

# LABOUR REPORT No. 7 (1916),

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## LABOUR BULLETIN No. 16

(OCTOBER to DECEMBER, 1916.)

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### SECTION I.—INTRODUCTION.

1. **General.**—The publication of this issue of the Labour Bulletin for the fourth quarter of 1916 has been delayed in order that it might be incorporated with the Annual Report. Pressure of other work has also delayed the publication somewhat. It contains information in summarised form regarding trade unionism, unemployment, prices, rents, purchasing-power of money, wages, 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 1916. 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 1916, 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.

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

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*NOTE.*—The Labour Bulletin, 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.

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.

**3. Classification of Industries.**—For the purpose of tabulating and publishing the results of the investigations which have been made in regard to labour organisation, unemployment, rates of wage, industrial disputes, etc., the following industrial classification of trades and occupations has been adopted:—

**Classification of Industries and Occupations.**

I.	Wood, Furniture, Sawmill, Timber-workers, &c.	VIII.	Mining, Quarries, &c.
II.	Engineering, Metal Works, &c	IX.	Railway and Tramway Services.
III.	Food, Drink, and Tobacco Manufacturing and Distribution.	X.	Other Land Transport.
IV.	Clothing, Hats, Boots, Textiles, Rope, Cordage, &c.	XI.	Shipping, Wharf Labour, &c.
V.	Books, Printing, Bookbinding, &c.	XII.	Pastoral, Agricultural, Rural, Horticultural, &c.
VI.	Other Manufacturing.	XIII.	Domestic, Hotels, &c.
VII.	Building.	XIV.	Miscellaneous.

**4. Industrial Conditions in the Quarter ended 31st December, 1916.**—Returns received from the secretaries of trade unions shew that the percentage of unemployed members of trade unions was 6.7 per cent. in the fourth quarter, compared with 5.3 per cent. in the preceding

quarter. The percentage of unemployment for the quarter under review was less than in the immediately preceding quarter in South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania, and higher in the remaining States. Compared with the corresponding quarter of 1915, unemployment was less in all the States, with the exception of New South Wales and Victoria, the percentage for the Commonwealth being 6.8 for the fourth quarter of 1915, and 6.7 for the quarter under review. As regards industrial groups, the returns classified for the whole Commonwealth indicate that there was a decrease in unemployment during the fourth quarter of 1916 in Groups III. (Food, Drink, etc.), V. (Books, Printing, etc.), and X. (Other Land Transport). In the remaining groups there was an increase of unemployment. Compared with the corresponding quarter (October to December) of 1915, there were increases recorded in the percentage of unemployment in Groups II. (Engineering, Metal Works, etc.), V. (Books, Printing, etc.), VI. (Other Manufacturing), VII. (Building), and the last group (Other and Miscellaneous), and decreases in the remaining groups.

**5. Weather Conditions and Rural Industries.**—The reports received from the agricultural and pastoral areas of the Commonwealth for the months of November to February (inclusive) were on the whole satisfactory. In all the States except Western Australia there has been an abundance of rain, and the returns as to harvesting and shearing operations were generally of a satisfactory character. The outlook for the forthcoming season is also reported to be bright.

In New South Wales the reports received as to conditions in rural industries were of a satisfactory character. In November and December cool temperatures and frequent thunderstorms were experienced, and though in some parts of the interior the heavy rains had a detrimental effect upon the crops, the prospects generally were said to be good. During January and February harvesting operations were well in hand, but were retarded somewhat by the broken weather. The wheat yield, while satisfactory in some districts, proved to be light in others, but the fruit yield was said to be generally good. The milk supply has continued to be satisfactory, and as the result of the excellent pasturage due to the beneficial rains, stock was in excellent condition.

In Victoria the wheat season is reported to have been highly satisfactory. From nearly all districts record yields are reported. In November the rains hindered the hay harvest somewhat, but the weather in December was favourable for the harvesting of wheat. The shearing season resulted in good clips, but the apple crop was light throughout the State. Other fruits, though somewhat late generally yielded good crops. The weather in January and February was favourable, and stock and crops were reported to be in a satisfactory condition. In Queensland the rainfall in November and December was much above the average practically throughout the State. In December there were serious floods in the Central and Northern districts resulting in the loss of much live stock and the ruination of many crops, while in those districts which were more fortunate harvesting operations were impeded. It is stated, however, that in spite of these drawbacks the agricultural and pastoral

outlook in January and February was exceptionally good, and the sugar-cane crops promise good yields for the 1917 harvest. The condition of stock and crops is everywhere reported to be entirely satisfactory.

In South Australia, as in the other Eastern States, there has been an abundance of rain; the rainfall for the period under review being above the average. At the end of November the prospects for the harvest were said to be bright, though the exceptionally cool weather in the months of December and January retarded operations somewhat. Neither was the weather during these months favourable for the fruit crops generally, and consequently they are said to have been light, with the exception of plums and pears. The wheat harvest, though delayed somewhat, was stated to have been satisfactory, and the yields heavy. At the end of February harvesting operations had been generally completed, and as there was an abundance of feed and water the condition of stock was reported to be excellent. The outlook from an agricultural and pastoral point of view was reported to be satisfactory throughout the whole of the State.

In Western Australia the rainfall for November was heavy, but owing to the dryness of September the hay crop was said to be light. At the end of December a fair proportion of the grain harvest had been gathered, and the results were generally said to be moderate to good. Heavy yields of stone fruits were reported, but the apple crop was light. Contrary to the experience in the Eastern States, the rainfall during December, January, and February was insufficient to ensure a good supply of water for stock, and consequently reports shew that there was some deterioration in their condition. While useful showers fell in February in some parts of the State, in others there was an almost entire absence of rain, and the pastures were dry, while the condition of stock was reported to be only fair.

