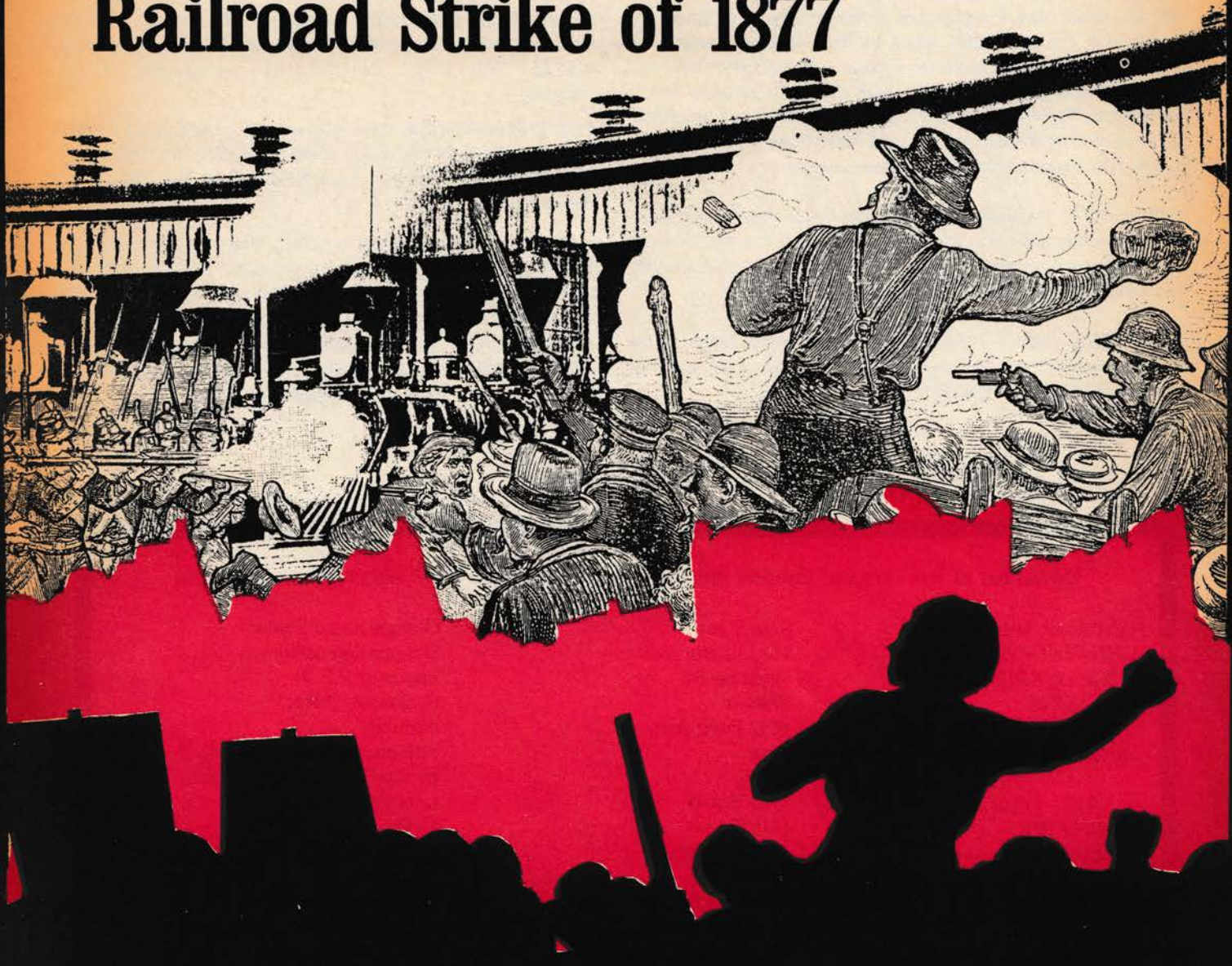


# The Pittsburgh Insurrection and Railroad Strike of 1877



*A Progressive Labor Party Pamphlet*

25¢



# Dedication

In the 1870's the working class was not organized as it will be when the Progressive Labor Party organizes to overthrow the capitalist class in this coming period of war and fascism. Nevertheless, Mao's dictum was as true then as it is today, "A single spark can set a prairie fire" (as long as the wheat is dry). We dedicate this pamphlet to those men and women who laid their lives on the line to spark the flames that swept the country.

**WILLIAM P. VANDEGRIFF**, striker from Martinsburgh, W. Va., who held the switch to stop the trains leaving Martinsburgh while the army blew him away. The switch remained in the closed position.

**AUGUSTUS "GUS" HARRIS**, trainmen who refused to man a "double-header" out from Pittsburgh, thus setting off the strike in Pittsburgh.

A black steamboatman, unnamed, who demanded of the crowd of black and white workers in St. Louis, "Will you stand with us regardless of color?," and the crowd roared, "We will!" The St. Louis strike was off and running.

**PAT THE AVENGER**, who followed in a dedicated manner and organized to cut down those Philadelphia militia who had killed his working class brothers at the 28th Street crossing.

**TO ALL THOSE WHO RAISED THE FIGHT AGAINST CAPITAL, TO ALL THOSE WHO ORGANIZED STRIKES, TO ALL THOSE WHO ADVANCED THE CAUSE OF THE WORKING PEOPLE, WE DEDICATE THIS PIECE OF WORKING CLASS HISTORY. LET THE VILLAINS WHO HIDE OUR HISTORY SHAKE. WE HAVE OUR CHAINS TO THROW OFF, AND A WORLD TO GAIN.**

## Partial list of workers and families murdered during the July 1877 Pittsburgh insurrection

SAMUEL P. JAMISON	37th Street	Occupation unknown
JOHN F. HOFFMAN	147 Liberty Ave.	Occupation unknown
JACOB De ARUNOTT	Webster St.	Engineer P.R.R.
JOHN LONG	Bolivar	Brakeman P.R.R.
CHARLES FLECHER	1043 Penn Ave.	Plumber
JACOB NEWMIESTER	Etna	Pittsburgh militiaman killed by the Philadelphia militia
SAMUEL LONG	17th Ward	Laborer
JOHNNY RHU	16th Street	18 years old
WILLIAM RAY	209 East Street	Allegheny (Pgh. North Side)
PATRICK CONNOR	29th Street	Machinist, Westinghouse Air Brake
DENIS CARTY	Diamond Street	Janitor at Emerald Hall
JOHN R. LONG	478 Liberty Ave.	Young boy
BENJAMIN HUCHANAN	Chauneey St., Minersville	Young boy
SAMUEL JAMISON	43rd & Butler St.	Plasterer
WM. GOTTSCHALK	36th & Butler St.	Saloon-keeper
NICHOLAS STOPPLE	Smallman Street	Barber
A CHILD OF A YEAR OLD	shot in the arms of its mother on the hill above 28th St.	
NICHOLAS KERR	Irwin Ave.	Brakeman Ft. Wayne R.R.
JOHN ENRIGHT	1 Carson St.	Peddler
ANTHONY WATCHER	Mulberry St.	Occupation unknown
JAMES WAGNER	5th Ward	Occupation unknown
WM. COSTELLO	Carson St.	Peddler
JOHN De CAMP	12th & Liberty	Brakeman, Pan Handle R.R.

# The Pittsburgh Insurrection of 1877

## INTRODUCTION

IN THE YEAR 1877, IN THE MONTH OF JULY from one end of the United States to the other, the railway workers went on strike. They struck after the fourth consecutive ten percent cut in their wages. They struck because their conditions had so eroded that they could barely survive. Their strike was a militant one. Most of the railroad lines from New York to San Francisco were affected, from the Mid-West to the South.

It was indeed a general railway strike. The railroad workers, in their struggles against the Pennsylvania, the New York Central, the Baltimore and Ohio and many others, gained much support from the rest of the industrial working class. In cities as far apart as Pittsburgh, Chicago and St. Louis, steel workers, iron workers, coal miners, farm workers, bargemen, glass workers, came out in support. In St. Louis, in fact, there was a general strike. In Pittsburgh the masses took complete hold of the city. In Chicago there was mass struggle against the ruling class and Marxists led the way.

Why is this strike of 100 years ago of such importance to the working class? What is meant by, "It is part of working class history?" What is history? What does history mean to working people? We will see from this pamphlet that history is hidden and distorted. We will see that, in fact, the makers of history are the workers, the masses, not the generals and kings. We will begin to understand what our great-grandparents did to stand up and change history. It wasn't done by the ballot, but by the bullet.

One important theme makes clear that the bosses used one railroad line to cut wages, and when it worked without a fight-back, they cut all the lines. Workers had to build a nation-wide fight—one to smash at all the railroad

bosses, not just one.

History means one thing to those few who rule us through their laws, arms, institutions, through their government, through our job situations, through their order and it means something else to us who work, who produce, who are the makers. History, as it has been taught to us, is of kings, generals, presidents, individual explorers and inventors. It's of factory owners and bishops and magnificent financiers, merchant princes and pharaohs, pimps and gangsters. In fact, it's of every-one except the people who put everything together: the masses, the workers. We are the real makers and breakers of history.

When we listen to news commentators on television, radio and in newspapers, they consistently tell us about the importance of the leadership of Carter, of the leadership of authority, of the leadership of one of the governors of one of the states and how important this leadership is to people. But, in fact, history is not made up of an inventor who comes upon, with "incredible understanding," a new thing like a railway train or an airplane. These are not the makers of history. They are only part of history. And the financiers who use incredible wealth to start enterprises (IBM or U.S. Steel, General Motors or Exxon) are not the makers of history. They are a reflection of working-class history. The presidents, senators and generals who sign treaties and imprison people, who hand down the laws, these people are not the makers of history, though they are a part, as all things are, of history. The makers, the prime movers of history, are the masses. Without them, there is no history.

The history that we are dealing with is of the mass uprisings in the United States of America in July of 1877. But to lift these great movements from the stream of history is to wonder how an egg became boiled without seeing the pot and the water and the gas that it was boiled in.

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DURING THE 1770'S, THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION began. It was the mass production of goods by mechanical methods, not individual effort. The sparks of this Industrial Revolution started in England and rapidly spread to Germany and the United States and around the world. It produced a new form of ruler, different from the barons and the earls, from the kings and queens. This ruler ruled a person's life through wage slavery and was able, through revolution, to take over from the old feudal class. They took over the state (the government) and passed their "democratic" laws.

In the U.S.A., the Industrial Revolution started to grow in the early 1800's. During the Civil War, capitalism and the Industrial Revolution and the new capitalist class shot forward (Morgan, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, etc.). Masses of people were involved in the production of goods, and in the Civil War there was an incredible amount of goods needed. In fact one of the reasons the North was able to

win was because it produced the necessary armaments and goods and services to keep the armies going. Industrial capitalism was reaching its heights and soon millions of people worked in industries—in iron and steel, on different railroads, in clothing factories, in mines, etc. There were still many farmworkers throughout the U.S.; most of the workers still worked on the farms, but industrialization was moving forward at a fast pace.

Immediately after the Civil War, the major form of industrial capitalist growth was the railway system. The railroads required huge amounts of iron and steel, of fuel, coal, wood and cloth. The railroad system grew at an incredible rate. Between 1867 and 1873, 30,000 new miles of track were laid. During the Great Depression of 1873 to 1893, 50,000 additional miles of track were laid. Invested capital grew from 2 to 10 billion dollars in a few years after the Civil War.

