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Elegy for a Bygone World

The message of the 1963 *Economic Study of the Pittsburgh Region* was that Pittsburgh's economy had remained in the nineteenth century despite changing technological and market conditions.[1] The six-county, 4,500-square-mile region under study (Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Washington, and Westmoreland Counties) suffered, accordingly, from slow population growth, a lag in employment opportunities compared to other metropolitan areas, above-average unemployment, underrepresentation of small firms, an excess of population in nonproductive age groups, a higher than average proportion of blue-collar workers. By 1900, the Pittsburgh region's economic mix possessed two distinctive features: an overspecialization in coal, iron, and steel, heavy electrical machinery, and glass, clay, and stone products, as well as a concentration of the labor force in the large plants required for those activities. The metals industries alone employed about 125,000 workers in 1960, representing two-fifths of manufacturing employment and one-seventh of total employment. The average manufacturing plant employed 109 persons, compared to the national average of 52.

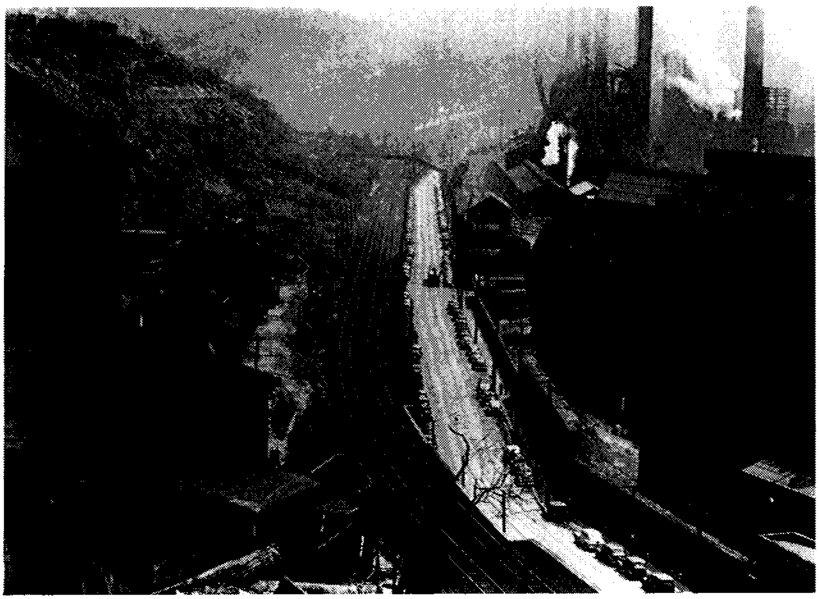
Overspecialization in heavy industry and the concomitant concentration of workers in large plants were associated with two other characteristics of the regional economy. The coal industry, though attenuated, still employed a larger percentage of the work force in the primary or extractive sector than was true for any other metropolitan area. At the same time, the region ranked lowest in tertiary employment (trade and services); large-scale heavy industry did not provide an environment that spawned a great number of small suppliers and businesses.

Although social scientists perceived that the Pittsburgh economy had reached a mature plateau and that diversification was necessary to prevent economic arteriosclerosis, a casual look at the region in the early 1960s might suggest otherwise. Arriving here in 1963, after nearly a decade in the more sylvan ambience of New England and upstate New York, I encountered a city that seemed more like a scene out of Dickens's Coketown—one that would not have been altogether alien to Andrew Carnegie or Henry Clay Frick had they returned to earth.

Pittsburgh thirty years ago was a rich feast for a historian. Legendary figures like Carnegie and Frick, Jones and Laughlin, Schwab, Westinghouse, Mellon, or Heinz seemed more real in Pittsburgh—where they had lived and brought the second industrial revolution to America. The steel mills, still exploding with a primeval energy, testified to their presence, as did the many philanthropies associated with their names. To experience the noise and heat of the mills and visit the mill communities precipitated an awareness of the typical working-class experience—the long journey from southern and eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century, the harsh life of a Pittsburgh steel worker and, ultimately, attainment of middle-class affluence after World War II.[2]

Whatever the statistics concerning the erosion of population, commercial activities, and employment opportunities in the mill towns, the physical presence of heavy industry—steel above all—was inescapable. Driving to or from downtown along the Parkway East, one passed the steel complex of Jones & Laughlin, its great blast furnaces breathing fire like a metallic dragon. On the opposite side of the Monongahela River was J&L's South Side Works, substantially expanded in the 1950s with the assistance of the Urban Redevelopment Authority.

