

FREIGHT HANDLERS STRIKE.

Action of Men in Chicago Cripples Railroads' Business—Demands of the Men.

CHICAGO, July 7.—A strike of 9,000 freight handlers in Chicago was called to-day, and every freight house of the twenty-four railroads concerned is practically tied up. Business men fear that the strike will be the most serious which has affected their interests in years.

The strike was called by a committee appointed at a meeting of 1,000 freight handlers held last night. The committee was instructed to call a strike within forty-eight hours unless the railroads should meet the demands of the men at once for an increase in wages, extra pay for overtime and holidays, and recognition of the union.

The committee went first to the men in the Michigan Central, the Illinois Central, and Wisconsin Central houses on the lake front. The men walked out with cheers and marched across the viaduct on Randolph Street with their union cards tucked in their hats.

By messenger and by telephone, according to the strike leaders, all other members of the Interior Freight Handlers' and Warehousemen's Union were called out. At noon President Curran of the union reported that his men were all out, and that it was all but impossible for any freight to enter Chicago or to leave it. Many of the railroads had small forces of men previously hired on hand when the strike was called, and by adding to it men from other departments managed to handle perishable commodities.

In the hiring of non-union men it is said the railroads run a serious risk of bringing about a strike of the teamsters, who recently won their fight from the packers. The teamsters, it is said, will refuse absolutely to have anything to do with freight in any way handled by non-union help.

The principal railroad systems affected by the strike are:

The Chicago, Cincinnati and St. Louis.
Chicago and Great Western.
Baltimore and Ohio.
Erie.
Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé.
Chicago Terminal Transfer Company.
Lake Shore and Michigan Southern.
Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific.
Chicago and Alton.
The "Monon."
Chicago and Eastern Illinois.
Wabash.
Grand Trunk.
Chicago, Burlington and Quincy.
The Pennsylvania.
Chicago and Northwestern.
Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul.
Illinois Central.
Michigan Central.
The "Nickel Plate."

These roads control over 100 warehouses in Chicago.

Although officials of the Teamsters' Union have declared that no instructions have been given the teamsters as to backing up the freight handlers, the sympathy of the teamsters was made apparent to-day. When the men walked out of the Illinois Central warehouse the teamsters who were receiving or unloading freight immediately took their trucks away.

That the railroads are expecting a strenuous struggle was made evident to-day, when the chief detective of an Eastern road bought 100 "billies," the entire stock of a prominent firm.

Two wagonloads of new men were taken to the Illinois Central warehouse under police guard during the afternoon. Officials of the Chicago and Northwestern refused to state what the situation in their warehouses is. It is believed, however, that all their men left. Officials of the Pennsylvania claimed that of the 300 men employed by them, only 12 walked out and that 6 of these returned. Mayor Harrison said that he had planned to go on a vacation, but that if the strike was not settled he would remain in the city.

It was reported to-night that the Illinois Central will bring 400 men from the South to take the places of strikers. Other roads were said to be taking similar measures.

Chairman Job of the State Board of Arbitration said: "I have sent letters to the managers of the roads affected and to President Curran of the freight handlers, offering the services of the board in attempting to bring about a settlement. So far I have received no reply from any of them."

Hopes of a speedy settlement of the strike are entertained to-night by officials of the union and members of the State Board of Arbitration. The officials of the union at a conference to-night told Chairman Job of the Board of Arbitration that they were willing to permit employes of the different companies to meet officials of the same to discuss the wage scale, providing a joint conference should be held at which officials of the union would be permitted to act as advisers to the men. The arbitration board is now working on the matter in an effort to bring about a conference between the railway managers and committees representing the men. As the railroad officials have favored this step from the beginning of the controversy there is little doubt that the strike can be settled satisfactorily to both sides if the conference shall be arranged.

Lack of unanimity already permeates the strike. The Chicago Federation of Labor was ignored when the order was issued for the men to quit work, and its executive officials are somewhat offended and are inclined to let the freight handlers fight out their battle in their own way.