

# N.Z. BUILDING PROGRESS

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Official Journal of the Dominion Federated Sawmillers' Association (Incorp.)

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Architecture, Building, Engineering and Industries

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## Editorial Comment

### Wages and Prices

The building industry, in common with all others is very vitally affected by the Arbitration Court's recent interpretation of a clause in the War Legislation and Statute Law Amendment Act of 1918, under which power is given to amend any Arbitration Court award on the application of either party, so far as hours and wages are concerned. The war caused such a complete dislocation of industrial conditions that business has been carried on largely in the hand-to-mouth fashion, nobody being able to predict with confidence what the conditions would be a month ahead. Contractors have in many cases been able to protect themselves with a provision that tenders were based on existing prices, and an adjustment has been made where it has been shown that after the acceptance of the tender, the prices of some of the materials used had substantially advanced. Now the Arbitration Court has introduced a new element of uncertainty. Hitherto it has refused to allow increases in wages in strict ratio to the proved increase in the cost of living, as evidenced in the Government Statistician's index prices of four groups of articles in common use. The view taken by the Court was that as such increases were mainly attributable to the war, the workers, or at any rate those who were receiving substantially more than a living wage, could, and should bear a portion of the burden imposed by the war on the community generally. The Court held that if this class was relieved wholly of the sacrifice under this head, it would fall with greater heaviness on other members of the community who were already bearing their fair share of the burden. But to-day the Arbitration Court finds that the hastily-passed amendment of 1918 is mandatory, and it has to adjust wages in accordance with the fluctuations in the cost of living. The Government Statistician has himself been put into the witness box in support of the union's claims for increases, and the official statistics as to the decline in the purchasing power of the sovereign will in future have a direct bearing on the wages of those who look to the Arbitration Court for adjustments in their working conditions. The only safeguard which the Court can impose against vexatious attempts to change