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# *Patronage and Philanthropy in Industrial America: Andrew Carnegie and the Free Library in Braddock, Pa.*

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*By Paul L. Krause*

"Andrew Carnegie"

From Scotland's heather-covered braes,  
In babyhood he came  
And early fixed his childish gaze,  
On lucre and on fame....

So skillfully he flew his kite,  
That wondrous was his luck;  
He reached for all the cash in sight;  
And rich investments struck;  
At railroads, likewise coke and coal,  
He took full many a fling,  
And was cast at length for the glorious role  
Of steel and iron king.

His boodle grew at rapid rate,  
But bitter was his cup,  
So fast did the wealth accumulate,  
He couldn't count it up;  
Of grief he might have died, they say,  
If he hadn't struck the plan  
Of giving a few odd millions away,  
Which made him a happy man.

On public libraries he spent  
Of shekels not a few;

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A goodly slice to Pittsburgh went,  
 And to Allegheny, too;  
 But still the loss he doesn't feel,  
 It cannot hurt his health,  
 For his mills keep on with endless zeal  
 A-piling up the wealth.<sup>1</sup>

**T**HERE are two legends of Andrew Carnegie. The first is the leg end of the ruthless robber baron. The second, of the great philanthropist who honore America with libraries and art institutions bearing his name.<sup>2</sup>

Most historians have tended to regard these two legends as contradictory and mutually exclusive. Indeed, virtually all interpretations of Carnegie's philanthropy have followed a similar strategy of "yes, but." Yes, Carnegie was a robber baron, but he was also a cultural benefactor. As one critic recently put it: "Agressive, ruthless, and no friend of the unions, Carnegie was nevertheless a robber baron with a difference." For all his failings and despotism, this critic asserts, Carnegie was a genuine philanthropist; moreover, his gestures of philanthropy somehow redeemed whatever questionable activities he engaged in as a businessman.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, this general view corresponds to how Carnegie himself wanted his philanthropical offerings to be interpreted — as a lasting legacy of his wealth that would erase and supersede the grimy details of its accumulation. Carnegie persistently sought to portray himself as the righteous prototype for all men of wealth who, he believed, were obliged to elevate and educate the men who worked for them. William Gladstone, the Liberal prime minister of Britain who befriended Carnegie, took appropriately appreciative note of Carnegie's philanthropic endeavors just months before the Homestead Lockout of 1892. "Wealth is at present like a monster threatening to swallow up the moral life of man," Gladstone wrote to Carnegie. "You by precept and example have

1 Arthur G. Burgoyne, *All Sorts of Pittsburghers, Sketched in Prose and Verse* (Pittsburgh: 1982) 5. Burgoyne was one of Pittsburgh's leading journalists in the late nineteenth century. He published this poem just weeks before the Homestead Lockout of 1892.

2 Representative of the first genre is Matthew Josephson, *The Robber Barons: The Great American Capitalists, 1861-1901* (New York: 1934). The best example of the many Carnegie "hagiographies" is Burton J. Hendrick, *The Life of Andrew Carnegie*, 2 vols. (New York: 1932).

3 Simon Pepper, "A Department Store of Learning," *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 May 1986.

been teaching him to disgorge. I, for one, applaud... your gallant efforts to direct rich men into a course of action more enlightened than they usually follow."<sup>4</sup>

Only months after Gladstone's laudatory message, the lockout at Carnegie's Homestead Steel Works, several miles upstream from Pittsburgh, left twelve men dead and killed unionism in the steel industry for 40 years. Yet even as Carnegie had been preparing to smash this stronghold of trade-unionism in the Pittsburgh district, he also pursued his dreams of philanthropic beneficence for the Steel City. In the wake of the bloody confrontation at Homestead, however, thousands of Pittsburghers chose to refuse a substantial gift of money from Carnegie for the Institute and Library in Schenley Park that now bear his name. Carnegie, true to form, pleaded that they accept his offerings:

It was indeed pitiable if the wage-earners for whom these (gifts) were chiefly intended should be permanently prejudiced against them by any shortcomings of the donor, however grievous, for, sadly as he may fail in his efforts to live worthily and do his duty — and no one, alas, knows as well as himself how far he falls short of his own ideal — yet his gifts to Pittsburgh must ever remain stainless and work good continuously and never evil. I hope, therefore, that... my fellow workmen (for I have a right to use this title)... see that fair play requires them to separate the donor and his many faults from libraries and music halls and art galleries, which have none. If they will only do this, I gladly risk their some day expunging the votes of censure passed upon me personally.<sup>5</sup>

As appealing as Carnegie's interpretation of his own philanthropy may be, there are problems with it. By what material or moral criteria did Carnegie's acts of generosity cancel the "shortcomings" to which he himself alluded? Conversely, on what grounds should we dismiss Carnegie's philanthropy as mere hypocrisy? Each of the interpretations implicit in these questions perpetuate the notion that his philanthropy and ruthlessness were somehow contradictory or paradoxical and can therefore be explained only through a rhetorical concession — "yes, but...."

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4 Gladstone to Carnegie, 19 May 1892, Andrew Carnegie Papers, Library of Congress, (hereafter, ACLC), vol. 16.

5 Andrew Carnegie to C.W. Scotell, 17 Dec. 1892, published in the *New York Times*, 18 Dec. 1892, ACLC, vol. 17. Despite the opposition in 1892, the city of Pittsburgh soon afterwards accepted Carnegie's gifts.