Leaving Pittsburgh, heading up the Mon Valley, one reached Homestead in a few minutes, site of the immense plant of the United States Steel Corporation (a name redolent with history, not yet the blank USX). Most famous of the Mon Valley mill towns because of the bloody strike of 1892, Homestead was a familiar place to many Pittsburghers with young children. One traversed Eighth Avenue, Homestead's bustling main thoroughfare, en route to Kennywood—the venerable, still pop-

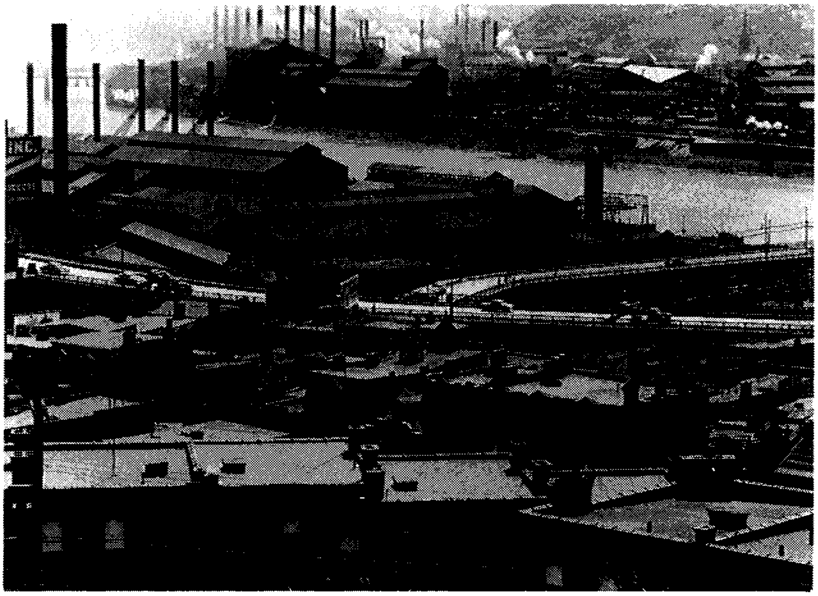


Jones & Laughlin mills before construction of the Parkway East, 1948. *Photo: Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh*

ular amusement park (recently supplemented by a nearby water park, Sandcastle).

Heading upriver again, one soon encountered the formidable Carrie Furnaces of U.S. Steel in Rankin. Preservationists hope to include them—still partly standing, but silent—with a section of Homestead in a steel heritage park. The Edgar Thomson Works of U.S. Steel in Braddock came next. This plant, with its forest of tall chimneys puffing smoke like demented tobacco addicts, was the base of Andrew Carnegie's steel empire, and Braddock was the site of his first library. The plant remains in operation with a much reduced work force.[3] The Duquesne Works of U.S. Steel followed. Nestled in a bend of the Monongahela, it was the site of the (now demolished) Dorothy Six blast furnaces. Continuing upriver, heading out of the deep bend, one reached McKeesport, home of U.S. Steel's National Works. In better days, McKeesport's downtown was a thriving shopping center for the surrounding mill towns. The Irvin Works of U.S. Steel in West Mifflin, still intact, loomed up across the river from McKeesport.

At Clairton, USX has kept a coke plant in operation—a source of frequent complaints from environmentalists over its pollution record.



J&L mills, Oakland, with the J&L South Side works across the Monongahela River.
Photo: Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

Viewed from across the river in the 1960s, the Clairton Works had the aura of a lunar landscape. Standing in the midst of a desolate post-atomic-bomb terrain, one was enveloped in a cloud of metallic-tasting fog. All the mill towns have experienced hard times, but Clairton had descended altogether into a municipal purgatory by the early 1990s; "The bankrupt city is without its own police department and reliant on the Pennsylvania State Police. This protection amounts to no more than a two-officer patrol at any given time and is proving woefully inadequate at controlling drug traffic and other crime at two county Housing Authority projects, according to residents."[4]

Heading upriver from Clairton, one passed the Allegheny County line into Washington County, where the Donora Works of U.S. Steel still functioned in 1963. Renowned among environmentalists for a lethal air inversion in 1948, Donora was an unlikely site for what was arguably the finest continental restaurant in the region—the Redwood Inn. Donora was reachable from Pittsburgh via Route 837, which carried one through or past all the mill towns mentioned. The Donora Works, in 1966, were the first of the U.S. Steel Mon Valley steel mills to be closed and demolished; a full decade later, a visitor would encounter a scene of stark desolation in the business district. Past Donora in Westmoreland County were the Monessen and Allenport Works of Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel.

Adjoining Allegheny County to the northwest was Beaver County. Driving out of Pittsburgh along Route 65, which parallels the Ohio River, one might visit Old Economy Village in Ambridge. This notable preservation project commemorated the utopian pastoral community established by the Rappites in the 1820s. The Rappites were pietists who lived by a code of biblical literalism and primitive Christian simplicity. Yet there was beauty in their lives and villages; it was expressed in the simple vernacular of their architecture and handicrafts and the care devoted to their horticulture. Across the river, in unintended but outlandish contrast to everything for which Economy stood, stretched the six-mile-long, 779-acre Aliquippa Works of Jones & Laughlin. And to the west of Aliquippa in Beaver County was the Midland Works of Crucible Steel. These two plants, established around 1909–1911, marked the final phase of large-scale steel production facilities in the region.

