Following is a summary of the attitude of the A.F.of L. toward foreign contract labor, Chinese immigration, and immigration in general, taken from Volume I of the A.F.of L. "History, Encylcopoedia and Reference Book". The numbers in parentheses refer to the reports of the annual conventions and the pages on which the summarized material is based.

Chinese Exclusion:

(1881, p.4) "The first convention declared thirty years' experience of the Pacific Coast with Chinese had proved their competition with white labor was the greatest evil with which a country could be afflicted; that publicity as to its true character be disseminated throughout the country and Congress urged to enact an exclusion act."

(1882, p.9) "Legislative Committee reported monster demonstrations everywhere against Chinese immigration. Bill passed by Congress was not satisfactory and had been made inoperative on the Coast by decisions of a government official and judges of California. (p.17) Legislative Committee was instructed to obtain a true interpretation of the act."

(1885, p.17) "Convention refused to indorse the use of force in settling the Chinese question, but demanded rigid enforcement of the exclusion act."

(1886, p.17) "Demanded enactment of laws by Congress to prevent the courts being used as back doors to admit such immigration. Efforts of the surveyor of the port of San Francisco had been nullified by court decisions."

(1887, p.30) "Insisted on a more stringent law and in 1888 (p.10) Congress prohibited the landing of Chinese anywhere in the United States."

(1889, p.15) "President reported law flagrantly violated while all which protect the interests, notably the tariff, are strictly enforced; that decisions of courts were peculiar and the influence of the Chinese Six Companies could only be appreciated by those who have lived in San Francisco."

(1892, p.39) "Indorsed stand of Pacific Coast unions to place Japanese in same status as Chinese. Also asked Treasury Department to permit representatives of organized labor to be present when return certificates were issued Chinese."

(1893, p.13) "Influenced by the Chinese Six Companies, Chinamen defied the registration act and government officials did not deport them as required by law. This gave them the idea the law was not to be enforced."

(1894, p.12) "The Secretary of State negotiated a treaty with the representative of the Chinese Government in reference to Chinese immigration. The executive council after due consideration of the matter and after obtaining the best legal advice, concluded that the treaty was a departure from the policy of our government and inimical to the interests of labor to have the matter of Chinese immigration subject to treaty stipulation with a foreign government. It had taken years of agitation and education to recover the right by which our people could legislate upon this subject, exclusively from the standpoint of our own interests, without intervention or question

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from the Chinese Government. There is no antipathy on the part of American workmen workmen to Chinese because of their nationality, but a people whimh has allowed civilization to pass them by untouched and uninfluenced,a people who allow themselves to be barbarously tyrannized over in their own country,and who menace the progress,the economic and social standing of the workers of other coutries,cannot be fraternized with. We are opposed to the servile of all countries,our own included. In view of these facts a determined protest was made against the ratification of the treaty,and although we failed to secure its rejection our action resulted in its postponement for several months." (From "History,Encycl.,Reference Book" I:174-175).

Foreign Labor under Contract:

(1881,p.4) "Plank four in the first platform demanded prohibition of the importation of foreign laborers under contract and in 1884 (p.16) Congress was again called on to enact a prohibitory law."

(1885,p.8) "Law was enacted but was not what labor had expected. During consideration of the measure a number of Senators were called on individually. One of them said: 'The conflict between capital and labor is irrepressible,capital seeking to obtain the largest production and the consequent greater profit on the least outlay on the one hand,and labor as against capital seeking to obtain the largest amount of wages for the least expenditure of time and force on the other.' This demonstrates among other things that the labor problem is no longer confined in its bearings to the employer and employee but is now regarded as a question of political economy."

(1888,p.10) "Congress prohibited importation of foreign labor under contract and the landing of Chinese anywhere in the United States. Charged Chinese were being smuggled across the Canadian border. (p.26) Refused to indorse plan to restrict immigration by a per capita tax."

(1889,p.24) "Importer of stone-cutters to work on the Texas capitol pleaded guilty and convention demanded that he be made to pay the $64,000 assessed against him. Also that Government officials be prevented from making the law void."

