

A HISTORY OF THE SOUTH MAITLAND COALFIELD  
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1900 - 1966  
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by

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I hereby declare that the thesis  
entitled "A History of the  
South Westland Coalfields, 1900-1966"  
is the product of my own  
research and has not been  
presented to any other  
University.

M. Reynolds.

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- Note :  
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1. The spelling of the word "labour" has been consistent throughout this thesis even though this has involved altering the spelling in quotations.
  2. The South Maitland Coalfield has generally been referred to as "South Maitland field" or simply "Maitland field".

\* \* \* \* \*

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CHAPTER I.

THE SOUTH MAITLAND COALFIELD.

Nestling peacefully in the beautiful valley amongst the hills, the thriving and prettily situated village of Cessnock during a recent visit presented a pleasant picture of quiet contentment and prosperity.

Almost surrounded by a wealth of mineral resources unrivalled in any part of the universe (1) and which extends to within its very doors, Cessnock is surely destined to make rapid advancement. (2)

The optimism of the Maitland Mercury observer was not unwarranted as, in a few years Cessnock did make the rapid progress he predicted and the surrounding district was soon the scene of immense activity based on the extraction of coal. However, the observer in the early part of the century would, no doubt, have been disappointed with the picture of Cessnock seen by Alan Walker in 1945:

... it is unplanned, dusty, treeless and devoid of adequate parks and recreation grounds; its houses of wood and galvanised iron, with poor gardens and with three 'depression villages', of erstwhile 'temporary' one-roomed shacks, now become permanent, and though somewhat improved, not an inspiring addition to the town. (3)

In the forty years between these two reports, Cessnock, the principal town on the South Maitland coalfield and the surrounding district, witnessed the growth of an extremely important industry, which by its very nature, brought ugliness and depression to the once "pretty" area. Although it is not denuded like the older and more intensive coalfields of Great Britain and Europe, there is ample evidence still that the South Maitland field has been assaulted and ravaged by the profit-seekers. Not only have the coal companies conducted mining operations in such a way that immense quantities of valuable coal have been lost irretrievably, as will be demonstrated below, but they

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1. Despite the fact that the whole of Australia has never had more than 1% of the known world resources of coal.
  2. Maitland Mercury, 5 January, 1904.
  3. A. Walker, Coaltown : A Social Survey of Cessnock, N.S.W. Melbourne, 1945. pp. 126-127.

have shown little interest in co-operating with local authorities in restoration schemes or in removing derelict pit-top structures.

When dealing with this question, Mr Justice Davidson, in the Report of the Commonwealth Board of Inquiry into the Coal Mining Industry (1946), (4) laid the blame on both the coal owners and the citizens:

The comment cannot be avoided that in earlier days there has been a want of foresight on the part of the colliery proprietors in the vicinity who were then making substantial profits, in neglecting to help the Municipality to provide amenities for the citizens, and that there has been a lamentable lack of co-operation and enterprise on the part of the citizens themselves in failing to procure this assistance for the purpose of making the town more attractive. (5)

The scene today is somewhat changed. Although the coal mining companies have still shown no sign of co-operating to make the coalfields more presentable than they were twenty years ago, the inhabitants have developed a different attitude. There has been some reconciliation between worker and employer after many years of industrial strife, and with more stable employment and brighter prospects the miner has become more civic-minded and appears to take greater interest in his surroundings than he did when security of work was more a hope than a reality. There is no doubt that the casual visitor is at first shocked by the apparent poverty of the South Maitland towns, as indicated by the poorer type housing, although by tradition, mine workers' dwellings have exhibited far more affluence on the inside than the exteriors would lead one to believe. Nevertheless, under the guidance of a fairly progressive City Council, the towns strung along the outcrop of the Greta seam have shown substantial improvement. Paint has restored the outside appearance of homes; new dwellings are being erected; and the development of splendid public buildings such as libraries, halls, schools and baths has been

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4. Henceforth cited as Report, Davidson Commission (1946).

5. Report, Davidson Commission (1946), p. 243.

encouraged and supported financially by the Joint Coal Board. Moreover, Cessnock is quickly becoming a city of trees, and people who see the jacarandas and bauhinias in bloom can now view with pleasure, a town once described thus:

There is little civic pride in the town. There are no parks or gardens of any importance or beauty, and the public buildings are unimpressive; trees are conspicuous by their absence; churches are small and unworthy considering the size of the town; private business houses and homes are often drab. It all reflects the definite disinterest [sic] of the people in their own community. (6)

It is worth noting that the comparative prosperity now evident on the South Maitland field is the result of a change in the general pattern of labour and job availability. [In the formative stages, towns and villages clustered around the coal mines and the whole population was closely integrated with the mining industry. This close association tended to promote and magnify bitterness and mis-understandings in times of crisis: the 1929 Lockout on the Maitland field antagonised miners for years; the series of stoppages during World War II alienated public opinion; and the disastrous strike of 1949 effectively reduced the bargaining power of the Miners' Federation and affected adversely, not only the mining industry and its immediate dependants, but also the whole economic life of New South Wales. During such industrial struggles the miner was isolated and often victimised. Moreover, intermittent working, so much a part of the history of coal mining in New South Wales, meant insecurity and hardship; and discontented and bitter miners with a lifetime of industrial strife behind them and little hope for the future could hardly be expected to take a vital interest in matters other than the immediate problem of living.

Today, the main towns of the South Maitland field have become "dormitory" towns as fewer men are employed in local coal mining than in any year of the previous twenty. As collieries closed and mechanisation increased in the

years after World War II, workers began travelling daily to jobs in Newcastle industries, in other coal mines of the Northern field <sup>(7)</sup> or at power stations around the shores of Lake Macquarie, commuting having been made possible by the development of a road system which gives easy access to centres of employment from the South Maitland coalfield. Persistent attempts by governments to help in the establishing of local industries to absorb dismissed mineworkers continue to be successful. The new jobs have provided coalfields' men with steady employment which has brought stability and progress to the whole area. The danger that the South Maitland field may become derelict has disappeared. Instead, the area can look forward to even greater prosperity, and the lack of initiative and incentive, so prevalent when mining activities engendered hatred and suspicion, should be replaced by co-operation, progress and confidence.

Although the Cessnock area was settled as early as 1826, <sup>(8)</sup> the story of the South Maitland area will always be linked with coal, even though the exploiting of the underlying seams began only about the beginning of the twentieth century. The South Maitland coalfield is a compact area some twenty miles in length and quite narrow extending in an arc following the outcrop of the Greta seam near which have been built towns associated with coal mining from Farley near Maitland to Millfield, west of Cessnock. In this area the Greta coal measures, originally flat, were affected by orogenic movements at the close of the Permo-Carboniferous period which developed a series of broad anticlinal and synclinal folds in the Permo-Carboniferous strata along the northern edge of the Maitland coalfield. Only one of these folds (the

