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THE CASE FOR
WAGES BOARDS.

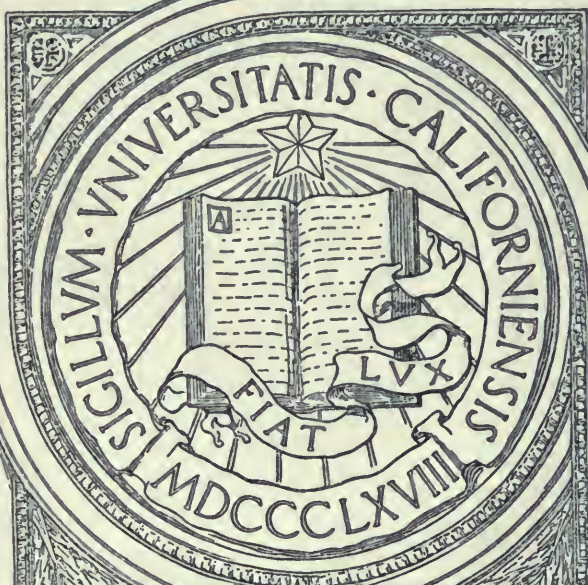
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THE CASE FOR .

WAGES BOARDS.

BY

CONSTANCE SMITH.



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IN MEMORIAM

JESSICA PEIKOTZ

TO THE
MEMORIAL

INTRODUCTION.

THERE was a time, not very far distant, when it was tacitly assumed, and even explicitly asserted, that different classes of the same people could be economically independent. The well-being or the degradation of a single division of the nation, however serious a question it might appear to the moralist or the humanitarian, did not present a problem demanding the attention of economists trained in the school of *laissez-faire*. The influence of the school, though fast waning, had still, in 1889, sufficient hold on the national mind to prevent any definite action from being taken on the Report presented by the House of Lords Committee on Sweating. The wave of humiliation, distress and dismay which ran through the country on publication of that Report was allowed to spend itself in an outburst of emotion of which the sole

direct practical outcome was a temporary craze for "slumming" on the part of certain well-to-do women. Indirectly, the Report has not been without effect: a deepened interest in the question of housing, a greater stringency in enforcing the laws of Public Health, certain amendments in the Factory and Workshops Act of 1901 may be traced, in the past, to the new knowledge of the conditions under which work is done by the poorest class of workers, conveyed to the general mind and conscience through its pages. But the root cause of the evil was left untouched. No one in authority, nineteen years ago, had the courage to "strike his finger on the place" and point out that, in regulation of the wages paid to the sweated, lay the only reasonable hope of abolishing the sweating system.

The first years of the twentieth century have witnessed a very widespread and remarkable change of thought on the subject of the interdependence of classes. The course of the world has forced us to recognise the solidarity which exists between all members of the body politic. If there is one truth which,

more than another, circumstances have of late combined to impress upon the minds of all thinking persons it is that, economically, we are all members one of another. The more deeply we examine into the sources of national prosperity or national decline the clearer does it become to us that even one unsound spot in the national organism is, and must be, the cause of weakness and corruption in the whole. The wealth acquired on one hand by under-payment of labour pays on the other—willingly or unwillingly—its toll towards the maintenance of those for whose incapacity, sickness, destitution or crime such under-payment is responsible. We come to realise painfully that, however splendid may be the industrial superstructure, if there lie about its roots a mass of bad work and half-starved workers, an abyss of inefficiency and misery into which men and women belonging to the higher working grades are in continual danger of slipping, and in the midst of which armies of children are being brought up to carry on the evil tradition into a new generation, there must be peril to the main building. Moreover, we foresee in the continued degradation

of a large class of the community an inevitable lowering of both the physique and the morale of our people which will presently amount, if it does not do so already, to a national danger. It is a sense of peril—social, industrial, commercial, national—which, quite as much as the simple instinct of compassion for the suffering and indignation on behalf of the oppressed, to-day impels thoughtful men and women to seek with almost feverish anxiety after a remedy for the sweating evil.

The consciousness of danger, the eager search for a way of escape, are not confined to thinkers of our own nationality. Every civilised country has its own sweating problem, and is more or less alive to the importance of finding a solution for it. In such assemblies as those of the International Association for Labour Legislation, comprising members hailing from seventeen different States, representing widely differing political platforms and social sympathies—Ministers of State, permanent officials, men of science, economists, Trade Unionists, factory inspectors, social reformers—the question of sweating, especially as it exhibits

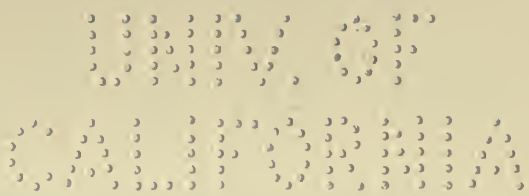
itself in connection with home work, holds a foremost place. Government after Government is showing, by fresh enactments, or by amendment of old laws, its sense of the necessity laid upon it to deal with the matter by means of legislation. And if in some cases the first legislative steps do not carry us very far, it must be remembered that they are largely tentative. The point is that everywhere legislative experiments are being tried. The old easy-going method of leaving things to right themselves by means of some unknown mysterious economic law has been abandoned, simply because its observance was discovered to have landed those blindly obeying it within sight of a national disaster from which they have shrunk back appalled.

We stand, then, in the presence not merely of a proved evil, but of a general movement in favour of applying a national remedy for that evil. The remedy, it is agreed, must be national, since the evil is too great to be fought and conquered by individual action. Individual action will doubtless do much in the future to break down the sweating system, as it has undoubtedly done much in the past

to build it up, but it is incapable of exorcising alone the monster it has helped to raise. Even organised bands of individuals, such as are to be found in consumers' leagues, are powerless to affect to any great extent the course of modern industry or to control the wheels within wheels which make up the complex machine of modern commerce. The sweating system has so interwoven itself with our national life that it is only by a national movement we shall free ourselves from its unhealthy trammels.

We shall consider here, very briefly :—

1. The principal features of the sweating evil in this country; and,
 2. The legislative action by which it is proposed to remedy it.
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THE CASE FOR WAGES BOARDS.

PART I.

DEFINITION OF SWEATING.

CERTAIN conditions of employment constitute sweating. These conditions were defined, in the Report of the Committee of the House of Lords already alluded to, to be (1) under-payment of the worker, (2) excessive hours of labour, (3) insanitary condition of workplaces. The definition can hardly be improved upon. It is comprehensive, and it places the causes of the evil in their correct order and relation. The root cause of sweating is the low wage, compelling excessive hours of labour if even a bare pittance is to be earned, and these conditions, taken together, lead in many cases first to the renting of an insanitary dwelling, because the worker is too poor to pay for

better accommodation, and then, when that worker is a woman, to enforced neglect of the home. For families or individuals occupying only one or two rooms which serve all the purposes of domestic life—living, cooking, sleeping, washing—the fact that, in the case of the home worker, they have to serve as workshop besides greatly adds to the difficulty of maintaining them in a wholesome state, even where the worker's trade is not in itself of an unhealthy or dirty nature. Yet it is in this last respect, and in this alone, that the lot of the sweated home worker may be said to have materially improved since 1890. This improvement is due, partly to better education and a higher standard of decency and comfort among the workers themselves, partly to increased attention paid by the public to the housing question, partly to greater stringency in enforcing the laws of public health, and to better administration of those laws by Public Health Committees and by Women Sanitary Inspectors and Health Visitors. It is not due to a rise in the remuneration of the

home worker, who is, in many trades, even worse paid than she was 20 years ago, and whose earnings, in certain directions, show an increasing tendency to drop; nor to any diminution of the hours spent in labour, which, with wages stationary or falling, remain of necessity as long as they formerly were, while in some instances they have grown even longer.

SWEATING IN FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS.

Although it is in the case of the home worker that all the features of sweating are most markedly present, yet it must not be supposed that the evil does not, to a serious degree, infect the industry carried on in many factories and workshops. While the Factory Acts secure to workers in such establishments a minimum of conditions of safety, sanitation, cleanliness and ventilation, and, where women and children are concerned, a limitation of the number of hours of work, they do not regulate the wages paid, and these are too often, especially when the workers are women and girls, as truly "sweating" wages as those received by the East End home worker from

the East End slop tailor or box maker. Factories in plenty may be found, both in London and in the Provinces—clothing factories, boot factories, food factories, factories in which all kinds of fancy articles are made—in which the women employed cannot, after years of service, hope to attain even the meagre weekly wage of 10s. There are others where the weekly payments vary from 3s. 9d. to 5s. or 6s., and 7s. is counted as a record week's pay. It is clear that, given the lowest modern standard of respectable living, and allowing no margin for holidays, recreation or self-improvement, the wages paid to employees of such firms as these are absolutely insufficient for maintenance. They have, therefore, to be supplemented from other sources. Where the case is that of a wife whose husband is wage-earner, or of a daughter living with her parents, the earnings may be regarded as a pocket-money wage; where the worker is dependent on her own exertions, the resources of the State or the community are drawn upon to make up the deficiency. In both cases, the industry falls into the ranks of "parasitic" industries.

SWEATING AND HOME WORK.

It is, however, in connection with home work that we should expect to find, and do find the sweating system most firmly established and most widely distributed. It is impossible even to attempt to compute the numbers of those who are carrying on sweated industries under the domestic roof. Quite recently the Home Secretary, with all the aid that official information and official statistics can afford at his command, declined the task; and no doubt rightly, for the out-workers' lists—which are as yet the only registers of home workers we possess—have been so imperfectly kept and checked that they provide a very uncertain basis for reckoning. Some notion of the number of workers of a particular class found in a particular district may be formed from time to time; thus, it has been ascertained that there are, roughly speaking, 16,000 in the “dress trade,” and 3,250 tailors and tailoresses in the Borough of Stepney; but anything like an exhaustive census is, pending more thorough and vigorous administration of our present law, out of the question. This much, however, we know with

certainty: that the sweated worker, more especially the sweated woman, is to be found pretty nearly everywhere up and down the country. Her presence is to be detected in the Provinces as well as in London, in the small towns as well as in the larger cities, and in many villages as well. Certain prominently sweated industries, such as gloving, have been from time immemorial carried on in village homes, to which the work is brought from the factory by a middleman or middlewoman.

The reason for this wide distribution is not far to seek. The superficial advantages of employing home work are such as appeal directly to the employer. Not only does he escape the payment of rent and rates for buildings in which to house his workers, while throwing upon them such direct expenses as warming, lighting, etc., but he escapes also, indirectly, from certain responsibilities which fall upon the man who employs people to work for him on his own premises: he has not to consider what to do with his workers in slack seasons; and, by reason of a cheaper

production, he can often manage slightly to undersell competitors who employ inworkers. In addition, the isolated position of his employees, who are necessarily unorganised and incapable of corporate action, enables him, if he will, to reduce wages from time to time with an ease and confidence unknown to employers who come, personally or through their managers, into direct touch with their workpeople. It is true that many of these apparent advantages are illusory, and that action which at first sight appears economical often proves in the end productive of bad work and a disproportionate waste of material. But the typical sweating employer, in so far as he sweats deliberately, rarely takes long views: his aim is the immediate gain to be snatched out of the competitive struggle. He never comes into contact with the human capital which he is using up. If he employs a middleman, still more if, as is often the case, he is only connected with the worker through a whole chain of middlemen, all sense of responsibility vanishes. Thus it comes to pass that, as Mrs. Sidney Webb pointed out

long ago, the pitiless pressure of the consumer, caring only to get the article cheap, is brought to bear directly upon the home worker, where, in the case of the factory worker, the employer, consciously or unconsciously, acts as a species of buffer.

