

# CRISIS IMMINENT IN THE CLOAK AND SUIT INDUSTRY

The Cloak and Suit Industry is the most important in the City of New York.

Working conditions are maintained under a Collective Agreement between

The Cloak, Suit and Skirt Mfrs. Protective Association

—and—

The International Ladies Garment Makers Union

entered into June 1st, 1919, for a term of three years.

This agreement provided a minimum scale of wages to be paid to the **slowest workers**, which is the highest minimum scale paid in any industry in this state. It was fixed at a standard to enable the **slowest worker** to maintain his family at the prevailing high cost of living.

Wages of **more efficient workers** were fixed at rates, in proportion, by comparison of their productivity with that of the **slowest workers**.

Thus, the **average wage** was established at figures more than fifty per cent (50%) above the **minimum scale**.

The agreement also provides—

*"There shall be no lock-out or strike in the shops of the members of the Association during the period of this agreement nor shall there be any individual shop lock-out, stoppage or shop strike pending the determination of any complaint or grievance. Should there be a stoppage of work or shop strike in any factory, immediate notice thereof shall be given by the Association to the Union. The Union agrees to return the striking workers to their work within twenty-four hours after the receipt by the Union of such notice, and until the expiration of such time it shall not be deemed that the striking workers have abandoned their employment. The consideration of stoppage cases shall have precedence over all other complaints and grievances arising hereunder."*

Immediately after the contract was signed, the workers, by means of threats, and a systematized method of coercion upon individual manufacturers in the Industry, forced additional advances of from 10% to 25% to the already high wages that had been established in each shop.

Though the contract is but six months old, the Union, disregarding the agreement fixing wages and the subsequent advances obtained from employers, made demands upon the Association for a further increase of 30% on the ground of higher cost of living, and threatened, if the demand was not conceded, it would obtain it through the unlawful method of **Shop Strikes, forbidden by the contract**.

The Association declined to accede to the Union's demand upon the following grounds:—

**BECAUSE:**—Wages have been advanced since the signing of the contract more than any possible increase in the cost of living that may have occurred during that time.

**BECAUSE:**—The wages of the workers are among the highest paid in any industry.

**BECAUSE:**—Further increases of wages would be added to the price of garments and passed on to the Public.

**BECAUSE:**—The Government requested organized labor, especially in Industries where compensation is high, to **cease** making unfair demands, which militate against the Government's efforts to lower the cost of living.

**BECAUSE:**—Wearing Apparel is a necessity and the Association has resolved to maintain prices, as far as lies within its power, at the lowest possible level.

THAT under the Agreement made June 1st, 1919, weekly working hours were **reduced from forty-nine to forty-four**, the working system was changed from **piece-work to week-work**, causing a **greatly decreased production**, and the repeated increases of wages obtained since that time more than **doubled the labor cost** in the production of garments

THAT Cloaks and Suits had reached **prices to the consumer** that were almost **prohibitive**

THAT The prevailing high prices had already seriously jeopardized the Industry

THAT The earnings of the workers are fully adequate to meet the present standards of living

THAT To advance the prices of garments under these circumstances would be an **imposition on the Public**

## THEREFORE

The Association takes the position that in the present state of the **Public mind** and in conformity with the avowed purpose of the **Government** to lower the cost of living, it is a moral obligation of the Association to co-operate to this end and in the **Public Interest** to prevent, as far as possible, unjustified increases in prices, especially as labor in this Industry is already among the highest paid in the country.

Notwithstanding our repeated assertions clearly justifying the position taken by us in a series of communications sent to the Union and of the obligations of the Union under the contract,

**THE UNION HAS FULFILLED ITS THREAT** and has already instigated **twenty-eight individual strikes** (all of which are, at present, actively carried on) in the shops of members of this Association in direct violation of the express provisions of the contract, thus bringing about a **crisis** in the Industry.

In this connection we wrote the Union under date of December 30th, 1919, as follows:—

"Notwithstanding the fact that our Agreement is barely six months old and that it expressly prohibits stoppages of work and strikes, yet there are at the present time twenty-eight strikes in the shops of members of this Association (some of which are more than two weeks old), and you have failed to respond to our repeated demands to return the men to work, in accordance with the terms of our agreement.

"Such conduct on your part leaves us no alternative than to insist that you return these men to their work in their respective shops on or before January 2nd, 1920.

"You have at all times maintained that you have full control over the workers, and should you fail to return these men to work, we shall be justified in believing that you did not exercise your power (as is your duty) in this regard. As this was the basic consideration for our entering in the Agreement with you, we shall be compelled under the circumstances, to make such publicity as we deem proper to show the injustice of the methods employed by you and the integrity of our position."

We received under date of December 31st, 1919, a reply from the Union reading as follows:

"In reply to your letter of the 30th inst., we wish to say that we do not know of any strikes at present in any of the shops of the members of your Association, and that no strikes will be called or tolerated by our Organization in any of these shops, as we are determined to live up fully to the terms and letter of our Agreement.

"As regards the stoppages occurring in any of these shops we wish to call your attention to specific provisions in our agreement governing and regulating same."

**AND IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER THERE OCCURRED FOURTEEN ADDITIONAL STRIKES.**

**THEREFORE:**—The Association is compelled to take a definite stand:—

**BECAUSE:**—The Association holds that a contract, eminently fair, fully protecting the interests of the workers, entered into in **good faith**, should be respected and the mutual obligations thereunder be observed with scrupulous integrity so that it may be recognized as something more than a **scrap of paper** . . . and

**BECAUSE:**—Of these facts and others of an industrial nature, involving control of an industry, the Association is prepared to **oppose** unjust demands at all cost to itself, so long as it receives the moral support of the Public or until such time when it will be indicated by the Public that increased wages to the workers and increased prices of cloaks and suits are desirable.

New York, January 2nd, 1920.

THE CLOAK, SUIT & SKIRT MFRS. PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION, 220 Fifth Avenue