

1919.

NEW ZEALAND.

THE COAL INDUSTRY.

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

To the Hon. W. D. S. MacDonald, Acting President of the Board of Trade.

INTRODUCTION.

SIR,—

1. On the 10th September last the appointed members of the Board, together with James Hight, Esquire, M.A., Litt.D., of Christchurch, were authorized and empowered, by Warrant issued by His Excellency the Governor-General under section 6 of the Cost of Living Act, 1915, to inquire into and report upon the following matters :—

- (1.) The present cost of the production and distribution of coal in New Zealand.
- (2.) Any increases in the cost of such production or distribution since the commencement of the present war, and the causes of such increases.
- (3.) Whether the profits made in the production and distribution of coal are fair and reasonable.
- (4.) Whether the selling-prices of coal are fair and reasonable.
- (5.) Whether increased economy or efficiency can be obtained in the production and distribution of coal, and, if so, in what respects and in what manner.
- (6.) All other matters affecting the supply or price of coal.
- (7.) The increases since the commencement of the present war in the cost of living so far as such increases affect men engaged in the production of coal, distinguishing between increases, if any, prior to and subsequent to the industrial agreements made in the coal industry in the year 1917.
- (8.) The increases since the commencement of the present war in the earnings of men engaged in the production of coal, distinguishing between increases, if any, prior to and subsequent to the said industrial agreements.

2. The Board held sittings at Auckland, Huntly, Glen Massey, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill, Nightcaps, Kaitangata, Greymouth, Runanga, Blackball, Westport, Denniston, Millerton, and Ngakawau, and heard evidence from 112 witnesses, comprising coal-mine owners, managers and secretaries of coal companies, mine-managers, coal-merchants, dealers, and mine workers. Considerable evidence was also taken regarding the cost-of-living side of the inquiry from storekeepers and other tradesmen in the mining districts relative to changes in prices of commodities. An analysis of the occupations of witnesses is as follows: Mine-owners, managers and secretaries of coal companies, 16; mine-managers, 13; miners and mine workers, 22; wholesale and retail distributors, 31; storekeepers, &c., 22; other witnesses, 8.

3. The evidence of witnesses was taken mainly *in camera*. The Board felt that as it had to deal with matters of a highly confidential nature this was the best course to adopt. The result has amply justified the step, as witnesses answered all questions fully and frankly, and the Board would like to place on record its appreciation of the material assistance given.