

HISTORY

OF THE

GRAND RAPIDS FURNITURE STRIKE

WITH FACTS HITHERTO
UNPUBLISHED.

BY VIVA FLAHERTY

"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God."

Ep. 6:12-13

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN
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INTRODUCTION

The following article, a part of which was written for the "Survey" of September 2, was not published at the desire of a citizen of Grand Rapids, for the reason that its publication "might only tend to prolong and keep alive enmities that could not in any way help the industry or Grand Rapids." If when he referred to "industry" he meant "manufacturers" and if by "Grand Rapids" he meant "board of trade," he was quite right. But the furniture industry includes more than the men at the top and Grand Rapids is more than the board of trade. And the people of Grand Rapids are awakened and enlightened and they can be trusted with the whole truth. A strike is a public matter, and if the people are to know how another is to be avoided they should know all the inside facts of this one, so that they may know whom to distrust and on whose shoulders rests the blame for a nineteen weeks' strike.

The investigation on which this article was based was made as one of my duties while employed as social service secretary of the Fountain Street Baptist church. Such a published report of industrial conditions would have given a new interpretation to Christian social service in Grand Rapids. Over the signature of an employe its publication would have

proved that the Fountain Street Baptist church is not the "class institution," "the furniture manufacturers' church," or "the rich men's club" that it was so frequently characterized during the strike. Had the citizen mentioned above consulted the writer of the article before exerting his influence for its suppression, the reputation of the church would have been cleared and it would have been given a new lease of life.

This history is published at this late date because of the efforts now being exerted by furniture manufacturers to crush organized labor.

V. F.

October 16, 1911.

HISTORY of the Grand Rapids Furniture Strike.

For nineteen weeks the furniture workers of Grand Rapids, Michigan, were out on a strike which called out upholsterers, carvers, finishers, machine hands, trimmers, packers and cabinet makers. The dissatisfaction of these workers was of long duration, but the unionization which made possible their determined stand began January, 1910. The seven unions that went out last April are estimated to have a membership of 4,000 workers in more than thirty-five shops; and, to swell their numbers, when the strike was at its height there was a large but uncertain number of non-union men not at work. Many of these were prevented from joining a labor organization either from religious principles or because the unskilled nature of their work made them ineligible for union membership. Many of the workers are members of the Christian Reformed denomination and during the strike its Classis decided that their members must withdraw from the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. While granting that the Brotherhood's general tendency is to seek betterment of social conditions and that it seeks human good, the Classis resolved that its church members might not belong because the Brotherhood is not founded upon divine right. The question will be carried by the men to higher church authority and they will remain with the union until the matter is finally settled. To most of the union men some strike benefit was paid; the unorganized workers

had no such assistance and no promise of future protection from the unions. Being thus the weakest and most unprotected, these were the first to go back to the factories. For weeks the unions stood firm with few losses, imported strikebreakers and a gradually increasing number of the unorganized men constituting the majority of the workers running the factories.

Grand Rapids is a city of 115,000 inhabitants, the second city in Michigan, and a city with an awakened social consciousness to which industrial war is thoroughly distasteful. Its furniture business is thus described in the Dictionary of Grand Rapids issued by the Old National Bank:

"The furniture business in Grand Rapids is as old as the city itself. Begun by men who conducted little shops, in which they worked side by side with their employers in the manufacture of what would today be considered a very crude product, it has grown until it gives employment to 8,500 men who work in 47 great factories that cover acres of ground. Meanwhile the standard of quality has kept pace with the increase in quantity so that now the Grand Rapids lines are recognized as the leaders. This recognition has led to the development of a unique feature of the business, a great semi-annual furniture exhibition in January and July, attended by buyers from all parts of the Union who crowd the city for two months of every year. Fairs similar to this are to be found only in such old world centers as Leipsic, Germany, which have built up through the centuries the reputation of being the headquarters of a particular industry. So great is the prestige of the semi-annual furniture season in Grand Rapids that outside firms send their samples here for exhibition. To accommodate them new buildings are constantly being erected to take the place of old buildings outgrown or to supply the increasing demand. Some of these are among the handsomest business blocks

in the city. One now contracted for will provide not only show rooms, but accommodations for the buyers during their stay."

