

SHIRTWAIST EMPLOYERS.

Their Statement of the Issues Involved
in the Strike.

To the Editor of The New York Times:

In your editorial article in to-day's TIMES under the caption "The Open Shop" are some statements which require correction. Will you allow me to trespass on your space for this purpose? You say: "The employers are ready to make substantially all the concessions asked for by the strikers, and they invite investigation as to the conditions complained of by the workers, which, if found bad, they will undertake to remedy." This is partly correct.

But the employers are not ready to make practically all the concessions asked for. They will not agree to employ only union labor; they will not agree to give up their right to employ and to discharge whom they see fit; they will not consent to having prices for work established without having a voice in the matter, nor will they allow a delegate to interfere in the running of their factories.

They cannot agree to keep at work employes for whom there is no work to do, as they are not running eleemosynary institutions, nor are they able to regulate the law of supply and demand which governs the waistmaking industry as it does all others. If the workers will so regulate the demand of the consumer that it shall run evenly through the year instead of being divided into "seasons," as at present, the employers will be glad to keep everybody at work all the time.

The Associated Waist and Dress Manufacturers have courted investigation of their shops by disinterested persons. They feel safe in stating that conditions will be found ideal. They have offered to submit to arbitration any grievances which the employes might claim existed, but they have never offered to arbitrate the question of open shop, John Mitchell to the contrary notwithstanding.

You say: "Left to the free play of the ordinary forces of supply and demand, the labor of these girls is so simple, the amount of it available, even at low wages and under hard conditions, is so great, that the great body of them are practically helpless."

This statement is at variance with the facts. The operators at the machines constitute by far the largest body of workers who are on strike. Their labor is skilled, and the supply is so limited that during the "season" there are practically two machines in New York for each operator. As this labor is so scarce, it follows that it has to be well paid, for, if a girl is dissatisfied with her earnings, she can find dozens of places open for her. Naturally, she is paid every cent she is worth, as her employer cannot afford to run the risk of losing her services by underpaying her. Even the unskilled labor is better paid than in any other industry employing girls.

Most shops employ many week-workers the year around, and these are paid their full salaries, whether they earn them or not. No manufacturer can run a shop properly without this regular organization of workers who are acquainted with the character of the work turned out in that particular shop. During the "busy season" piece workers are added, and what these earn depends on their ability. A good piece worker will make more than a week worker, but her employment is not steady.

It is deplorable that the real issue of the present strike is obscured by the mouthings of suffragettes, by wealthy "faddists" who for want of a Horse Show or other amusements seek fresh means of excitement, and by writers who, with the most superficial knowledge of trade conditions, promulgate, through various mediums, "erudite" articles brimming with misstatements but full of "heart interests"—such writers' chief desideratum.

The sole issue is that of the open shop, and it is for this that the manufacturers are standing.

The strikers cannot win if they refrain from intimidation and violence, as the shops are gradually filling up with satisfied workers. That they do not refrain is evidenced by the nightly riots in the district occupied by the waistmaking industry and by Police Court records. They attack workers, not only as they leave the shops, but as they leave and arrive at their homes. And we manufacturers are practically requested to sit supinely and have our working people beaten without attempting to give them protection.

The ultimate result of the strikers' present tactics, if successful, would be to drive from New York to other cities an industry employing over \$75,000,000 capital—with due apologies to those on whom the sound of "capital" has the effect of a red rag on a bull.

GEORGE S. LEWY.

New York, Dec. 16, 1909.