All this had been called railroad imperialism. For the



railroad owners and financiers, it was the golden age. The companies bought up much of the land throughout the West, which in fact, was given to them by the different states to bring in the railroad. By 1893 they owned a quarter of Minnesota and Washington state, a fifth of Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, North Dakota, Montana, a seventh of Nebraska, an eighth of California, and a ninth of Louisiana. Pennsylvania was called Tom Scott's state. Scott was the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad System; he made \$170,000 in 1873, an incredible sum for that period, more than kings and queens. The railroads also opened mines in Colorado, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Washington, Oregon and California. They had tremendous amounts invested in mines and timber. The railroads were indeed the center of capital.

All this incredible growth was directed by the financial and industrial capitalists and carried out by their mouthpieces and lawmakers in Washington and the state and city governments. Together they held the U.S. working class in a straight jacket. Although American financial and industrial capitalists were massive, the major imperialist capitalists in those days were the English. They invested billions in U.S. industry and for them the world was indeed their oyster, from India to Egypt to Africa to the Fiji Isles, British imperialism spanned the globe.

**BY 1873 WHEREAS THERE WAS MUCH CAPITAL** in the U.S. held by the capitalists, the fever for making quick money had become so full-blown that the capital needed to maintain the expansion could not be found; American capitalist development crumbled in 1873, along with Jay Cook and his bank. For the ruling class it was a time for consolidation and rationalization; for the working class a time of increasing poverty. The workers had always been poor and physically wretched, but during those years their health diintegrated even more. The railway capitalists and the Rockefellers and Carnegies adopted the philosophy of Herbert Spencer who came to the U.S. in 1873 from England. His ideas fit the bill perfectly: there should be no burdening of the "superior" to support the "inferior," but occasional charity lifts the moral integrity of the mighty. This was indeed a philosophy of imperialism and was embraced by the rulers of the United States. Against this massive wealth stood the masses of unemployed and employed workers, white and black.

After the Civil War, people began to assert their freedom by developing their farms, moving into cities for jobs and fighting to vote. White and black together joined in the fight to unionize, first through the National Labor Union in 1866 (the first nation-wide labor movement) and then in the Knights of Labor in the 1870's to better all working people's wages and lives. The northern capitalists, seeing the danger of a united working class and wanting to build bridges with the old slave-owning class, first withdrew the Union army from the South and allowed the Ku Klux Klan a free hand to kill and maim blacks and whites who supported blacks. The northern capitalists then used blacks as scabs against whites on strike. All these acts were to foment division. In fact, in

April 1877 in Braidwood, Illinois, the bosses brought in blacks to scab, during a major coal mine strike.

Most refused to scab. The height of this strike in which the bosses tried to divide black from white was reached in June. Only a few short weeks later the masses answered the bosses a different way with the tremendous unity of black and white during the Great Railroad Strike. Black workers everywhere refused to scab.

**IN THE DEPRESSION OF 1873 UNEMPLOYMENT** increased sharply; by 1876 it was as high as 20 percent, and even higher in many states. Trade unions most often were only city-wide and limited to one specific skill or trade. On the railroad brakemen, firemen and engineers were split up. Such divisions made the bosses' job easier. They were able, for the most part, to run their business without hinderance. By 1877 railroad union membership nation-wide had shrunk to 15,000.

Conditions had become so anarchic in the U.S. that millions of starving unemployed tramped from city to city looking for work. All the journals of the day talked of this mass movement. Youth, for their part, fought back; the term "young hoodlum" became current in 1876.

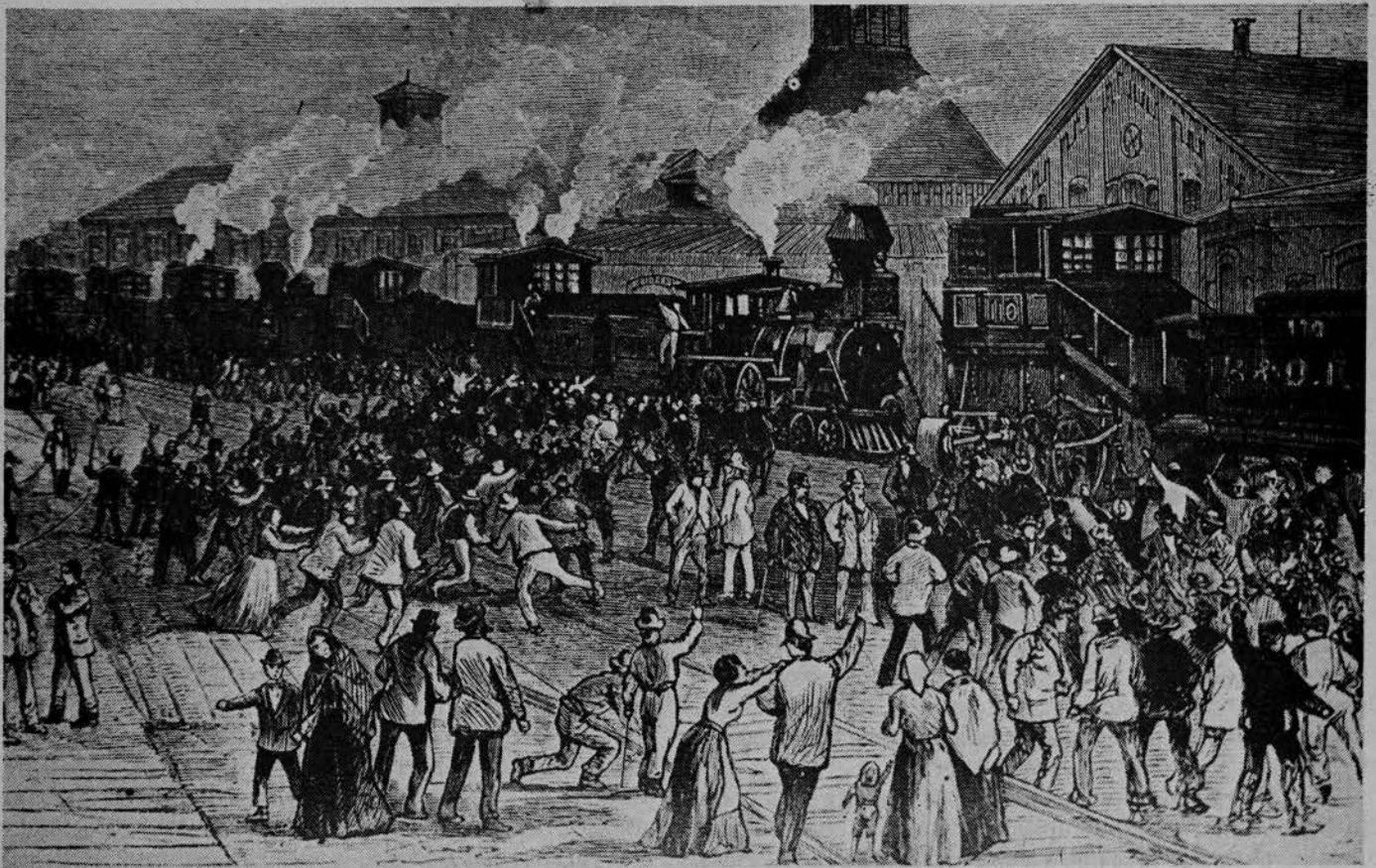
Because of railroad imperialism and its central importance to capital, the railroad workers' wages and productivity were of the greatest importance to the capitalist class. Here, super-profits were squeezed out of the working class. During the 1870's the railroad bosses sought to offset revenue losses by cutting back workers' pay another 10 percent. The division among the various trades caused a stalemate. The bosses thought workers would knuckle under, but the fourth cut in three years was the last straw.

In 1877 the Robert Barons of the United States were riding high. They seemed immune to the troubles of their European predecessors. The United States was a nation undergoing a great industrial expansion. Railroad, steel, and other budding monopoly corporations were wielding an "incredible power," netting enormous profits despite a depression that had been in progress for four years. Although unemployment was above the 3,000,000 mark, with millions more working one or two days a week (in a labor force of approximately 20,000,000), and although wages had dropped 40 to 50 percent since the Civil War, big business was still making giant strides.

1877 was a year of murder, too. It witnessed one of the most barbaric acts of a rising ruling class: the hanging of 11 workers, the Molly McGuires, who had attempted to organize the coal miners of Pennsylvania. In such an atmosphere a British writer was moved to write:

"For some time past, the wealthier classes in the United States have been pervaded by an uneasy feeling that they were living over a mine of social and industrial discontent, and that one day this mine would explode and blow society into the air."

The mine did explode in 1877, and while it did not "blow society into the air" completely, the explosion did put an embargo on 20,000 miles of freight traffic, including the four major trunk lines from the Atlantic to the



**THE STRIKE IS ON! . . . Workers mass to stop the trains on the B.&O. at Martinsburgh, West Virginia**

Mississippi. Hundreds of thousands of men and women belonging to the laboring classes, ceased to work, seized railroads, closed factories, foundries, shops, mills, mines, and laid a complete embargo on all internal commerce. The state militia was called out in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia, New York, New Jersey, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, and Missouri. And finally, for the first time in U.S. history, Federal troops were used. Their guns and bayonets were responsible for the killing of more than 100 workers and injuring nearly 500 others. In short, it was the nearest thing to a nationwide general strike that the U.S. had ever experienced. Echoes of the Paris Commune were heard in Pittsburgh in those fateful July days.

**CONSIDER THE STATE OF THE PENNSYLVANIA** Railroad, the principal struck corporation. In 1877, the PRR owned, leased, operated, or controlled 90 different railroad lines, canals and ferries in nine states. When the depression of 1873 began, this monopoly was worth nearly \$50 million in cash value of stocks and bonds, with a capitalization of \$40,000,000. Its holdings extended over 6,000 miles.

In the early years of the decade, it had secured control of 28,000 acres of anthracite coal fields in the vicinity of its lines. Its president, Col. Thomas Scott, was paid \$175,000 annually, free from income taxes. This salary did not include amounts "earned" from stock and bond holdings, nor his salary as U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania. And, "after having salted down in the surplus

fund more than \$1,500,000, paid 8 percent dividends, all interest on bonds, taxes, and expenses of every name and nature, there was in the corporation's treasury on January 1, 1877 available cash assets derived from profits of the previous year amounting to \$3,613,315.06, a prosperity almost unequalled in the history of railroads in the U.S."

Moreover, the existence of billions of dollars of "watered stock" upon which dividends were paid meant that the actual dividends was twice the 8 percent reported. Truly, in magnitude of operations, the PRR surpassed all other railroads in the world. Its size was matched by an unmitigated arrogance. Vast sums were wasted by the presidents and directors in lavish expenditures of free passes and special cars to friends, in stock-jobbing speculations, and in the form of ostentatious extravagance. This was the opinion of a special committee of the British Parliament which reported to that body on the strikes.

Meanwhile, the railroad bosses pooled their west-bound traffic and entered into a local alliance in New York to further increase their control. The PRR also used to place money in express and transportation companies, thereby impairing the apparent real earnings of the railroad. This is a practice still used by the Penn-Central (CONRAIL) through investments in hotels in mid-town New York City. They then accumulated large amounts in "reserve" and "surplus" funds. A plaintive cry arose among the stockholders after several years, "that the officers were absorbing the legitimate earnings by in-



cidental enterprises, collusion with contractors, patrons, etc., and were growing rich faster than the stockholders."

