

A PERSONAL INVESTIGATION INTO CONDITIONS THAT CONFRONT WORKING WOMEN OF CHICAGO

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The following article on the condition of the working women in some occupations in Chicago, was written by Miss Zelia Emerson, a wealthy young woman of Jackson, Mich., who has come to Chicago and allied herself with the Women's Trades Union League. These are her own personal experiences and the results of her investigation to the present time. Miss Emerson expects in the near future to obtain employment in a factory, to further her investigations.

When she has completed her investigations the result will be presented to the state factory inspector for action.

By Zelia Emerson.

In my investigations of conditions that confront working women in Chicago, I have not only paid attention to the operation of the 10-hour law, but also to state laws regarding department stores, and to the accommodations furnished the girl and women employes.

In many places where I applied for positions I was turned away, being told I was not the kind of girl desired for the work. I can only ascribe this to the fact that I may have looked hard to "handle," knowing the law, and understanding my rights under it.

At some places where I was offered jobs I refused after finding the living apartments of the

employes were unendurable to me. There was no violation of the law at these places that I know of, but the sleeping quarters of the girls were overcrowded. Four in a room and two in a bed was too much for me, even for a chance to push my investigation.

My first work was in the Rothschild department store in December. I was a clerk. There the 10-hour law was enforced, but there were no chairs provided for the girls. That is an infraction of the law, and it is an awful strain for the girls to stand up all day. In other respects this store seemed to live up to the "law," but the wages of the girls were pitifully small. How they lived on their pay was more than I can see. Saleswomen here were paid \$6 a week, and cashiers and wrappers, \$5 a week. The cash girls, the majority of whom are 14-year-old girls, receive but \$2.50 a week.

Each girl must have an apron. For this she pays the store 50 cents. Even then the apron is not hers. Should she be discharged or leave the service of the store for any reason she is forced to return the apron; but she doesn't get back her 50 cents. In this store it was the smallness of the wages rather than any violations of the laws that wore down the girls and made them old before their time.

Knab's restaurant, Clark and Madison streets, was the next place I worked. I was a dish-