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STORY OF THE

GRAND RAPIDS STRIKE

BY

R. W. IRWIN

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Before undertaking to tell you the story of the Grand Rapids strike, it probably would not be out of place to tell you something of our city and of our furniture industry.

Grand Rapids has a population of 115,000. The records show that of this number 20,251 men and boys are employed in some 532 factories. There are 53 factories manufacturing furniture, fixtures, etc., employing in round numbers 9,000 men. Quite a large proportion of the furniture workers are Holland and Polish, or of those descents.

In the early days, Grand Rapids was settled very largely by Hollanders, and the many sturdy characteristics of this race are evident throughout our city today. I think it is safe to say that there is not a city in the United States more truly entitled to the name "city of homes" than Grand Rapids, nor do I believe there is any other place in this country where the rank and file of the laboring men are better housed and better cared for than in Grand Rapids.

I doubt if it is necessary at this time to go into any detailed account of the size and character of the furniture industry in Grand Rapids. I think every man here is well acquainted with it. You all know, and I make this statement without egotism, the position that Grand Rapids holds today in the furniture world. There is one point, however, that I desire to lay emphasis upon at this time, because I think it had a great bearing upon the situation at the time of our recent labor troubles. It is more unfortunate, but it is nevertheless true, that throughout the city of Grand Rapids, for several years, there has been a feeling that the furniture factories were not paying good wages. This feeling had a great deal to do with the fact that public sentiment, at the time of

the strike, was not with the furniture manufacturers. We all recognized this, and we all recognized the injustice of it, but the fact remained just the same.

Now, this misapprehension, in my judgment, came about through a lack of knowledge on the part of our citizens of the real fundamental principles underlying the furniture business. They had not the first appreciation of what it was that had made for Grand Rapids the name it holds today in the furniture world, nor had they any knowledge or appreciation of the comparative wages in the furniture factories in Grand Rapids and in furniture centers elsewhere. They did know, and I do not question but what it was true, that the wages in the average furniture factories did not compare favorably with many other lines of manufacture, but there are reasons for this, upon which I will touch later.

I do not question but what, with the knowledge that this opinion prevailed within our city, that the furniture men were derelict in their duties in not having, long before this trouble occurred, acquainted the people with the true situation, that there might have been a better understanding on the part of their workmen and the business community. They, evidently, were not concerned about this feeling because they realized themselves what the true situation was, and thought others should appreciate it.

Grand Rapids does not owe its prominence in the furniture world to its proximity to raw material, nor to any natural advantage. It may be that in the early days we were near to the lumber supply, but many, many other places in which furniture was manufactured, were as near to that supply as Grand Rapids. We were not advantageously located in the matter of transportation, for a large part of the market for furniture was in the far East and the far West. In the East, we are under a handicap and always have been, in the matter of freight rates, and in the West, we have not the compensating advantages to off-set, that our geographical location entitles us to.

Now, in view of this, what was it that made for Grand Rapids the name it has today? It was the fact that in the early days of the industry, through chance or otherwise, there became engaged in this business men of unusual strength and

business ability. It is to such men as George W. Gay, Julius Berkey, John Widdicomb, David Kendall, Charles Black, Elias Matter, who have since passed away, and to men like William Widdicomb, Major McBride, and John Mowat, who, of the "old guard," are still actively engaged in the industry, that Grand Rapids owes its supremacy in the furniture world. Compare the ability of these men with an equal number in any other line, in any other locality, and it will show you why Grand Rapids took a place in the front ranks. When you stop to consider that almost all the men engaged in the furniture industry in the early days, were men of unusual strength of character and business ability, it shows plainly why Grand Rapids obtained the start and its position as a furniture manufacturing center.

No one understands better, no one can understand better, than you men here, that any progress made in the furniture world has been made against the keenest competition. There are absolutely no artificial means of maintaining the furniture manufacturing business, nor has there ever been. If all businesses throughout the country were conducted upon the same basis of open, free competition, there would be no trust problem in this country; there would be no need for the Sherman law nor any government control of corporations.

