a choice of either accepting the reduction or leaving with their families. As a result, a day or so later the mill of Lorenz, Sterling and Company was forced to close for lack of workers who refused to work for reduced wages. Thus were drawn the lines of battle in a dispute between capital and labor that would last nearly four months and involve a riot and court trial before it was ended. In retrospect it was to be considered the first great labor demonstration in the history of the iron industry.

The mill owners' insistence on a 25 per cent reduction in wages stemmed from an economically depressed condition in the iron industry and the conviction of the owners that they could no longer pay existing wages and stay in business. As early as 1848 the Gazette was concerned by the fact that nearly half the mills in Pittsburgh were idle. This inactivity was the result of the Tariff of 1846 which had greatly reduced the protection of the American iron industry afforded them by the Tariff of 1842. The Gazette went on to say that “Now

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1 The Daily Morning Post (Pittsburgh), December 19, 1849, 2. Hereafter cited as Post.
2 Ibid., December 20, 1849, 2.
our old and powerful rivals [Great Britain] are in the field, and instead of a tariff of 79% to 100% find a 30% rate only to oppose them. The consequence is that our mills are partly idle — nor can they be kept in operation at a profit that will repay their owners.”

The Post took an entirely different view of the situation and threatened to publish figures and statistics to prove that the mill owners were making enormous profits under the Tariff of 1846, which, however, it never did. Instead of the mills being idle the Post declared that “We hear iron manufacturers say they can hardly meet the demand.”

But the Gazette still continued to emphasize the point that the Pittsburgh mills were not flourishing under the Tariff of 1846. Previously they could not fill their orders for lack of iron. Now there was a lack of orders. The Gazette would leave it to the public to decide when the mills seemed most flourishing — “When waiting orders or when orders were waiting to be filled.”

Again in an editorial the Gazette lamented the adverse effects of the Tariff of 1846 on the iron industry. It stated that an English workman here one year claimed he was paid twice as much as in England. With the difference in wages it was impossible, according to the Gazette, to compete with English mills under the present tariff provisions.

From the following figures, taken from the Gazette, it can readily be seen in comparing the Tariffs of 1842 and 1846 that the rates on some items were reduced by as much as 79 per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRODUCT</th>
<th>TARIFF 1842</th>
<th>TARIFF 1846</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheet iron</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoop iron</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pig iron</td>
<td>109%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar-rolled iron</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar-hammered iron</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
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From November 21 to 23, 1849, iron masters from various parts of the United States met together at Pittsburgh for the National Iron Masters' Convention. They sought ways of removing the burden of the Tariff of 1846 and bettering the general economic conditions of the

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4 The Pittsburgh Daily Gazette, April 1, 1848, 2. Hereafter cited as Gazette.
5 Post, April 7, 1848, 2.
6 Gazette, April 8, 1848, 2.
7 Ibid., October 30, 1848, 2.
8 Ibid., March 28, 1848, 2.
iron industry. The Gazette gave extensive space in reporting each day's sessions, summarizing all of the main points in important speeches. The convention, before it adjourned, passed a number of resolutions condemning the Tariff of 1846, and urged its modification by the next Congress. A number of permanent committees were established to see that these resolutions were carried out. Surprisingly, a resolution was passed in favor of discouraging the introduction of foreign labor.

Coupled with the low tariff on iron there was a marked decline in the demand for railroad iron in England at this time. As a result American markets were flooded with railroad iron from English iron manufacturers. An example of this flooding can be found in a news item appearing in the Pittsburgh Daily Commercial Journal stating that the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad had purchased 23,000 tons of British railroad iron for $10 a ton cheaper than the American product. The years 1848 to 1851 were hard years for the iron industry with low tariffs, overproduction in England and the higher wages of American workmen.

However, workmen were determined to resist any efforts by the owners to reduce their wages. In a letter published by the Post, a workman was reported to have said he refused to work because the owners had asked him to leave his home — owned by the company — or accept a reduction in wages. Other workmen stated that when they went for their pay, they were told there was no money. If they accepted the reduction there would be money available.

