

\$16 for a twelve-hour day. The men who hold these positions are immigrants as well as native born, but they are more properly to be ranked as a sort of foreman than as workmen. The mines offer nothing comparable to these most highly paid jobs in the steel work.

Effect of  
immigra-  
tion on  
wages

One of the most important questions in regard to our immigration is the question how this vast addition to our labor supply has affected the price of labor.

Since the pause due to the Civil War over 21,500,000 have entered our ports,\* the majority of them laborers. Vast numbers have indeed returned (in the decade 1899-1908 alone, 3,275,589,† more than one-seventh of the whole number) and thousands more have died here. Yet in 1900 there were at work nearly 9,000,000 white men and boys of foreign parentage,—not very far from half (43 per cent) of all male white workers. One would suppose that America could not have absorbed these myriads without bringing wages down with a run.

The course  
of wages

Notoriously this has not been the case. Chart III, drawn from the carefully computed tables in Dr. Edith Abbott's study of the wages of unskilled labor ‡ seems to show a general upward trend of wages, other than those of farm laborers, from 1840 to 1890, interrupted by the abnormal rise and fall, between 1860 and 1880, caused by the Civil War and the depreciation of the currency. From 1890 to 1900 this gain seems not to have been maintained. Yet I suppose that few would hold that the workingman in America has on the whole lost ground economically.

Retrospec-  
tions

Granting this, there has been loss and retrogression for certain classes and at certain points. Some trades,

\* June 30, 1862-June 30, 1909; 21,663,203.

† Ann. Report Comm. Gen. of Immig. for 1908, page 228. See also pages 250-252, 294-296 and appendix XVIII, page 463.

‡ "The Wages of Unskilled Labor in the United States, 1850-1900." For criticism and explanation of the tables the student is referred to the original. See also, for tables and chart showing relative money wages, real wages and hours of labor, 1840-1899, Bull. of the U. S. Dept. of Labor, No. 38 (Jan., 1902), page 123 ff.

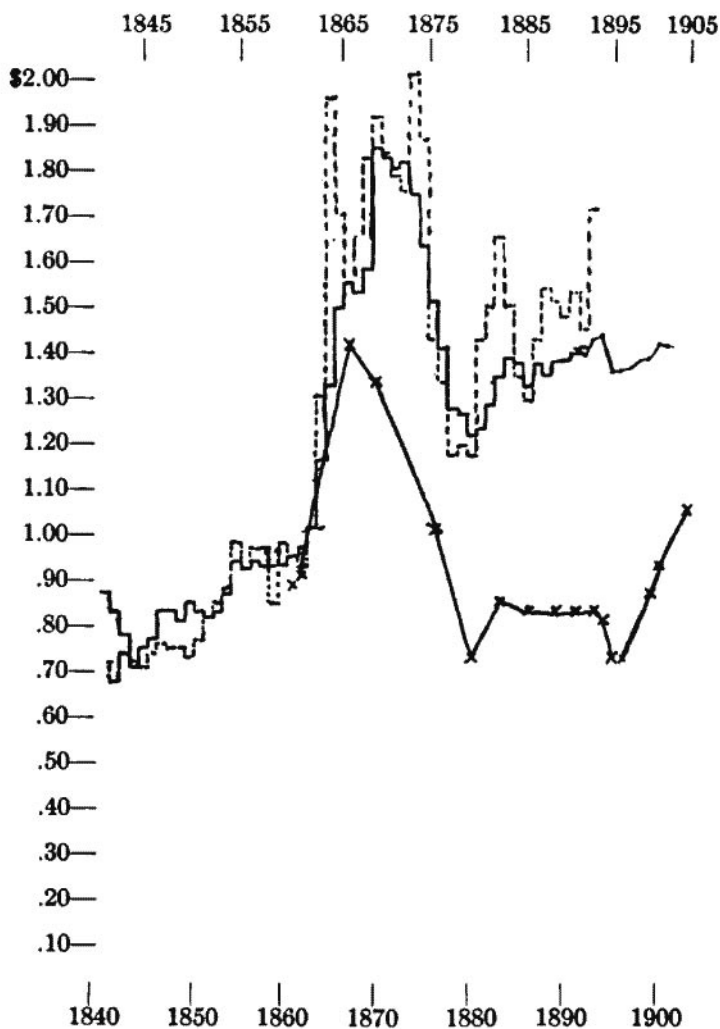


CHART III.—COURSE OF WAGES OF UNSKILLED LABOR

FROM DR. EDITH ABBOTT'S "THE WAGES OF UNSKILLED LABOR IN THE UNITED STATES," 1850-1900

- Wages of unskilled labor (from Table X). ———
- Wages of miners (from Table XII). - - - - -
- Wages of agricultural laborers (from Table XIII). -x-x-x-
- Wages of common laborers, 1890-1900 (from Table XV). . . . .

chiefly those subjected to sweating (and of these notably the needle trades), have suffered from the influx from Europe. Furthermore, specialization of industry and exaggeration of the seasonal character of production have tended to degrade whole classes of workers, including the tramp labor of the farm; and the abundant supply of immigrant labor has facilitated both specialization and seasonal concentration.

