

economical methods of firing grates and ranges. In Auckland there is not that wide difference in the prices of the same kind of coal which is observable in some of the southern centres; but the experience of one firm shows that the public is slow to buy in the cheapest market, even when the goods are of similar quality and are brought directly to the notice of consumers. Six thousand people in a large suburban area in Auckland were afforded an opportunity of obtaining their coal at from 4s. 3d. to 5s. per ton cheaper than they could obtain it elsewhere, conditionally upon either cash with order or collection on delivery, and taking no less than three bags ($\frac{1}{4}$ ton) at a time. Within four months fewer than 150 took advantage of the possibility of making this saving—amounting to over 10 per cent. in their coal bill.

(f.) *Possibilities of Improvement.*—In the Auckland District itself we gathered only a few suggestions for improvement in the method of distributing coal.

(1.) *Railways:* Complaints were made of the length of time taken by the railway to carry coal from the mine to the dealer's siding; in many cases the time extended to two or three days. It was alleged, too, that some of the pilfering *en route*, which undoubtedly occurs, is due to the railway employees. It was suggested that the distribution of coal would be improved if a mineral express train were made up every day from Huntly to the southern markets. The Railway Department, however, states that there is not sufficient business between Huntly and Marton (246 miles) to provide a full train-load, and that existing services provide for coal being carried between them at present in twenty-seven, thirty, and thirty-nine hours respectively.

(2.) *Bagging at the Mine:* A suggestion was made that coal should be bagged not at the dealer's shed, but at the mine. This, however, does not appear to be advisable. It was tried some time ago in Auckland with coal for the Taranaki District, and was abandoned. The practice increased the cost, because of the more rapid decay of the bags, the increased handling, and shortage of sacks.

(3.) *Baskets instead of Bags:* It has been proposed to substitute for bags, wicker baskets, to be filled at the mine, and packed in trucks. These baskets would hold about 180 lb. each, are estimated to last seventy-five times, and would cost at current prices from 10s. to 12s. each. While their use would be attended with certain advantages, these would be outweighed by the disadvantages. The baskets would be awkward to handle, and to carry, not fitting comfortably to the spine; their use would increase the difficulty of detecting short-weight by inspection; and their comparative rigidity would prevent satisfactory packing with the larger coal.

(4.) *Increased Use of Small Coals:* The greater the demand for the smaller coals such as through coal and slack, or even kitchen or steam, as a substitute for best screened coal, the greater is the probability of a fall in the price of screened. Undoubtedly, the price of house coal would have risen more than it has done but for the increased proportions of kitchen, through, and slack used for household and other purposes. It is clear, however, that the great majority of consumers demand large screened coal as necessary for household use, and any lowering of the price of house coal through this means must be looked for in the direction of the greater industrial use of the fine coals, and the education of the housewife to the possibility and profit of small-coal consumption in grate and range.

(5.) *Elimination of the Small Coal-dealers, and the Institution of Central Agencies for Mines, Municipal Depots, or Co-operative Coal-stores:* The Pukemiro Collieries Company delivers kitchen coal in a certain part of Auckland for 4s. 3d. a ton, or over 10 per cent. cheaper than the ordinary dealers. The Auckland Co-operative Society sells its kitchen coal in ton lots for 6s., or 15 per cent. cheaper to its members than the ordinary dealers' price, showing a profit of 3s. 3d. a ton, or over 10 per cent. (The actual profit is less, owing to the average order being below a ton.) In the case of this society most of the clerical and managing work was done without remuneration, but, after making allowances for this, there is still a substantial saving to the consumer.

The dealers who are in business on a big scale can subdivide their orders according to localities, and serve several customers within a comparatively small area from one trip of each cart, but the smaller dealer's costs are enormously increased by the long distances he has to travel to fulfil his daily orders. Consumers could help to systematize delivery, and thereby keep the cost of cartage down, by ordering their coal before their supply runs out.

(6.) *Correct Weight:* There is, of course, a rise in the real price of coal if the money paid remaining the same, the amount delivered to the consumer is less. This is the problem of light weight. Though the evidence is contradictory, the probability of light weight in coal-deliveries in the Auckland District is established. The temptation to give light weight has, of course, increased with the diminution in the supply of coal, making coal more valuable. It is much easier to give light weight in coal than in most other goods. We were told that frequently dealers bag more than twelve bags to the ton—they sell not a ton of coal, but twelve bags of coal. Small dealers may make another sack out of the twelve obtained from the merchants' sheds. Then there is the probability of pilfering on the way from the yard to the consumer's house. It is estimated by an authority with special means of knowledge that *the coal as delivered to the consumer is about 5 per cent. short of the weight as given by the dealer*. It is easy to make a partially full bag of coal appear to be full, and when repaired bags are used the possibility of light weight is increased. The responsibility for this shortage of weight must rest on both dealer and carter.

The use of hundredweight bags has been suggested as a remedy, but the drivers object to this, as it would mean twenty journeys instead of twelve, and the smaller bag is not so well adapted to the carrier's back as the larger. The small bag is used in Wellington apparently with a net advantage which may, however, be due to the steeper nature of much of the ground to be covered by delivery in Wellington, prohibiting altogether the use of the heavier sack.

(g.) *Rate of Distributor's Profit.*—It is assumed that the question of the reasonableness of distributors' profits refers to coal-dealing under existing conditions and with the present methods