

gives no information) may be divided into two groups, the first of which, with a population of about thirteen millions, includes all districts where conditions of some kind as to wages are imposed; and the second, with a population of about eight millions, includes all districts where no such conditions exist.

According to an article on the Scotch Return in the *Labour Gazette* for April, 1899, seventeen local authorities, with an aggregate population of a little over one and a-half millions, include in their contracts conditions as to wages, and twenty-four local authorities, with a population of nearly two millions, specify conditions as to employment (including conditions as to wages).

Two hundred and eleven local authorities, with a population of rather over two millions, make no conditions as to employment in their contracts.

The above particulars show the very large extent to which the local authorities of Great Britain have already adopted the system of dictating to contractors the way in which they are to carry out their contracts. A case has occurred recently at West Ham in which this system of interference has been carried to an unprecedented extent. A firm of engineers, Messrs. Ferranti, whose works are in the Oldham district, and who pay the rates of wages recognized by the trade unions in that district, tendered for some work required by the West Ham Town Council. This body, after accepting the tender, insisted that the wages paid should be those prevailing in the Manchester district, with which neither they nor the contractors have any concern whatever. As stated above, some authorities require their contractors to pay the wages in force within the authorities' own districts, and some the wages in force where the work is executed; but it never appears to have occurred to any council before to enforce rates in a district with which neither party is connected.

This system of interfering with contractors not only imposes most unfair and onerous conditions upon them, but is distinctly prejudicial to the ratepayers, as contractors will naturally insist upon getting a higher price to compensate them for the vexatious conditions to which they have to submit. Many of the councils, indeed, who have adopted this policy would not be at all sorry to drive away the contractors altogether, as they would then have an excuse for executing their work by direct labour. This, of course, is the worst system of all for the ratepayers, as has been fully proved by the extravagance and corruption in the Works Department of the London County Council. It is satisfactory to note that in some places the authorities are at last beginning to rebel against the assumption of their workmen that they are to receive more pay and do less work merely because they are employed by a public body. According to an article in a recent number of the *Journal of Gas Lighting*, it seems likely that the policy of direct employment will shortly be abandoned at Leicester. It is to be hoped that this case will not stand alone, and that other local authorities will realise that their only true policy is to give the work to those contractors who will do it on the most advantageous terms, and to leave them entirely free as to the arrangements which they and their workmen may find it mutually convenient to make.

A leading member of the Employers' Parliamentary Council, writing to the Secretary on May 11th, says:—
"The present system is heading straight for socialism. I certainly think that employers as citizens should oppose the principle of municipal trading by all means in their power. They have, moreover, a more direct interest in the matter: if this thing goes on, the trade unions will become masters of the municipalities, and then it will be the employers' turn to be dominated by the trade unions. The employers must not let this thing drift, or they will suffer for it. The trade unions, having found their match in their late contests with Lord Penrhyn, Colonel Dyer, and Sir William Lewis, recognize the fact that success cannot be had on those lines, and they have, as you must know, and as I learn from their reports, etc., resolved to follow municipal lines—that is, to capture the municipalities. I hope, therefore, we (the Employers' Council) will do something effective before the Committee. Mr. Joseph Cowen said the other day in reference to municipal trading that 'it begins in Tooley Street and ends in Tammany.'"

May, 1899.