

Retail Prices.—Since January 1910, the “Labour Gazette” has published for each month the retail prices of some thirty foods, and of coal, wood, coal oil, and the prevailing rates for the rent of a six-roomed house in some 60 localities in Canada having a population of 10,000 or over, as at the middle of the month. Similar returns were secured for December, 1900, and December, 1905, for the Board of Inquiry into the Cost of Living in Canada, 1914 and 1915. From these figures calculations of typical weekly expenditures have been made in terms of the average prices for each year and each month. Tables 19 and 20 show the results of this family budget for 1920 by months and for previous periods for the Dominion and for each province.

For some time it has been felt that statistics of retail prices in Canada should be placed upon a broader basis and that quotations should be secured from a larger number of dealers for a larger number of commodities so that an index number of retail prices might eventually be calculated. In 1918 the Cost of Living Commissioner was instructed to undertake the collection of quotations for a wide range of foods and groceries—a function taken over in 1919 by the Board of Commerce and in 1920 by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, which also secures from representative dealers quotations for fuel commodities. For January, 1921, and subsequent months the prices reported by butchers and grocers to the Bureau of Statistics and through the “Labour Gazette” correspondents to the Department of Labour, have been averaged, and in future the retail prices of food published in the “Labour Gazette” will be calculated on this basis.

Retail prices, according to the general view of economists, inasmuch as they are more influenced by custom and tradition—by economic friction—than wholesale prices, move less rapidly than the latter whether upwards or downwards. It will be noted from the tables printed that whereas wholesale prices reached their maximum in May, 1920, retail prices of the commodities mentioned attained their maximum only in July, 1920, and have since that time receded more slowly than wholesale prices. Between May and December, 1920, wholesale prices fell from 356·6 to 290·5 or 18·5 p.c., while from July to December, 1920, retail prices of the commodities considered in the family budget declined only from \$26·918 to \$25·666, or 4·65 p.c.