It is probably a fact that the average wages paid in a wood working industry are lower than in some other lines of manufacturing, notably, the iron industry. It is not my purpose to go into any great detail to show why this difference exists. I think there is a reason—it is because this business furnishes employment to a very large proportion of unskilled labor, and to a greater proportion of semi-skilled labor, that is fitted for work with an apprenticeship of a few months. It is absolutely wrong to an industry of this character to compare its average wage scale with that of other lines, which require an apprenticeship of years. It may be a question whether a large preponderance of industries of this character is a good thing for a community. That is a subject I do not intend to take up. The fact, however, remains that the average wages throughout the wood working industry are lower, as I said before, than they are in many other lines, and it is further true that this condition is one for which no one group of manufacturers, nor all combined, can be blamed. I believe

that for an equal amount of brains and physical effort, the wages in the furniture industry of this country will compare favorably with other lines.

There has been a feeling in our community that because of the standing that Grand Rapids had, to manufacture successfully in that town was a very easy proposition; all you needed to have, according to the general impression, was the name "Grand Rapids" on your stationery, and success would surely follow. That idea was, evidently, brought about from the successes that have been made in the furniture industry in Grand Rapids. You all know that what success we have made has been by being ever on the "job"; that it has been an open, free fight, with no favors. You know that we have no advantages other than the advantage that may have been gained through the severest competition, but the real, true situation was not understood in our city. There seemed to be a feeling that in the matter of the demands made upon us, it was within our power to do anything we saw fit and that all we would have to do would be to raise prices to compensate for the increased cost of production.

You can look the country over but I do not believe you will find an industrial center in which the relationship between the manufacturers and the employe was more pleasant or cordial than in Grand Rapids, prior to the first of January, 1910. This is evidenced by the fact that we had, within the industry, very few labor organizations. There had been, within the last twenty years, but two strikes; one, the carvers' strike, some fifteen or twenty years ago, and another on the part of the upholsterers of the city about seven years ago. These two strikes together did not involve as many men as are employed in one of the good sized factories.

I do not believe it is a right explanation of this long period of industrial peace to say that the men were under the domination of the factory managers. I do not believe that in free America such peace could exist for so long a period unless it was well founded; unless it was founded upon justice, and I claim that it was founded upon justice in our city.

During the Summer and Fall of the year 1909, prices of most all commodities and necessities of life reached their maximum height. There had been a very marked increase,

during the five or six months preceding January, 1910, an increase that necessitated a general wage advancement throughout the entire country. In many lines of industry, it was possible to make this adjustment promptly, because it could be immediately embodied in the cost of the goods. The competitive nature of the furniture business, the fact that there were absolutely no working agreements in reference to prices between any furniture factories, not excepting our local factories, made it necessary for the furniture industry as a whole, to make preparations for the absorption of any such additional cost, as a general advancement in wages would necessitate, in the cost of their goods.

Realizing that an increase in wages was bound to come, a movement was started throughout the furniture industry, to try and make advances that would be compensating for it. Under ordinary conditions, this matter would have worked out in our city, without any great dissatisfaction, but, unfortunately, in December of that year, there was a strike on the part of the cabinet makers in one of the large factories. The manager, realizing that what the men asked for was bound to come and anxious to get out his samples for the coming season, told these men to go back to work and that, beyond question, after the first of January, what they asked would be granted. The account of this, as printed in a local paper, was: that this manager said the factories in Grand Rapids would advance wages on the first day of January. I have no way of knowing just what it was the manager said, except what he told me, and what I have stated is his version of it. Unfortunately, this was followed by an editorial in one of our papers, complimenting the manufacturers upon deciding to recognize conditions by making an advance in wages January first.

The manufacturers of Grand Rapids had never treated the wage problem as an association matter. There was absolutely no basis upon which they could get together as an organization for the advancement of wages.

That what had been published in reference to an increase in wages was accepted by the men as the policy of the furniture manufacturers, was plainly shown. It was evident, shortly after the first of January, that the men expected a horizontal raise. The factories stood ready to handle the situation in the same manner that they had always handled the

wage question, by individual arrangements with the men, with the recognition on their part that advances should and would be made; but the unfortunate thing is that the Grand Rapids manufacturers did not appreciate the situation that had been brought about; they did not realize what this disappointment would be to the men.

Shortly after the first of January, the advances started and in the factory in which I am interested, 95% of the men in our employ received advances before the 15th day of February, and, I think, this was the common practice throughout the city. The fact, however, remained that the men did not entirely get over their disappointment that this advance was not made on the first pay day after the first of the year.

Shortly following this time, there was a mayoralty campaign on in our city. The contesting parties were the former mayor and a furniture manufacturer. Naturally, this brought the furniture question into the realm of politics, and, I think, you all know well what this means. In this instance it meant that our attitude toward our men and our practices were absolutely misconstrued. It was sowing the seed of discontent.