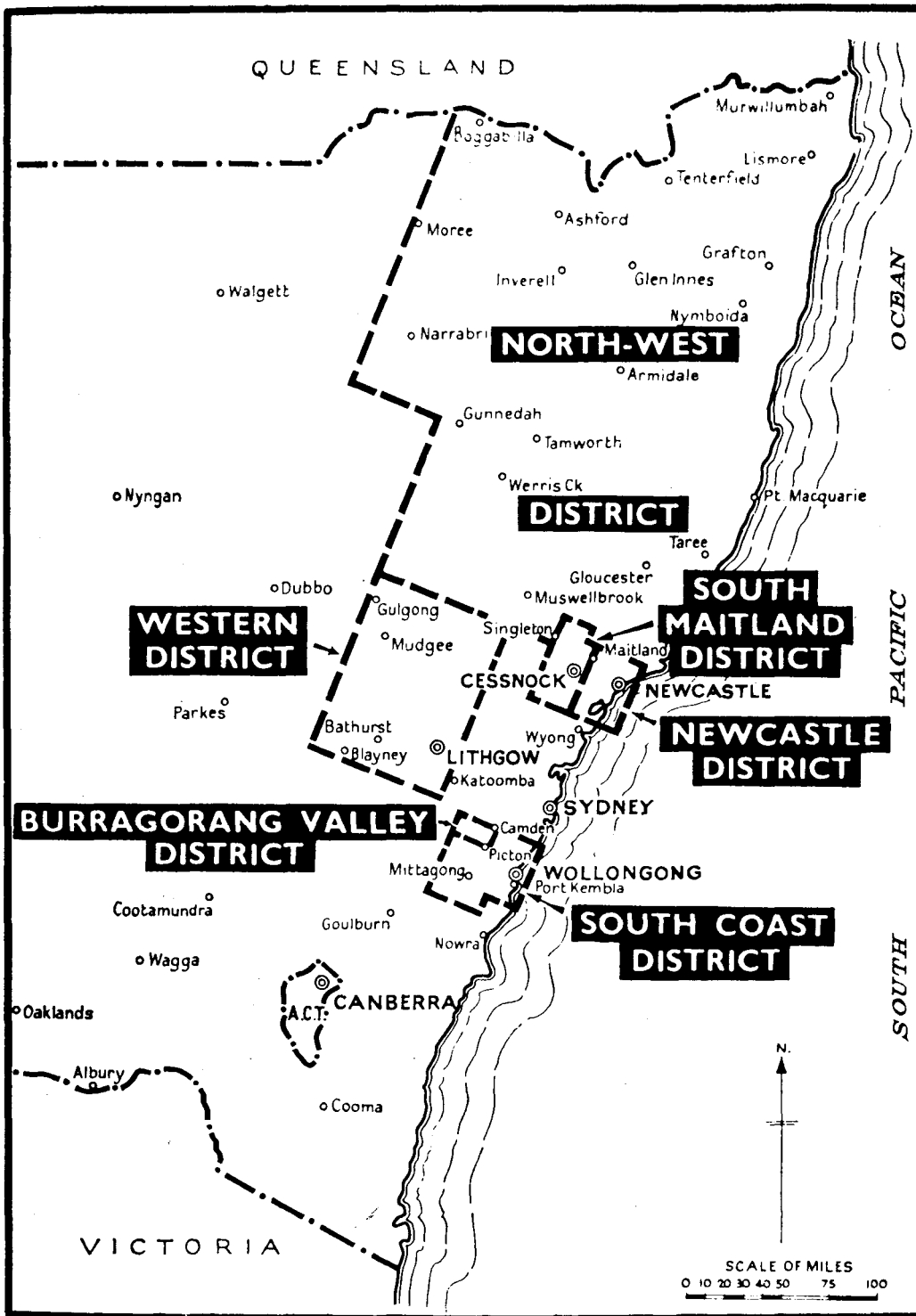
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7. The South Maitland coalfield is quite distinct from, but a part of the larger area around Newcastle known as the Northern field.

8. In this year John Campbell was promised a land grant, on part of which Cessnock now stands. The whole district was originally used for farming.

CHART I.

THE COAL DISTRICTS OF NEW SOUTH WALES.



Source: Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66)

Lochinvar anticline) extended much to the south of the present course of the Hunter River. (9) It was to the east and south of the Lochinvar anticline that the Greta seam outcropped making it most suitable for coal winning operations.

Collieries along or close to the outcrop in 1930 included the following: South Greta, East Greta, Glen Ayr, Ayrfield, Stanford Merthyr, Pelaw Main, Richmond Main, Hebburn, Hebburn No.2, Elrington, Abermain, Abermain No.2, Abermain No. 3, Grotmain, Neath, Aberdare, Aberdare Extended, Aberdare Central, Aberdare South, Hill End, Cessnock, Bellbird, Kalingo, Pelton, Greta Main, Stanford Merthyr No. 2 and Millfield Greta. (10)

The greater part of the area embraced within the South Maitland coalfield is typically one of low relief, from one hundred feet to five hundred feet above sea level, bounded on three sides by high ranges of Triassic sediments, half encircling the field. The Broken Back range of hills, a spur from the high carboniferous range of Mount Bright (1565') traverses the centre of the area from west to east. The average height of this range is from six hundred feet to six hundred and fifty feet above sea level but rising to nine hundred feet at The Pinnacle where the ridge branches into three main spurs falling gradually towards Mulbring Creek. A most conspicuous landmark in the district is Mount Tomalpin, an outlier of the Broken Back range. It is an isolated table-topped hill 646 feet high and flanked by precipitous cliffs. Between the Broken Back range and the Triassic plateau to the south, the average surface height is between four hundred feet and five hundred feet above sea level, while on the northern side of the range, the average height varies from one hundred feet to two hundred and fifty feet above sea level. Wollombi Brook and

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9. C.A.Sussmilch, Geology of New South Wales. Sydney, 1922. p.153

10. New South Wales Mineral Resources No. 37. The Coal Resources of the Southern Portion of the Maitland-Cessnock-Greta Coal District. Sydney, 1939. p.4



its tributaries, Congewai, Quarrybylong and Sandy Creeks traverse the area from east to west. Black Creek and Deep Creek with their tributaries drain the area north of Broken Back range, while Mulbring, or Wallis Creek, flowing north, drains the eastern portion of the area. Such is the topography of one of the most important coal bearing areas in Australia, an area, which in 1966 could boast a population of over thirty -five thousand people, although the entire population in 1903 of the village of Cessnock (now the chief city on the coalfield) lived in fourteen houses. <sup>(11)</sup> The discovery and working of the Greta seam was the only reason for such growth.

Coal had been known to exist in the Hunter Valley from 1791 when William Bryant, an escaped convict, landed with his wife, Mary, his two children and several other convicts near the mouth of the Hunter River on their way to distant Timor. Six years later, <sup>(12)</sup> Lieutenant John Shortland, R.N., on his way home after pursuing runaway convicts sailed into the mouth of the Hunter River (as he called it) which he described as " a very fine coal river " and saw a considerable quantity of very good coal lying so near the waterside as to be conveniently shipped. <sup>(13)</sup> Following <sup>e</sup> these observations, Governors Hunter and King made some attempts to exploit the coal seams, although it was not until after 1801 that all New South Wales coal operations were concentrated on the Hunter River, <sup>(14)</sup> some shipments being made to Calcutta and the Cape of Good Hope, <sup>(15)</sup> the beginning, in a very small way, of what,

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11. When an application for an additional liquor licence was made at Maitland Court in 1903 it was stated that there were only fourteen houses within half a mile of Cessnock Post Office and not more than 150 over a wider area.

12. In September, 1797.

13. Pamphlet: The Story of the Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company, 1860-1960.

14. The South Coast measures were discovered in 1797, and in 1801 Joseph Platt, the only coal miner in the Colony was sent to bore near Appin in the hope of reaching the Coal Cliff measures.

15. Historical Records of Australia, I, XIV p.545

one hundred and fifty years later, was to be a most lively trade through the port of Newcastle.

