

# ILGWU NEWS-HISTORY

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CONVENTION ISSUE

CHAPTER 3

1909 - 1910

## Uprising of the Twenty Thousand

# Waistmakers Vote General Strike



Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, shown addressing the historic shirtwaist strike meeting in Cooper Union Hall.

### Uprising of 30,000 Stirs Entire City - Gompers' Appeal for Unity Cheered at Cooper Union Mass Meeting

NEW YORK, Nov. 23, 1909—Thirty thousand ladies' waistmakers, driven to desperation by the intolerable conditions prevailing in their trade, voted to go on a general strike last night at four enormous mass meetings which packed Cooper Union, Astoria Hall, Beethoven Hall and Manhattan Lyceum.

For weeks these weary men and women — 70 per cent of them are women — debated the advisability of rebelling against long hours, low wages and brutal treatment at the hands of the bosses and their foremen, of pitting their numbers against the wealth of their masters. For weeks they weighed the awful trials of a strike in the balance against their present miserable lot, and unanimously they decided to strike.

The decision to strike was first reached at the Cooper Union meeting which was addressed by Samuel Gompers, president of the AFL.

Gompers was given an ovation when he was introduced by Chairman B. Feigenbaum. The vast crowd rose to its feet and cheered him very enthusiastically for several minutes.

"A man would be less than human," said Gompers, in opening, "if he were not impressed with your reception. I want you men and women not to give all your

enthusiasm for a man, no matter who he may be. I would prefer that you put all of your enthusiasm into your union and your cause."

Continuing, Gompers said: "I have never declared a strike in all my life. I have done my share to prevent strikes, but there comes a time when not to strike is but to rivet the chains of slavery upon our wrists."

Speaking of the possibility of a general strike, Gompers said: "Yes, Mr. Shirtwaist Manufacturer, it may be inconvenient for you if your boys and girls go out on strike, but there are things of more importance than your convenience and your profit. There are the lives of the boys and girls working in your business."

Appealing to the men and women to stand together, he declared: "If you had an organization before this, it would have stood there as a challenge to the employers who sought to impose such conditions as you bear."

"This is the time and the opportunity, and I doubt if you let it pass whether it can be created again in five or ten years, or a generation. I say, friends, do not enter too hastily but when you can't get the manufacturers to give you what you want, then strike. And when you strike, let the manufacturers know you are on strike!"

"I ask you to stand together," said Gompers in conclusion, "to have faith in yourselves, to be true

(Continued on Page 2)

## Why the Waistmakers Strike

By Clara Lemlich

First let me tell you something about the way we work and what we are paid. There are two kinds of work—regular, that is salary work, and piece work. The regular work pays about \$6 a week and the girls have to be at their machines at 7 o'clock in the morning and they stay at them until 8 o'clock at night, with just one-half hour for lunch in that time.

But most of the girls do not do

the salary work. Most of them do the other—piece work, and they are able to earn from \$3 a week to \$6 a week. A very few of them are able to make \$11 a week but only for two months in the year.

The work is all divided up. No

(Continued on Page 2)

## Rules for Picketing

Don't walk in groups of more than two or three.

Don't stand in front of the shop; walk up and down the block.

Don't stop the person you wish to talk to; walk alongside of him.

Don't get excited and shout when you are talking.

Don't put your hand on the person you are speaking to. Don't touch his sleeve or button. This

may be construed as a "technical assault."

Don't call anyone "scab" or use abusive language of any kind.

Plead, persuade, appeal, but do not threaten.

If a policeman arrests you and you are sure that you have committed no offence, take down his number and give it to your union officers.

## "Revolt"



## 2000 Walk Out At Baltimore's Largest Shops

BALTIMORE, Dec. 16, 1909—Nearly 2,000 garment workers, representing three of the largest garment-making houses in the city, are out on strike today, charging they have been treated unfairly by the employers.

For several years there has been considerable activity among the garment workers of this city. Strike has followed strike, affecting many of the largest firms in the city.

A meeting attended by about 1,000 of the strikers was held today at the Labor Lyceum. At a meeting of the District Council of the Garment Workers the strike was indorsed. Labor leaders from New York are expected to arrive in the next few days to manage the strike.

