

I regret to report that the number of accidents at coal-mines has again been high, owing, as in previous years, to falls in the mines, principally during pillar-extraction. Notwithstanding the precautions taken, accidents from this cause continue to occur, and their prevention is a difficult problem to deal with.

A Royal Commission was appointed during the year to inquire into and report on the conditions relating to the health and safety of the miners of New Zealand and the administration of mining laws; also to make recommendations for any amendment of these laws which might be considered necessary. One of the subjects which this Commission was ordered to inquire more particularly into was, What steps could be taken for the better prevention of accidents, particularly those from the use and firing of explosives, falls from roof and side, also accidents in shafts and from machinery. In the report presented by the Commission certain recommendations were made, the most important of which are, in brief, as follows:—

(1.) That the lifts in pillar-workings be restricted to 10 ft. in height, and that the Inspector of Mines have power to determine the height at which the remaining coal shall be taken out, subject to the right of appeal.

(2.) That systematic timbering in its modern sense be adopted—viz., that distances should be fixed for the regular setting of props, sets, and chocks, and that such distances should not be exceeded.

(3.) That the maximum widths of bords and cut-throughs, where the bord-and-pillar system is followed, should be 12 ft. and 9 ft. respectively for a distance of 2 yards when opening out or breaking away; thereafter that the maximum widths be 18 ft. and 12 ft. respectively.

(4.) That no timber should be withdrawn except by lever and chain or blasting.

(5.) That the use of chains be prohibited on all but face-jigs, and that wire ropes be substituted therefor.

(6.) That the use of water should be compulsory in all ways in a dry and dusty mine where the dust cannot otherwise be conveniently removed.

(7.) That the provisions of section 6 of the British Statutory Rules and Orders of the Explosives in Coal-mines Order, dated 17th December, 1906, be incorporated in the New Zealand mining statutes.

(8.) That the Inspector of Mines should have power to prohibit the use of electricity in any mine or part of a mine where, on account of the risk of explosion of gas or coal-dust, such use would be dangerous.

(9.) That workmen should be withdrawn from any place where the proportion of inflammable gas exceeds $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

(10.) That all winding-engine drivers should be medically examined annually for heart weakness, liability to fits, and defective hearing and vision.

(11.) That every winding-rope should be recapped at intervals of not more than six months, and that the section of the rope last cut should be held available for inspection or for testing purposes by the Inspector of Mines or Machinery.

(12.) That a coal-miner should have had experience in coal-hewing and timbering for two years and a half before he has charge of a place.

(13.) That all deputies or firemen who examine the mine before the first shift starts should remain at a convenient station near the entrance of the mine, in order that each man entering might have an opportunity of obtaining a verbal report as to the condition of his place.

(14.) That a committee should be set up at each mine with power to make, alter, and from time to time amend additional special rules, such committee to consist of the mine-manager, the Inspector of Mines for the district, and a representative appointed by a majority of the workers in the mine.

The above and other recommendations it is proposed to incorporate in a Bill to amend the Coal mines Act, 1908, and if this becomes law, and is conscientiously observed, there should be a material reduction in the number of mining accidents.