Immigration to the South

IMMIGRATION TO THE SOUTH

Report of P. H. Gadsden, Vice-President Charleston Chamber of Commerce, to the Mayor of Charleston.

Published Under Resolution of Charleston Chamber of Commerce.

The mayor stated that he had the full report of Mr. P. H. Gadsden regarding his visit to Bremen as to immigration. On motion this report was ordered to be published in the Year Book.

The Hon. R. G. Rhett, Mayor, Charleston, S. C.:

Dear Sir:—As one of a committee of three appointed by the South Carolina Branch of the Southern Industrial and Immigration Association, and as the special representative of the City of Charleston, I left Charleston on March 8th, for Bremen. Before sailing on the 12th, I had a very satisfactory interview with both Mr. Culp, vice-president of the Southern Railway, and Mr. Walters, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Atlantic Coast Line. I was very much impressed with the interest shown by both these corporations in the result of the trip. I was assured by both the Southern Railway and the Atlantic Coast Line that they would use every effort to secure return cargoes for the “Wittekind” in case a permanent line could be established.

At New York I met Mr. Watson and we sailed on the “Kaiser Wilhelm II,” on the 12th. On arriving at Bremerhaven, on Tuesday, the 19th, we were met at the landing by Capt. Von Bardeleben, of the “Wittekind,” who immediately advised us that, owing to the very great congestion of immigrants at Bremen the “Wittekind,” which had arrived on Saturday, the 17th, was ordered to sail for Baltimore on Thursday, the 21st, with 1,500 immigrants. So great was the demand for a speedy departure he had been forced to work all of Sunday and every night. He also advised us that the Lloyds had received a number of letters from the “Wittekind” immigrants, showing great dissatisfaction as to conditions in South Carolina, and strongly intimated that the situation, so far as the Lloyds were concerned, had materially changed for the worse since his last trip to Charleston.

This was fully confirmed the next morning on our first interview with Mr. Von Pilis and his assistant, Mr. Plettenberg. Mr. Von Pilis being the director in charge of the steerage department. In addition to the letters from immigrants, which the Lloyds had received, they
had also had a very full report to the same effect from Mr. Giese, the stenographer of Mr. Plettenberg. Mr. Misler, the immigrant agent of the Lloyds, had also received similar complaints.

They stated to me that the success of their immigrant business depended absolutely on the confidence of the immigrant class in Europe, and had been built up by their dealing in absolute good faith with them on every occasion and by never misrepresenting the facts; that no movement could be successful or made permanent on prepaid passages, but must be based on the letters and reports of those who had gone ahead to their relatives and friends; that the immigrants as a class were ignorant and suspicious, and that as a rule all they knew of the United States were Boston, Baltimore and New York, and they naturally wanted to go where some of their people had preceded them; that it would be very difficult, even on pre-payment of passage, to divert them to South Carolina, and impossible unless we could satisfy those already there that the business proposition in this light was secondary in importance; that they would not carry, at any price, immigrants where they would not be satisfied, as it would seriously affect their entire immigrant business.

Upon investigation I found the complaints were based primarily on the wages received in South Carolina. Some reported getting 40, 50 and 75 cents a day, when they had been promised $1.50 to $2, and upwards. Some reported that they were making less money in South Carolina than they made at home.

As far as I could ascertain, the misrepresentations, if any were made, must have been made by subordinate immigrant agents of Mr. Misler, without his knowledge. Mr. Watson gave the Lloyds a copy of the wage scale in South Carolina mills as the basis upon which to engage immigrants for mill help, and therefore cannot be held responsible, in my judgment, for the situation.

My opinion is that the difficulty of securing immigrants to the South on the wage scale presented, was such, even with prepaid passage, that the immigrant agents found it necessary to go beyond the scale in order to produce results. Another complaint was that their money was held out for one or two weeks; that is to say, that the mills paid off every two weeks, whereas they had been accustomed in Europe to payment at the end of each week. Having none of their own people to advise them they became alarmed and jumped to the conclusion that they were being robbed. They were also unaccustomed to dealing with the company's store on credit and, as a natural result in some cases, the easy credit had been abused, so that when pay day arrived the immigrant found that there was no actual cash coming to him.