(1890,p.15) "Protested against amendment of the alien contract labor law,as it would destroy its intent and open the floodgates for hordes of laborers being brought to this country like slaves. (p.29) Protested against glutting labor market during World's Fair in Chicago as in Philadelphia at the time of the Centennial exposition. (p.33) Recommended all unions agitate for amendments to the alien labor law."

(1891,p.28) "Asked Treasury Department to change ruling that musicians do not come under the law."

(1892,p.38) "Condemned pratice of bringing large numbers of poor,persecuted and deceived Jewish working people from Europe and placing them in the sweatshops and trade schools to be taught the rudiments of the tailoring trade and then thrown on an overstocked labor market."

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(1893,p.13) "More violations of the law were reported for six months than for any previous year. Immigration officials should be appointed because of their sympathy with the law. (p.62) Indorsed amendment to law providing that a laborer who gave evidence of an employer violating the act should not be deported."

(1895,p.77) "Again demanded proper law against aliens being brought to United States under a species of slavery known as a contract."

(From A.F.of L. "History etc." I: 231-232).

Immigration:

(1891,pp.15-50) "The immigration question had become serious and the convention instructed the Executive Council to do everything in its power to secure legislation 'restricting artificial,stimulated immigration and for the absolute prohibition of the landing of all contract and assisted immigration whether from Europe,Asia or the Canadian provinces to the end the level of our civilization shall not be lowered.' It declared: 'Resolved,That we protest this attempt to shut out from our shores the poor of other races and nationalities is caused by the laws of necessity and self-protection consequent upon our existing industrial system,and we pledge ourselves and the American Federation of Labor to renewed efforts toward the abolition of the wage competitive system through the historical and scientific methods of the trades unions,and so to spread the redeeming gospel of short hours and higher wages that all lands shall bloom in beauty and plenty and all humanity be equal partakers of the commonwealth.' Also: 'The time was when the American people could declare the United States should be a haven for the oppressed of all nations and invite all who desired to seek a new home to our shores. At that time the industries of our country were entirely in their infancy,our lands were undeveloped, our resources greater than we ever knew. The poeple who came did so of their own volition,they cast their fortunes with those already here,harmonized and blended with them. Today,however, there is not an industry which is not overcrowded with working people who vainly plead for an opportunity to work. This is not only confined to the factories,workshops,mills,mines and stores; the same complaint can be heard arising from the farm lands,and all join in one mighty cry that relief must come. On the other hand we see artificial famines in some of the older countries caused by the vast holdings of the titled wealthy class. While the masses the tyrannical and effete monarchs bolster up their miserable dynasties by forcing immigration,whilst their willing tools furnish the means to aid them out of their respective countries; and as they cannot go to many other countries in Europe,and owing to the laxity of public spirit and a recognition of the dangers that threaten us,they are literally dumped upon our shores. There are societies formed for that purpose which forward at least 10,000 immigrants a month,and again the ship companies by the wiles known to the cunning

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speculator improperly stimulate unnecessary and unhealthy immigration. We view the immigration problem not from the mere selfish standpoint of our protection, but we are persuaded that it not only tends to destroy the independence, progress and advancement of our people, but also is an efficient means by which the effete institutions of some of the European countries are perpetuated and thus economical, political and social reforms postponed or avoided.' "

(1892, pages 14-30) "'There can be no question but unrestricted immigration is working a great injury to the people of our country. Organizations supposed to be beneficial and charitable in their nature and supposed philanthropists simply gather hordes of people, pack them in vessels worse than cattle, with no room or ventilation, where even the decencies of life can not be observed, and in that frightful condition thrust them upon our shores.' (1894, p.12) "Congress should be informed of the large transient provincial immigration entering the United States and its effects on American labor should be investigated. (p.47) Further restriction of immigration is unnecessary except in keeping out contract laborers, criminals other than political and those apt to become public charges."

(1895, p.63) "Believed apathy of labor officials was caused by inability to secure convictions under existing laws covering immigration. Law should be amended."