—THE CALL

## Strike in Phila. Wins Labor and Public Support

PHILADELPHIA, Dec. 26, 1909—The striking shirtwaist makers here are being given the support of the entire labor movement. More than a hundred resolutions of sympathy have been received and the girls are determined to win.

The manufacturers are willing to concede every demand of the strikers, they say, except recognition of the union. But the strikers sneer at these statements of the bosses, arguing that they are merely doped handed out to deaden public sentiment.

(Continued on Page 2)



# Waist Workers Vote to Strike

(Continued from Page 1)

to your comrades. If you strike, be cool, calm, collected and determined. Let your watchword be: Union and progress, and until then no surrender!"

This was greeted with a storm of applause.

Clara Lemlich, who was badly beaten up by thugs during the strike in the shop of Louis Leiser, interrupted Jacob Panken just as he started to speak, saying: "I want to say a few words." Cries came from all parts of the hall, "Get up on the platform!" Willing hands lifted the frail little girl with flashing black eyes to the stage, and she said simply: "I have listened to all the speakers. I would not have further patience for talk, as I am one of those who feels and suffers from the things pictured. I move that we go on a general strike!"

As the tremulous voice of the girl died away, the audience rose en masse and cheered her to the echo. A grim sea of faces, with high purpose and resolve, they shouted and cheered the deliberation of war for living conditions hoarsely.

When Chairman Feigenbaum put Miss Lemlich's motion to a vote there was a resounding roar of ayes throughout the hall, and once again the vast crowd broke into roars of applause. The demonstration lasted several minutes.

A committee of 15 girls led by one boy immediately left Cooper Union to carry the message to Beethoven Hall, Manhattan Lyceum and Astoria Hall. The appearance of the committee at each point was the signal for a demonstration. The ratification of the Cooper Union decision to go out on a general strike by the other meetings was in each case followed by a prolonged demonstration.

—THE CALL

## Signing of Ten Stirs Hope for Speedy Victory

NEW YORK, Nov. 24, 1909—With the strike of the shirtwaist makers only one day old, 10 manufacturers came to terms with their employees yesterday and signed the union agreement. Last night all was jubilation in the ranks of the operatives and a speedy victory was prophesied.

The 10 firms signed an agreement by which they recognized the Ladies' Shirt Waist Makers' Union and agreed to a 52-hour working week. In some cases there were increases of pay, in others the operatives were satisfied with their present rate of recompense.

The strikers were particularly joyful at the victory over the Diamond Waist Co., for that concern's workers had quit work before the general strike was declared.

Added strength was given to the movement when, after an enthusiastic meeting lasting two hours, the Cutters' Union voted to join the strike.

Union officers' figures were that 19,000 operators were on strike last night, these being 9,000 union members and 10,000 sympathizers, of whom 5,000 applied yesterday for admission to the union.

From the viewpoint of the strike managers the outlook is rosy. It was said at the headquarters in Clinton Hall, 151 Clinton St., last night that a large number of manufacturers had signified their willingness to sign any reasonable agreement. It is the general belief that the whole trouble will be over in a few days.

—THE WORLD

## Shirtwaist Strike Gets Under Way



Top, members of the strike committee; right, Clara Lemlich, a strike leader; left, scene outside of Clinton Hall.

—The World

## Lemlich Reveals Reasons For Waistmakers' Strike

(Continued from Page 1)

girl ever makes a whole waist. There are examiners and finishers. They all get different pay for their work, but it runs only from \$3 or \$5 a week the finishers make to the \$6 or sometimes \$7 a week the cutters and some others make.

The shops. Well, there is just one row of machines that the daylight ever gets to—that is the front row, nearest the window. The girls at all the other rows of machines back in the shops have to work by gaslight, by day as well as by night. Oh, yes, the shops keep the work going at night, too.

### 'Call Us Names'

The bosses in the shops are hardly what you would call educated men, and the girls to them are part of the machines they are running. They yell at the girls and they 'call them down' even worse than I imagine the Negro slaves were in the South.