It was not only the shutdown of steel plants that decimated the heavy industrial sector. A short distance from Pittsburgh along the Parkway East was the Turtle Creek Valley. Here, in East Pittsburgh and Wilmerding, respectively, were the vast Westinghouse Electric and Westinghouse Air Brake Corporation plants. Once employing thousands, the "great Westinghouse works [had become] a mere repair shop for used generator machinery" by the mid-1980s.[5]

The severe recession of the early 1980s precipitated the decision by U.S. Steel and other steel companies to close down their plants in the Pittsburgh area. Attrition turned into swift decapitation of an entire industry built over the course of a century. Between 1982 and 1987, U.S. Steel abandoned its blast furnace complexes at Rankin (1982) and Duquesne (1984), and its mills at Duquesne (1984), Clairton, except for a coke plant (1984), Homestead (1986), and McKeesport (1987). The Donora Works, as mentioned earlier, had been closed in 1966. Jones & Laughlin (LTV Steel) closed its South Side and Hazelwood plants in 1985, while keeping the Hazelwood coke plant in operation. At about the same time, J&L shut down its Aliquippa Works in Beaver County. Wheeling-Pittsburgh closed its Monessen Works in Westmoreland County in 1986.[6]

A combination of competitive pressures, market changes, low-cost imports, overcapacity, rigidity and miscalculations by management, labor, and government, as well as productivity problems in the older plants of Pittsburgh—and the Northeast generally—explain the industrial Götterdämmerung. According to John P. Hoerr, in his magisterial study of labor relations in the Mon Valley:

> Perhaps the key mistake of the entire period, the one that would start an unraveling process that has not ended, came in the 1950s. The domestic industry expanded its capacity from 100 million to 149 million tons during that decade . . . [and] they expanded in the wrong way, building large, new, open hearth shops. The more efficient basic oxygen furnace (BOF) had already been invented in Germany. . . . The domestic industry stuck with open hearths because they provided greater volumes of steel to feed large rolling mills.

Subsequently, the companies found themselves on a treadmill; they raised prices to maintain profit margins as unit costs escalated, further reducing their competitive status in an increasingly international market. Decades of adversarial labor relations based on unilateral company control of the production process ensured that even the threat of extinction prevented a cooperative response: "The union's short term goal was to push to the limit for economic benefits, regardless of whether they would be generated solely by the growth of the steel business, or whether the consumer of steel would have to chip in by paying higher prices."[7]

The shutdown of the steel industry in the Pittsburgh region involved more than jobs.[8] Swept away was an intergenerational way of life that provided a sense of continuity, security, family cohesion, and communality. The mill towns had been created for the single purpose of producing steel, but around that function the workers had created an encompassing social system. Its loss defined the real cost of deindustrialization. Hoerr, a McKeesport native, vividly portrays the allure of a life in steelmaking:

> For young men in the mill towns of those days, there was a very tangible sense of having to make an implicit bargain with life from the outset. There were two choices. If you took a job in the mill, you could stay in McKeesport among family and friends, earn decent pay, and gain a sort of lifetime security (except for layoffs and strikes) in an industry that would last forever. You traded advancement for security and expected life to stick to its bargain.[9]

Young men graduated from high school and entered the mill "just like their fathers, brothers, uncles and grandfathers before them." The work was hard and sometimes dangerous, but it provided a "sense of identity and self-respect." In Homestead, the steel works were known to locals as the "thirteenth grade" and "Riverside Academy." Bill Gorol, Jr., went to work there in 1977, like his father in 1944, his grandfather in 1913, and his great-grandfather in the 1890s.[10] Beyond work and family, there were many other institutions that built and sustained a sense of identity in the mill town world: neighborhood, ethnic club or fraternity, church, union, athletic association, tavern. The mill communities were not at all bereft of cultural life, but it was working-class rather than boutique culture.

Anyone whose encounter with the Pittsburgh area mill towns during the postwar decades was limited to the industrial section suffered from a misconception of their ecology. They were built according to a pattern, like the New England mill towns of the mid-nineteenth century. The steel plants, like the textile mills, usurped the flatland along the river. Railroads, rather than canals, serviced the steel works. Past the main avenue that paralleled the mill, one ascended the slopes and moved farther from the forbidding industrial sector. Attractive neighborhoods of

USS Publicity photo ca. 1950. *Photo: United States Steel Corporation* well-tended homes, gardens, and churches materialized. They expressed pride and a sense of permanence.