CAUSES OF SWEATING.

These are not one, but many. Responsibility for the existence of the system cannot be placed entirely on the shoulders of the employers, either as individuals or as a body. Individual greed or haste to be rich has doubtless played its part in creating the present economic conditions, but an even greater part has been played by the pressure of unregulated competition, by an unthinking rage for cheapness, by the national acquiescence in supposed inevitable abuses. With truth has it been said that the sweater is the nation.

THE ALIEN IMMIGRANT.

It is natural to inquire, at this point, how far the presence of the alien immigrant among us is responsible for the prevalence of sweating. Now, it would be idle to deny

that, in certain localities, and in certain branches of trade, the cheap labour of the Russian or Polish Jew has helped to lower the already low wage of the English boot closer and the English tailoress. But the evidence of to-day, confirming the evidence tendered to the Lords Committee nineteen years earlier, clearly establishes the fact that the alien immigrant, while he complicates our problem, has in no sense created it. In 1908, as in 1889, Russian and Polish workers are only to be found in appreciable numbers in London, Manchester, and Leeds. Yet sweating obtains, as we have already had occasion to show, in numberless other places. Nor is it confined to industries in which foreigners compete with our own workers. There is no worse sweated industry than that of chain and nail-making, a trade which, as is well known, is entirely confined to our own country-people. Again, in the tailoring trade, where, as regards certain branches, Jewish competition is admittedly keen, the pulling down of tailors' wages by cheap female labour carried on at home far exceeds the depression

wrought by the rivalry of the Jewish worker. If the alien here has slain his thousands, assuredly the wife of the casual labourer has slain her tens of thousands. For along with casual labour goes, by a fateful, inevitable connection, sweated home work. On the other hand, the existence of sweated home work, wretchedly paid as it is, makes possible, in many instances, the continued existence of the casual labourer doing two or three days' work a week; and so the whole system revolves in a vicious circle.

PRINCIPAL SWEATED INDUSTRIES.

First in order and importance come the great trades of tailoring in all its branches, wholesale dressmaking (which includes the making up of mantles, jackets, blouses, pinafores, aprons and skirts) and what is known as the white trade (shirts, and all kinds of underwear except hosiery). These employ a huge army of workers, much of whose work is done for export. The most heavily sweated articles, especially in clothing trades, are frequently found among the goods manufactured for colonial and foreign use.

It is no secret that an immense proportion of the ready-made wearing apparel sold at home or exported from our shores is made up by outworkers living under miserable conditions, but it is not, perhaps, generally known that many expensive garments made to order are similarly "finished" in the dirty and insanitary dwellings of sweated tailors and seamstresses. Much of the cheaper boot and shoe trade is also carried on in domestic workshops. In addition, there are a host of small piecework trades which are very largely home industries. Reference has already been made to the chain and nail industry at Bromsgrove and Dudley. Outworkers are also employed in the making of locks, latches and keys, and in file making. Clipping and finishing of machine-made laces and nets is a considerable home industry. Among the numerous home trades in which women are chiefly or exclusively employed may be mentioned cap-making, tie-making, belt-making; making, repairing, and finishing of umbrellas and sunshades, artificial flower-making, tent and sack-making, covering of racquet and tennis balls, box-making, paper

bag-making, glove stitching, bead work, manufacture of clay pipes and cigarette holders, military embroidery, cheap saddlery, shawl fringing, carding and boxing of buttons and hooks and eyes, brush-making, feather sorting, fur-pulling and sewing, basket-making, and the manufacture of stuffed toys.

EXAMPLES OF EARNINGS.

In all these trades the average wage of the home worker is excessively low. Out of the hundreds of examples to be gathered from official records, such as the Blue Book issued in 1907, containing the Report of the Home Work Committee, or from the reports of investigations made by such bodies as the Research Committee of the Christian Social Union, and the Women's Industrial Council, only a very few can here be given. They are selected, not as extreme cases, but rather as being fairly typical of the position of the worker engaged in that trade of which they illustrate the conditions. For instance, one of the factory inspectors, giving evidence last June before the Home Work

Committee, stated the following to be “common rates of pay for certain classes of work in London:—

Boys’ knickers, making throughout, 2d. pair ;

Men’s coats, making throughout, 4d. to 9d. ;

Vests with five pockets, making throughout,
3½d. each ;

Boys’ cotton blouses, 1s. 1d. a dozen.”

The inspector goes on to state that in Bristol the making of trousers is paid at from 5d. to 8½d. a pair; common coats, from 4d. to 8d.; while in Reading trousers are made throughout in the outworkers’ homes for 4d., 5d. and 6d. The rate of pay in London for common export shirts with collar band only is put by the same authority at 10d. a dozen (making throughout); but at Woolwich Miss Squire found such shirts being made for no more than 6d. a dozen. In these cases “sewings”—*i.e.*, cotton for sewing the shirts—are found by the worker and form, consequently, a deduction from her earnings. A case cited by the inspector whose evidence has been quoted is of interest as being, on the witness’s testimony, typical of a large number of these outwork cases. It was

that of a young widow supporting herself and two children by shirt making. Miss Squire found her making skirts at $8\frac{3}{4}$ d. a dozen. She bought sewing cotton at 4d. a reel, using one reel for three dozen shirts. By a special effort she could make three dozen in a day, but it was elicited by cross-examination of the witness, that this was an effort which could not possibly be maintained day after day. The earnings of the woman, a steady worker, whose house the inspector noted as "beautifully kept," varied from 5s. to 8s. a week. On the occasion when Miss Squire visited her she had made 40 shirts between Tuesday evening, when she fetched them out, and the Thursday morning when she took them back to the factory.

Some interesting particulars with regard to corset making were tendered by the same official witness. Makers of "common" corsets (selling at from 1s. 1d. to 1s. 11d. each) receive 1s. $7\frac{1}{2}$ d. for making a dozen pairs, but out of this there are deductions for cane and cotton, which on two dozen pairs reach a total of 1s. 6d. The net amount of wage earned on

two dozen pairs is therefore 1s. 9d., or 10½d. a dozen. These, it is specially noted, were the earnings of a skilled worker who, by the inspector's testimony, "worked admirably and rapidly." Yet this admirable and rapid workwoman could only complete her two dozen pairs in three days, thereby earning the daily wage of 7d. if she worked at high pressure, and did not have to fetch or carry to or from the factory.

The cases just given can be easily paralleled in the industry of wholesale dressmaking. Here we find muslin blouses with twenty tucks made for 3s. a dozen, nightgowns with frills and insertion for 2s. 9d. a dozen, dressing gowns elaborately trimmed for 5s. 6d. a dozen. The average earnings in this case, typical of thousands of others, were 7s. per week for a day lasting from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Another witness before the Home Work Committee (Mr. Thomas Holmes, formerly the well known Police Court Missionary, now Secretary of the Howard Association), showed the Committee a skirt and coat made throughout by two women, who found their own machine and thread, for 1s. 1d. He testified

that these two women, a mother and daughter, had been doing the same work at this price for twenty years, making seven costumes in about two days, by working from 9 in the morning to 12-30 at night, with the short intervals needed for cooking and eating their simple meals and doing their housework.

Sweating in the boot trade is much on the increase. In London the uppers of ladies' boots are being machined at 1s. 6d. the dozen pairs, while in Leicester the same work is done for 10d. The men engaged in the Bristol boot trade are actually making boots throughout in their own homes at 9d. a pair, with attendant expenses for rivets and grindery amounting to 1s. 6d. a dozen.

Nor are things better in those smaller trades of which we have given a list. Brush-making is a skilled trade; yet a rate of 5d. to 6½d. a dozen is common in London, Leeds, Bristol, Birmingham, and other principal brush-making centres, and 8s. a week is considered a good wage for a steady average worker. The average earnings of box makers vary from 4s. 6d. to about 7s. 6d. a week; match boxes are paid at 2½d. a gross. This

for steady work. Nor is this net profit. A farthing a gross must be deducted, for flour has to be bought to make the paste; in addition, a fire must be kept up to warm the paste and to dry the boxes.

Sack-sewers are even worse off, 6s. a week for very hard work representing high earnings in the case of ordinary sacks, though a clever worker "sitting at" Navy sacks the whole day can earn a daily wage of 1s. 4d.

In tent-making we find a tent 16 yards long with 58 holes to make and 110 eyes to sew on, taking a worker a whole day to finish, paid for at 9½d. Army bell-tents are a little more profitable, bringing in 2s. each. But in this case the workers find their own thread, which costs 2d. per ball.

Three shillings and sixpence per gross is paid for strawberry baskets. But as the worker finds the wood, which costs 2s., and it takes two days to make a gross, her net earnings amount to 9d. per day. With the small hardware trades of Birmingham we touch, apparently, the lowest rates. The Superintending Factory Inspector for the Midlands gives 4s. 3d.

as the highest weekly earnings he has been able to discover in the case of a competent hook and eye carder doing ten hours pretty constant work a day, even with the help of her children (the average rate is put at 3s. 2½d.) Payment for a "pack" (a gross of cards on each of which a gross of hooks and eyes has been sewn) varies from 8d. to 1s. 2d., according to the size of the hooks and eyes, the smallest sizes being the best paid. Out of this 1s. 2d. or 8d., ½d. for needles and thread have to be found, and, unless the worker fetches the work from the factory and takes it back herself, a penny a pack in addition must be paid to a collector for collection and delivery. Button carding, again, produces net earnings of 2s. to 3s. a week, working the whole week through; 4s. 3d. was the largest weekly amount earned by any one of the considerable number of women visited by Mr. Graves and his assistants.

FALL IN HOMEWORK WAGES.

Ample evidence, official and unofficial, is forthcoming to show that, low as are the wages in the trades just discussed, they

tend steadily to fall still lower. Those in the hook and eye trade are said to have been stationary for 40 years, but in nearly all the others the tendency is downwards. One of the witnesses before the Home Work Committee, a tailor's machinist, gave the following figures in connection with reduction of wages on Government contracts in his own trade:—

Khaki jackets, paid for at 2s. 7½d. each in 1904,
are in 1908 being made for 1s. 5½d.

Making of Post Office uniforms has fallen from
15s. to 10s. 2d.

Police tunics, from 2s. 8d. to 1s. 9d.