There are no dressing rooms for the girls in the shops. They have to hang up their hats and coats—such as they are—on hooks along the walls. Sometimes a girl has a new hat. It never is much to look at because it never costs more than 50 cents, but it's pretty sure to be spoiled after it's been at the shop.

We're human, all of us girls, and we're young. We like new hats as well as any other young women. Why shouldn't we? And if one of us gets a new one, even if it hasn't cost more than 50 cents, that means that we have gone for weeks on two cent lunches—dry cake and nothing else.

The shops are unsanitary—that's the word that is generally used, but there ought to be a worse one used. Whenever we tear or damage any of the goods we sew on, or whenever it is found damaged after we are through with it, whether we have done it or not, we are charged for the piece and sometimes for a whole yard of the material—perhaps \$1 or \$1.50.

At the beginning of every slow season, \$2 is deducted from our salaries. We have never been able to find out what this is for.

—N. Y. EVENING JOURNAL

Miss Lemlich called for the strike vote at Cooper Union meeting.

## Bright-eyed Children From Shops in Philly Give Strike Picture

(Continued from Page 1)

A dinner was tendered by Etta Booden and seven other shirtwaist operators to the members of the Cleaners and Markers' Union.

The bright faces of the budding girls and boys, the future citizens of America, afforded a picture to the thinking person more damning than all the literature penned by the world's geniuses, a picture epitomizing capitalism in all its hideousness. Here were mere children, all of them of grammar school age, gathered together round a table to tell of the reasons why the school doors closed in their faces and the shop doors opened wide.

—THE CALL

## Veterans of Phila. Picket Line



—The Call

Among the most spirited strikers in Philadelphia are these youthful garment workers: Lizzie Weiss, 14 years old; Fannie Katz, 13 years old; Fannie Banish, 12 years old, and Sadie Gorrok, 12 years old.

## Time Out for News and Food



—Lewis Hine in McClure's

A group of strikers eat a hurried lunch and read the latest reports.



# Bosses' Scheme to Crack Strike Exposed by Hillquit

NEW YORK, Dec. 11, 1909—The waistmakers' strike witnessed a sensational development yesterday afternoon when Morris Hillquit, who with John Mitchell had served on the Arbitration Committee to bring about a peaceful settlement, made three startling revelations concerning the methods, strength and treachery

of the Associated Waist and Dress Manufacturers, the employers against whom the strike is now being waged.

The expose was made at a mass meeting that packed Grand Central Palace, Lexington Ave. and 43rd St. The audience, composed of strikers, received the disclosures with astonishment and then burst into wild cheers and applause that lasted for many minutes, and subsided only to be taken up again and again. The disclosures were as follows:

First—the Associated Waist and Dress Manufacturers, that august body with offices at the fashionable Hoffman House, whose president, I. B. Hyman, had said that it represents between 600 and 700 manufacturers, had, in fact, never enlisted more than 60 bosses, and represented no more than 10 per cent of the trade.

Second—that this association met night before last behind closed doors and while discussing how to break the strike decided to bribe a "well known" union man who promised to either deliver the strikers, or, if not successful, organize a rival union for the agreed price of \$500, to be paid at the time of the initial meeting, and \$2,500 when the new organization would be launched.

Third—that an injunction is being planned to restrain the strikers from picketing. This injunction is to be served some time today.

## Out of the Bosses' Mouth

This information disclosed by Hillquit came from substantial sources and had been brought from the very midst of the bosses by one who participated in the scheming and was present at the meeting.

"The injunction of which I spoke," continued Hillquit, "is being prepared right now. I know the lawyer who will write it. I know the plaintiff and I know the women who figure in it. Unless the scheme fails, it will be served tomorrow."

"This shows how weak your employers are," said the speaker. "They have repudiated the agree-

ment because they did not want to give away their secret, knowing full well that they could not maintain their bluff when it came to give facts and figures.

"And these are the men who call you anarchists and lawless mob—you who fight in the open, who picket in the open, who meet in the open, who make your demands known to all; you who are fearless and bold and cannot be conquered by legitimate means, are to be subdued by treachery and corruption."

"They like you, individually. They say to each of you that you are lovable, but when you, lovable girls, are formed into a bunch of lovable girls, then you cease to be lovable."