About this time, the organizers, representing the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, came upon the scene. This organization is a very large one and claims to be the largest organization of skilled workers in the United States. They have a membership, according to their own statement, of something like 220,000, with a treasury, prior to this strike, of $400,000, less what they had invested in a building in Indianapolis. This organization was founded in 1882 and its jurisdiction has been recognized in the building trades for many years. Until about five years ago, they had never gone further in their work of organizing factories, than the manufacturing lumber plants, such as planing mills, etc., but later, they took in interior trim manufacturers, such as doors and fixtures. This brought them close to the household furniture industry. Beyond question, they saw here a very large field for activity. In surveying the situation, they saw an industry employing something over 50,000 men that, as a general proposition, had never been organized. What was more natural than that they should seek to bring the workers in this industry within their fold? Having decided to do this, the logical step was to first move upon Grand Rapids. Grand Rapids,

where probably more medium and high grade furniture was made than at any other one place, would make a splendid point of attack. If they were successful here, they would move to other points. And why should they not be successful, in view of the fact that these factories had had no experience with strikes, and that their organization had a great fund from which to pay strike benefits?

They sent a corps of their very best organizers to Grand Rapids and, we must confess, these organizers did their work well. Within the next few months they succeeded in organizing a very large proportion of the workers in the Grand Rapids factories. Feeling sure of their position, that they had dealt justly with their men in the past, the manufacturers did not raise a hand to prevent this organization. They had always maintained, and maintain today, that their factories shall be open to all workers, regardless of their religion, membership in unions, or other affiliations.

For several months following this period, the work of organization went on. This work finally culminated in a request for a conference between representatives of the union and the manufacturers. This, the manufacturers refused to concede. Later on, formal demands were served upon the Association, but, not intending to recognize the unions, the manufacturers refused to reply. Following this, on February 9, 1911, an agreement was submitted by the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, to every furniture manufacturer, for their signature. This agreement, in substance was as follows: That on and after the first day of April, nine hours should constitute a day's work; that wages should be increased 10% over the present rate paid, (this would have meant, taking into consideration the shorter time, an average increase in wage of 22%). They also demanded that a minimum wage scale be adopted and that piece work be dispensed with. To this communication, the manufacturers replied direct to their employes, through letters addressed to each workman: to the effect that they had always operated on an open shop basis, dealing with every man, union or non-union, without discrimination, on the basis of ability and individual arrangement, and that they would continue to handle this matter in the future as they had handled it in the past.

At this time it might not be out of place to touch upon

our Association, which has been criticized so severely by the labor leaders. The Grand Rapids Furniture Manufacturers' Employers Association, at the time of the strike, had a membership of 39 factories, employing about 7,200 men. It was from the beginning, and always has been, a defense organization, pure and simple. It stood for the open shop and the only other thing that a firm subscribed to, in becoming a member of this organization, was to a uniformity of working hours. There never has been any such question as wage agreement between the various factories, maximum or minimum. In a body of this kind, a question so important as this is bound to come up from time to time, but it has always been contended, and successfully so, by a large majority of the membership of the Association, that inasmuch as we were not willing to treat with our men as an organization, we must not in any way work against their interests as an organization, and that every man should be left free to sell his labor in the open market at the highest price obtainable.

Notwithstanding the many charges of black-listing, keeping records of employes, preventing their freely going from one factory to another, this principle has been maintained to the fullest extent, and all of these charges are absolute falsehoods. No record of any kind or nature has been kept, as to the work or prices paid any individual employe, nor was there any black-list in existence, nor, in fact, anything that prevented the men from selling their labor where they could obtain the most for it.

In the early days of the Association, under the first secretary, a system, more or less in detail, for keeping a record of the employes, so that they might be properly graded, was installed. This, as we proved before the Commission of Inquiry, was abandoned something like five years ago. I know that nothing of this nature, either collectively or between a few of the factories, has been maintained. I do not question but what every factory keeps some kind of a record of its own employes, and may, when it discharges an employe, make a record of the reason why he was discharged. I think that is something every one would recognize a manufacturer would have the right to do. The claim that these records are used for the benefit of other manufacturers is untrue.