Besides the large factories there are numerous small ones, the number of employes in each of the various Grand Rapids factories ranging from a few to over three thousand. These factories are said to turn out about one-tenth of the furniture made in the United States.

It is the quality of the Grand Rapids product which makes it the envy of the other furniture cities, and some part of the credit for this quality is due to the skill of hands and heads trained till they work as smoothly as machines. It is this skill that was the cause, during the strike, of the many advertisements in local papers for furniture workers who were wanted in other cities, and enabled some thousand of the strikers to leave the city.

Government statistics for 1907 show, however, that though Grand Rapids led the country in the quality of its output, it did not lead in the rate of wages paid its furniture workers. Since 1906 Grand Rapids wages have risen $16\frac{3}{4}$ per cent, in the face of a larger increase in the cost of living, but this does not mean that every man has received an increase. The actual wage average at the present time is hard to estimate, since the range of workers is from boys learning the trade to skilled artisans working on woods so precious they are bought by the pound. A considerable share of the work, perhaps more than in most industries, is done by unskilled labor. Not only do these different grades of workers make an average hard to strike, but factories turn-

ing out different kinds of furniture have different scales of pay, depending on the skill of the processes involved. Different factories again pay different rates for the same process; one, for example, paying \$2.30 to cabinet makers, another \$2.46; and even among men in the same factory individual ability often determines the wage. The personal equation also enters very largely into the situation and complicates it greatly. A general average taken from the pay of 8,401 men working during the same period in 62 factories engaged in some branch of the furniture business, gives an average wage of \$1.91. Twenty-four factories averaged over \$2 a day, paid to 1,187 employes. In the remaining thirty-eight the vast majority of the men, 7,214, were employed and received an average of under \$2 a day. The lowest rate for a single factory was \$1.75, an average among 247 men; the highest was \$3.15, paid by a factory employing five men. Such are the averages when skilled and unskilled, men and boys, are taken together. The only averages for skilled men are those given in a statement by the manufacturers, made early in the trouble. According to this statement cabinet makers averaged \$2.39 a day, finishers \$1.85, other skilled workers \$1.96 to \$2. These low rates for the skilled workers give some indication of the much lower rate the unskilled receive. It is a significant fact that in dull times when the men are being laid off, the averages go up, and in good times when the factories are employing every hand for whom they have room, the averages drop. This is because the factories in hard times try to keep their skilled and valuable hands em-

ployed so that they will not go elsewhere in search of work, letting go the less skilled workers in order to make the necessary reduction in operating expenses.

It was to a question of wages almost two years ago that the first cause of the strike can be traced. In November, 1909, following, as the men claim, a 10 per cent raise in the selling price of its product, a committee of three, representing the forty-five cabinet makers in the Oriel factory, waited upon the management and asked for an increase in wages. They were told to return after the furniture season. They did so and the only reply to their request was the discharging, now that the critical season was over, of the chairman of the committee, who had been in the employ of the factory for almost twenty-six years, as a punishment for being an agitator. The other cabinet makers walked out in sympathy with him. All were offered reinstatement after three weeks, and all except the chairman, who with a recommendation preferred to find work elsewhere, returned to the Oriel. From this incident, demonstrating as it did the helplessness of the individual in bargaining with his employer, the attempt of the workers to organize may be said to have had its beginnings. Workmen from other factories also became interested, and these men together took out a charter from the national organization of cabinet makers, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, and in the following February sent for an organizer.