In truth, the concurrent acts of magnificent philanthropy and vicious union-busting are not mutually exclusive; nor do they simply signify some form of social or psychological perversity on Carnegie's part. Both acts derive from the single coherent system of belief that underlay Carnegie's ambitious agenda for modern America, an agenda that he repeatedly spelled out in no uncertain terms in his writings. Carnegie's initiatives in the world of business, together with his published statements on wealth, progress, and democracy, suggest that his cultural benefactions and industrial despotism were informed by a shared logic. Simply put, the matter is not "yes, a robber baron, but a benefactor," but rather "yes a robber baron and a benefactor." The activities of these two personae must be examined together in the context of Carnegie's larger intellectual and social agenda. For "both" Carnegies were intent on achieving a single, overarching goal: in the name of the "morality of improvement" and an unwavering faith in progress, Carnegie sought nothing less than full control over the instruments of material and cultural production in America. Indeed, Carnegie's conscious strivings toward what can only be called hegemony point to the indissoluble ties between two forms of activity typically considered to constitute separate realms of human endeavor.<sup>6</sup>

Carnegie did not present himself in such light. Like other great philanthropists, he represented himself as what Thorstein Veblen has called the "keeper of the National Integrity" and "guide to literature and art, church and state, science and education, law and morals — the standard container of civic virtue." In this spirit, Carnegie built his libraries, museums and trade schools and hoped they would convey to their patrons and to the larger public that version of civic virtue which was his.<sup>7</sup>

The ritual initiation of Carnegie's career as a philanthropist in Braddock, Pa., in 1889 provides clues to the complex nature of the man whose name became synonymous with philanthropy and offers insights into the complex nature of philanthropy in modern America. It is a telling fact

6 I have borrowed the term, "morality of improvement," from Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: 1973). This morality, which informed the discourse of the great industrialists of the nineteenth century, held that the pursuit of self-interest and economic advantage was not only "rational," but universally beneficent. For a discussion of the material basis of culture, see Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: 1977), 11-20; on hegemony, see 108-114.

7 Veblen, as quoted in Josephson, *Robber Barons*, 316-17; Andrew Carnegie, *Dedication of the Carnegie Library at the Edgar Thomson Steel Rail Works, Braddock: Address to Workingmen*, (Pittsburgh: 1889); and W.F. Stevens, "The Carnegie Library, Homestead," in Margaret Byington, *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town* (Pittsburgh: 1974), 255-70.

indeed that the first instance of Carnegie's legendary philanthropy in the United States coincided with a major instance of his legendary ruthlessness. Perhaps more telling, historians of Carnegie have consistently overlooked or suppressed this conjunction in their obstinate narratives of the "yes, but" version of his life. This essay seeks to restore Carnegie's first major philanthropical endowment in America, the Free Library in Braddock, to the violent context of labor conflict from which it emerged. Reduced to the simplest skeleton of a narrative: yes, Andrew Carnegie busted the union in Braddock, and then he gave the town a magnificent library.

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On 30 March 1889, Andrew Carnegie went to Braddock to dedicate the Carnegie Free Library and, as he put it, "to hand it over" to the mixed community of workers he employed at the Edgar Thomson mill. Over the course of his life, Carnegie would finance 2,811 public libraries, most of them in Great Britain and the United States, but all destined, he explained, to "improve the minds" of workers. Carnegie attended many of the dedication ceremonies. He especially enjoyed the ceremonies in Britain, where he often received the "Freedom of the City" — the medieval equivalent of the key to the city — in recognition of his gift. Nothing seemed to please Carnegie more than the pseudo-feudal pageantry of these festivities. Carnegie, the committed "republican" and lifelong Chartist who secretly coveted the friendship of kings and emperors, loved it all: riding in an open carriage through winding streets amid throngs of cheering townspeople; meeting with the Lord Mayor and other officials at the town hall; receiving the small parchment that attested to the Freedom.<sup>8</sup>

Dedicating the new Braddock library, with its Scottish baronial design, also brought the "Laird of Skibo" extraordinary pleasure. In a telling reference to his philosophical mentor, Herbert Spencer, Carnegie inaugurated his first American library by declaring that life's "highest

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8 Carnegie, *Dedication*, 1, and Carnegie to an unnamed correspondent, 18 Oct. 1884, ACLC, vol. 8; *National Labor Tribune* (hereafter, *NLT*), 6 Apr. 1889; *Iron Age*, 4 Apr. 1889; Pepper, "Department Store," Joseph Frazier Wall, *Andrew Carnegie* (New York: 1970), 82-85, 97, 815-20 and 828; and Robert Green McCloskey, *American Conservatism in the Age of Enterprise, 1865-1910* (New York: 1964), 137-38. On Carnegie's notorious delight in receiving the Freedom of the City, see William W. Delaney's popular song about the Homestead Lockout of 1892, "Father Was Killed by the Pinkerton Men," reproduced in Philip S. Foner, *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: 1975), 242-45. Chartism was a mass movement in Britain that sought universal manhood suffrage. The movement reached peak strength from 1838 to 1850. Many Chartists were republicans and therefore opposed to monarchy.

award... is the purchase of *satisfactions*." His purchase of the Braddock library was "a great satisfaction, one of the greatest I have ever acquired." Carnegie, in fact, saw not merely the library, but all of Braddock, as his creation. And he was convinced that Braddock and its steelworks, the cornerstone of his industrial empire, were the majestic harbingers of the harmonious social order that Spencer had promised.<sup>9</sup>

It was around this conviction and principles like those propounded

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*'...Carnegie sought nothing less than full control over the instruments of material and cultural production in America.'*

