

THE COST OF LIVING.

INCREASED PRICE OF FOODS.

Two substantial and well-founded complaints are emanating from two important sections of our people (says the "Sydney Morning Herald of Monday)—the housewives, who are making a gallant struggle to manage things economically, and the landlords, who are finding the number of people in arrears with their rent increasing. Both may be traced back to the one source—the increased cost of living. It is natural to expect at winter time an increase in certain foods, and, generally speaking, the community accepts nature's adjustments without cavil, pinching in on the consumption of the dearer commodities during that season. Rents in many of the suburbs have gone up during the last last two or three years, partly on account of the desire of people to live in cottages, and partly because many of the older places are practically untenable on account of needing too many alterations to bring them into modern favour. Many old houses in a far from habitable condition are standing, as they have in plenty of instances for several months, earning nothing for their owners and deteriorating by neglect.

But it is the general advance in the cost of the household commodities that is telling most severely.

Taking some of the important items of household food expenditure, we find that to-day the price of the 2lb. loaf is 3½d. booked, or 3¼d. cash. In many homes this represents an advance in expenditure of from 9d. to 2s. a week. Flour rose last week to £12 10s. a ton, and it matters little to the buyers of bread whether Chicago, Mark-lane, or other wheat-gamblers have been exploiting their fellow-gamblers or not. They are the people who have to pay. Meat is comparatively dear in a meat-producing country—good rump steak at 8d. for instance. Meat soon reaches the prohibitive point, however, and the first thing in the home in which retrenchment is made is generally in it. Jam comes next, and treacle and golden syrup are levied upon to take its place. Sago has evidently gone up. All the better classes of fish are up in price. Whiting are at a prohibitive rate, and schnapper, bream, Murray cod, and blue cod are amongst our dearest fish. Were it not for the succulent garfish, which have, however, also gained in value, and sea mullet and jew-fish, the fish-eater would be going about ravenous. The ocean harvest of rich and valuable small shoal fish is not yet reaped, and, even if it were, the public would look at it askance until it began to recognise species new to it as highly nutritious. This is a matter which a proper system of central marketing all day long will doubtless adjust in due time.

Poultry is too expensive for the majority of people just now, yet hens are not laying, and eggs are at an extortionate price altogether. Ordinary scraggy poultry is realising 4s. 6d. to 5s. a pair (dressed) on the average, and turkeys are up to Christmas figures, at 21s. a pair. Eggs are retailing at from 2s. to 2s. 6d. a dozen, and their cost means that rice-puddings, bread-puddings, and various dishes in which eggs play an important part have to be usurped by plain boiled rice and boiled puddings, with sugar and milk or treacle. This brings one to the important subject of milk, and in this great food another rise is announced to be passed on to the general public. Nature is the great controlling factor in milk, and as grass is scarce in some of the milk-producing centres and fodder dear, the probability of a drop is remote. Preserved and concentrated milks are food naturally flown to when fresh milk becomes dear, but these do not appear to have cheapened, although the local manufacture has increased. Jam became dearer on account of the Wages Board's award increasing the cost of manufacture. For home making jam melon and marrow are being largely utilised, but the cost of these has sprung up and the fruit-sellers can hardly secure enough for customers. Vegetables have been expensive for some time. Potatoes, onions, cabbages, peas, and beans are all at fairly high prices.

Butter shows no sign of becoming cheaper. Indeed, the latest market quotations show a rise to 100s. a hundredweight wholesale for best brands. Nobody honestly desires to eat anything but the best in butter. There is a large export trade in butter, and it is said that one can buy Australian and New Zealand butter as cheaply in London as in the lands of their production, although over 12,000 miles of sea intervene. Cheese is a little easier than a few months ago, but not as cheap as it should be in this rich dairying country. Many of the hotelkeepers have curtailed the cheese supply in their bars also.

According to restaurant-proprietors and hotelkeepers, who make a feature of public meals at prices ranging in the cheaper class restaurants at 6d. to the better classes at 8d. and 1s., and up to 2s. 6d., for the ordinary three or four course meal, the pinch is being felt reversely. The cost of food supplies to many of them, although most are able to buy wholesale, has increased, and the burden of the business expenditure is to be added to by the greater rates of wages, which must be paid to waiters, waitresses, chefs, cooks, and kitchenmen, etc., from to-day. Restaurant-proprietors are wondering how long they will be able to carry on without raising their prices to their customers, but they are averse to doing this, as they knew it means that many people will stop their midday meal in the city and carry their lunches. In some of the pastry factories the difficulty was anticipated some months ago, and some cakes were made smaller than before.

Among the sufferers are landlords. The high rents prevailing in some quarters are balanced by the low ones prevailing in others, but it is inevitable that landlords will suffer through the greater cost of living. The number of people who leave houses owing rent is growing larger. It is partly an indication that the maintenance of the household has become more difficult.