Many remember the Mon Valley mill towns as lively, friendly places to be in the expansive years of World War II and its aftermath: "The narrow brick streets of the mill towns were filled with streetcars, automobiles, workers going to and from the plant, and shoppers carrying big brown paper bags." Braddock in the 1940s laid claim to five movie theaters, dozens of car dealerships, "retail shops galore." An old-time resident of Rankin, a half-mile chunk of earth overlooking the river between Swissvale and Braddock, reminisced about life there in the 1930s: "Oh, it was nice. Everybody was friendly. Everybody had their own little clubs to go to. We had a lot of stores. It was an awfully nice community."[11] But the mill town, like the steelworker, was vulnerable—both depended upon a single industry for prosperity and survival. In Homestead, for example, U.S. Steel provided jobs for the handicapped, cleaned the streets with company equipment, and burned the city's garbage in its open-hearth facilities. But when the godfather packed up and left, there was no one to take his place. Braddock, the "Little Pittsburgh" of the Mon Valley's Indian Summer, turned derelict—a stroll down Braddock Avenue by the early 1990s was like "taking a trip down death row" in view of the pervasive crack scene. The population had peaked at 22,000 in the 1950s, descending to about 5,300 by the mid-1980s. The plant had once employed 6,000 at fourteen open-hearth furnaces and five blast furnaces; employment had dropped to a mere 650 jobs by the 1980s. Carnegie's handsome library, his first such gift, was closed in 1974—but was not torn down and has since undergone restoration. The Braddock scene had a postapocalypse ambience: "Plywood covers the smashed windows of vacant buildings. . . . Weeds grow in empty lots. The handful of stores still open wear iron grates as defensive shields. Pockets of idled men mill about on shabby street corners."[12]

The decisive shutdown of the steel industry throughout the Pittsburgh region in the 1980s devastated a once stable and prosperous working-class way of life. Simply put, the drift of the mill towns toward smaller, poorer, older populations dramatically quickened (many steelworkers had already moved out to the suburbs after World War II). The progress made by the growing number of black steelworkers in the post-1960s era abruptly ended. The tax base of the mill towns eroded at

USS Works, Homestead, 1970s. *Photo: Author*

exactly the time when vastly increased health and welfare services were most needed. Steel industry contraction and economic diversification in the Pittsburgh region may have been necessary and desirable. But the cost of the transition was unevenly distributed; it fell disproportionately upon one generation of workers and their communities. It was a wrenching industrial revolution in reverse.[13]

If an unemployed steelworker neither left the region nor retired on a pension, his skills and the security he had known proved to be liabilities in seeking employment. Proficiency in steelmaking was not readily transferable to an economy expanding toward services and advanced technology. The ease with which he had found work within the steel industry, probably with the aid of family or friends, resulted in a lack of experience and confidence when forced to look for another job: "Man, I've worked since I was sixteen. I had one job after another. Before you quit one job, you had another one lined up. You never went months without work. This is all new to me, trying to find a job. I've tried like hell, there's nothing out there." It was difficult to accept what was never supposed to happen. A longtime Homestead steelworker explained, "Everybody felt the mill would always be there. On that basis they went out and bought cars, houses, and all. . . . We have no experience in this. . . . For seventeen years, I went down to the shop each day and they tell you what you are doing that day. Now where am I going?"

Over generations, the expectation had been that one was set for life in a familiar round of work, family, friends, community. "It was easy," a former steelworker observed; "you went to work, had a few beers afterward, and then went home. You had a lot of money for the wife and kids. You had nice vacations. You bought anything you wanted."[14]

The relationship between steelworkers and steel companies was both contentious and paternalistic. The companies fiercely defended managerial prerogatives and made every effort to discourage initiative on the part of workers or unions. Rules, regulations, and an elaborate hierarchical bureaucracy typified U.S. Steel labor policy. Throughout its history, U.S. Steel "regarded hourly workers as an undifferentiated horde, incapable of doing anything more than following orders and collecting the paycheck." In response, Hoerr writes, the workers and union "had no concern for competitiveness and rejected the idea that [they] bore any responsibility for seeing that the plant operated efficiently."[15]

When the steel industry crumbled, mill towns as well as workers had difficulty adjusting. The steel communities, which had existed only to produce steel and had depended on the companies for their economic sustenance, suddenly had to cope with an unwanted freedom and need to make decisions about the future. Steelworkers, similarly, had to cope with the loss of security, sense of worth, and identity—all of which were wrapped up in the jobs that would never return. A railroader in the Homestead plant, a third-generation employee, perceived the challenge confronting the former steelworkers and their communities: "Blue collar is traditional. Things are planned out for you. Someone is taking care of you, rather than you taking care of yourself. Now it is more survival of the fittest. You need the tools to achieve your goals."[16]

A major effort to analyze the human consequences of deindustrialization was the River Communities Project (RCP) of the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh. Directed by James Cunningham, who had guided ACTION-Housing's neighborhood urban extension experiment in the 1960s, the RCP produced two surveys of Aliquippa, another of East Pittsburgh and Turtle Creek, and a volume of essays dealing with "survival and resilience" in the Mon Valley.[17] These studies were supplemented by more specialized research concerning the impact of deindustrialization upon the elderly, women, children, the unemployed, and blacks.[18] Another study examined a community-university effort to promote youth enterprise in Aliquippa, Monessen, and the East Liberty district of Pittsburgh.[19]