In July, 1910, the union felt itself strong enough to act. A committee of the organized workers waited upon the president of one

of the two organizations of furniture manufacturers—the Furniture Manufacturers' Association—to present their request for a conference to consider the betterment of hours and wages. They were asked to wait until after the July furniture season, when a conference between the two organizations might be arranged. In August they returned, to be told that each firm would treat independently with its men. When the process of organization began the employers did not stem the tide of unionism by individual factory agreements; now a conference was asked for by the unionized workers and not by the whole group of workers in the individual shops. No further attempts at adjustment were made till fall, when the union requested a conference with the other association of furniture manufacturers—the Furniture Manufacturers Employers' Association. This time the refusal to deal with the union took the form almost of a challenge to strike. A later communication received no reply, and on February 9 the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, which includes four of the unions, addressed letters to the individual firms stating that the union council would be pleased to meet the firm addressed, for its approval and advice on the following proposed trade agreement—a nine-hour day with ten hours' pay; a 10 per cent increase in wages; the abolition of piece work, and the establishing of a minimum wage scale on an hour basis. This trade agreement was for consideration only; but such consideration in conference with the union council involved recognition of the union. The employers' cognizance of this fact is shown by the letters

given out March 1 to each employe by each firm in the Furniture Manufacturers Employers' Association, the association which was conducting the affairs of the manufacturers.

"We understand that certain officials of an organized body of workmen of the city have expressed a wish to confer with us about the management of our business.

We have always operated on an open shop basis; dealing with every man, union and non-union, without discrimination, on the basis of ability and individual arrangement.

From its organization this company has always recognized the liberty of every man to sell his labor freely, independently and at the best price obtainable.

This company will continue to conduct its business in these respects in the future as in the past."

By a referendum vote taken the last Saturday in March, 95 per cent of the unionized furniture workers voted to strike April 1.

The dissatisfaction of which the vote to strike was the climax had been generally known for a long time. Earnest and friendly consideration of the letters of February 9 had been urged upon the employers by the newspapers, by business men and, unofficially, by the president of the board of trade, for the best interests of employers, employes and the city. The mayor suggested the formation of a citizens' committee to discuss ways and means of preventing further trouble, and to act as a committee of arbitration. The answer of the furniture manufacturers to these efforts is summed up in their letter to the mayor:

"We beg to acknowledge the receipt of your communication of recent date.

This association is not unmindful of your profound concern and disinterested attitude in this matter, but beg to assure you of our confidence in our ability to meet any conditions that may arise."

The workers agreed to arbitration; by refusing, the manufacturers put themselves in the wrong with a large part of the public, who felt that trouble in the basic industry of Grand Rapids was by no means the concern of the furniture manufacturers alone, but the vital concern of Grand Rapids. Furthermore, for reasons which will be explained later, the manufacturers were known to use the words "disinterested attitude" in reference to the mayor ironically, and the injection of bitter personalities into a matter involving the welfare of so many workers created a bad impression. The press commented on the manufacturers' action unfavorably and from this time on the sympathy of the press was decidedly with the workers. Nor was the press, any more than the employers, blind to the fact that arbitration would have to be between the two organizations and that this was the cause of the manufacturers' refusal. The associated employers refused arbitration in order to maintain the right of organized capital to deal with labor unorganized; the press, representing the views of many citizens, came out strongly for the right of labor to deal collectively with capital acting collectively. The following extract from the News is typical:

"There is little question that by far the greater proportion of the labor disturbances with which the country has been afflicted have been and are the result of the refusal by organized employers to accord the workers the right of collective bargaining—the right to deal collectively, through their chosen representatives in the matter of settling wages and other contracts relative to the conditions of labor."

After the effort of the mayor to bring about

arbitration had failed and after the board of trade decided not to take a hand in the matter, a self-constituted committee of five was made up, known as the Commission of Inquiry. Although it was not in any sense a board of arbitration, the unions agreed to postpone the date of the walkout and to wait for the action of the commission in the hope that a peaceful settlement might be brought about. This commission, as a board of inquiry when they wanted a board of arbitration, was not an arrangement entirely satisfactory to the workers, but they waited for the reply of the manufacturers on April 18, which was similar in tone to their other published statements. On April 19 at 9 o'clock the walkout began.

