

including trimmings, 11 per cent.; and the profit, 11 per cent. All the trimmings were made by labour also, the distribution is done by labour, and consequently, with labour costing 44 per cent., if you raise the cost of labour you would naturally raise the cost of the article to the consumer. I ask Mr. Roberts if that is not so. I also ask if it would not be wise for the labour people, instead of trying to increase wages, to concentrate on a reduction in the cost of production. In this connection I would like to call attention to the following figures prepared by the Cambridge Economic Service, showing the wholesale price index of eleven countries, based on sixteen articles of food, and nineteen materials: Sixteen articles of food accounted for 40 per cent., and the nineteen materials for 60 per cent., making 100 per cent. In England the regulation index number is 145. There is only one other country which is higher, and that is New Zealand, with 154. Sweden is 141; Canada and Belgium, 137; United States of America, 136; Italy and Holland, 129; Germany, 124 (all on gold); Africa, 117; France, 104. Our present price index is the highest in the world, and if you raise labour rates how will the poor farmer be able to feed the rest of the world?

Mr. Roberts's Reply.

Mr. Roberts: I am afraid that fifteen minutes will not permit me to deal properly with all the questions that have been asked regarding the cost of living and many other matters. The first question was asked by Mr. Williams, who called attention to this statement in my paper: "The labour movement insists on the right of the industrial unions to decide whether they shall register under the Court of Arbitration or not," and shall not be compelled by law to submit an industrial dispute to arbitration. Mr. Williams asks if I would not concede the same right to the employers of labour. My answer is this: As a student of history I know that the employers of labour throughout the world had all the right prior to restrictive laws being enforced against them. Every student of history knows what the employers did to the workers, and the state to which they reduced them. Would it be necessary for me to remind you of the slavery that went on in the British coal-mines?

Mr. Turner: Answer the question.

Mr. Roberts: I am doing so, and it is my question, Mr. Turner, and not yours. We have been gentle enough to your side. What is the position? The employers of labour cannot be trusted to extend the same treatment to the workers that the farmer expects to receive when he is working hard. Does he expect another man to sit on him and grind him to pieces? But the worker belongs to the subject class, and if the employers were allowed that freedom that some want, where would the English race be? I am not quoting a labour man in my reference, but I am quoting Shaftesbury, an employer of labour himself. No, we cannot allow what you ask, because of the fact that if the employer wants to raise the standard of living for himself he can do so by starving the worker without starving himself—he can, in fact, withhold the means of life from the worker. That is another reason for not giving the employer the same right. And let me call your attention to the fact that prior to the Arbitration Act coming into force you had a Sweating Commission in New Zealand. The employers had all the power prior to that Act, and what was the result? Women were working fifteen hours a day for 15s. per week. You cannot expect liberty under such conditions.

A Delegate: Men are working longer hours at less money to-day in primary industries.

Mr. Roberts: The employers are doing that. The men are not working the long hours where an award of the Arbitration Court is in existence, but where there is no award they are still working the long hours—that is, where the employers have that right without any laws to stop them. That is my answer to Mr. Williams. There is no comparison whatever. That is not the fault of the employers. I am not saying the employer is any worse than the worker, because it is the competitive system that compels the employer to-day to act as he does. An employer engages labour without any regard to whether the payment will help the workers to live comfortably. He is pressed down by the competitive system, and he has, possibly, to sell his commodity at a low rate. So the good man has no option but to follow the lead of the man who is indifferent to the needs of the workers, and the great stand-by of the reasonable employer of labour to-day is the trade-union movement, that forces all employers to follow the same methods of production, and improved conditions of employment. The next question by Mr. Williams is as follows: "Mr. Roberts stated that the minimum rates in recent years have become the standard rates in the overwhelming majority of industries. Is not this an argument against statutory wage-fixation by any tribunal?" My reply is this: Take, for instance, men who are digging up the streets, or men who are putting through a cutting—they are all doing the same amount and class of work: why should one man get a wage higher than another? The reason why the minimum rate has become the maximum rate on the waterfront is because all workers are expected to do the same amount of work, and they do as a rule carry out the same kind of work. I remember in New Zealand twenty-five years ago when employers gave another man a shilling a day extra to drive the other men along by speeding them up. That was dishonest; and these things created a grievance, distress, and discontent on the part of the labour movement against the employers, and there is no reason why it should not be ended. Under the present system there is no reason why there should not be a rate fixed by law definitely in that matter. The next question is that by Mr. Brechin: "Are the workers dissatisfied with the Court of Arbitration?" Certainly they are dissatisfied—not with the Court of Arbitration, but with the treatment the Court has meted out to them. They are in favour of settling all disputes by an arbitration tribunal; but they have held, and rightly so—and we can prove it—that they have not received justice on the basis laid down by the Court itself. I have in my paper some figures to show how the value of the pound has been reduced as regards its purchasing-power. I have indicated also that the workers to-day do not receive a wage-increase corresponding with that decrease in the purchasing value of the pound. In other words, their standard of living was less than that of other sections of the community; and, while the standard