Mr. Howarth and Miss Mona Wilson, in the valuable study of employment and wages which forms one of the most important chapters of their volume on life in West Ham, state that the same story—the story of reduced wages—comes from nearly every trade, and give numerous examples in support of their statement. A tailoress, who has worked at her trade for 40 years and is now getting 2s. 6d. a dozen for coats and 2s. 3d. a dozen for reefers, was ten years ago receiving 5s. a dozen from middlemen for the same work; 18 years ago, for machine work done directly

for a factory, she got 1s., 1s. 6d. and 2s. a coat; while in her early days, when most of the work was done by hand, she was paid as much as 5s. a coat. Another case is that of a waistcoat maker, whose pay from 1s. to 1s. 4d. for a waistcoat has gradually decreased to 6½d. and 7½d. The reduction on shirts, while less perceptible in terms of hard cash, is none the less real, much more elaborate work being demanded for pay which was formerly given for the plainest kind of shirt only. A maker of girls' jackets, who can remember getting 17s. 6d. a dozen 15 years ago, now gets 5s. 6d. a dozen for precisely the same work. Constant small reductions are being made, owing to the intervention of other workers who, desperate for work, offer "to do it for less." It is a fairly common experience for a home worker to be confronted with the alternative of losing her work or accepting it at a reduced rate of pay, because the employer has found someone "who will take it at a lower price." Home workers are particularly helpless in the face of such proposed reduction. When rates are lowered in a factory, even if it be a factory in

which the workers are wholly unorganised, the employers know that they have to face a certain amount of public opinion on their own premises and a wider public opinion outside them. Both these checks upon reckless or unwarrantable lowering of wages are absent in the case of the woman whose work is done at home.

IRREGULARITY OF EARNINGS.

The earnings of the home worker are not only low but irregular. It is a characteristic of the industries which employ outworkers that, unlike the greater industries of the country, they have no wage standard. So far from a market rate, general or local, being established in these trades, it is not uncommon to find an employer of labour totally unaware of the rates which are being paid by his rival in the next street. Thus it comes about that one worker is often employed by two firms to do precisely similar work for quite different pay. A case of this kind came recently within the personal experience of the writer. The worker was a box maker employed by two firms in the East End of London. For each she made

boxes of precisely the same quality and size, but from one of these she received 4½d. per gross more than from the other. As she could not obtain sufficient work by which to maintain herself from the better paying firm, she was obliged to eke out a living by accepting a certain number weekly of the worse paid boxes. The evil of such a system, or want of system, does not end with the particular case. In a short time we may expect to find that, in obedience to the law of competition, the better paying firm will have cut down its wages to the lower rate. In addition to irregularity as between firm and firm, a considerable amount of such irregularity is found in different "orders" issued by the same firm.

UNCERTAINTY OF EMPLOYMENT.

Uncertainty of employment is one of the peculiar griefs of the home worker. Over and above the general fluctuation of trade, necessarily affecting the volume of employment, and the ebb and flow of the tide of seasonal work, she has to suffer from the absence of any contract with her employers beyond that which binds her to

bring back, completed, her last bundle of piecework. This absence of contract works to her disadvantage, even when she continues to obtain employment, by waste of her sole capital—her time. The long hours spent in going to and fro to fetch work from the factory and to carry it back, or in waiting for the work to be given out at the office or warehouse, are as truly a deduction from the worker's meagre wages as the sums paid, where home and factory lie far apart, in tram and omnibus fares.

FINES AND DEDUCTIONS.

The cost of "journeys" in actual pence paid out day by day forms a serious item in the home worker's budget of expenditure. Nor do these payments, and the amounts deducted for materials, exhaust the list of those which have to be struck off the total weekly earnings before calculating the net gain on the week's work. To these should be added, in many cases, the cost of firing; in all, where long hours are worked, money paid out for light, whether in the form of kerosene or "penny-in-the-slot" gas; in the clothing trade, the hire or gradual purchase of a machine must

be included. There is, further, the serious question of fines for damaged or imperfect work. Case after case is found in which the worker is compelled on account of some slight flaw in her work, to purchase the article made at its full price. This practice of compelling the workers to buy damaged articles prevails in connection with factory as well as home work; in too many factories it has led to the objectionable practice of raffling; on the home worker it frequently imposes a burden which can only be worked off by degrees. The case of the Bristol tailoress fined £2 for wrongly placing pockets in the pair of trousers she was finishing for a few pence is, perhaps, an extreme example of this kind; but official reports abound in cases which, in a scarcely less startling fashion, set at nought the "fair and reasonable" clause of the Truck Act. To take a few of these as they occur in factories: In a tailoring case in Leeds, four girl machinists were compelled to buy some men's trousers that had been found to have a spot of oil on them. There was no proof that one of the four girls had

even seen or touched the trousers, and only one *could*, by the employer's admission, be in fault; yet three had 1s. 2d. each deducted from their wages. One of the senior women inspectors reports an instance of a hosiery firm which, paying its workers 3½d. per dozen for stockings, imposed a fine of 16s. for alleged bad work, and yet was unable, upon a prosecution being taken, to produce any proof of negligence. Another inspector found an employer preparing to impose fines for imperfect work in the case of women employed on minute operations in connection with the production of a cheap warming pan, paid for at ½d. a gross. The subdivision of labour in this case was so great that it took 25 women to produce the article; and work was carried on with such extreme rapidity that any care or excellence in workmanship was out of the question. In a case that came before one of the London Stipendiary Magistrates, it was found that in a collar factory a fine of £1 0s. 6d. had been imposed on a girl for stitching 6 dozen collars nearer the edge than the order given her set down,

the payment for stitching the collars being 1s. 9d. For a similar error a fine of 9s. was imposed on a stitcher who received five farthings a dozen for her work. Instances in which apprentices, from whom a certain amount of imperfect or spoiled work must be expected, have been fined out of all proportion to any payments made to them, are common; as an experienced factory inspector recently observed, in certain establishments the whole training of the young worker appears to be carried on by means of fines. Allusion has already been made to deductions for materials. These, even when they represent only the cost price of those materials, are a serious drawback upon small earnings. It is not, however, disputed that the workers frequently pay more than the cost price. The Report of the Chief Inspector for the year 1906 cites the case of a woman making skirts in a factory who, out of one week's estimated earnings of 18s. 10d., received only 11s. 1d., the remaining 7s. 9d. having gone to pay for power, cotton and needles. The Report for the previous year mentions firms of

glove makers which were accustomed to make 10, 14, and even 20 per cent. on the "sewings" supplied to their workers. A boot factory deducted grindery from the operatives' wages at a higher rate than that charged by retail shops. From the wages of a majolica paintress in the Potteries, earning 11s. a week, 1s. 2d. was deducted, 6d. of the deduction being for expenses connected with the carrying out of the special rules, which it was clearly the business of the employer to bear himself. Examples, officially reported, of compulsory deductions for payments to a cook for warming food, to an errand girl, for use of stove, boiling water and dining room, even in cases where the workers do not avail themselves of these services and conveniences, occur over and over again. Nor are instances wanting of deductions for contributions to hospitals, for certifying surgeons' fees, and even for the annual beanfeast fund.

While the case of factory workers in respect of fines and deductions is hard, that of outworkers is harder still. If

employed by a middleman they are outside the protection of the Truck Acts; even if they take their work direct from a factory, they are, few of them, in a position to dispute the pronouncement of the manager or forewoman who declares them to have forfeited so much out of their estimated earnings. They may know, like the girls who were well aware, when paying 1d. each for machine needles which could be bought at the rate of eight-a-penny outside the factory, that they are being grossly overcharged for materials; but, since the alternative to acceptance of the charge is dismissal, they will leave it unchallenged. The poorest and most ignorant workers are particularly exposed to oppression of this kind. Thus we find the handkerchief sewers of Belfast paid at the rate of $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per dozen, subject to a fine of 4d. per dozen for any mistake. A better kind of handkerchief, paid for at $3\frac{1}{4}$ d. a dozen, carries a fine of 1s. 3d. Where the wages are as low as those commonly received by the home worker in the clothing or smaller piecework trades, the deduction of even a few pence becomes of

vital importance to the wage earner. The economic helplessness of the home workers is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in their inability to protect themselves against excessive fines and deductions.

THE SWEATED WORKER.

This inability need surprise no one who knows from what ranks of the population the main body of those workers who are popularly described as "sweated" is recruited. The men are those who have never had a chance in life or who, having had one, have, sometimes through their own fault, but more often through physical defect, mental feebleness or lack of equipment, failed to keep their hold upon it. They are for the most part sons of sweated workers like themselves, turned out upon the world to pick up their living without having been taught how to earn it. The women are the wives of casual labourers, of men out of work, of men unable or unwilling to work, the widows with families to bring up, the deserted wives, the daughters with aged or infirm parents dependent on their labour. To all of them the one absorbing question is the immediate earning of a few shillings or

pence. They are of those who never have been able and never will be able to make provision for the future. They live on the edge of the abyss of destitution, and all their energies are bent to the effort of saving themselves from toppling into it. Such people have neither expectations nor reserves; their one ambition is to retain the work by which they exist, however miserably; their one fear, lest it should be taken from them.

DIRECT EFFECTS OF SWEATING.

(a) ON THE HOME.

The direct effects of sweating are easily seen. Over-work, imperfect nourishment, insufficient rest and clothing produce results, physical, mental and moral, which proclaim themselves even to a careless observer. Where the sweating system invades the homes, its results are not confined to the sweated worker, but extend more or less to the whole family. Home work, it has been said with truth, is too often the negation of home life. Where, as is most commonly the case, the sweated worker is the wife and

mother, the conditions under which she works are frequently more disastrous to her children than to herself.

(b) INFANT MORTALITY AND CHILD LABOUR.

The sweated worker's infant is handicapped, even before birth, by prenatal conditions: the exhaustion of the mother, by toil carried on up to the very day of her confinement, predisposes her offspring to the atrophy and debility which are fatal to so large a number of infants; and her early return after child-birth to that toil, coupled with imperfect nutrition, due to lack of means with which to purchase nourishing food, greatly diminishes its chance of life. When we come, in official reports, upon such a case as that of the blousemaker who was found by the factory inspector sitting up in bed engaged in work six hours after the birth of her child, we expect to find the infant mortality rate among the children of home workers a high one. For the children who live to grow up, the danger presents itself that they will either be pressed into the service of the home industry at the earliest possible moment, or forced at an early age, while still in attendance at school,

into some other occupation unsuitable to their age and injurious to their health. The business of street trading, though not wholly confined to the children of the very poor, certainly draws many of its recruits from just that class of home in which the brushmaker or the matchbox maker plies her trade ; and official evidence in abundance exists to show that the practice of employing children as assistants in many home industries is a widespread one. Miss Squire stated before the Home Work Committee that they were very "considerably employed" in some of the clothing trades, such as gloving ; while in Nottingham, in the lace trade, she asserted their employment to be "very prevalent." There they work, it seems, in the dinner hour, between two school attendances, without removing their hats or jackets, eating their food on the return walk to school. They work again in the evening on their return, and in neighbours' houses as well as at home. Their employment begins at six years old, and even under. The Superintending Factory Inspector for the Midlands gave the age at which the child

hook and eye carders of Birmingham begin work as three, and stated that he had himself seen children of three, four and five regularly engaged in the business of "linking." Again, Dr. Agnew, the Medical Superintendent Officer of Health for the Urban District of Lurgan, in drawing the attention of his Council to the employment of children in the operation of drawing handkerchiefs "under circumstances that are entirely inconsistent with their physical development," states that they are "often of the tenderest years." He goes on to say—"In the poorest and most unhealthy of our dwellings this variety of home work is carried on to an inconceivable extent, and in some streets one could hardly enter a house without seeing two, three, four, or more children, varying in age from six to twelve years, sitting round a table, all intently busy trying to earn a miserable pittance. . . . Not only are these children kept close at work from the time they return from school until late bed-time, but very often the most flimsy pretexts are made for keeping them at home, so that they may even be kept at work during

school hours." In a supplementary statement, Dr. Agnew adds that "it was in the lowest class of houses, not fit to harbour children at any time, that one saw children of from three to twelve sitting wearing their eyes out." The price paid for drawing two dozen handkerchiefs was 1½d.

