

Strike!—or Lock-Out?

The labor unions concerned in the Omaha labor strikes persist in seeking to prejudice the public in their favor by asserting that they have been "locked out" by their employers—thrown out of work at a time when the nation needs every man at work. They charge the employers with an unpatriotic act. They claim the existing situation is a "lock out"—not a "strike." What are the facts?

WHAT IS A STRIKE?

The Standard Dictionary defines a strike: "The quitting of work

by a body of laborers for the purpose of compelling their employer or employers to comply with some demand or condition."

WHAT IS A LOCKOUT?

The same dictionary defines a lockout: "The shutting down of a manufactory or other place of business by the employers because of unwillingness of employes to work on terms satisfactory to the former."

Here Are the Facts:

The **Electrical Workers' union** demanded, in January, effective April 1, a "closed shop," a wage increase from 57½ cents to 68¾ cents per hour, and that no agreement should extend beyond August 1, a period of only seven months. The electrical contractors refused the "closed shop" demand and insisted that an adjustment of their differences with employes should be for a longer period, in order to avoid frequent controversies.

The contractors raised their employes from 57½ to 60 cents an hour April 1 and offered another increase to 62½ cents, effective August 1. They had already in 1916 raised wages from 50 to 57½ cents per hour.

On the morning of April 2 union electricians left their work without previous notice and of their own accord and attended a meeting of the union. They have not since returned to their work.

WAS THIS A "STRIKE"—OR A "LOCKOUT?"

Fight to the Finish.

The **Hoisting Engineers' union** issued a printed ultimatum in January that on April 1 their wages "shall" be 62½, 70 and 75 cents an hour for respective classes and that an elaborate set of working rules, including the "closed shop," should become effective. Their employers raised their wages April 1 from 55, 62½ and 67½ cents per hour for respective classes to 57½, 65 and 70 cents.

On the morning of April 2 members of this union refused to continue at work.

WAS THIS A "STRIKE"—OR A "LOCKOUT?"

After the strike two committees of this union called upon the Secretary of the Business Men's Association to request a conference. When told that employers desired to continue to maintain an "open shop" in Omaha, with free opportunity to union and non-union men alike, they said that a conference would be useless, as they would never agree to an "open shop."

One of the committeemen, Mr. McMullen, a national organizer from Chicago, corrected the local business agent, who called the "strike" a "lockout." McMullen said it was a "strike," and that unless the "closed shop" was conceded the unions would "fight to the finish."

Rules and More Rules.

The **Painters' and Paper-Hangers' union** demand observance of 81½ pages of trade rules, including limitation of the efficiency and work of its members. It demanded a minimum wage scale of 62½ cents per hour. The employers conceded an advance from 55 to 57½ cents as a minimum, with many skilled workmen receiving more.

On April 2 the union members quit work of their own accord.

WAS THIS A "STRIKE"—OR A "LOCKOUT?"

One Demand—Recognition.

The **Mill Workers' union** made three demands, two of which were practically in full effect at the

time in the planing mills. The remaining unfulfilled demand was for recognition of this new union, which had been organized in the **Dezettel campaign** to unionize Omaha and make it a "closed shop" town.

On May 1 the union "business agent" went to the mills and ordered the men to quit work. They obeyed his command.

WAS THIS A "STRIKE"—OR A "LOCKOUT?"

The **Boiler Makers' union**, organized in the Dezettel campaign, had made demands for a "closed shop," onerous working rules and a wage increase to 62½ cents an hour for boiler makers and 45 cents for helpers. Boiler makers had been advanced in 1916 from 35-40 to 35-50 cents an hour and recently to a flat 55 cents. Helpers and handymen had been advanced from 22½-37½ to 25-40 cents and later to 30-47½ cents per hour.

The boiler makers were urged by their employers to remain at work, but quit of their own accord.

WAS THIS A "STRIKE"—OR A "LOCKOUT?"

The **Plasterers' union**, which already claimed to have a "closed shop," demanded a wage increase from \$6 to \$7 a day of eight hours. To enforce this demand, its members quit work of their own accord May 10.