The Post reported that approximately 200 puddlers and boilers, as the workmen were called, met in a mass meeting on December 22, 1849, at Duffy's, a local hall. They passed resolutions indicating their determination "to resist all encroachments upon their rights in the shape of reducing wages." The workmen met again on the following

9 Ibid., November 22, 1849, 2, and November 23, 1849, 2. Also found in Iron Manufacturers' Convention, Proceedings of Iron Convention (Pittsburgh, 1849), 12-14.
13 Post, December 21, 1849, 2.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., December 24, 1849, 2.
Monday, December 24, and approved further resolutions. After much deliberation they felt it was unfair and unnecessary, on the part of some of the mill owners, to attempt to reduce their wages. They further resolved that “We, as workmen, are determined to work for no reduction in wages.” 16 The puddlers and boilers met next on January 5, at Duffy’s, and confirmed the conditions under which they would return to work. They would not work for any price under the present rate of $6 boiling per ton and $4 puddling per ton. 17

Apparently not all the workers chose to quit immediately, for the Post disclosed the fact that a William Girty was accidentally dragged into the machinery at the Graff, Lindsay and Company ironworks and was severely injured. 18

It might also be noted here that Joseph Barker, the street preacher and demagogue, who was later to play an important part in the riots and trial, was elected Mayor of Pittsburgh on January 8, while confined in the county jail. 19

The Post on January 14 formally endorsed the workmen for the first time in an editorial urging them to desist from returning to work until their demands were met. The editorial went on to comment that from ten to twelve establishments had been closed until Congress granted them more “protection.” 20 According to Fahnestock’s Directory for 1850 there were thirteen rolling mills in Pittsburgh, 21 making it apparent that at least one mill was still operating under the old wage scale. In the same editorial the Post estimated that from 1,200 to 1,500 men were presently idled. 22

The strikers ran an advertisement in the Post on January 14, notifying other workmen of their position:

NOTICE TO PUDDLERS AND BOILERS

The Puddlers and Boilers throughout the United States are hereby notified that their fellow craftsmen of Pittsburgh and vicinity are at strike against a reduction of wages, which the employers wish to bring about. We have understood that the employers have sent abroad for hands to work at reduced wages. There are plenty of hands now in this city, and it is believed, under the circumstances, that no honorable Puddler and Boiler will come here to undermine their brethren now out of employ. 23

16 Ibid., December 27, 1849, 2.
17 Ibid., January 7, 1850, 2.
18 Ibid., January 4, 1850, 2.
19 Ibid., January 9, 1850, 2.
20 Ibid., January 14, 1850, 2.
22 Post, January 14, 1850, 2.
23 Ibid.
The workmen also ordered this advertisement to be published twice in the Philadelphia Pennsylvanian and the New York Herald. This is the first indication that the owners were not going to negotiate but were going to find workmen from eastern cities to operate their mills. At this point the strike was a little over two weeks old.

The next day the Post wrote a glowing editorial concerning the successful results of an iron workers association in Cincinnati which had formed its own company, thus combining the function of capital and labor. Until this editorial there had been no public mention of such an association of iron workers in the Pittsburgh area. William Matthews, a popular leader of the strikers, also mentioned this association and urged the workers to adopt it at their meeting held on January 14 as reported by the Post. This was an idea that was to gather the support of almost all the Pittsburgh papers, even those who were opposed to the workmen's striking.

In the same meeting, previously mentioned, one worker suggested the strikers show unity and determination in the form of a public procession. His motion was almost unanimously defeated. This is interesting in light of the subsequent action of the workers in appearing in not one but three public processions.

On January 16, after nearly three weeks of silence, two other Pittsburgh newspapers made mention of the strike for the first time. In an editorial, the Gazette stated the fact that a strike did exist in the city among the puddlers and boilers and that the proprietors of the mills wanted to reduce the wages of the workmen. They gave as a reason for the reduction the low price of iron and the fact that the mill owners could not afford the present wages. The Dispatch mentioned the strikers meeting at Duffy's on January 14 and admitted that they had copied their report from an article in the Post. However, the Dispatch was quite surprised to learn that the workmen, themselves, made all the speeches and showed clearly that they had the talent and information necessary to handle the situation.

The next day the Dispatch, in an editorial, came out in support of associations in the iron mills and alluded to the successful operation of the association in Cincinnati. On the same day the Gazette voiced

24 Ibid., January 15, 1850, 2.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Gazette, January 16, 1850, 2.
29 Ibid., January 17, 1850, 2.
its support of the workers in their efforts to form associations. If this could be accomplished a reversal of roles from iron worker to capitalist would end all strikes. On January 18, the Post commented on the fact that although the Pittsburgh papers differed in their support of the strikers, almost all of them favored the idea of association. The Dispatch, however, pointed out that one danger in forming associations was that the failure of one might retard the further growth of similar institutions. Therefore those who were engaged in this enterprise were cautioned to be careful. This could well explain the general support of the idea of associations by papers not otherwise supporting the strikers.