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in his essay on "Wealth" that Carnegie built his speech at Braddock. At the time, the first intallment had not yet been published, and Carnegie borrowed freely from it for his dedication speech. In "Wealth," Carnegie argued that the preeminent problem of the era was indeed "the proper administration of wealth." For him, the single solution — the only true "antidote" for what he characterized as "the temporary unequal distribution of wealth" — was for the rich man "to consider all surplus revenues which comes to him simply as trust funds which he is called upon to administer..." for the benefit of "his poorer brethren...." The successful businessman, Carnegie declared, is a "trustee for the poor" and for the entire community; the charge of the trustee is to administer the wealth of the community "far better than it could or would have done for itself." To Carnegie, the most appealing expression of this public trusteeship was the establishment of free public libraries, because the library offered to "the industrious and the ambitious" the surest means of self-advancement.<sup>10</sup>

Carnegie steadfastly maintained that he was a democrat in the

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9 *American Manufacturer* (hereafter, AM), 9 Sept. 1882; Carnegie, *Dedication*, 1; Wall, *Carnegie*, 384-86 and 689; Hendrick, *Carnegie*, vol. 1, 240-41; Pepper, "Department Store"; and Walter C. Kidney, *Landmark Architecture: Pittsburgh and Allegheny County* (Pittsburgh:1985), 286. In 1882, Spencer visited Braddock as Carnegie's guest; however, Spencer did not concur that the seeds of utopia were to be found in the town. "Six months' residence here," Spencer remarked, "would justify suicide."

10 "Wealth" appeared in *North American Review* 148 (June 1889), 653-64, and was continued as "The Best Fields for Philanthropy" in *North American Review* 149 (December 1889), 682-98. The essay was reprinted in Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays* (New York:1900). For discussions of Carnegie's essay, see Wall, *Carnegie*, 806-15, and McCloskey, *American Conservatism*, 162-65. The quotations in the text are drawn from these works.

truest sense of the word. "Fellow workmen," were the words he chose to begin his dedication of the Braddock Library. "Believe me, fellow workmen," he repeated, "the interests of Capital and Labor are one." Carnegie went on to say that wealth had made him not merely a custodian of the public good, but had confirmed his position as a full and equal member of the laboring community. "Gentlemen, I am very jealous of my title to the name 'fellow workman,'" Carnegie declared. "Let it always be understood that we are workers together, and although I no longer work with my hands, as I am proud to say I once did, yet when I pass through the works I object to the airs which men... seem to put on as I pass along.

I am just as much entitled to the proud appellation of 'workingman' as any of you, and I hope you will remember this hereafter and treat me with proper respect as one of the great guild of those who labor and perform a use in the community, and who upon that basis alone founds his claim to live in comfort."<sup>11</sup>

In Carnegie's view, the greatest testament to this mutuality of interest had been achieved only recently in Braddock. In 1888, Carnegie and the Edgar Thomson steelworkers had signed an agreement based on a sliding scale that pegged their wages to the market price of steel. The result, Carnegie said, was a genuine "partnership" between management and labor under which workers "are no longer only employees" but also "sharers with us in the profits of our business...." It was out of his share of these profits that Carnegie had fulfilled his obligation as a public trustee and built the library "to express his care for the well-being of those upon whose labor he depends for success." The library, Carnegie said, was "a centre of light and learning, a never-failing spring of all good influences," and only education could ensure labor's progressive march away from "serfdom" and toward the "universal recognition" it deserved. "If you want to make labor what it should be, educate yourself in useful knowledge," Carnegie counselled. "This is the moral I would emphasize."<sup>12</sup>

Carnegie explained this "moral," and indeed the very ethic of his library, by asserting that "useful knowledge" did not embrace "classical learning," what we today call the liberal arts. Rather, the "new idea of education" was to concentrate — as the new library in Braddock most assuredly would — on the study of business and science alone. Success

<sup>11</sup> Carnegie, *Dedication*, 1, 5 and 17-18.

<sup>12</sup> Carnegie, *Dedication*, 1, 3, 5, 7-8, 15, 21-22, and 30-31; *AM*, 2 May and 11 May 1888; *Commoner*, 5 May and 12 May, 2 June and 9 June, and 1 Sept. and 13 Sept. 1888; *NLT*, 14 Apr. and 28 Apr., 5 May, 6 Oct., and 3 Nov. 1888; and *Iron Age*, 5 Apr. and 12 Apr., 10 May, and 23 June 1888.

in these realms ensured the advance of civilization and also brought enormous, and just, fiscal rewards to individuals. The heroes of the era, those who owned modern-day "titles of honor" such as "mechanical engineer" and "manager of steel mill," were those men who had rescued metalmaking from iron puddlers — highly skilled workers who in effect had cooked iron — by creating the remarkably efficient and profitable Bessemer steel industry.<sup>13</sup>

Carnegie saw the Braddock Free Library as something more than a means of ensuring progress. Something in the construction of the library, and indeed in all of Carnegie's "charity," exceeded even his thirst for fame. The larger issue that tormented Carnegie was the solution to the outstanding ethical problem of his professional life: how to make money and simultaneously be a kind employer — and a good man.<sup>14</sup>

This problem had weighed heavily on Carnegie for decades. In 1868, at the age of 33, he wrote a note to himself that became his most celebrated piece of writing. In the note, which his most recent biographer has aptly characterized as a "remarkable document of self-analysis and adjuration," Carnegie made plans to "cast aside business forever..." within two years. "The amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry," he wrote. "(There is) no idol more debasing than the worship of money.... To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time, must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery."<sup>15</sup>

Carnegie, of course, did not forsake the pursuit of money within two years nor limit his income to the annual maximum of \$50,000 as he had announced in his private memo. Nor did he forsake the desire for "making the acquaintance of literary men" and "taking part in public matters... connected with education and improvement of the poorer classes." Indeed, at the time he dedicated America's first Carnegie Library, not only could Carnegie count "literary men" such as Herbert

<sup>13</sup> Carnegie, *Dedication*, 21-22. Like all the great steel men of his time, Carnegie believed that the Bessemer process signaled the dawn of a new, and nobler, civilization. I have explored this theme in "The Road to Homestead," Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1987, ch.1.