In answering these criticisms Mr. Watson showed that instead of mill help he had been sent plumbers, carpenters, fresco painters, etc.; in other words, men unaccustomed to work in the mills, and who, necessarily, could not secure adequate compensation until they learned their business.
Immigration to the South

At the interview with Mr. Misler a few days afterwards we found the same conditions, only worse, if possible. Mr. Misler's business consists in issuing advertisements throughout the various countries of Europe, and personally soliciting immigrants for America for the Lloyds. He has no official connection with the Lloyds Company. The complaints which had been received by him were so numerous and were of so serious a character that he was afraid to proceed further in Southern immigration, for fear of its immediate injurious effect upon his personal business. He stated positively that he would not be willing to take any further steps to secure laborers for South Carolina or the South unless he could first be assured that the immigrants would be placed in remunerative positions, under conditions that would make them satisfied.

The time of my visit was particularly unfavorable. The congestion of immigrants at Bremen awaiting transportation to America had never been so great in the history of the Lloyds. At the time of my visit there were from 8,000 to 12,000 immigrants in Bremen and its vicinity, being housed and fed at the expense of the Lloyds for lack of ships, notwithstanding the fact that they were sending off a shipload of 1,000 to 1,500 each day. The expense of the Lloyds in taking care of these people varied from $4,000 to $5,000 a day, and during my stay of ten days they certainly must have spent $40,000 in the maintenance of these immigrants. This, coupled with the discouraging reports already referred to, made it almost impossible for me to get them to discuss the matter on a business basis.

After a week of daily visits to the office I insisted that some definite position be taken by them in the matter, and suggested that they make me a proposition predicated upon our ability to demonstrate to their satisfaction hereafter that the conditions were satisfactory, or would be made so. It was not until Tuesday, March 26, that I succeeded in having the matter taken up from a business point of view, and they agreed to make up figures showing the minimum cost of a round trip of the "Wittekind," which we should guarantee. After considerable discussion it was agreed by all parties that the difficulty of securing return cargoes during the months of May, June, July and August was such that we should base the figures on sailings every sixty days from September 1 to May 1.

In order that I should be in a position to cover the whole subject I then took up the matter of freight with the freight department, so that I might ascertain the objections to be urged by that department. I found the criticisms to be as follows: A serious criticism was based on the loss of time at Charleston in discharging and loading, which was three weeks, as against seven or eight days in Galveston and Baltimore. They claimed that a round trip of the "Wittekind" from Bremen to Charleston should not exceed seven weeks, whereas it had consumed practically ten; that a passenger boat could not afford to lose the time discharging and loading that a freight boat could. I suggested that if the line were made permanent I thought we could
prevail on the railroads entering Charleston to improve the facilities for discharging and loading, and so shorten the time to a satisfactory limit. They further insisted that the ship should discharge and load at the same wharf, and that she should not be required to go to the fertilizer wharf to discharge kainit. In discussing west-bound freight the point was made that during the three spring months no kainit was shipped. I undertook to see whether on this point our different fertilizer interests could not arrange to guarantee a cargo of kainit for every trip at current rates. On east-bound freight they required 10,000 bales of cotton, and stated that while, of course, it was impossible to fix a rate, the rate at Charleston would be the current rate at Savannah, which latter rate was fixed from time to time by competition of several lines running to Savannah.

