

THE LEVEE STRIKE.

Yesterday the controversy between the Screwmen, and the Ship Agents and Stevedores over the compensation to be paid for handling cotton cargoes culminated in a general strike of all labor engaged in handling freight in the port of New Orleans. The Longshoremen, General Freight Handlers, Coal Wheelers, Cotton Yardmen, and, in fact, every class of labor connected with the business of the port, went on strike in sympathy with the Screwmen, thus effectually tying up commerce for the time being.

This action on the part of the Dock and Cotton Council, the central body controlling all branches of labor on the levee, had been anticipated, and therefore created no surprise. There is now no other course open to the shipping interests but to load and unload their ships as best they may with the ship's crews and such outside or local help as they may be able to secure. It is to be a test of endurance between the shipping interests on the one hand and the regular labor of the port on the other.

A strike involving so large a number of men, something more than eight thousand laborers, white and colored, cannot be viewed except with concern, as, aside from the difficulty of maintaining public peace under such circumstances, there is the serious damage to the commerce of the port that has to be considered. The more stubborn the fight and the longer a settlement is deferred the greater will be the diversion of traffic to other ports where the conditions are more favorable.

The causes leading up to the strike are too well known to need review here. Even those Stevedores and lines which promptly signed contracts with the Longshoremen for three years under the impression that as they did not handle cotton they would not be involved in the trouble with the Screwmen, have fared no better than the others, as the Longshoremen have promptly broken their contracts and have stopped work. This is not a pleasant feature of the general strike declared by the Dock and Cotton Council, as their action has hit friends and foes alike.

The contest on the part of the shipping interests is claimed to be a supreme effort to place New Orleans upon a parity with other and competing ports. Just what changes in the compensation paid to labor will establish that parity has not yet been fully established by impartial investigation. The labor interests ought to be as willing as the shipping interests to enable the port, on the prosperity of which their livelihood depends, to compete with trade rivals on fair terms. The action of the Dock and Cotton Council yesterday would seem to imply that they are not willing to budge an inch in the interest of the prosperity of the port.

With such an impasse existing the duty of the authorities is clear, namely, to preserve the public peace at whatever cost. It is the right of labor to refuse to work, and that right must be respected, but it is equally the right of other labor to work for whatever wages seems fair, and the laws guarantee to every man in this right to sell his labor full protection and security.

It is gratifying to note that the Screwmen declare that they have no intention or desire to make trouble or interfere with the working of outside labor, and denounce as uncalled-for all insinuations to the contrary. These assurances should be accepted as sincere, and the labor leaders held to a strict fulfillment of this pledge, and whatever happens to disturb the public peace should be laid at the door of those really responsible, no matter who they be.

As the Pleayune has already stated in connection with this strike, no situation is so complex that it cannot be straightened out, if a sincere attempt is made to reach a solution. The commerce of the port cannot be permitted to suffer, no matter what long established customs are overthrown, but just how much each interest must sacrifice for the general good can only be established by impartial arbitration.

But there is no prospect of any settlement, and evidently the issue is to be fought to a finish. It is plain that this has been threatened for some time, and if the time has come the sooner the fight is made the better. No single class of men, whether rich or poor, employe or employer, can be allowed to hold this city and its commerce and industries in slavery.