<sup>14</sup> Wall, *Carnegie*, 522. Carnegie enjoyed the tremendous publicity won by his philanthropic ventures. Poultney Bigelow, an informed contemporary, was probably correct when he suggested that "never before in the history of plutocratic America had one man purchased by mere money so much social advertising and flattery." In observing Carnegie happily dart about his numerous plaques that commemorated library gifts, Mark Twain said of his good friend: "He has bought fame and paid cash for it."

<sup>15</sup> Photoduplication, ACLC, vol. 3. Carnegie's note is reprinted in Wall, *Carnegie*, 224-25, and McCloskey, *American Conservatism*, 144.



Spencer, Matthew Arnold, and Mark Twain as friends, but he also counted profits in excess of \$3.5 million per year. (By 1899, these profits would reach an annual yield of \$40 million.) While it is impossible to imagine the fabulous dimension of equivalent sums today, it is possible to appreciate the troubling contradictions that the amassing of such wealth created for a man of Carnegie's avowed convictions. For he faced a struggle between two powerful impulses: a genuine, if condescending, Christian humanitarianism and an insatiable acquisitiveness that sanctioned, as his biographers have shown, the ruthless pursuit of the "main chance."<sup>16</sup>

Carnegie did not experience this dilemma alone, but few experienced it so intensely. Many ambitious men had to confront the moral contradictions of success. Chartist Thomas W. "Old Beeswax" Taylor, for example, left Britain with some of the same hopes that the young Carnegie had harbored. Taylor, like Carnegie, came to recognize the moral pitfalls of money-making even as he himself pursued the main chance. But Taylor ultimately concluded that the moral contradictions of acquisitiveness could not be ethically reconciled. He went on to help lead the labor movement and ended his career in the late 1880s as the workers' mayor of Homestead. Carnegie, in contrast, sought a solution that would somehow allow him to make piles of money and avoid, as he put it, "degradation."<sup>17</sup>

Carnegie struggled toward a solution for 20 years while continuing, in the words of his cautionary note, to "push inordinately" toward the pinnacles of wealth. Just as work was about to commence on the Braddock Library in the midst of labor's "Great Upheaval" of 1886, he published two essays that discussed how to make money while remaining principled. Carnegie defended unionism and faulted employers for contributing to industrial unrest. Although he criticized workers for their role in the disturbances of 1886, he declared that the "right of workingmen to combine and form trades-unions is... sacred" and he also denounced the practice of hiring non-union workers. "To expect that one

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16 James Howard Bridge, *The Inside History of the Carnegie Steel Company: A Romance of Millions* (New York: 1903), 294-95. For some of the points in this paragraph and the succeeding one, I have drawn on McCloskey, *American Conservatism*, ch. 6, esp. 145-47.

17 Taylor was one of the most famous labor leaders in the United States in the late nineteenth century; however, history has not been particularly kind to his memory. See Krause, "Road to Homestead," ch. 4, and "Labor Republicanism and 'Za Chlebom': Anglo-American and Slavic Solidarity in Homestead," in Dirk Hoerder, ed., *Struggle a Hard Battle: Essays on Working-Class Immigrants* (DeKalb: 1986), 146 and 151.

dependent upon his daily wage for the necessities of life will stand peaceably and see a new man employed in his stead is to expect much...." Carnegie wrote. "... The employer of labor will find it much more to his interest, wherever possible, to allow his works to remain idle and await the result of a dispute than to employ a class of men that can be induced to take the place of other men who have stopped work." Carnegie went further: he suggested that union opposition to non-union labor was justified and that employers need observe the first union commandment. "There is an unwritten law among the best workmen: 'Thou shalt not take thy neighbor's job.' No wise employer will lightly lose his old employees. Length of service counts for much in many ways. Calling upon strange men should be the last resort."<sup>18</sup>

The open-ended qualifications of "the last resort" notwithstanding, Carnegie's 1886 essays brought him recognition as a defender of the rights of organized labor. True, his condemnation of strike-breaking by means of hiring non-union workers incurred the wrath of his colleagues — most notably, Henry Clay Frick — but Carnegie was delighted by the kudos he received from some union officials.

The year 1886 also brought Carnegie tremendous satisfaction from another literary quarter: *Triumphant Democracy*, his homage to America that catalogued its industrial achievements, sold 30,000 copies in the United States and 40,000 in Britain. The principal idea of the book was that the United States had triumphed materially because it was a democracy, and that the ultimate purpose of democracy was material progress. To make this argument, Carnegie defined democracy in narrow political terms: free access to the ballot. For Carnegie, then, Chartism's most reductive definition continued to hold; he did not recognize that inequality might arise from sources other than the denial of the suffrage. And like his fellow advocates of the "morality of improvement," Carnegie saw the advance of civilization as equivalent to increases in productive capacity — and profits.<sup>19</sup>

*Triumphant Democracy* was more than Carnegie's simple defense of plutocracy or a personal effort to reconcile himself with his "republican"

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18 Andrew Carnegie, "An Employer's View of the Labor Question," *Forum* 1 (April 1886): 114-125, and "Results of the Labor Struggle," *Forum* 1 (Aug. 1886): 538-551, both of which were reprinted in *The Gospel of Wealth*. For discussions of Carnegie's 1886 essays, see Wall, *Carnegie*, 523-27; Bridge, *Inside History*, 186-88; and McCloskey, *American Conservatism*, 147-49. The quotations in the text are drawn from these sources.