During the nineteenth century Newcastle coal mining grew very slowly, although there were some significant developments such as the monopoly granted to the Australian Agricultural Company; <sup>(16)</sup> the use of coal for lighting <sup>(17)</sup> and steaming purposes; and the extension of coal winning activities to the Maitland area. Coal mining advanced closer to the South Maitland area in 1861 when "The Newcastle and Walls End Coal Company" began production at Wallsend. <sup>(18)</sup> Shortly after this, attention was focussed on the Greta seam when coal was discovered in 1864 at Anvil Creek near Branxton by Thomas Frost, who probably began prospecting on the advice of W. Keen, Government Examiner of Coalfields, Keen was particularly interested in the location of kerosene shale deposits and having received a block of this material which had been dredged from the Hunter River near Morpeth, made an inspection of the area and forecast the discovery of the mineral in the district. After Frost's discovery at Anvil Creek Keen inspected the site and carried out further prospecting at Dalwood Creek where an outcrop of coal was located. The Greta Coal and Shale Mine Company was formed to work Anvil Creek, coal and kerosene shale being raised, while a little later, the Honourable Bourne Russell opened up an outcrop of coal near Homeville, a small tonnage being raised.

These discoveries and mining operations were a little to the north of the main Greta seam outcrop on the South Maitland field, but prospectors were getting close to the valuable deposits south of Maitland. The first coal samples from the South Maitland field were brought to Maitland by a man called

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16. Abandoned in 1847.

17. The Australian Gas Light Company was formed in 1841.

18. This company later developed Pelton Colliery to the west of Cessnock.

Thomas in the early 1870's, but the presence of coal in the area could hardly have gone un-noticed during the nineteenth century considering the number of settlers who had lived near the outcrop. In an article in the Cessnock Eagle in 1914 James Scott claimed that during the construction of the 'Great North Road' in the late 1820's, an officer sketched some outcrops of coal near what is now the site of Bellbird Colliery and town, just outside Cessnock. It was also maintained that from about 1840 settlers in the area reported the finding of outcrops, exposed seams and water worn coal lumps in creeks. (19)

Nevertheless, it is generally conceded that the most significant find of coal was that by William Tester, a selector, who found lumps of coal in Deep Creek after a flood, the actual discovery site being close to where the surface workings of Abermain No. 1 Colliery now stand. A report on the coal measures and geological structure of the northern part of the South Maitland field was made in 1884 by C.S. Wilkinson, a government geologist, but it was left to Edgeworth David to make a detailed survey of the whole field.

Acting on Tester's information David located the Greta seam in Deep Creek and traced the outcrop to Homeville Colliery, a distance of twelve miles. (20) Subsequently, the outcrop of the Greta seam around the Lochinvar Dome was mapped completely by David, and acting quickly, the Department of Mines reserved 3,700 acres for the purposes of coal mining. David's progress report was published in the Annual Report of the Department of Mines in 1888. (21) The actual line of the outcrop from the old Homeville Colliery near Farley, to Deep Creek was shown and along this line the collieries of South Greta, East Greta, Heddon Greta, Stanford Merthyr, Pelaw Main, Hebburn and Abermain were eventually developed. The new discovery was an exciting

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19. Cessnock Eagle, 7 August, 1914.

20. Telarah is now situated near the site of this early colliery.

21. Report, Department of Mines, 1888. pp. 167-169

one and David's optimism was matched by his hard work. It is appropriate that a monument now stands near the spot where his camp was made in 1886, as a tribute to his enthusiasm and untiring efforts to prove a seam which was to be of great importance to Australia's economic development.

David worked diligently and enthusiastically, walking the outcrops and mapping the coal bearing formations, catching the early train from Farley to visit the more distant parts of the area and returning to camp at all hours.... It is said that when overtaken by nightfall far from camp and unable to continue mapping, David would make his way back by following the conglomerate, lighting matches at intervals to make sure he was still on it. (22)

David also found time to deliver a popular lecture in the School of Arts, West Maitland, on Coal and offered to give another lecture if desired. (23)

His great optimism for the future of the South Maitland field was reflected in his work on the Hunter River Coal Measures, published in 1907, where he claimed it was certain that the Greta horizon offered the finest prospects for future coal development in any part of the field. (24) David's comments on the reservation of a very large area for mining purposes were also interesting in view of the opposition expressed at the time and later:

As soon as the discovery of the seam was made by my party, and reported to the late Government Geologist, Mr C.S. Wilkinson, steps were taken to reserve a very large area in the vicinity, in the interests of coal mining, several parishes being included in the large Coal Reserve. At the time, and for some years subsequent, there was some little outcry on the part of intending selectors against the locking up for selection of so large an area of land, but the immense development in coal mining which has taken place of later years would seem to fully justify the action then taken by the Department of Mines. Soon after the Report by the Geological Surveyor on this seam was made public, the land in the neighbourhood was taken up by a syndicate, and a company - the Silkstone Company - was floated for the purpose of working the seam. (25)

22. Pamphlet: Edgeworth David Memorial. Seventy-fifth Anniversary, 1886-1961. Maitland, 1961. p.5

23. Maitland Mercury, 25 September, 1886.

24. T.W.E. David, The Geology of the Hunter River Coal Measures, New South Wales. Sydney, 1907. p.126 et seq.

25. Ibid., p.126 et seq.

The importance of David's discovery is incontestable today, but in 1903 even when the seam had been proved, David's evidence was needed before a Public Works' Committee on a proposal to build a tramway from East Maitland to West Maitland and on to Stanford Merthyr and Pelaw Main Collieries. In his evidence David estimated that in the two areas of the Maitland district there were 700,000,000 tons of exploitable coal and that thousands of miners would come to pits at Maitland where the resources of coal would last 180 years at an annual output of five million tons. (26) However, despite the proving of the Greta seam by Edgeworth David and despite the setting aside of a large area for coal mining purposes, there was little development until the dawn of the twentieth century, coal production in the area being confined to sporadic and small - scale attempts. One of these coal winning activities was begun in 1887 by the South Greta Coal Company on a lease of 1,335 acres close to Maitland, (27) but with little result. The Maitland Colliery Company Limited, formed in 1888 to mine a small property of only 537 acres within a mile of Maitland, proved to be equally insignificant in light of the huge development soon to come. (28)

More lasting, and certainly more productive, was the East Greta Colliery which mined an area consisting of approximately 250 acres, two and a half miles west of West Maitland. Initially this mine was opened by four men and the coal was taken by dray to West Maitland, there being no connecting railway. The need for capital to promote further development led to the formation of a new company on April 23, 1891, the East Greta Coal Mining Company Limited, which by 1900, was employing upward of three hundred miners to produce well

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26. Maitland Mercury. 9 July, 1903.

27. Sydney Morning Herald. 15 May, 1906.

28. Ibid.

over one hundred thousand tons of coal per annum. (29) The coal produced from this mine was of excellent quality and when, by 1893, a connecting rail link was made between the colliery and the Great Northern Railway at East Greta Junction, (30) it seemed the whole field would soon be opened up. However, during the last decade of the nineteenth century there was a period of depression in the coal industry. Prices fell from 10/4 per ton in 1891 to 6/11 per ton in 1898 (31) and in 1896 a prolonged strike on the Newcastle field demonstrated that the time for investment was not opportune; (32) large - scale investors were wary, and small - scale enterprises could not hope to survive.

Fortunately for the coal industry the setback was only temporary and the economic situation improved after 1898, bringing an increase in coal prices and better trading prospects. It was in the following three or four years that the larger coal mining companies moved into the South Maitland field: the East Greta Coal Mining Company expanded its operations; J. and A. Brown entered the field; and the Aberdare Colliery Company of New South Wales took up twelve thousand acres of mining leases which were later disposed of to the Australian Agricultural Company, Abermain Collieries Limited and the Caledonian Coal Company. (33) The bigger companies were in a strong position, the depression having squeezed out the smaller operators. Moreover, the favourable leases obtained by companies with considerable capital gave them the opportunity to win handsome returns for relatively little outlay, as their tunnels had to be driven only short distances into the outcrop, whereas smaller companies, if they wished to share the Greta seam, were forced to sink expensive shafts away from the outcrop. The financial interest of the

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29. Report, Department of Mines, 1900.