Wages in the steel industry of Pittsburgh have just been considered. But if we look a little further back for comparison we find that this industry seems to have offered less and less favorable conditions for the past fifteen years or so. Hours have increased and wages have declined. "It is estimated by many who are in a position to know, that the actual earnings of skilled workmen in the steel mills have declined 20 to 50 per cent since 1897,"\*—of the *skilled* workmen, we must notice. The unskilled laborers, on the other hand, men paid by time, not by the ton, "have had their wages advanced in recent years, while the earnings of tonnage men were declining." The explanation offered by Mr. Fitch, in his admirable Pittsburgh Survey study of the steel industry just quoted, is that the company cuts the wages of those men on whose speed the output depends, in order to increase their exertions. In any case, the class which has been flooded by immigrant labor is not the class which has lost ground, but the reverse is the case.

Clogging  
effect of  
immigration  
on the labor  
market

I think we may conclude that the earnings of the rough, manly labor of the country have not in general been pushed backward by the inrush of these hosts of workers with low standards of wages and comfort. On the other hand, it seems impossible to doubt that if there had been no such influx wages would have risen in some degree which it is not possible to calculate. Had our legislation

\* Fitch, John Andrews: "The Steel Industry and the Labor Problem." *Charities and the Commons*, XXI, pages 1079-1092 (March 6, 1909).

shielded labor by anything corresponding to the protection accorded to employers, it would have greatly retarded and curtailed, both for evil and for good, the exploitation of our resources and the growth of our production. Capitalists would have been bidding against one another for "hands" just as their wives have been actually bidding against one another for servants, with results upon which this is not the place to speculate.

That the depressing effect of the immigrant on the labor market has been chiefly of this merely negative character—clogging the rise of wages instead of causing a sharp decline—is due to three main causes. Reasons why no worse

First, the vast expansion of industry has supplied new work for the new workers (or for old workers whose empty places the newcomers have then filled), thus minimizing the competition of immigrants with those already in the country.

Secondly, labor organizations have done a substantial service, not merely to their own members nor to the working class in general, but to the whole country, in standardizing wage rates within their own fields, and to some considerable extent outside them also.

Thirdly, we have to thank the particular character of the immigrants themselves, especially those of the newer type represented by Slavs and Italians, for the fact that they have not done more damage to our wage standards.

The first point, the expansion of industry, needs little elaboration. The total value of our manufacturing products has been given by the census as for 1870, four billion dollars; 1880, five billion; 1890 (the close of the first decade of the new immigration), nine billion; 1900, thirteen billion dollars. (1) Expansion of industry

As a single illustration of the relation of this expansion to Slavic labor I may take the great Punxsutawny coke district, north of Pittsburgh. Practically all the labor about the coke ovens is done by Slavs, and to the question, "Who did this work before these men came?" the answer was, "It was not done."

This aspect of the situation was especially prominent in the flush times of 1906, when I was visiting various Slavic centres in this country; at that time the effects of the general expanding trend of our production were intensified by the special effect of the prosperity of the moment. At Galveston I found employers competing with one another on the wharf for the services of arriving immigrants; in Tercio, Colorado, a few months later, mines could not be worked to the full for lack of men, and from the harvest fields of the Northwest a great cry was going up that there were not enough laborers to gather the crops. When the demand for labor is so great as this we may absorb a million immigrants a year with comparatively little injury to the laborers who are here.

(2) Organi-  
zation of  
labor

As to the second point, the steadying of wage standards through organization; though the Slavs come mainly from districts in which labor and capital have not undergone their modern development, they have proved surprisingly available union material, as was shown in the great strike of anthracite miners in 1902, and in the strike in the Chicago slaughter houses in 1904.

Even when the Slav does not join the union he often seems to have an instinctive class consciousness, quite without theoretical basis, which keeps him from being a "strike breaker." A Croatian physician said to me, "Our people are not in the union, but they respect its rules. It is not that they are afraid and not that they sympathize, but a class feeling." And this among men as innocent of socialism as a Maine farmer could be!

In spite of the terrible simplicity which at home too often makes the Slavs the prey of usurers, they can be made to understand the advantage of paying out their hardly won dollars and wasting their costly American time in idleness for the sake of future benefit. An observer of the slaughter-house strike wrote:

"Even the young women, the pleasant-looking Slav girls, told very simply and very distinctly what the strike