## Mitchell Talks

John Mitchell, second vice-president of the American Federation of Labor, was introduced by the chairman of the meeting, Miss Rose Schneiderman, vice-president of the Women's Trade Union League, as the man who had settled many strikes. He said:

"At first the officers of your union inserted a provision that the union should be recognized. To this the employers objected. We took the matter back to your union, and after a meeting of the executive committee it was decided to allow this question also to go to arbitration. To this the employers agreed."

"You can imagine our surprise when we came to the meeting to find that at the very beginning we were notified that the question of the recognition of the union was objected to, and was not even to go to arbitration."

The meeting was the most enthusiastic since the strike was declared. Notwithstanding the miserable weather, a line of 1,000 people gathered around Grand Central Palace two hours before the doors were to open. They stood outside, defying rain, wind and cold, and were fairly soaked before they were at last admitted.

—THE CALL

## Strikers Parade To City Hall to Decry Brutality

NEW YORK, Dec. 4, 1909—The striking waistmakers as a protest against the alleged brutality of the police to strike pickets had a parade yesterday afternoon from Lipzin's Theatre, Bowery and Rivington St., to the City Hall, where a committee of the union submitted a petition to the Mayor asking that the police be made to respect the rights of the strike pickets.

Before the parade started, a mass meeting was held in the theater, where the strikers were addressed by Mrs. Malkiel, Miss Ida Raub and others. There were about 9,000 women and 1,500 men in line when the parade, which consisted of shop committees, and contained about one-third of the strikers, started.

Mayor McClellan, who was out when the committee arrived, soon returned, and went quickly into his office, where the petition was conveyed to him. He came out in a few minutes to the anteroom where Miss Marot told him that the committee appealed to him personally because the requests of the strike pickets to stop alleged discrimination by the police in favor of the employers made to the Police Department met with no response.

The strikers were insulted, humiliated and beaten, she said, and arrested by wholesale, some being fined and others discharged, for only asking strikebreakers not to take the places of strikers. After listening a few minutes the Mayor turned to go, saying:

"I'm glad you came. I shall certainly confer with Commissioner Baker and see that the police don't go beyond their duty. Good day."

—N. Y. TRIBUNE

## The March to City Hall



As the procession moved through the city.



Linked arm-in-arm on their way down the Bowery to City Hall.

## Cops Hustle Picket Lines, Protect Struck Factories

NEW YORK, Dec. 11, 1909—"We ain't here to protect the strikers nor anybody belongin' to 'em. We're here to protect the scabs," one of the officers detailed to a shop in Grand St. said frankly last night to a member of the Women's Trade Union League who was picketing.

The length of Greene St. and all over the surrounding district shops could be seen similarly picketed and guarded by policemen and detectives in plain clothes. At 6 o'clock the first squad of women

strikebreakers was hurried down from the shop.

"Girls, do you know there's a strike on at Abram's?" called the pickets as they passed them. That was all, and none of the pickets stopped walking a minute, but the officer laid his hand on his club and proceeded to hustle the pickets.

"Move faster!" he admonished them, "an' walk further. You've no right to keep walkin' in front of this shop. Do you want to get t'rown in de gutter? Ah!"

But the pickets gave him no opening. The shop "boss" took a hand.

"Get along and stop obstructin' my sidewalk!" he shouted.

"We are moving, and you're not an officer," retorted the little Barnard graduate who was walking with the trained nurse. She's about four feet high.

"This is my sidewalk. You move!" he threatened her. She was moving. All the pickets kept moving, only as they moved they kept up their call to the women who poured out of the shops from time to time:

"Girls, do you know there's a strike on?"

The magistrates seem to be changing their attitude toward the strikers. In the Essex Market Court yesterday morning Magistrate Krotel imposed a fine of \$10 each on five girl shirtwaist makers charged with taking part in a riot on Clinton St. Thursday night, and told them if they were brought before him again he would send them to the workhouse. Magistrate Breen, in the Jefferson Market Court, who heretofore simply lectured the strikers brought before him, fined several yesterday for "annoying non-union girls going to work."