A citizens' committee, composed of Rt. Rev. Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Schrembs, John Blodgett, William Judson and George Heferan, had also reported in favor of arbitration. This committee had been working quietly and effectively, but its work was suddenly cut short by the organization of the Commission of Inquiry through the efforts of the Rev. Alfred W. Wishart, who later became its secretary. Bishop Schrembs, of the citizens' committee, was invited to become a member of the commission. The other members were Sidney Stevens, John Hayes and Heber Knott.

The union leaders distrusted the commission, for they disliked the tactics of its organizer, whom Organizer Macfarlane of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners later designated as "the hired servant of that powerful union, the Furniture Manufacturers Employers' Association." The workers believed they

had a friend in Bishop Schrembs, who proved that their confidence had not been misplaced. The objects of the commission, as published, showed such a filmy pretense at true investigation and inquiry as to make it seem that the real object was to gain time by delaying the strike. Another real object was later revealed. According to the rules, the workers and their representatives made statements of their grievances and proposals, together with their reasons therefor. They appeared in person before the commission and told their side of the story. In accordance with the second rule, such grievances and proposals, with the reasons therefor, were presented to the manufacturers and their statement was received in reply. The manufacturers did not appear in person to be cross-examined, as had the workers. The third rule permitted the commission to consider the subject matter presented to it by the respective parties thereto, to summarize the same and determine therefrom what such party was or was not willing to do. The commission discovered what the workers had found out long before; namely, that the furniture manufacturers were not willing to do anything except conduct their business in the future as in the past. The fourth rule is the most interesting because it was so misleading. It gave power to the commission to make such further independent investigation of manufacturing conditions and workers' conditions in the furniture industry here or elsewhere as might be necessary for the sole purpose of verifying allegations in either of the said statements. The investigation attempted was so poor an excuse for an investigation as not

to be worthy of the name.

The commission's report consisted of little more than the statements from both sides and the commission's deductions therefrom. By the terms under which it was constituted the commission itself could have made no attempt at settlement, but many thought that the preliminary inquiry should have been followed up by a more thorough investigation by experts. The inquiry did serve, however, to start the strike with a clear statement of the men's actual grievances and the manufacturers' reply. The men claimed that the present wage was not commensurate with living expenses, that there had been no general increase in wages of late but on the contrary more than one general cut, and that since Grand Rapids dominated the market the employers could afford a raise at this time. They maintained their stand for a nine-hour day with ten hours' pay, in place of the present ten-hour day with Saturday half-holiday, without pay, in many of the factories, for the abolishing of the piece-work system and the establishing of a minimum wage scale on an hour basis. They further claimed that a blacklist and a general agreement to keep a certain level of wages existed, operated both through the employment bureau of the Employers' Association (another association of local employers of which the Furniture Manufacturers Employers' Association is a member) and also by communication between factories. The general drift of the men's statement was thus a demand for wages that would make it possible to keep up with the increased cost of living without lowering their standard; for freedom from vexatious

control by their employers, and for hours of work that would give some chance for home life. No claim of intolerable conditions was made.

In their reply the employers stuck to the letter of the men's demands as a business proposition. They repudiated any social responsibility to regulate wages to suit the cost of living. They denied that they controlled the furniture market, claimed that there had been a raise of wages of $16\frac{3}{4}$ per cent in the last five years and no general cut, that they could afford no further raise of pay or any shortening of hours, unless like wages and hours were adopted by the trade throughout the country. They did not consider it feasible to give up the piecework system and they denied the existence of a blacklist.