19 This paragraph and the next one are drawn from Andrew Carnegie, *Triumphant Democracy* (London: 1886), *passim*, Wall, *Carnegie*, 442-47 and 526; and McCloskey, *American Conservatism*, 153-58.

past. It provided the self-justification that Carnegie sought in answer to the warning that the pursuit of wealth could "degrade... beyond hope of permanent recovery." America, itself, he proclaimed, was indeed "thunder(ing) past with the rush of the express" to still greater heights of production and consumption.<sup>20</sup> But rather than check the reckless advance of runaway "progress," Carnegie took pride in the role he played therein. To be sure, the metaphor of America as an "express train" was not innocent, for Carnegie's own wealth was being stoked daily by the Edgar Thomson Works, the world's largest producer of steel rails. Such paradoxes might have troubled a man who thought of himself as an enlightened and principled liberal. But what might seem from our vantage point a dilemma was ultimately re-solved by Carnegie within the logic of his personal and political agenda.

From the beginning of operations at the Edgar Thomson, Carnegie easily managed to do whatever was necessary to ensure that production quotas for the "express" would be met in his premier rail-making facility. In the late 1870s, he ousted the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers from the mill in the union's inaugural effort to organize Bessemer steelworkers. Between 1882 and 1885, Carnegie moved often, and decisively, to counter further initiatives by the Amalgamated and the Knights of Labor. In 1883, an innovation known as the "direct process" allowed Carnegie to dismiss 300 Amalgamated men. Carnegie won a large wage reduction from the Knights and the Amalgamated in 1883, and in 1884 he extracted yet another reduction. In August 1884, he discharged 300 workers whose presence had been made "redundant" by the introduction of natural gas into the production process. In 1885, Carnegie finally succeeded in destroying two lodges of the Amalgamated and one assembly of the Knights.<sup>21</sup>

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20 Carnegie, *Triumphant Democracy*, 1.

21 *NLT*, 9 Dec. 1876; 1, 29 Apr., 24 June, and 8 July 1882; 21 Jan., 10 and 31 Mar., 14 and 28 Apr., 31 Mar., 5 May, 14 Jul., 2 Sept., and 22 Dec. 1883; 2 Sept., 6, 13, 20 and 27 Dec. 1884; 10 Jan., 7 and 14 Feb., 28 Mar., and 3 Apr. 1885; *AM*, 21 Dec. 1883, 26 Dec. 1884, 6 Feb., 20 Mar. and 20 Nov. 1885; John A. Fitch, *The Steel Workers* (New York: 1910), 11 and 112-14, and the comments of two unidentified steelworkers, "CH-1" and "CD-6," in his "Research Notes," Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention, 1877*, 43-44, and *Proceedings, 1882*, 796; John Swinton's *Paper*, 22 Feb. 1885; *Iron Age*, 5 and 26 Feb. 1885; James Holt, "Trade Unionism in the British and U.S. Steel Industries, 1888-1912: A Comparative Approach," *Labor History* 18 (1977): 12-13; Bridge, *Inside History*, 185; Jonathan Garlock and N.C. Builder, comps., "The Knights of Labor Data Bank and Users' Manual and Index to Local Assemblies," unpublished manuscript, Rochester, New York, 234-39; and *Commoner*, 23 Oct. 1887 and 28 Jan. 1888. I thank Charles Hill, the grandson of John Fitch, for the use of his research notes.

Tensions ran high at the Edgar Thomson throughout this period. There were many work-stoppages, and Carnegie called in the police. In the midst of an 1885 shutdown in Braddock, Carnegie remarked that he was uncertain when he would be able to re-open the mill. Labor costs were no longer competitive, and for this, he held the unions responsible. Nevertheless, he claimed utter confidence that harmony eventually would prevail at the Edgar Thomson and indeed wherever workers and employers struggled. "I believe that socialism is the grandest theory ever presented, and I am sure some day it will rule the world," Carnegie told the *New York Times*. "Then we will have attained the millennium."<sup>22</sup>

Thomas Armstrong, the editor of the *National Labor Tribune* and Pittsburgh's preeminent labor leader, responded quickly to Carnegie's cloying remarks. What Carnegie was really intimating, Armstrong wrote in the *Tribune*, was that the division between workers and employers would continue until the Second Coming. Carnegie may well approve of socialism when he reads Charles Fourier, Armstrong declared, or contemplates the teachings of the Saviour. Then there is no doubt that Carnegie "looks upon all men as his brothers, and could wish that all were on a happy equality morally and materially." But when it came to the management of affairs in this world, he operates with different priorities: "At present... Mr. Carnegie means business primarily and emphatically, and that business is his own...."