It was no wonder President Scott could report on March 13, 1877 that the PRR was in such good shape (despite the depression) that it will continue to yield satisfactory results. The condition of its employees, however, was quite another matter.

**AN EXAMINATION OF HOW THE WORKING CLASS** was faring amid such a "prosperity" reveals the source of this fabulous wealth. Figures tell part of the story, and they show that the wages of 13 categories of PRR workers in 1877 were nearly 20 percent short of what was absolutely needed to support themselves and their families. These cost-of-living wage comparisons assumed year-round employment, which was far from the case.

On the Baltimore & Ohio, firemen were averaging \$20-\$27 monthly, from which they were forced to pay board expenses while away from home, leaving only 45c a day to support their families. The average wage on the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western was \$18-\$25 a month. Many were not earning 75c on days they worked, and there were constant references to wages being reduced to the starvation point, and the striking down of salaries to a point below the requirements of life.

The impoverishment of the railroad workers reached the impossible situation on the Cleveland and Lake Shore road, in which a brakeman was being paid 16c for a run into Cleveland and then was forced to pay 25c fare to report back to the dispatcher! But figures tell only part of the story.

Constant and incessant waiting helped to depress conditions even more. Not working full-time, workers would have to wait in the yards to be hired; if away for a moment a man's chance might be lost. Many times all the work was given to one man, others being turned away after waiting all day. Once dispatched, men would have to wait at the other end of the line for a ride home, receiving pay neither for waiting or traveling time. While a train was undergoing repairs, men would have to mark time, again without pay. One engine might be laid up from six weeks to three months in the course of a year. Such conditions caused one newspaper to comment that wages were so low that "it takes all the time not consumed in sleep to earn enough to keep body and soul together."

One company practice was particularly insidious. An engineer earning \$2.70 a day would have his wages cut 10 percent or 27c to \$2.43 per day, with the promise that when "conditions improved" the reduction would be restored. But the 10 percent "restored" was computed as 10 percent of \$2.43 or 24c, raising his wage back to only \$2.67. By such a process the owners paid 8 percent dividends.

In the Lackawanna mine valleys, owned by the PRR, miners went to work without breakfast and empty lunch boxes, content with one meal when the day's work was done, if thereby their families could be kept from unendurable sufferings. "Slavery has been abolished in America," remarked one man, "but there is a modified

form of it on the PRR."

**ON MAY 26, 1877 THE PRR ANNOUNCED THAT,** due to "depressed business conditions," there would be a 10 percent wage-cut instituted on June 1. This would be the fourth since the beginning of the depression in 1873. That there was a "depressed condition" was a lie, and the bosses knew it. Just 10 weeks earlier, Scott had reported that the causes of the "disturbance of the country's business interest have been so far removed that he could guarantee continued satisfactory results." The company had been netting from **7 to 9 million dollars annually**. In 1877 net freight profits increased, bearing out Scott's prediction.

The railroad bosses had agreed previously that if the PRR workers submitted to the cut, the New York Central would follow on July 1, and the Baltimore and Ohio on the 15th. They assumed any possible strike would have been knocked out of the workers by then. However, they dared not to make a reduction on two main lines at the same time.

The June 1 cut on the PRR went over with little resistance. Some workers of the newly-formed Trainmen's Union were planning a strike, but company officials were informed of the plan and when all leaders of the union were fired, the strike collapsed. With no further protest, the company assumed they had beaten the workers into taking the cut.

Events moved rapidly as the bubble stretched to its bursting point. On July 15th the Baltimore and Ohio announced its 10 percent cut in wages, to take effect the next day. On that same day railroad workers at Westernport, Maryland and Martinsburg, West Virginia went on strike. Below is a proclamation from Maryland announcing the strike and the reasons for it:

**"STRIKE AND LIVE! BREAD WE MUST HAVE! REMAIN AND PERISH!** A company that has from time to time so unmercifully cut our wages, and finally has reduced us to starvation, for such we have lost all sympathy. We have humbled ourselves from time to time to unjust demands until our children cry for bread. A company that knows all this, we should ask in the name of high heaven what more do they want, our blood! They can get our lives. We are willing to sacrifice them, not for the company, but for our rights. Call out your armed hosts, if you want them. Shield yourselves if you can, and remember that no foe, however dreaded, can repel us for a moment. Our determination may seem frail, but let it come. They may think our cause is weak; 15,000 noble miners and railroaders who have been insulted and put upon by this self same company, are at our backs. The working classes in every state in the union are in our favor, and we feel confident that the God of the poor and the oppressed of the earth is with us. Therefore, let the clashing of arms be heard; let the fiery elements be poured out if they think it right, but in need of our right and in defense of our families, we shall conquer, or we shall die."

The strike was on!

**WITHIN A MATTER OF HOURS, THE B&O RUNNING** from Baltimore through West Virginia and Pennsylvania to Columbus, Ohio was shut tight. Soon afterwards the "armed hosts" were called out. On the very first day three strike leaders were arrested in Baltimore, charged with "attempting to incite a riot." The next day rail bosses began to order their mayors and governors to crush the strike. Never before had the U.S. ruling class's use of state power been more naked.

B&O Vice-President King wired Governor Matthews of West Virginia, who then ordered two militia companies to escort scabs onto trains. At Martinsburg, the mayor arrested the strike leaders, but hundreds of workers rescued them. Troops from Wheeling were sent to Grafton, W.Va. and arrested suspected strike leaders.

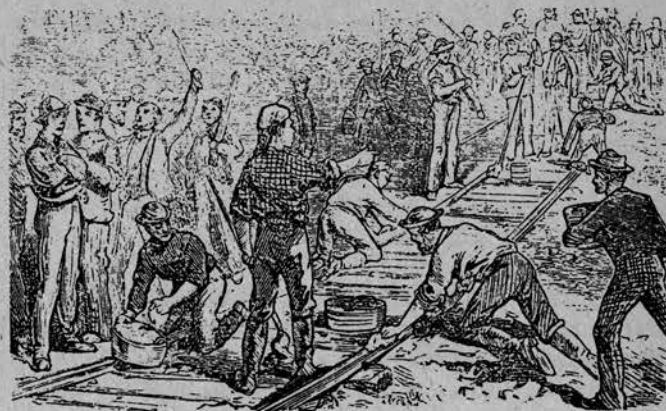
The strike was not 24 hours old when the first blood was spilled. Troops in Baltimore who were being sent to break the strike were met by thousands of angry workers who denounced their use as strike-breakers. The troops fired into the crowds, killing nine and wounding 18 to "protect the railroads" in the heart of Baltimore. This was only the beginning; soon similar events were to take place in every major railroad center in 16 of the then 38 states. The nation's eyes turned to Pittsburgh. There the strike took a new turn; the workers fought back, and what was perhaps the closest to destruction by insurrection the U.S. bosses have ever been, occurred in those four days in July 1877.

The bosses of the PRR were so sure that their workers were duped into accepting the June 1st pay-cut, that on the 16th of July they decided to squeeze the workers a little more. Robert Pitcairn, Superintendent of the PRR's Pittsburgh Division, ordered all through freight trains from Pittsburgh to Conemaugh to be run as "double-headers" beginning Thursday, July 19th. Instead of one locomotive and about 13 cars, the same crew would now operate two locomotives and 30 cars. This meant that one fireman would have to hop from one engine to another in order to keep coal in the burner. It also meant that the brakeman would have double the cars to climb over the top in order to set brakes. The rail bosses could now move a larger amount of freight with half the number of brakemen and firemen, lining Mr. Scott's pockets with still more profits.

#### THURSDAY, JULY 19th

At 12:01 a.m., Thursday the 19th, the new order for "double-headers" took effect and at 3:00 a.m. the first of the new trains pulled out with no sign of resistance from the workers. Robert Pitcairn was so convinced that his order would be swallowed by the men without protest that he left later that morning with his family for a holiday at their seaside resort in New Jersey.

At 8:30 that morning a large group of trainmen sat in the roundhouse and talked about the "double-headers." They also were reading the news about the B&O strike in Martinsburg and the shooting of workers in Baltimore. At that moment, conductor William Ryan was getting his crew together to take out the 8:40 freight. Just then a



Soaping the tracks at Hornellville, New York

young flagman named Augustus "Gus" Harris declared he would not crew the "double-header." His decision came as no surprise to most of the trainmen; they all felt the same about the order and it was just a question of who would be the first to speak out against it. Immediately the rest of Ryan's crew joined with young Harris and all refused to crew the 8:40. At 9:00 o'clock, Chief Clerk David Watt was informed of the incident; he ordered the train to be manned by another crew.

In the Trainmen's Room of the roundhouse, 25 crews were told to man the train; all 25 refused. Watt fired them on the spot. The news spread like a wildfire through the yards. Everywhere men were dropping their work and joining the crowd at the roundhouse. Trainmaster David Garrett was called to the scene now and he ordered that the train be crewed by anyone who could be found. A dispatcher named McCabe found a trio of yardmen who said they would take the freight out. They were led to the train by Garrett, where they were met by the striking rail workers whose numbers were growing rapidly.

The workers of the PRR were determined that this train would not be moved. When one of the trio of scabs tried to couple a caboose to the train, he was stopped by a striking worker who threw a link pin at him. The scab ran like a dog to hide in the Philadelphia Express which sat near by. Seeing this the other scabs also fled. So the 8:40 stood idle; the workers of Pittsburgh had won the first round in the battle against the rail bosses.

**WHEN NOON CAME THE NUMBER OF STRIKING** workers was well into the hundreds. Crews from trains coming into Pittsburgh and from trains passing through had left their engines and joined the strike. Seeing that the workers were determined to hold their ground, Watt decided to call the police to stop the strike. Watt went off to see Pittsburgh's mayor McCarthy to ask for police aid. Meanwhile, the workers began taking possession of all the main switches into and out of the Pittsburgh freight yard.

Watt arrived at City Hall and found that the City Council had just laid off virtually the entire day-force of cops. When Watt asked the mayor himself to come out and talk with the workers he refused, saying that the troubles of the PRR were none of his concern. But he informed Watt that most of the laid-off policemen were in



the building collecting their last pay, and if he wished to put them on the PRR's payroll he was sure it could be arranged. Watt then hired ten cops. When they arrived back at the yards, they were able to retake a couple of switches, but Watt soon found that even if all the switches were cleared not one worker could be found to move a train. So now the striking workers had won a second round. Furious, Watt sent a message to Mayor McCarthy ordering him to send 50 policemen. Five showed up, so about 1:00 p.m. Watt left the city for the stockyards at Torrens Station in East Liberty to see if any of the stock trains could be moved.

At Torrens Station, as in the Pittsburgh freight yards, a large group of railroaders and their families had gathered. By coupling a yard engine to a stock train and fooling the crowd, Watt was able to get one train east-bound, with a crew of foremen and small bosses. At 4:00 p.m. Watt wanted to repeat this move again, but was stopped when no one could be found to man the train. Back in Pittsburgh, a large crowd of people had begun to gather at the 28th Street Crossing. In the next few days this place was to become known to the entire population of the city. There were a couple of attempts to move trains when a few scabs would be found or bought, but each time the attempt was beaten back by the workers. Finally the bosses gave up and no trains were moved on the 19th.