The commission's report was drawn up, and submitted by the secretary. But it is said that this report was not the final one, for it was a "whitewash" for the manufacturers, having no regard to the evidence, and seemed to indicate the second true object of the commission. A modified report was substituted, in which the commission concluded that the blacklist did not exist in the employment bureau of the association, though individual factories kept records. They felt that the piecework system was open to abuse and that the nine-hour day was desirable and practicable. On the question of the practicability of raising wages they did not feel that they had sufficient data to decide. The manufacturers paid no more attention to this report of the commission than they had paid to previous efforts of the workers and the public to bring

about a fair and peaceful settlement. Their arrogance and highhandedness was only exceeded by their shortsightedness, for they further revealed their policy and their plans to an unsympathetic public.

Following this report came interpretations which were not correct. Bishop Schrembs took occasion to publicly explain the report as it stood. Several days later Mr. Wishart, as a "friend of the workingmen," addressed an open letter to the strikers urging them to return to work, and stating that the furniture manufacturers would never enter into any agreement or recognize the unions in any way. Organizer Macfarlane's letter to Mr. Wishart followed the next day. Bishop Schrembs addressed an open letter to stockholders and furniture manufacturers, urging them to concede the nine-hour day. His use of the phrase, "the commission of inquiry established with your consent and under your rules," and the frequent use of "your commission," carried more meaning than the casual reader observed. This was a magnificent letter, expressing the convictions of a true man and a noble priest. Such a determined stand for justice taken by a churchman indicates the place which organized Christianity must take in the industrial revolution, or cease to call itself Christian and, instead, worship openly the Almighty God of the Pocketbook, who rules by the divine right of capital.

It is interesting to note just here that recognition of the union by a conference agreement was not a "demand" of the unions, since some of the seven factories which settled with their men during the strike published statements of

an intention to run on the basis of a nine-hour day with ten hours' pay and the union men returned to work. Others of these seven employers held conferences with men who had formerly been in their employ, and with their representatives. That the trade agreement was not demanded is shown by the fact that in one factory the men returned to work when promised sixty hours' pay for fifty-five hours' work, instead of fifty-five hours' pay for fifty-five hours' work—this being the firm's one concession. Five of these settlements were made early enough in the strike to make these two facts evident to the manufacturers and the public. But the action of the only one of these five firms which was a member of the association met with such disapproval that it resigned from the association. The last firm to make a settlement with its men, and the second of the association members that settled, did so with the approval of the association. It made the slightest concession. No other manufacturer offered even such a slight concession as sixty hours' pay for fifty-five hours' work.

The strike was marked by four well-attended events: the riot of May 15, the picnic of June 17, the mass meeting of July 4, and the parade of July 14. The riot took place in a factory neighborhood. It was characterized by the Evening Press as the worst demonstration in the history of the city. That only four men were arrested and that three of these required the services of an interpreter in court indicates that the riot was not very serious and that excitable Poles were the offenders. At the hour of closing a mob of strikers and

sympathizers, many of them women, attempted to attack a group of strikebreakers who were being taken from the factory in an automobile. Armed police were called and pandemonium reigned until the fire hose was brought into play. Immediately after the riot the leading unions issued the following official statement:

"We do hereby wish to declare that we members of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, who always and at all times believe in law and order, do deeply deplore all acts of violence and if in any way we can avoid such actions we will gladly assist the authorities in so doing.

If at any time we find a member of our organization doing any unlawful acts we will take immediate steps to discharge him from our ranks."

The next day, according to a statement in the "Free" Press of June 17, Organizer Macfarlane gave evidence of good faith by notifying the police in time to prevent a threatened attack on another factory. Furthermore, in response to a call for special police and by the advice of the organizer, many of the strikers presented themselves to the chief of police as applicants for this office, with the result that from one-third to one-half of the special police were chosen from among the strikers or strike sympathizers. Indefinite charges were made by the manufacturers that some of these men had refused to protect strikebreakers and others had tried to incite strikers to violence. One charge was proved and the man was removed from office, but on the whole this system of putting the strikers on their honor worked well. On both sides, in comparison with other labor wars, there has been as little disorder as was humanly possible where feel-

ing ran high. It would be a Utopian dream to expect men at all times to stand by quietly while others take their places in the shops, and yet among these hundreds of strikers not more than twenty-five men were convicted and sentenced to fines or short imprisonment. The severest penalty was a recommendation in two cases of two years' imprisonment. At least fifteen men were discharged. The vast majority of the disorderly were Polish or Lithuanian, most of the American and Dutch strikers conscientiously keeping good order and in many cases interfering to prevent violence.

