

FIREMEN STRIKE; OLYMPIC HELD

Part of Crew Leave Vessel as She
Is About to Sail from South-
ampton with 1,400 Passengers.

DISTRUST THE LIFEBOATS

Men Declare the Collapsibles
Taken from Troopships Are
Old and Unseaworthy.

SAILORS OFFER TO JOIN

But Union Officials Decline to Advise
Them, Fearing Prosecution—
Liner Now Off Spithead.

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

LONDON, April 24.—The White Star liner Olympic, which was to sail from Southampton for New York at noon to-day, still lies off Spithead owing to a strike of firemen because of fears that the new collapsible boats are unseaworthy.

Although grumbling was heard among the men last night, to-day's action was a complete surprise. Everything appeared to be going on as usual until 20 minutes to 12, just as the liner was about to sail, when several firemen declared that the forty collapsible boats taken from troopships in the harbor were rotten and unseaworthy and would not open.

The alarm quickly spread through the stokehold, and a request was sent to Mr. Curry, the Southampton manager of the White Star Line, that all the collapsible boats be replaced by wooden lifeboats. Mr. Curry replied that this was impossible and told the men the boats had been passed by a Board of Trade Inspector. Some, he added, had been tried in the water and found entirely seaworthy.

The men were not satisfied and the entire staff of firemen, greasers, and trimmers, with but three exceptions, ceased work, collected their kits, and left the ship, singing, "We're All Going the Same Way Home."

There are three watches in the Olympic. Each watch consists of fifty-five firemen, 24 trimmers, 8 greasers, and 5 leading firemen, so that altogether 276 men deserted their posts. The three men who remained were a storekeeper, an electric light man, and the man in charge of the refrigerating machinery.

When the firemen had gone the seamen became discontented and refused to handle the ropes, this duty being performed by stewards and officials of the line, who were in the ship.

Mr. Curry pointed out that the men's refusal to obey orders was rank mutiny and that Capt. Haddock, if he pleased, could order the police to place every deserting fireman aboard the ship.

For the best part of an hour there was pandemonium on the quay. Many firemen appeared intoxicated and rushed about preventing other stokers from joining the ship. They still sang, "We're All Going the Same Way Home," being accompanied by a tin whistle band under the direction of a self-appointed conductor.

A meeting of the strikers was hastily formed on the quay and addressed by Mr. Cannon, Secretary of the Seafarers' Union, to which most of the men belong. Mr. Cannon told the men he would not take any responsibility himself, but would leave the matter entirely to them. His position would be directed by their vote.

Scores of hands went up in favor of a strike. There was not a single man who voted to rejoin the ship.

Just before the Olympic steamed away a stoker who had been left behind slid down one of the ropes at the bow on to the quay and joined his cheering comrades, who were holding another meeting at the entrance to the docks. An official of the Seafarers' Union, addressing the crowd, asserted that the firemen had left the Olympic because the White Star Line would not take proper precautions to save the lives of those aboard the vessel.

Mr. Walls, chief engineer of the Philadelphia, promptly contradicted the statement. "Don't you men be fools," he said. "You know what distress there is in town through the Titanic. Don't add to it. Be reasonable. The collapsible boats are all right in every way. If you will come to the Philadelphia I will put you aboard."

The Olympic strikers only jeered.

There is a decided conflict of opinion about the condition of the collapsible boats. Capt. Clarke, the Board of Trade Inspector, states that he personally tested the boats and found them all right. They had been previously passed by the Admiralty, he told the men, and he said he was prepared to accompany the Olympic to Cowes and there test any of the boats that they should select.

The strikers' side of the story, as told by Mr. Cannon, is:

"The men inspected the boats when they were mustered this morning and found many of them in a rotten condition. One man is alleged to have put his hand through the canvas of one boat. All the boats are from six to ten years old, and when the men tried to open them they could not do so.

Continued on Page 3.

OLYMPIC IS HELD BY STRIKE OF CREW

Continued from Page 1.

Further, only four extra men had been signed on to man the boats."

Mr. Curry, who accompanied the Olympic as far as the bar, said tonight: "We shall get a substitute crew at Spithead."

The sailors aboard the Olympic this evening sent the following Marconigram to Mr. Cannon:

"Shall the crew proceed in the Olympic? The sailors wait your decision."

Mr. Cannon said he was unable to advise the sailors, as such advice might be interpreted as incitement to mutiny, for which there was a heavy penalty. His reply was:

"You are aboard. The key of the situation is in your hands."

Twenty men were waiting in the White Star offices this evening ready to be signed on the Olympic, while the strikers were meeting in a neighboring school and expressing their determination to maintain their attitude.

An official of the company states that it is possible that the Olympic will sail to-morrow morning at 9 o'clock. Tonight a tug left Southampton with forty firemen for her.

A Belfast telegram states that it is learned from a trustworthy source that thirty-two lifeboats, each accommodating sixty-five persons, have been forwarded by Harland & Wolff to Liverpool for the Olympic, which, it was understood, will proceed to Liverpool to take them aboard.

It is stated that the White Star officials at Southampton are confident of being able to replace the strikers. A hundred substitutes have already been taken aboard, but the strikers are picketing the offices of the company as well as the dock entrances and pier, and they declare that they will prevent the Olympic from sailing until the collapsible boats are replaced by wooden ones.

The White Star officials say the rumor that a number of passengers asked to be put ashore because they objected to sailing with a scratch crew is pure fiction.