

DOORS WERE LOCKED, SAY RESCUED GIRLS

Workers Huddled Against Them
as Fire Spread, According
to Strike Leader.

MASS MEETING OF PROTEST

Arranged by Women's Trade Union
League—Triangle Employees Under-
paid, Miss Dreier Charges.

Speaking to delegates from twenty philanthropic organizations and settlement workers, who met yesterday in the headquarters of the Women's Trade Union League to plan a mass meeting to discuss problems suggested by the Triangle Waist Company's fire, Leonora O'Reilly, a leader in the strike in the company's plant last year, declared that to her certain knowledge the doors on the eighth and ninth floors of the building were locked fast Saturday afternoon.

"I have just come from a luncheon we prepared for the unfortunate girls who escaped," Miss O'Reilly declared. "They all told me one thing—that the doors were locked. Eighteen of our workers have been going the rounds of the families of those having employment. In every family they tell the same story.

"And while at first this thing may seem strange to you, I assure you it is not strange at all. The girls are locked in while they work in nearly every factory. We exploited this fact when we declared the strike in the Triangle plant, and later saw it grow into the revolt of the entire trade.

"And since that strike the rule about keeping the doors locked has been enforced more strictly than ever. It had an economic basis and it was to the advantage of the employer in more ways than one.

"In the first place, employers do not trust their help. In many factories they search them at night to see that they do not carry off the shirtwaists they have made.

Planned to Prevent Tardiness.

"To enforce rules regarding tardiness the idea of locking the doors was first inaugurated. It was found that if girls understood they could not get into the factories after the minute of commencing work in the morning, they would be more sure to come on time.

"But, in trying to lock the late-comers out, they overlooked the fact that they were also locking those in who were at work. After the strike the locked doors gave another protection, for it was when agents entered the rooms of all shirtwaist factories simultaneously that the girls all walked out to join the revolt. The locked doors were a permanent guarantee that there would be no more sudden notices to cease work passed simultaneously to all factories.

"The girls with whom I lunched to-day were very excited, and could tell but little with definiteness. But they did say that they had seen large numbers of girls huddled against the locked doors, and the reports of the fire agree that girls were found in just this position on the eighth, and especially on the ninth floor."

The meeting Miss O'Reilly addressed passed resolutions denouncing the administrative policies which did not provide better means of egress. It also appointed committees to confer with labor organizations and employers and see if a cooperative plan cannot be worked out to bring about an improvement of exit facilities in loft structures.

Miss Mary E. Dreier, President of the Women's Trade Union League, who was arrested in the strike while doing picket duty in front of the Triangle Waist Company's place of business, said she recognized among the dead many who had passed with her through the strike experiences.

"The worst of all the firms we had to

deal with was that of Harris & Blanck," Miss Dreier declared. "When both sides had been wearied by the long struggle and it seemed they could get together, Mr. Blanck came to our representatives and pleaded with us that he had a business reputation to sustain—that he didn't want it to seem that we had beaten him into making changes. He said if we would only help him save his face and let the girls go back he would see that the improvements were speedily made and every sanitary regulation suggested was complied with.

"His words were reassuring. We thought he had seen the justice of our demands for decent working conditions. He was the largest man in the business, controlling factories in Newark and Philadelphia, as well as in New York. We trusted him, and let our girls go back.

"They found that each experienced girl was required to teach six Italian girls all she knew about the business—these six being seated near her machine to see her sew. Then we found the experienced girls, as soon as they had done the instructing necessary, were dismissed.

"All who had joined in the strike as leaders were dismissed, one by one, whenever excuses, however slight, could be found. The union girls were put exclusively on the eighth floor, after others had been instructed to do their work, and thus it is that there are so many employes other than Jews who met their death. The employes, up to the time of the strike adjustment, were nearly all Jewish."

Says Girls Were Underpaid.

Miss Dreier recounted the manner in which she was arrested in front of the place, and then received apologies from the police when her identity became known and reproaches from the policeman who had taken her into custody for not telling him who she was, so that he could have avoided the "mistake." She said that in every union shop the girls were paid 60 cents a dozen for doing work for which the girls in the Triangle shop got 35 cents a dozen, and that it was because of this low rate that the girls were still at work at an hour when employes had left off work in nearly all the factories of the city.

"The poor Italian girl," she said, "has no conception, when she first arrives, of how short a distance \$6 a week will go in this country. She thinks the wage is fair; her more experienced sisters know that \$10 a week is less than needed to keep decently alive. And there you have the game Harris & Blanck played—they exploited the newly arrived and unsophisticated and turned out those to whom they pledged that they would change conditions in their shop."