**AT ABOUT 5:00 P.M. WATT WENT ONCE AGAIN** to City Hall to see Mayor McCarthy, but was informed that the mayor had left the city for Castle Shannon where his wife was supposedly sick. When he demanded police assistance, he was told by the mayor's clerk that the day-force was too busy and that the night-force were needed elsewhere. For any more help he was suggested to see Allegheny County Sheriff Fife.

Watt met with Fife later that night, and persuaded him to go to 28th St. and talk with the workers there. Fife was booed and hissed as he climb atop a locomotive to address the workers. He ordered them to disperse and go home. This was met by loud shouts and jeering from the crowd. A worker took the lead and told Fife that the railroad workers had no intention of giving up the strike, at least not until the rail bosses restored the 10 percent wage cuts and dropped the "double-headers." "It's question of bread and blood," the worker exclaimed, "and we will fight the rail bosses to the end." With this, Fife gave up and left the crossing. Watt was demanding that Sheriff Fife gather a posse and either arrest the strikers or else physically remove them from company property. To this, Fife explained that not one man could be found who would move against the striking railroaders.

That night a large meeting was held on the North Side at Phoenix Hall where the railroad workers unanimously endorsed the strike. The workers from Pittsburgh were joined by fellow railroaders of the Western Division and together they adopted the following demands:

- 1) Restoration of all 10 percent wage cuts;
- 2) All workers fired for striking to be rehired to their former positions;

3) Engineers and firemen to have only one wage classification, the highest prior to the strike;

4) Double-headers to be abolished;

5) Every engine have it's own fireman.

**DURING THIS MEETING MESSAGES OF SUPPORT** were coming in from other workers. From the Monongahela Valley coal fields came this note: "Hold your positions until tomorrow, and we will send 500 coal miners to assist you." Next a young worker from a rolling steel mill took the floor and assured the railroaders of support from Pittsburgh labor generally. "We're with you," he said. "We're in the same boat. I heard a reduction of 10 percent hint in our mills this morning. I won't call employers despots, I won't call them tyrants, but the term capitalist is sort of synonymous and will do as well."

The meeting was interrupted several times by announcements of other roads joining the strike. The B&O's Connellsville branch to Pittsburgh was to be out on strike by morning. Other announcements were made when new train crews joined the strike. The meeting ended enthusiastically with a resolution and a call for "all workmen to make common cause with their brethern on the railroads."

After the meeting, large groups of people gathered again at the 28th Street crossing. The one thing that now scared the hell out of the bosses was the make-up of the crowd: men, women and children, black and white, old and young—one angry mass of workers and their families. At 9:00 p.m. they stopped a livestock train coming from Pittsburgh, but after holding it for a while decided, for the sake of the animals, to let it pass.

Meanwhile Watt was busy sending telegrams to the Pennsylvania Adjutant General James Latta, informing him that the police and sheriff were useless against the striking workers. Tom Scott also received news of the events in Pittsburgh at the home of his daughter in Delaware. Among the top officials of the PRR arose the cry almost in chorus, "WE WANT TROOPS!"

General Latta sent a telegram to Major General Alfred L. Pearson, Commander of the 6th Division of the Pittsburgh militia, asking him to send a full report of the situation, and his opinion on whether troops would be needed. But this was a decision that was already decided. Robert Pitcairn, who had quickly returned from his vacation, called Fife, Watt, Pearson, and ex-senator John Scott to his office. After little discussion the decision was made. Scott drew up the dispatch, Fife signed it and it was sent to Latta, asking that the Pittsburgh militia be used against the striking railroad workers. The answer came at 3:30 a.m., Friday, July 20th. It was a short message ordering Gen. Pearson to call out the troops.

#### **FRIDAY, JULY 20th**

Friday morning nothing ran except passenger and mail trains. At that time, the workers were only striking freight. In the yards the workers had complete control of all the main switches. A crowd of about 600 men, women and children was gathered at Torrens Station that





The workers of Pittsburgh arm themselves at a local gun shop.

morning. Sheriff Fife arrived and tried to scare the people into leaving by reading them the telegram ordering out the militia. From the crowd came again the cry of "Bread or blood," and someone shouted, "We will wade in blood to our knees before we back down from the PRR." With this, Fife again gave up and left.

The morning papers carried large advertisements from Pearson calling the members of the Pittsburgh militia to report with arms to the Union Depot. Unlike other cities, Pittsburgh had no pre-arranged signal for alerting the militia, so this meant the only way the militia could be reached was either by going from home to home or putting ads in the papers.

Meanwhile, on the steps of the Union Depot Robert Pitcairn agreed to meet with a group of railroad workers. The group brought the list of demands approved the night before at the Phoenix Hall meeting. With Pitcairn was the PRR Vice-President Cassatt who had come to Pittsburgh during the night on a special train. When Cassatt read the demands he told Pitcairn, "Have no further talks with them; they have asked for things we can't grant them at all. It isn't worthwhile to discuss the matter. I can't possibly send such a paper to Mr. Scott."

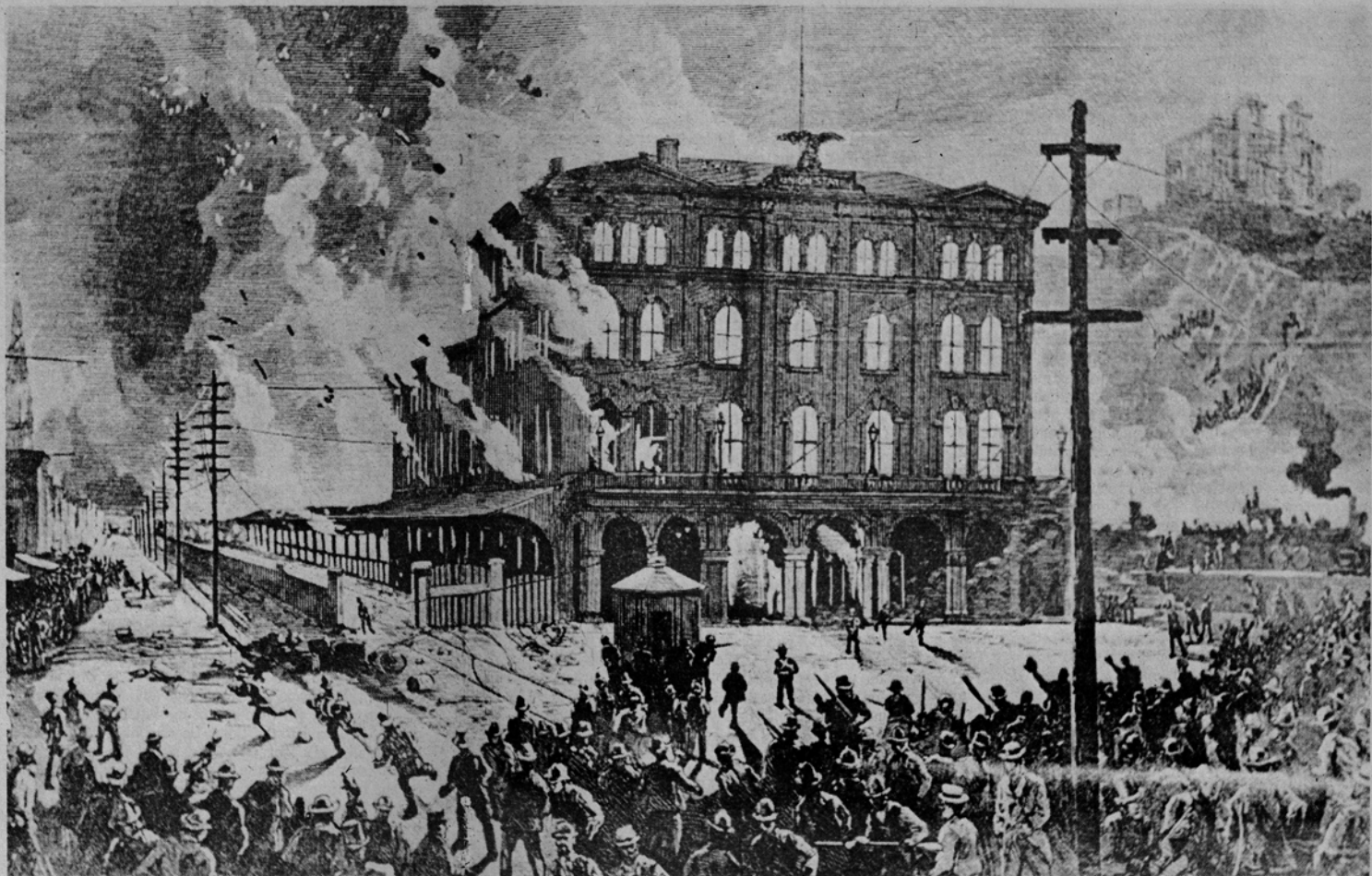
Colonel Guthrie was having his share of trouble this Friday morning. Even though most of the men of his 18th Regiment had been contacted during the night, they were not showing up as ordered. By noon less than 2/3 of the regiment reported. Not one from the 14th Regiment had shown, only 50 from the 19th, and Captain Breck came

later with only 25, and two artillery pieces. General Pearson assembled the small force and marched then up Liberty Ave. towards the 28th St. crossing. Upon seeing the size of the group there, he withdrew and returned to the Union Depot to talk with company officials. He told them that this little group of militia could do nothing to break up the thousands gathered at the crossing. The troops' only effect could come from firing on the crowd and using the artillery to clear the crossing.

**IMMEDIATELY CASSATT GAVE PEARSON THE O.K.** to order the troops to fire on the striking workers. Although the rail bosses understood that the strike must be broken, many were not yet ready to turn to wholesale murder to do it. Such was William Thaw, Vice-President of the Ft. Wayne Railroad. He strongly opposed Cassatt's order. Being a native Pittsburgher (which Cassatt was not) Thaw also questioned whether local militia would fire on strikers, many of whom were relatives, neighbors or friends.

After a heated debate, Pearson was told to bring his troops back to Union Depot and keep them there until further orders. The troops stacked their arms and openly mixed and mingled with the groups of strikers. Later it was discovered that the large number of militiamen who did not show up, strongly supported the strike. They knew they might be called on to shoot down their own townspeople to protect the PRR.

It is clear that the Pittsburgh militia handed their guns



ATTACKING THE SEATS OF POWER . . . Workers put the torch to the Union Depot, Pittsburgh headquarters of the Pennsylvania Railroad bosses.



