

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL PRICES.

Prices of Commodities in Canada.—In 1910 the Labour Department published a Special Report by R. H. Coats, B.A., F.S.S., on Wholesale Prices in Canada during the 20 years 1890 to 1909, and this has since been followed by similar annual reports on the prices of 1910 to 1914. In these reports, prices are measured by index numbers based upon the average prices of from 230 to 272 selected commodities in the period of 1890 to 1899. The plan followed by the Department has involved the collection from the best available sources of the wholesale prices of a selected list of commodities during 25 years, the prices as a general rule being those of the first market day in each month at the principal markets of the articles quoted. The commodities selected have been divided into 13 general groups. Representing the average price of commodities in the base-period by 100, the tables and diagrams published in the reports show the course of prices during the 25 years 1890-1914, for all the commodities combined, for each of the 13 groups, and for separate commodities.

Table 4 shows the index numbers of all commodities by groups from 1890 to 1914, and Table 5 the index numbers by groups from month to month in 1914. The diagrams on page 530 show the course of prices by index numbers in graphic form for the 25 years and the monthly fluctuation during the year 1914.

Wholesale Prices.—From the tables and diagrams it will be seen that prices during 1914 continued to rise, though, as in 1913, less steeply than from 1909 to 1912. From January to July, 1914, however, there was a tendency downwards which was sharply reversed on the outbreak of the war. In August and September the abnormal situation following the opening of hostilities resulted in steep advances in the prices of many commodities. The more important of these are indicated in the table of index numbers by groups of commodities. As trade conditions were readjusted prices declined, but were still on a very high level.

It will be noticed that, although food prices included in the list of commodities were much lower in 1913 than in 1912 and the latter part of 1911, a high point had been reached by the beginning of 1914, and a still higher level was reached in September, after a gradual decline during the first seven months of the year.

Retail Prices.—Returns showing the retail prices of some thirty staple articles of consumption, including foods, fuel and coal oil and the average cost of rent to working men, have been obtained by the Department of Labour for each month since January 1910 in all localities in Canada having a population of 10,000 or over. From these returns calculations of typical weekly expenditures, in the terms of the average prices in these cities for each year, have been made, as shown in Table 6.

The increase in the cost of food since 1910 appears as 5.3 p.c.; for rent, 14.8 p.c.; for fuel and lighting, 7.7 p.c.; and for the total expenditure, 8.6 p.c. It will be noted that the average rent declined during 1914, there being also slight declines in some foods and in fuel.