—N. Y. TRIBUNE

## Assault on Sub-Contractor Starts Shirtwaist Walkout

By Constance D. Leupp

NEW YORK, Dec. 18, 1909—Curiously enough, it was a sub-contractor who started the strike. Some 18 months ago at the Triangle shop on Washington Pl. (Harris and Blank's) this man because he was "sick of slave-driving" protested to the manager, saying he wanted to go and take his girls with him.

He was not allowed to speak to the girls after he had expressed himself, but was told to report to the cashier for his pay. Fearful of a slugging on the way up in the elevator, he asked to have someone go with him, and was not only refused, but set upon and dragged out of the shop—the original "assault."

As he was dragged along he shouted, "Will you stay at your machines and see a fellow worker treated this way?" And impulsively 400 operators dropped their work and walked out.

—THE SURVEY

## Police Arrested Thousands of Strikers



An arrested shirtwaist picket is led from the "Black Maria" in front of Jefferson Market Court.

—Collier's



## Mass Meeting Protests Arrests



Mrs. Belmont was among the speakers at Rutgers Square rally.

—Collier's

# Rich Women Hear Wage Slaves' Lot

NEW YORK, Dec. 16, 1909—A remarkable meeting, one that was as peculiar as it was interesting, and as unique as it was pathetic, took place yesterday afternoon for the striking waistmakers at the Colony Club, the most exclusive club in the city, of which Miss Ann Morgan, Miss Elizabeth Marbury, Mrs. Edgerton, Mrs. J. B. Harriman and others of the same financial and social standing are members.

These women, the cream of the "400", had come to listen to the story of the strike from the lips of the strikers, told in simple words by those who had been mistreated, abused, enslaved by capitalism, poverty and police persecution. Four hundred women, representing the richest people of the world, occupied as many gilt chairs in the beautiful gymnasium of the sumptuous club.

In contradistinction to this bejeweled, befurred, belaced, begowned audience, Miss Mary E. Dreier, president of the Women's Trade Union League, brought with her 10 of the girl strikers, 10 wage slaves, some of them mere children, who, as they subsequently told, worked from early morning till late at night for as little as \$3 a week; girls on whose meagre earnings depended children still younger, mothers sick and fathers out of work. And the rich women listened. Seldom, if ever, have they listened with such interest to the tales of the war between capital and labor, to the incidents of pain, of misery, of grief in the great struggle between the classes.

### Nameless Victims

Miss Dreier, introducing the strikers, said that she would not give their names, as some of them had to tell of circumstances too painful to appear in print.

One young girl, who said that she worked at the Triangle Waist Co., said that the conditions in that shop were so bad that it was intolerable.

The girl told how that firm hired prostitutes to abuse them when they first began to picket. She said, "They hired immoral girls to attack us and they would approach us only to give the policemen the excuse to arrest us. In two weeks 89 arrests were made. I, too, was arrested, and the policeman grabbed me by the hand and said such

insulting words that I am ashamed to tell you.

One pretty girl told what happened to her the day before when she was picketing. "I just called to a girl and said that I wanted to talk to her. She then turned on me and smashed me in the face, breaking my glasses and cutting my eye. I began to scream and called on the policeman to protect me. Instead of that he arrested me and dragged me to the station house where I had to spend the entire night."

Another girl said that there are on the books of the manufacturers girls who make as high as \$30. But when you come to examine the thing closer you will find that there are four girls working under her, and that the money is to be divided among them.

"In the shop we are not called by name; we have numbers. We work so steadily that in most cases we do not know the girl who works next to us."

One little girl who said she was 15, but who looked much younger, told her tale in a few words. She said: "I am a tucker. I make \$3 a week. I have to help support the family. Father is out of work, and we have three younger children."

One girl told how some firms have a systematic way of stealing time from the girls. She said: "I worked for the Bijou Waist Co. and they made us work long hours by moving the hands of the clock when we did not see it. Sometimes we found that we only got 20 minutes for lunch and that when our clock showed 5 it was really after 6."

Rev. Francis J. Clay Moran, who was in the audience, told how he had watched the pickets for five days and testified that all was true as described, and in a strong speech denounced the police.

After the meeting the girls and the women of the league were taken down to tea.

