

so that such shafts or outlets shall afford a separate means of ingress or egress available to persons employed in such mine. We think this provision is, if properly enforced, sufficient. In effect, this recommendation is a repetition of the complaint in the Cardiff Mine inquiry, that there were not two travelling-roads available at all times to the miners, and we dealt with it at page five of this report.

(4.) We are of opinion that this rule would add to the safety of the men working in the mine, for, in the event of an explosion in any section of a mine, stoppings made of boards are too weak to resist the pressure, and would be easily blown out, and the chance of the men escaping would be diminished.

(5.) We think that a "tester" should be provided for in the Act and regulations. There appears to be little doubt that in some instances lamps have been given out in an unfit condition, and an unnecessary risk incurred.

(6.) We are of opinion that this is a reasonable stipulation, and would tend to the safety of those employed.

Although we have not been able to report favourably on all these recommendations from the Trades and Labour Councils Conference, it is satisfactory to receive them, and to know that the points relating to the protection and welfare of the men employed in coal-mines have been intelligently debated and resolved on, and it is a fair inference to make that there are no other substantial questions which they wish dealt with. Viewing the communication from this representative body of men as of considerable importance, we have embodied the full text thereof in this report.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS.

We recommend the appointment of a Chief Inspector of Coal-mines for the colony, who should be a man of high qualification, possessing experience both in New Zealand and Britain or America. Each District Inspector should furnish to the Chief Inspector a monthly report showing the work done during the previous month, and the condition of each mine inspected. In case of any difficulty between the Inspector and the mine-owners the Chief Inspector should personally visit the mine, and special powers should be given the Chief Inspector to act promptly and effectively in order to remedy what may be amiss. Under the present system the Inspectors report annually to the Minister of Mines, and this has led to matters being allowed to stand over which ought to have been dealt with at once. The districts placed under each Inspector are, in our opinion, too large, and there are too many gold- and coal-mines in each district for the existing staff to satisfactorily deal with. Additional Inspectors should be appointed, and the mines should be inspected more frequently than has heretofore been the practice. The provisions of the Acts and regulations should be strictly carried out, and the forfeiture clauses enforced where mines are either unworked for any considerable periods or are neglected.

Survey.—We recommend a resumption of the surveys formerly made of coal-bearing areas. The present surveys and estimates should be corrected by the information since obtained from actual working; and lands hitherto unsurveyed, but which are believed to contain coal, should be carefully and thoroughly surveyed. The theory that many outcrops on an area justify an estimate based upon the idea that the seams run continuously through the area on which the outcrops appear should be officially tested, and if proved fallacious, as we believe it to be, should be abandoned. In short, a determined effort should be made to take stock of our coal resources, and let the people of the colony know how far they can rely upon a coal-supply for the next generation.

Sale of Coal-bearing Lands.—Immediate efforts should be made to ascertain where coal-bearing areas are situated on Crown lands, and such lands should not be sold. It is true that under certain conditions freehold lands may be resumed for coal-mining purposes, but the compensation to be paid to the owner generally prevents such resumption.

Reservation of Coal Areas.—We recommend to the consideration of your Excellency's Advisers the sound policy of reserving to the State the coal areas not now alienated or worked. The establishment of a coal-mine owned and worked by the State has been much pressed upon us by many witnesses, but it is a question involving so many political considerations that we feel it is one eminently beyond our functions, and is only to be dealt with and decided by Parliament. But in the meantime the acquisition by individuals of areas which may be required for the people generally should be prevented.

Haulage-rates on Railway.—We were much pressed to recommend a differential rate on the various classes of coal carried. It was urged that slack and nuts should be carried at a less rate than round coal. We regret we are unable to make any recommendation thereon. It is a matter really outside the scope of our Commission, and is one relating to railway administration. We are aware that the experiment of charging lesser rates for the lower classes of coal was made, and was found not to work satisfactorily. We commend the subject to the serious consideration of the authorities.

State Distribution of Coal.—Much evidence was offered to us, which we felt unable as well as unwilling to reject, on the subject of the cost of coal to the consumer, as compared with the cost of production. The case of the Westport Company's coal—which is produced at 7s. 10d. a ton in the railway-trucks at Waimangaroa, and is retailed in Wellington at £1 15s. a ton net—is a striking example of the cost of distribution. Mokau coal, produced at the mine at 8s. 6d., is sold in New Plymouth retail at £1 14s. per ton. The same proportion practically exists throughout the colony. We believe that if the State, which now buys a large quantity of coal at a moderate price, would sell such coal at a fair price to consumers the grievance now complained of would vanish, and the result would be that, while the State would fix the fair retail price of coal, the present dealers would sell at such price and would not be injured.