

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

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Changing Labor Conditions in Wartime

By FLORENCE KELLEY

Changes before America entered the War

Since August, 1914, labor conditions in the United States have been changing incessantly, but the minds of the mass of wage-earners have not kept pace with these changes.

Before the war European immigration into the United States had been, for several years, at the rate of more than a million a year, largely from the nations then at war,—Italy and the Balkan countries. This vast influx almost exclusively of people of the wage-earning class produced no conspicuous fall in wages. Unemployment was present, both seasonal and chronic as it had been for many years, but not obviously increased by the immigration. There was still enough cheap land and sufficiently rapid expansion of industry to keep wage conditions relatively stable.

Real wages were declining. The dollar was already buying less food, fuel and shelter from year to year. But this was recognized as permanent only by a very small group of writers led by Isbel King.

Then came the war followed instantly both by a reduction in immigration and by epidemic unemployment which led to no permanent organization—either legislative or voluntary—intended to prevent its appearance on an immense scale at the close of the war.