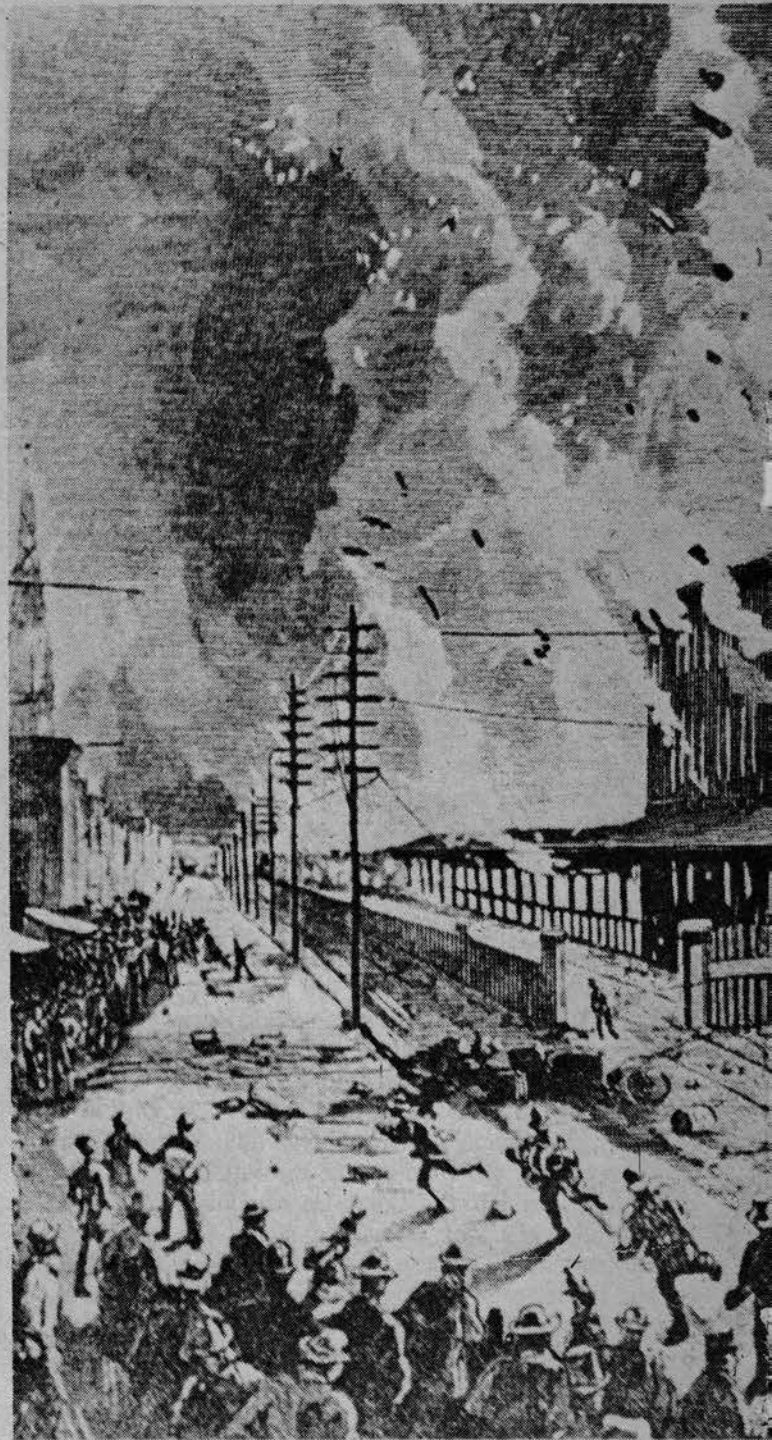
over to their brothers and sisters at the 28th Street Crossing. It became even more clear that the Pittsburgh militia was part of the working class when one of their number was later gunned down by the Philadelphia militia. With their army experience, the Pittsburgh militia was among the leaders of the later attack upon the roundhouse, making it clear that working-class soldiers, once understanding they are being used as a pawn by the capitalist class, will unite with their class brothers and sisters.

The rail bosses in Pittsburgh were soon to realize that Thaw's predictions were accurate, that the effectiveness of the Pittsburgh militia was nil. Cassatt, again quick to respond, pointed out that troops from Philadelphia could be brought to Pittsburgh immediately by a special train that the PRR would be happy to arrange. He also declared that due to a petty quarrel between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia that had existed for years, there would be no chance of the troops from Philadelphia being sympathetic with workers from Pittsburgh. (This quarrel between the two cities went back at least 30 years. In 1846 Philadelphia's influence in the legislature denied the B&O a right-of-way to Pittsburgh. Pittsburghers held an indignant meeting against "Philadelphia capitalists," and the *Pittsburgh Gazette* condemned "the bitter hostility of Philadelphia to our interest in this respect." A Philadelphia reporter wrote home from Pittsburgh that "not only the citizens but the merchants generally are now greatly exasperated against Philadelphia." A generation later, in 1877, Pittsburghers regarded Philadelphia as the seat of Col. Thomas Scott's empire, and they were sure to look upon the Philadelphia militia as oppressors.

Immediately the telegrams went out to Tom Scott and Adjutant General Latta asking for the Philadelphia militia. Later that evening Latta called the First Division of the Pennsylvania National Guard to duty, ordering them to report to the Union Depot in Philadelphia. The 600 men were put on two special trains, provided by the PRR, and were on their way to Pittsburgh. The trip was not to be an easy one, though, for all along the way thousands of workers gathered to boo them as they passed or throw rocks at the train. This was a small sample of the class hatred they were to meet in Pittsburgh itself.

#### SATURDAY, JULY 21st

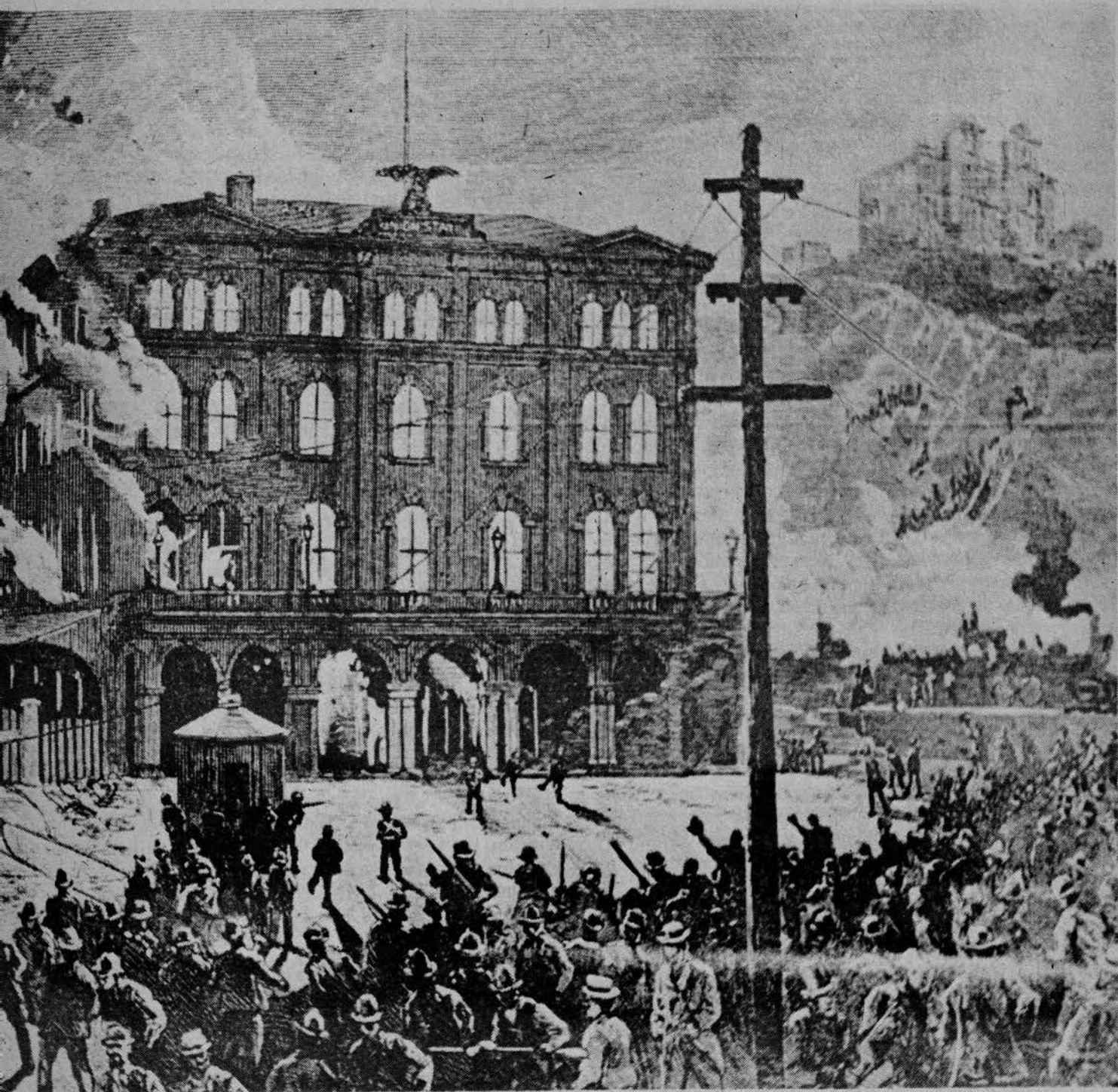
The Philadelphia militia arrived in Pittsburgh at noon on July 21st. This being a Saturday, there was thousands of people at the 28th Street Crossing to watch their arrival. The mills in Pittsburgh worked only a half a day on Saturday, so steelworkers by the hundreds had joined the railroaders, many bringing their families. The hill above the railroad at 28th Street (where Bigalow Blvd. now runs) was completely covered with people. As the two trains pulled in from the east, one could see gun barrels sticking out from the windows. The condition of the trains indicated the trip had not been a pleasant one. The cars were battered and debris was piled on their roofs from the massive stonings they had received in Harrisburg, Johnstown and Altoona. As the trains



ATTACKING THE SEATS OF POWER . . . Workers put the torch to

entered the yard, the troops looked out over the thousands of people and saw over 2,000 idle freight cars and locomotives. They and their masters understood clearly that their job was to get these cars moving, regardless of the cost.

The two trains proceeded quickly through the yards to the Union Depot. There the troops were taken inside and fed. As they sat and awaited orders, each soldier was given an extra 10 rounds of ammunition. At 4:00 p.m. they were marched out of the Depot in columns of four and began moving up Liberty Ave. The rear detachment was



the Union Depot, Pittsburgh headquarters of the Pennsylvania Railroad bosses.

pulling two Gatling guns. They were led by Sheriff Fife and 17 deputies (some were members of his family). These deputies had warrants for the arrest of 11 strike leaders. The crowd at the crossing at this time was estimated to be between 5,000 and 6,000 men, women and children.

When the troops reached 28th Street, they split into two columns. One stayed on the Liberty Ave. side of the main tracks; and the other went along the base of the hill above the tracks. Their orders were to clear the tracks. The troops came up against the crowd like a wall. In the

words of a witness, "The troops recoiled like jumping up against a rock; the crowd stood right like a wall; there was no give."

"Hold the fort," yelled the audience on the hillside to the crowd below; "stand to your post!" The advance was superfluous, since the sheer density of the crowd prevented their retreat. One Philadelphia soldier collapsed from sunstroke or a fit and, stiffened in spasm, was carried to the telegraph office two blocks back.

The order was passed to the blue-clad east ranks to advance up the tracks and meet the crowd with fixed



bayonets. The troops lowered the shiny points and moved against the crowd. Several felt the steel enter their flesh; a machinist got a bayonet in the back. Still the crowd held their place, many grabbed the bayonets with their bare hands and twisted them, either taking the gun from the astonished soldiers, or getting severely cut. Howls, curses and yells erupted from the crowd. One officer in a maddened fit screamed at the crowd, "Why don't you people move back!"

**THERE IS NO CLEAR PICTURE OF WHAT HAPPENED** next. Some say that the crowd on the hill watching this bayonet assault on their friends began to throw stones at the Philadelphia troops. Others say that the troops saw they were completely boxed in by thousands of angry workers, and the officers saw that the only course was to shoot their way out. At investigative hearings held after the strike, the officers denied that such an order was given, but witness after witness from the crowd of people who were at the crossing, all tell the same story—that the order to fire was clearly heard.

