

Another factor which materially added to our difficulties in providing sufficient coal for our industries and services was the Australian marine engineers' strike, which resulted in several colliers whose engineers were on Australian articles having to be temporarily withdrawn from the Newcastle-New Zealand trade.

As the direct outcome of the reduction in outputs due to the operation of the "go-slow" policy, together with the falling-off already referred to, the position of coal-supplies towards the end of last year was extremely critical; and, having in view the cessation of mining operations—both here and at Newcastle—during the Christmas and New Year holidays, Government, through the High Commissioner for New Zealand, arranged for two shipments of South African coal, which arrived in the Dominion in February last, at a time when industries were experiencing the utmost difficulty in obtaining coal to enable them to carry on. One shipment was discharged at Wellington, principally for freezing-works; the other at Lyttelton, where the bulk of the cargo was distributed throughout the Canterbury Province to meet the requirements of threshing plants, harvesting operations being then in full swing.

Although the price of the coal brought by these steamers was considerably higher than that ruling for other classes of coal locally, no difficulty was experienced in disposing of same, and it is to the credit of the industries concerned that they took full advantage of the shipments in question, irrespective of price.

With regard to the present year, a review of the first five months in comparison with the same period last year discloses—as shown in the following table—a shortage in outputs from the principal coal-mines of 111,503 tons; but, on the other hand, importations on the same basis show an increase of 53,713 tons, leaving a net deficit of 57,790 tons.

Dealing separately with bituminous coals, however, it must be placed on record that of the total shortage disclosed—viz., 111,503 tons—in the principal New Zealand mines, no less than 81,475 tons (over 70 per cent.) is in hard coals.

As against the above shortage of 111,503 tons, importations during the same period have increased by 53,713 tons, leaving, as shown, a net deficit of 57,790 tons.

	Monthly Outputs, Important Mines.		Importations.		Combined Outputs and Importations.		Decrease.
	1919.	1920.	1919.	1920.	1919.	1920.	
	Tons.	Tons.	Tons.	Tons.	Tons.	Tons.	Tons.
January ..	133,510	99,585	21,364	48,475	154,874	148,060	6,814
February ..	139,190	104,210	24,384	44,466	163,574	148,676	4,898
March ..	146,444	131,377	40,699	45,646	187,143	177,023	10,120
April ..	121,051	116,352	40,142	36,078	161,193	152,430	8,763
May ..	153,611	130,779	33,131	38,768	186,742	169,547	27,195
Totals ..	693,806	582,303	159,720	213,433	853,526	795,736	57,790

Since the abolition of the "go-slow" policy some improvement has taken place in outputs; but, unfortunately, delays to steamers on the West Coast—where bar delays are frequent—and again at discharge ports owing to heavy rains and congestion of shipping, with consequent shortage of labour, have resulted in a certain amount of disorganization, so that industries have not as yet secured any material advantage from the increased outputs. Then, again, the improvement referred to in outputs has been counterbalanced by the withdrawal of steamers usually engaged in the carriage of coal from Newcastle for the purpose of transporting—as already mentioned—New Zealand's purchase of wheat from Australia. Admiralty requirements, approximating 5,000 tons per month, have also to be met.

It is hoped, however, to clear up the carriage of wheat during June, when it is trusted arrangements can be made to considerably increase the present tonnage employed in the Newcastle-New Zealand coal trade.

HOUSEHOLD SUPPLIES.

In dealing with the question of household supplies every effort has been made to allocate as much as possible for this purpose, but it was inevitable with the serious decline in production—especially of hard coal—that supplies for domestic purposes had to be seriously restricted, as had such steps not been taken a serious curtailment in the activities of many industries and public services would have resulted. The rationing scheme inaugurated by the Wellington Coal Trade Committee last year is still in operation, and has resulted in supplies of domestic coal being distributed in such a manner as to ensure that no householder receives more than bare requirements.

Since the inception of the scheme in June last year 209,226 applications for permits have been dealt with, representing orders amounting to 24,731 tons, the average order per customer being 2·3 cwt.

It may be pointed out that the question of providing household supplies for Wellington possesses features not obtaining in other centres, inasmuch as practically the whole of Wellington's domestic coal is seaborne; consequently the supply is subject to more frequent interruption owing to dislocation of shipping and other causes affecting the movements of steamers than is the case in other centres where supplies are railed direct from the collieries. Nor is this the most important feature, for practically the whole of Wellington's supply is confined to bituminous coals, which, as indicated earlier