From the time the union sent the proposed agreement until a week or two prior to the first of April, the date that had been set by the union for a reply, matters stood in statu quo. As it became more evident, as time went on, that neither side was going to yield, the city became very much excited. Everyone dreaded a strike and its impending troubles. All kinds of propositions and suggestions were made by well-meaning people for a settlement, of which arbitration was the principal one set forth. These well-meaning people did not realize that questions so fundamental, questions that struck at the very vitals of the industry, could not be submitted to arbitration. It was, in fact, a problem that could not be arbitrated. No commission or board could have been gathered together that could have decided this matter absolutely on its merits, without prejudice to either party. Without a knowledge of what should be given in return for a day's pay, of a stipulated sum for stipulated hours, what possible basis for a just arbitration could there be? There was absolutely no standard to go by. The factories in our city manufacture all lines of goods, household furniture, school furniture, opera chairs, store furniture and bookcases. Now, what possible common basis for a determination as to what should be given in return for the wage awarded could there be for any board of arbitrators?

The result was that the manufacturers refused, for this reason, to submit their case to people who could not possibly render an intelligent decision, no matter how much they might be inclined so to do.

When it was seen that arbitration would not be accepted, it did not dampen the ardor of some of our citizens, to use their best endeavor to ward off the trouble. They were in hopes that some kind of an investigation of the whole situation, that would lay before the workers and the manufacturers the true conditions as they existed, might, perchance, be the means of avoiding this strike, which, it seemed, was surely coming. As a result, several propositions were publicly announced. This finally culminated in the appearance before the Executive Committee of the Manufacturers Association, of Bishop Schrembs, who had lately been made Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Western Michigan, and Rev. Alfred W. Wishart, pastor of the Fountain Street Baptist Church. Both

of these gentlemen had shown themselves to be very much interested in the situation and both were working to a common end, to avoid, if possible, the coming struggle. These two gentlemen had plans that, while they were expressed in different language, were practically the same. They asked that we agree to a Commission of Inquiry, that each party's position might be fully understood, in the hopes that this publicity might be the means of a better understanding. To this, the manufacturers readily agreed, and it was left with them to go over the proposals governing the proposed Commission, and to submit any changes in form that they might find were necessary. A meeting was arranged with the same parties for later in the day.

The manufacturers practically accepted verbatum the draft that had been prepared by Bishop Schrembs in his own hand, with the exception that they added a fourth paragraph. The rules governing the Commission were as follows:

"We approve of the suggestion that has come to us from disinterested citizens that a committee of inquiry be formed.

"This committee of inquiry shall not in any sense be a board of arbitration. Its scope shall be limited to the following functions:

"First, To obtain from any employes or group of employes, either individually or through their representatives, a statement of their grievances and proposals together with their reasons therefor.

"Second, To present such grievances and proposals with the reasons therefor to the manufacturer or manufacturers concerned and to receive their statement in reply thereto.

"Third, To consider the subject matter presented to it by the respective parties thereto, to summarize the same and determine therefrom what such party is or is not willing to do.

"Fourth, To make such further independent investigation of manufacturing conditions and workers' conditions in the furniture industry here or elsewhere as may be necessary for the sole purpose of verifying allegations in either of the said statements."

The fourth paragraph, which was added by the furniture manufacturers, was added for the express purpose of providing

for a thorough investigation of the conditions surrounding the manufacture of furniture. Many felt, as I have stated before, that in the matter of wage advancement, or anything that would increase beyond reason the cost of their product, was striking at the vitals of their business. They knew that the business was one of an open, competitive nature and that they could not successfully meet competition unless they worked under practically the same conditions as their competition.

When this fourth paragraph was submitted to the two gentlemen named, they expressed their highest approval of what we had added. Bishop Schrembs made the statement that we were more than fair; that we had shown ourselves to be broad gauged business men with a confidence in the position we had taken, and that no man could ask more than we had offered. He said, "You have given permission, by the addition of this fourth paragraph, for more than we could reasonably have expected, because you have made it possible for the entire community to understand the true underlying situation as pertains to your industry."

The commission that was agreed upon by the manufacturers and laboring men, was made up of five prominent citizens. The first work of the commission was to hear the complaints of the laboring men and to formulate for them their grievances and proposals. To this end, they organized and held hearings for the laboring men. It was deemed expedient that all sessions should be private, but a complete, verbatim record was kept of all that was said before this commission. This record is still in existence and some day may be used to disprove some of the slanderous statements that have been made in reference to this commission.

