

The amount of cargo shipped on the Great Lakes during 1908 had plunged by more than half from 1907 totals. Iron ore, the largest total commodity hauled, saw its tonnage drop from 40,727,972 to 24,939,185 gross tons in 1908, a 40 percent decline by the close of navigation.<sup>34</sup> Even so, the reduced amount was an estimated 20 percent greater amount than demand required. Companies built up stockpiles ahead of anticipated labour trouble. Making the most of their position, the owners announced unilateral wage freezes and the continuation of the open shop.<sup>35</sup>

### The Strike of 1909

Despite the promise to move toward strike action on 1 May the sailor unions stood on unstable ground during the winter of 1908-09. Though they had previously stood apart from the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association, and the Marine Firemen, Oilers and Water Tenders Benevolent Association, the Lake Seamen's Union now chose to work with them. Leaders confronted their limited ability to provide financial support to striking workers.<sup>36</sup> Without this backing, unity within the various unions would have been difficult to achieve. Though the engineer's union had rejected the open shop and yellow-dog contracts even for licensed sailors in June 1908, a number of engineers left in January 1909 to accept positions after facing bleak work prospects on shore.<sup>37</sup> The defections gave the Lake Carriers' the opportunity to claim that their vessels had all the engineers they needed. Despite this unsettling turn of events sailor affiliated unions still pushed ahead with the strike.<sup>38</sup> On 1 May 1909 the Lake Seamen's Union and its remaining union allies declared a strike effective.<sup>39</sup>

The Lake Carriers' immediately implemented the contingency plans they had prepared since 1903. Tall slab fences already under construction were rushed to completion, limiting access to critical dock facilities. Private security and detective

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Fisher to Robert Clarke, 20 November 1908, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1908, ISU-BHC-DPL; "Union Lake Men in Predicament," *CL*, 27 July 1908; "Lake Seamen's Union Dislikes 'Welfare Plan,'" *DNT*, 17 December 1908; "Marine Men Against Strikes," *Toledo Blade (TB)*, 17 December 1908.

34 "Movement of Ore is Reduced 50 Percent," *Detroit Free Press (DFP)*, 4 September 1908; "Coal Shipments Fall off Badly," *DEH*, 27 October 1908; "Total Ore Shipments," *Duluth Evening Herald (DEH)*, 15 December 1908; "Domestic Commerce on the Great Lakes," *Annual Report of the Department of Commerce and Labor, Internal Commerce of the United States*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909), 1095-1097.

35 *Annual Report of the Lake Carriers' Association* (Cleveland: Lake Carriers' Association, 1908), 10.

36 MFOBWA Meeting Minutes, Buffalo, New York, Box 1, Folder: Superior, WI-Meeting Minutes, 1908-1909, ISU-BHC-DPL; "Annual Meeting of the Lake Carriers' Association," *MR*, 39, No.3, (21 January 1909), 22; Larowe, 36-38.

37 "Engineers Won't Sign," *DFP*, 5 June 1909.

38 "Lake Carriers for Open Shop," *DNT*, 21 January 1909; "More Engineers to Sign Contracts," *DFP*, 28 January 1909; "All the Engineers that He Needs," *DEH*, 12 March 1909; "Engineers are Signed," *DEH*, 5 April 1909; "Livingstone to Ignore Unions," *DNT*, 16 April 1909; "Expect Strike at all Ports," *TB*, 21 April 1909.

39 "15,000 Seamen on Lakes on Strike," *DFP*, 1 May 1909.