

The Board should also take over, administer, and develop the existing coal-mines of the State. The industry should be subject to taxation and rating in common with all other industries.

The Board would probably find it advantageous to organize its business on an extension of the lines followed at present by the Westport Coal Company, which administers its affairs through a general manager, who is assisted in respect of production by a district manager in charge of all the mines on the field, with several mine-managers subordinate, and, in respect of marketing and distribution, by a sales manager and branch managers in the different consuming centres. It should consider the advisability of owning and running steamers for the transport of coal.

Among the subjects to which the Board should give attention at the earliest moment are the following, which came prominently under our notice as affecting the production of coal:—

(1.) Reference of the methods of mining to be followed in new mines to a committee representative of the best experience and theoretical knowledge, so as to avoid certain present dangers and costly hindrances to production that have followed upon the adoption of unsuitable methods without due consideration.

(2.) The provision of suitable housing-accommodation at the mining-fields. We strongly recommend that the Coal Board be empowered to impose a levy of 3d. per ton on all coal raised in the Dominion, to be supplemented by a duty of 3d. per ton on all imported coal, for the purpose of providing interest and sinking-fund charges for loans to build houses and provide suitable means of recreation for mine workers on recognized town-planning lines. We are satisfied that the value and probable duration of the industry warrant this step being taken on most of the fields, and that the fund so provided would prove sufficient for the purpose.

Its cost we consider to be a fair charge to be borne by the industry itself. The scheme should be worked out forthwith in detail, and inaugurated at places like Avoca and Denniston, to quote two cases—one typical of new mines, the other of long-established collieries with a long life ahead. (See Chapter VII, p. 81.) The miners should be encouraged to form in each centre a housing committee to see that the houses and gardens are kept in proper order and to advise the Board of the needs of the district.

(3.) The institution of an easy means of transporting miners from their homes to within reasonable distance from their working-faces. This is necessarily bound up with the question of the location of any new mining settlements under (2). (See Chapter I and Chapter V, pp. 21 and 73.) Closely related to this is the duty of arranging with the Railway Department for a better train service between the workers' homes and the mines. It was asserted, for example, that at Rotowaro and Pukemiro the coal-output could be increased by 4,000 tons per year if so much of the men's time were not wasted by an inefficient train service. There appears to be need of improvement even in the railway-line serving the State mines at Dunollie and Rewanui in respect of suiting the convenience of the mine workers, as well as on the Blackball line.

(4.) The establishment wherever needed—for example, at Huntly—of a motor-ambulance depot with a small dispensary, and a maternity hospital with a bed or two for emergency purposes, and any similar appropriate facilities for dealing with accidents and providing medical attention and comforts for the remoter mining camps.

(5.) The desirability of introducing certain improvements in the technical processes of mining the coal, more particularly coal-cutting machines (see Chapter I, p. 20), double-decked cages as used in Australia (for Huntly), the system of flushing the mines with sand in order to allow of the mining of the maximum amount of coal on the fields.

(6.) The transfer of the management of those railways which serve coal-mines only, such as the Greymouth - Point Elizabeth and Westport-Mokihinui lines, to the Coal Board. A certain amount of inconvenience and friction is caused by the fact that the mines have no direct control over these railways.

(7.) The modification of certain parts of the Coal-mines Act. We do not feel justified in advising any alteration in the following particulars concerning which representations were made to us. They require consideration by experts in mining itself, and should receive the attention of the proposed Board.

- (i.) Giving miners the power, at the discretion of the Mining Inspector, of firing their own shots in certain conditions—*e.g.*, in wet places.
- (ii.) The abolition of the provision limiting the number of men employed in a ventilated district to fifty.
- (iii.) The reduction of the time a miner must spend underground before he may be put in charge of a face. We do not think a *prima facie* case has been made out for this demand.
- (iv.) The placing of two names on the board at the mine-mouth—that of the general manager as well as that of the mine-manager—so that in a case of disaster both may be held responsible.

(8.) The urgent need of improving the coal ports. The further development of the harbours giving outlet to the West Coast mines is a matter of vital importance to the coal trade of the Dominion. Upon this depends not only the regularity of the supply of bituminous large coal in the centres of the Dominion, but the possibility of a profitable export trade in the smaller coals of the districts and the cheapness of that part of the supply marketed here; for if a steady foreign market can be developed for the bunker coals the other part of the output can be sold at a lower price. We direct particular attention to the extract from the evidence tendered to us by Mr. C. N. Boulton, Engineer to the Westport Harbour Board, printed in Appendix A, in which he recommends certain improvements as absolutely necessary in his opinion to make Westport Harbour adequate to the needs of the coal trade.