Not surprisingly, the research confirmed that massive economic dislocation and unemployment were generating widespread social problems in a context of fragmented and impoverished governments: "Disinvestment turns vital centers of production into shrinking retirement communities" that are increasingly "sustaining themselves with social security and pension checks."[20] Critical issues included loss of health insurance for many families, public education systems that had been geared to supplying recruits for the mills rather than for college, river- and rail-based transportation systems representative of the paleotechnic era that provided poor access to interstate highways or the airport, outmigration of the younger, better-educated population, racial tensions, and crime.

Cunningham found that survival techniques for Aliquippa residents included belt tightening, sharing, appealing to support networks, and the ministrations of churches, unions, and social agencies. A consistent theme of the River Communities Project is the vital role of family as a buffer against deprivation. The norm in these mill towns was "intergenerational reciprocity." Family was the supreme refuge. Elderly parents supporting adult children carried much of the burden.[21] Family cohesion characteristic of mill town life, together with government and industry pension programs, helped to mitigate the impact of massive deindustrialization in the Pittsburgh region.

The social work origins of the River Communities Project are expressed in its emphasis upon the plight of individuals and families, their efforts to cope with conditions that undermined their capacity for self-support, the threat to their self-respect resulting from unaccustomed dependency, and the role of community and social agencies. People were often slow to accept assistance from social agencies for fear of compromising their self-respect. Social service professionals interviewed for the Turtle Creek study "felt they could provide more assistance if community residents would let them." Pride kept residents of Duquesne "from accepting services and goods not earned directly by their own labor."[22] Resistance to entitlements or welfare was widespread: "People of the distressed communities still cling proudly to their spirit of self-reliance. They would rather go without or borrow from a relative than apply to a social agency."[23] Such repudiation of assistance from strangers was indeed a vestige of a bygone world.

Cunningham believed that the conflict between need and pride might be reconciled through community organization efforts, transforming dispirited or powerless individuals into a unified force for renewal and reconstruction. The community organization theme was prominent at the outset of the project—the Aliquippa report released in 1984. Noting the dismal condition of municipal government—political squabbling within Aliquippa's city council, alienation of a black population that lacked representation, layoff of police officers and other municipal workers, deterioration of the B.F. Jones Memorial Library, declining revenues, and increasing debt—Cunningham stressed the need for community cohesion in order to "restore some vitality and sweetness to life in Aliquippa." Since it was beyond the capacity of government to act, leadership would have to come from a "broad community task force."[24] This response to the deindustrialization crisis had to compensate, also, for the absence of regional organization. Allegheny County was fragmented into 130 fiercely independent local jurisdictions. Individual communities had no choice but to adopt a self-help strategy.[25]

Aliquippa illustrated, in microcosm, the variety of self-help expedients in the Ohio and Mon Valleys. As always, "churches and family networks" were among the primary sources of assistance and survival. Under Anglican auspices, a "Community of Celebration" was organized, "committed to being a sign of the celebration of Jesus Christ in the whole of life and to being a friend of the poor and the oppressed." Also church inspired was "People Helping People," a nonprofit corporation formed by the Greater Aliquippa Ministerial Association in 1983. The Aliquippa Salvation Army Corps Community Center was another of the religious agencies that "help Aliquippa survive."[26]

Supplementing family, ethnic associations, fraternal organizations, and churches were the efforts of more formal social agencies and agencies for employment retraining. Between 1984 and 1986, for example, no fewer than four training centers opened in Aliquippa. They included the Beaver Valley Job Training Partnership, established through the federal Job Training Partnership Act of 1983. But the many programs in the region in the 1980s had limited success. They did not necessarily lead to jobs, or they led to jobs incommensurate with the age, experience, and needs of the unemployed worker.[27]

Worker-initiated, and reminiscent of the 1930s, were the unemployed workers' committees that operated outside the union structure. Following the mass layoffs of 1981, a coalition of these groups in 1982 established the Mon Valley Unemployed Steelworkers Committee (later Mon Valley Unemployed Committee). The Beaver County Unemployed Committee was created in 1985 by former LTV workers in Aliquippa; the following year witnessed the organization of the Mid-Mon Valley Unemployed Committee. In the winter of 1986 these groups formed a federation known as the Unemployed Council of Southwestern Pennsylvania. These worker-controlled committees were significant as an effort to combine assistance and self-respect. They devoted considerable attention to seeking trade readjustment allowances and help for the unemployed. A highly charged issue in the period was mortgage foreclosure; the worker committees acted to prevent sheriff's sales of homes and played a key role in formulating the Pennsylvania Homeowners Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program (1983). The committees were also active in organizing food banks.[28]

