

with those of Invercargill and Dunedin in respect of the South. Shopkeepers generally testified that, though their level of prices may be different, yet they move in the same direction as those of the neighbouring larger centres and in a similar proportion. *The data generally cannot be regarded as altogether satisfactory* either in respect to prices, comprehensiveness of range, definition of the articles included, the relative quantities consumed from time to time in the period, or the constitution of the average family, including its proportion of wage-earning members. These are matters of such vital importance, and their correct ascertainment is a question of the application of methods so numerous and complicated, that they should properly form the subject of a special though subordinate inquiry.

### 3. CHANGES REPORTED: PROVISIONAL RESULTS.

The price statistics collected were classified according to districts and submitted to the Government Statistician, who kindly calculated index numbers registering the changes they showed.

The prices of all foodstuffs, common household requisites, including light, and rent quoted in evidence showed increases between 1914 and the third quarter of 1918 of 74 per cent. for the Southern District (Kaitangata and Nightcaps), 68 per cent. for the West Coast, and 62 per cent. for the Waikato fields. These figures, however, are mere averages of prices and take no account whatever of the relative importance in consumption of the different commodities—for example, an increase of from 1s. 2½d. to 4s. 4d. per pound in the price of cream of tartar having the same weight as a rise of from 10s. 7½d. to 13s. in the price of sugar per 56 lb.

When these prices are weighted in accordance with the scale of relative weights used by the Government Statistician, and based on his view of the relative proportions of the commodities in question actually consumed in workers' households over the Dominion as a whole, the results obtained are very different. The former percentages (quoted in the last paragraph) are indexes of changes in *prices*; the percentages that follow are indexes of the most probable changes in the actual *amounts expended* on food and household requisites, including light, on the assumption (i) that the relative proportions are the same for the mining population as for the total population, and (ii) that these relative proportions have remained unchanged during the war period. Without a special inquiry, such as that hinted at above, there can be no substantial ground for either accepting or denying these assumptions. The percentage increases of actual expenditure thus determined are for the Southern Districts 50 per cent., for the West Coast 54 per cent., and for the Waikato 35 per cent., an average of 46 per cent. for the three. This may be compared with the Government Statistician's estimate of the increase of the average expenditure on groceries and foods other than meat for the whole Dominion between July, 1914, and September, 1918—viz., 43 per cent. approximately. Comparison may also be made with the movements in the Government Statistician's averages for the towns contiguous to the mine-fields. The increases for Hamilton, Greymouth, Dunedin, and Invercargill were approximately 39, 40, 45, and 46 per cent. respectively, or an average of nearly 43 cent., practically the same as for the Dominion as a whole.

The Secretary of the Miners' Federation presented certain price statistics in evidence. These were also weighted in a similar manner and the index of change calculated. This showed a considerably higher rate of change for the Northern District than the evidence of shopkeepers warranted, a slightly lower rate for the West Coast, and a slightly higher rate for the South, the average increase for the three being 56 per cent. If the section relating to prices in the North is eliminated from this particular evidence the general result (for West and South) is the same as that derived from the evidence of shopkeepers—namely, 52 per cent.

The evidence in regard to the changes in the price of meat varied very considerably from district to district, the range being as wide as from 30 to 84 per cent. The highest rate of increase was in the West, the lowest in the North. An estimate of 54 per cent. is the most reasonable from the available price data given directly in evidence and weighted according to the importance of the various cuts. The corresponding increase for expenditure on meat according to the Government Statistician's returns between July, 1914, and the end of August, 1918, for the whole Dominion was only 37 per cent., and for Dunedin, Hamilton, Greymouth, and Invercargill 35 per cent. The figures for September were 38 and 40 per cent. respectively. These differences suggest the necessity of caution in deducing any conclusion for practical purposes from the evidence tendered. *The opinion of the Board is that the increase in the expenditure on all foods, groceries, and light cannot, in view of all the available evidence, be assessed at more than 50 per cent., and that this estimate is necessarily very imperfect and would probably require revision after a more intensive special inquiry into this particular problem.* The Statistician's estimate of the increase in the expenditure on all foods (including groceries) for the whole Dominion between July, 1914, and August, 1918, is 41 per cent., and for Dunedin, Hamilton, Greymouth, and Invercargill 39 per cent. The corresponding figures for September, 1918, are 41 and 41 per cent. respectively. It is not likely that the *rate of change* in the expenditure on foodstuffs has been more than 25 per cent. higher in the case of the mining camps than in that of the towns close by, assuming in both cases that the relative amounts consumed are unchanged, and that the Government Statistician's data, which has been systematically collected and checked, is accurate.

*Board and lodging* has increased, according to the evidence, during the war period about 22 per cent. in the Southern fields, 37 per cent. on the West Coast, and 32 per cent. in the North. Rents in some localities have remained unchanged; in others there have been slight increases; the average rise is not more than 5 per cent.