Having canvassed thoroughly the objections both of the passenger and freight departments, I invited a proposition for the establishment of a permanent line, based upon, first, their becoming satisfied as to the conditions throughout the South and the wage scale; second, upon their criticisms and suggestions as to freight being favorably considered. Predicated upon the above they made me on Tuesday, March the following proposition:

They would put the “Wittekind” on permanently from September to May for a guarantee of 250,000 marks per trip, equivalent to say, $62,500. I had them analyze this figure as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kainit</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 bales of cotton</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total freight</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leaving a balance for the prepayment of immigrant passage of 150,000 marks, or about 1,070 immigrants per trip. I immediately advised them that this was out of the question as it was based upon a full cargo and passenger list, and offered in return to carry out the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kainit</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 bales of cotton</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants</td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>128,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That is to say, about 200 immigrants per trip.

After an hour’s discussion an appointment was made to meet Director Heineke, who, in the absence of Director General Wiegand, was the executive officer of the company. Later in the afternoon we met in Director Heineke’s office. After again reviewing the objections on the part of the passenger and freight departments, he stated
that the figures were the lowest upon which they would be willing to operate a line; that the proposition made by me would not be considered. The only concession he was willing to make was that he stated that, for a permanent line they must certainly be guaranteed from 600 to 700 immigrants per trip; that passage of these immigrants would have to be prepaid, as they could not be obtained otherwise, and that the passage money for 600 immigrants would have to be prepaid, whether we secured that number or not, it being the opinion of the passenger department that, for the present at least, there would be great difficulty in securing, even upon prepayment of passage, from 200 to 300 immigrants per trip. Of course, if after operating for one season the conditions were satisfactory, no further guarantees would be required. In conclusion Director Heincke would say that the Lloyds were still interested in the establishment of a line from Bremen to Charleston, and regretted exceedingly that the conditions at present did not seem to warrant the continuance of the line; that if by the 1st of September we desired to run the "Wittekind" for another trip he would be willing to let us have her upon the same terms as the first trip, that is to say, a full cargo of freight each way and 400 to 500 immigrants, whose passage, of course, would have to be prepaid by us. I was compelled to say that we were not in a position to accept his proposition. This was the last of a series of interviews held every day but one from March 20 to 29. I left Bremen on March 29th, for Hamburg, and sailed on the "Kaiserin Augusta Victoria," on the 30th.

The above concludes my official report so far as the establishment of a permanent line between Bremen and Charleston is concerned. I take it, however, that one of the objects of my trip was to obtain information on the entire subject of immigration, so as to aid us in our future work on this subject, and I therefore, give herewith my observations on the general subject of immigration as a contribution to the general fund of information on the subject, in the hope that it may aid us and the people throughout the South in coming to a correct understanding of this problem and to work it out on a proper business basis.

1. The success of the immigration movement to the South from European countries depends more largely upon the people of the South than it does upon the immigrants.

In the discussions on this subject up to this time, our efforts have been almost entirely expended in inducing immigrants to come to the South, and we have thought little or nothing of how the immigrant is to be treated after he has come here. As I have shown, the officers of the Lloyds impressed upon me day after day, in every interview I held with them, that the essential thing to be obtained and to be understood thoroughly by the people of the South before they could contemplate any permanent movement for immigration, was that they must make up their minds to use every effort to satisfy each and every
individual immigrant who was brought over, not only that the representations as to his compensation should be faithfully and strictly carried out, but that if the people of the South desired to divert a part of the tide of immigration from the North and West they must be willing to study the immigrant himself and endeavor to make his stay in the South as agreeable as possible. Immigration to the North and West has been going on so long that the immigrant now coming over goes among friends and relatives speaking his own tongue and living under conditions with which he is familiar. The first immigrants who come to the South are met with conditions absolutely different, not only from those they left at home, but from those which they know are being enjoyed by their friends and relatives in the North and West, and therefore our people, if we are to succeed in this effort to obtain a white population, must be prepared to endeavor in every way practicable to assist the immigrant in becoming assimilated to the conditions of the South with as little friction as possible.

Too much stress cannot be laid upon this point. It is the one which our people have not, up to this time, in my judgment, seriously considered. Prepayment of passage will not bring immigrants permanently, but the immigration movement depends absolutely upon the favorable reports coming from the immigrants who have first come over. In this light it will be seen how vital is it that no effort should be spared to place the first immigrants who are induced to come under the most advantageous conditions, and that the representations made to them should be strictly lived up to, and that every effort should be made to conform their conditions of life to that enjoyed by similar immigrants in other parts of the country.

