

Sir: Mr. Alvin S. Johnson accuses Professor Taussig of beclouding the minimum wage. Mr. Johnson has done something worse: he has beclouded economic theory.

Mr. Johnson first attempts to disprove the statement that a minimum wage would lead to a rise of prices. More strictly, he attempts to disprove that "this rise in prices is really inevitable." All he really proves is that it is not inevitable in all cases---a fact which the minimum wage opponent freely admits. All that the minimum wage opponent insists is that there will be a tendency for prices to rise, and that this tendency is bound to realize itself in an actual rise in a large number of cases---perhaps the majority. Mr. Johnson has little faith in his own argument, and certainly does not believe it clinches his case, for later on he "grants" it in order to disprove something else. This is the assumption "that an advance in women's wages to a living level would mean an actual increase in costs." In arguing this point, Mr. Johnson assumes a typical economic employer as unblushingly as ever a classical economist assumed an "economic man." All that Mr. Johnson proves here is about the same thing that he proves in the case of an advance in prices---that it will not take place in all cases. True: the minimum wage opponent merely argues that ~~it~~ will take place in a sufficient number of cases to cause widespread misery. But Mr. Johnson, feeling the same way toward this argument as toward the first one, finally agrees to "grant the unemployment."

And now appears the weirdest of Mr. Johnson's arguments. "Immigrants and the children of immigrants make up the mass of those most cruelly sweated. \* \* \* A nation-wide living wage might at first

produce unemployment, but in the long run, chiefly in consequence of the check it would give to immigration, the slack would be taken up by the natural development of industry."

And in the meantime---what? Will the immigrants thrown out of work, who cannot afford to pay their passage back, simply be allowed to die off here? Is America so fortunate as to possess a large section of the population whose lives and happiness are worth less than the happiness of the rest of us? Or possibly worth nothing at all---for are we not to deprive them entirely of happiness, and perhaps of the possibility of living, merely in order to add to the margin of the happiness of others? The oddest part of this argument is its inconsistency. For it is precisely in order to alleviate the misery of these immigrants, "the most cruelly sweated," that the minimum wage is supposed to be needed. Mr. Johnson possibly expects these immigrants, after the institution of a minimum wage here, to withdraw quietly to their own country, though he himself admits---in fact, contends---that "labor is not mobile." And there are possibilities that Mr. Johnson overlooks. It is not unlikely that even some of the "most cruelly sweated" immigrants are better off in this country than in their own land, or otherwise they would not come here; or if they came here and were deceived, the deception would soon become known, and immigration would cease or fall off enormously. There is the further possibility, or rather probability, of which Mr. Johnson makes no mention; that the minimum wage, in raising the price of certain articles here, would allow the importation of the same articles from European countries not subject to the minimum wage law and manufacturing under lower costs, and would mean the entire abolition of those industries here, together with the employment they give.

Mr Johnson argues like a man who has never been in doubt and is merely trying to prove something: he is an attorney. One prefers the arguments of Professor Taussig, a man who is in doubt and is honestly trying to find out something: he is a judge.

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