

the time when such a plea could be advanced, and "the high price of labour at present" can hardly explain why a house should be let when it is old and rotten for £1 5s. per week which when new produced only 17s. The answer is, of course, that the present cost of labour and materials has nothing to do with the question. The high rent is demanded because persons needing houses are driven to sacrifice an undue portion of their income through the necessity of having roofs of some sort over the heads of their families. Therefore the project entertained by the Government of assisting the wage-earners by obtaining land for them, and by making advances to enable them to build their own dwellings, is hailed with delight by the workers, especially by the workers in towns. The project opens up a door of escape against the crushing system of exploitation by which the owner of private lands and private dwellings in cities and suburbs is taking an ever-increasing portion of the wages paid in industries. There can certainly be no reason why the town worker, who as a taxpayer has to share the guarantee by means of which the country settler obtains cheap money wherewith to improve his property, should not have a reciprocal duty performed for him in his turn. A scheme insuring cheap houses in the suburbs, and easy communication with industrial centres by low fares for "workmen's trains," would not only be a direct benefit to workers, but to others, by relieving the competition for town residences, and would exercise a highly desirable check on the growing rents of town dwellings, now occupied almost (through want of alternative) by compulsion. With the pressure of population removed from the centres, not only will this compulsory payment of high rents comparatively cease, but this will also probably lower the indirect rent-burden, as shops, following the workers' suburban settlement, will then not necessarily be situated in a few crowded thoroughfares; nor will the shopkeeper find that, hard as he may toil to pay his rent, the rent increases at a racing pace with the expiry of each short lease. Occupying wider spaces and healthier breeding-grounds, the cities may then have a chance to rear citizens under conditions which Dr. Mason, Chief Health Officer of the Government, declared in his last annual report to be impossible in the congested state of our present urban life.

ARBITRATION.

There is a strong and persistent feeling existing among trade-unionists that "preference to unionists" should be made statutory, and that such preference should not be of a shadowy nature.

There is reason for congratulation in noting the results which have followed the appointment of Inspectors of Awards. Not only have officials of industrial unions been relieved of the very invidious duty of becoming prominent in actions against employers, but, as Inspectors grow more acquainted with general conditions and particular awards within their districts, their efficiency is increased, and the benefits accruing to workers are considerably more weighty. I may cite, as an example of this, that during the year they laid informations for 295 cases of breach of award, out of which they won 232. They also settled 312 cases without having recourse to the Arbitration Court, and in these cases were enabled to obtain £1,463 8s. 4d. of back wages for the workers. This was considerably more than the back wages obtained in the cases brought before the Court—in the latter the fines inflicted were £529 10s., and back wages £450. Of course, it must be remembered that the Court had to adjudicate on the doubtful and difficult cases; where the employer had only been guilty of inadvertence the undisputed amount was more easily obtained through the action of the Inspector. Nevertheless, the value of the Inspectors' services in saving the time of the Court and preventing needless industrial friction is at once apparent.

Among notable decisions of the Arbitration Court during the year may be specified that of the Auckland Builders and Contractors' Labourers' Industrial Union of Workers *v.* Arthur E. Clark (Book of Awards, Vol. v., p. 190). The information was laid against a chimney-builder for employing a workman at a rate below the minimum wage named in the award. The defence was that the employer had not been cited or served with any notice concerning the making of the award, and it was pleaded that Clark knew nothing of the existence of any award. The Court ruled that an employer who is not mentioned in the award is not bound in the award. In another case, where a similar ruling was given—Auckland Builders and Contractors' Union *v.* Hannan ("Awards, &c.," Vol. v., page 194)—the circumstances were somewhat different, as the respondent, who is a draper, employed the workmen on erecting a building, and therefore was not an employer engaged in the building trade. The position in this respect was set right by section 2 of the amending Act of 1904.

Another case of importance was that of an interpretation of the Wellington Drivers award, as to the proper mode of computing the double time allowed for working on holidays. It was ruled that 15s. is to be paid (in addition to the weekly wage) for work done on Sundays or holidays.