

2.—Retail Prices of Commodities.

Statistics of retail prices in Canada have been published by the Department of Labour since 1910, the retail prices of the principal staple foods, of coal, wood and coal oil and also the prevailing rates for the rent of six-roomed houses being published in the Labour Gazette each month for the cities having a population of 10,000 or more, some sixty in number. Figures for December, 1900, and December, 1905, were also secured in a special investigation in 1914.

The Dominion Bureau of Statistics, in addition to collecting and compiling wholesale prices, also collects the retail prices of over 80 commodities in some sixty cities in Canada. These are averaged by the Bureau with certain prices received through correspondents of the Labour Department, and are then handed over to the latter for insertion in the "Labour Gazette." The Labour Department also compiles a family budget from this material, together with data on fuel, lighting and rents collected by its own correspondents. The Bureau has made use of this material to obtain the tables which follow; the index numbers which they contain are the result of a special compilation made by the Bureau.

Table 31 shows the prices of the items which were included in the family budget and the index numbers of groups from 1916 to 1924. The index numbers are weighted with the quantities used by the Department of Labour in computing their monthly family budget. Table 33 gives these group indexes by provinces.

An examination of the tables reveals the course of the budget, consisting of food, fuel, lighting and rents, over the period shown. The Dominion index for 1915 indicated a slight fall from 1914. From that year until 1920 the upward movement proceeded with only an occasional check. Early in 1919 there was a slight fall, but it was quickly succeeded by a steady rise to July, 1920, which was the peak month in retail prices (May, 1920, being the peak month in wholesale prices). The index then stood at 190.8, as compared with 100 in 1913. It fell to 152.8 in July, 1921, then rose slightly for some months, but afterwards began to decline again, reaching 152.4 in December, 1921. After dropping to 148.9 in 1922, the index rose slightly to 150.2 in 1923, but declined to 147.6 in 1924.

In addition to the statistics of retail prices of food and fuel and of rates of rent, the Department, in 1920 and subsequent years, has secured figures of retail prices of staple lines of clothing, including footwear, from retail dealers throughout Canada, for each year back to 1913. From these quotations the percentages of changes in the cost of clothing have been calculated. Information was also secured as to the prices of household supplies, furniture, furnishings, etc., and an estimate has been made of the percentage changes in the cost of miscellaneous items, the information thus gathered showing that such changes are approximately equal to the average changes in other items. The percentage changes in food, fuel and rent have been calculated from the weekly budgets published in the Labour Gazette from month to month, and Table 32 summarizes the yearly and quarterly changes by groups, the figures for each group and for all items being weighted according to the family budget method.

From July, 1920, to June, 1921, food and clothing prices fell steeply, and fuel slightly, while rent advanced. Food recovered in August and September, 1921, but by December was back to June levels. The decline continued until June, 1922, since when the changes have been mostly seasonal, being high in March and low in July. Fuel declined slowly from the middle of 1921 to July, 1922, then it advanced until February, 1923. Since then the decline has been slight.