While Carnegie enjoyed considerable literary success in 1886, he was less happy with the course of labor relations in Braddock that year. In his protracted dispute with organized workers, he was forced to move from a 12- to an 8-hour day and to hire 300 more men. "The spirit of unionism is not yet dead at Braddock," the *Labor Tribune* proclaimed. The Laird of Skibo was not pleased. Once and for all, he decided, it was time to end unionism at the Edgar Thomson. The opportunity came in December 1887 when the annual contract expired. Carnegie responded by closing the mill, discharging hundreds of men, and demanding a return to the 12-hour day. Carnegie directly managed the lockout of 1888 from start to finish. As part of his agenda, he sought substantial wage reductions, which were to be achieved through the imposition of his celebrated sliding scale.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The quotations in this and in the succeeding paragraph are drawn from *NLT*, 10 Jan. 1885. The complete set of the *NLT* is in Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>23</sup> My account of the Braddock lockout is based on: *AM*, 27 Jan., 17 Feb., 30 Mar., 6, 13, 20 and 27 Apr., 2 and 11 May 1888; *Commoner*, 21 Jan., 11 and 18 Feb., 3, 10, 17 and 31 Mar., 7, 14, 21, and 28 Apr., 5 and 12 May, 2 and 9 June, 1 and 13 Sept. 1888 and 1 Jan., 2 Mar. and 25 May 1889; Terrence V. Powderly Papers, reel 25, microfilm at Davis

In 1886, Carnegie had argued in "An Employer's View of the Labor Question" that the sliding scale ensured the "partnership" between labor and management. He repeated this argument in his dedication speech at the Braddock Library. The "partnership" offered to the Braddock steelworkers, however, clearly favored one partner alone. The sliding scale which Carnegie proposed would change the steelworkers' piece rates by linking them to the fluctuating market price of steel; until then, their wages had been determined by an annual contract that was based on the consistently higher market price of iron. The steelworkers claimed that because Carnegie's new scale would drastically reduce the base which set the ratio between their piece rates and market prices, the scale would transfer an inequitable portion of the profits to Carnegie. Carnegie, on the other hand, argued that the Edgar Thomson Works owed its unprecedented productivity and fabulous success less to the efforts of workers than to the technological improvements that he had set in place. He therefore justified the sliding scale, with its reduced base, on grounds that it would guarantee him a just and reasonable return on his investment. For the workers, however, Carnegie's scale demeaned the value of their work, offended their sense of "natural" justice and made a mockery of republican virtue.<sup>24</sup>

The steelworkers of Local Assembly 1967 of the Knights of Labor charged that Carnegie's intent was to transform workers at the Edgar Thomson into "white slaves." Despite his professions of republicanism, the assembly declared, Carnegie had always opposed unions and "always treated his workmen as though they were his creatures — body and soul."

Consider David Gibson, like Carnegie himself, a native of Dumfries, Scotland. As a young man, he had had occasion to hear Carnegie speak about the promise America offered new immigrants. "During his

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Library, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; Knights of Labor, District Assembly 3, *Minutes of the 2nd Quarterly Meeting, April 1888* (Pittsburgh, 1888), Powderly Papers, reel 65, microfilm at Hillman Library, 9-10, 14, 16, 25 and 43-44; *Pittsburgh Trades Journal*, 5 May, 23 and 30 June, 28 July, and 8 Sept. 1888; *NLT*, 9 and 16 Jan. and 24 Apr. 1886 and 14 and 28 Apr., 5 May, 6 Oct. and 3 Nov. 1888; *Iron Age*, 5, 12 Apr., 10 May, and 23 June 1888; Carnegie, *Dedication, passim*; and Fitch, Research Notes, "CD-6," and *Steel Workers*, 114. The 1888 lockout has received only passing attention from historians.

<sup>24</sup> The views of the Edgar Thomson workers reflected many of the same concerns which metalworkers in Pittsburgh had expressed since the end of the Civil War. Striking similarities can be found, for example, in the public statements of iron puddlers during an important lockout that occurred in 1874-75. See Krause, "The Road to Homestead," ch. 2.

remarks," Gibson recalled, "he advised all young men to migrate to America, where a large field was before them, to better their condition. He said further that all those taking advantage of his advice would meet with his support and he would certainly find them positions." Gibson took Carnegie's advice and invitation to heart: he emigrated to America, settled in Braddock and found work at the Edgar Thomson. During the lockout of 1888, however, Gibson, along with other union men, lost his job. When he tried to find work at the Homestead Steel Works and, later,

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*'Carnegie celebrated his victory...by giving his repentant workers a library and calling it a monument to his 'partnership' with them.'*

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at facilities not owned by Carnegie, Gibson discovered that Carnegie had blacklisted him.<sup>25</sup>

The Braddock lockout was a disaster not only for Gibson. In direct violation of his own commandment, "Thou shalt not take thy neighbor's job," Carnegie hired non-union workers — and enough Pinkertons to protect them. When the mill reopened, Braddock was a town under siege. Carnegie told his former employees that if they wanted to return to work, they could sign an ironclad agreement that barred membership in the union. The workers capitulated. Carnegie had ended unionism at the Edgar Thomson for decades.<sup>26</sup>

Carnegie celebrated his victory in Braddock by giving his repentant workers a library and calling it a monument to his "partnership" with them. In his dedication speech, Carnegie announced that just weeks before he had received a letter from Homestead asking if he also planned

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<sup>25</sup> NLT, 3 Nov. 1888.

<sup>26</sup> The 1888 Braddock lockout fueled the already raging jurisdictional battles between the Knights of Labor and the national leadership of the Amalgamated, and made it even more difficult for advocates of a wide "amalgamation" of all workers to inject life into Pittsburgh's foundering labor movement. Within the Knights, the lockout also kindled dissension between local assemblers and district and national leaders. Despite these problems, the Knights managed to withstand the lockout until May, partly because of assistance offered by members of the Amalgamated Association in Homestead. Hendrick, *Carnegie*, vol. 1, 372-76, gives a radically different account of the lockout, asserting that it demonstrated Carnegie's commitment to the principles enunciated in his 1886 essays. Wall, *Carnegie*, 527-28, while acknowledging that Carnegie did not quite live up to his stated principles, overlooks the use of non-union labor and the hiring of Pinkertons.