The proposals of the workmen, as finally formulated and presented to the manufacturers, through the commission, were, in substance, the same proposals that were made by the union to the factories. These requests were supported by the statements that no material general raise in wages had occurred in the last five years, except in a few minor instances where some lines of work had been raised from three to four per cent. They further alleged that in many of these instances the increase was made to pace makers and not to the balance

f the crew; that the present average wage was not a living vage and does not enable the worker to maintain a normal nd decent standard of life. They alleged, further, that during his period in which there had been no increases in wages, urniture had been advanced in price 10% at three different mes. They also gave a schedule of wages that purported to e the wages paid in the furniture factories in the city. The bolition of piece work was called for upon the ground that s soon as the piece worker turned out more than he had one under the day system, the price was arbitrarily lowered, nd that the continuation of this system meant an increased utput on the part of the working man, without a corre-ponding increase in pay. The old proposition that the manu-acturers were maintaining a black list, which did not permit he men to sell their labor freely in the open market, was lso alleged.

The creation of this commission and the time necessary or its work, had caused the workmen to postpone their strike, vhich had originally been set for the first of April. Within a easonable length of time the manufacturers made their reply, nd, before making this reply, the necessary statistics were athered to support their answer. The manufacturers under-ook to show what I have heretofore stated, that the furniture usiness is a competitive business and that Grand Rapids ould only maintain its present position in the furniture world, rovided it was enabled to manufacture under conlditions imilar to those surrounding the industry elsewhere.

We proved, beyond the question of a doubt, that but a mall proportion of the country's furniture was made in Grand Rapids; that we had no natural advantages, in fact that in nany things we were under disadvantages as compared with ther localities. All of the allegations were denied and proofs ubmitted. We submitted proofs to show that in the average vage paid in Grand Rapids there had been an increase of 28½% over the wages paid in 1901 and an increase of 16¼% ver the wages paid in 1906, showing plainly, as I have hereto-ore stated, that the manufacturers had recognized the changed conomic conditions and had adjusted their wages accordingly.

I believe that the increases made in our city, and they were made without any pressure other than that of the com-

petition for labor, will compare favorably with advances made in other industrial centers during the same period.

We further showed a continuity of working time that was most remarkable. During a period of four years, the average was 97% of the days that the factories could have run; this is excluding Sundays and legal holidays. This proves that the competition which exists between the factories for men, works to the advantage of the men. With absolutely no arrangement about hiring each others' men, it behooves every manufacturer in Grand Rapids to strain to the utmost the operation of his factory during dull periods, that he may not lose his best men to the other factories. If we had been working under such a hard and fast agreement as was charged, this condition would never exist, but during the dull periods of the year men would be laid off. Why not, if we had the power that was alleged, to prevent them from obtaining em-ployment elsewhere?

The statistics in reference to the wage paid, were gathered from the pay rolls of all of the Association factories and the calculations were made, taking into consideration every em-ployee in the plant. They were not based upon averages of the high and the low, but show the actual increase in the average wages paid. Now, when you take into consideration the large proportion of unskilled labor that is employed by all the furniture factories, I think the average with the skilled labor will compare quite favorably with that paid in other lines of work.

Our proofs further substantiated the statement that was made at the time, that the wages in the industry in Grand Rapids were higher than the average wages paid in this in-dustry throughout the country.

The great sociological question that was raised in their allegation, that the wages paid did not allow the workmen to maintain a decent and normal standard of life, was one that they could hardly expect us to take up. If we were paying wages equal to the average paid by the industry throughout the country, making the same lines of goods, we were fulfilling our duty in this direction, and if the allegation as made was true, the causes were deeper than the furniture industry.

In view of the situation as we saw it, it was absolutely

ecessary for us to refuse all of the demands that had been ıade. We claimed, and claim today, that we cannot operate ur factories upon a nine hour basis, with increased wages, nless this basis is established throughout the furniture in-ustry. This does not mean that we were opposed to the nine our day and better wages for which the men asked, but simply ıat it was beyond our power to grant it to them and maintain ıe Grand Rapids market.

When our statement was submitted to the commission, ıe question was raised as to whether we would be willing to llow independent investigations outside of the Association. harges had been made that bad conditions existed in some of ıe factories. We told them that we welcomed any such an ıvestigation and the eight or nine men who were present, ach for himself, volunteered any information that was wanted ı reference to these conditions within their business, and that) far as we were concerned as an organization, we had no bjections to their calling in any manufacturer; in fact, we sked that they do so, because if there were, as alleged, condi-ons in some of the factories that should not be tolerated, we anted it to be shown.

