

STRIKES AMONG ARTISANS

IS THERE A CLIQUE OF AGITATORS AT WORK?

A CENTRAL ORGANIZATION THAT SUPPORTS
STRIKES—SHOE-MAKERS; TAILORS, FUR-
NITURE-MAKERS, AND PAINTERS ALL DE-
MANDING HIGHER WAGES.

Agitation on the question of increased wages seems to be rapidly spreading among all classes of working men, and strikes or preparation for strikes are the order of the day. Some employers are inclined to believe, as one said yesterday, that "there is a heap of wire-pulling going on somewhere," and that some secret clique of agitators or demagogues is trying to get working men to engage in a general universal strike that shall take in all classes of trade and cause unlimited confusion. "It looks queer," continued this employer, "that shoe-makers and tailors, furniture-makers and clothing cutters, model-makers, and painters, cigar-makers and piano-makers should all happen to determine at the same time that they must have higher wages. I don't believe workmen are really as discontented as they are made to think they are. Somebody is pulling wires somewhere." A TIMES reporter talked with a large number of workmen of various trades yesterday, some of whom are now on strike. Not one would admit that there was any kind of understanding or concerted action between any two different trades. Most of the men declared positively that they had never heard of such a thing as a general strike of all the trades. Such questions, however, as "Why did you strike?" or "Why do you propose to strike?" were met with vague answers except in one case. "We didn't strike for the fun of the thing," said one of the striking cabinet-makers of Henry Hermann's furniture manufactory; "we struck because of hunger," and a number of his fellow-workmen said that was the reason exactly.

Hermann's strikers held another meeting at the Germania Assembly Rooms in the Bowery yesterday morning, but did nothing of special interest. Mr. Hermann does not propose to accede to their demands, while the strikers say they will hold out until he is forced to do so. When the men first struck, last week, they asked for an advance of 10 per cent. in their wages. They decided to give their employer until 11 o'clock on Saturday to grant their demand. That hour passed with no concession from Mr. Hermann, and so the men increased their demand from 10 to 15 per cent. They are now standing out for the latter figure. The men laugh scornfully at Mr. Hermann's offer to establish a graded scale of wages by which those men earning \$16 and over in two weeks should receive an advance. There are a great many of the men, they say, who do not make much more than half that sum, and these men would get no advantage from such a compromise. One of them said yesterday that when they received the 10 per cent. advance last year Mr. Hermann at once raised his price for furniture 15 per cent., so that he made rather than lost by the advance in wages. Some disquietude was felt among the strikers yesterday by a report freely circulated to the effect that Mr. Hermann had sent one of his superintendents to the West in search of men to take the strikers' places. Most of the latter, however, expressed themselves as not at all troubled about it. "Hermann might as well try to make furniture with a lot of shoe-makers as with them men from the West," said one of them. The cabinet-makers have been joined by the carvers of the establishment, and expect soon to have the machinists keep them company.

The striking fever has attacked the house and fresco painters, and a meeting of the craft to talk about getting more money for their labor has been called for to-morrow evening at the Germania Assembly Rooms. The TIMES reporter was unable to find the originators of this movement yesterday, painters generally professing to know nothing about it. The model-makers of the City are also infected with the strike idea, and they are to meet to-day at No. 216 East Forty-first-street, to form a union. The cigar-makers find a special grievance in "the tenement-house system" of cigar manufacture. They have agitated the question for months past, and now propose to make a grand onward movement in the shape of a mass-meeting. This is to be held at Cooper Union on Friday evening, when an earnest protest against the system will be made, and it is expected, also, that there will be some talk about better wages. A widely-different class of workmen are the clothing-cutters, but they, too, want higher wages than they are getting now, and for the purpose of talking the matter over they are to meet together in the Germania Assembly Rooms, on Sunday next. They have already held one meeting at which they resolved "to form a strong union," in order to gain "for their families and themselves a better standard of comfort." The journeymen tailors are also preparing to strike for better wages.

"The Journeymen Tailors' Protective and Benevolent Union" is a society which has existed since 1863, but has lain dormant for some years. It has lately taken a fresh start, and it now has over 600 members. It has paid up a debt of \$8,000 incurred during the strikes of 1876, and has money left in its treasury. Under its auspices a meeting of West Side tailors was held last evening at No. 24 Greenwich-avenue, to induce the West Side men to join the union. It was stated that since 1876 employers have, under the plea of "hard times," reduced wages from 40 to 60 per cent. A few employers, however, have only cut down about 5 per cent. The journeymen now propose to force wages up to the old figures. Just now business is dull. It will become active again about the middle of March, when Spring clothing will come into demand. The tailors say they intend to employ the interval in thoroughly organizing. Then, when business becomes brisk, they will strike, unless their demands are complied with. The men claim that employers are making more money now, and can well afford to pay more wages. An employer told THE TIMES reporter that the trouble with the men was the fact that they are not willing to see men paid "according to their ability." "Most employers," said he, "have one or two men who are much better workmen than their companions, and such men generally get a dollar more for making a coat or suit. The men who are not able to earn this extra dollar grumble, and that is where the trouble comes in. They want a poor workman to be paid as much as a good one." He added that where small houses pay, say \$5 and \$7 for the making of a coat, the large houses get the same work done for \$2 and \$3. One of the journeymen at last evening's meeting said the big houses scattered their work among farmers' wives in the country, and paid 50 cents to \$1 for the sewing of a whole suit.

Shoe-makers, too, have been seized with the general longing for more money, and are organizing to secure it. An organization meeting of "turn" men—those who make the finest class of shoes and slippers—was held last evening at Military Hall, No. 193 Bowery. The men complain that their wages have been steadily cut down until now the best workmen cannot earn more than \$2 for a day's work of 14 hours. One of the speakers gave the prices now paid by employers as ranging all the way from \$3 50 to \$6 per dozen for fine French kid slippers, and from 16 cents to 37½ cents per pair for fine morocco slippers. Only a very few bosses are paying the latter prices, but the turn men propose to force all to pay the higher rates. It was stated that every boss in the City is doing all the work he can, and that there is actually a scarcity of workmen. Under these circumstances the men argue that united action is all that is needed to make the bosses pay good wages. An employer named Dobson addressed the meeting and said he was now paying the higher wages. Unless, however, the men forced the other bosses to pay the same he would have to come down again. He declared, in reply to a question, that the employers cannot afford to pay the wages asked unless they raise their prices. The meeting finally adjourned to meet again on Monday evening.

Inquiries among the shoe-makers, as well as among the tailors, regarding the originators of the present agitation, failed to elicit any admissions that there is any central organization or clique pulling the strings of the different trades-unions. But one of the tailors told the reporter that the Tailors' Union was a member of the "Amalgamated Labor Union," which was composed of representatives from most of the trade organizations. He denied that this union had anything whatever to do with originating strikes, but claimed that its sole object was to cause all trades to help the men of any one trade who do strike. Each trade must help itself for the first two weeks of any strike, and then the Amalgamated Union helps bear the burden. The tailor said the cabinet-makers' organization was also a member of the union, and if Hermann's cabinet-makers hold out two weeks they will receive help from it.