The River Communities Project's 1984 report on Aliquippa had urged the creation of a "broad community task force" to assume leadership in revitalization. Although this report and the other community surveys contained a multitude of proposals for economic and social development, none received greater emphasis than the need for community organization. In Aliquippa, for example, Cunningham saw fragmentation, factionalism, "local government frustrated and making little progress," an absence of "unified planning and action." Any comeback depended, ultimately, "on the ability of local people to move beyond fragmentation."[29]

There is an intriguing resemblance between these perceptions and those of the celebrated Pittsburgh Survey of 1907–1908, which emphasized the disparity in power and organization between the economic-corporate and social sectors in the region. But the survey, a quintessential example of middle-class reform perspectives in the early twentieth century, saw redemption through expansion of the regulatory powers of government; it was a vision of rule by technocratic benevolence. Very different was Cunningham's latter-day social work concept of redemption by community-based process. Aliquippa would only degenerate if it awaited salvation through external forces—government or corporate. It had to take control of its own destiny, "unite to plan and act, make demands on outside institutions, and start to make a few things better."[30] Evolving out of the first Aliquippa report, and from proposals made by

Cunningham and Cathy Cairns at a May 1984 "Comeback Conference" at the University of Pittsburgh, was the Aliquippa Alliance for Unity and Development (AAUD), organized in the summer of that year.

The beneficiary of funding from the Heinz Endowments, the AAUD developed a complex three-track program. The first of these, according to Cathy Cairns, executive director from 1984 to 1993, was the creation of a social service and health network which, by 1990, was serving nearly 2,000 residents of southern Beaver County. The second track, education and youth employment, encompassed "basic literacy and math skills, computer education, and apprenticeship training programs, linked to real jobs." An adult program, established in 1989, provided "customized" job training. The third AAUD track featured economic development programs. Its accomplishments included designation of the area as a state enterprise zone and establishment of two business incubators (inexperienced and low-income entrepreneurs were assisted by the social service and education divisions). Other initiatives in the economic sphere included studies of the economic prospects of the community, tax reform (encouraging LTV use or sale of its mill property), federal funding of infrastructure improvements to improve access to the mill site and to downtown, and the county's purchase of some 120 acres of the mill. The Aliquippa Alliance, by 1993, "owned or controlled over 10 percent of the city's useable commercial square footage, located mostly in the downtown."[31]

The AAUD was not an isolated phenomenon (although its original intention to dissolve in three to five years was unique and improbable). It was paralleled in the 1980s by the creation of a Community Development Corporation (CDC) network in Pittsburgh neighborhoods and the Mon Valley Initiative (a federation of Mon Valley CDCs). What these organizations represented, in a context of community and neighborhood demoralization and dissolution, was a quest for strategies for reconstruction. More specifically, they sought a mixture of economic development, community revitalization, social service, and citizen empowerment strategies that might improve the quality of life. They were also de facto substitutes for the governments and corporations upon whom the communities had previously depended for services and livelihood.

An underlying theme of the RCP was that deindustrialization was irreversible. However, an alliance of labor and church dissenters emerged in the 1980s who contested the valedictions for steel production in the Mon Valley. They were sustained by the belief that deindustrialization was not the product of irreversible global and domestic impersonal forces, but of a calculated policy of disinvestment by banks and corporations. If so, it could be reversed. A labor historian, David L. Rosenberg, stated the argument for deindustrialization by design. According to Rosenberg, two processes, "deindustrialization and the planning of Pittsburgh, have been closely connected and the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (ACCD) has played and continues to play a crucial role in both." A narrowly based elite organization, the ACCD aspired to attain "balance and diversity in the regional economy" at the expense of the traditional industrial sector. Critical to Rosenberg's argument was his examination of the conference's Executive Committee which, from 1968 to 1990, revealed (to Rosenberg's satisfaction) a pattern of Mellon domination. "The possibility of global overcapacity and competition from foreign imports could not have been entirely unanticipated by conference planners, when, in their role as bank directors, they must have participated in the banks' investment policies."[32] Expanded world capacity, he concludes, generated a flood of exports that competed with regional production.

This line of analysis, favored by church and labor groups spawned in the early 1980s, raises several significant economic issues. Was it economically viable to modernize the aged industrial plants in the Pittsburgh region in competition with newer plants closer to markets farther west? Would not modernization itself have entailed substantial labor reductions? Was it not imperative for the Pittsburgh region to diversify an economy long burdened by excessive reliance on metals fabrication? Although the United States needed to retain a significant manufacturing sector (as critics of deindustrialization argued), did it have to be in Pittsburgh?[33] Or how much manufacturing, and what kind, was appropriate for Pittsburgh's post-steel economy?