2. We must realize that for some considerable period of time to come the passage of every immigrant must be prepaid. How long such prepayment of passage must continue will depend entirely upon ourselves. One State or community may succeed much sooner than another in establishing a sufficient number of satisfied immigrants, whose letters home will bring other immigrants willing to prepay their own passage, and so be able to place itself on a paying basis; but the movement as a whole will have to be prepaid until conditions in the South generally are made inviting to immigration. This question is much more serious than our people appreciate. We are encouraging immigration because we are dissatisfied with negro labor, and want to supplant the negro with white labor, but it seems to me that we have entirely overlooked our industrial conditions, namely, that the wage scale throughout the South is based upon negro labor, which means cheap labor. In endeavoring to secure immigrants from Europe we are competing in the labor markets of the world with the employers of labor through the North and West, and offer a wage scale materially lower than that obtaining in the North. It must be admitted by all of us that in practically every department of labor the scale of wages in the South, even, I submit, in the cotton mill
industry, is lower than in the North, on account of the fact that our scale is based on an inferior class of labor. It is not a question whether the immigrant from Belgium, Germany, Galicia, Hungary, Denmark or Sweden can obtain better wages in the South than he commands at home; what he naturally wants to know is can he command the same wages as his friends in similar employment in Montana, South Dakota, Iowa, etc. Numbers of his friends and relatives have already gone to these States and sent money back for the passage of other members of the family.

I learned to my surprise that the immigrant in Europe is much better informed on the comparative wage scale throughout the United States than I was, and he knows that at present the wage scale in the South is materially lower in almost every department of labor than in the North and West. It is easy to understand how, under these conditions, he will not care to come to the South, even if his passage is prepaid.

In considering this question, and in treating with the Lloyds, I very soon learned that it could not be considered as a South Carolina proposition, but if it were to succeed at all it must be treated from the standpoint of the entire South. The same objection applies in the case of immigrant farm labor. With us he is paid from $10 to $15 a month and board; in the North and West he is paid from $20 to $30 a month and board.

I found that a more important consideration in favor of the North and West as against the South, so far as farm labor was concerned, was that in the North and West the immigrant farm laborer was considered as a member of the farmer's family, slept in his house and was fed at his table, whereas in the South, as a rule, he was given an outhouse to sleep in similar to that occupied by the negroes on the place, and was not allowed to eat with the farmer's family or to associate with them on equal terms; in other words, a social line was drawn which does not exist in the North and West.

This, again, is the direct result of our industrial conditions and the employment of negro labor. We have for so many years been employing negro labor that we have come to think that the class of labor performed by the negro is menial to a large degree, and therefore we are not prepared at the present time to treat the immigrant supplanting such a negro on the same terms as he is treated in the North and West. These objections were given me by different people who had studied the question in Europe and were thoroughly informed.

So far, therefore, as the importation of white laborers is concerned, except white skilled labor for particular industries, my conclusion, from careful investigation of the subject and conversations with those who had made it a life time study, is that the South at this time is not prepared to meet the conditions necessary for the successful
importation of white labor; that in order to supplant the negro laborer with the European laborer we must make up our minds to conform our wage scale to that obtaining in the communities where only white labor is employed and, as a corollary, learn to treat the white laborer more as an equal and less as a servant.