(c) DETERIORATION OF WORK.

The work suffers as well as the worker. Haste, over-strain, a system of industry which makes quantity in production at once the sole aim and the over-mastering motive of labour, will of necessity produce a poor and shoddy type of manufactured article. A vast proportion of the articles produced by sweated labour, sold at fabulously cheap prices, and eagerly bought up by the public, especially by its less well-to-do members, are so flimsy in construction, so rough and imperfect in finish, that they have little or no lasting quality, and require to be continually replaced. This may benefit a limited class of manufacturers; it certainly does not serve the interests of the great body of purchasers. There is often, even among the sweated home workers, a quite remarkable manual dexterity. But speed is

naturally their first object, and, where this is the case, care for thoroughness is sure to go to the wall.

INDIRECT EFFECTS OF SWEATING.

(a) ON THE FUTURE OF THE RACE.

It is not difficult to trace the disastrous influence of the sweating system on lives that have grown up under its shadow. The children of the hook and eye carders and the handkerchief drawers are doomed, by the fact of a childhood and youth passed without training, without discipline, without adequate care, to just such an existence as that of their parents before them. The boys will become casual labourers if they do not become loafers. The girls will marry men like their brothers, and supplement the meagre wages irregularly brought home by their husbands by working at sweated rates in some home piecework trade. To preach to households like those of which we have written the value of skilled training for their boys and girls is to waste breath. The time for training cannot be afforded. So the child goes forth to the industrial battle unequipped with the armour

of knowledge or the weapons of skill; physically feeble and undeveloped, by reason of the over-work and under-feeding of his early years; intellectually backward, because bodily fatigue and a too precocious initiation into the round of mechanical toil has dulled wits that at the beginning were, perhaps, bright enough. His moral character will almost certainly be exposed as soon as he emerges from boyhood to the very hardest test to which moral character can be put—that of intermittent employment: of spells of hard work, alternating with much longer spells of enforced idleness. Need we be surprised if he does not stand the test? The moral wrecks to be found among the children of the sweated are frequently as much the products of the sweating system as their sickly, feeble-minded and defective brothers and sisters. Together they help to furnish recruits to the growing army of the unemployed and unemployable, to fill our workhouses, hospitals, asylums, and prisons.

(b) ON THE LABOUR MARKET.

We have already noted the close connection that exists between sweated home work and

casual labour. The former helps to maintain the latter. In certain districts it has an even more disastrous effect: it encourages the men to lead lives of idleness, leaving the task of supporting the household to their wives. But sweating, in the sense of underpayment—the remuneration of labour by less than a living wage—is not, as we have already pointed out, confined to industries carried on in the home. Where sweated wages are paid in factories or workshops to women, for work that might be done by men, and, but for the cheapness of unorganised women's labour, would be done by men, the economic and social effects are disastrous: the rightful bread-winner remains unemployed, the wife and mother is taken from the home which requires her presence, while the family receives an insufficient sum for its maintenance. Where these conditions prevail throughout a whole city or district, we get such a case as that of Dundee, where, it has been bitterly said, "all the women work and all the men loaf." They do not all loaf, as a matter of fact; they go away to places where work may be had. Consequently, the female population

of Dundee at the present time is to the male as three to one, and every social problem takes there an aggravated form—aggravated by the condition of chronic poverty, varied by crises of acute distress, in which the people live.

(c) ON THE COMMUNITY.

It is clear, from the examples already given of the earnings of different home workers, all of them typical examples illustrating the position of classes, not the exceptional suffering of individuals, that many such workers cannot, given the cost of lodging, food and firing in towns, live on their earnings. For as much as their means fall short of the sum sufficient to maintain bare existence, the community bears the burden of their maintenance. By Poor Law allowances, by the action of Distress Committees, by private charity, we are helping to foster the sweating system. Miss Squire told the Home Work Committee that "a good number of box-makers" are always in receipt of parish relief. A recent inquiry in Woolwich shows that home workers in a number of trades in that borough have regular allowances from

the Guardians. Such allowances serve, as truly as did those granted to agricultural labourers before the passing of the New Poor Law, as rates in aid of wages. In short, the community is here directly taking upon itself the duty of supplementing the insufficient payments of the employer. The indirect expenditure thrown upon it by reason of the sickness, destitution and crime bred of the sweating system, expenditure which finds its outward expression in a host of Government and charitable institutions in every corner of the land, is incalculably vast, and represents a waste of national income as well as of national capital, of pounds, shillings and pence in the present, as well as of human lives in the future, which it would be well for business men, no less than social reformers, to consider.

PART II.

THE CURE OF SWEATING.

No one concerned for the welfare of this country can hold the facts briefly presented under Part I. to be of slight importance. Sweated workers form already a large class of the community, and their numbers are being constantly added to. A fluctuation of trade, a change of fashion, or a commercial crisis will alike send a host of workers, living previously just above the poverty line, across it into the ranks of the sweated. In individual cases, the illness of the bread winner, or the failure of an employing firm is often sufficient to bring a whole family within the grip of the sweating system. This means, as we have seen, gradual deterioration of the national type, both on its physical and on its moral side. The need of some common effort for the overthrow of an evil so widespread and so far-reaching in its consequences, which has already tainted to so great an extent the springs of our national life, is urgent, and is

felt to be so. The individual is powerless in the matter—powerless, that is, as far as any impression on the system is concerned; associations of individuals are in little better case. While consumers' leagues have their uses as forms of public protest against an iniquity which has roused the public conscience to revolt, they are ineffective instruments of radical reform. Nor can Trade Unionism, which has done so much in the past to raise the status and improve the condition of the worker, help effectually here. Attempts to organise the home worker have been made, without success, again and again in this country. For organisation to succeed there must be some bond of common labour, some spirit of comradeship, at the lowest some opportunity for communication and interchange of ideas between member and member. None of these things exist or can exist in connection with home work. The out-workers attached to a factory do not know one another, and have no leisure to come together in voluntary assembly. Neither can they, for the most part, spare even a few pence in the week to

pay a Trade Union subscription of the most modest kind. Time, money, opportunity—it must be added, heart and enterprise—in fine, all the things needful for a successful combination are lacking in them; their circumstances forbid them to band themselves together for any object, even the bettering of their condition. Unless the nation, acting through the State, steps in to help them, that condition will remain unaltered, or rather, since no condition is stationary, it will go from bad to worse. The remedy must be legislative. And if we accept the principle that has hitherto governed British industrial legislation, namely, that the protection of the State may rightly be claimed on behalf of those incapable of protecting themselves, we shall acknowledge that a fair case for legislation has been here made out. It remains to indicate the kind of legislation which will meet the difficulties of the case.

THE LICENSING REMEDY.

A proposal to extend to this country the system of licensing home workplaces which prevails in New York and in some other American States has found favour with a

certain number of social reformers. Reports from the United States are not altogether encouraging as to the success of the system, even in respect of its very limited object: its promoters themselves appear disappointed with its results, and admit that it has led to much corruption and fraudulent sub-letting of licenses by workers to other workers. Further, the system seems to place the responsibility for the condition of the workplace on the wrong shoulders. By legally relieving employers of outworkers of all such responsibility we should be fostering rather than discouraging the present tendency to "give out" work in increasing quantities. There are those who see in the issue of licenses by the factory inspector a useful method of getting into touch with the out-worker, particularly in view of the close inspection that will be needed to enforce minimum rates fixed by Wages Boards when these shall be established. It is, however, a question whether the existing out-workers' lists, properly worked, would not supply all the machinery needful for this purpose, while the improved conditions which licensing

is directed to secure would result automatically from the improvement in the condition of the worker, brought about by better and more regular wages. If this process of gradual improvement seems too slow, and immediate action be desired in the interests of the public health and safety, no objection need be taken to licensing as an adjunct to Wages Boards, but it should be clearly understood that the measure in contemplation belongs rather to the category of Public Health Acts than to that of laws regulating industry. That which we have defined as the root cause of sweating—wages—would be wholly untouched by it.

WAGES BOARDS.

No legislation which does not propose to cut at this root of evil will avail to shake the hold of the sweating system upon the lower branches of industry. The promoters of the National Anti-Sweating League realised this when they founded their association; and their activities have from the outset been concentrated upon the wages question. Their belief found concrete expression in the Sweated Industries Bill, which passed

its second reading in the House of Commons on the 21st February, 1908, without a division. The aim and scope of the Bill are well set forth in the Memorandum which accompanies it, which we proceed to quote in full:—

“The object of this Bill is to provide for the establishment of Wages Boards with power to fix the minimum rate of wages to be paid to workers in particular trades. The Bill will apply in the first instance only to the trades specified in the schedule. Power is given to the Home Secretary to say to what other trades the Bill is to be extended, and no doubt at first the extension will be made only to what are known as the “sweated industries,” that is, industries in which outworkers are largely employed, and in which the rate of remuneration is low. A Wages Board will have power to fix a minimum rate for any single kind of work, and will have the widest discretion as to fixing time rates or piecework rates, and as to varying the minimum according to the locality, the kind of work, and the persons employed. The Bill provides that a Wages Board shall be composed of representatives of employers and

representatives of employed in equal numbers, with a chairman chosen by the members or nominated by the Home Secretary. It is proposed to entrust the enforcement of payment of the minimum rate to factory inspectors.*

The Bill, it will be seen, is a modest one. It deals, not with an ideal minimum wage, to be fixed in accordance with the workers' supposed needs, but with actual rates of payment in existing industries. It is frankly experimental, and it limits the initial field of experiment to three trades. Those named in the schedule are tailoring, dressmaking, and the making, altering, trimming, finishing and repairing of shirts, all three heavily sweated industries, employing a large number of women workers, in which payment by piecework rates is customary. On examining the clauses of the Bill itself, it will be noted that it is proposed to appoint separate Boards, not only for different trades, but for different areas, so that full allowance may be made for variation of local conditions. The fact that, with the exception of the chairman, these

* For the Bill itself see Appendix.

Boards are to consist exclusively of representatives of employers and employed, and that the minimum rate determined will therefore be fixed by persons conversant with the trade, aware what it is fit to bear locally, and having all alike an interest in keeping it alive, is the best guarantee that those rates will not be ruinous to the industry. Clause 5 provides for the greatest elasticity in the method of calculating the minimum rates of wages. The rates may be calculated either by time or by piecework (rates for home workers being necessarily calculated by piecework only), they may be different not only for different kinds of work but for different parts of a district; they may even be "different for different classes of persons employed"—a provision doubtless intended to meet the case of "the old and slow worker." Great importance is attached by the promoters to clause 2. This clause lays down that when application for the establishment of a Wages Board for any trade in any district is made to the Secretary of State by any Trade Union or Trades Council, representing

persons employed in the trade in the district, or by any six persons who are either local employers of labour or local workers in the trade in question, the Secretary of State shall cause an inquiry to be held into the desirability of appointing such a Wages Board. To those who have studied the proceedings of Joint Committees established in connection with the great organised industries of the country, and of Conciliation Boards working under the presidency of an arbitrator appointed by the Board of Trade, know the immense value of the face to face meeting of employers and employed which these Committees and Boards compel: such meeting is often the first necessary step to mutual understanding and co-operation. A complete separation, for the most part, of the sweated workers, more particularly of the sweated home workers, from their employer, has hitherto existed, and has been found a principal bar to any improvement in the condition of such workers. The retention of this clause in any measure founded on the present Bill (which, it is acknowledged, cannot pass into law during

the present year) is, therefore, of fundamental importance. As in the Victorian Act, on which the Bill has been modelled, not only is the payment or offering of wages at a lower rate than the minimum made an offence subject to penalties, but provision for the recovery of the deficiency by a worker who has been receiving the lower rate is also included.

