

PRICE CONTROL

The Price Tribunal reports that it has continued to maintain control over the prices of goods and services during the past year, and also submits the following observations:—

A simplified procedure has been adopted, wherever possible, in order to facilitate the speedy application of approved prices without departing from Government policy as regards the control of prices. Difficulties confronting traders in the transition period since the cessation of hostilities, including the necessity to rehabilitate returned servicemen, have resulted in a tendency for costs to rise and increase the responsibility of the Tribunal to safeguard the interests of consumers. The volume of work involved in administering subsidy payments has increased considerably and the staff has been further augmented. On the removal of man-power control a number of temporary officers returned to commercial positions, but all permanent officers have remained on the staff. To meet the Tribunal's staffing requirements on the accountancy side of the work, transfers of permanent officers by way of secondment have been made from other Departments.

The number of Price Orders issued during the year ended 31st March, 1946, was 157—numbers 350 to 506 inclusive—this latter figure representing the cumulative total of Price Orders to 31st March, 1946. This number included amendments as well as new Orders, and covered a comprehensive range of commodities, and particularly foodstuffs and articles of clothing.

During the year 310 convictions for breaches of the Price Control Regulations were entered. The number of traders affected was 173, and 3 cases were dismissed. The total fines imposed now total £9,916 15s., of which the sum of £1,671 5s. was in respect of the past year.

The co-operation between the Tribunal and the Standards Institute, referred to in previous reports, has again been maintained. There has also been an increasing measure of co-operation with the Department of Industries and Commerce and the Bureau of Industry with the object of co-relating price control and production.

The Clothing Stabilization Committee, set up during the previous year, has handled a large volume of work covering subsidization of essential lines of clothing. The personnel of the Committee has again included representatives of the Tribunal, Treasury, and the Economic Stabilization Commission, and co-ordination between these Departments has been maintained.

In addition to essential clothing, subsidies relating to farm products, foodstuffs, and other stabilized goods are also administered by the Tribunal.

In general the Tribunal has continued to receive the valued co-operation of most traders and industries.

MINISTRY OF SUPPLY

In last year's report it was stated that the time was approaching when the Supply Organization would disappear and when the Department of Industries and Commerce would resume its normal functions. Reductions in purchases abroad for warlike stores and in local contracts for similar purposes were then already substantial. The principal activity of the Ministry of Supply to-day—apart from what may be termed cleaning up of wartime work—is supplies for our Forces in Japan and such Government-to-Government transactions as are necessary to obtain commodities in short supply.

It is only now when the actual emergency is receding into history and we are able to reflect on the events of the past seven years that we can ascribe perspective to the scale and the diversity of the demands imposed by the war on the Ministry. Nor is the magnitude of its task sufficiently signified by the statement that its transactions exceeded £100,000,000 in value. Its full significance is conveyed only when account is taken, firstly of the difficulties imposed by war on the purchase and movement of goods, and secondly, of the novel features introduced into trading during the war to ensure the greatest advantage to the war effort of the Allied Nations. Organization for war in other countries made it necessary for the New Zealand Government (as also was the case with other Governments) to enter into trade in many essential commodities. In many cases it was necessary for the Government to become a stockist of goods so that local reserves against emergency could be maintained. Many commodities in short supply were the subject of allocation by control bodies, whose authority embraced all the Allied Nations. Very large proportions of the goods which moved between the Allied Nations were not subject to payment or continuing liability under the customary procedures of international trade, but were transferred as mutual aid. The principles of mutual aid characterized lend-lease goods and services from the United States, reverse lend-lease