

COAL FROM OVERSEAS.

The continued decrease in the outputs of New Zealand mines made it quite obvious that if primary industries and public services were to be maintained our supplies of coal would have to be considerably augmented by importations, and accordingly urgent representations were made by cable to the High Commissioner for New Zealand and the Secretary of State for the Colonies stressing the urgent need for arranging for overseas steamers which, owing to the difficulty in securing cargo in the United Kingdom, were coming out practically in ballast, to lift Newcastle coal for New Zealand; but, owing to the food shortage at Home and the urgent necessity for getting produce away to relieve the position, as well as for carrying troops at the earliest possible moment, this could not be arranged. It may be pointed out here that the New Zealand output of hard coal has never been sufficient for its requirements. Relief has always been necessary from Newcastle to the extent of up to nearly half a million tons annually in normal times. On the outbreak of hostilities the effect of war conditions immediately made itself felt, and resulted in considerably reduced importations, coupled with which the output of hard coal from our own mines was steadily going down; also, the consumption of hard coal during the war had been increased owing to war activities extending certain industrial operations. This rendered some method necessary to divert hard coal to industries, including railways, which depend largely on this class of coal. Measures were therefore taken in this direction by limiting the use of hard coal in areas where lignite coal was plentiful, and in Christchurch no hard coal can be delivered for household consumption unless an equivalent quantity of lignite (when available) is delivered at the same time. In Dunedin five-sixths of all coal delivered for domestic use must be other than "hard," a small proportion of this coal being necessary to permit of the lower-grade lignites being used to advantage owing to the relatively low heating-values of many of the lignite coals mined in Otago and Canterbury.

BUNKERING OVERSEAS STEAMERS.

It was the custom up to about April or May, 1918, to give bunker supplies to overseas steamers leaving Australia for the United Kingdom via Wellington and Panama Canal equivalent to the quantity consumed on the voyage from Australia to New Zealand. This, of course, was adopted to make all possible space available for foodstuffs and troops going to the United Kingdom. However, our supplies were in such a precarious condition that the attention of the Australian authorities was forcibly drawn to the fact that unless our supplies were immediately augmented by shipments from Australia we could not meet bunkering requirements of through steamers. We were in possession of reliable information at this time that Australia was holding plenty of coal for sale, providing we could find ships to lift it. The Union Company pointed out at this juncture that they could not carry more coal than about 16,000 tons per month from Newcastle without interfering with the conveyance to the Dominion of such articles as case oils, paper, cornsacks, woolpacks, vegetable oils, salt, fertilizers, wattle-bark, and other essential commodities, stocks of which were universally held in small quantities. In addition, arrangements had to be made to carry from Australia two and three-quarter million bushels of wheat. In view of these facts, the Australian Government were requested to let us have a few special cargoes of hard coal by one of the Australian colliers. This arrangement suited our requirements much better than having coal sent over to meet bunkering requirements of Australian oversea vessels.

REPEATED REQUESTS.

As the outcome of these representations a collier was despatched with 4,000 tons of coal. Permission was also given by the Shipping Controller for the "Perth" and "Melbourne" to continue in the New Zealand—Newcastle trade, and take back cargoes of timber for Australian ports. The Shipping Controller was unable to divert other steamers, as several of the larger ones had been requisitioned to take foodstuffs overseas. Repeated requests were made for further relief, but it was stated that the coal requirements at the various Commonwealth ports would not permit of any other boat being spared. As a matter of fact the coal situation in many of the Australian States has been for some time past just as acute as it is in the Dominion, and regulations on the same lines as those in operation here have recently been gazetted, whereby all coal, including amount to be exported, can be regulated. The carriage of hardwood timber from Australia, which was usually carried on colliers, has had to be practically discontinued altogether in order to load colliers to their full coal-carrying capacity.

DIMINUTION OF SUPPLIES.

Coming to 1919, it is necessary to review the outputs and importations from 1914 in order to illustrate how supplies have gradually diminished during the war period.

				Outputs. Tons.	Importations. Tons.	Totals. Tons.
1914	...	...	...	2,275,593	518,070	2,793,663
1915	...	...	...	2,208,624	353,471	2,562,095
1916	...	...	...	2,257,135	293,956	2,551,091
1917	...	...	...	2,068,419	291,597	2,360,016
1918	...	...	...	2,034,250	255,332	2,289,582

From this it will be seen that to the end of 1918 there were, roughly, half a million tons less than in 1914.