

Shortly after attaining office, the Government, on representations made by the owners of coal-mining rights, considered in detail provisions of the Coal Act, 1948, whereby all privately owned coal was vested in the Crown. As an immediate step, the operations of the Coal Valuation Commission, appointed to determine and allot compensation payable to holders of coal-mining rights, were suspended.

On examination it was found that the advantages of securing control of the coal resources of New Zealand did not appear commensurate with the cost of compensation for their acquisition acceptable to the owners, and, further, that the State already, by possession of Crown lands and by purchase and lease of freehold coal-mining rights, controlled sufficient coal to meet the needs of the industry for many years. Accordingly, the Government has decided to repeal the Coal Act. All coal and servitudes in private ownership before the passing of the Act will now revert to their previous owners and their position will be identical to that enjoyed previously. At the same time, it is proposed to amend the Coal-mines Act to ensure a greater measure of control in the interests of conservation and efficient working of coal. To this end it will be made obligatory on the owner of any mine on or under private land to carry out the requirements of the Inspector of Coal-mines in regard to the working of the mine in the most efficient manner so as to extract the maximum possible quantity of coal from the land and without causing unnecessary loss of coal. In future the Minister will be able, on the request of any owner working coal on or under any land, to take as a public work land and/or coal for the purpose of creating a new mine or extending the workings of an existing mine. The Minister will also be enabled to take as a public work a coal-mine.

Provision will also be taken to enable the Inspector of Coal-mines to compel the working of barrier coal and the adjustment of barriers between adjoining owners or lessees on Crown and private lands so as to avoid unnecessary loss of coal.

It is considered that by these measures sufficient control will be exercised to promote conservation of coal without resorting to measures which will entail unnecessary expense by way of compensation.

### OPENCAST MINING

A record production was again obtained from opencast mines, 741,987 tons being produced in 1949, as against 676,728 tons in 1948, an increase of 65,259 tons. Since 1943 each succeeding year has shown a substantial increase over the preceding one in the production of coal by opencast mining and each year this production has constituted a higher proportion of the total output. Over 26 per cent. of the total production was obtained from opencast workings in 1949, a proportion that must be considered high even in countries overseas where opencast mining has been highly developed. Every effort will be made to increase production of coal by this method. The high percentage of coal recovered and the elasticity afforded to coal-production by this method are only two of the many favourable aspects of this form of mining. New opencast mines are either in the process of development or under consideration at Denniston, Garvey Creek, Ohai, and Huntly, and the search for new areas amenable to this form of mining is being continued.

Steady progress has been made in the Stockton field, where operations have been commenced on a new section termed "F" Block. This block has been surveyed in considerable detail and has been close bored on a grid pattern with holes spaced at 200 ft. centres. This has allowed of the amount of coal recoverable (1,189,000 tons) and the amount of overburden to be shifted (2,588,000 cubic yards) to be estimated with accuracy. Both the topography of the area and the structure of the coal-seam have been mapped in detail so that the layout of future operations can be planned with confidence. To