—THE CALL

## Philly Settlement Marks Finish of 2-Mo. Stoppage

PHILADELPHIA, Feb. 19, 1910—After a 25-hour conference between representatives of the strikers, the employers' association and the public, the Philadelphia shirtwaist strike was settled on Feb. 6, and practically all the girls have by this time returned to work.

The settlement involves the following concessions: on the part of the employers, a permanent arbitration board; on the part of the strikers, the open shop. The essential points are the employment of union workers in their respective shops "without discrimination"; a committee of three in each shop to arrange the wage-scale; no charges for needles, straps or ordinary wear and tear on the machinery.

—THE SURVEY

## Was His Face Red!

NEW YORK, Dec. 25, 1909—Annie Berman, a strike picket, was fined \$10 by Magistrate Cornell in the Tombs Court for disorderly conduct and causing a crowd to collect in Lispenard St. She was also held for \$300 bail on the charge of being abusive to Patrolman Dipper of the Oak St. Station. She was put in charge of the probation officer.

When she was first arraigned, her face was very red from standing in the air.

"Why do you paint your face?" said the magistrate.

"I don't use paint," she said indignantly, wetting her finger and drawing it across her cheek to show that the color would not come off.

—N. Y. TRIBUNE

# Girls Interviewed At Strikers' Hall

By Sarah Comstock

Clinton Hall is over in that part of the East Side where grapes and fur scarfs and suspenders are sold from an endless row of push-carts. If Clinton Hall ever prided itself upon being a masculine rendezvous that day is past. On a morning early in the strike

I threaded my way between push-carts and at last fought a passage into the hall. Girls were everywhere; girls, girls, girls. Occasionally men were interspersed.

"I understood that this was the headquarters of the shirtwaist strikers," I faltered at last, having tried in vain to break into several groups.

"That's right. This here's the place," responded an authority.

"But I thought . . ." This was a scene of gaiety and flirtation. My preconceived idea of a strike was a somber meeting where somber resolutions were made, and there was always a background of mothers wiping their eyes with their aprons and vowing that they would still endure for the "great cause," and of babes who wept bitterly for a soup bone to suck.

"Them's the strikers," said the authority, and his hand swept all the groups.

"But they don't look as if they had any grievance," I objected.

"Just because they're laughin' ain't no sign they don't mean business," my guide responded. "You talk to 'em and find out. Le's see—Emma talks English. Here—Emma!"

A girl of 15 left off a Yiddish flirtation and came forward.

"Tell this lady whether you mean to hold out."

Instantly there was a transformation. From a Ghetto coquette the child passed in the twinkling of an eye to an orator.

"Hold out?" she cried. "Do we mean to hold out? You look. You'll see. My boss he says: 'What's the matter with you?' he says when I talk to him. 'You make \$10 a week. You ain't got no kick.' I says: 'If I ain't got no kick for myself I got one for them girls you ain't payin' but \$3 or \$4,' I says."

"Then you make \$10 a week?" I said.

"Sure. I make good money. I need to. It's dang'rous what I do."

"Do you support anybody besides yourself on your \$10?"

"Sure. My mother's sick; she can't work."

"How much does your living cost you?"

"I pay \$9 a mont' for two rooms. Sometimes we eat \$5, sometimes \$6 in a week. But the boss he's got to pay all the girls what they got a right to. Look at Sadie here. Say, it is to cry to see that girl."

Sadie appeared, a child of about 13. "What do you earn?" I asked.

"Three and a half."

"Do you pay more than your own way?"

"Sure. My grandfather, he can't walk. I keep us. I gotta have the money. We ain't got nothing saved." She had a knitted scarf tied down over her head, a marked sign of poverty in this dressy multitude; within it her little face looked pinched with need and anxiety.

"Say, ain't it to cry to look at her?" repeated Emma.

—COLLIERS



A speaker in one of the halls reports on the progress of the strike.

—W. T. Benda in McClure's



**Mrs. Belmont Visits Night Court**

During her sudden appearance in night court at 3 o'clock on the morning of Dec. 14, Mrs. Belmont gave her magnificent home at 477 Madison Ave. as security to release four shirtwaist strikers. Magistrate Butts asked her if she was positive her home was worth \$800. "It is valued at \$400,000," she replied.