"to do something" for that town. "Do something for Homestead?" Carnegie retorted. "Well, we have expected for a long time, but so far in vain, that Homestead should do something for us." If "Homestead" would only do something for him, he added solicitously, he would be pleased to build a library there, too. "I am only too anxious to do for them what I have done for you...", Carnegie told the Edgar Thomson workers. "I hope one day I may have the privilege of erecting at Homestead such a building as you have here; but... our works at Homestead are not to us as our works at Edgar Thomson. Our men there are not partners." The Amalgamated Association, Carnegie explained, had strong lodges in Homestead that compelled him to pay exorbitant wages. "Of course... the firm may decide to give the men at Homestead the benefit of the sliding scale which you enjoy," Carnegie said. "I know that for the success of (the) Homestead works, regarded from the point of view of the capital invested..., that the present system at Homestead must be changed."<sup>27</sup>

Within months, Carnegie was hard at work trying to make this change. What ensued was the Homestead Lockout of 1889. Carnegie wanted to "give" Homestead steelworkers a sliding scale as well as an ironclad contract of their own, and he hired non-union labor and Pinkertons to ensure that his "gifts" were delivered. Homesteaders such as John McLuckie, who had led the Amalgamated's Braddock lodges until Carnegie destroyed them, and Councilman John Elias Jones, a leader of the local union since the Homestead Strike of 1882, joined other workers in rejecting Carnegie's generosity. These steelworkers and their families wanted no part of Carnegie's "partnership." they believed that it would undermine their American rights. "King Carnegie," one labor paper warned the Homestead workers, "had his gun loaded" for them too.<sup>28</sup>

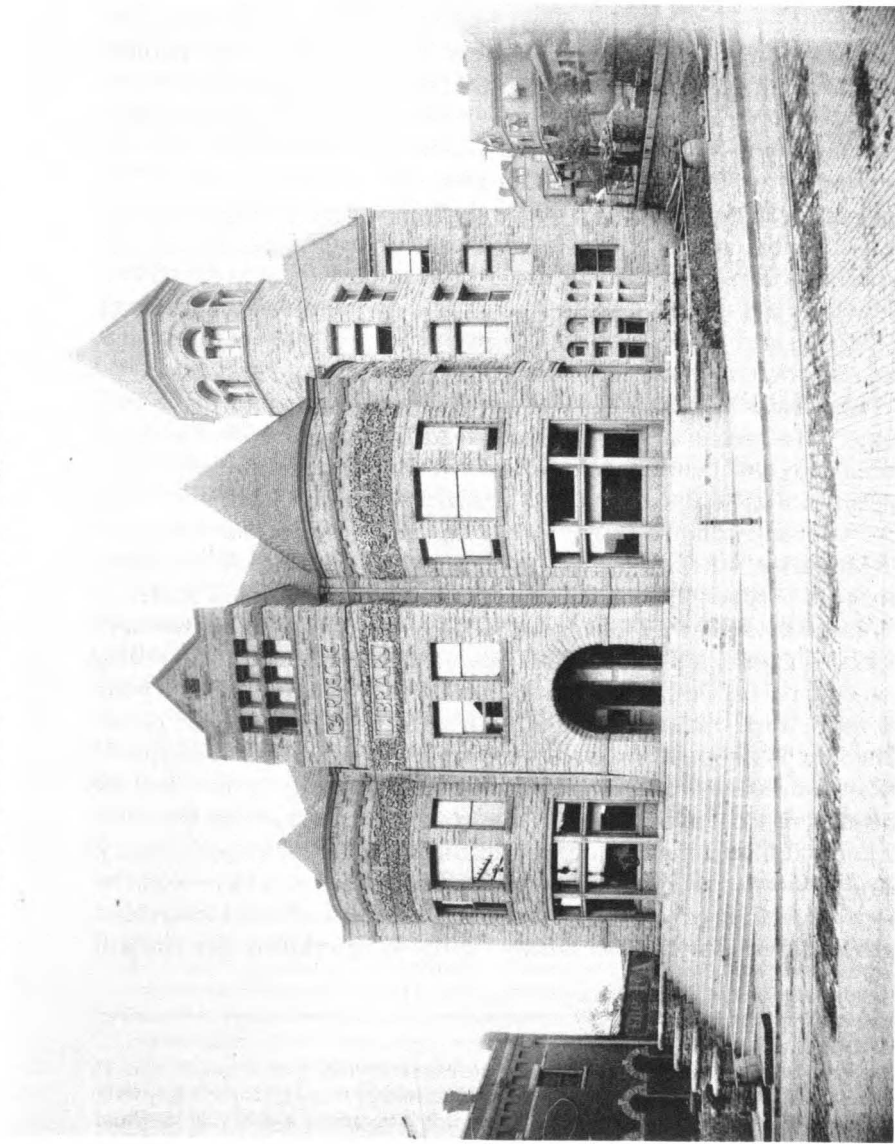
The Homestead workers needed little such warning, for they had all witnessed the coercive assault on their union brothers across the river and knew full well the cost of the commanding "feudalesque" library that now adorned their sister town.<sup>29</sup> "All or most of you have read the speech of Mr. Carnegie to the workmen of Braddock..." one Homestead steelworker wrote in the *Labor Tribune*. "Now the question is, Are you still

<sup>27</sup> Carnegie, *Dedication*, 12-13 and 15.

<sup>28</sup> This paragraph and the succeeding one are based on: *NLT*, 3, 13, 20 and 27 Apr., 15 June, and 20 July 1889; *Commoner*, 27 Apr. 1889; *Pittsburgh Post*, 11, 12 and 16 July 1889; *Pittsburgh Times*, 16 July 1889; *Pittsburgh Chronicle Telegraph*, 11 and 12 July 1889; and *Pittsburgh Press*, 12, 13 and 14 July 1889. On the Homestead Lockout of 1889, see Krause, "Road to Homestead," 520-543.