Ida Rowe, a field worker for the league, told of her experiences trying to get the Mayor and the Building Department to take action against known firetraps, following the Newark disaster.

"We found the authority scattered all through the City Government," she said; "the Building Department referred us to the Fire Department, and the Fire Department to the Factory Inspectors, and so it went.

"Chief Croker told me how anxious he was to gain complete control. I think we are anxious to see him have it, or see it centred in his department, since it knows more than the others about the toll in death lists that the improper facilities

have. I think a monster mass meeting, which we are here to provide for, should put itself on record as in favor of such consolidation and revision of the laws."

To Seek Data from the Workers.

The question of gathering information about conditions in factories was brought up by Morris Hillquit. Miss O'Reilly said that it was more than any girl's head was worth to speak openly about the conditions of her employment. "I propose that we name a committee," she said, "which will advertise that it will guard as secret any information brought to it." She proposed that the girls of all factory buildings be asked these questions:

- Do you work in a fire trap?
- Are the doors locked while you work?
- Are there bars on the windows?
- Are there fire escapes on all floors?
- Are the escapes readily accessible?
- Are scraps or waste allowed to accumulate near the motors or steam plant?
- If so, you work in a fire trap. You may secretly describe your condition by calling at the homes or writing to Mrs. Stephen Wise, 23 West Ninetieth Street; Leonora O'Reilly, 680 Seventh Avenue; Mrs. Beard, 501 West 120th Street; Mrs. Olleshelmer, 5 East Fifty-eighth Street, or Helen Marot, 43 East Twenty-second Street.

Circulars as suggested were ordered sent out, the data gathered to be turned over to a steering committee of twenty-five citizens to be named by the mass meeting's Chairman, to plan for a general assembly on Thursday or Friday night in the largest hall available.

Rabbi Stephen Wise declared that he was willing to take no man's word—especially no official's word—about what the facts of the shirtwaist fire were. "We have seen," he said, "the terrible evidences of what officials can do in the way of avoiding the search for facts in the case of the recent legislative investigating committee, which passed so skillfully all opportunities really to find out the scandals of race track gambling.

"I want the citizens of New York to find out for themselves, through the medium of a committee named at a general mass assembly. If this thing was avoidable I want to see those responsible punished. If it was due to some corrupt failure to enforce the law I want to see that determined. And I do not trust public officials to determine it for us; it is our own task as citizens to do that for ourselves."

The Resolutions.

Benjamin C. Marsh of the Mayor's Committee on Congestion of Population, William J. Schieffelin, President of the People's Union, and others spoke in favor of the resolutions which were adopted, and which read:

Whereas, So soon following the frightful holocaust in our neighboring city of Newark, and in spite of the solemn warning to our officials in a leading New York magazine, that conditions were as bad, or worse, here, this dreadful disaster has come to the most helpless of our people, the working women of our city and those dependent upon them; and

Whereas, It is most evident that there has been neglect on the part of many, both officials and private citizens, and especially lack of co-operation to prevent such accidents, and that such neglect is immediately the cause of this most deplorable affliction; and

Whereas, Yet deeper lie causes, such as the continuation of industrial warfare, the failure to exact and enforce proper factory inspection, the inexcusable delay about adopting measures, which in other countries have minimized such dangers and provided for the compensation of the victims of industrial accidents in a manner, which results in a maximum of prevention; and

Whereas, These, our sisters and our brothers will have died in vain if the occasion pass without a full and firm expression of the indignation, shame, and grief, with which the horror has been received by all, now therefore be it:

Resolved, That we, who are here assembled, deplore and condemn the blindness of public officials, who fatuously permit such conditions to continue, the insufficiency of the number of factory inspectors, the greed of employers, who do not welcome, but instead punish with dismissal, employes, who demand safe conditions under which to work, and the inertia of the great, busy public, which does not render such unprofitable, both in the public servant and the employer; and

Be it resolved, That we call upon the people of our city, State, and Nation to bring to account all who are responsible for such conditions, and to take steps to render it impossible that we should ever again be compelled to bow our heads in helpless grief, and rage, and shame at that which human forethought could so easily prevent; and

Be it resolved, That we call upon the working people of New York, and all in sympathy with them, to join in the funeral procession of the victims, and thus give expression alike to their sorrow and to their resolve to prevent such horrors in future.

The committee of twenty-five called for to arrange a mass meeting, it was announced, would be appointed this morning from among the city's most representative men and women.