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HUNGER AND WORK

By the Same Author

**LABOUR CONDITIONS IN WESTERN
EUROPE**

NEW FASHIONS IN WAGE THEORY

HUNGER AND WORK

STATISTICAL STUDIES

By

JÜRGEN KUCZYNSKI

With a Foreword by

R. COPPOCK

LONDON

LAWRENCE & WISHART

X: 946.3.N4

G8

13118

FIRST PUBLISHED . . . 1888

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1938

PUBLISHED BY LAWRENCE AND WISHART LTD., 2 PARTON STREET,
RED LION SQUARE, W.C.1

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES

FOREWORD

MR. KUCZYNSKI has performed a valuable task in preparing this statistical study under the title of "Hunger and Work." While the pangs of hunger, arising from the need for work, admit of a statistical approach, it is true that the unfortunate victims of our mad hatter's economic system enjoy no alleviation of their distress in the knowledge that this is supported by figures. Indeed, the author himself makes this clear, for he says that "this book is not written to tell the millions of underfed people that . . . they are underfed, for they know it themselves much better than anybody else." But these figures, if carefully studied, should convince the complacent, and should disturb even the conscience of a certain bishop who, securely tucked away from mundane temptations through the medium of about £60 per week, is reported to have attributed the under-nourishment of workers who get less than sixty shillings a week to their own dietetic mistakes. A really comforting thought, but so wide of the mark! Let no one, with information in front of him in such a convenient and easy form as this book provides, doubt the misery which abounds far too much even in these plenteous days of civilisation.

The author's case proceeds from the initial examination of what is familiarly known as the "Rowntree" standard, and he shows that this standard, inadequate as it is, cannot be reached by hundreds of thousands of workers in full employment—let alone by the unemployed. Mr. Kuczynski carefully examines the basic industries of the country—agriculture; textile; metal, engineering, and shipbuilding; mining; building; transport; food, drink and tobacco; brick, pottery, glass, etc.; public utility services; and clothing. What is this "Rowntree" standard? It is the standard

which Mr. B. Seebohm Rowntree, after laboured enquiry, found essential as the absolutely *minimum* one applicable to a family of two parents and three children ; and he established that, in the late autumn of 1936, the total necessary weekly expenditure of such a group was 53*s.*, an amount which at the end of 1937 had, by virtue of the increase in the cost of living, risen to 56*s.* 6*d.*

This, then, is the standard by which wages have been judged by Mr. Kuczynski, and his conclusions are as distressing as the conditions of those about whom he writes—namely, that a substantial part of the fully employed working-class population lack all but the most elementary necessities of life. How could it be otherwise when families get less than 56*s.* 6*d.* a week ?

In regard to the building industry, the inescapable conclusion is that about half of the total number of building trade workers—that is, the labourers—are living *under* the “ Rowntree ” minimum.

The last part of the book is usefully devoted to the proven thesis that the economic position of the workers in general has considerably deteriorated since the crisis year of 1931 ; that, relatively to the “ upper strata ” of society, whose riches have grown disproportionately, the position of the working class has become steadily and consistently worse.

One of the reasons given by the author for his study is the desire to rouse all concerned to fight for the general welfare of the people and for social justice. This is an object which should particularly appeal to Trade Unions and Trade Unionists. Trade Unions exist to improve and uphold the standard of life of their members. If they need fortifying with facts which no amount of argument can upset, this little book will provide the necessary evidence. Not only should Trade Unionists, to whom I heartily recommend this work, regard it as an invaluable aid, but the workers generally, many of whom have regrettably not seen the urgent necessity of joining with their fellow workers in organisation, should welcome the evidence collected on their behalf. Trade Unions, in so far as they succeed in bettering the economic lot of their

members, raise the whole standard of life for the general body of the working class.

The fight for the general welfare of the people and for social justice is not an isolated movement in working-class activity. The struggle is persistent, constant, and grim. The workers can afford to neglect no weapon in the economic battle they are compelled to wage. Their enemies are not really influenced by any consideration of sentiment, although they might pretend to be. This array of facts and figures presented so clearly involves the uncomfortable alternatives, on the part of those who are satisfied with existing conditions, of deliberately blinding themselves to the rottenness of things in the rather forlorn hope of justifying their sympathetic pretensions, or of openly disclosing themselves as class enemies.