There is another issue raised by Rosenberg's, and similar, critiques. One gets the impression that the disinvestment policy was devised by a narrow corporate and financial elite that could anticipate a decline of union power as a fringe benefit. In reality, the policy was favored (or at least not resisted) by a wide range of community interests who recognized the possibility of significant economic and environmental transformation. Those with a new vision of economic reconstruction, who saw the historic industrial sector as an economic liability, gave a chilly reception to the idea of reindustrialization.

The tactics of the closely aligned Denominational Ministry Strategy (DMS), and Network to Save the Mon-Ohio Valley, were disastrous. They generated a backlash that deflected attention from their critique of the investment policies of Pittsburgh banks and corporations. The DMS was formed in 1979 by Lutheran and Episcopal clergy. The Network, an alliance of DMS and labor dissidents, followed in 1982. They focused their protests against disinvestment on Mellon Bank. But the appointment of Charles Honeywell as strategist resulted in a kind of self-destructive radical theater. Formerly employed by the Shadyside Action Coalition, a neighborhood group, Honeywell had been influenced by the late Saul Alinsky, the radical community organizer based in Chicago. From Alinsky he learned that change could be precipitated by consciousness-raising confrontation. In Pittsburgh, consciousness raising included dumping sacks of pennies in Mellon bank lobbies and depositing fish in safety deposit boxes. A tactic that precipitated vehement condemnation was the invasion of a Christmas pageant dinner at the Shadyside Presbyterian Church. On December 16, 1984, four masked men tossed balloons inflated with dye and skunk water at the celebrants, a group that presumably included representatives of the Pittsburgh corporate elite.

By early 1983, the Protestant church hierarchies had repudiated the DMS. As the DMS became increasingly obsessed with battling and discrediting the Lutheran leadership, which had defrocked two of the pastors, it forgot about corporations, banks, mill town deterioration, and reinvestment. A group of the dissidents occupied Trinity Lutheran Church in Clairton for a week and had to be evicted by the sheriff.[34]

A more sober effort to promote reindustrialization was embodied in the Tri-State Conference on Steel, and the Steel Valley Authority (SVA). Organized in 1979, Tri-State not only protested against wholesale deindustrialization, but attempted to create an institutionalized basis for worker and community involvement in the investment process. According to Staughton Lynd, workers in Youngstown, Ohio, and the Pittsburgh region, beginning in 1977, began exploring the concept that

> private decisions with catastrophic social consequences are really public decisions, that some kind of community property right arises from the long-

> standing relation between a company and a community, and that the power of eminent domain . . . should be used to acquire industrial facilities when corporations no longer wish to operate them.[35]

Initially, Tri-State attempted to persuade individual borough councils to acquire manufacturing plants. When Crucible Steel in Midland abandoned production in 1982, for example, Tri-State urged the locality to acquire the property through eminent domain and to issue bonds to finance the purchase of the plant. The following year, Tri-State joined protests against Mellon Bank policies concerning the Mesta Machine Company's bankruptcy proceedings in West Homestead. Worker groups demanded that Mellon release company assets to pay back wages and benefits. A Save Mesta Committee created by Tri-State and others proposed that the municipality acquire the plant. Although the borough council did approve the creation of a nine-member authority, the scheme was vetoed by the mayor. Here, as elsewhere, municipal authorities feared potential legal liabilities or financial burdens.

Tri-State's efforts to save the Dorothy Six blast furnace and oxygen process furnace in Duquesne (shut down in 1984) also failed. A feasibility study issued by Lazard Freres in January 1986 declared that market conditions and financing prospects were too poor, the costs of furnace improvements and a continuous caster too high. Also futile were efforts to prevent the loss of the American Standard Corporation plants in Swissvale (Union Switch & Signal) and Wilmerding (Westinghouse Air Brake). A Save the Brake and Switch Coalition, including the Tri-State Conference, lost a court action to prevent the Radice Corporation (which had acquired Union Switch & Signal in October 1985) from dismantling the property.[36]

The determination to thwart deindustrialization was reaffirmed by the creation of the Steel Valley Authority in 1985. It was incorporated with nine members (including Pittsburgh) in January 1986. But local concerns over liabilities, costs, and municipal independence constricted its ability to function effectively. Even more important was the continued lack of private investment capital for acquisition and development.[37]

Nothing more dramatically symbolized the industrial era in Pittsburgh than the coke facilities and blast furnaces of J&L near the downtown center, and the 110-acre plant spreading along the South Side flatland. LTV closed the latter facility in 1985, giving the newly created

SVA an opportunity to demonstrate that worker and community initiative could revitalize the steel industry. The object was to restart the two electric furnaces that had been installed in the 1970s (when 5,000 workers toiled at the plant) and produce rough slabs for sale. But six years and $600,000 later, LTV, South Side residents, and City Council members had lost patience with the inability of SVA to utilize the property.

