

WASTAGE OF COAL.

In last year's Statement I commented at some length on the unnecessary wastage of coal which has taken place over a long period of time in this country. I drew special attention to the slack-coal problem, particularly in the Waikato District, where for a number of years 100,000 tons of slack has been annually dumped to waste.

I also stated that I had approached the Waikato coal-owners with a view to obtaining their co-operation in regard to the control of screen openings. I am very happy to report that the position in the Waikato District has now completely changed, and it is unlikely that any slack whatever will be wasted during the current year. The operations of Waikato Carbonization, Ltd., the improved market for slack-coal, and the policy of controlling screen openings have brought about this most desirable result, and I wish to place on record my deep appreciation of the co-operation which I have received from the coal-mining companies.

In the Southland District a moderate amount of slack is still being wasted; the position, of course, is not nearly so serious as that which prevailed in the Waikato District, but nevertheless I hope to eliminate the major portion, if not the whole, of this waste by enlisting the assistance of the coal-mining companies, particularly in regard to screening. I have not yet had the same co-operation in this respect as I have received in the Waikato District, but I hope that before long voluntary arrangements will be arrived at which will achieve the desired result. Failing the termination of the waste by voluntary methods, I will be forced to consider the question of legislation to enable me to deal effectively with the problem.

NEW AVENUES OF COAL-UTILIZATION.

My Department continues to keep in intimate touch with the latest developments abroad in hydrogenation and other processes for the extraction of oil from coal.

An officer of the Industries and Commerce Department accompanied the Hon. the Minister of Finance during his recent visit to Great Britain, and gave special attention to all recent developments in coal-utilization.

I mentioned last year that a qualitative and quantitative survey of our coal resources was a most necessary preliminary work before proper consideration could be given to any major scheme. I am pleased to say that this survey has now been commenced, and is referred to elsewhere in this Statement.

COAL-MINING LEGISLATION.

During the year the Coal-mines Amendment Act, 1936, was passed. This was a short measure of six sections only, which dealt with some urgent improvements to ensure increased safety in the working of coal-mines.

The Act also authorizes the establishment and maintenance of rescue-stations, and makes provision for the necessary finance for these institutions.

A further Coal-mines Amendment Bill will shortly be submitted to Parliament. It includes a number of further provisions designed to improve the administration of the Coal-mines Act, and has been framed as a result of suggestions and recommendations received from the coal-mine owners, the miners' organizations, and the Department's own staff.

RESCUE-STATIONS.

Following upon the passing of the necessary legislation, the Government approved of steps being taken to establish the first rescue-station in the Greymouth District. A site has been chosen in the Township of Dobson, which is strategically situated to serve promptly the major number of the mines in the Greymouth area. Plans and specifications for the necessary building have been completed, and tenders will be called immediately a satisfactory title is obtained to the land on which the structure is to be erected.

An order has gone forward to Great Britain for all the necessary equipment, and a special rescue motor-truck has been designed. Five sets of Proto apparatus