30. Pamphlet: Pioneer Company of the South Maitland Coalfield. (Undated)

31. Prices based on average export prices. Reports, Department of Mines.

32. J.T. Sutcliffe, A History of Trade Unionism in Australia, Melbourne, 1921.

33. S.M.H. 15 May, 1906. p. 127.

larger coal companies in the railway lines which were extended to meet the transport demands of new mines not only contributed to the growth of monopolistic companies but also had the effect of inhibiting the expansion of the field in the early stages of its development.

With the arrival of the railway line at Cessnock in February, 1904, greater impetus was given to coal production on the South Maitland field, an impetus which was not checked until 1925, when the Department of Mines banned the opening of new mines because of the over-capacity of the industry. Nevertheless, the railway line had been slow in coming: in 1893, the first link was built from East Greta Junction to the East Greta Colliery; by 1902 the line had only reached Stanford Merthyr, although Pelaw Main Colliery was being developed in anticipation of a rail extension; in the following two years, first Weston, then Abermain, and finally Cessnock were joined by rail to the main New South Wales system. (34)

The coal leases taken up and operated near East Greta were in the northern portion of the South Maitland field: the first company to work the South Maitland field proper was the Silkstone Coal Company which began prospecting work in 1899, but with little commercial success. The Stanford Greta Company entered the field in 1899, but work was suspended early in the year 1900 and its holdings divided into two parts, one of which was acquired by J. and A. Brown, and later to be known as Pelaw Main Colliery, operations beginning there in December, 1900. The other portion was secured by the East Greta Coal Mining Company whose Stanford Merthyr pit was also opened in 1900. Further along the outcrop and towards Cessnock, the Hebburn Coal Mining Company began mining operations in October, 1902, (35) while in the following year, the Abermain

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34. The growth of the South Maitland Railway system will be considered in detail in Chapter II.

35. New South Wales Mineral Resources No. 37. Sydney, 1939. p.7

Colliery Company began operating on land held originally by the Silkstone Company, the colliery producing 67,000 tons in the first year. (36)

Gradually the outcrop of the Greta seam was opened up along its entire length: the Caledonian Coal Mining Company began shaft sinking in 1905 at the Aberdare Colliery near Cessnock; in the same year the important colliery of Richmond Main was begun by J. and A. Brown (37) although there was no coal produced on any large scale until 1913; Aberdare Extended Colliery was opened in 1906 by the Caledonian Coal Company near the site of Cessnock railway station; shaft sinking was begun at Neath Colliery in May, 1906 by the Wickham and Bullock Island Coal Mining Company although earlier prospecting had resulted in the finding of coal at a depth of 286 feet in October, 1905. (38) For the following four years (that is, from 1906), there was little new activity, but in 1910 the Abermain Colliery Company began its No. 2 shaft, completion being effected by 1912. The upward trend in coal prices evident after 1909 (39) was responsible for the opening up of new collieries to the west of Cessnock. Increased coal production and higher prices continued until 1928, (40) the interstate export price of coal rising from 9/3 per ton in 1909 to 23/6 per ton in 1928 and production from the Greta seam rising from 2,184,098 tons in 1909 to 4,935,286 tons in 1927, in which year the production from the Greta seam accounted for 69.07% of the total New South Wales output. (41) It was as a result of these buoyant conditions that coal mining activities were intensified

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36. Ibid.

37. From information supplied by J. Comerford it appears that the first coal operations on the Richmond Main site were begun about 1888, but the original company did not operate for long.

38. F. Danvers Power, Coalfields and Collieries of Australia. Melbourne, 1912. p. 353.

39. In the four or five years before World War I there was a steady increase in home consumption and interstate exports, and from 1904 to 1912, a rise in exports overseas.

40. When the Australian coal market was faced with cheap imported coal making a fall in wages necessary in order to reduce costs.

41. Reports, Department of Mines.



to the west of Cessnock: Bellbird Colliery, bought from the original owners, J. and A. Brown, and subsequently sold to the Hetton Bellbird Colliery Limited, began production in 1912; Aberdare Central, near the township of Kitchener, was begun in 1914, the first coal being won in 1917; Pelton Colliery, owned by the Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company commenced operations on April 15, 1916; and numerous other collieries were opened in quick succession: Cessnock Colliery(1917); Hebburn No.2(1918); Greta Main(1921); Gretamain and Stanford Merthyr No. 2(1922); Abermain No. 3(1923); Hill End and Millfield Greta(1924); and Hildale(1927).<sup>(42)</sup>

The opening of so many new collieries in the South Maitland field led to such over-capacity in the industry that the New South Wales Department of Mines felt compelled, in 1925, to grant no further coal leases for five years. It must be emphasised that the coal companies did not take any effective measures themselves to curb over-production, and in fact, two more collieries were opened up during the period of the ban as permission to develop had been granted prior to 1925. The first was Kalingo Colliery, owned by the Wickham and Bullock Island Coal Mining Company, which commenced shaft sinking in 1922 and production in 1927. The second, Elrington Colliery, owned by the Broken Hill Collieries Proprietary Limited was also opened in 1927, permission having been granted in 1921.<sup>(43)</sup>

Colliery development on the South Maitland field was such that pits were strung out along the outcrop of the Greta seam in a concentrated geographical situation from East Greta through Cessnock to Bellbird and Paxton. These were tunnel or drift type mines; the shaft type mines lay in an arc from Pelaw Main to Maitland Main and were all within four miles of the outcrop. All were

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42. Reports, Department of Mines, N.S.W.

43. Ibid.

eventually served by a network of private railways about twenty-two miles in length so that all collieries were brought to within forty miles of the port of Newcastle. The significance of the private railways will be dealt with later but it should be noticed here that the New South Wales Government was apparently not interested in organising the rail link to the mines on the Greta outcrop. Despite subsequent demands by many people that the line be taken over, successive Governments have declined to do so, so that the South maitland coalfield now has no adequate passenger rail service, the coal companies with a financial interest in the railway closing it down when the carrying of passengers became uneconomic.

Economic conditions and industrial strife after 1929 precluded the possibility of new mine openings. The Lockout of miners on the South Maitland field was followed by the disastrous years of the depression, during which coal mining was not a profitable business. Judge Drake-Brockman of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court remarked in 1939, after a close investigation of the financial aspects of the coal industry in New South Wales during the three worst years of the depression, that "an examination of the books of some thirty of the principal collieries revealed a truly remarkable set of facts. During the last seven years, with few exceptions, they have consistently made losses " (44) ...

It was on this sombre note that the coal mining industry had to face up to World War II, during which the problem was not one of over-capacity, but rather one of serious under-capacity, which continued for almost a decade beyond the cessation of hostilities, stability, prosperity and co-operation not coming to the coalfield until saner relations between management and workers were achieved.

CHAPTER II.COLLIERY, SHIPPING, RAILWAY LINKS.