LTV had already cleared forty-five acres of the site by the spring of 1991, when two development forces converged. Gustine Company, a local realtor, expressed interest in the entire site for a mixed-use project involving housing, retailing, small businesses, and warehouses. Simultaneously, the South Side Planning Forum issued a report (funded by LTV and prepared by the South Side Local Development Company) urging a similar mixed-purpose project. Any prospect for housing would be lost, however, if the idled electric furnaces were restarted.

Early in July 1991, two Pittsburgh councilmen urged demolition of the entire plant in order to exploit "a magnificent opportunity for a mixed-use development project."[38] At the same time, the Gustine Company announced its intention to create a $50 million residential and commercial complex on the 110-acre site, including a marina and riverfront parks. Pittsburgh newspapers were eager to write an obituary for

Demolition of LTV South Side works, 1984. *Photo: Author* steel production within the city's limits. According to the *Pittsburgh Press*, "It is time to begin an orderly planning process for reusing this prime parcel. Sounding the death knell for the electric furnaces is the painful first step." The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* contended that the SVA had "left a legacy of false hopes" and it was "time to move on. Bring on riverfront development in the South Side."[39] The Gustine project never materialized and, by 1994, the site had become a leading candidate for a riverboat gambling complex—provided such "gaming" is approved by the state legislature in 1995.

Efforts to halt the erosion of the industrial sector in the Pittsburgh region failed through a convergence of market forces and a strong consensus within the civic coalition that the local economy had to be diversified and modernized. Robert Erikson, project director for SVA, complained that LTV wanted $35 million for a site it hoped to purchase for $10 million. But $120 million of investment capital would not flow to what seemed a lost cause at the time—an unfavorable market for steel slabs, the high cost of scrap steel needed for production, and the expense of installing a continuous caster. Although conceding that the prospects for restarting the electric furnaces on the South Side were negligible, Erikson defended the aspiration to preserve manufacturing jobs: "We're moving closer toward earning money in less productive ways. We're becoming a tourist destination. . . . Now rich foreign tourists are coming here and we're making the beds."[40]

The deindustrialization of the Pittsburgh region produced a social tragedy—thousands of unemployed workers and an intergenerational way of life destroyed. Whole communities of stable, independent, hard-working families dissolved in the 1980s. Although worker and community groups made little progress in preserving the steel-based industrial sector or reviving the mill towns, they did raise fundamental issues of economic policy. This was true, especially of the Tri-State Conference and the SVA.

Tri-State/SVA have argued consistently that a balanced, vigorous regional economy requires an extensive manufacturing sector. "A retail-service economy cannot exist in a vacuum; it ultimately depends upon those sectors, such as basic manufacturing, that export to the larger markets. . . . Sophisticated medical care, chic restaurants, specialized legal services and higher education are all part of the *consumer* economy, not the *productive* economy." Advanced technology, with its limited job potential, "should be *applied* to our metalmaking and metalworking industries, not seen as a *replacement* for them."[41]

Tri-State/SVA never accepted the argument of the steel industry that steel production had become unprofitable and that it was therefore necessary to abandon steel in favor of more diversifed investment. The labor groups insisted that steelmaking was profitable enough, but not as profitable as alternative avenues of investment. The problem was that U.S. Steel and other steel corporations failed to modernize and remain competitive, preferring to channel their funds into other "more lucrative businesses." The industry strategy was to run plants into the ground and shift profits into nonsteel investments such as petrochemicals and natural gas (while American banks were financing the modernization of foreign steel companies). According to a Tri-State Conference report,

> While foreign steel firms modernized and prepared their industries to challenge American dominance, U.S. Steel was apparently content to just rake in the profits. Later, rather than face the technological challenge posed by Japanese super mills . . . with their basic oxygen furnaces and continuous casters, U.S. Steel disinvested from its steel business into oil, chemicals, plastics and real estate.[42]

Along with the role of manufacturing in a regional economy, Tri-State/SVA also raised fundamental and enduring issues of industrial relations—what a company owes to its labor force and to the community. Thus Charles McCollester condemned as irrational and irresponsible the casual abandonment of the skilled Pittsburgh regional labor force. It did not make economic sense to toss away such a valuable resource.[43] Similarly, Tri-State objected that "an entire generation of skilled industrial workers is being cut out of the nation's economic life and left idle. . . . A century-old culture based upon the making, shaping and fitting of metal is being needlessly and thoughtlessly obliterated." It was not all right to "hurt people economically—in ways that damage their children, their families, their communities—as long as you do it in the name of your property rights." A new principle was needed: that economics and technology "should be subordinated to the preservation and nurturing of community."[44] In essence, the concept of property rights had to be extended to include a voice for workers and communities. Banks and corporations should not have unilateral power to impoverish an entire region. Surveying the mill town scene in late 1993, a reporter concluded that "the industrial towns that line southwestern Pennsylvania's rivers have become the region's Third World, increasingly disadvantaged and increasingly unable to take care of themselves."[45]