On January 18, the Journal made its first comment on the strike with an editorial clarifying the mill owners' position in reducing wages. It went on to say that while the Tariff of 1842 was still in operation and affording adequate protection, the mill owners granted the employees a 20 per cent increase in wages to the present rate of $6 per ton boiling and $4 per ton puddling. At that time the iron industry was enjoying a level of prosperity. After the passage of the lower Tariff of 1846 the owners found themselves unable to pay the advanced rate but continued to do so until the end of 1849. They then proposed a reduction of 25 per cent which would make the rates $4.50 per ton boiling and $3 per ton puddling.

On the same day, in a brief news item, the Chronicle made brief mention of the fact that the puddlers and boilers in the Pittsburgh vicinity were on strike against an attempted reduction in wages. This was to be the only comment, on the strike, issued by the Chronicle until February 12, 1850.

Meanwhile, the strikers were meeting almost daily and their determination to resist the owners' demands was stiffening. They met on January 19 and for the first time expressed their determination to start their own mill. In an editorial the Post declared that the workers resolved to stand firm and that the mill owners were mistaken if they thought workers from eastern cities would come here for reduced wages. Again the Post stated that the puddlers and boilers' meeting

30 Gazette, January 17, 1850, 2.
31 Post, January 18, 1850, 2.
32 Dispatch, January 18, 1850, 2.
33 Journal, January 18, 1850, 2.
34 Morning Chronicle (Pittsburgh), January 18, 1850, 2. Hereafter cited as Chronicle.
35 Post, January 21, 1850, 2.
36 Ibid., January 19, 1850, 2.
on January 21 was characterized by harmony and resolution.\textsuperscript{37} The \textit{Post} also reported that on January 28 the strikers sent three committees to Cincinnati and Wellsville, Ohio, and to Mercer, Pennsylvania, to inquire about offers from these towns to form associations.\textsuperscript{38}

A sympathy meeting for the Pittsburgh strikers was held on January 19 in Wheeling, West Virginia, and was addressed by William Matthews, of Pittsburgh. After the meeting the Wheeling iron workers, who were not striking, decided to give financial aid to the strikers.\textsuperscript{39} It was later reported in the \textit{Chronicle} that a sum of $100 had been received.\textsuperscript{40} Collection committees were also successful in Sharpsburg — $23, and Pittsburgh — $200.\textsuperscript{41} Later they even received support from New Castle — $143,\textsuperscript{42} and $350 from Portsmouth, Ohio.\textsuperscript{43} Again the strikers received $400 from Portsmouth and Zanesville, Ohio, for their cause.\textsuperscript{44} Perhaps the most interesting scheme for raising money to help the strikers and their families appeared in the \textit{Post} as copied from the \textit{Cincinnati Nonpareil}. A huge cake was to be raffled at a dollar per chance with the proceeds being sent to Pittsburgh.\textsuperscript{45}

The iron workers were also busy raising money for other purposes. A committee of strikers was appointed to investigate the idea of association. In its report it recommended association as the only way of gaining any recognition and permanent advantage.\textsuperscript{46} This report was favorably received by the workers and there commenced a vigorous drive to subscribe money to purchase stock in several ventures proposed to the strikers. On February 12, the \textit{Chronicle} reported $20,300 raised for a mill in Cincinnati and about $8,000 subscribed for a mill in Sharon, Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{47} By February 16 the sum for the Stephens Mill in Cincinnati had risen to $33,000.\textsuperscript{48} This appears to be a very high figure to be raised by workmen alone, but it was supported by accounts of similar amounts in both the \textit{Post} and the \textit{Gazette}. It must not be assumed, however, that this represented cash