Just as soon as the leaders found that none of their de-ıands were conceded to, they called the men out, on April 9th. This occurred the next day after our statement was led with the Commission of Inquiry. They did not wait until ıe Commission could investigate the matter, as they had ower to do under the rules provided for their organization; ıey did not wait for any report on the part of this Commis-on.

We entered into this work in good faith, because we anted the true situation placed before our men and the public. s soon as it was found that the men had gone out on a strike, ıere was a strong feeling on the part of the members of the ommission that their work should be abandoned. To this e objected most strenuously. We had agreed to lay our case efore an impartial body and having done so, we demanded ıat they fulfill the trust they had accepted. We demanded ıat the fourth paragraph of the rules be adhered to and that ıey make an investigation to either substantiate or disprove ıe statements that both parties had made. It took consider-

able effort to impress upon the Commission the necessity of proceeding with this work. This it finally did, however, and the result was that the claims we had made were substantiated in every particular. It recognized our position and so stated in its findings.

It found that we were unjustly discriminated against in freight rates; that our statement of outside competition was correct; that hours and wages were practically the same in Grand Rapids as elsewhere; that no black-list was maintained and that the employment bureau was worthy of high praise; that our statements as to wages were correct. They urged a shorter work day as being in harmony with the principles of modern political economy and that we do all we could, through our National Association or otherwise, to bring about this end.

Some statements have been made that certain members of the Commission were prejudiced in favor of the manufacturers and greatly influenced the final report of the Commission. Such statements are cruel and almost criminal. It is a reflection upon every member of the Commission to say that such men as made it up, men for whom the community had always had the highest respect, would sign their names to a report that did not reflect their honest views, after weighing all of the evidence presented. The simple facts are that the proposition of the manufacturers was proven beyond the shadow of a doubt, and no other kind of a report could or would be made by men of such high character.

The history of the strike, from this time on, is not vastly different from that of the average industrial struggle of this magnitude, except that it was of much longer duration.

About 7,000 men walked out. For some time the manufacturers made no particular effort to fill the places of their striking employes. At the end of three weeks they established a system whereby each factory reported every day the number of men that were at work. The first report was made on the 22nd of May and at that time it was found that in 36 factories there were 1309 men at work. This gradually increased, some weeks not over forty or fifty and some weeks several hundred, until on the first of July there were 2944 men at work. About this time the manufacturers made something of an effort to bring in workmen from outside. In this they were quite suc-

cessful. The gain from that time on was more rapid. On the first of August, there were 3912 men at work, and the last report, taken just before the strike was declared off, showed 5190 men at work. You can see from this that the gain was steady from the start.

It has been repeatedly stated, and possibly it is true, that this was, comparatively speaking, a very orderly and peaceable strike. Be that as it may, the fact remains that there were many assaults upon the men who continued at work. Intimidation was a most common thing, in fact so much so that no man could feel safe from harm to himself or his family, if he worked.

There is absolutely no doubt but what many men were kept out of the factories by this means. From the day the strike was called, a most carefully worked out plan of picketing was installed by the unions. The men all wore badges with the word "picket" in large letters.

The interference with the men who were working in Grand Rapids, prior to May 17, 1911, was by threats and assaults, such as are punishable under the criminal law and should have been dealt with by the police. Every day brought reports of from two to four assaults, varying from threats to severe poundings, and in some instances with such weapons as would have made them deadly assaults. The police force consisted of from between 80 to 90 men, and even with a change of hours of service, the largest possible relief that could be mustered at one time was in the neighborhood of 25 men.

The furniture factories, over forty in number, scattered from one end of the city to the other, obviously could not be protected by this force.

Failure of the police to apprehend violators of the law, led to a demand for further police protection. The attitude of the Mayor and some members of the Board of Police and Fire Commisisoners brought about a sharp controversy as to the length to which the police would go. With this apathy on the part of the authorities, instances of violence grew daily, until they culminated in a riot at the Wididcomb Plant on June 15, 1911.

Following the Widdicomb riot, the Mayor, realizing that

the continuation of violence and the inadequacy of the police force must inevitably result in a call of the militia, issued a proclamation calling upon one hundred citizens of Grand Rapids to volunteer for police duty.