EXISTING MINIMUM RATES.

Before proceeding to enumerate the probable effect of Wages Boards, it may be useful to point out that the principle of the minimum rate is not a new one in this country. In the great Government factories and workshops—arsenals, dockyards, clothing manufactories—it obtains, and is carried into practice, fixed rates being paid to all the different classes of labour employed. The great organised trades have, by the method of collective bargaining, and the action of the Joint Committees and Conciliation Boards already referred to, succeeded in establishing minimum rates in the different departments of their own industries. Coal miners, engineers, cotton

operatives, all work under this system. More recently, the arbitrations conducted by Mr. G. R. Askwith, K.C., for the Board of Trade, have succeeded in establishing the same system in a large number of trades less perfectly organised than the mining, cotton or engineering industry. Few of these are simple trades presenting small difficulties of calculation; some, like the lace trade, are as complicated and as subject to disturbance by the introduction of new patterns as any trade can well be. Much has been said of the impossibility of getting a satisfactory piecework list fixed by a Wages Board for a trade having so many branches as tailoring. That which has been successfully accomplished, with acknowledged benefit to all concerned, in the case of Lancashire "lists" and Nottingham "cards" should not, and we may be sure will not, present insuperable difficulties in that of an industry considerably less complex.

WHAT WAGES BOARDS MAY BE EXPECTED TO DO.

The first effect of Wages Boards will be one of steadying and regulating rather than

of greatly raising wages. They will set a limit to undercutting. They will check that continual lowering of the price of the article by $\frac{1}{2}$ d. or $\frac{1}{4}$ d., which bears so hardly on the conscientious employer who desires to keep up a decent level of wages. At present all those trades which can be described as "sweated" have no wage standard at all. Miss Macarthur, in her evidence before the Home Work Committee, showed that on one side of a street in Whitechapel there is a standard firm where girls can earn 14s. and 16s. a week in tea-packing, while close by there is another tea-packing firm where the average wage is not more than 7s. 6d. for a practically similar output. She referred also to a recent trade dispute with an East End blacking firm, which arose because the girls employed in filling bottles at piecework rates, whose wages worked out at 10s. and 12s. a week, suddenly found from a notice put up in the factory that the piecework rates were about to be reduced by one-half, bringing down their earnings to 5s. and 6s. per week. The dispute was settled by the girls going back on the old terms at the

end of two days. Thus, a reduction of practically 50 per cent. was made and cancelled within little over 48 hours. It would be difficult to find an instance better illustrating what Miss Macarthur rightly called "the present chaos in the payment of wages" in the trades under consideration.

To judge from the effect of Wages Boards where they have been already set up, we may certainly expect a gradual rise in the rate of wages under a Wages Board system. But this would not be obtained by any wholesale change in the rate for a trade or district, but rather by the levelling up of the rates paid by the worst employers to the standard of those paid by the better class of firms. The worst kind of sweating being thus done away with, and the most miserable workers raised a degree in the industrial scale, there would ensue an increase of purchasing power among the workers which would stimulate production and add at once to the volume of employment and to the wages fund. The pocket-money worker, who at the present time frequently obtains employment by under-selling the

competitor who depends upon her work for her living, would be discouraged and gradually, it is to be hoped, eliminated under a system which makes such under-selling illegal. The genuine workers, being placed under the direct protection of the law in respect of their wages, would learn to claim the protection of that law as they have done in the case of other laws directed to secure their personal safety, to preserve their health and to limit their hours of labour. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose that the spirit of combination in which the home workers have shown themselves hitherto entirely lacking, and which has but a feeble existence among low-paid factory workers, would, under improved and improving conditions, inspire these workers to personal organised effort on their own behalf. A greater sense of stability would prevail in the industries affected, to the advantage of employers and employed alike. The workers would be free from the burden of uncertainty in earning which is one of the grimmest features of their lot. The masters would no longer have to contend with the competition of rivals,

either without conscience, or with so little capital that they cannot afford to listen to its dictates. This kind of security need not check enterprise; it should rather tend to promote it. It is not when a factory owner can barely keep his head above water that he is likely to try fresh experiments or to develop new lines of business or manufacture; it is not when the operative's wage is irregular, precarious and unstable, when he is without guarantee that good and careful work will meet with any better reward than that which is superficial and perfunctory, that he puts his best brains and skill to the matter in hand.

COLONIAL SYSTEMS OF REGULATING WAGES.

Fortunately we are not left to infer the probable effects of a system of Wages Boards from what we know of human nature, nor to gather them for the beneficial working of voluntary Conciliation Boards. Colonial legislation offers us an example and an object lesson of the exact kind which we require. In

all our Australasian colonies wages are now, in one way or another, fixed and regulated under the sanction of the State. This sanction works, in the Dominion of New Zealand and in New South Wales, by means of Arbitration Acts; in Victoria, which has been taken as a model by the smaller Australian colonies, and by Sir Charles Dilke and all subsequent promoters of Wages Boards Bills in Great Britain, the more elastic system of nominated special Boards representing employers and employed in equal proportion has been adopted. This system has naturally commended itself for initiation in our own country, rather than that preferred in New Zealand, as being, from the very fact that it is framed on less rigid lines, more easily susceptible of adaptation to the needs of an old and complicated civilisation. In this choice, the fact that the principle of compulsory arbitration has never found favour with any class engaged in industry in this country, and that it has again and again been deliberately rejected by the representatives of organised labour; had also to be taken into account.

VICTORIAN WAGES BOARDS.

The first Wages Boards, dealing with seven industries, were established in Victoria, 1896. The Boards now number 49, and have been constituted for the following trades:—

Aerated Water	Jam, Pickle, and Sauce
Agricultural Implements	Making
Artificial Manures	Jewellery
Bedstead and Fender	Leather Goods
Making	Malting
Boot Making	Milliners
Brass Workers	Millet Broom Making
Baking	Oven and Stove Making
Breweries	Paper Bags
Brick Making	Pastrycooks
Brush and Broom Making	Plate Glass
Butchers	Pottery
Candle Makers	Printers
Cardboard Boxes	Saddlery
Cigar Making	Shirt Making
Clothing Trade	Stone Cutting
Confectionery	Soap and Soda
Coopers	Starch
Cycle Trade	Tanning
Dress and Mantle Making	Tinsmiths
Engraving	Underclothing
Farriers	Waterproof Clothing
Fellmongers	Wicker Work
Flour	Wood Workers
Furniture	Woollen Trade
Ironmoulders	

The number of these Boards may be added to by a resolution of both Houses of Parliament, and such additions have been made at intervals since the Boards were first established eleven years ago. A Board consists of not less than four or more than ten members, of whom half come from the ranks of the employers, and half from those of the employed, with an outside chairman. Formerly the members of the Board were elected. At present they are nominated by the Minister of Labour, to whom appeal may be made against the Board's decisions. Appointments to any special Board are for three years only, but members may be re-appointed at the expiration of that term. The function of the Board is "to determine the lowest prices or rates which may be paid to any person or persons, or class of persons, employed either inside or outside a factory or workroom."* Their business is to ascertain the average "prices or rates of payment paid by reputable employers to employees of average capacity," and they may

* In Victoria, four persons other than Chinese, and one Chinese, constitute a factory. Places where out-work is done, and outside workers, are all registered and subject to inspection.

not fix a minimum higher than these average prices or rates. But they are at liberty, should they consider the average wage an inadequate minimum, to make a report to the Minister, who has then to bring the question before the Court constituted as a Final Court of Appeal for such cases. Provision is made for the fixing of special prices or rates in the case of "aged, infirm or slow workers."

The award of a Board is called a Determination. A Determination remains in force until the issue of a fresh Determination, unless amended or revoked by the Court of Industrial Appeal. Every employer is bound to affix in his factory or workshop a copy of the Determination applying to the industry there carried on. Penalties for the breach of Determinations are attached to the Act. The penalty for "employing or attempting to employ, authorising or permitting to be employed" any person at less than the minimum established by the Determination, is, in the case of a first conviction, to be not more than £10; of a second, not less than £5 nor more than £25, while, for any subsequent offence the fines range

from £50 to £100. In addition, the balance of wages of which the worker has been defrauded is recoverable by him, on his suing for payment within twelve months, even though he has signed an agreement to accept a wage lower than the minimum. On a third conviction the registration of the convicted employer's place of business is cancelled.

Mention has been made of appeal. Not only may the majority of representatives either of employers or employed on any Board appeal against a Determination of a majority of the whole Board, but such right of appeal is also enjoyed by 25 per cent. of the total workers in a trade or by employers employing 25 per cent. of such workers. The judgment of the Court is final. It consists of a Judge of the Supreme Court, who is appointed by the Governor in Council, and two Assessors appointed by the Judge himself. It is the duty of the Court, before deciding to uphold or quash a Determination, to take into consideration whether it is likely to injure the trade to which it applies, by checking its progress or diminishing the

amount of employment in the trade. It is free to amend as well as to adopt or reject any Determination.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BOARDS.

In Victoria, as with ourselves, the Wages Boards movement originated in a public desire to put down sweating. Eleven years ago, sweating, especially in certain trades—among which we may name particularly baking, bootmaking, and all branches of the clothing trade—was rife in Melbourne. It is claimed by supporters of the Wages Boards system that, by its means, the evil has been practically stamped out, nor has any serious testimony been offered in contradiction of this assertion. While accepting in its full force the warning of Mr. Ernest Aves in his recent report on *The Wages Boards and Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Acts of Australia and New Zealand*, to remember that the effects of Wages Boards in Victoria have hitherto been felt only during a period of prosperity, it is impossible to accept the (possibly) implied argument that sweating *might* have disappeared automatically by reason of the growing wealth of the colony,

seeing that sweating does not appreciably diminish during periods of prosperity in Germany, in the United States of America, and in our own country, but is found to flourish in good and bad times alike. In Victoria, as at home, one of the strongest arguments in favour of special legislation was to be found in the condition of the outworker, and the depressing effect of outwork in industry in general. There, as here, the most striking examples of this effect were to be found in the clothing trades. In 1890 the Chief Inspector of Factories in Victoria showed that, in tailoring, outside prices ruled 30 to 40 per cent. below those paid in the factory, while in bootmaking they stood at 15 per cent. below, in addition to certain expenses. The Report of the Factories Act Inquiry Board of 1893 produced still more striking examples of disparity. To quote two or three: Coats made inside for 2s. 9d. to 3s. 6d. brought the home worker 1s. 3d. only. The inside figures for boys' coats were found to be 1s. 9d., the outside, 6d.; men's trousers, inside, 1s. 3d.; outside, 6d. Five years later, in the

underclothing trade, the Chief Inspector adduced the following figures to show the difference between prices paid to outworkers and fair rates for similar goods in factories :

	Price paid to Outworker. Per doz.	...	Price paid in a Factory for Low- class Goods. Per doz.
Night Dresses	2 6	...	6 9
Knickers	1 6	...	2 11
Chemises	1 6	...	2 9
Pillow Cases (with frill)	0 9	...	2 5
Pillow Cases (plain).....	0 4½	...	1 6

Apart from the hardship imposed upon employees working at home by such discrepancies in the rates, these were tending to affect the general course of trade ; with the increase of home work came the closing down of factories, and the better class of factory employers began to suffer from the pressure of competition founded on the underpayment of the worker. It will be seen that the Victorian problem, in all its main features, resembles our own ; indeed, in Victoria in 1896 we may see reflected on a diminished scale the present position of Great Britain with respect to her sweated industries.