WAS THIS A "STRIKE"—OR A "LOCKOUT?"

Enters the Sympathetic Strike.

The **Carpenters' union** had no grievance of its own. It had a contract with the building contractors, running to 1919, providing periodical wage increases and binding the carpenters not to enter into a sympathetic strike. Notwithstanding this, union carpenters quit work on various jobs rather than use mill work made in Omaha unless it bore the union label. This was an aid to the striking mill workers, who had struck at the instigation of the Carpenters' union.

Union carpenters further refused to work on certain jobs protected by a district court injunction forbidding striking electricians from doing unlawful acts. This injunction prohibited nothing except the commission of acts in themselves unlawful, such as threats and violence toward non-union electricians and destruction of electrical contractors' property.

The business agent of the Carpenters' union ordered these carpenters to quit their work. They obeyed his command.

WAS THIS A "STRIKE"—OR A "LOCKOUT?"

Sympathetic Strike Extends.

The **Building Trades Council**, an alliance of unions in the building trades, now came to the front for the purpose of making the fight for one union the fight of all. Its "business agent" ordered union iron workers, sheet metal workers, lathers and common laborers to quit work on various jobs for no other reason than that one or more non-union workmen of other trades were employed on the job.

These unions had no grievances of their own. The sheet metal workers, iron workers and lathers had all made demands prior to May 1, which had

been satisfactorily adjusted, including wage increases. Members of these four unions left their jobs at the command of the business agent of the **Building Trades Council**, without the knowledge or consent of their employers, to support a "closed shop" of the entire building industry of Omaha.

WAS THIS A "STRIKE"—OR A "LOCKOUT?"

The Case of the Teamsters.

The **Teamsters' union** includes team-drivers, truck-drivers, stablemen and helpers. It is one of the new unions organized by Max Dezettel in his campaign to make Omaha a "closed union" town.

Demands of this union have been related in previous statements of this series. They included the "closed shop" as a principal feature, with provisions binding the employer to dismiss non-union men who refused to join the union and any union men who failed to keep in "good standing."

On May 15 all of the union teamsters employed by the C. W. Hull Co., coal and building material dealers, which company was largely unionized, suddenly quit work of their own accord, using as a pretext the discharge for cause of an employe who happened to be a member and officer of the union. They notified the company that they would not return to work until their proposed contract, including the "closed shop" and full union recognition, had been signed and the discharged employe reinstated.

Making the Streets Unsafe.

The day following the Hull strike this company endeavored to make some necessary deliveries. Mobs of pickets, members of the Teamsters' union, attacked drivers and beat them up shamefully.

The picket system did not end with the Hull company. Non-union drivers for other building material, coal and lumber companies throughout the city—companies without connection with the Hull company and against which this union had no grievance other than the refusal to accede to its "closed shop" and other demands—were forcibly stopped on their rounds and ordered to "join the union or get off the streets," and told that if they did not they would find themselves unable to drive a wagon.

Non-union drivers generally were terrorized. Many were forced to join the union against their will. Others did not dare to continue in their employment.

Conditions grew worse from day to day, and finally forced the building material and lumber dealers from making deliveries. This was their only alternative unless they wished to have their drivers assaulted and unionized—and their business then subjected to a series of strikes unless they conceded this new union's demands.

Lumber and building material deliveries being stopped, the union picketing centered upon coal companies, with such success that police protection was and is necessary to maintain the delivery of coal in necessary cases.

WAS THIS A "STRIKE"—OR A "LOCKOUT?"

STRIKES!—or LOCKOUTS?

These are the facts of the strikes in Omaha. The employers did not "shut down" or "lockout" employees. It is a story of STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE, one succeeding another—one called sympathetically to aid another—strikes called in every instance after the President of the nation had announced his intention to ask congress to declare war on Germany, and in some instances after war had actually been declared. Is it patriotism in a year of war for labor unions to try to enforce new conditions and aggressive demands?

Business Men's Association of Omaha