The nature of this response was as was anticipated and arranged for by the Mayor and the strike organizers. It was stated by one of the leaders that the Mayor had called and talked the matter over with them and that they got busy with the result that nearly every special policeman sworn in was a union man. A large proportion were strikers. Conditions were but little improved after the police force was increased. Violence and intimidations were common. If proper protection was to be given to the men who wanted to work, something else would have to be done. The manufacturers applied to Judge McDonald for an injunction, which was issued on May 17th and, after argument, made permanent two weeks later.

This injunction granted to all the factories in the Furniture Manufacturers Employers' Association, was directed to the strike leaders, the unions, the members of the shop committees and their confederates and associates, and forbade, in terms, the maintaining of spies and pickets at the factories, the use of threats, violence or abusive language, of the gathering in such large numbers as to cause fear on the part of workmen. In making the injunction permanent, Judge McDonald, commenting upon the term "picket" stated that he did not deem the maintaining of a reasonable number of men to observe conditions in the plant a violation of the injunction against picketing. This opened the way for a continuance of a considerable part of the intimidation and violence which had preceded the injunction. Crowds collected at the station and interfered with the men who were coming in to take the striking workmen's places. This "reasonable observance" gave opportunity for the taking of the workmen's names so that the committee might visit them at their homes in the evening, and intimidation was only in a measure checked by the injunction.

The appeal to Judge McDonald for protection, however, had one great beneficial effect. The Sheriff of Kent County, who had been disposed to leave the matter of maintaining order in the hands of the city police, was instructed by the

Court to see that the injunction was obeyed. His force being inadequate, he agreed to swear in as deputies those men who wished to remain at work, or to go to work in the struck shops, providing the factories would undertake to be responsible for their behavior as deputies. This resulted in the swearing in as deputies of 200 workmen and of placing through the factories and on the streets of the city at the hours when the men were leaving the plants, a considerable scattering of men having lawful authority to preserve peace and whose sympathy lay directly with the men who sought to work.

Several arrests were made by these newly created deputies and their presence prevented serious violence in many instances. It should be said further to the credit of these deputies that in no instance was a commission revoked, or one of these men arrested for misuse of this authority or misconduct while a deputy.

The attitude of the strikers and the press toward the injunction was commendable. In spite of the effort on the part of the organizers and of the attorney for the strikers, even before the court, to raise the cry of "government by injunction" and "the injunction is the weapon of the employer," confidence in the Court and the apparent necessity for and sanity of the injunction itself, compelled a respectful acquiescence in it on the part of a majority of the strikers, though, as stated above, there were willful violations of it by a number who would probably have recognized no authority.

The Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners paid strike benefits after the first week of $4.00 per week, to this was generally added $1.00 donated from other sources. The finishers' union were unable to keep up their benefits to the end. All told, there was paid to the men by the unions somewhere between $150,000 and $175,000.

From the ranks of the Employers' Association there were but two desertions,—the American Seating Company, commonly called the "Seating Trust," with head offices at Chicago and plants in several points of the country, made an agreement on May 26th to work nine hours with ten hours pay. Piece work continued at the old prices. On the face of the matter this looked like a big victory for the strikers, but it proved to be an empty one. This company worked almost

entirely upon a piece-work basis, so that in reality only about 10% of their men were affected by the concessions. Something like 35 or 40 men out of from 350 to 400 secured the benefits of a shorter work day at the old rate of pay.

The only other factory that gave in was the Nachtegall Manufacturing Company, a small corcern employing about 30 men, making bank furniture. They started up on the nine hour basis with ten hours pay on May 13th.

With these exceptions, every firm stood out until the end, which came on August 17th. There was much talk about the Association being held together by a bond; the use of threats and intimidation regarding bank accommodations, shipping privileges, etc. It probably is needless to say that every statement of this kind was absolutely false.

All the world loves a fighter, but all the world asks for honesty and fair play on the part of the leader in any fight. No one can blame the exponents of unionism for fighting for their cause. In this trouble the men had a leader of no mean ability, but a man who had no regard for the truth of the statements made to his men. The promises of strike pay and their fulfillment is a matter of their concern, and not ours, but statements about the manufacturers are our concern and we have the right to challenge them, because many were absolutely false. The men were taught class hatred; that their employers with whom many had been associated for years, were their enemies; and that by means of the black-list and other records they were being kept from selling their labor freely, as the manufacturer sells his product. A fair sample, and a most damnable one, of these stories told the men, to illustrate what hard hearted, selfish individuals the manufacturers were, was to the effect that they had fought the bringing into our city of other industries, because of the effect upon the labor market; that they were the means of driving the Brunswick-Balke Company out of the city, because they paid higher wages. These statements were absolutely false and the men who made them knew that they were not true. The Brunswick-Balke Company went to another city because they received a large bonus, and for no other reason. No furniture man laid a stone in their way, if they desired to stay in Grand Rapids. I make the statement, and I can prove it, that no class of men or men

engaged in any other industry in our city, have spent more time and effort in endeavoring to bring other industries to Grand Rapids than the men engaged in the furniture business.