Suddenly from the front of the formation came the roar of muskets. The crowd was dumb-struck, but only for a moment. Then they started yelling and screaming. At the front of the formation, angry workers grabbed for the soldiers' guns; the troops stepped back and fired into the crowd again. They fired in all directions outward from their hollow square. The next volley of fire was centered on the hillside where the supposed stones were coming from. The rank facing Liberty Ave. turned around and fired over the heads of their fellow troops. All along the hillside people were seen falling and little wisps of dust were seen where bullets hit the hill.

How many died in those few moments cannot be determined. The *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette* wrote a day or two later that the number killed was 20. Ten deaths were certain, but many who were dead or wounded were carried off by friends to be buried or to die later.

Fifteen Philadelphia soldiers were hurt, but none were killed. Finally, when a cease-fire order was given, General Britton decided to pull his troops back and get them away from the crossing. They picked up their wounded, carried them back to 26th Street and took refuge in the roundhouse. It was decided that they would spend the night there and move against the crowd on the hill and at the crossing again the next day. But, as a result of their murders of the workers at the crossing, this would be their last day in Pittsburgh.

**THE NEWS OF THE SLAUGHTER AT 26th STREET** spread through the city like wildfire. Thousands joined the workers in the street. The killings had jolted most people from passive ill will into fighting hatred. The group of Pittsburgh militia who were on the hillside at the time of the shootings took their arms and joined the ranks of the workers. It was clear that a battle between the forces of labor and the Pennsylvania Railroad was about to take place.

To insure that no more workers would be shot down

without any chance of defense, the working people of Pittsburgh began taking up arms. Some owners of city gun shops who were sympathetic to the strikers (they hated the PRR, too) gave all their guns to the workers. Those who would not see the workers just take them. Short meetings were held in the streets, and soon 4,000 armed workers, organized in semi-military order, with flags flying and drums beating, formed into two solid columns and marched to the roundhouse, one column up Penn Ave. and the other up Liberty Ave. Cheered on by the dense mass of people crowding the streets as far as the eye could see, they rapidly joined those workers who had surrounded the Philadelphia troops in the roundhouse. This army was truly a workers' army. It consisted of rail workers, steelworkers, glassworkers, miners, and all industries of Pittsburgh. The workers in its ranks were white, black and every nationality one could think of. The wives and daughters of the workers also joined in, transporting extra ammunition up to the roundhouse. Such a display of class unity had never been seen anywhere before, except during the 1871 Paris Commune.

Two hundred workers were established as a guard to patrol the area from the Union Depot to the stockyards, while from 10,000 to 20,000 workers set about forcing the troops from their roundhouse haven. All evening a blazing gun battle went on between the workers and the troops. Though no one was killed on either side, a couple of soldiers were wounded and the rest were kept in constant fear.

Later in the evening someone realized that the stronghold of the troops stood at the bottom of a gentle incline, with scores of loaded oil and coal cars standing at the top. Immediately the cry of "Let's roast 'em out!" went up from the crowd. The great barbecue began with the firing of a freight car. It was easily pushed down the incline, but a misplaced switch sent the car tumbling off the track near the upper roundhouse. Then a half dozen coke cars rumbled down and crashed against the derailed car with a sound heard plainly by thousands on the hillside. Oil cars were touched off and sent down the grade. Great clouds of smoke boiled up from the flaming mass. Whenever a car would slow down on its decline to the roundhouse, twenty or so workers would run out and give it a fresh push.

The sand house was the first to catch fire. Then slowly, the flames worked their way to the roundhouse. Being of stone it would not burn, but the huge fire created such an intense heat, that it became unbearable for the troops inside. The fire made the night sky of Pittsburgh glow bright red. Before the crowd on the hillside a spectacle unfolded to be remembered for a lifetime. Reflected fire glittered from the eyes of thousands. Farmers, a dozen or so miles out in the country began to wonder about the strange glow on the horizon over Pittsburgh way.

#### SUNDAY, JULY 22nd

At 2:35 a.m. on the morning of July 22nd, 1877, the *New York Times* reporter in Pittsburgh filed a dispatch to the effect that the working class of Pittsburgh "had taken

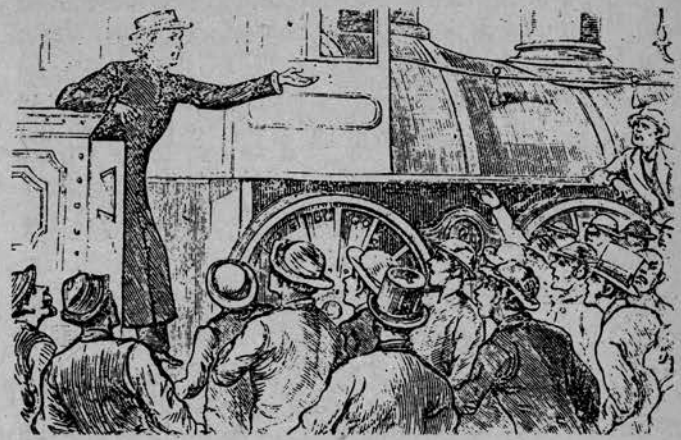
possession of the city."

Later that morning, at 7:30, the all-night firing of the roundhouse paid off; suddenly the roof of the building burst into flames. At 7:50 General Britton's troops came running out of the roundhouse. A gun battle took place in which men on both sides fell. The Philadelphia troops took off at full flight down Penn Ave., towards the Allegheny Arsenal. There they hoped to get a fresh supply of ammunition and food, for they had not eaten since the coffee and sandwiches of Saturday noon and were down to a couple of rounds per man. All along the retreat, women and children leaned from house windows and cursed the Philadelphians. Men waited impassively with navy revolvers sagging in their coats. The troops at the head of the column met no opposition; but behind them they presently heard the crackling reports of rifles and pistols.

A little past 32nd Street, a tall middle-aged man had begun to follow the retreating troops with a breech-loading rifle. From a white belt around his waist hung a black cartridge box. The lone attacker fired coolly and deliberately, now and then stepping into a doorway or alley to reload. One person claimed afterwards to have overheard him muttering something about getting revenge for the killing of his best friend at the 28th Street shooting. Occasionally his shots found their target. A soldier fell dead at 33rd Street, whereupon several soldiers paused to fire back at their grim pursuer. Splinters grazed a doorway and struck the man in the face, but he kept on, unscathed otherwise. He seemed bent on following them, regardless of his own life, until he fell or ran out of targets. Never identified, he was passed on into Pittsburgh legend as "Pat the Avenger."

**THE PHILADELPHIA TROOPS REACHED THE ARSENAL**, but found it, offered them little protection. The workers had already taken all the ammunition, and the officers of the Pittsburgh militia who were at the Armory wanted no part of the Philadelphia troops, telling them to move on. So the troops kept on the run down Penn Ave. and onto Butler Street and did not stop running until they reached Sharpsburg. By now the workers had given up the pursuit, seeming content to have chased them out of town. In Sharpsburg no one would give, or even sell, a crumb of food to the fugitives. Two Sharpsburg boys had been among the Pittsburgh militia wounded on the hillside Saturday afternoon, and the hatred in the town persuaded Britton to push on. About noon he stopped his men on a hill near the Allegheny County Work House. The inmates yelled insults and heckled the troops from their cell windows, but by now this was mild treatment for the Philadelphia forces. Later the workhouse guards and officials gave them bread, coffee and some meat. It was here that the "crack" troops from Philadelphia would remain until the strike was over. They were completely crushed by the might of the working class of Pittsburgh.

Mayor McCarthy, who had returned to Pittsburgh late Saturday night, was figuring that the Philadelphia militia would emerge from the roundhouse Sunday morning and at last put an end to the strike. Therefore, he had not held the police night-force, which went off duty at 6:00 a.m.



Bishop Twigg about to be cut down (see p. 12)

When the mayor finally realized that the Philadelphians had been run completely out of the city, he wired the central station to hold all night cops who might still be there. These few unlucky stragglers, along with the day-shift, totaled less than 80 men. The Chief of Police had advertised in the Sunday papers for all laid-off policemen to "volunteer" for the emergency. This appeal received little response; those few who did appear came late and showed no enthusiasm. The small force was scattered throughout the crowds of thousands and at any given moment the mayor and police chief could get no more than 15 men together in a body.

For most of the day Mayor McCarthy went up and down Liberty Ave. trying to find volunteers for the police force. Later he came to the platform at Union Depot where he attempted to tell the crowd to end the strike. Hooting and jeering drowned him out, and finally, taking all of his wimpering they could, the crowd picked up all 210 lbs. of him and dumped him on the street outside.

Sheriff Fife could not be found at all this Sunday morning. He was last seen just after the massacre at 28th Street on Saturday afternoon, heading west along the tracks and "making pretty good time." During the night, people had warned his family to leave Pittsburgh before they were burned out or killed. Mrs. Fife sought refuge with her neighbors, but nobody on Washington Street would let her in. They blamed her husband for the murders at 28th St. For his own protection the Sheriff got James P. Barr, editor of the **Pittsburgh Post**, to send out a wire declaring "Sheriff Fife's dead body has been found." In the rush of later news, most people probably never did learn that Fife was hiding in the courthouse Saturday night and all day Sunday.

**ON THIS SUNDAY MORNING, A PITTSBURGH MILITIA** officer asked Adjutant General Latta to reassemble the 19th Regiment of the Pittsburgh Militia. Latta refused, on the grounds that he no longer had a bit of trust for the Pittsburgh troops. With no other forces at his command, he and other state officials and rail bosses wandered about helplessly, watching Pittsburgh slip more and more into the hands of the workers. Later that day they moved their quarters from the Union Depot Hotel to the Monogahela House where they all used aliases on the



guest list.

Ever since Friday afternoon, Tom Scott had been pressuring Pennsylvania Governor Hartranft to return from his trip in the west. Although Latta wired Hartranft that he need not end his vacation, at nine Saturday night word of the Pittsburgh slaughter reached Hartranft in Utah, and he took a special train east at midnight. Missouri Valley newspapers made much of the governor's dash for home, in the manner of Sheridan's ride. By Monday morning he had reached Omaha where another special train waited for him, courtesy of the Chicago & Northwestern.

Despite the examples set by Governors Matthews of West Virginia and Carroll of Maryland, Hartranft did not see fit to ask President Hayes for aid until Sunday night. The War Department's only official reaction to the Pittsburgh affair during Sunday was to send a company of regulars from Columbus Barracks in Ohio, to protect the Allegheny Arsenal. These men, about 50 in all, did not even leave for Pittsburgh until 5:00 p.m. Sunday evening.

On Sunday, Liberty Ave. was dark from the immense crowds. From the Rush House to 7th Street, thousands jammed the streets so "you could hardly get through." Many were from the factory districts of the South Side, steelworkers, miners, glass workers, farm hands, and, of course, railroaders. Men and women, black and white, and all nationalities and religious beliefs joined together as one solid mass. On Liberty Ave., huge tables had been set up, filled with vast quantities of food. People sang songs, and music was played, and for some time a carnival-like atmosphere pervaded the city.