Another serious difficulty in the way of importing foreign labor is that, as I understand the recent Act of Congress and the opinion of the Attorney General, while a State can advertise its advantages and prepay passages, it cannot guarantee employment. It will be seen at once what a handicap this is to a new movement. Practically every immigrant now coming to Baltimore, New York and Boston, in addition to his steamer ticket, has a railroad ticket to some point out West, where he has relatives or friends, and is confident of securing a position, which has practically been secured for him by some relative. It will be readily seen that an immigrant, ignorant of our conditions and with no money, would with great difficulty be induced to come to Charleston or any other Southern port, not knowing what is to become of him on his arrival. This objection was strongly urged upon me by the Lloyds. To meet it I suggested that an intelligence bureau be established at Charleston, which would receive applications from all over the South for labor, and give accurate information as to the scale of wages, etc., this information to be classified and tabulated; that the immigrant be told to apply on landing to such bureau for information. He would then have an opportunity of selecting a position according to his trade in whatever part of the South he desired, and doubtless arrangements could be made with the parties desiring such labor to pay the railroad fare to the place of employment.

I have purposely given at length the difficulties which have come to my notice, and which must be overcome to insure the success of this movement of importing white labor. I have done so, not to discourage, but in order that from now on we shall conduct this matter with full knowledge of the underlying conditions and difficulties, and base our actions on sound business principles. All thinking men in the South agree that this agitation for immigration is not temporary, but that it indicates a fixed policy of the South, brought about by the serious lack of labor. It is incumbent upon all of us, therefore, to unite upon some common plan and work out the problem for the benefit of the entire South and not any particular section of it. My conclusion is, that for the present, the importation of laborers, except in small numbers for exceptionally favorable localities, is not practicable. The history of all immigration shows that the first immigrants to any locality were not laborers, but settlers, home-seekers, and that when a considerable number of them had been placed their friends and relatives followed and constituted the laboring class.
Immigration to the South

This is the plan which should, in my judgment, be adopted in the South, and one which has great promise of success. What the South has that the North and West have not is cheap, fertile soil. I would recommend that through the agency of the Southern Industrial and Immigration Association we should organize what might properly be called the Southern Colonization Company, with a capital stock, if possible, of $500,000, inviting subscriptions to the capital stock from all the business interests throughout the South; that this company should, as part of its scope, organize an intelligence bureau, as indicated above. The plan of operations of such a company would be to obtain options on desirable lands through the South, and sell such lands to settlers on easy terms and at moderate prices.

With each family of settlers there are usually a son and daughter old enough to work, who will not be needed on the farm, and these can be placed by the company through its intelligence bureau. I believe such a company, organized with sufficient capital to inspire confidence, and officered by men who fully understood the question and were desirous of working it out for the true interests of the South as a whole, would be the most practicable way of handling the matter to insure permanent success, and that the company could be made a financial success.

I would add that I went over this colonization plan fully with Mr. Von Pilis and he fully approved of the suggestions made above; in fact, considered it essential before the Lloyds or any other steamship company would be willing to establish a permanent line. A company so organized would necessarily be directly interested in seeing that all immigrants were taken care of and made satisfied, and through such a company the conditions generally throughout the South as to labor could gradually be worked up to a basis which would make it practicable to import white labor direct.

As a summary of the above I would say that the points to be considered in the order of their importance are the following:

1. That the duty is devolved upon the people of the South, if they desire European immigrants, to use every effort to satisfy them after they have arrived.
2. That for a very considerable period the passage of each and every immigrant will have to be prepaid.
3. That until such time as the wage scale of the South approaches more nearly that obtaining through the North and West it is hopeless to expect white laborers to come to the South in preference to the North.
4. That our attitude throughout the South to the white laborer will have to be materially altered before we can expect to have the immigrant satisfied to remain as a laborer with us.
5. That we have been proceeding up to this time on a purely artificial and unnatural plan in reference to this subject of immigration;
that nowhere has it ever been possible to bring in the laborer first, and that all successful immigration movements have been started by the settler and followed by the laborer.

6. That an effort should be made to interest the business and thinking men throughout the entire South from now on in a combination of effort on the lines of colonization, preferable, I think, in one company, but not necessarily so. If such a company can be organized within a reasonable time on proper lines and with sufficient capital, I believe it will ultimately work out the salvation of the South so far as the labor question is concerned, and is, I believe, the only practical method of accomplishing that end.

Very truly yours,

P. H. GADSDEN.