# STRIKING SCENES



*TOP, right: Pickets ignore the policeman as they maintain their watch for scabs. CENTER, left: These girls dressed up for picket duty in front of a Wooster St. shop; right: group of strikers hailed at huge Hippodrome rally after being released from Blackwell's Island workhouse. BOTTOM, left: The pretzel man was the strikers' roving canteen; right: some of the girls who sold the special strike edition of THE CALL on the streets of New York. Proceeds went to the strike fund.*

*—Pictures from N. Y. American, N Y. Tribune, Collier's, Munsey's*





# NEWS-HISTORY

## Editorials

### No Surrender!

It seems almost unbelievable, almost a miracle, this great strike of ours, this rebellion of tens of thousands of young women and men in the shirtwaist shops of New York!

We had never hoped—in our wildest dreams—that these girls, driven by want and the lash of economic necessity to work for miserable wages amounting to as little as from \$3 to \$6 a week for 60 and more hours, that they would at long last revolt against their all-powerful bosses—the shirtwaist magnates and their henchmen, the contractors, and leave their shops to fight for a union and for a better life!

As they quit their sweatshops, they vowed that they would not return before their union was recognized, before their earnings were raised to a standard of decency, before their factories were made fit for human beings to work in. And today, as they stand guard near their shops, the voice of that peerless leader of organized labor, Samuel Gompers, who spoke to them on the night of Nov. 22 in the Cooper Union Hall rings in their ears:

"I ask you to stand together, to have faith in yourselves, to be true to your comrades . . . Let your watchword be: Union and progress, and until then, no surrender!" . . .

\* \* \*

These girls and boys, and they are striking against economic oppression not only in the shirtwaist shops of New York but in Philadelphia, in Baltimore and in Boston, are fully aware that they cannot expect decent behavior from the hired gangs which the bosses have placed in front of the shops to protect scabs and to beat up the strikers.

The shirtwaist makers—thousands upon thousands of them out morning, noon and night on the "sidewalks of New York" picketing their shops—have learned from bitter experience that they cannot get a square deal from Tammany's police who are clubbing them, who are arresting them by the hundreds, for no cause except to please the manufacturers and to drain through fines the meagre union treasury!

The strikers are no less aware that they can expect no strike benefits from their young and struggling union, that very often they would have to remain in jail overnight because the union has no money to get a bondsman; still they have gone on for weeks and weeks now—into the winter cold, into rain, snow and slush to man the picket lines, to warn people against entering the abandoned shops, against strikebreaking!

\* \* \*

They are fighting on without a thought of defeat in their hearts, and today they are no longer alone in this struggle. The conscience of New York has awakened, and men and women who represent the best in our community, outstanding women like Miss Ann Morgan, Miss Elizabeth Marbury, Mrs. Edgerton, Mrs. J. B. Harriman, have lined up on the side of our girl strikers in this heart-stirring crusade.

The pledge remains—alive, virile and unbeatable—no surrender, no retreat until victory is won, shirtwaist makers!

### "The Strongest Link"



—The Call

## Strike Ends As 354 Sign Union Pacts

By Miriam Finn Scott

When I went to the office of the union a few days ago before the strike was called, I found that the headquarters of the Ladies' Waist-makers Union of New York was a corner, mere "desk-room," in one very small office, and that the general organizer, secretary, treasurer and walking delegate were all combined in one not very large man.

This hard-working Pooh-Bah informed me that his union had an irregular, unenthusiastic membership of about 800, scattered throughout Greater New York; that 90 per cent were of foreign birth, more than half did not speak English, and that practically none of them had any knowledge or experience in union organization. Such was the fighting condition of the union when the long struggle with the 400 manufacturers began.

Though the union was so weak, the girls were ripe for revolt—and unyielding revolt—and for 14 weeks, amid the greatest hardships, they maintained the fight, and at length carried it on to complete victory. At the time the strike was declared off, 354 employers had signed the union's contract.

