

A WORD FOR THE UNDERDOG.

To the Editor.

Sir,—Who else could be an Underdog but a back farmer? The luckier dog is sitting tight on the top, and if occasionally any sound is uttered from underneath, it seems more like pitiful squeaking than human voice. His sorrows? His rights? You know, one is allowed to believe that business in this sinful world is done in the name of right, but certainly it is done by diplomacy. And as farmer's diplomacy very seldom extends beyond his cow yard... well, that's the end of it.

There is Hewett's road, about one mile in length, branching from the main Trowutta road. This one mile serves four farmers who live on their farms. And so it may be said that it is "thickly populated"; anyhow, for Tasmania it is. All these farms were selected in the very first days of opening the country for selection, something about 20 years back. They were paying already road rates when Smithton was not as big as good farmer's pigsty. Since that time Smithton grew and fattened at the expense of these and similar back farmers till it now enjoys the reputation of one of the most prosperous towns in the North-West. But four farmers could not progress as much as to have their road metalled, and when last summer their three culverts and a bridge collapsed and made communication with the outside world both difficult and dangerous, they report the matter and continued to report on every conceivable occasion to whom it concerns; yet they never gained anything but bare promises, which don't seem to improve condition of their road.

Yes, Smithton now is all right, but for our four farmers 20 years made very slight difference; in those far gone-by days farmer was in a danger of getting drowned in the mud on his road, and now, with advanced civilisation, he will first break his neck in the culvert pit, and then get drowned.

I wouldn't venture to say that this example is an exception. How many back farmers are in similar difficulties? God knows. But when a big district, as a whole, is still in worse condition, then it would be almost a crime to confide the secret to God alone.

I mean Sunny Hills district. Sunny Hills is rich, early settled, and well developed country. Part of it originally was open, without any trees, and at the present time there are many farms where all the ground could be already ploughed. There is no inducement for cultivation on account of isolated position of Sunny Hills, and yet every farmer has some produce for the market, though not every one is able to deliver it to railway station. There is this season about 800 tons of potatoes and swedes for the market, but they never will deliver to the railway more than 250 tons, probably not as much, and the balance will be wasted away at home. It costs them at the present

the balance will be wasted away at home. It costs them at the present time on average 20 shillings per ton to cart it to the station; for some it runs as high as 25 shillings per ton. What makes it impossible to deliver produce to the railway is not the cost of carting, though high it is, but the shortage of horse teams. There is abundance of bullock teams, but bullocks cannot cart regularly 8-10 miles along the metal in hilly country.

And all these producers live from one to three miles to Edith Creek railway station, with splendid gradient of the road, slightly down the hill. All the trouble is that 1½ miles of this road is not metalled. When produce season comes, rain season comes too. People cart their produce to the last possibility, till the slush on the road is three-

four feet deep, with holes that seem to be without bottom. Were this road metalled, the cost of carting would be only from five to six shillings per ton, and it is easy to predict that cultivation would increase at least twofold from the very start.

It is the consideration of the regular loss to the railway, through isolation of Sunny Hills, that made the Commissioner for Railways last year take an active part in demanding from the Government a sufficient vote to metal this road. It granted a little over £1000, and together with previous unexpended vote, almost enough to metal it. But last year Government was in financial difficulties. Though no difficulties could excuse Government for delay in this urgent work, yet people were not insistent. This year tenders are being called for many last year votes. Sunny Hills people were waiting from day to day to see their road mentioned, but in vain. The other day they signed and sent a petition to the council. Will their road be metalled? One begins to doubt. And the fact is that some of the people connected with municipal matters advance the most amazing reason against metalling this road. They say that heavy timber carting will always spoil the metal. Well, then what do they collect timber toll for? They say that timber toll is wanted to repair the damages done to the road by carting. Then why don't they do it? Rumor is that only for the last summer timber toll collected from this road exceeds £150. And how much is expended on this road? Nothing. It is not the first year that this road gives revenue for the municipality, and it will be giving it for the next fifty years. It is the only track of road in the whole world that gives direct net profit, and fathers of municipality are prepared to collect this unlawful revenue indefinitely. If road was metalled they would have to expend at least a part of it on repair, but as long as it is not metalled they have an excuse not to expend anything at all and turn the money for some other purpose. Is it not the real reason against metalling the road?

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When certain things happen between individuals we call them robbery, theft, burglary, and so on, as the case may be. But when the whole district is robbed regularly, then human ingenuity gives it some innocent looking and respectable name, like "timber toll."

There must be a law passed either to expend timber toll money on the road from which it is collected, or not to collect it at all.

After all, it is only nature's law that there are and there always will be both Topdogs and Underdogs. But, Mr. Topdog, don't squeeze so hard!

-Yours,

etc.,

S. SUTCHKOFF.

Edith Creek.