WORK OF THE BOARDS.

Perhaps the most striking testimony to this work lies in the fact that legislation, frankly experimental in 1896, and repeatedly re-enacted for a fixed period only, was in 1905, after nine years' experience of its working, when the six original Special Boards had already risen in number to 37, carried beyond the experimental stage, no time limit being imposed by the consolidating act of that year. The growing favourable opinion of employers must also be taken into account. Naturally there was among these, in the first instance, considerable opposition to the new departure; nor should we expect to find, even at the present time, employers' opinion unanimous in its favour. There is only one negative point on which, in this connection, Mr. Aves pronounces employers to be absolutely unanimous: namely, the conclusion that special Boards are preferable to Arbitration Courts. But as early as the close of 1898 the Victorian Chamber of Manufacturers was generally agreed that benefits had resulted from the Act, and advocated its extension to several trades then untouched by it.

The conversion of Sir Frederick Surgood, one of the leading business men in Australasia, from opposition to the principle of Special Boards in 1906 to convinced advocacy of the extension of that principle to additional trades in 1900, when the clause empowering either House to bring new trades under the Act was before the Upper House of the Legislature, is a powerful argument on the side of those who contend that the establishment of a minimum wages for sweated industries would operate in favour of the employer as well as of the employed. The fact recorded by Mr. Aves, that the system has not proved prejudicial to the small as compared with the large employer is also a point to be noted. The same investigator, who, in his report, as in his evidence before the Home Work Committee, adopts an attitude of strict—we had almost said, of superhuman—impartiality, notes, further, that of the replies sent in response to a form of questions circulated by him, a majority for all trades “reflect opinion that as regards

output the Boards have had no appreciable effect," while an employer holding a representative position gives it as his general opinion that the system has "made for better goods." In writing on "The Test of Experience and Opinion," Mr Aves states that—"there is also a very widespread belief that the Boards have been instrumental, some say in abolishing, and others in modifying the evils of sweating, and, from complex motives, there is in Victoria a great preponderance of opinion among all classes in favour of the retention of the Boards." Further on he remarks—"In general it may safely be affirmed that so wide an acquiescence in the operations of the Special Boards is a demonstration that, under the circumstances of the moment, the Determinations are on the whole not considered to militate seriously against either regularity or certainty of employment." Mr. Aves is of opinion that "in industries in which the problem of underpayment was most urgent" the present favourable view taken of the Special Boards will endure, since "the lesson appears to be being learned that low

wages are not necessarily the cheapest." He also notes the good moral effect of the Special Board Determination in "fixing a standard price which other trades tend to follow," and also in creating "a very active sentiment hostile to sweating." Mr. Aves' witness on the relation between increased wages and increased cost of production and price of article, by many persons assumed to be inseparable, is instructive and important. "Some of the fallacies, mainly traceable to an assumed fixity in the determining conditions, personal and economic, which underlie this assumption in its application to certain industries are recalled by Victorian experience, and the extent to which the combined view is held that Special Boards have increased wages and have not increased cost is of practical significance, since it is found to prevail in several of those trades in which the evil of under-payment is apt to be most prevalent. The Special Boards themselves may or may not have sent wages up to the extent often assumed or even at all. The fact remains that in several trades in which wages have tended upwards there is much

testimony to the fact that neither cost nor price have been similarly affected, and in some instances it has been admitted that they have tended in the opposite direction." The Melbourne manager of one of the largest importing and manufacturing firms in Australia is quoted as saying: "they (the Special Boards) have made no difference in business and no traceable difference in prices." Another employer in the clothing trade gave an experience of several years during which, while wages had increased 20 %, costs had diminished 35 %. In the replies furnished to the questions set forth in Form B of Mr. Aves' Report, 28 persons state that they are unable to mention a single case in which Special Boards have led to an increase in price, while nine only answer doubtfully or in the opposite sense. The advantage of a greater equality of conditions on both sides, secured by a minimum rate, appears to be strongly felt in Victoria, and the fact that the honest employer is, under a Special Board, placed on an equality with the sweater is forcibly insisted on. "This point is mentioned repeatedly." So cautious and careful a collector of evidence

as Mr. Aves feels constrained to add that “from this point of view, which is reflected in connection with trades of many descriptions—from engineering down to white work—the Special Boards may almost be regarded as having won general approval.”

BENEFITS TO THE WORKERS.

The greater equality of conditions produced under Special Boards is even more important to the worker than his employer. This, together with the “steadyding” of wages, both as regards uniformity of payment for the same kind of work and fixation for a period, are frequently mentioned by Victorian workers as among the chief advantages which Special Boards have brought them. Men and women “know the rate,” and have learned to claim it. Though the actual rise in wages has in many instances been small, the upward tendency has been constant, while the downward has been absolutely checked. The variations in increase as between trades is very great, and shows incidentally that the natural play of economic forces is not arrested by the action of the Boards. Actual increases in the average weekly wages, above the average

before the Determinations came into force in each case, range from 1d. (ovenmakers) to 11s. 4d. (coopers). The Rev. John Hoatson, late Vice-President of the Victorian Anti-Sweating League, speaking at the Guildhall Conference on a Minimum Wage, in October, 1906, gave figures showing that the average of increments in the 37 trades having Special Boards at that date, was over 4s. 4d. ; the average of increments in eight of those trades, in which female labour is chiefly or largely employed, being a fraction under 2s. Such increments, though they may appear small to persons whose weekly income is not reckoned in pence, represent a very real advance in comfort to the workers concerned. The fact that these increased wages are ensured to them under legal sanction for a certain period may be said to double their actual economic value.

Mr. Hoatson's figures were taken from the Chief Inspector's Report of 1904. Coming to the report of 1906, we find the upward tendency previously noted steadily maintained. A few examples, selected chiefly from those industries in which under-payment was

prevalent before the first Determinations came into force in 1896, may be both interesting and instructive:—

	Average Wage before Determination.			...	Average Wage under Board 1906.			...	General average increase for each employé in trade.		
	£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.
Bootmakers	1	3	2	...	1	6	11	...	0	3	9
Bakers.....	1	12	6	...	2	2	8	...	0	10	2
Brushmakers ...	1	3	1	...	1	8	9	...	0	5	8
Confectioners ...	0	16	11	...	0	19	9	...	0	2	10
Dressmakers*...	0	11	11	...	0	12	8	...	0	0	9
Pottery	1	8	1	...	1	11	3	...	0	3	2
Underclothing...	0	11	3	...	0	12	11	...	0	1	8

There is a general concensus of opinion, that the position of the home worker has been greatly improved through the Determinations, and that “unless handicapped by some personal disability or by claims of alternative duties,” their earnings correspond to those of others in the trades concerned. There seems, as the Special Commissioner observes, no reason to believe that less than the legal rates are paid to home workers under the Wages Boards system.

* The Dressmaking Board was not formed till 1904. The figures given, therefore, represent two years' working only. The small advance in *average wages* is due to the presence in the trade of a very large proportion of juvenile workers—4,578 to 2,383 adults. The average wage of the adult dressmaker has risen under the Board from 18s. 8d. to 21s. 4d., an average of 2s. 8d. for each adult worker.

A few individual cases cited by Mr. Hoatson from official records exhibit the effect of the Determinations upon the worst forms of sweating:—

(a) A trouser finisher (1893), working ten to twelve hours per day, earned 5s. in a week; minimum now, 20s. Average of piece workers, 21s. 5d.

(b) A shirt finisher (1890), "good worker," maximum, 2s. 6d. per day. Others (1893-4), per week, "working constantly," 7s. to 8s.; minimum now, 16s. Average in-worker, 20s. 5d.; out piece-worker, 15s.

(c) Shirtmakers of one class, before Determination, 2s. 4d. per dozen; afterwards (1898), 3s. 3d. Finishers, before Determination, 4½d. per dozen; afterwards, 8d.

(d) Mole trousers: pay increased from 5d. to 9½d. (Board's log) per pair; stock vests, 6s. per dozen, increased to 11s.; stock coats, 1s. 3d. each, increased to 2s. 3d.

DISPARITY OF EARNINGS IN TRADES NOT HAVING SPECIAL BOARDS.

Mr. Villiers, speaking in the House of Commons on the Second Reading of the

Sweated Industries Bill, pointed out that, taking all the Victorian industries together, the average wage per week was higher by 5s. 9½d. in trades having Boards than in trades having none. The conclusion to be drawn from these general figures is confirmed when we come to examine the cases in detail, and to compare like with like. For instance, in the dressmaking trade, the average wage in 1903, before the appointment of a Board, was 11s. 11d. per week, as compared with 12s. 7d. in the comparatively inferior under-clothing trade; 14s. 10d. in the shirt industry, and 22s. 2d. in the clothing, which had each a Special Board. The milliners, who remained outside the Act until 1906, had then an average wage of 9s. 10d. per week, a weekly wage lower by 4s. 9d. than that being earned by the shirtmakers. Dissatisfaction with the low prices ruling in the trade created a demand for a Special Board, which has been duly appointed and has made a Determination. Statistics of the result of this Determination are not yet published, but will be shortly available.

ADMINISTRATION.

The enforcement of the Determinations was at first attended in Victoria by a certain amount of difficulty. No determined or organised attempt at evasion, however, seems to have taken place, and administration of the Act has gradually become easier until, in his latest Report (1906), the Chief Inspector has little to complain of on this score. The reports sent in by his staff are almost unanimous on the point of due observance of the law. Thus, one Inspector writes—"The Determination is well complied with, and I have not received a single complaint since it came into force." Another: "The Determination is well observed and legal rates are being paid." A third: "No difficulty is experienced in applying the wages conditions." A fourth: "I have no trouble in carrying out this Determination." With respect to nearly every trade and in every district the story is the same. Only one serious breach of a Determination is recorded. It affected a large number of confectioner's employees, but was apparently due to an oversight, and was at once rectified

by the payment of arrears of wages amounting to over £100. Only in the case of the furniture trade, which is largely in the hands of the Chinese, have the determinations been found unworkable. Readiness to enforce the Act seems to be found in equal measure with justices of the peace and police magistrates.

VICTORIAN WAGES BOARDS AND FLOURISHING TRADE.