<sup>29</sup> On the "simple Richardson Romanesque design" of the Free Library in Braddock, see Kidney, *Landmark Architecture*, 286.

*Carnegie Library in Braddock (Art Work of McKeesport, Braddock and Homestead, Part III, [W.H. Parish Publishing Co., 1894] ).*





willing to act as the tools for others — to sell your rights as free men and to remain slaves?"

Well into the twentieth century, Braddock steelworkers would frequent the baths and athletic facilities housed in the library building, but bitter feelings about the terms of Carnegie's bequest smoldered in the steeltowns of the Monogahela Valley. "I would sooner enter a building built with the dirty silver of Judas received for betraying Christ than enter a Carnegie library," a writer for the *Commoner and Glassworker* explained. And John Fitch, a more disinterested observer, noted in *The Pittsburgh Survey* that "there is a great deal of prejudice against the gift of Mr. Carnegie on account of the several labor conflicts that have occurred in the mills formerly controlled by him...." Indeed, in the 33 years that Carnegie bestowed libraries, 225 communities turned down his offer. Not suprisingly, this sentiment was especially strong in Pennsylvania: 20 of the 46 towns Carnegie solicited said "No."<sup>30</sup>

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Marcel Mauss, the French anthropologist who has explored the complex social, moral, and political dynamics of the seemingly simple ritual of gift-giving, argues that gifts "are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested. The form usually taken is that of the gift generously offered, but the accompanying behavior is formal pretense and social deception. For the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest" that reflects "nothing less than the division of labour itself...." One Homestead steelworker expressed the inherent ironies of Carnegie's gifts as follows: "Carnegie builds libraries for the working men, but what good are libraries to me, working practically eighteen hours a day?"<sup>31</sup>

As the stormy history of work relations at the Edgar Thomson demonstrates, many of the great political and moral questions then at the

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<sup>30</sup> Fitch, *Steel Workers*, 203, and Paris, "The Canny Scot." Whereas the precise circumstances surrounding the various rejections await further consideration, it is the general fact of these negative responses to Carnegie's generosity that is of interest here. <sup>31</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: 1967), 1; and Fitch, Research Notes, "Nubia-1." The comments of the Homestead steelworker quoted in the text were confirmed in other interviews conducted by Fitch. A steelworker ("CH-1") who had labored in the Edgar Thomson and in the Homestead works before the 1892 lockout told Fitch that "he never uses the library, and the mill men do not use it at all. As a rule, they do not care for it, but they couldn't use it even if they wanted to, for they work too long hours to permit the use of any such thing as a library."

very center of America's divided allegiances were embedded in the gift of the library: Who would control the factories and the seats of government? Who would be best equipped to shape the cultural values of modern America? What was the meaning of democracy? What was the measure of a good life? These questions, also encoded in Carnegie's remarks directed to the workers of Homestead, surely weighed on him, too. Clearly, though, the challenge of these questions did not stand in Carnegie's way as he pushed "inordinately" beyond his own warning about the risks of acquisitiveness, toward the unparalleled wealth that he won. That this wealth did in fact bring with it an element of "degradation" surely was one reason he so insistently sought to disburse it.<sup>32</sup>

Yet Carnegie's philanthropy has retained its mythic aura. The Free Library building in Braddock, a recent commentator has remarked, stands even today amid the industrial ruins of the Steel Valley as an example of Carnegie's "extraordinary philanthropy." For the "sole condition" attached to most of his library gifts, the commentator continues, was a pledge from municipal authorities to support the library with a minimal tax assessment. In truth, Carnegie's gifts presupposed an exchange — an unequal, involuntary exchange — and the personal assessments he extracted from Braddock, Homestead and the other Monongahela steel towns which each have their own Carnegie Library far exceeded the value of his gift. In no sense were his libraries "free" to the people.<sup>33</sup>

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Hegemony is a difficult social concept to grasp, for it entails the conscious and unconscious manipulation of everyday structures of work and pleasure as well as a whole body of practices and expectations, thoughts and values, that circulate invisibly in our culture to reinforce patterns of domination and subordination. In this century, Antonio Gramsci, the Italian political theorist, has provided the clearest route to understanding hegemony; in the last century, Andrew Carnegie, no

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32 This interpretation is suggested by McCloskey, *American Conservatism*, 163.

33 Pepper, "A Department Store of Learning." Pepper mistakenly notes that Carnegie "promised" libraries to Homestead as well as to Duquesne in his Braddock speech. A similar misreading can be found in Kidney, *Landmark Architecture*, 284. In the Braddock dedication speech, Carnegie informed the residents of Homestead that "they (too) evidently need a library." Homesteaders — reading between his lines — knew that Carnegie's offer was more threat than promise. Indeed, as the events of 1892 were to prove, for the "privilege" of a library they could expect to pay a heavy fine.

mean theorist himself, suggested ways to achieve it. The degree to which he succeeded raises an important question. One thing is certain: many of his employees saw through his gambit before they succumbed to force. ■

Garland Publishing Inc. seeks contributors for a compact encyclopedia, *The War of the American Revolution*. Writers who wish to contribute articles of 50 to 2,000 words on the military and naval aspects of the 1763-1783 era (battles, campaigns, skirmishes, frontier fighting, prominent commanders, weaponry, maritime affairs, etc.) should contact Richard L. Blanco, History Department, SUNY College at Brockport, NY 14420.