

N.Z. BUILDING

PROGRESS

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Editorial Comment

War Bonus on Wages

The system of carrying out works by tender is going to become more difficult unless trade organisations adopt a standard clause protecting contractors against losses through increases in the cost of labour or important material during the currency of the contract. The Arbitration Court continues its policy of adjusting wages to meet the cost of living by adding war bonuses to "the basic wage." The bonus is 2½d per hour, based on the cost of living up till the end of March, and this bonus is to be readjusted every six months. To the worker who has to spend nearly all his income on high-priced necessities, this war bonus is absolutely necessary to meet the difficult conditions of the moment. Unfortunately the system of assessment is haphazard, and the commodities taken into account by the Government Statistician only cover, approximately, 54 per cent. of the total domestic expenditure, usually regarded as constituting "the cost of living." To show how small things affect these imposing index figures, a decrease in the latest cost of living statistics is attributable solely to the fact that potatoes some time ago were temporarily dear, but have now become moderately cheap. There is no doubt that the Government Statistician is extremely conscientious, careful and scientific in his methods, but if the results of his monthly inquiries into the cost of a limited number of commodities are to affect the pecuniary affairs of nearly every workman and employer in the land, the Statistical Department should be reorganised, its scope of inquiry enlarged, and its functions strengthened by means of statutory power, to demand accurate figures from different classes of traders. South Africa has armed its official statisticians with this power, and in view of the important use to which the cost of living figures are being put in New Zealand under the terms of a clause in an Act which the Arbitration Court regards as mandatory, it is surprising that Parliament passed the clause without providing the machinery for efficiently ascertaining the working data. However, this is a little weakness of New Zealand Parliaments, which