The bosses, with the help of the "Black Crows" of the church, tried to split the unity of the workers by attempting to turn one nationality against another and one religion against another, but this failed. Their economic and social status, not their nationality or religion, determined their role. This Sunday all on the scene seemed to be brothers and sisters up in arms against the great corporation.

The workers then organized the removal of goods from the standing freight cars and their distribution among the people in the crowd, many of whom had not a decent meal for months. Sacks of corn, flour in barrels, cotton in bales, wool in bags, bread, crackers, fruit, sugar, candies, hides, leather, shoes, glassware, clothing, hay, whiskey, alcohol, tobacco, coal, coke, silks, jewelry, and even assorted volumes of Chamber's Encyclopedia were handed out. The crowds were determined to obtain many of the things the railroads had deprived them of for so long. The mayor took his police to the yards and tried to arrest a few people for "looting," but when he arrived he soon realized that his small force could have little effect. He left in disgust when he spotted one known policeman standing in a freight car throwing felt hats down to the crowd, and two others helping unload another.

**IN THE YARDS MANY RAILROAD CARS WERE** burning; the roundhouse that had housed the

Philadelphia troops was still in flames. Even though firemen had been putting water on it 10 minutes after Britton and his men left, they knew it was too late to stop the fire. The fire soon spread to some shanties and a lumberyard. The crowds of workers did nothing to stop the fires in the yards. To them this was the best way to get back at the Pennsylvania Railroad. The bosses at the PRR were not too disappointed at the fires either, for in the yards there was much old rolling stock that would have to be replaced in a few years, at company cost. By letting this stock burn, it could be replaced at the expense of whoever was determined to be responsible for the strike. Later, at hearings on the strikes of 1877, it was proven that many agents and officials of the PRR actually helped in the burning of cars. After the strike a bill for over five million dollars was sent to Allegheny County.

The fires spread and moved closer and closer to the Union Depot. When a string of cars at 15th Street burst into flames, Union Depot was six blocks closer to the fire. A few minutes later an exploding liquor car sent a stream of fire 30 yards closer to the depot. A few minutes before three, fire broke out in a passenger car standing half under the depot train shed. Thousands of spectators on the hillside cheered as the huge roof of the platform blazed up. Within minutes the building and the sheds were a roaring mass of flames. The Rush House, the St. James Hotel and other buildings across the street smoked from the heat, but a drenching by fire hoses saved them. Not one drop of water was directed at the depot. At 3:30 the heavy gravel roof crashed down with the noise of a power blast.

Throughout the next four to five days of working-class rule in Pittsburgh, many attempts were made to break the workers spirit; to provoke them into destroying property in an effort to split a portion of the population from them; to invoke "religion" against them; to play on the "sympathies" of the "weaker sex"; to shout "alien," "communist," etc. But to this the workers seemed unaffected and more united than ever.

A leading clergyman, Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, condemned the strike. At his wealthy Brooklyn church in front of his over-fed congregation, he stated, "It is the working class oppressed; yes, undoubtedly it is"; nevertheless, "God has intended the great to be great and the little to be little . . . the trade union originated under the European system destroys liberty . . . I do not say that the dollar a day is enough to support a man and five children if he insists on smoking and drinking beer . . . but the man who cannot live on bread and water is not fit to live." Strikers from Kansas City to Chicago retorted, "Let that bastard live on that diet."

The Pittsburgh workers' answer to such "religious" interference was demonstrated when the Catholic Bishop Twigg called upon them to disperse quietly to their homes. A kettle full of tar was set blazing under his nose, and the crowd treated him to a running commentary of rude remarks, not all complimentary to his reverence. A blazing freight car was run along side, and still the



Philadelphia troops in full retreat, routed by the armed workers of Pittsburgh.

Bishop kept on about how he understood times were hard, but all would be rewarded after death in heaven. A man mounted a locomotive and rang the bell vigorously; still the Bishop spoke until driven from his position by a shower of stones. This proceeding was remarkable, inasmuch as the people in the crowd were made up of nine-tenths Catholics.

**A FEATURE OF THE STRIKE THAT THE PRESS** kept referring to as "unique" (even a casual glance at U.S. history would disapprove this) was the militancy of women, wives of the workers. As often as the men, the women displayed supreme heroism and determination in support of the strikers' cause.

Aside from being part of that "dense mass of humanity" that gathered on the hill at the 28th Street Crossing on that memorable July 21st night, "they talked to the Sheriff 'worse' than the men, used viler epithets . . . and did everything in their power to influence resistance."

When the Sheriff told the women to disperse with their children because the troops were approaching and someone might be hurt, the women answered that they were there to fight and support their husbands and families.

This spirit was not confined to Pittsburgh. The **Baltimore Star** reported: "The singular part of the disturbance is the very active part taken by the women, who are the wives and mothers of the railroaders. They declare for starvation rather than have their people work

for the reduced wages. Better to starve outright, they say, than to die by slow starvation." At one point, when police had attacked the strikers, the women routed them with clubs.

At Fort Wayne, Indiana, when women hotel workers heard of the strike, many were the elegant lunches that disappeared out of the back doors of hotels and finally into the mouths of the strikers. Here, the class consciousness that seemed to permeate all workers in those July days, expressing itself in strikes of many other groups of workers against their impoverished conditions, seized these Fort Wayne women too. "At a pre-arranged hour, every waitress, dishwasher, and chambermaid marched into the dining room of every hotel in Ft. Wayne, and, in the name of every over-worked hour and under-paid day, demanded an increase of 50c a week. They struck and they won.

**THE AGE-OLD ATTEMPT TO USE LOWER-PAID** black workers as scabs by the ruling class was completely lacking. The black people generally let it be known that they were not only in sympathy with their white brothers, with whom so many had fought side-by-side in the late slave-owners' rebellion, but they forcefully demonstrated on their behalf, as well as striking for their own demands.

Black workers were among those who marched to rout the Philadelphia troops from the roundhouse in Pittsburgh. In the nation's capital "crowds of workingmen of



both colors" demonstrated their sympathy with the strikers.

In St. Louis, which had its own general strike, a committee composed of four white workers and one black worker went to the mayor to present the wage demands of the city's workers, while a body of 500, mostly black, went to the levee and marched its entire length calling out the river workers to join the strike.

In Louisville, Kentucky, martial law was declared to crush a demonstration of black reservoir and sewer workers who had struck in sympathy with the railroad workers, after which they had raised demands of their own for higher wages.

Perhaps the greatest act of solidarity happened in Harrisburg, Pa., where a group of black workers captured a third train of troops en route from Philadelphia. These soldiers never saw Pittsburgh.

The gigantic demonstrations that swept the nation on behalf of the workers generally, and the Pittsburgh workers in particular, were so massive as to rock the ruling class back on its heels. This working-class solidarity caused the rulers to enact measures of a qualitatively different nature immediately following the strikes. It was after the 1877 events that Tom Scott and his cohorts began erecting huge armories in the big cities, with narrow windows through which to point rifles down broad avenues against potential insurrections. It was after 1877 that businessmen began donating land near the large cities for army camps to be strategically located for use in rebellions. It was after 1877 that the cry went up for a large "peace-time" regular, standing army. The U.S. ruling class wanted no part of a Paris Commune.

**CITIES WHERE MEMBERS OF THE WORKINGMANS Party** were organized became **political** centers of battle. There were repeated calls for the shortening of the work-day, for an 8-hour day, as at the rally of 40,000 in Chicago where it was "Resolved that the hours of labor be reduced as new labor-saving machinery be introduced, in order that" (as stated at New York's Cooper Union meeting) those out of work "may be employed."

In addition, nationalization of the railroads was a particular demand in the call of the Workingman's Party and in all mass meetings. It was this party, active in many demonstrations and in some cases led by Marxists (St. Louis and Chicago), which advanced an entire program, including:

- (1) The eight-hour day;
- (2) Rigid sanitation laws for job and home;
- (3) Bureau of Labor Statistics in every state, manned by trade unionists;
- (4) No prison labor used by private employers;
- (5) No child labor under 14 years of age;
- (6) Free public education;
- (7) Workman's compensation;
- (8) Free counsel;
- (9) Abolition of all Company laws;
- (10) Government-run railroads, telegraphs, and all transportation;

(11) All industrial enterprises to be placed under control of the Government as fast as practicable, and operated by free, cooperative trade unions for the good of the whole people.

The last was one of the more clearly-defined signs of the desire for some form of public ownership, cooperatives, etc. While the actual organized call for a basic change in the system was slight, it was enough, with the other demands, to frighten the ruling classes.

One demand receiving a big push called upon "all comrades of toil to commence . . . the organization of a great federation of labor." (Chicago resolution). In New York loud applause greeted the statement that it was the "imperative duty of all workingmen to organize into trade unions, so that combined capital can be successfully resisted and overcome."

In New Jersey, Governor Bedle had ordered state troops under arms as a "precautionary move" against "sympathizers" with the strikers. Nevertheless, in Newark, on July 24th, Leander Thompson, a New Yorker, spoke to a mass rally, calling on the assembled workers to "resist the tyranny of capital. Our statemen offer the hangman's rope and the soldier's bullet as the only remedies . . . if the people, in the justice of whose cause lies their strength, will take the remedy into their own hands, we must . . . have better laws."

**IN NEW YORK CITY'S TOMPKINS SQUARE, AT** what Pinkerton called "one of the largest, if not the largest, open-air meeting" ever held in America, a jammed Square heard various representatives of workers' organizations and nationality societies speak. One of these was the famous John Swinton, who charged that the corporations were cutting wages so low "as to make life a choice between starvation and suicide. Glory to the militia in Pittsburgh who refused to fire on the workers! (Great Applause). Glory to the 16th Pennsylvania, that refused to be accomplices of the murders of the innocent men, women and children of Pittsburgh!"

At Cooper Union another rally of N.Y. workers was held, where the following resolution was passed:

"Whereas our brother workmen who toil on the railroads as brakemen, firemen, engineers, etc., have been forced to revolt against the starvation pay which their wealthy employers would impose upon them for long and killing hours of labor;

"Whereas this revolt or strike of the railroad men has spread over the entire country, gaining on all sides sympathy and support;

"Be it resolved by this mass meeting—

"That the time has arrived for the working people of America to resist by all legitimate means the oppression of capital, and the robbery which it perpetrates on labor; (Applause)

"That we enter our strong protest against the manner in which the militia have been used against the people, and offer our fraternal greetings to the volunteer soldiers who fraternized with their fellow workers; (Loud and

continued applause)

"That we express our sympathy with the railroad men and others who are now on strike, and pledge ourselves to use every effort to render aid."

Across the country in San Francisco, a worker was arrested for carrying a banner calling upon workmen to meet and express solidarity with the Eastern strikers. The next day, the 23rd, 10,000 met for this purpose. Another 10,000 massed in Philadelphia, members of the Grand Army of Starvation, where one speaker called on all workers to "rise up in their might and fight for their rights. Better a thousand of us shot down in the streets than ten thousand die of starvation."

The workers of the National Tube Works in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, gathered together and marched all over town to martial music, calling fellow workers from their houses. A general strike movement swept the area, first spreading to a rolling mill, then a car works, then a planing mill. The tube strikers demanded \$1.50 a day for laborers and a raise of twenty-five cents a day for all, including boys. Thousands of McKeesport workers marched with a brass band to Andrew Carnegie's great Edgar Thompson Steel Works at Braddock calling out planing mill and tin mill workers en route. By the end of the day the entire force of Carnegie workers and those of the Braddock car works had joined the strike.

