

Shall We Bar the Gate?

IT has always been the boast of Americans that we invited the poor and oppressed of all the world to find liberty and opportunity within our borders. But the most hospitable host may be embarrassed by an unanticipated influx of guests. The United States has already passed legislation excluding paupers, illiterates, Chinese and other classes of persons who have, in the opinion of Congress, entered the melting pot more rapidly than they could be smelted into sound American metal. The Pacific coast is alarmed over a relatively small increase in the Japanese population and is demanding a general exclusion law against Orientals. Congress is even considering the total exclusion of labor immigration from Europe for two years.

The situation is this. Immigrants are now coming to the United States at the rate of about 95,000 a month, according to the United States Commissioner General of Immigration. Immigration at this rate could, perhaps, be assimilated, especially since there is also heavy emigration back to the "old countries." But passports are still ordinarily required of immigrants. This legacy of wartime conditions will soon be removed and no one knows how fast the tide of immigration will run westward if this barrier is taken down and no substitute put in its place. All that is certain is that hungry, tax-ridden, war-stricken Europe is a place which the average workingman would be glad to leave for the comparative prosperity of the United States. American trades unionists fear that in any case there will be much unemployment this winter and perhaps for a year or two to come, and that heavy immigration at this time would overstock the labor market and force down the whole standard of living. They are therefore demanding of Congress drastic legislation to protect them against any competition with alien immigrant labor.

Representative Johnson has introduced a bill placing an absolute ban on immigration for two years with the exception of certain specified classes of aliens. These exceptions include: (1) "otherwise admissible aliens lawfully resident in the United States"; (2) Government officials and their families and attendants; (3) travelers not intending to stay more than six months in the United States; (4) students coming to "particularly designated" institutions of learning. All immigrants must obtain passports viséd by an American consulate. Partial and conditional exemption from the exclusion act is also granted to relatives of citizens, naturalized citizens and aliens who have declared their intention of becoming citizens; to skilled laborers and domestic servants, and to residents of Canada, Newfoundland, Cuba and Mexico. Even with these exceptions, the proposed general exclusion bill is drastic beyond precedent and will probably be modified before it is approved in both houses of Congress.