

The increase in the tonnage of coal imported from Australia is due to the dislocation of supplies from the West Coast coalfields owing to the earthquakes in June, 1929, and also to the delay to steamers at Greymouth and Westport owing to the bar at these ports being unworkable. Another contributing factor to the increased purchase of Australian coal was the flooding of the Hikurangi Mine, which stopped supplies from this source for practically the whole year.

It is satisfactory to note that, despite the temporary dislocation of supplies of New Zealand coal from the causes I have enumerated, the purchases of New Zealand coal were almost as high as in the previous year.

During the past year trials were made with various New Zealand coals with a view to their suitability for our purposes, and, in addition, tests have been continued with an improved grate and a combustion appliance with a view to enabling the Department to extend the use of the locally produced fuel.

Reference has been made in previous reports to the necessity for maintaining an adequate reserve stock of coal as a standby in the event of dislocation of supplies owing to shipping being unable to work Westport or Greymouth or to temporary stoppages through earthquakes, and as New Zealand coals are unsuitable for storage purposes it will be necessary in the near future to replenish our reserves with imported coal suitable for storage purposes. Our purchases in this direction will be kept to the minimum commensurate with the quantity required to build up an adequate reserve.

I need hardly stress the fact that even a temporary stoppage of the railway service owing to a shortage in fuel-supplies would vitally affect the industries and commerce of the Dominion, and it is therefore in the real interests of the country that reserve supplies should be maintained.

The work of reorganizing the main stores throughout the Dominion is proceeding steadily, and it will be some time yet before the whole system will be complete in each centre throughout the Dominion.

Buildings are now being provided at the four main centres and until such time as these are completed it is not possible to finalize certain matters affecting the organization of the Stores Branch.

During the year a number of requisitions were made on us by gas-producing concerns, who had fallen into serious difficulty owing to the stoppage of supplies of coal from Newcastle, for permission to draw from our reserve stocks of Newcastle coal. Owing to the uncertainty of the whole fuel position we were naturally very loathe to deplete our reserves. We, however, agreed to release quantities in the most pressing cases, and we have been assured that our action in doing so prevented much serious public inconvenience.

#### SICK-BENEFIT FUND.

The Government Railway Employees' Sick-benefit Society was instituted during the previous year, and the result of the operations for the first complete year's operations is a loss of £643 18s. 11d.

The revenue totalled £29,598 1s. 9d., and the sick-benefit payments to £30,242 0s. 8d. The influenza epidemic during the winter of 1929 threw a heavy strain on the fund in the first few months of the financial year. The total membership on 31st March, 1930, was 13,290, and the average membership 13,115.

#### SUGGESTIONS AND INVENTIONS.

The Suggestions and Inventions Committee dealt with 1,414 suggestions during the year, as compared with 1,491 during the previous year; of these, 132 suggestions were recommended for adoption either wholly or partially; 406 were referred to heads of branches for their consideration, or were already in operation or related to matters of policy; 746 were not recommended for adoption; and 130 are under trial or investigation, and have been carried forward for further consideration.

In each case in which a suggestion has been wholly or partly adopted due acknowledgment — by monetary award or otherwise, as the circumstances appeared to justify — has been made to the person responsible for the suggestion.

A number of suggestions received from the Australian railways were dealt with by the committee, and several suggestions adopted in New Zealand were forwarded to Australia for consideration.

While a number of the suggestions received during the year were not new and had previously been dealt with by the committee, a number of others showed originality on the part of those making them. The majority of the suggestions related to matters in connection with more efficient and economical operation, and an improvement in the Department's relations with the general public.

#### CORRESPONDENCE COURSE AND TRAINING SCHOOL.

A total of 613 members of the service received tuition in the various phases of railway-work for the year ended 31st March, 1930.

To date 1,247 members have passed the departmental examinations, and 548 secured partial passes. The results show that the staff are taking advantage of the facilities offered for study. The correspondence courses also enable members to gain a good deal of knowledge on other subjects than those in which they may be immediately engaged in connection with their work, and this must of necessity open up greater possibilities as regards the future for those members.

During the year 155 cadets went through the usual course of training in telegraphy, railway accounting, &c.

The Cadets' Hostel is still maintaining its useful purpose. It was self-supporting during the year, the charges being sufficient to cover working-expenses and interest on the invested capital.

The sports side was carried on successfully during the year, and the hostel is now represented by a fourth-grade team in the Rugby competition.

Apart from the advantages obtained in regard to the training of cadets in the school, the social atmosphere engendered between the members of the hostel must have a good effect, and parents may feel assured that the living conditions and general surroundings of their boys are up to a desirable standard.