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid.}, January 22, 1850, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid.}, February 4, 1850, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{39} \textit{Dispatch}, January 25, 1850, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{40} \textit{Chronicle}, February 12, 1850, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{41} \textit{Post}, February 12, 1850, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}, March 1, 1850, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{43} \textit{Gazette}, March 12, 1850, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{44} \textit{Post}, March 20, 1850, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}, March 20, 1850, 2, as copied from the \textit{Cincinnati Nonpareil}.
\item \textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}, February 5, 1850, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{47} \textit{Chronicle}, February 12, 1850, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid.}, February 16, 1850, 2.
\end{itemize}
sums raised by the striking iron workers among themselves. The subscripted sums quoted most likely represented cash amounts and pledges of cash from the iron workers plus similar amounts from interested parties in these two towns. William Matthews and twenty other men left for Cincinnati on February 19 to begin negotiations with representatives of that city.49 A similar group travelled to Sharon a few weeks later to accomplish the same task.50

The Gazette, which had been opposed to the strikers from the outset, continued to laud the idea of association in its editorials. On February 14, it pointed out that in an association any laborer who could purchase a share of stock would thus obtain a share of the business in which he worked and therefore receive a portion of the profits. It was hoped that the interests of capital and labor would become so interwoven that scarcely any difficulty would arise between them.51 What the Gazette didn’t say was that perhaps the formation of associations in other cities would rid Pittsburgh of some of the more active and troublesome strikers.

Meanwhile the owners had not been idle. The Post reported on January 22 that a group of Pittsburgh employers had gone east, mainly to Philadelphia, to recruit new workers to run their mills.52 This group was led by a Mr. Lindsay of the firm of Graff, Lindsay and Company. It is interesting to note that in the riots that were to follow later, Mr. Lindsay’s firm was the first one attacked.

This group met with some success since at that time there was a good deal of unemployment in Philadelphia and the workmen were being paid only $3.50 for the work proposed by the owners from Pittsburgh.53 The owners were ready to offer the eastern workers $4.50 per ton — boiling, which was the rate rejected by the Pittsburgh iron workers — a 25 per cent reduction of the previous rate. With this offer, nineteen puddlers arrived on February 9,54 and thirty more on February 15.55 Many were to come but their arrivals ceased to be newsworthy and were not closely noted in the papers.

Once in Pittsburgh, however, many of the eastern workers were reluctant to begin work in the mills and began attending strike meet-

49 Post, February 19, 1850, 2.
50 Ibid., March 7, 1850, 2.
51 Gazette, February 14, 1850, 2.
52 Post, January 22, 1850, 2.
53 Ibid., February 13, 1850, 2.
54 Ibid., February 11, 1850, 2.
55 Chronicle, February 16, 1850, 2.
ings of the puddlers and boilers.\textsuperscript{56} When called upon to speak at these meetings they explained that they had come here because of a promise for higher wages and had no desire to undermine the position of the local mill workers.\textsuperscript{57} They also claimed that the Pittsburgh mill owners had deceived them in their presentation of the situation in Pittsburgh. They were told they had been brought here because the owners wanted American puddlers, not English and Welsh.\textsuperscript{58} The Post wrote in an editorial on February 25, that the owners were claiming in their dispatches to the east that Welshmen and Englishmen here were refusing to work and thereby denying American men the right to work.\textsuperscript{59} There may have been some recent immigrants among the striking mill workers but this was not the real issue in dispute. The owners conveniently used this to cloud the wage issue and gain support for themselves by appealing to nativism.

At a meeting of the strikers on February 4, it was reported that the owners, recruiting workers in Baltimore, claimed a scarcity of workers here.\textsuperscript{60} One puddler said that the only scarcity was for workmen who would accept the reduced wages.

Many eastern workers, after arriving in Pittsburgh, decided to return home as stated by the Chronicle, “They were escorted by a delegation of puddlers and boilers of this city.”\textsuperscript{61} Just how the local strikers treated the newly arrived workmen was the subject of some debate in the local newspapers. In reporting the return home of a number of eastern workers the Dispatch asked for confirmation of this rumor.\textsuperscript{62} The next day the Dispatch claimed to have learned the truth — that Pittsburgh workmen had shown utmost hospitality toward the easterners and no threats had been made.\textsuperscript{63} Probably closer to the truth was a comment in the Post, which had enthusiastically supported the strikers to this point, that the new men returned home because of the hostility shown by the old workmen.\textsuperscript{64} Toward the end of February, the Journal claimed that no avenue of access to the city was left without its committee of strikers. Threats of such a nature were made as to send three-fourths of the men home.\textsuperscript{65} Never-