It is worth note that, along with the multiplication of Special Boards and general compliance with the Determinations has gone most satisfactory growth in the prosperity of the colony, and an increasing volume of trade. In the Report of the Chief Inspector, previously quoted, reference is again and again made by the inspectors to "the satisfactory state" of their respective districts. Such expressions as "Trade is brisk," "Trade was good during the year," "A very good year was experienced." "This trade is having its share of the general prosperity," frequently recur. To argue from this pleasing state of things that Wages Boards conduce to commercial prosperity would be to attempt to

prove too much. But we may be permitted to infer that they do not act as a check upon the course of such prosperity.

SOME OBJECTIONS DISCUSSED.

Many of the objections ordinarily advanced against Wages Boards, or, indeed, against any proposal to regulate wages, are little more than a re-statement of the arguments employed to defeat the passing of the earlier Factory Acts. They rely for support on the principle, more or less disguised, of *laissez faire*. It would not be profitable, and is hardly necessary, to discuss them here. But there are some others, more strictly addressed to the practical proposal now before the country, to which it seems desirable to give such brief consideration as space permits.

WAGES BOARDS AND UNEMPLOYMENT.

First, there is the fear frequently expressed, that Wages Boards would increase unemployment, by pushing out of the labour market the less competent worker, who is unfit to earn even the minimum rate, and by giving the *coup de grâce* to weak and tottering industries. We have seen that the proposed Wages Boards legislation of Great Britain, like the

existing Wages Boards legislation of Victoria, makes special provision for the case of the old and slow worker. But granted that there are individuals of this class who will be unable, under the new conditions, to find employment, even at special rates, there still remains the question whether it is not wiser, on purely economic grounds, to face boldly the necessity of maintaining for a while a certain number of persons physically or mentally incapable of fully maintaining themselves, rather than of condemning to "half employment," to borrow an excellent phrase from Miss Clementina Black, an infinitely greater number of people who, given a fair chance, are perfectly able to earn their own living. By choosing the lesser evil, we limit the period of our responsibility, which at present is being indefinitely extended to future generations, as the children of the sweated workers who are our contemporaries grow up and follow in the footsteps of their parents.

But sound economists who have carefully studied the subject do not hold that under a Wages Boards system we should have a "net" reduction of employment. Since the

first result of the establishment of such a system will be an increased wages bill, involving the transference of a fresh portion of wealth to the pockets of certain classes of workers, there must at once follow an increased purchasing power on the part of those workers—Lord Hugh Cecil lately reminded us that unemployment is fundamentally due to lack of purchasing power—and a raising of the general standard of consumption in the community. Workers will not only buy more, but better articles, and this movement must inevitably tend both to greater volume and greater regularity of employment.

With regard to those industries which are so deficient in capital or in organisation that they can only maintain a precarious foothold in the competitive area by under-payment of the workers they employ, it is clear that the community would be better off for their disappearance. Such trade as they have hitherto managed to divert from more stable and better conducted businesses would flow, on their disappearance, into healthier channels: the amount of employment which they represent would not be destroyed

with them, but would gather itself about fresh centres of industry.

QUESTION OF INCREASED COST AND PRICE.

Would the cost of production, and consequently the price of the article to the consumer, be greatly raised by the establishment of minimum rates? We have seen, that, as far as Victoria is concerned, the balance of testimony is in favour of a negative reply to this question. There are, moreover, other and wider grounds than a limited Colonial experiment on which to base such a reply. Daily experience shows that, in a considerable number of industries, there is a margin which could safely be drawn upon for the levelling-up purposes of a minimum rate. Cases are not infrequently found, for instance, in trades employing women's labour at a sweated wage, where vigorous representation on behalf of the workers, acting upon a wholesome fear of publicity on the part of the employing firm, has produced a considerable increase, amounting on occasion to something like a doubling of the rate of pay. It must be remembered, further, that

the cash margin is not the only one at the disposal of employers of labour. Human nature is lazy, and most people need some stimulus to enterprise. The economy which is now too often effected by taking a penny or a halfpenny off the wages of the employés, would, were that method made impracticable by a Wages Board Determination, be otherwise contrived: by the introduction of improved machinery, by better organisation (as has been done in the greater factory industries since they were denied the easy solution of their problems by overtime), by checking the reckless waste which, where a vast quantity of very cheap articles are made by indifferent workers labouring desperately against time, swallows up, according to trustworthy expert testimony, a considerable amount of profit every year, and by abolition of the ruinous practice of selling under cost price in the case of certain of the articles manufactured, in order to make a market for the rest. Further, all industrial experience teaches, as the leaders of industry are themselves increasingly forward to acknowledge, that with the

improvement of the workman comes improvement also in his work, even where this is highly specialised. Witness the increase rather than the decrease of output which followed the shortening of hours in the cotton industry. As was recently pointed out by Mr. Alfred Mond, M.P., if an industry stood to rise or fall by the cheapness of the labour employed, Lancashire, instead of being at the head of the cotton trade would have already yielded her place to Germany and Japan; it is by virtue of the superiority of her products that she retains it. Nor is cost of production necessarily lowest where the wages are low and the hours long. Mr. Mond gave, in this connection, a striking example to the contrary in his own industry. It is in Great Britain that the employees of that industry earn the highest wages and work the shortest hours; it is in Russia that they work longest and earn least. Yet the cost of production per ton is lower in Great Britain, and higher in Russia, than in any of the other European countries.

MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM.

Apprehension is often expressed lest the minimum wage, once established in an

industry, should become the maximum in that industry; and assertions that this actually occurs have not been wanting. Again, there is much testimony from Victoria to support the contrary view. Opening, almost at haphazard, the latest Report of the Victorian Chief Inspector of Factories, we find, under the heading of the Aerated Water Trade Board—"The Determination is well complied with, *the wages of many of the men and boys being above the minimum.*" Again, in a report on the Brick Trade Board—"Some of the employees receive above the wage as stated in the Determination." Once more, an Inspector under the Jam Trade Board writes: "In some factories, wages in excess of Determination rates are paid." A similar state of things is found to obtain at home in industries where minimum rates have been fixed by means of collective bargaining or arbitration under the Board of Trade. Here, too, the more skilled, industrious and capable worker is able to earn a higher wage than that calculated on the average capacity of the average man or woman.

WAGES BOARDS AND PROTECTION.

There are those who believe that Wages Boards can only be successful in conjunction with a Protectionist system. This belief Mr. Aves, who is not personally in favour of giving a legal sanction to the Determinations of Wages Boards in this country, states to be wide-spread in Australia. He adds, justly, that "this point is of very different relevancy in different industries," and dwells, in connection with it, on "the large body of opinion in the clothing trade which agrees that cost and price have not increased." We have, however, less reason to concern ourselves on this point, since leading men of the Tariff Reform party in this country, among them Lord Milner and Mr. Alfred Lyttelton, have made it clear that their adhesion to the Wages Boards experiment does not depend upon its connection with a policy of Tariff Reform, and it is admitted that the reform of the tariff and colonial preference would not of themselves provide a solution of the sweating problem. This, in so far as it is affected by international competition, will better be dealt with by

international agreements on the model of those entered into at Berne in 1906. Recent legislation has shown that the Governments of Europe are fully alive to the pressing nature of a question which is quite as serious on the Continent as with ourselves, and the inquiries instituted by certain of these Governments, with a view to ascertaining the extent to which the products of sweated home labour enter into international competition marks the first step towards common action in the matter.

THE QUESTION OF ADMINISTRATION.

This will naturally be more difficult of solution in England than in Victoria. But, with goodwill on the part of the nation, the difficult should not prove insoluble. The staff of our factory department is probably unequalled, and we have only to increase its numbers sufficiently to render it capable of grappling with the fresh task to which we invite it. The national goodwill alluded to must, however, display itself in readiness to expend some money in the enforcement of the law; an Act to establish Wages Boards, unaccompanied by provision for sufficient and efficient inspection would be foredoomed to failure.

We should expect that after brief trial of the Act, the workers themselves would speedily become active assistants in the business of its administration, by insisting on enforcement of its provisions against any attempt at evasion on the part of their employers.

“FREEDOM OF CONTRACT.”

The last objection to be considered is what may be called the moral objection. Many of those who have not been brought into personal contact with sweated workers, and with the conditions under which sweated industry is carried on, deprecate the setting up of any machinery which appears to limit the opportunity for free bargaining between employer and employed. They are afraid that such machinery may destroy the spirit of enterprise, and that the assumption of responsibility in the matter of wages by the State will tend to weaken the personal relation between masters and men. To such objectors the best reply is an invitation to study the situation at close quarters and at first hand. They cannot then fail to perceive that the outstanding features in the present position of the sweated worker, especially when that

worker is a woman, are absolute inability to bargain freely and total lack of independence. Such a worker must take the work offered, at any terms that may be proposed, under penalty of an immediate drop into the abyss of destitution. The spirit of enterprise is rarely found to animate those who are working excessive hours for a bare pittance; it is only when people have been raised from the lowest deeps of poverty that they develop, as a rule, a divine discontent with their lot. The depressing quality of thoroughly bad conditions produces rather a kind of fatalistic acquiescence in a social system which the sufferer feels herself powerless to alter. As to the "personal relationship," it is useless to devise schemes for preserving it; for good or evil, it is practically a thing of the past. More and more, industry and commerce, like battleships, tend towards the "all big" type. Everywhere, the business that was formerly the affair of an individual or a family is now the result of the activities of an association or a limited company acting through its salaried servants. We may deplore the change, but

we are powerless to resist it. Its conquest of the territory of industry, already widespread, promises at no distant period of time to be complete. In face of its advances it is absurd to talk of leaving to the more enlightened conscience or the heightened moral sense of the employer of the future, the task of reforming the abuses of the sweating system and dealing justly with his employees. In a great number of cases the employer is practically powerless, even now, so to deal. In time to come, as he becomes increasingly the instrument of great impersonal forces, financial and social, behind him, all capacity for such individual dealing will be taken from him. It is only by accepting under the sanction of the State the regulation of wages in those industries where it has hitherto gone unregulated, with such results in the shape of economic chaos and human degradation as we have been considering, that the best employer can save himself from being ultimately dragged down to the level of the worst. For him, as for his workers, an Act establishing Wages Boards would be a genuine measure of protection.

POSTSCRIPT.

WHILE the foregoing pages were passing through the press, the Report of the Home Work Committee was placed in the hands of the public. It is not too much to say that this Report is a document of great national importance. The unanimous recognition by a Parliamentary Committee, on which employers as a class were strongly represented, of the fact that "no proposals which fail to increase the income of 'Home Workers' can have any appreciable effect in ameliorating their condition," and the equally unanimous recommendation that, in the case of home workers, an attempt should be made to regulate wages by means of a system of Wages Boards, together show what a profound impression was produced upon the minds of those who heard it by the testimony of the witnesses from whom I have quoted, and how overwhelming was the conclusion from this testimony, that the sole remedy for the evils of which it established the existence, is to be found in a legal minimum rate.

These pronouncements of the Committee, accompanied by a resolution to report the Sweated Industries Bill unamended to the House, clear the way for future Government action on the lines of that Bill.

