ASSISTANCE TO MINING

During the financial year ended 31st March, 1945, assistance has been extended to the mining industry on a basis similar to past years. A sum of £31,281 was advanced to promote and maintain coal production, £203 to gold-mining, and £362 towards the production of manganese.

It is gratifying to report that in the case of scheelite-mining, repayment in full of the sums advanced has now been made in great part. In the case of three parties, advances exceeding £1,000 in each case were made, but these have now been paid in full by deductions from the proceeds of the sale of scheelite concentrates.

In other instances prospecting operations proved unsuccessful, as must always occur in mining, and the advances made have been written off, but over 75 per cent. of the money advanced to the industry has been recovered.

POST-WAR DEVELOPMENT

Of all minerals, coal will continue to command the greatest attention in the post-war years.

It is apparent that for some years at least imports of coal from Australia will be restricted and New Zealand will be forced upon her own coal resources. Some time must also elapse before new hydro-electric-power schemes can be developed, so that demand will continue at a high rate. The main concern will be maintenance of output, and as mines approach exhaustion new mines must be opened up. Before this can be effected, accurate information derived from geological surveys, confirmed by drilling, is required, and these have been proceeding for some time.

In time it is hoped to have a reasonably accurate picture of the coal resources of New Zealand, but this is an undertaking of some magnitude, and for a commencement work must be concentrated upon the more urgent problem of the supply of the higher-grade coals. In time this work will be extended to the lignite deposits of New Zealand, which promise to be of great value, and at the same time consideration can be given to various methods of processing and upgrading these coals.

Interest will be maintained in all developments of the use of coal as the basis of production of various chemicals, but serious consideration of their introduction to New Zealand must wait till the fundamental information as to quantities available has been determined and the coal resources of New Zealand can be critically examined in their correct perspective.

As far as the utilization of coal is concerned, the construction of a briquetting plant to treat various blends of slack coal has been under consideration for some time, while by enlisting the services of a fuel technologist it is hoped that the various grades of coal can be put to their correct uses and the maximum value obtained from them.

No sensational development can be expected in the gold-mining industry, but with adequate labour and equipment again available it is hoped that the decline in production during the war will be arrested in great part.

Many minerals such as cinnabar, scheelite, mica, &c., which were important during the war will now be in plentiful supply overseas, and production in New Zealand will decrease. It is expected that increasing attention, however, will be paid to non-metallic minerals, in particular clays, and that, in conjunction with the Geological Survey, the Mines Department will endeavour to have deposits prospected and opened up to supply the industrial needs of New Zealand.

Recently the military use of violent atomic energy has focused attention on the metal uranium which has proved the most suitable material for producing explosive effects by the disintegration of the atom.

The known workable deposits of uranium-ores are located in Canada and the Belgian Congo, and an intensive world-wide search for other deposits is inevitable.

In New Zealand some traces of the metal have been reported, and a careful examination of the prospects of finding economic deposits will undoubtedly be made in the period immediately following the war.