Coal mining on the South Maitland field has been largely the preserve of the bigger joint stock companies, amalgamations and integration of subsidiary interests being prominent features, so that the trend has been for increasing production to fall into fewer hands. This has led to the public fear of monopoly and exploitation:

Horizontal combinations of separate colliery concerns, the vertical intrusion of shipping interests and steel works into colliery ownership, and what might be called the 'circular' combination of colliery enterprises with coke-works, brickyards, power stations and railways, all of these either by way of amalgamation of separate existing concerns or the development of ancillary enterprises, have in some small degree manifested themselves. (1)

As early as 1867 the export market formed the largest part of the trade of the various collieries in the Newcastle district and with subsequent growth in production and export, it was naturally in the best interests of the large companies in the district to maintain the selling price of coal at as high a rate as possible and the best way to do this was by mutual agreement. However, while a great part of coal mining in the Newcastle district was still in the hands of individual and small private companies the way to combination was not easy to organise as the maintenance of a high selling price could be achieved only by the smaller companies agreeing to intermittent working to meet the demands of consumers, the smaller concerns having insufficient capital to remain idle for long periods.

For this reason principally, the early attempts to fix selling prices by agreement ended in failure, but another attempt at cartellisation was made in 1874, after a successful miners' strike had demonstrated the urgency for owners to combine. Under this arrangement each company was allocated a quota

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1. F.R.E.Mauldon, The Economics of Australian Coal. Melbourne, 1929. p.76

of the trade, the particular allocation being dependent on the current market, and rising or falling with the demand. Fines were imposed on every ton of coal sold above the quota, the proceeds being used to re-imburse the companies which had not been able to sell their share. This scheme, although lasting a little longer than twelve months, <sup>(2)</sup> was also a failure because the smaller companies could not afford the periods of idleness necessary to make the scheme work, and the relative strength of these smaller concerns was still strong enough to break up the combination. A period of strong competition followed and yet another attempt to combine was made in 1878, the earlier scheme being modified so that the penalties for over-selling remained while the allocations were made on probable market requirements for the year. However, once again the 'vend', as it was called, broke up in 1880, when uncertainty of work produced industrial unrest which led to a prolonged stoppage. Further attempts to combine in 1891 and 1902 also failed, the depression affecting the earlier arrangement, while the rapid development of the South Maitland field after 1900 brought greater competition than before.

It is not difficult to explain why the movement towards combination became more prominent from about 1875. Before that date, production for the growing export market was hampered by the number of small companies and individuals, and the over-capacity of the industry. In fact, as Mauldon has pointed out:

Up to 1875, with the exception of the large Australian Agricultural Company financed with English funds, the enterprisers in coal in New South Wales were individuals, partnerships, and small private companies. Since that date, and more especially, from the beginning of the nineties, with the opening up of the rich Greta Seam of the Maitland field, the greater part of the coal production of the State has tended to come from a minority of large joint stock companies. (3)

Other factors promoting ideas of cartellisation were equally significant: the geographical concentration of collieries on the Newcastle field was most

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2. The plan came to an end in 1875.

3. F.R.E.Mauldon, The Economics of Australian Coal, Melbourne, 1929. pp.73-4

noticeable, and even more so on the South Maitland field; coal on both fields was of exceptional quality, the thicker seams of South Maitland giving that field a greater potential; and the chronic over-capacity, together with a monopoly of the best coal in Australia, led to a concentration of interests. The more immediate factors influencing the trend to combinations began in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Dislocation of the coal industry through strike action in 1887 and 1890, and the financial crisis of 1893 brought a temporary loss of export markets, a state of affairs which worsened when local industry began to feel the effect of the depression. However, the position had eased by 1897, and overseas' exports, from all three coal districts of New South Wales<sup>4</sup>. (4) were growing, although from 1901 the Northern field was clearly the most active, producing in 1906, seventy per cent of the State's output. (5)

The year 1901, however, marked the downward turning point of the rising tide of coal prices....The ascendancy of the rich Maitland field as a new source of competitive supply was not to be achieved without profoundly disturbing results to the entire coal industry. Proprietors and employees alike turned aggressively to measures which might consolidate their defences in the confusion of re-adjustment. (6)

To counter the effect of falling prices a new association of coal owners in the Northern district tried to fix prices, but failed when two or three collieries began to give rebates to customers. From a price of 8/1 per ton in 1903 coal rates fell to 7/3 per ton in 1904, and to 6/5 per ton in 1906, while production on the Northern field rose from 4,410,465 tons in 1903 to 5,336,188 tons in 1906, the Greta seam's contribution rising from 571,096 tons in 1903 to 1,316,702 tons in 1906. (7)

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4. That is, the Northern, Southern and Western.

5. F.R.E. Mauldon, The Economics of Australian Coal. Melbourne, 1929. p.77

6. Ibid.

7. Annual Reports, Department of Mines (N.S.W.).

Faced with declining prices and increased output, coal owners formed another association in 1906 "to revise and maintain the price of coal". (8) Terms of agreement for Vend members were decided, but the document remained unsigned, the Association having been warned by its legal adviser that

...any agreement that might be signed would bring the proprietors under the provisions of the Australian Industries Preservation Act, 1906, and in his opinion, it would be more advisable to carry on our operations on the lines of the agreement already decided upon, but without any signed document. (9)

The Vend arrangements were outlined later (10) by Mr Justice Isaacs who commented that an allotment was made to each member of the Vend as a proportion of the aggregate trade in each year. No member was allowed to sell at prices lower than those fixed from time to time, or to offer rebates or discounts of any kind. Penalties were imposed for selling in excess of allotment, and compensation given when a member's quota could not be sold. (11)

H.L.Wilkinson was rather critical of this penalty system, claiming that the lower rate of penalties introduced in 1909 (12) as a variation of those fixed originally "allowed the certain amount of latitude necessary to prevent public discussion". (13)

The superior quality of Newcastle and Maitland coal gave those fields a virtual monopoly of the interstate trade which had been carried on by various shipping companies and a few coal merchants owning a number of small steamers. Among the companies operating the coal trade in the first decade of the twentieth century were the Adelaide Steamship Company, Howard Smith and Company, Huddart Parker and Company, McIlwraith Mc Eacharn and Company, and

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8. H.L.Wilkinson, The Trust Movement in Australia. Melbourne, 1914. p.78.

9. Ibid., p.79.

10. In 1912.

11. H.L.Wilkinson, The Trust Movement in Australia. Melbourne, 1914. p.79.

12. Penalty and compensation rates were fixed at 1/6 per ton.

13. H.L.Wilkinson, The Trust Movement in Australia. Melbourne, 1914. p.82.

the Melbourne Steamship Company. Not only did these companies act as carriers, but in addition, they established coal depots and became coal contractors, although competition was still open. When the agreement was completed with the Associated Northern Collieries (14) direct dealing was stopped and the various shipping companies including James Paterson and Company and J. and A. Brown (also colliery owners) were given a monopoly of the sale of Newcastle coal outside New South Wales. Prior to this, in April, 1906, an important proposal had been adopted by the Association of Northern Collieries, when it was decided that no coal would be sold by the Association in the Commonwealth (New South Wales excepted) except to the steamship companies set forth in the proposed agreement for carriage. (15) According to the evidence produced by the collieries in 1912, the idea of this proposal was incorporated in an actual agreement (which was not signed), the main clauses being:

- A. The Vendors (the Associated Collieries) agree to sell to the purchasing agents (the four shipping companies, viz. the Adelaide Steamship Company, Howard Smith and Company, McIlwraith McEacharn and Company, Huddart Parker and Company), the whole of the coal which may be required by the purchasing agents to supply the trade of the States of Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland.
- B. The Vendors will as far as practicable, forward to the purchasing agents the coal from the particular colliery required by the purchasing agents, and failing that, then coal from one or other of the collieries of the same class... provided that in no case shall the Vendors be called upon to deliver coal from any colliery that has reached the limit of output assigned to it by the Vendors under any agreement existing between the collieries.
- C. All coal shall be delivered by the Vendors to the purchasing agents f.o.b.... and the prices to be paid for the various classes of coal shall be fixed by the Vendors annually.
- D. The Vendors agree not to supply any coal for consumption in any of the States (Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland) except to the said purchasing agents.
- E. The purchasing agents shall not purchase, sell or deal directly or indirectly or engage directly or indirectly in, or share the profits of the carriage of any coal other than that purchased by the purchasing agents from the Vendors. (16)

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14. On 13 September, 1906.

