

SECTION I.—INTRODUCTION.

1. **General.**—This report contains information in summarised form regarding trade unionism, unemployment, prices, rents, purchasing-power of money, wages, industrial disputes, and general industrial conditions. These comprise the matters of most general interest and importance now being investigated from year to year (beginning on the 1st January, 1913) by the Labour and Industrial Branch of this Bureau. The inquiries in regard to several of these matters were extended back to the year 1891, so as to furnish statistics comparable with those published herein for 1918. The continuity of the returns now being collected is thus substantially preserved.

In addition, the Appendixes to the Report furnish detailed particulars in a comparable form—firstly, as to prices (wholesale and retail) and rents for the year 1918, and secondly, as to current rates of wages and hours of labour in all the more important trades and occupations in the several States.

The interests concerned in certain of these questions are varied and extensive, and associated with the latter are some important aspects of those economic and industrial problems which have, in comparatively recent years, become the subject of so much research and discussion on the part of statesmen, publicists and students, as well as of those who are engaged in the practical application of Conciliation and Arbitration, Industrial Court and Wages Board Acts.

Most, if not all, of the subjects dealt with in this Report have, in the past, not received in the Commonwealth that attention they now demand, and in view of the lack of data bearing thereon, it became necessary, before any comprehensive or reliable results could be obtained, to commence the collection of the data *de novo*, and to create a suitable organisation for that purpose.

In consequence of the urgent necessity for economy, the publication of the Quarterly Labour Bulletins ceased with No. 18 (June, 1917). The principal tables hitherto published in these Bulletins will, in future, be included in the Quarterly Summary of Australian Statistics.

In 1917 a Royal Commission was appointed by the Western Australian Government to inquire into the cost of necessaries of life. This Commission conducted an inquiry by means of household budgets. In response to a request of this Commission the Commonwealth Statistician was authorised by the Minister for Home and Territories (Hon. P. McM. Glynn, K.C.M.P.), to undertake the necessary analysis and tabulations of the returns received. This was done, and the report furnished to the Western Australian Government is now given in Section VI hereof.

NOTE—The Labour Report, in its accounts of proceedings, abstracts of reports, legal decisions, quotations and other matters of concern to labour, is not to be regarded as expressing an official endorsement of any of the views or opinions contained therein.

Notwithstanding the very explicit statement of the purpose and scope of the investigations of the Bureau as to variations in prices and purchasing-power of money given in the various Labour Reports, misunderstandings in regard thereto are still prevalent. An endeavour has been made to set forth the essentials of the problem and of its solution, with sufficient illustration to enable anyone, who, being qualified to form a competent opinion, will give the matter serious attention. A limited number of copies of this article have already been issued in pamphlet form, and the report now appears as Appendix I. hereof. Part I. of this Appendix consists of introductory remarks on price-indexes. In Part II. the purchasing-power of money and the nature of price indexes is indicated, while in Parts III. and IV. the technique and significance of price-indexes are dealt with in detail.

In Appendixes II. and III. wholesale and retail price index-numbers are given for a number of other countries from 1840 in the case of wholesale, and 1877 in the case of retail prices. In addition tabular information is given of the commodities included both for wholesale and retail prices investigations in the countries reviewed.

2. Sources of Information.—In the collection of the data upon which the particulars given in this Report are based, a great variety of sources of information has been utilised. For example, in the collection of data as to the purchasing-power of money, particulars are obtained direct from retail dealers and house-agents, the complete scheme providing for the collection, analysis, and tabulation of over 140,000 separate prices and quotations each year. Particulars as to wholesale prices are taken from the market quotations in the daily press and in trade journals. Information as to unemployment is collected from trade-unions, partly direct and partly through the labour agents and correspondents, whose services are also utilised in collecting returns from trade unions as to industrial disputes and changes in rates of wage. As regards the last two matters, however, returns are also collected from employers and employers' associations. A large number of reports and returns are also received from official sources. These relate to operations of industrial courts and wages boards, employment bureaux, assisted and nominated immigrants, accidents, and cognate matters. Although the work of collecting the necessary information and of keeping in touch with industrial conditions and matters throughout the whole Commonwealth from a single bureau centralised in Melbourne is necessarily one of some difficulty and magnitude, it is felt that the conspectus which is thus given of the industrial affairs of the entire Commonwealth fully justifies the effort, and is essential to the proper control and direction of Australia's development in this regard.

On return to the central Bureau, the particulars given on the forms are examined and checked, and in case of any discrepancy or apparent inconsistency, the forms are returned for verification and correction.

It is gratifying to note that the response of all persons has been, on the whole, satisfactory, and the thanks of the Bureau are due to many who went to a certain amount of trouble and personal inconvenience in order to obtain the desired information from the books of their Associations and from other sources.