

CHAPTER VIII.—POPULATION MOVEMENTS.

Question 11 : What effect have the movements of the urban and the rural populations had on the cost of living ?

Inquiries in other lands.

1. Inquiries into this matter show that similar bodies to the Cost of Living Commission in other lands have expressed the opinion that the movement of so many country people to the cities in various parts of the world has had a very marked effect on the cost of living. The Massachusetts Commission on the High Cost of Living stated that the main factors in restricting supply and enhancing the cost of commodities have been the drain of population from the land, which has decreased the proportion of persons engaged in producing the food-supply ; and the exhaustion of natural resources, which has resulted in increased expenses of production and distribution, especially the latter. The Select Committee appointed by the Senate of the United States to make an exhaustive investigation into this subject specified several causes, and amongst the foremost they placed “ the shifting of population from food-producing to food-consuming occupations and localities,” though this appears somewhat inaptly worded, because the consumers of food are not limited to the towns nor the producers of food to the country. Mr. Mackenzie King, the Canadian Minister of Labour, in summarizing the reasons for the increased cost of living in Canada, held that one of the most potent causes was “ the increase in town population, largely through immigration.” Though this movement has not been so rapid in New Zealand as in other countries, still it is disquieting to find that for the first time in our history the census returns show that half our population is living in the towns, and that the number of persons engaged in agricultural and pastoral pursuits is not increasing so rapidly as that of the other sections of the community.

Nature and extent of the movement in New Zealand.

2. For the purpose of indicating the growth of the urban population relative to that of the total population, the census returns of the Dominion classify the population into residents in counties and residents in boroughs. The following table shows this distribution of the people for the period since 1881 :—

TABLE 52.—SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION IN COUNTIES AND BOROUGHS AT EACH QUINQUENNIAL CENSUS SINCE 1881.

Census.	Counties.	Boroughs.	Percentage.		
			Counties.	Boroughs.	Shipboard and Islands.
1881	291,238	194,981	59.44	39.80	0.76
1886	327,328	245,612	56.58	42.46	0.96
1891	352,097	270,343	56.18	43.14	0.68
1896	391,735	307,294	55.69	43.69	0.62
1901	417,596	350,202	54.04	45.32	0.64
1906	458,797	424,614	51.63	47.79	0.58
1911	496,779	505,598	49.26	50.14	0.60

Whilst in 1891 56 persons out of every 100 in the population were living in the counties, in 1911 there were only 49. The position is even worse than these figures show ; for, first, during the period in question the definition of “ borough ” has changed so as to exclude all towns of under 1,000, and, secondly, the official “ county ” population includes several thousands of people living in districts really urban, but not included in the “ borough ” population—such as the population of Eden County in Auckland, the population of Heathcote and Waimairi, near Christchurch, and Reefton. On the other hand, it may be said that the interests of many of the smaller “ boroughs ” are predominantly rural, and that their population has little in common, as regards occupations and opportunities of living a healthy outdoor life, with the residents of the large towns. But, after making all due