The large scale of the strike and its long continuance the employers claimed to be due not to spontaneous enthusiasm on the part of the men, but to the influence of newspapers, organizers, and vote-catching politicians in the city government. In reality, cause and effect seem to have been the other way. The long dissatisfaction resulting from efforts to raise wages by individual bargaining, culminating in the Oriel trouble, brought matters to the point where the professional organizers' services could be used with effect. So too with the politicians—they did not put new ideas into the workmen's heads. They simply, for their own ends, played up the men's known grievances.

Charges of blacklisting in two mayoralty campaigns had much to do with fomenting the labor trouble. Certain sections of the constitution of the Employers' Association might have given rise to suspicions of this character. In Article I, Section 3, one of the objects, as stated, is "The adoption of a uniform, legiti-

mate system whereby members may ascertain who is and who is not competent or worthy of their employment." One of the duties of the general secretary was to "keep a record of employes of members of the association, as may be approved by the association." That this provision has been abused is a difficult matter to prove, because proof would have to be based on the affidavits of workers. Workers making such affidavits would place their names on a permanent blacklist. In the following way the workers have proved to their own satisfaction, at least, that some agreement exists among the manufacturers. John was getting \$2 a day in A's factory and learned that for the same work he could get \$2.25 with B and he applied for the job. When asked how much he had been receiving with A he said \$2.25. He was asked to return later. When he returned he was told that B had work for him at \$2. He remonstrated and received the information that \$2 was all he received with A. He was free to choose between A and B. It is from such incidents as this that political capital has been made. The Mayor and others who are well informed have also charged the board of trade with not only not offering inducements to outside industries paying high wages but of turning the cold shoulder to automobile factories, etc. A comparison of the wages of automobile machine hands and furniture machine hands is so striking as to make clear the dissatisfaction which would have been the immediate result among furniture workers, had automobiles been added to Grand Rapids products.

The sympathy of press and city officials

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created the usual situation of a protected strike. In addition to the appointment of strikers as special policemen by the city government, the board of aldermen adopted a resolution on July 24 urging arbitration. The preamble is as follows:

"Whereas, the importation of laborers into this city from other points during the present labor controversy in the furniture industry cannot but have a serious effect upon the social conditions in this city, both because of the large number of unemployed which will result and the suffering caused thereby, and also the bringing in of men of questionable character which may occur, and who, being thrown upon their own resources, will prove a detriment to the peace and safety of the city."

The newspapers gave a publicity, in most places denied in time of strike, to the relatively large number of strikebreakers who complain that they were deluded into coming to the city by promises of work, with no word that a strike was on. At this time, too, when the use of the injunction to prevent picketing is becoming more and more common throughout the country, the Judge of the Circuit court in Grand Rapids, in no sense a politician working in harmony with the city government, so modified the injunction granted against the strikers, which the manufacturers applied for after the riot, as to make "picketing" practically synonymous with "violence" and to allow the strikers all the rights of peaceful pickets. The strikers had thus in their favor a friendly public, press and city government, but the manufacturers had, as usual, the endurance which capital and the ownership of the machinery make possible.

