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Editorial Comment

The Living Wage.

New Zealand has just escaped from the verge of industrial upheaval. It is fortunate that conciliatory counsels prevailed, or the spark which was thrown by the horse drivers would easily have sprung into a blaze, owing to the resentment felt by many manual workers over the high cost of living. In fixing a minimum of £2 12s. weekly for drivers, the Arbitration Court evidently considered that this was a fair minimum giving fair reward for the slowest worker who could "keep his job," but the press and public were almost unanimous in declaring that this was not a wage on which a man could keep a family in health and comfort during these times of high food prices, especially in Wellington, where high rent adds to the difficulty of making ends meet on a small wage. The dispute threw into vivid relief the question of the minimum wage. Is it made the maximum by employers? The facts show that the bulk of Wellington carters get more than the minimum at present. Doubtless, when conditions of trade are bad, and employment scarce, there would be a tendency to regard the minimum as a standard, but the award protects the employee from possible evil results of an over-supply of labour by fixing a limit below which the employer cannot legally go. That legal limit, the minimum of the Arbitration Court award, is certainly very low in the case of the drivers, and would have a tendency if adopted in practice, to drive efficient labour out of that calling. This business is in an important transition stage: motor traction is gradually but surely replacing the horse, and it would be very unfortunate if the lowest class of labour was transferred from the care of horse-driven, to mechanically-driven vehicles. The bad driver can waste and destroy more than his minimum wage every day if he is trusted with a motor. The New Zealand postal department has learned that lesson. Youths were very generally employed at low wages to drive small mail-collecting motors and cycles, but they are being displaced by men, the reason given by the Secretary of the Department being that