

SOURCE 6

Extract from a Ministry of Labour report on the cost of living during the war, October 1917

(PRO ref: LAB 41/81)

HOW TO USE THIS SOURCE TO HELP YOU ANSWER THE BIG QUESTION :

Look carefully at this source and consider what it tells you about how workers were affected by the war and how they contributed to the war effort. You should consider:

ASK YOURSELF:

- According to the report, how did the war affect wages?
- Did any workers benefit from these changes?
- How did the majority of workers do?
- Is there any evidence in this source to suggest that working people did or did not support the war effort?

SOURCE 6

During the early months of the war, there was little change in rates of wages generally. About the end of 1914, however, a rise in the cost of food and clothing, combined with which was an increasing shortage of labour, led to a demand for higher wages, and in February, 1915, a sharp upward movement began, the advances largely taking the form of war bonuses or special increases limited to the period of the war.

In a few cases, the increases given during the war are either roughly equivalent to, or not far short of, the increase in cost of living. Among these may be mentioned iron ore miners in Cumberland and blastfurnacemen and iron and steel millmen in various districts, whose wages have risen, frequently by 70 or 80 per cent. on pre-war rates,

Such cases, however, are only a minority. In the building trades the usual increase, for men, has been from 2d. to 2½d. per hour (say 8s. to 10s.6d. per week): in the textile trades it has been about 20 per cent.

Taking all industries together, the increases in rates of wages would appear to range, in the great majority of cases, from about 20 per cent. up to 60 or 70 per cent., and even 80 per cent. in a few instances, the average being probably in the neighbourhood of 35 to 40 per cent.

This figure, of course, is much below the average increase in cost of living, which is estimated at about 80 per cent., exclusive of the extra taxes on tea, sugar &c., and it is evident that if consideration were given only to the rates of wages paid for the same work, the great bulk of the working classes would appear to be in a much worse position than before the war.