With a very few exceptions all had agreed to a closed shop, to a 52-hour week, to a raise of wages from 12 to 15 per cent, to do away with the sub-contracting system and many other abuses, to limit night work to two hours per day and not more than twice a week, to pay week-workers for legal holidays, and in the slack season to divide the work among all workers, instead of giving it to a favored few.

Important as are the direct economic results of the victory, there is another result of even greater significance, and that is the existence of a real union where before there had been but the shadow of one. Very recently I had occasion to visit the new headquarters of the union, and the contrast with the headquarters before the fight began was enough in itself to tell what a different thing the Ladies' Waistmakers' Union now is from the union of six months ago.

Instead of a corner in one room, the union has a suite of two rooms, which it already finds too small for its purpose. Instead of a few hundred scattered members, there are now 20,000 girls in good standing, with new ones coming in daily; instead of the entire staff of officers being incorporated in one man, the union now has two organizers, two recording secretaries, two financial secretaries, nine walking delegates, one bookkeeper and three stenographers.

Besides, each organized shop has a voluntary chairman, and once a week all the chairmen meet with the walking delegates to report the conditions of the shops. In this way the union is kept in constant touch with each individual shop. Instead of an income of but little better than nothing a week, the average weekly income from dues and initiation fees is \$2,400. The union has also established an employment bureau in its offices. When any girl is out of work, instead of tramping from shop to shop, she need only come to the bureau at the union's offices.

The strike has also had another result. There had been a tradition that women cannot strike. These young, inexperienced girls have proved that women can strike, and strike successfully.

—THE OUTLOOK, July 2, 1910

### "Contrast at Christmas Time"



—The Call

## Waistmakers Show Women Can Strike

By Ida M. Tarbell

Leading muckraker and author of "Story of Standard Oil Co."

March, 1910—You have asked me for my opinion of the meaning of the strike of the shirtwaist workers and the assistance that has been given them by women of wealth and education and high standing.

I have not been a close observer of the strike, but I have been much impressed by two features of it, which no person who habitually observes and is interested in contemporary life could have failed to see. Both these features seem to me significant.

The first is the amazing tenacity with which the strikers have held together.

When one considers that these girls went out almost simultaneously, that they had no previous organization calling them out, that many of them had not been in organizations before, it is obvious that they could only have been held together by the realization that some principle of tremendous importance to themselves was at stake.

#### Worked Out Own Conviction

I have talked to a number of the girls and heard them speak at meetings, and everything corroborates this impression. All of the girls without exception that I have talked with, had worked out practically for themselves the conviction that the only chance of fair treatment in their industry was in standing together. They were so convinced of this that they were willing to go hungry, if necessary, in order to see it established.

This feeling seemed to be quite as strong among the girls who received good wages and fair treatment as among the girls who were underpaid and badly treated. They all argued that while their own condition might be better now, there was no telling when, if they attempted to stand alone, they would lose what they had. And in any case, they all argued that the stronger ought to help the weaker.

The logical way in which these girls argued this proposition has been most impressive to me. It proves conclusively how strong and

how general the principle of unionism has grown. There is no escaping the deep seriousness with which this mass of girls were inspired, or the willingness with which they were ready to make sacrifices to establish their belief.

#### Public Respects Strike

Not less impressive or less important in my judgment is another phase of the strike, and that is the almost general recognition on the part of the New York public that it is a movement which must be respected. From the start the press, if not altogether sympathetic, was respectful; while a large body of people, who had perhaps thought very little on the subject of unionism, and who had little acquaintance with the conditions under which the shirtwaist workers lived, immediately came to their assistance.

These people did not ask whether the girls were taking this step without making any mistakes, without any lapses into disorder, without any illogical position. They said very rightly that these girls had a right to make an orderly stand to improve their condition. In doing that they are working not merely for themselves, but for society as a whole. Anything which improves their condition must improve everything in the town. It was a recognition, perhaps in most cases unconscious, that the struggle of one is the struggle of all.

#### New Sense of Solidarity

The women who in New York went to the aid of these strikers did not as a rule, in my judgment, do so because they were women, but rather out of a new and growing sense of the solidarity of society, and a new and growing sense that if anybody was making a fight against a wrong, it was their business to stand by and help.

—AMERICAN FEDERATIONIST