15. H.L. Wilkinson, The Trust Movement in Australia. Melbourne, 1914. p.83.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

Payment of penalties by purchasing agents to Vendors for every ton of coal purchased in violation of the agreement was fixed at the rate of four shillings per ton ;<sup>(17)</sup> while a further clause provided that the purchasing agents should not sell coal at higher rates than certain amounts above the f.o.b. price at Newcastle. At the same time large coal in lots of less than ten thousand tons in any one year was allowed to be sold at three shillings per ton advance on the fixed rates, provided that the additional price was credited to the collieries supplying the coal.<sup>(18)</sup> In all cases, wharfage, cartage, and other costs incurred by the purchasing agents could be added to the selling price. The effect of fixing the selling price in this way was to place the various shipping companies in the position of agents rather than purchasers.

The most obvious result of the linkage of collieries and interstate shipping was the increase in and stabilisation of the price of coal. The upward trend in the selling price after the agreement of 1906 is indicated in the following table:

TABLE I.

Table showing the selling price per ton of coal, 1906 - 12.

YEAR	SELLING PRICE PER TON (At Pit Mouth)
1906	6/5 (19)
1907	7/4
1908	8/1
1909	8/3½
1910	8/1½
1911	8/0
1912	8/1

Source: H.L.Wilkinson, The Trust Movement in Australia.  
Melbourne, 1914. p.84.

17. Ibid., p. 84

18. Ibid.

19. In 1906 the Newcastle selling price of coal was 9/0 per ton. Cited in (Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. App.I.



Coal prices which importing states were forced to pay also showed the effects of the colliery - steamship alliance, the increases being clearly demonstrated in the following table of prices paid by consumers before and after the agreement: (20)

TABLE II.

Prices paid for coal per ton by individual consumers before and after the colliery - steamship alliance, 1906.

PURCHASER	Year				
	1905	1906	1907	1908	1910
<u>VICTORIA.</u>					
Footscray Gas Company	14/-	-	18/6	19/9	-
Australian Paper Company	-	13/6	18/6	21/-	20/-
Melbourne Harbour or Trust	-	11/6	15/3	17/9	17/9
Victorian Railways	10/6	-	14/1	-	15/5
Melbourne City Council	-	13/6	18/3	20/10	20/4
Retail Dealers, Melbourne	-	14/9	21/-	22/-	21/6
<u>SOUTH AUSTRALIA.</u>					
Retail Dealers, Adelaide	17/-	17/-	24/6	26/-	26/3
S.Australian Government	18/5	-	25/7	27/2	27/3
Adelaide City Council	-	18/5	26/3	27/9	28/-
S.Australian Railways	-	11/9	-	17/6	17/-
<u>WESTERN AUSTRALIA.</u>					
Perth Gas Company	17/6	23/-	-	21/-	-
Perth City Council	-	23/-	26/8	-	28/8
<u>QUEENSLAND.</u>					
Townsville Harbour	18/9	20/6	23/-	25/-	25/-

Source: H.L.Wilkinson, The Trust Movement In Australia. Melbourne, 1914. p.85.

The prices quoted were for large coal and would include delivery, and would have to be corrected for any increase in cost of cartage during the period. However, this increase would be almost negligible compared with the increase at Newcastle where prices rose from 7/6 per ton in 1905 to 10/- per ton in 1907 and to 11/- per ton in 1908. (21) When receiving the increased prices in 1912, Mr Justice Isaacs was highly critical of the

20. i.e. the Agreement of 1906

21. H.L.Wilkinson, The Trust Movement in Australia. Melbourne, 1914. p.85.

combinations:

Even if the various types of calculation in the intricate circumstances before us were reduced in amount - and considerably reduced - there is such an enormous margin of excess, and so many circumstances concurring in the same results, that I would entertain no doubt whatever the public have borne, are bearing, and will, unless the combination is restrained, continue to bear a heavy detriment in regard to the cost of coal attributable entirely to the existence of the defendants' combination. (22)

In his analysis of the profits of the shipping companies, Wilkinson found the profits to be about twenty-five per cent on the capital outlay, but came to the conclusion that it was impossible " to say how much of this large profit was derived from shipping, and how much from the coal business; the only thing certain is that the shipping companies have got the profit, and the Australian people have found the money " (23)

The effect of the combination was also reflected in the miners' wages, as they were working more regularly because of the abolition of competition and the existence of an organised system of marketing and a regular output. In 1905, a year of unrestricted competition, the production of 4,645,742 tons of coal was valued at £1,473,995, but in 1908, when the Vend was fully operational, 6,511,002 tons, valued at £2,625,446 were produced. In the same years the number of miners employed on the Northern field rose from 10,505 to 13,243. Production of Greta seam coal in 1905 was 1,213,057 tons and in 1908, 2,459,911 tons, employment figures rising from 1,828 to 3,747 (24) Working expenses were also reduced substantially, probably from about sixpence to one shilling per ton as productivity increased, the annual tonnage raised per person employed rising from 562 tons in 1905 to 647 tons in 1908. (25)

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22. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

24. Annual Reports, Department of Mines (N.S.W.)

25. H.L. Wilkinson, *The Trust Movement in Australia*. Melbourne, 1914. p.80.

The foregoing has revealed the great contribution made to the stability of the coal industry by the formation of the Vend even though consumers were required to pay higher prices for coal from New South Wales, but the Vend did not solve the industry's problem of over-capacity: some collieries still worked up to their capacity even when they had filled their quota; it did not allow for expansion by individual companies: no new colliery could be opened without permission of the Vend; and the shipping companies' monopoly of the coastal trade prevented any further enterprise in that field. Nevertheless, the Vend was a powerful factor in developing the resources of the South Maitland field by initiating a period of relatively stable prices, thus allowing the expenditure of capital necessary for further development; and it prepared the way for the organic union of colliery and shipping interests which followed soon after 1912. It has not been possible to discover the composition of the membership of the Associated Northern Collieries, but it would be fairly safe to assume that the majority of companies operating on the South Maitland field would have been members, the principal proprietors being: J. and A. Brown; the East Greta Coal Mining Company Limited; the Caledonian Coal Company; Abermain Collieries Limited; the Hetton Coal Company Limited; and the Australian Agricultural Company. It was these companies, which, after 1912, when the Vend was dissolved, established close connections with various interstate shipping concerns. The dissolution of the Vend came as a result of legal proceedings by the Commonwealth Government in 1912, on grounds, under the Australian Industries Preservation Act, of combinations detrimental to the public interest. However, the subsequent arrangement replacing the relationship of shipping companies as mere selling agents, made possible a safe and effective monopoly by financial alliances " between pairs of large coal producers and purveyors of shipping ". (26)

CALEDONIAN COLLIERIES LIMITED - HOWARD SMITH AND COMPANY.