**THE SPARKS TOUCHED OFF BY THE RAILROAD** workers inflamed not only their brothers and sisters in this country, but working people across the Atlantic as well. "Intense interest prevailed in Russia and Germany regarding the railroad strikes in America, and all their leading journals published articles and editorials on the subject. The old socialistic leaders are loud in their praise . . ." Pinkerton charged repeatedly that it was all the doing of "The International" led by Marx.

To these demonstrations of the bonds of solidarity within the American working class, a "Red Scare" was a feeble answer indeed. Nevertheless, it was trotted out in an attempt to split the striking workers from the non-striking.

The press would characterize a speaker at a mass demonstration as being of "Communist notoriety"; a paper would refer to the "Communist element from Europe" (they were always "foreigners," subscribing to a "foreign ideology").

Pittsburgh was "in the hands of men animated by the devilish spirit of communism." It was all the fault of "the bloody communist." Pinkerton wrote that "the communistic class" was "the real cause of the strikes." **The Pennsylvania State Legislature Report on the Railroad Strikes of 1877** concluded that "the foreign spirit of communism" helped to foment the strike.

However, when the general manager of the Pennsylvania Railroad wrote an article with repeated references to the "bloody, gaunt, alien Communist troublemakers," the workers rose, not only to refuse to accept such a version, but to defend the Communist. One of the best refutations was the answer to the general

manager's article in the form of an open letter, written by "A Red-Hot Striker" from Scranton, Pa. A part is pertinent here:

"Now I want to settle first what the Communist is, for if he is the infernal machine you say he is, nobody wants anything to do with him. But you call him the 'gaunt Communist.' Thereby I suspect something. Gaunt is he? And he 'has placed his foot on American soil!' Well, sir, it's too bad. There oughtn't to be a 'gaunt' man or woman in the whole country! There may be them that is gaunt by nature, but that ain't the sort you mean. You mean they have got 'gaunt' because they haven't got rich. You mean people who ain't fed or half-clothed. Now the Communist is 'gaunt' and the railway manager isn't. Don't this show the way the wind blows? He is a Communist because he is 'gaunt,' isn't he? You challenge me to compare 'the Communist to the Railway?' I say the 'Commune' represents the cause of the poor in this: that its object is to give every human being born into this world a chance to live life long and die well. And I say of the 'Railway,' it represents the few rich who don't want everybody to have a chance for a decent living, but intend to grind out of the rest of the world all the wealth possible for their own benefit."

As one can see, for the most part the workers clearly understood the purpose of such a "red scare," and as in the article by the "Red-Hot Striker" they rejected it. But this age old tactic of the ruling class did serve one purpose. The businessmen and elements of the petty-bourgeoisie who at first had supported the strikes in one way or the other, suddenly turned against the strikers, viciously attacking them. In Pittsburgh these elements began forming special police forces, which grew to 1,000 men, and joined in with the authorities to do everything to crush the strike.

**THE FINAL BLOW CAME WHEN THE UNITED States Government and President Hayes sent the regular army into areas of the strike. Troops were recalled from the West where they were engaged in the massacre of the Indians. Others were called from the South where they had been since the end of the Civil War. When these troops left for the North, the Ku Klux Klan was allowed to run rampant in the South. At this time, the U.S. Army consisted of about 15,000 men. Upon orders of Hayes, 10,000 of these troops were sent to Pennsylvania alone.**

Over 3,000 swiftly entered Pittsburgh under the command of Pennsylvania Governor Hartranft and began a mass clean-up of the strikers. They arrested many supposed leaders, and, without meeting any resistance, were able to disarm the masses. The strikers were not prepared to take on the U.S. Army. Military HQ was set up on East Liberty, and in a few days the city was returned to the bosses and their politicians. The ragged Philadelphia militia who had been hiding in Sharpsburg returned to the city and helped with the occupation.

Once it was certain that the bosses and the PRR was in full control again, the troops were moved to another area where the strikers were still hanging on, and the same



action was taken, from line to line and city to city, until the strike in Pennsylvania was crushed entirely. Although workers in some other states held out for weeks, a great part of the movement died when the spark of rebellion was extinguished in Pennsylvania. Almost immediately the trains were started again. And the first freight out of Pittsburgh after the strike was a "double-header."

While the strike caused no radical change in economic conditions, they were a giant blow in an ever upward struggle, a turning point in U.S. history. A few hundred thousand workers, with the sympathy and sometimes active cooperation of the overwhelming masses, had "shut down" the United States of America for ten days. The ruling classes were aghast at the vision of what an aroused working class could do; but even more menacing to them was the threat of what might happen once these workers discovered fully the innate might they possessed as a class.

Surely, in the word of one of their partisans, the workers could say of their cause, as Galileo of the earth, it moves!

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## THE LESSONS OF 1877

### I. CAPITALISM THEN AND NOW:

In 1877 capitalism in the United States was a very viable force. It had revolutionized the means of production. The capitalist class had many areas of expansion ahead of it: the Mid-West and the West; oil, and the auto industry; financial enterprises overseas, that were to become imperialism. The huge natural resources of minerals and labor were ready for capitalist exploitation. The working class in their battles against the bosses and their state were able to make tremendous steps forward in their standards of living over the years. In 1877 the bosses' state apparatus—the cops, the army, the courts, and all the governmental forms—were in a process of growth. It was against this background that the struggle of the masses in 1877 must be placed.

Today, in 1977, an era that the Progressive Labor Party has called the coming era of war and fascism, the U.S. capitalist class has a vast bureaucratic system. In order to survive to oppress the working class, it needs billions of dollars, largely dead capital. In 1877, the United States contained the fourth or fifth major capitalist class in the world. It grew until the end of WWII and then became number one. Today it faces the growing capitalist might of Russia, Germany, and Japan. The re-division of the world's imperialist spoils are again close at hand. In 1877 the United States, with a population of 80 million, needed an army of 15,000. Today, to combat the growing capitalist strength of the Soviet Union, the U.S. bosses have a multi-billion dollar armed force. The options of U.S. capital are shrinking. The masses who moved against the state in 1877 did so to secure a decent living. The masses that will move against the state in this coming period will do so for the survival of the human race, against the plans of the bosses for atomic holocaust, for

the destruction of capitalism itself.

In 1877, William P. Vandergrift died holding the switch to stop the trains from moving out. He acted on the behalf of millions, as can be seen from the actions that followed. We do not know who will be the Vandergrifts of the future who smash the fingers and destroy those who will dare to attempt a holocaust. But one thing the masses have proven again and again over the last 100 years: **there will be a Vandergrift.** Historically in 1877, the working classes' aspirations were not completely apparent. Today the Progressive Labor Party must lead the working classes understanding of this state to its overthrow, and the setting up of the dictatorship of the proletariat—workers democracy, socialism.

### II. THE WORKING CLASS IS MULTI-RACIAL

In 1877 the working class was made up of black and white, but many of the industries were completely white. The mass agitation by socialists and communists over the next 100 years was to fight this racism and turn the working class into a growing multi-racial force. The industrial working class was in the forefront of such struggles. The industrial working class today represents a huge reserve and leadership for the battles of the future. In 1877, with the intensification of Jim Crow, the bosses consistently used the threat of black or foreign scabs against white workers. The battles of 1877 showed the tremendous unity of class brothers and sisters, no matter which "race," or what country they came from. "Foreign-born" workers were leaders of struggle in Chicago, Cincinnati, etc. Today, in 1977, bosses use the same tactics to divide workers, with the added one of putting down women workers. In 1977, with a multi-racial, multi-national, male and female work-force, the bosses' tactics are still as dangerous but can be more easily overcome. The Committee Against Racism (CAR) is becoming a factor in this important unity.

### III. THE ARMY

In 1877, the U.S. Army had been used by the capitalist class in the wholesale slaughter of the Native American population. The Army was brought back in July of 1877 from slaughtering the Sioux to cut down the working class in Chicago. In the South after the war against slavery, the U.S. Army had supposedly (and sometimes actually) defended the newly-won rights of the black people. These, too, were called North to put down the workers' insurrection. The Ku Klux Klan took full advantage of that departure, and their reign of terror against blacks and whites who supported them grew with each passing day. In 1977, the U.S. Army, after being used in a racist imperialist war in Vietnam, is being readied for a racist war in Africa. We need to insure that this Army does not fight that racist war; it is of major concern to the working class, for our bosses **will use that Army against us, too.** We must turn that Army into our Army. We must turn the guns around!

#### IV. PITTSBURGH MILITIA VS. PHILADELPHIA MILITIA

Why was it that the Pittsburgh militia handed over their weapons to the Pittsburgh working class and the Philadelphia militia fired upon the Pittsburgh working class? Is it simply a question of the city they were born in? Is it simply due to the antagonism of the Pittsburgh citizenry to the center of Tom Scott's empire in Philadelphia? This seems to have some validity, but, in fact, under the scrutiny of history, it does not hold water.

In 1887 Samuel C. Logan wrote a book called **A City's Danger and Defense**. It was a 355-page account of the Scranton city guard, a citizen's militia. In fact, it is about the protection of life and property during the violent strikes of 1877. The book makes clear that it was because of the middle-class background of some of the guard that they could be trusted more than the working-class members of the militia. In fact, the Philadelphia militia helped to put down the citizenry of its own city as well as helping to put down the rebellion of the Pittsburgh citizenry. Correctly, then, the position is one of **class**. The Pittsburgh militia had a larger working-class element and understood the class nature and problems of their brothers and sisters. The Philadelphia militia was more middle-class and they only cared for the security of property. The question is one of **class**.

#### V. THE NEED FOR THE PARTY, THE NEED FOR REVOLUTION

The masses struck in 1877 to defend against economic attack. It turned into a full-scale insurrection, battling the forces of the bosses' state, when the latter attempted to enforce the wage-cuts. Heroic as the workers were, they did not foresee the necessity to take on the state, did not necessarily see it as a weapon of a ruling class that has to be smashed. With that and subsequent experiences, we communists understand today that we must go beyond reform to revolution, to a proletarian dictatorship over the bosses, replacing the bosses' dictatorship. To achieve that goal, we need a communist party to lead that class struggle.

That the masses will move cannot be denied. That the masses will fight to the death cannot be denied. We in the Progressive Labor Party have a difficult but historic task. We must clear away the words of lying trade-union leaders, who would have us once again walk in a circle

from reform to reform. There is nothing so heady as the idea that one does not need to fight, that "love" will cure everything. "Why can't we all be friends?" In 1877 it was clear that individually the bosses did not give a tinker's damn for us. Today, with their plans for fascism and nuclear war on the horizon, we can see their class does not give a damn for our class. Through the Party, we must see that now is the hour to organize for the eventual seizing of state power. The cycle of reform to reform must stop. Let it stop here. If the memory of 1877 should do one thing for us, it should show us that heroism is not enough, but that the Party must become the organized strategist for the taking of state power.

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THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

## REBELLION IN CHICAGO



CHICAGO, June 4—Angry Puerto Rican workers overturned police cars in pitched battles against the racist cops during a week-end of rebellion in the Humboldt Park area. Police brutality, racist unemployment and lousy living conditions are what capitalism has to offer for the working class. Rebellions such as this give workers experience to be used in the fight for workers' power!

(Further details on pages 2 and 3)



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