The fight for social justice! How respectable it sounds! What professions of virtuous indignation does it not conjure up! But here is no calm dissertation on the wrongs of mankind; no abstract philosophising on evil. Here are hard facts showing that food is short; that housing is bad; that civilised man lacks that which makes him civilised in the best sense of this term—cultural amenities. The despairing cry of man is indeed for social justice. But the concrete expression of the struggle lies in the incessant Trade Union activity for higher wages, shorter hours, better conditions.

I hope every Trade Union will get this book.

R. COPPOCK.

*(General Secretary, The National Federation
of Building Trades Operatives)*

P R E F A C E

On January 24, 1938, the *Daily Herald* reported from Ipswich under the heading "Bishop blames the Poor":

"Working people are chiefly to blame for under-nourishment, believes the Bishop of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich. During a conference on malnutrition here, yesterday, a woman jumped to her feet waving the letter in which Dr. Whittingham made this charge:

"I think you are quite mistaken in your suggestion that there are 13½ million underfed people in this country," wrote the Bishop.

"On the contrary, the number who are underfed is really extremely small, and for the most part it is their own fault, because their money is unwisely spent."

This book is not written to convince people like the Bishop of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich—who, by the way, according to the *Daily Herald*, receives about £60 per week.

This book is not written to tell the millions of underfed people that even according to official statistics they are underfed, for they know it themselves much better than anybody else.

This book does not even deal with all the underfed people in Great Britain. It deals exclusively with the workers. And for them chiefly it is written: to tell them in which specific industries workers are worst off, to give them a bird's-eye view of the whole situation, to put into their hands computations based on Government material which will help them in their fight for higher wages, to assist Trade Unionists in negotiations for better living conditions.

But the book is not written exclusively for the workers, nor exclusively for their representatives in the Trade Unions. It is written also to rouse all those who are ready to help the Labour Movement because their general welfare is intimately connected with that of the workers: small tradesmen, small craftsmen, teachers, physicians, etc. Finally, the book is

written for all those who, irrespective of their special interests, are ready to fight for the general welfare of the people and for social justice.

Chapter III of this book deals with conditions in individual industries, and since few if any know more about conditions in these industries than Trade Union officials, I have sent the individual sections of Chapter III to Trade Unions, who represent the workers in the industries dealt with, for comments and suggestions for improvement.

Most of the Trade Unions to which these sections of Chapter III were sent have found time to look them over, and almost all have approved of them. That does not mean that they take any responsibility for anything contained in these sections—but it does mean that they generally agree with what I say, and can see, to say the least, no fault in stating the case of the workers as I have done it.

The Trade Unions and Trade Union officials who approved of the respective sections sent to them are :

Mr. Arthur Shaw, C.B.E., J.P., General Secretary, National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers.

Mr. Andrew Naesmith, Secretary, Amalgamated Weavers Association.

Mr. L. E. Cobbett, Statistical Department, The Iron and Steel Trades Confederation.

Mr. Mark Hodgson, J.P., General Secretary, Boilermakers and Iron and Steel Shipbuilders Society.

Mr. Arthur Hollins, Secretary, National Society of Pottery Workers.

Mr. H. B. Pointing, National Union of Agricultural Workers.

Mr. W. Banfield, J.P., M.P., General Secretary, Operative Bakers, Confectioners and Allied Workers.

Mr. Bryn Roberts, General Secretary, National Union of Public Employees.

Mr. Geo. Chester, General Secretary, National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives.

Mr. J. Nunn, General and Financial Secretary, Amalgamated Society of Leather Workers.

Mr. F. Wolstencroft, General Secretary, Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers.

Mr. R. Coppock, General Secretary, The National Federation of Building Trades Operatives.

The above and the following Trade Unions and Trade Union officials were good enough to supply me with wage statistical material and (or) to give me the benefit of their advice on certain points dealt with in the sections concerning the workers whom they represent :

Mr. John Price, Secretary, Political and Research Department, Transport and General Workers Union.

Research Department of the Amalgamated Engineering Union.

Mr. J. Marchbank, General Secretary, The National Union of Railwaymen.

Mr. W. Stott, General Secretary, Railway Clerks Association of Great Britain and Ireland.

To all of them I wish to express my sincere thanks for their help.

The reader of this book must bear in mind that it deals exclusively with workers, and that the final estimate as to the number of people living below the Rowntree minimum standard, below the Rowntree poverty line, refers only to the working class. Besides the workers there are quite a number of other people who are living below the poverty line, but whose living conditions are outside the scope of this enquiry.

JÜRGEN KUCZYNSKI.

April, 1938.

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