

PART II OF THE EXPLOSIVE AND DANGEROUS GOODS ACT, 1908.

It has been recognized for some considerable time that this part of our Act is in urgent need of amendment, but the matter was held over owing to the war. During the past year a considerable amount of time has been devoted to the preparation of an amending Act which it is hoped to have ready in time for the coming session of Parliament.

The present Act is the consolidation of the Dangerous Goods Act of 1882, and the main provisions are similar to those of the British Petroleum Act of 1871. The enormous increase which has occurred of late years in the consumption of petroleum, due to the extended use of the light oil-engine, has entirely altered the conditions existing when these Acts were passed, and in Britain a departmental committee was set up in 1909 "To inquire into the sufficiency of the existing regulations relating to the storage, use, and conveyance of petroleum spirit, and to report what further precautions, if any, are, in their opinion, desirable as tending to diminish the dangers attending thereon." This committee made reports in 1910 and 1913, and their major comments are applicable with equal or even greater force to New Zealand. I would particularly quote the following recommendations:—

- (1.) That provision be made for direct Government control by a central authority. (In Britain H.M. Inspectors of Explosives exercise some of the functions of a central authority by virtue of their decisions under a section corresponding with section 32 of our Act, which has never been brought into force.)
- (2.) That the excessive decentralization permitted by the Act was objectional. (In New Zealand there are 335 local authorities competent to frame by-laws and to administer the Act.)
- (3.) That there was no obligation on local authorities to enforce the Act. (As far as could be ascertained, only about fifty local authorities in New Zealand have actually framed by-laws, and a considerable number even of these do not enforce them.)
- (4.) That the Act gives inadequate powers (of search, seizure, &c.) to local-authority officers.

Recent legislation in Australia has been drafted on the recommendations of the British departmental committee referred to above, and provides for the entire administration and issue of licenses by one of the Government Departments. This arrangement works satisfactorily under the conditions existing in the Australian States, where there is one big centre dominating the rest of the country, and where every part of the State is readily accessible from the capital. The geographical conditions in New Zealand are very different, and it is considered that the control by local authorities offers considerable advantages; and, without committing the Department, it may be stated that an attempt has been made to combine the two systems, and provide for local administration of the regulations under the proposed Act.

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IV. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, DOMINION MUSEUM.

Dominion Museum, Wellington, 23rd July, 1920.

THE MUSEUM AND THE WAR.

In former reports I have emphasized the need of a new building to replace the old, unsuitable, overcrowded, leaking, and decayed wooden building which passes under the name of the Dominion Museum, and which houses many valuable collections of national interest. The delay in placing these collections beyond the danger of fire and slow decay now that nearly two years have elapsed since the Armistice is a standing disgrace to the people, the Parliament, and the Government of New Zealand.

The present constitution of the Museum leaves it without adequate friends and protectors. As an ordinary Government Department it misses the local support, both financial and political, which the museums of other centres receive, and its Director, being a public servant, is not free, without the risk of losing his position, to criticize the action of the Government. The Dominion Museum, like the national museums of other countries, should be under a board of trustees who can protect its interests when occasion arises. But besides being a national museum, the Dominion Museum also serves as the provincial museum for Wellington, and it should receive from the people of Wellington the support given to the provincial museums of the other centres. Experience has shown that this will not be forthcoming so long as the Museum remains an ordinary Government Department, but there is every hope that it would be accorded were the Museum under a board of trustees.

BOARD OF SCIENCE AND ART.

The fifth annual meeting of the Board was held in the Dominion Museum on the 23rd June, 1920, under the chairmanship of the Hon. G. J. Anderson. The following resolutions were passed:—

Amendments to Science and Art Act, 1913.—That the question of placing the control of the Dominion Museum, the Turnbull Library, the National Art Gallery, and other scientific and artistic activities under a board of trustees be referred to a sub-committee consisting of Dr. Thomson and Mr. von Haast to report to the next meeting of the Board. The Board (a) repeats its commendation made in March, 1919, that it is desirable that the National Art Gallery should be