Caledonian Collieries Limited was established in 1913 to take over the property of the Caledonian Coal Company Limited, a Scottish company founded in 1895 with substantial interests in the Newcastle and Maitland areas. and operating five mines : Aberdare, Aberdare Extended, West Wallsend, West Wallsend Extended and Waratah, the last three being on the Newcastle field. Howard Smith and Company had been local agents and attorneys for the original company <sup>(27)</sup> and by 1913, when the company was reconstructed, it held a controlling interest in it , <sup>(28)</sup> the new company having a paid-up capital of £852,507, consisting of 600,007 ordinary shares and 252,500 preference shares. <sup>(29)</sup> In the Memorandum of Association of the new company, Howard Smith and Company Limited appeared as the sole vendors of the collieries, land and goodwill, without any recital of an antecedent conveyance to them by the Caledonian Coal Company Limited, and Howard Smith and Company was presumably entitled to receive as consideration the whole of the then issued share capital. <sup>(30)</sup> By 1918, share capital, fully paid-up, stood at £1,191,695, of which Howard Smith and Company Limited held 237,253 preference shares and 695,681 ordinary shares. <sup>(31)</sup> Another increase in share capital took place in 1920, when it was raised to £1,487,894, the major interest still being held by the shipping company. <sup>(32)</sup> The reconstructed company made good profits in the early 1920's, <sup>(33)</sup> but after 1927 difficulties arose. Over-production and loss of export markets caused a cessation of dividend payments in 1928, and they were

27. Royal Commission into the Coal Mining Industry and the Coal Trade of New South Wales. Sydney, 1919. p.13. (Henceforth cited as Report, Campbell Commission(1919)).

28. Sydney Stock Exchange. Research and Statistical Bureau. 6159, Coal and Allied Industries Limited. p.2.

29. A.G.L.Shaw and G.R.Bruns, The Australian Coal Industry. Melbourne, 1947. p. 59.

30. Report, Campbell Commission(1919). p. 14.

31. Ibid.

32. Sydney Evening News. 20 March, 1929.

33. 10% and 12% dividends were paid on ordinary shares in 1920 and 1921 respectively according to Shaw and Bruns, op. cit., p.59.

not resumed until 19<sup>3</sup>9. (34) Caledonian Collieries Limited was the largest colliery group on the South Maitland field before 1930, its pits of Aberdare and Aberdare Extended producing nearly 900,000 tons of coal in 1918. At that time the company's mines of Aberdare South (Abernethy) and Aberdare Central (Kitchener) were being developed, but by 1923 the latter was producing over 400,000 tons per year while Aberdare South ranked among the largest producers on the field. (35)

During the Second World War industrial disputes hindered operations in the company's mines, but open-cut mining was commenced at Caldare Colliery and Caledon Colliery, and two new underground mines were opened, at Waratah No2 on the Newcastle field and at Aberdare North Tunnel near Cessnock. (36) A dividend of ten per cent on ordinary shares was paid in 1956, the first issue since 1928, (37) and in 1959 the company issued 360,912 shares to acquire Cessnock Collieries Limited, bringing paid capital to £1,848,806. (38) Coal and Allied Industries Limited was formed in May, 1960 with an authorised capital of ten million pounds to acquire the issued capital of Caledonian Collieries Limited and J. and A. Brown and Abermain-Seaham Collieries Limited on the basis of four five-shilling ordinary shares in Coal and Allied for each twenty-shillings' ordinary share in Caledonian Collieries Limited, and five five-shillings' share in the J. and A. Brown company. Four five-shillings' seven per cent cumulative non-participation preference shares in Coal and Allied Industries, having the same voting rights as ordinary shares, were also given for each twenty-shillings' six per cent cumulative participating preference share in Caledonian Collieries Limited. Because of

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34. Sydney Stock Exchange. R.S.B. C159. Coal and Allied Industries Ltd.

35. Annual Reports, Department of Mines, N.S.W.

36. Sydney Stock Exchange. R.S.B. C159. Coal and Allied Industries Ltd.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

the controlling interest which Howard Smith and Company had in Caledonian Collieries Limited, the offer for the shares which they held was greater than that which applied to the other shareholders of Caledonian Collieries Limited.<sup>(39)</sup>

AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURAL COMPANY - HUDDART PARKER LIMITED (HEBBURN LIMITED)

The Australian Agricultural Company, once the holder of a monopoly on all coal produced in New South Wales, entered the South Maitland field in 1902, opening up Hebburn Colliery near the holdings of James Weston. Hebburn was a large producer, the annual output being about 400,000 tons. The Australian Agricultural Company also held an interest in the Aberdare Railway, but in July, 1914, both the colliery and the company's railway interests were acquired by a new company known as Hebburn Limited. The new operators began with a paid-up capital of £700,000, of which £675,450 was shared equally between the Australian Agricultural Company and Huddart Parker Limited,<sup>(40)</sup> the management of the company being left entirely to Huddart Parker Limited.<sup>(41)</sup> Preliminary work was begun in 1916 on a new mine at the southern end of the company's property. This pit was later known as Hebburn No. 2 and was comparable in size and output with the first colliery.

Later, Hebburn Limited acquired a one-third interest in Elrington Collieries Limited which began developmental work at Elrington Colliery in 1924, the first coal being produced some four years later.<sup>(42)</sup> A recent development in relation to Hebburn Limited has been its acquisition in 1967 by J. and A. Brown and Abermain-Seaham Collieries Limited (an operating subsidiary of the Coal and Allied group. At the same time Coal and Allied Industries acquired the fifty

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39. Ibid.  
40. Sydney Evening News. 20 March, 1929.  
41. Huddart Parker Limited. An Historical Survey of the Company 1876-1926. The Coal Business of the Company. Mitchell Library. (Q656.5090)  
42. Annual Reports, Department of Mines, N.S.W. H

per cent interest in the South Maitland Railways Proprietary Limited held by Boral Limited<sup>(43)</sup> thus widening the hold of Coal and Allied Industries over the South Maitland coalfield and its related transport.

#### EAST GRETA COAL MINING COMPANY - ADELAIDE STEAMSHIP COMPANY LIMITED.

The East Greta Coal Mining Company Limited was one of the pioneers of the South Maitland field and operated Stanford Merthyr No. 1 and No. 2, as well as East Greta Colliery, close to Maitland. The company was also the first to begin private railway construction in the district, having completed the East Greta line from East Greta Junction to Stanford Merthyr No. 1 by 1901. Some twenty years later, in order to develop its colliery holding in the Ellalong-Millfield area, south west of Cessnock, the East Greta Coal Mining Company completed arrangements with the Adelaide Steamship Company Limited to take up 250,000 shares, about one half of the then existing capital of the company.<sup>(44)</sup> The three collieries operated by the company had an aggregate yearly output of approximately 600,000 tons and contributed much to the field's production and history. The colliery's interest in railways will be discussed later in this chapter.