Charging the newspapers with being muzzled and calling the public supine, the

Furniture Manufacturer and Artisan, a trade magazine, published the "Free" Press. Since the manufacturers claimed that they could not get a hearing in the papers, that the facts on their side were suppressed, this paper should have been a valuable means of checking off misstatements in other papers. Unfortunately the "Free" Press was not so used. A careful reading of two issues shows little besides violent attack on the other papers and on all strike sympathizers, with no attempt to disprove false statements made by them, warnings to the strikers and the fomenters of the strike that they, and they alone, are threatening the prosperity of the city and vociferations in the manner of the man who feels that he has the whip hand to the effect that the strike will be lost and the men will go back to work in the end, beaten. The "Free" Press could have afforded the manufacturers also a means of furnishing proof that would bear out their statement that they invite investigation of their business to prove that they cannot afford to grant the men's demands. Such investigation as a basis for compromise with their employes was not; however, a part of their policy. They knew that the real issue was collective bargaining; that any concession whatever involved the recognition of the right of workmen to organize with all the possibilities of progressive demands in the future. They dreaded the closed shop and were resolved to sit tight till the union was broken.

The fear on the part of the manufacturers that unjust demands would follow any concession made to the unions indicates the distance between them and their workmen, whose char-

acter they did not appreciate. Many of the leaders among the striking furniture workers are deeply religious men with very clear cut ideas of what was just to their employers. And it is their sense of the injustice, with which they feel that they and particularly their less well-equipped comrades have been treated, that led them to determine to organize, in spite of custom and religious scruples, to gain the trade agreement. They would have been satisfied with a compromise, but the day for compromise has passed. These furniture workers are not men who can be thrown down and walked over by any group of employers, looking out for the interests of labor at all times, without getting up with a full-grown suspicion that the theory of the identity of the interests of capital and labor is a myth and a delusion. If the employe gets more in wages the employer gets less in profits, and the employer is not going to get less in profits if he can help it. And when the cost of living is rising by jumps to meet an inelastic wage scale, the furniture workers will have to follow the example set by their employers and look out for themselves first.

The workers lost the strike. Moral victories do not pay for potatoes and sugar, or secure the rest and relaxation that a hard day's work merits. It was might not right that settled this strike and, consequently, industrial peace has not been secured in Grand Rapids. No one concerned years for another strike—particularly the striker,—because he and his family suffer most. But will the workers never wake up to their power, for they have it! It is with their ballots that they can do much now, for

capital is so thoroughly organized that striking against it, except in a general strike, is like striking against an iron wall. But undermine the wall by legislation protecting the workers! Relegate all professional politicians to the dump heap and train leaders from the ranks of the workers; they will be less apt to be "trimmers." Minimum wages and eight hour days can be secured by legislation. Where there is honesty, numbers not money count at the ballot box and the workers have the numbers and constitute the majority. They can be the government if they will.

The question of the closed shop agitated the employers of Grand Rapids very much during the strike, though it was not a point at issue. The resolution against the closed shop and for the open shop signed by 150 members of the Employers' Association and published in local papers is particularly interesting to one who knows the constitution of that association previous to this time. Beside the provision which might be interpreted, without stretching the imagination, as the basis for a blacklist, there are many other items of interest. Another of the objects is "to protect its members and associates in such manner as may be deemed expedient and proper against legislative, municipal and other political encroachments." This provision taken with that for the appointment of a standing committee "on legal action and legislation" and another "committee on police" look as though the "firms, corporations and merchants within the city of Grand Rapids and vicinity" were getting ready to take civil government into their own hands.

We hear so much about unionism taking

away a workman's individual rights. But the Employers' Association was governed by an executive committee appointed on the basis of payrolls. A combined annual payroll of from one hundred thousand to five hundred thousand dollars entitled a group of associates to one representative on the executive committee, "authorized and empowered to act in all matters affecting the association as a whole." And a majority of the committee constituted a quorum. What happened to the individual liberty of an individual employer? And as this constitution figured its first assessment from January 1, 1903, and the unions of furniture workers were not in the field until 1910, was the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners an aggressive or a defensive organization in Grand Rapids?

