

Summing up the operation of the Housing Acts, it appears that, since the passing of the Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act, 74 Urban Councils have borrowed £661,555 &c., Act, up to 31st March, 1913, 74 Urban Councils have borrowed £661,555 for the erection of 2,981 houses and 32 Rural District Councils have borrowed £87,557 for the erection of 470 houses.

In December the Local Government Board issued a supplementary statement to the Press, which showed that since the passing of the above Act, 135 Urban Authorities had borrowed £945,300 for the erection of 4321 houses and 75 Rural Authorities had borrowed £246,484 for the erection of 1,177 houses.

This, after three years and in face of the universal need for radical housing reform, has been the barren result of a much-vaunted piece of legislation which has cost Parliament years of discussion, and whose administration involves the country in an annual expenditure out of all proportion to the trumpery benefits it confers.

A.W.M.

### "THE LIVING WAGE"

By W. Lord

The following discussion of the minimum wage is an extract from an excellent paper on Mr. Snowden's book *THE LIVING WAGE*, read at a meeting of the Halifax Junior Liberal Association.

I find in the book what I generally find in the literature of Socialism, a fundamental conception of human society, which I do not hold. Human society is not a huge machine, to be controlled and constantly regulated. It is an organism which can only live by the individual life of its parts. And in the free and natural development of all the parts will be secured the harmony of the whole.

To fix a minimum wage, it would be necessary also to regulate prices, in order to secure the value of the wage.

It seems to me to be starting at the wrong end. It is starting with an effect, instead of adopting the radical principal of getting down to the cause.

Mr. Snowden, too, gives away his case, when he says (p. 138), without at the same time carrying out a drastic reform of the land system the attempt to force a 30s. minimum for farm labourers would be disastrous. Again, he says (p. 139): So long as land and the great industrial monopolies are privately owned, there will always be difficulty in getting any reform which will be more than a very meagre benefit.

In these two statements Mr. Snowden makes the admission that land monopoly is the predominating force in keeping wages down. And so I hold that wages reform must come along the lines of land reform. It must come by organic and not mechanical means.

At the very commencement of the book Mr. Snowden argues for the minimum wage on the ground that every workman had a right to a wage which would enable him to provide his family with all the material things needed for their health and physical well-being.

I agree with him, but amongst those things which are needed for health and physical well-being one of the most important is housing, and the question of housing reform is bound up with the larger question of land reform.

I was much interested in reading an article by Mr. Jas. Parker, M.P., in the *HALIFAX COURIER*, September 6th, on "Land and Labour," in which he touches on the minimum wage:—

Whatever policy is adopted with regard to land, the agricultural labourer's wage must be raised considerably if the worker is to be prevented from leaving the village for the town. In some of the northern counties, notably Durham and Cumberland, the agricultural labourer is being paid 22s. and 23s. a week. This is no doubt chiefly

due to the fact that in these counties there are other employers ready to engage the labourer to work in or about the iron and coal mines at wages of 30s. or upwards and the farmer must pay a wage sufficiently high to make the labourer feel that, on the whole, he will be as well off employed on the farm as he would on the higher wage at the iron or coal mine. What this competition for the labourer's work has accomplished in the counties named a legal minimum wage law might bring about where no such competitive industries exist. It is not a question of prices for produce that determines the wage. While no doubt in the case of market gardening nearness to a large town does enable the producer to get a better net price for his produce, it is none the less true that, in the main, the price for agricultural produce is fixed by world markets rather than by local conditions. In view of these facts, coupled with the further fact that the cost of living in the rural districts is pretty much the same all over the country, I favour a national minimum wage for the whole of the country, to be fixed by a Wages Board, upon which Board farmers and labourers in equal numbers with an independent chairman, would decide upon the wage. I am not inclined to insert any figure as to what the amount should be. It is sufficient for my purpose here to state that we have it on the authority of many successful farmers that the counties that pay the best agricultural wages find that their cost of cultivation is less expensive than is the case of the lower paid counties. There remains the problem: Who is to bear the cost of the increased wages, landlord or farmer, or the consumer of the produce? I have not the space to go fully into the matter, and shall therefore content myself with stating that, unless the farmer will agree to, nay, agitate for, a system of land taxation, the landlord will not bear any considerable share of the increased cost.

Now that statement by Mr. Parker is interesting for one or two reasons. First it is interesting because it recognises that competition can be an elevating as well as a depressing force. The competition of the coal mines of Durham and Cumberland enables the agricultural labourers of those counties to receive a wage of 22s. and 23s., though the average wage throughout England is only about 17s. 6d.

Again, it lays down the axiom (I think a sound one), that the prices of commodities do not determine wages.

And still further, it recognises that the policy of taxing land values is the question of immediate practical politics.

I disagree with Mr. Parker when he says that a legal minimum wage must accomplish for the agricultural labourers of rural England what the presence of the mines has accomplished in Durham and Cumberland. I think the remedy lies in more competition and that competition may be induced by unlocking the land.

Give the agricultural labourer access to land, and you will have a remedy which will work according to natural law and which will force up wages far better than by the clumsy machinery of Wage Boards. Not only that, but it would have the effect of stopping the drift of the rural population to the towns, and the absence of this competition in the labour market would enable the townsman to obtain higher wages.

Medicine Hat is a single-tax town, like many of the Western Canadian cities, and taxes are levied on land only. A man may, therefore, own a vacant plot of ground and pay as much in taxes as another man who has a large block of buildings standing upon a similar area. As the tax rate last year was only 15 mils—that is, 15 dollars upon a thousand dollars' worth of land, a manufacturer has no need to think much of taxes even when he has to pay them.—ANSWERS, October 4th.

ERRATUM.—In the December issue of *LAND VALUES*, p. 267, right-hand column, 23rd line from the foot, read £169 instead of £1,691.