\textsuperscript{56} Post, February 12, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., February 12, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., February 25, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., February 5, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{61} Chronicle, February 12, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{62} Dispatch, February 13, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., February 14, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{64} Post, February 13, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{65} Journal, February 26, 1850, 1.
theless, enough eastern men remained here to enable three firms: Graff, Lindsay and Company; Bailey, Brown and Company; and the Shoenbergers to start reduced operations on February 18.66

The conservative press tried to prove that the iron workers were making good wages — at least $1,000 per year — but the Post said it was more in the area of $500. A letter from a workman, published by the Post, explained that it took eleven hours to make a ton of wrought iron for which he received $6. Out of the $6 he had to pay his helpers. If something went wrong with the process, he was still obligated to pay them.67

It was mentioned previously, that at one of the earlier meetings of workmen a motion to hold a public procession was almost unanimously defeated. As the strike progressed through January and into February and no progress with the owners was made, more workers were coming from the east and remaining. The strikers now felt it necessary to make some public show of their determination and unity. On February 16 approximately 300 puddlers and boilers assembled and marched through the downtown streets in a quiet and orderly manner.68 On the following Monday, February 18, they again marched, amid music and banners, and this time were met by three military companies of the city, called out as a precautionary measure by Sheriff Carter Curtis.69 The strikers passed through the streets peacefully and there were no incidents. The Post was quick to criticize the Sheriff’s action as rash and totally unnecessary in light of the fact that the marchers were orderly.70 As mentioned earlier, three of the mills opened on February 18. It could well have been that the strikers planned these two public processions to coincide with the re-opening of the mills in the hope of scaring away the eastern workers.

The Chronicle defended the Sheriff’s action, stating that the opening of some of the mills and the procession held on the day could have touched off a spark of violence.71 The Journal also supported this view in an editorial stating that if eastern workmen persisted in working, there could very well be an outbreak of violence.72

It was evident, in the editorials and news columns of the papers, that tension among the strikers, the “black sheep,” as the eastern hands

66 Dispatch, February 19, 1850, 2.
67 Post, January 26, 1850, 2.
68 Dispatch, February 18, 1850, 2.
69 Ibid., February 19, 1850, 2.
70 Post, February 20, 1850, 2.
71 Chronicle, February 19, 1850, 2.
72 Journal, February 26, 1850, 1.
were called, and the owners was mounting. The puddlers and boilers were meeting almost daily now and passing resolutions that they would work for the old rates and no others.\textsuperscript{73} The editor of the Post accused the owners of guarding their new workers with private police and "pimps" to and from work.\textsuperscript{74} He also claimed that the mill owners had threatened to appeal to businesses to withdraw their patronage of the Post.\textsuperscript{75} The Post also published a claim made by one of the eastern men that he had been promised $100 if the mill owners were successful in keeping down wages.\textsuperscript{76} The Journal claimed that strikers were threatening physical violence against eastern workers who remained here.\textsuperscript{77} At the same time the Chronicle stated that the mills which opened on February 18 had enough workers now to double production.\textsuperscript{78} The language used became more forceful, the positions taken became less compromising, and the charges became more exaggerated and farther from the fact.

With an atmosphere becoming more and more tense, the puddlers decided to hold another public procession to prove they would not be intimidated by the police and militia.\textsuperscript{79} The procession itself was held without incident but the stage was now set whereby any event could possibly incite violence.

\textbf{The Rolling Mill Riots and Subsequent Trial}

Contrary to the old saw, March 1 dawned like a lamb with no indication of impending crisis. Before the day ended it would have generally been agreed that March had roared in like a lion in the city of Pittsburgh.

At about 11:00 A.M., a group of women estimated at from 60 to 100 met at the rolling mill of Graff, Lindsay and Company.\textsuperscript{80} The crowd seemed to have gathered quickly and was backed by a considerable number of sympathetic men and boys, many of whom, the Journal claimed, were striking puddlers and boilers.\textsuperscript{81} The women were described by the Post as "women who lived near the scene and some