In Tasmania the abnormally wet condition of the season continued during November and December. The continual showers and cool, cloudy weather discounted the early promise of the crops, and delayed harvesting and shearing operations. Fortunately fine weather was experienced in January and the early part of February, enabling harvesting and shearing to be completed. Much of the grain was discoloured and rusted with the excessive rains. The apple crop was reported to be poor, but yields of other fruits fairly satisfactory. There was no lack of water or pasturage, and consequently milk returns were good and the condition of stock satisfactory.

**6. Variations in Retail Prices, House Rent, and Purchasing-Power of Money.**—On pages 31 and 32 of Labour Report No. 6, attention was directed to the fact that a change had been made in the base period to which the index-numbers for the thirty towns were computed. Formerly the weighted average expenditure in the thirty towns for the whole of the year 1912 was taken as base, but in the Report referred to, it was stated that in that Report, and in future Reports and Bulletins, the index-numbers in the tables referring to the thirty towns, as well as in those referring to the six capital towns, the base to which the index-numbers are computed would be the weighted average expenditure for the six capital towns in 1911. The tables on page 33 to 38 of Report No. 6

give the index-numbers for the thirty towns for food and groceries only at monthly, quarterly and yearly periods, and for house rent and food, groceries and house rent combined, at quarterly and yearly periods for the years 1912 to 1915 inclusive. These have been brought up to date in Section IV. hereof. It should be observed, therefore, that if it is desired to make comparisons with the index-numbers given in Section IV. hereof for the thirty towns, such comparisons should be made with the index-numbers given in the Report referred to, and not with index-numbers published in Reports or Quarterly Bulletins issued prior to May, 1916.

The index-numbers for food, groceries and house rent combined, for thirty of the more important towns fell from 1294 in the third quarter of 1916 to 1276 in the quarter under review. The corresponding index-number for the fourth quarter (October to December) of 1915, was 1310; of 1914, 1113; of 1913, 1071; and of 1912, 1110. The combined index-number for the quarter under review was lower in all the States. Compared with the corresponding quarter of 1915, it was lower in all the States except Western Australia, which shews a slight increase.

There has been a slight increase in the price of groceries in the quarter under review, compared with the preceding quarter, in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania and a slight decrease in the remaining States, and a decrease in the price of dairy produce in all the States except Queensland. Prices of meat were higher in Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania, and lower in the remaining States, while house rents shew only slight variation.

**7. Special Investigation as to variations in prices and house rents in 150 towns.**—Section V. hereof gives the result of the fourth annual investigation into the relative cost of food, groceries and house rents in 150 towns in the Commonwealth. The first and second of these investigations referred to 100 towns. At the third investigation (1915) the number of towns from which returns were collected was extended to 150 towns, and in November 1916, returns were again collected from the same number of towns. Tables are given shewing by means of index-numbers, the relative cost of food and groceries, house rent, and food, groceries and house rent combined. As in the case of the monthly investigations, all comparisons as to relative cost in the different periods and of towns are based upon the assumption of a constant regimen: see Labour Report No. 1, Appendix viii., and Labour Bulletin No. 9, pp. 27 to 46.

**8. Wholesale Prices.**—The general level of wholesale prices shews that there was an increase during the fourth quarter of 1916 compared with the immediately preceding quarter. The index-number for the fourth quarter of 1916 was 1514, compared with 1505 in the third quarter of 1916. This increase was due to the increase in the cost of textiles, leather, etc., and groceries and tobacco, which more than counter-balanced decreases in the cost of commodities included in the remaining groups.

9. **Industrial Disputes.**—The number of disputes which began during the fourth quarter of 1916 was 93, compared with 161 in the preceding quarter. Of this number, 50 occurred in New South Wales. In the new disputes 61,427 persons were directly, and 4542 indirectly involved, giving a total of 65,969. The total number of working days lost in both new and old disputes was 752,701, and the estimated total loss in wages £423,152. By far the greater proportion of the disputes occurred in the mining industry. In this industry the total number of persons directly and indirectly affected was 21,972, the number of working days lost, 463,579, and the estimated total loss of wages, £273,523.

10. **Changes in Rates of Wage.**—The number of changes (all of which, with the exception of one, were increases) recorded during the fourth quarter of 1916 was 251, of which 112 occurred in New South Wales, 40 in Victoria, 34 in Queensland, 34 in South Australia, 15 in Western Australia, 13 in Tasmania, and 1 in the Federal Capital Territory. The total number of persons affected was 110,907, and the aggregate increase in wages per week was £29,191. The largest number of persons affected, and the largest increase in wages, occurred in Group XIV. (Miscellaneous), in which 31,333 persons obtained increases aggregating £7314 per week.

11. **Miscellaneous.**—During the quarter under review the number of selected and nominated immigrants arriving in the Commonwealth was 190 (comprising 135 dependants), compared with 567 during the third quarter of 1916. The greatest number (109) is reported from New South Wales. As regards occupations, of the males 7 are classified in the Pastoral, Agricultural, etc., group, and of the females, 16 are domestic servants.

The State Government Free Employment Bureaux report that during the quarter 17,686 applications for employment were received. During the same period 8723 applications from employers were received, and 9589 positions filled.

The total number of fatal accidents reported during the quarter was 29, and of other accidents, causing incapacitation from work for over 14 days, was 1221. The corresponding figures for the third quarter of 1916 were 26 and 1258 respectively. By far the greatest number of accidents occurred in the mining industry.