

also took place to the agricultural labourers in 1897, very trifling indeed, but still a change for the better. Railway employees numbering 374,147 had an advance in wages last year, so also seamen. It may be said from the statistics officially published, that last year there was a rise in wages over the whole field of industry in the United Kingdom, and a tendency towards a decrease in the number of hours required for a week's work. It seems likely that the advance was caused by a general movement to recover the ground lost during the depression of 1893, 1894 and 1895. In those years the number out of work was double what it was in 1896, when a number of strikes occurred which affected 198,687 workers. Out of these 78,486 gained what they struck for; 66,320 submitted to employers' terms; and 53,598 affected a compromise. In the strikes of 1896, there was an aggregate of 3,748,525 days lost, involving a wages' loss of not less than from 5 to 6 millions of dollars, which would pay 14,000 men the average artisan wages for a whole year. In this aspect of the labour question, Canada has a remarkably favourable record, as our industries have been very little disturbed by strikes, which we regard as an evidence of the higher intelligence of Canadian work people, and their enjoying more comfortable circumstances than those in the old country. Having shown that the rate of wages in the States increased between 1870 and 1897, the question arises whether their purchasing power was greater or less in the latter than in the former year, for it is manifest that, if the cost of living advances pro rata with wages, or in a higher degree, the condition of the wage-earner is not improved by higher wages. If wages, on the other hand, remain stationary, or advance while the cost of living is declining, then the wage-earner is being materially benefited. The U. S. Labour Bureau gives a table showing what one dollar would buy in 1897 and in previous years, which we condense as follows:—

Articles.	1872.	1878.	1881.	1897.
	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.
Flour .....	18.18	22.72	19.76	30.31
Rice .....	8.93	10.87	10.25	12.82
Tea .....	1.45	1.66	1.72	2.16
Coffee .....	2.35	3.77	3.47	3.57
Sugar, white .....	8.33	10.90	9.09	17.86
Soap, common .....	12.50	12.34	14.81	23.81
Beef, roasting .....	5.26	6.94	6.88	6.85
Veal .....	9.52	9.80	8.50	13.66
Mutton .....	9.80	9.70	8.82	14.08
Pork, salted .....	9.09	10.31	7.54	10.87
Butter .....	2.55	3.97	2.88	4.13
Cheese .....	5.71	8.13	5.71	7.19
Potatoes, bush .....	.97	1.03	.79	.99
Milk, qts. ....	12.50	18.86	16.66	17.86
Eggs, doz. ....	3.33	4.01	3.07	4.27
Coal .....	217.39	310.56	255.18	333.33

In all the above leading articles of domestic consumption, the purchasing power of a \$1 has increased since 1872. In dry goods its buying power has also enlarged, especially in sheetings, prints and flannels. These data apply generally to labor conditions in Canada. In this Dominion, as in Great Britain, France, Belgium, and the United States, there has been an

advance in the price of labour in the last twenty years, and a decrease in the cost of the staple articles of domestic consumption. In the same period the earning power of capital has decreased. The deduction is then a reasonable one that, the proportion of the total value of manufactured products divisible amongst wage-earners has been enlarged to some extent at the expense of capitalists, it, however, being no uncommon phenomenon to have dear capital and low wages, and cheap capital and higher wages. Capital is vitally interested in the condition of the working, the artisan classes, being such as to ensure their contentment and prosperity, as thereby social order and peace are assured, and capital and labour interest work in concert for their mutual welfare.

**WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION ACT.**

Although the majority of British insurance journals give due credit to Mr. Chamberlain for conducting the Compensation Act through the House of Commons, they continue to complain of his assumption of knowledge of what the cost of risks under the Act should be. In his recent speech at Manchester, Mr. Chamberlain again made references to the Compensation Act, which have caused much talk and no little commotion in insurance circles. It would seem that his allusions to the question of cost to employers under the Act are bound to cause trouble, and it is surprising that the clever Colonial Secretary does not leave to trained actuaries and experienced managers of insurance companies the settlement of a question upon which their testimony is certainly more valuable than his. The *Policy-Holder* of the 23rd ult. thus refers to Mr. Chamberlain's attitude towards the question of cost:—

Of course he is anxious to exhibit his own offspring in the best possible light, and to prove that the Act is not only a good but also a cheap one, but, like the lady in the play, he doth protest too much. The Act is both a good and a cheap one, but not so cheap as Mr. Chamberlain would have us believe. Mr. Chamberlain is in the position of a counsel who makes a strong statement but fails to support it by the evidence of credible witnesses. On what authority does Mr. Chamberlain make the confident declaration that in the great majority of trades the cost of the risk under the Act is only about 5% per £100 of wages? The Act has been in force for less than five months, and there exist, at present, no data upon which to form a reliable judgment, and Mr. Chamberlain's declarations must be, therefore, merely speculative, either on his own part or on the part of those who supply him with information. If the cost is more than the amount he names it will be due, so Mr. Chamberlain urges, to the charges made by insurance companies for canvassing, advertising, and dividends, and, in consequence, he advises manufacturers, not engaged in an exceptionally dangerous trade, to take the risk themselves or to join with others in the same trade