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Post}, February 20, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Ibid.}, February 25, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid.}, February 26, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Journal}, February 26, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Chronicle}, February 25, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Post}, February 27, 1850, 2.
\textsuperscript{80} Henry Mann, \textit{Our Police} (Pittsburgh: 1889), 88. Hereafter cited as Mann.
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Journal}, March 2, 1850, 2.
\end{footnotes}
others,” 82 and as “The wives and friends of the puddlers,” 83 by the Chronicle. Regardless of their true identity, and it is safe to assume that they were closely related to the strikers, the women, armed with stones, chunks of coal and sticks, met little resistance. Almost immediately they entered the mill since there was only one policeman present. 84 Once on the premises they drove all eastern hands out and threw coal and dirt in the furnaces, spoiling the day’s iron valued at several hundred dollars. 85 One reason the women met with so little resistance was that the solitary policeman and the eastern hands were powerless in knowing how to resist them. If they had used force in turning the women away then most likely the crowd of men and boys following would have joined the fray. After driving the “black sheep” out and taking possession of the mill, the women were satisfied and did little further damage. The Gazette, however, stated that the last worker in the mill was seized by the women and hurried to the river where his life was saved only with his promise to leave Pittsburgh. 86 It is probable that the extent of the threat carried only to a ducking in the water.

Having achieved their objective at Graff, Lindsay and Company the throng then proceeded to the Shoenberger mill where preparations had been made to meet them. Sheriff Curtis made a futile attempt to speak to them but was loudly booed. Mayor Barker, an experienced haranguer, arrived on the scene, and mounting a pile of blooms, proceeded to persuade the crowd to disperse. 87 Except for the damage to the iron in the furnaces at Graff, Lindsay and Company, there was no further mischief that day. Although there was no serious injury or extensive damage done by the crowd on March 1, the incident could not be taken lightly. The crowd made a mockery of law and order by entering private property, disrupting the operations of a business, and driving law-abiding men from their work. The fact that there were no serious incidents was credited more to the complete surprise and unpreparedness of the mill owners and their unwillingness forcibly to resist women, than to any action by the crowd.

The immediate reaction of the press was predictable. The Post, while not condoning the actions of the crowd, reported that after

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82 Post, March 2, 1850, 2.
83 Chronicle, March 2, 1850, 2.
84 Ibid.
85 Gazette, March 2, 1850, 2.
86 Ibid.
87 Journal, March 2, 1850, 2.
"careful investigation into the disturbances on March 1," it was perfectly satisfied that the puddlers and boilers had nothing to do with them. The other papers were unanimous in their condemnation of the riot and linked the women to the puddlers and boilers. The Journal said that mere public disclaimer of the disturbances by the strikers was by no means enough to convince public opinion. It was alluding to a meeting held on the same afternoon by the strikers at which time they passed a number of resolutions disavowing all connection with, and repudiating, the disturbance.

If nothing else, the riot on March 1 focused the attention of all Pittsburgh on the strike in the iron mills. Probably every idle person, rabble-rouser, school child and interested spectator was on hand the next day (Saturday) hoping to see more of what they read in the papers and heard by rumor. They were not to be disappointed.

Hurrying to the scene on March 2 the Gazette witnessed a much larger crowd of men, women and children surrounding the mill of Bailey, Brown and Company. The Gazette noted that the rioters were more reckless than on the previous day and appeared to be under the influence of alcohol. Sheriff Curtis was there with a number of policemen but they were to prove incapable of handling the crowd this day. The owners had closed the gates, so rioters began throwing stones and chunks of coal over the fence into the open yard. The workmen inside, having tired of this, began throwing the missiles back, which, of course, further aggravated the crowd. Several women tried to rush an opening in the fence but were forcibly shoved back by one of the owners, a Mr. Bailey. When the men in the crowd learned of this it was decided the women should make another attempt with the help of the men. This time Mr. Bailey and several of his workmen were overwhelmed and the mob poured through. The men and boys were much more active this day in throwing stones and shouting threats. Once inside the fence the crowd quickly took possession of the mill, chasing the workmen out and actually beating those they could catch. They proceeded to pull the grates from the furnaces, threw dirt and rocks into the iron, thus spoiling it. It was later brought out in the trial that when the mob took possession of the mill the steam engine

88 Post, March 2, 1850, 2.
89 Journal, March 2, 1850, 2.
90 Post, March 2, 1850, 2.
91 Gazette, March 4, 1850, 2.
92 Mann, 88.
93 Gazette, March 4, 1850, 2.
94 Ibid.
had been left running and that one of Mr. Bailey's employees had rushed back into the mill to shut it off with utter disregard for his own personal safety. If the engine had not been shut down there could have been an explosion resulting in serious injury or death to many people. Both Sheriff Curtis and Mayor Barker tried to speak to the crowd but they would listen to no one. William Matthews, a leader of the strikers, spoke at some length to the mob and urged them to disperse, saying that these acts could only hurt the strikers' cause. Many of the men left but the women were so agitated they proceeded to the Graff, Lindsay and Company works again. The mill, this time, was closed and closely guarded by the police, and the women soon dispersed. Mr. Bailey and a number of his workmen were seriously injured by the mob, but all recovered.