(1896, p.81; 1887, pp.23-88) "Conventions declared in favor of a 'reasonable measure of restriction on the lines of the educational test contained in the bill passed by the last Congress but vetoed by the President.' "

(From "History etc" Pp. 241-242)

Why the A.F.of L. should have objected so strenuously to immigration may become apparent from the following paragraphs, taken from Vol.19 of the Industrial Commission's Report, pp.966-967: "The leading influence, which, at the present time, resists the depression of wages is labor organization. This appears under two somewhat different phases: First, in those strong trade bodies based upon skill, which, like the glass blowers and others, have forced the immigrant to betake himself to other lines of less resistance, and, second, in those occupations of less skill or more machinery, where, in the years already passed, the immigrant has gained control, but has lately established labor organizations. In either of these cases the menace of immigration consists, first, in those workmen who are imported from abroad under contract or by solicitation to take the places of organized labor at times of strike or lockout. This is the menace attempted to be overcome by the alien contract labor laws.

"Secondly, in the steady immigration of poor, but hard-working people who are unfamiliar with the traditions and customs of organization, unaccustomed to the rules and the self-control which it imposes, and incapable of learning the same through their ignorance of the language, and who are, moreover, forced by their poverty to work for low wages, and by their lack

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of friends to work with docility and desperate energy for him who first gives them a job. This is by far the main characteristic of immigration at the present time, as respects labor organizations.

"It is this constant influx of immigrants into a trade, as in the clothing trade, that handicaps the educational work of organization almost as rapidly as it is advanced. It requires two or three years for immigrants to be brought to a sense of the need for organization and to develop the necessary ability to promote it, but by that time an additional inroad of immigrants has gained a decisive influence on the trade. This is one of the reasons why, in the mine workers' organizations, the State of Illinois, being more remote from the impact of European immigration, is much better organized than the State of Pennsylvania. Whatever else may be said about immigration, it certainly presents a most serious problem for labor organization.

"In no country have labor unions been confronted by a greater multitude of disintegrating forces than in the U.S., and these are based directly on immigration. We have in the same competitive field different races, languages, and religions. With all these differences it is an easy matter for foremen to play the working people one against the other. Often nothing short of actual want and starvation is adequate to wipe out these differences and to bring these divergent races together on the simple economic basis of labor organization. This has been demonstrated among the coal miners, the clothing workers, the textile workers, and others. These trades furnish striking evidence that the influx of immigrants with low standards of living may become so large and constant as to overcome the native powers of assimilation and to reduce permanently the quality of the population.

"The problem of mixed nationalities has brought about one novelty in the method of organization in some of the American labor unions compared with those of other countries, namely, branch organizations based on race. These branches, each electing its own race leader, form a central council or representative body through their leaders, and it is this council which is the source of legislation and negotiation for all of the nationalities in the union."

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As early as 1870 we find the following "Petition of Unemployed Laborers to the Legislature of California,":

"To the Hon.the Legislature of the State of California:

"The petition of the undersigned,who are unemployed laborers seeking employment in the Labor Exchange of San Francisco without finding any,humbly represent to your honorable body-

"That,by reason of the extreme low rate of wages which Chinese accept for their labor,petitioners cannot get employment.

"That petitioners are citizens of the United States of America,and have been hitherto accustomed to find employment readily.

"That every branch of employment seems curtailed and diminished by the competition of Chinamen,whose mode and standard of living are so ~~generally~~ greatly below that which the petitioners have been accustomed to that they look upon the fate of white laborers,if there be no remedy offered,as utterly degraded.

"Petitioners do not presume to argue the injury to every interest of this State and neighboring States which will follow the destruction and dispersion of the white laborers and their families.