In view of the complete admission in the Report of the premises put forward by the advocates of Wages Boards, the decision of the majority of the Committee

to recommend the setting up of such Boards to regulate the earnings of home workers only, leaving untouched "the very low rates of remuneration . . . by no means confined to them, but . . . not infrequently the lot of factory workers also in the trades in which home work is prevalent"—to quote its own words—appears illogical as well as open to practical objection. It needs no profound official experience to anticipate the numerous administrative difficulties that must inevitably arise should an attempt be made to legislate separately for different groups of workers in the same industry. Other drawbacks to this method of procedure readily suggest themselves, such as the futility of legislation directed to the prevention of sweating in the home, while permitting it to rule unchecked in the factory; and the serious risk that, under a system of partial regulation, home work would—contrary to the expressed desire of the Committee—be killed out, not owing to a salutary change in habits or an improvement in the economic situation, but because the employer would prefer to produce entirely in factories where he was free to pay his employees at rates below the local minimum. Further, the exclusion of factory workers necessitates the establishment of an artificial time-rate, with all its attendant difficulties.

Logic, practical considerations, and administrative convenience then alike urge the conclusion that the Wages Boards experiment, if it is to be a fair, must be a full one. It is true that the case of the home workers was that specifically submitted to the Committee for

investigation; but this is no reason for ignoring the showing of the evidence that it is a case which cannot be isolated for remedial purposes from that of the sweated worker in general. The Committee, varying slightly the schedule of the Sweated Industries Bill, recommends as first subjects for the operation of Wages Boards, "tailoring, the making of shirts, underclothing and baby-linen, and the finishing processes of machine-made lace." Perhaps it may be found desirable to begin with one of these trades only. There need be no complaint on this score and no misgivings, so long as provision is made that the minimum rate shall apply to both branches of the selected trade—to in as well as to out-work. But to discriminate between the two would be a fatal error. The experiment in such a case, being incomplete, must necessarily be also inconclusive.

APPENDIX.

SWEATED INDUSTRIES BILL.

MEMORANDUM.

THE object of this Bill is to provide for the establishment of Wages Boards with power to fix the minimum rate of wages to be paid to workers in particular trades. The Bill will apply in the first instance only to the trades specified in the Schedule. Power is given to the Home Secretary to say to what other trades the Bill is to be extended, and no doubt at first the extension will be made only to what are known as the "sweated industries," that is, industries in which outworkers are largely employed, and in which the rate of remuneration is low. A Wages Board will have power to fix a minimum rate for any single kind of work, and will have the widest discretion as to fixing time rates or piece-work rates, and as to varying the minimum according to the locality, the kind of work, and the persons employed. The Bill provides that a Wages Board shall be composed of representatives of employers and representatives of employed in equal numbers, with a chairman chosen by the members or nominated by the Home Secretary. It is proposed to entrust the enforcement of payment of the minimum rate to factory inspectors.

A

BILL

TO

Improve the Conditions of Employment, including the establishment of a Legal Minimum Wage of Persons employed in certain Industries.

BE it enacted by the King's most excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and

Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

APPOINTMENT AND POWERS OF WAGES BOARD.

1.—(1) Wages boards shall be established throughout the United Kingdom, for the trades specified in the schedule hereto, and shall act for such areas as the Secretary of State may determine.

(2) The Secretary of State may, if he thinks fit, on application being made and an inquiry being held as hereinafter provided, direct that a wages board shall be established for any other trade in any district.

(3) A wages board shall have power to make regulations fixing the minimum rate of wages to be paid to persons employed in their district in or about their trade.

APPLICATIONS AND INQUIRIES.

2.—(1) Application for the establishment of a wages board for any trade in any district may be made to the Secretary of State by any trade union or trades council which represents persons employed in the trade in the district, or by any six persons who are either employers of labour or employed in the trade in the district.

(2) On application being made as provided in this section, the Secretary of State shall cause an inquiry to be held into the desirability of appointing a wages board in accordance with the application, and the provisions of sections forty-five and forty-six of the Coal Mines Regulation Act, 1887, shall apply to the inquiry with the necessary modifications.

COMPOSITION AND MODE OF APPOINTMENT OF WAGES BOARDS.

3.—(1) A wages board shall consist of a chairman and such number of other members, not less than six and not more than ten, as the Secretary of State in each case may determine.

(2) One half of the number of members other than the chairman shall be representatives of employers and one half representatives of persons employed in the trade in the district.

(3) The representatives of employers and of persons employed shall be chosen by the employers and the persons employed respectively in such manner as the Secretary of State may on each occasion determine, or in default of such choice being made shall be nominated by the Secretary of State.

(4) The chairman shall be chosen by the other members within fourteen days from their appointment, or in default shall be nominated by the Secretary of State.

TERM OF OFFICE, RESIGNATION, AND CASUAL VACANCIES.

4.—(1) The term of office of a wages board shall be five years, or such shorter time not being less than two years as the Secretary of State may in any case at any time determine, and at the end of such term of office all the members of the board shall go out of office.

(2) The chairman or any other member of a wages board may resign on giving to the board one month's previous notice in writing of his intention to do so.

(3) A casual vacancy on a wages board among the representatives of employers, or among the representatives of persons employed, shall be filled by the remaining representatives of employers or of persons employed, as the case may be, within fourteen days after the vacancy occurs, or in default the Secretary of State shall nominate a new representative of employers or of persons employed.

MANNER OF CALCULATING MINIMUM RATE OF WAGES.

5.—(1) The minimum rate of wages fixed by a wages board may be calculated either by time or by piece-work, or so as to give an employer the option of paying either by time or by piece-work, except that in case of work given out from a factory or workshop or other place to be done elsewhere it shall be calculated by piece-work only.

(2) The minimum rate of wages may be fixed for any kind or kinds of work in a trade, and may be different for different kinds of work, and for different parts of the district, as the board think fit.

(3) The minimum rate of wages may be fixed for any class or classes of persons employed in a trade, and may be different for different classes of persons employed, as the board think fit.

ESTABLISHMENT, PUBLICATION, AND EVIDENCE OF MINIMUM RATES OF WAGES.

6.—(1) Regulations made by a wages board fixing a minimum rate or rates of wages for a trade in their district shall state the date from which the minimum rate or rates of wages shall be established, and the minimum rate or rates of wages shall be

established for that trade in that district as from that date, and shall continue established until they are cancelled by the wages board or their successors.

(2) Such regulations shall be published as soon as they are made, in such manner as the Secretary of State may direct.

(3) Section eighty-six of the Factory and Workshop Act, 1901, so far as it relates to the publication of regulations under that Act in factories and workshops, shall apply to the publication of regulations under this Act as if they were regulations under that Act.

(4) A document purporting to be a copy of regulations under this Act, and to be signed by an inspector appointed under the Factory and Workshop Act, 1901, shall be evidence (but not to the exclusion of other proof) of the regulations and of the minimum rate or rates of wages fixed by them, and of the fact of the due establishment of the minimum rate or rates under this Act.

PROCEEDINGS OF WAGES BOARDS.

7.—(1) Any determination of a wages board under this Act may be made by a majority of the members present.

(2) The Secretary of State when determining the number of members of a wages board shall determine what number of members, not being more than one half of the total number of members, shall form a quorum, but the formation of a quorum shall not depend on the presence of any number or proportion of representatives either of employers or of persons employed.

OFFENCES, PENALTIES, AND RECOVERY OF DEFICIENCY.

8.—(1) Where a minimum rate of wages is established in any district for any class of persons employed in any kind of work in any trade, any person carrying on business in the district who pays or offers wages, or on whose behalf wages are paid or offered, at a lower rate than the minimum, to any person of that class employed by him in that kind of work in that trade, shall be guilty of an offence against this Act.

(2) If wages are paid or offered by time where the minimum rate established is calculated by piece-work, or if wages are paid or offered by piece-work where the minimum rate established is calculated by time, the wages shall be deemed to be paid or offered at a lower rate than the minimum.

(3) Any person guilty of an offence against this Act shall be liable on summary conviction in case of a first conviction to a fine of not less than *one pound* or more than *five pounds* for each offence, and in case of a second or subsequent conviction within two years from the last conviction to a fine of not less than *two pounds* and not more than *twenty pounds* for each offence.

(4) When a person has been paid wages at a rate less than the minimum rate fixed under this Act, and applying to him, he shall be entitled to recover the deficiency.

ENFORCEMENT OF ACT BY FACTORY INSPECTORS.

9. It shall be the duty of inspectors appointed under the Factory and Workshop Act, 1901, to enforce the provisions of this Act within their districts, and for this purpose they shall have the same powers and authorities as they have for the purpose of enforcing the provisions of that Act, *and all expenses incurred by them under this Act shall be deemed to be expenses incurred by them under that Act.*

INTERPRETATION.

10. In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires—

The expression "trade" means any manufacture, process, trade, or business;

The expression "district" means any local area, whether county, borough, part of a county, or part of a borough, within the discretion of the Secretary of State.

COMMENCEMENT OF ACT.

11. This Act shall come into operation on the *first day of January one thousand nine hundred and nine.*

SHORT TITLE.

12. This Act may be cited as the Sweated Industries Act, 1908.

SCHEDULE.

TRADES TO WHICH THE ACT APPLIES IN THE FIRST INSTANCE.

Tailoring;

Dressmaking;

The making, altering, trimming, finishing, and repairing of shirts.

PUBLICATIONS ON SWEATING.

The following publications may be obtained from the National Anti-Sweating League, and will be found of much value in the study of the Sweating Question:—

POST FREE.

“Sweating as it is”	1d.
“Sweated Industries”: Speech delivered by Lord Milner	1d.
“Report of Queen’s Hall Demonstration”...	1½d.
“Sweating and Home Work” (Fabian Tract)	1½d.
“Bibliography of Sweating and the Mini- mum Wage”	3½d.
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“Sweating” (Social Service Series). Ed. Cadbury and George Shann	1s. 2d.
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“Sweated Industries.” By Miss Clementina Black	3s. 10d.
“Women’s Work and Wages”: A Phase of Life in an Industrial City. By E. Cadbury, M. C. Matheson, and Geo. Shann	6s. 4d.

Other Books on Social and Industrial Subjects will be forwarded on request.

National Anti-Sweating League

TO SECURE A MINIMUM WAGE.

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Hon. Treasurer Earl BEAUCHAMP.

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* *Members of the General Purposes Committee.*

Secretary : Mr. JAS. J. MALLON.

The National Anti-Sweating League was formed at the close of the Queen's Hall Sweated Industries Exhibition to work to secure the payment of minimum rates for workers in the sweated trades. Its activity is carried on under three heads—

- 1. PROPAGANDA.**—The League organises Exhibitions of Sweated Goods and Workers. It holds demonstrations, distributes literature, lends lantern slides and collections of sweated exhibits, and supplies lecturers to interested societies.
- 2. INVESTIGATION.**—The League carries out inquiries into existing conditions. An investigation of certain London trades is now completed, and its results will be shortly issued in book form.
- 3. LEGISLATION.**—The League has promoted the Sweated Industries Bill (see Appendix), which passed its Second Reading on February 29th, 1908. The proposal of the Bill to create Wages Boards has since been endorsed by the unanimous findings of a Select Committee of the House of Commons.

For the development of the work of the League money is urgently required. Sympathisers are asked to send subscriptions or donations to the Secretary, at 133, Salisbury Square, E.C.

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