Sheriff Curtis, realizing the inadequacy of the police, had alerted three militia companies, the Duquesne Greys, German Rifles, and Irish Greens, to stand by at their armories in case they were needed on Saturday. However, they were not called into action.

Several of the more prominent rioters were arrested and held on $500 bond. Sheriff Curtis had a proclamation published in all the papers on Monday requesting the citizens to refrain from assembling in crowds on the streets, especially in the area of the mills. He also alerted the militia to be ready at a moment's notice.

These actions by the authorities probably had a marked effect in ending the riots and discouraging any further outbreaks or incidents. Now was the time to seek out culprits, fix the blame for the cause of the riots and assess the damage done by them.

The more responsible leaders of the strikers pointed out, at a meeting at Duffy's, that violence and destruction of the mills would injure their cause. The Journal, in an editorial, stated that if public sympathy were for the strikers before their cause was taken up by rioters, once the rioters struck that sympathy shifted. Even if the strikers didn't instigate the riots, it was planned for their benefit — to rid the mills of eastern workmen. It was now a question of order or mobocracy and the public was sure to condemn all strikers, not just a few who might have been engaged in the riots. This sentiment was echoed in all the

95 Ibid., April 9, 1850, 2.
96 Ibid., March 4, 1850, 2.
97 Mann, 88.
98 Chronicle, March 4, 1850, 2.
99 Post, March 4, 1850, 2.
100 Journal, March 6, 1850, 2.
papers except the *Post*, which, although never condoning the acts of violence, still persisted in its belief that the puddlers and boilers had taken no part in the riots.

The riots proved unsuccessful in driving away eastern workmen or scaring the owners. On Monday following the riots all three of the mills attacked were back in operation.\(^{101}\) The Lorenz and Sterling mill started work on March 5.\(^{102}\) Semple, Bissells and Company started on March 6.\(^{101}\) James Wood and Company resumed on March 18,\(^{104}\) and Church, Carothers and Company on March 19.\(^{105}\) It was noted that almost all of the mills closed by the strike were now open and operating satisfactorily with the eastern workers. In fact, some owners claimed the work of the new hands surpassed that of the strikers.\(^{106}\)

There were no more acts of violence but on several occasions the militia was called out for false alarms.\(^{107}\)

The strikers continued to meet frequently but discussion had changed from talk of wages to joining the various associations being formed and leaving Pittsburgh.\(^{108}\) This was undoubtedly due to the fact that most of the mills were now working and all the jobs were filled by eastern workmen. In truth, many of the strikers had been forced to take jobs with the railroads, canals and neighboring farms because they could not hold out any longer.\(^{109}\)

The case involving the rioters arrested finally came to trial on April 8 in the Court of Quarter Sessions. The indictment charged James Bratt, Patrick and Ann McDermott, Charles Murphy, Peter and Margaret Graham, Mary Reeves, Catherine Riley, otherwise called Catherine Evans, James Horner, Peter Richey, Joseph Davis and Eliza Morgan with inciting to riot.\(^{110}\) William B. McClure was judge. Representing the prosecution were Messrs. Darragh, Shaler and McKnight; the defense, Messrs. Black, Courtney, Porter and Burns.

All the papers with the exception of the *Chronicle* published extensive accounts of the trial. The *Chronicle* made no mention at all.

