



Inequalities in War-Work Pay

I see Wiltshire farmers are now protesting against the outrageous inequalities of a system that condemns experienced yeomen of the soil, skilled in the arts of husbandry, to a minimum wage far below that which a “raw” youth, with little if any qualifications, can command in other branches of war work.

Because the vicious circle is now hopelessly out of control, the farmers want higher prices for their product in order that they may pay higher wages to their men. I have no doubt at all that agricultural workers, who are “tied” by law to the land, could quickly adapt themselves to factory conditions and soon be earning a wage very much in advance of the 50s. minimum they are demanding.

Through Mr. W. W. Wakefield, Member for Swindon, the attention of Mr. Ernest Brown, Minister of Labour, has been again drawn to this problem and to the considerable feeling it is creating in Wiltshire and other parts of the country.

He has been told by the way of illustration, of three youths, all 17 years of age, who were bought before the magistrate charged with doing damage to a hayrick. Two of them explained that they were working and that their job involved the pushing of a wheel-barrow, and in the case of the third, carrying a hod. Their wages were £5 a week – that is £2 in excess of the minimum which our key men of our basic and most vital industry have been refused by the county agricultural wages committees throughout the country.

Another lad, over 16 years of age, who had fallen foul of the police and was recently discharged from an industrial school, told the Bench he was receiving a wage of £3 17s. 6d. a week at an aerodrome. One might compare this wage with the earnings of aircraftsmen fighting pilot-officers; but is it worthwhile?

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