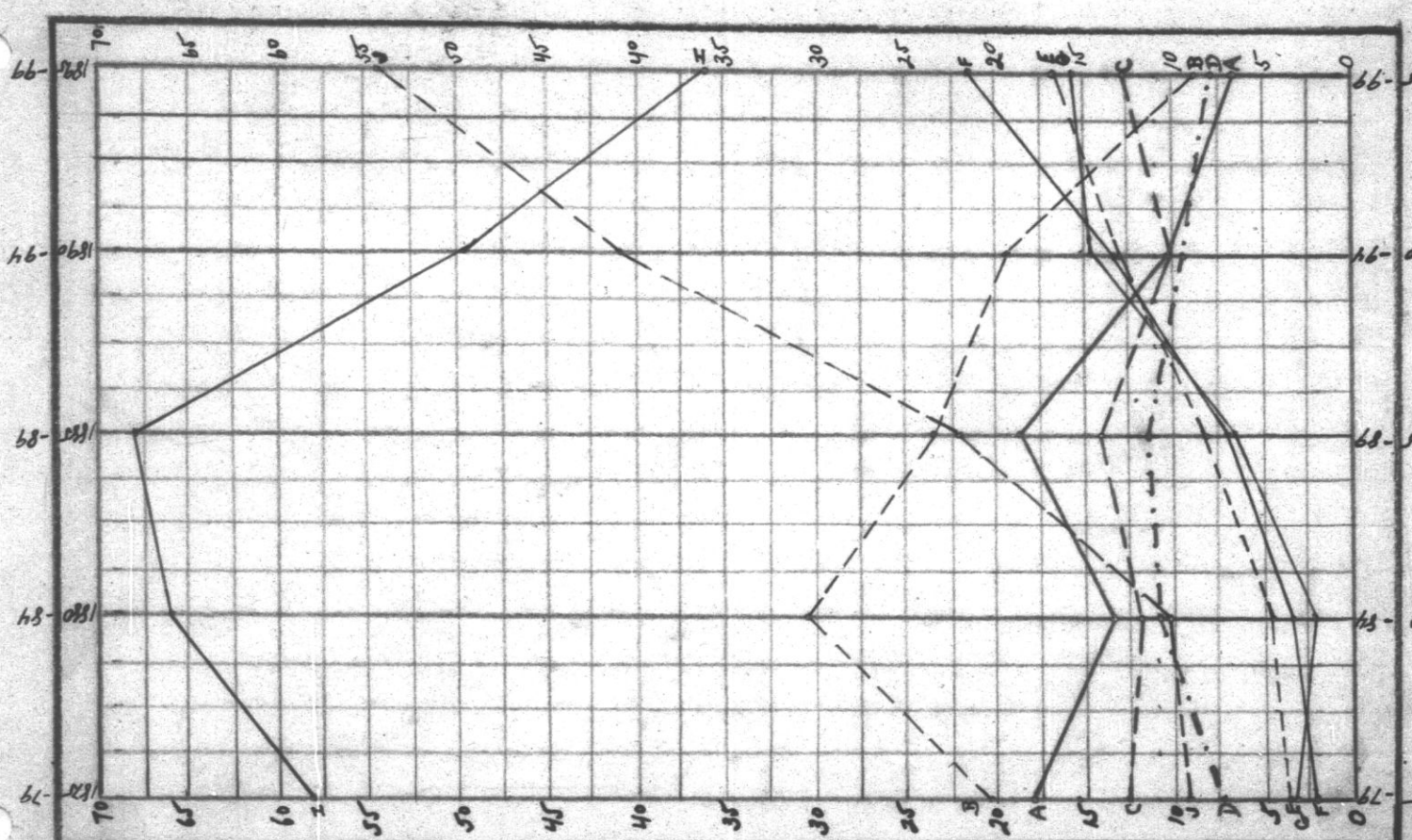
"They simply inform your honorable body that they are idle-driven from the ~~fair~~ field of honest labor by a strange race,who have no ideas,interests,or sympathies in common with us.

"In conclusion,we pray your honorable body to adopt some measures for the total exclusion of the Chinese race from our State."

Signed (by a number of workmen).

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Nationality of Immigrants. % of Total for each 5-year Period, 1875-1899



A ——— Eng., Scot., Wales

B – – – – – Germany

C — — — — Ireland

D —·— · —·— Sweden & Nor.

E – – – – – – – Austria-Hung.

F ——— Italy

G ——— Russia & Pol.

I ——— Gt. Brit. Irel. Ger., Scandinavia

J – – – – – – Austria-Hung., Italy, Russia

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