101 *Gazette*, March 5, 1850, 2.
102 *Post*, March 6, 1850, 2.
103 *Gazette*, March 6, 1850, 2.
107 *Dispatch*, March 5, 1850, 2, also in *Chronicle*, March 11, 1850, 2, and March 16, 1850, 2.
108 *Post*, March 18, 1850, 2.
109 *Ibid.*, March 30, 1850, 2, also April 1, 1850, 2.
110 *Quarter Sessions Minutes: Allegheny County: Docket 15*, March 1850 to March 1851. Hereafter cited as *Quarter Sessions*. 
of the trial until April 11 when it published the sentences of those convicted.\textsuperscript{111} The trial concerned itself solely with the incidents of the second day of riots, the attacks made on the firm of Bailey, Brown and Company and the physical harm done to the workmen present. Several members of that firm were called to testify and exhibit their still visible wounds and bruises. A number of eastern workmen were called to tell how they were forcibly driven from the mill. Mayor Barker and several policemen were also questioned concerning their attempts to disperse the mob.\textsuperscript{112}

The second day of the trial was largely concerned with the presentation of the defense’s case. It dealt mainly with character witnesses for the male defendants. Not a single defendant was called nor any witnesses in the defense of the women on trial.\textsuperscript{113} On the third day the jury rendered a verdict of guilty as charged on the defendants: Patrick and Ann McDermott, Joseph Davis, James Bratt, Eliza Morgan, Mary Reeves, Catherine Riley and Margaret Graham, and were recommended to the mercy of the court. The jury found Peter Richey, Peter Graham, Charles Murphy and James Horner not guilty. The defendants Patrick McDermott and James Bratt were sentenced to eighteen months’ imprisonment in the penitentiary, a fine of 6\textdollar 4 and costs of the prosecution. All of the women named were sentenced to thirty days in the county jail and fined $50 each.\textsuperscript{114} Joseph Davis fled bail and was never sentenced.

Immediate public reaction was that eighteen months was too severe a sentence for the two men mentioned. A giant protest meeting was held on April 12 and petitions were circulated to have McDermott and Bratt pardoned.\textsuperscript{115} On May 1 a petition was sent to Governor Johnson bearing 4,300 names and asking him to pardon the two men.\textsuperscript{116} Little concern was displayed for the women and they served their sentences and were released on May 16 when Governor Johnson remitted their fines.\textsuperscript{117}

The puddlers and boilers still continued to strike following the trial but their activities, for the most part, went unreported by the papers, including the Post. On April 25, the Post mentioned an im-

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{111} \textit{Chronicle}, April 11, 1850, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} A full account of the two days of testimony may be found in the \textit{Post}, \textit{Dispatch}, \textit{Gazette} and \textit{Journal} for those days.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Quarter Sessions.
  \item \textsuperscript{115} \textit{Post}, April 13, 1850, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{116} Ibid., May 1, 1850, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{117} \textit{Journal}, May 17, 1850, 2.
\end{itemize}
portant meeting to be held the next day when an interesting communication was to be read. The communication was an offer from the owners to the strikers to return to work at “compromise” wages. These “compromise” wages were $4.50 a ton for boiling and $3.00 a ton for puddling, the original offer made by the owners. By this time the strikers were weary and readily accepted the offer.

The owners, however, refused to discharge the eastern workers, thus making the old hands wait until production increased before going back to work and then at the reduced rate. After almost four months of striking the old hands were unable to get work in the mills on any terms.

**Summary and Conclusions**

An outgrowth of the iron workers’ strike was the formation of associations. An example of this was the Sharon Iron Company, established in 1850 by a number of Pittsburgh workmen in Sharon, Pennsylvania. The mill was completed in late 1850 but did not begin operations until 1851. In addition to the mill, the company built homes for the member workmen. The mill ran until 1855 when it was closed. Later it was sold to several local businessmen. Of all the proposed associations, at the time of the strike, the above mentioned example was the only one to be found. Its short existence would seem to indicate that its operation was not successful.

Associations had several drawbacks. The first was that workmen were required to invest money in the mill. Many iron workers had no savings and thus were denied the opportunity to join. Even in those days an iron mill required a sizable outlay of money to build and this factor probably handicapped the growth of associations in the iron industry. Also, in theory, all the members of an association had equal voice in making decisions. This diffusion of responsibility was not an ideal characteristic for a business organization, where decision-making should be concentrated in as few hands as possible.

The Pittsburgh puddlers and boilers were leaders of the labor movement in the iron industry. In a sense they were the natural leaders for other workmen since they were the most skilled, highest paid workers and were able to hire their own assistants for the

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118 Post, April 26, 1850, 2.
120 Fitch, 76-77.
furnaces. The Pittsburgh iron strike of 1850 was the first great labor demonstration in the entire iron industry. Although the strikers failed, it may be assumed that they were slowly learning the necessity of organization.