

CONTROL OF COAL-DISTRIBUTION.

During the twelve months that have elapsed since the last report, incorporated in that of the Munitions and Supplies Department, the work of controlling the distribution of coal in the best national interests has continued to be one demanding the closest possible attention in view of the steadily declining production in the Dominion, especially of hard coals, and decreased importations, which have fallen off by nearly 50 per cent. when compared with pre-war figures.

In order that the work and functions carried out by the Department may be more readily understood it is desirable at this stage to review the circumstances leading up to the establishment of the system of control designed to meet the exceptional conditions the Dominion was placed in respecting coal-supplies.

Early in 1917 it became clear that the position of coal stocks held in the Dominion, together with decreased outputs and importations, rendered some efficient method of coal-control necessary to guard against any stoppage or curtailment of the industries and public services of the Dominion. Consequently, in February, 1917, the Coal Trade Regulations were gazetted. These regulations were divided into two parts. Part I, which came into force immediately, authorized the Minister in Charge to collect any information he required necessary to enable him to exercise the desired control. Part 2, however, as amended later, was really the operative part of the regulations, and came into operation on the 29th August, 1917. It authorized the Governor by warrant gazetted to constitute any part of the Dominion as a coal-trade district, and at the same time to appoint for each such district a Coal Trade Committee, the functions of which were to inquire, at the Minister's request, into all matters relative to coal, including the granting of permits under the regulations. Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch were thereupon gazetted as coal-trade districts, and committees were appointed accordingly. No necessity existed at this time to extend the system of control to the Otago, Southland, and Westland Districts, but the former was duly brought into line on the 10th May, 1918.

In addition to the Coal Trade Committees already referred to, the members of the Supplies Board of Advice, Messrs. A. H. Miles, Alexander Macintosh, and George Wilson, were appointed on the 5th February, 1917, and continued their services, which were gratuitous, until the Armistice was signed with Germany. It may be mentioned here that the members of the various Coal Trade Committees also gave their services gratuitously, the Government only bearing the expense of administration.

Towards the end of 1917, as the outcome of the big coal strike in Australia, the Dominion was compelled to rely solely on the local mines for supplies, and, consequent upon reduced outputs brought about by the "go-slow" policy in many of the local mines, the position became so acute as to render conservation measures absolutely imperative. The following table discloses the position which had arisen:—

				Outputs. Tons.	Imports. Tons.	Total. Tons.
1916	...	...	...	2,257,135	293,956	2,551,091
1917	...	...	...	2,068,419	291,597	2,360,016
		Decrease	...	188,716	2,359	191,075

LIGHTING REGULATIONS.

Lighting Regulations were gazetted on the 6th June, 1917, which gave local bodies or companies concerned with the supply of electric or gas lighting power to impose such restrictions as they thought fit upon the use of coal-gas or electricity supplied by such local bodies or companies, the primary object being to economize in the direction of curtailing advertising, veranda, external lighting, window, and street lighting. In this connection the local authorities were duly communicated with with a view to taking such action as might commend itself to them. As from August, 1918, Government offices were closed at 4.30 p.m. instead of 5 p.m. in order to economize in lighting, such offices commencing business at 8.30 a.m. in lieu of 9 a.m.

On the 5th July regulations were gazetted declaring that the manufacture and supply of coal-gas and electricity for light and power were essential industries in the public welfare.

SHIPPING REGULATIONS.

In addition, regulations were gazetted on the 11th June, 1917, entitled the "Shipping Regulations," which made it unlawful for any ship registered in New Zealand to leave the Dominion for any port beyond the seas, or to leave a proclaimed port in New Zealand, except with a license issued by the Minister of Marine. At this time, however, all overseas ships arriving in the Dominion were under Imperial instructions, and it was not possible to make regulations governing their movements in New Zealand waters.

STRICTER MEASURES.

Early in 1918 the whole position was again carefully reviewed, and the stocks held, especially of hard coals, warranted the adoption of stricter measures in order to secure closer control of distribution. It was therefore decided to take steps to influence the distribution of coal to localities where most needed. This action was rendered necessary so that essential industries and public services could, if possible, be provided with sufficient suitable coal to avoid any dislocation of business. The principal coal companies were therefore requested to telegraph not later than Wednesday every week the estimated output for the following week, together with the proposed allocation, ports of discharge, and consignees, the Minister to then wire his decision, when arrangements for space could be made with the shipping companies concerned, such allocation to be duly notified. This scheme has been in operation ever since, and is giving satisfaction.