

of trade in question, the Shirtmaking Trade Board (Great Britain) have given notice of certain minimum rates of wages which they propose to fix; but it is not known whether, after considering objections to the rates, they will adhere to the proposals, and at the present time no such rates are in operation.

I am, Madam, your obedient servant,
S. G. BARNES.

This was an utter denial of Runciman's own promise, and of the Fair Contracts Clause, which was supposed to protect all persons employed on Government work against unfair rates. I wrote to Runciman in a rage of indignation:

"In substance I take the letter to mean that you cannot, will not, and do not care to do anything to prevent the sweating of working women, who are executing orders for the Government, through the medium of contractors and sub-contractors. This being the case, to reply to us as you did, when we saw you, was dishonest in the extreme."

I sent the correspondence to the Press. *The Manchester Guardian* published it in full. To my astonishment, and still greater indignation, an official of the National Anti-Sweating League leapt into the lists to defend the Government and the sweating contractors. Replying to me through an interviewer sent to him by the *Manchester Guardian*, he declared: "As a matter of fact the prices being paid for Government work are in general good . . . any good worker used to the particular kind of work" should be able, he said, to earn £1 a week or more. He insisted that girls in well-equipped power-driven factories were earning 40s. a week and upwards. That was not my experience.

About that time a crowd of workers at Kent's big brush factory in Victoria Park Road, Bow, had come to me with their brushes and bristles, and their pay envelopes stamped with the broad arrow—to show they were doing Government work. Their fingers were cut and bleeding, bent and permanently deformed by the wire, their eyes red and sore from excessive labour. They were paid 1s. 2d. a dozen brushes, each having 163 holes to be filled. The quickest worker in the factory had managed to earn 11s. 1d., of which 3s. had been made by taking her work home at night, after toiling from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the factory. Other workers had made only from 6s. to 8s., part of it also at home. Out-workers were paid a penny a dozen less than the factory hands, machine workers only 9d. a dozen, the quickest of them making but 12s. a week, the average 7s. or 8s.

I cited this case, in replying to the Anti-Sweating League, and quoted also the rates complained of by the Stepney Public Health Committee, and the Liverpool Anti-Sweating League.

The Anti-Sweating League official still, through the *Manchester Guardian*, defended the contractors, denying the charges from Stepney, and ignoring those from Liverpool, though the League was originally an offshoot of his own organisation. He observed sententiously that if the

facts in regard to Kent's brushmakers were as serious as alleged, they should at once be communicated to the Director of Contracts at the War Office. This I had done, as a matter of routine, as soon as the case came to my notice. Moreover, the facts had already been communicated to Mr. J. J. Mallon, the Secretary of the National Anti-Sweating League, a member of the I.L.P. and an intimate friend of Mary Macarthur. Arthur Henderson, M.P., had sent the facts to the National Anti-Sweating League when I had appealed to him for aid. War time patriotism provided the Government with many strange defenders!

As usual, it was Keir Hardie who secured increased pay for Kent's brushmakers. The method I learnt from him then, and often employed thereafter, was simple, though tedious. It was to goad the Government into compelling the worst wage-payers among its contractors to conform to the rates of other firms of the same sort by appealing to the "Fair Contracts Clause." Yet alas, alas, even the best of the contractors paid grievously little to women workers.

Roberts, the chairman of the Liverpool Anti-Sweating League, refused to be ignored. He retorted that women who earned £1 a week on Army work usually accomplished it by the aid of overtime. He showed that employers paying women 2½d. for soldiers' kit bags were selling them to the Government for 5s. He gave a list of authenticated cases of sweating, including that of a woman, after four years' experience on power machines, working from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and paid 6s. a week.

The Public Health officers of Bethnal Green, undismayed by the doubt the Anti-Sweating official had cast on their statements, continued publishing gross instances of sweating. The making of soldiers' flannel belts paid for at 8d. a dozen, cotton provided by worker, time to make, eight hours; khaki sleeve waistcoats at 3s. per dozen; a contractor paying 3½d. a dozen for soldiers' needle-cases to a woman farming them out at 2d. a dozen. The Workers' War Emergency Committee, to which Mallon, Mary Macarthur and their friends all owed allegiance, also rushed to the charge, reporting cases of women making soldiers' shirts in the West End at 2s. 6d. per dozen, women earning 1d. per hour on soldiers' pillows, and 1s. for a long day's work on soldiers' beds. The Paddington Local Distress Committee declared 1½d. to 1¾d. the district price for "finishing" soldiers' trousers; capable workers could do only one pair per hour.

Women complained to me daily. A mother supporting six children brought me her pay envelope. In four hours she could make seven soldiers' bags and received 5½d. The material was so thick and harsh that she sometimes broke many needles. A Bow contractor was paying 1d. a dozen less for brushes than Kent's before the increase; another paid 1s. 8d. for 400 eyelet holes on soldiers' kit bags; a woman earned 5s. 7d. at the work in 42 hours.

I complained to the War Office of the rates for soldiers' shirts paid by a Stepney firm; the employer transferred the shirts to outworkers, and kept the indoor workers to blouse-making. The rates for the shirts