These are extracts from the constitution of the Employers' Association as it was known before the strike. This constitution was called in and all copies were supposedly destroyed; any revised copy has not been made public. The following letter dated September 22 was sent by registered mail to the secretary of the Furniture Manufacturers Employers' Association:

"We are enclosing herewith a copy of the general constitution of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and a copy of the constitution of the district council of the United Brotherhood and respectfully request, as an exchange of courtesy, copies of the constitution of the Furniture Manufacturers Employers' Association and of the Employers' Association, of which the F. M. E. A. is a member."

The association had three alternatives,—to send the constitutions, to send a letter of acknowledgment with an evasive reply or to

ignore the Brotherhood's request. They adopted the third alternative, though the second would have been the wiser. The Brotherhood knew that no copies of the constitution as requested would be forthcoming. The aim and methods of employees' unions have always been in the limelight and these unions have benefited correspondingly through public criticism. Employers' unions will not get into the limelight if they can possibly help it, for they know that public opinion would make short work of their aims and methods. By maintaining secrecy, employers' unions make of public duties private duties, which are not within the scope of human tribunals. All employers' associations should be investigated by the state, to make sure that they are not conspiracies in restraint of labor. But only free-necked investigators, semi-detectives, shrewd and keen, with square jaws and the love of truth can find the truth and make it public. For organized employers like nothing better than to be "whitewashed," and they have all kinds of muzzles to offer to the man who will do the job.

In the strike of the furniture workers the side of the strikers was given so much more publicity and truthful representation than labor's side of the question generally receives from the press, usually strongly biased in favor of capital, that this strike stands out in bold relief comparatively free from a network of misrepresentation and lies sure to be told by the powers that be in order to protect their own interests, retain their power and keep the public ignorant of the true state of affairs. Capital knows that when the people realize

that capital is organized in this country today for the conscious and deliberate purpose of crushing labor in its efforts to become free, the people will make common cause with labor and send the divine right of capital to join the divine right of kings. Industrial freedom is a state which the world as yet has not experienced.

It is the resistance offered by capital to this onward march of industrial progress that makes what is called the "class struggle." The unlimited power of capital is being restricted by the trade agreement and the closed shop and capital is getting more and more desperate with each threatened encroachment on its arbitrary power. The responsibility for so-called labor wars rests with capital, as it does with the Furniture Manufacturers Employers' Association in this labor war. Organized money is the greatest enemy of social progress; it has no heart and it is determined and unscrupulous. Conciliation and arbitration are not parts of its policy. Yet the workers are blamed for being "class conscious," are accused of arousing enmity and stirring up trouble. We are told that "employers are tired and wish men would quit striking against them." But when employers reserve for themselves rights and privileges which they deny their employees, the employers are the ones who are responsible for class consciousness. To witness: the furniture manufacturers of Grand Rapids organized in three associations refusing to confer with such of their employees as are organized.

Such "educational literature" as is published by the National Association of Manufacturers

and which was distributed in Grand Rapids during the strike by the Citizens' Alliance is only intended to throw dust in the eyes of the people. Fortunately our public schools furnish an education in economics sufficient to counteract any influence such false teachings might otherwise have. The facts are so distorted and the style is so venomous that these educational pamphlets have the effect of arousing suspicion against the N. A. of M. instead of casting discredit on organized labor as was evidently the purpose of their publishers.

The one complication connected with this strike was the very interest manifested in it by a friendly public that felt its responsibility, but that, not knowing the situation by experience or investigation, made some serious blunders. The action of the Classis of the Christian Reformed Church is a conspicuous example. It committed a gross injustice to the workers by investigating their organization during the strike while postponing action upon the employers' association to an indefinite date. If it could not have investigated both organizations simultaneously it should not have "butted in." This action is only one of many illustrations of the inefficiency of organized Christianity when it attempts to deal with modern social problems. When the public knows more industrial truth as various communities live through industrial battles or as facts are brought to light and circulated by investigators, it will come to a better understanding of the action that should be taken to bring about a peace and harmony that will be real and lasting, because it will be based on justice.

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