What was it that gave Grand Rapids the name it is known by all over the world? What is it that has had so much to do with the progress of that city and has made many of its institutions possible? What has caused many of its fine buildings to be erected? What is it that brings 1200 to 1500 people to our city twice a year, who stay from one to four weeks? The furniture industry.

Many of the men who built up this industry were born and raised in Grand Rapids. A great many had worked their way from the bench and minor positions to leadership in their businesses. Many had been foremost in the ranks of workers for Christian, charitable, and other philanthropic purposes. Prior to this time they had been classed as good citizens, but almost over night they were branded as selfish, cruel men, seeking to hold down the working man, unwilling to give him a wage sufficient to maintain a decent standard of life.

People seemed to forget that these men had hearts and that they had proven their interest in humanity to as great an extent as had many of their critics. They, however, knew the conditions surrounding their own business; what their competition was, and that to grant what was asked would spell "ruin" to Grand Rapids as the leading furniture market.

The great growth of the Grand Rapids market for the sale of furniture, with the dozens of buildings devoted to that purpose, and hundreds of outside lines exhibited there every season, is well known, but it is not fully appreciated that at the same time this is bringing every season the products of almost the entire country right to our doors and placing them in most direct competition with our manufactures.

Do not take from this that we fear you, for we do not. We are ready to meet you in open competition, but we must hold to ourselves the same conditions under which we work that obtain throughout the furniture world.

Thus, after a struggle of seventeen weeks, the strike came to an end on August 17th, the men going back to work upon

the same terms that were in force when they went out. Very little reliable, detailed data is available as to the great industrial strikes in this country, but, beyond question, taking into consideration the number of men involved, duration, and amount of strike benefits paid, this can be classed as one of the largest.

In reviewing all that has transpired, I think we must recognize, as found by the Commission of Inquiry, who investigated our matter, that "the shorter work day, generally speaking, is justified by humane considerations and is in harmony with the principles of modern political economy," and we must also recognize that our industry is not abreast of the times in this respect. Years ago, and not so very many either, twelve or fourteen hour work days were common; while today the maximum is about ten hours, and nine hours is much more common. I think we owe it to ourselves to recognize first, the humane side of the question. The lot of all workmen at the best is none too good; ten hours of continuous labor is a long day, leaving very little, if any, time to the worker for recreation or companionship with his family. Second, that a large number of the other industries have recognized this condition and are upon the nine hour basis. I do not believe it necessary to go into great detail as to the hours of labor in other lines, for I believe you men all appreciate that what I say is true. If it is true, it remains for us to be progressive enough, and broad enough, to accept the situation from all viewpoints and to see that this same condition is brought about within our industry.

If you were to ask me if I thought that the manufacturers in any one or two localities could do it alone, I would, unhesitatingly, say "no," but I do believe that such a powerful organization as this can bring it about, if it goes at the matter with a will. I realize fully that the average furniture business today could not stand such an increase in the cost of production unless it was immediately reflected in the selling prices. In the last analysis, all increases in cost are borne by the consumer and this, I believe, is one that can, from all considerations, be rightfully added to the selling price and passed on.

If this organization will use its efforts in this matter, I am

ure that within a very short space of time the nine hour ystem can be made operative throughout the entire wood vorking industry.

Gentlemen, remember, "we pass this way but once" and it s worth something to every one of us to feel that we have had ur part in bringing greater comforts and pleasures to the housands upon thousands of people engaged in this industry. et us be men among men; let us accept the power that has een given us and, in a measure at least, apply it for the benefit f mankind.

Emerson says: "Life is a search after power." By reason f that search we have gained for ourselves a power at least ar above that of many men. We have gained a power which ow enables us to do an act which will prove that we are will- ng to use what Providence has given us, to some end other han one that is purely selfish.

Let us show the world a commercial organization that is villing to deal broadly with one of the great social problems vithin its fold, just because it believes it is right.

Let us take the initiative in this great movement and not ease in our efforts until the end has been achieved.