#### J. AND A. BROWN AND ABERMAIN-SEAHAM COLLIERIES LIMITED.

This company was formed in January, 1931 to effect an amalgamation between the interests of James and Alexander Brown, those of the Abermain - Seaham Collieries Limited and those of the East Greta Coal Mining Company Limited. The Abermain-Seaham Collieries Company had been formed in 1922 by the amalgamation of the Abermain Colliery Company<sup>(45)</sup> (incorporated in 1903) and

43. Sydney Stock Exchange. F.S.B. C159. Coal and Allied Industries Ltd.

44. The East Greta Coal Mining Company Ltd. - Pioneer Company of the South Maitland Coalfield. (Reprinted from the S.M.H., c. 1922. Mitchell Library. 622.33/E)

45. Abermain Nos. 1, 2 and 3 were controlled by this company.

Seaham Collieries Limited. Authorised capital was four million pounds in twenty-shillings' shares of which 800,000 and £200,000 seven per cent convertible mortgage debentures were allotted to J. and A. Brown for the Pelaw Main, Richmond Main, Minmi and Stockrington Collieries, <sup>(46)</sup> together with railways, plant and workshops. <sup>(47)</sup> Prior shareholders in Abermain-Seaham Collieries Limited received two shares in the reconstructed company (1931) for every three held. This holding amounted to 800,000 shares, and 300,000 shares were allotted as consideration for the East Greta Coal Mining Company Limited. Adelaide Steamship Company, because of its interests in the above companies, became the largest shareholder, with 527,614 shares of the 1,900,007 issued. <sup>(48)</sup> Because demand for coal decreased during the depression, Seaham No. 1 <sup>(49)</sup> was closed in 1931, and in subsequent years the loss of export markets and prolonged industrial disputes caused a further decline in profits. They reached a record low of £6,168 in 1935-36. <sup>(50)</sup> When the issued capital of the Wallarah Coal Company Limited <sup>(51)</sup> was acquired in 1956, J. and A. Brown and Abermain-Seaham Collieries Limited controlled and operated ten collieries producing approximately 1,800,000 tons of coal per year from the Newcastle and South Maitland fields, as well as its own railways and locomotives, coal preparation plants and electric power plant, engineering workshops, two ships engaged in the Newcastle to Sydney collier trade, a coal depot at Ball's Head, Sydney, and valuable forest areas, together with a New Zealand subsidiary, Thomas Brown Limited, engaged in coal marketing in New Zealand. The company acquired

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46. Minmi and Stockrington were not on the South Maitland field.  
 47. Sydney Stock Exchange. R.S.B. C159. Coal and Allied Industries Limited.  
 48. By 1929, other shipping companies, including Howard Smith and Co., and Huddart Parker Ltd., held shares in Abermain-Seaham Collieries Ltd. totalling 121,760. (Sydney Evening News, 21 March, 1929.)  
 49. Not on the South Maitland Field.  
 50. Sydney Stock Exchange. R.S.B. C159. Coal and Allied Industries Limited.  
 51. Wallarah Colliery was 25 miles south of Newcastle and produced first grade steam coal.



in 1958, two new subsidiaries which operated the Liddell and Durham Collieries in the Singleton-Muswellbrook area, but was itself acquired by Coal and Allied Industries in 1960. (52)

According to the Royal Commission of 1919<sup>(53)</sup> the organic relation which existed between the two coal companies (East Greta Coal Mining Company Limited and Abermain-Seaham Collieries Limited) and the Adelaide Steamship Company was based, not so much on any shareholding interest, as upon some form of contract, probably connected with the debenture charge upon the collieries held by the steamship company. (54) However, shares in the coal companies were probably acquired after 1919 and no doubt over a long period.

#### OTHER COLLIERY - SHIPPING CONNECTIONS.

The Hetton-Bellbird Coal Company and the shipping firm of McIlwraith McEacharn were also connected in a similar fashion, while other related interests were of a more positive kind. R.W. Miller and Company at present holds a pre-eminent position in the Australian coal industry, through its activities as producer, distributor and shipper. Its operations are most diverse and embrace hotels, production, distribution and shipping of coal, engineering, road transport and insurance. The company owns or controls the production of nine collieries on the Northern field (55) and has offices in the main cities of Australia and in Tokio (Japan) as well. Through this network the group handles the distribution of its own production and also acts as distributor for most other coal producers in northern New South Wales, including the total production of Coal and Allied Industries Limited for

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52. Sydney Stock Exchange. R.S.B. C159. Coal and Allied Industries Ltd.

53. Report, Campbell Commission. (1919) p.50.

54. Ibid.

55. Including Ayrfield and Millfield Collieries on the South Maitland field.

the Australian market. (56)

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The Royal Commission of 1919 inquiring into the coal industry could reach no definite conclusion as to the exact nature of the links between the various colliery and shipping companies beyond suggesting that

Their relations might possibly be explained as being perfectly harmless and legitimate as far as the consuming public in this or other states are concerned, ..

[but] it is a business alliance intended necessarily to accomplish a definite purpose connected with the producing and trading functions of the collieries; whether and to what extent competition is restricted and regulated I am unable to say. (57)

On the other hand, the Royal Commission ten years later (58) had no doubt that the way was open for monopolistic control and restriction since

In total, approximately 60% of the output of the Maitland field is produced in collieries having a substantial connection with associated interstate steamship owners, while an additional 25% of the output is from collieries whose proprietors own ships trading coast-wise or interstate with coal cargoes. (59)

Similarly, Mauldon had no doubt of the advantages accruing to those concerned with colliery -shipping alliances:

It is obvious that the organic union of colliery companies with shipping enterprises which vend the bulk of the coal sold on the interstate markets gives the former, under normal conditions of demand, at once strong protection from uncertainties on the competitive fringe of sales and the power to set the price for the greater part of the coal upon which the Australian Community depends. (60)

Control of the interstate coal trade by the various shipping companies was found to have been operating by the 1929 Royal Commission and an explanation of the role of the shipping companies was suggested:

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56. Sydney Stock Exchange. R.S.B. R82. R.W.Miller(Holdings) Limited.

57. Report, Campbell Commission(1919). p. 49.

58. Report of the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry. Sydney, 1930.  
(Cited hereafter as: Report, Davidson Commission(1930)).

59. Report ,Davidson Commission(1930). p.140.

60. F.R.E.Mauldon,The Economics of Australian Coal.Melbourne,1929. p.79.

The consumers find it of no value to make contracts with coal mining companies in New South Wales because of the difficulties in obtaining shipping facilities and they find it more effective to place their orders with one or other shipping company which distributes coal at prices which include all charges to the point of delivery in the state of the consumer. The purchaser is able to name the mines from which he desires supplies and is not precluded from obtaining coal from those collieries. (61)

The question of profitability arising from the colliery-shipping link has not been decided one way or the other. Nevertheless, it appears that too much attention has been given to condemning those concerned as monopolists and profiteers. For example, it has been asserted that Howard Smith and Company exercised its controlling interest to depress profits in its subsidiary, Caledonian Collieries Limited, while recouping itself by shipping operations and coal selling. (62) This was denied by a Howard Smith accountant (A.W.Harvey) in evidence before the Arbitration Court. He claimed that "Howard Smith purchased from Caledonian Collieries Limited all its own coal requirements - 130,000 tons in 1937 - which were less than 14 per cent of the total sales of the Caledonian Collieries." (63)

Judge Drake-Brockman, when handing down his judgment in the coal miners' case for new working conditions before the Arbitration Court in 1939, after commenting that no attempt had been made by the shipping companies to conceal their financial interests in the coal mining industry, said:

The shipping concerns do not make undue profits out of their coal transactions as coal merchants, nor out of coal freights. The company with the best results derived only 11 per cent of its total profit from this source despite the fact that coal comprised more than half the total tonnage freight carried. (64)

The real problem in estimating profit seems to be that the complicated links

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61. Report, Davidson Commission (1929). p.258.

62. A.G.L.Shaw and G.R.Bruns, The Australian Coal Industry. Melbourne, 1947. pp.71-2

63. Minutes of Evidence. Coal Miners' Case. Arbitration Court, 1939. p.1842 Cited in Shaw and Bruns. op. cit., p.72.

64. 40 Commonwealth Arbitration Report. p.383. Cited in Shaw and Bruns, op.cit., p. 72.

between collieries and shipping companies make it impossible to give an accurate assessment. What is certain however, is that even if profits have not resulted from the alliances, the aim in establishing such links was financial gain, to be brought about by some degree of monopoly through combinations of associated interests.

In the Northern coal district, which includes the South Maitland field, the large coal companies did not rely entirely on their affiliations with shipping companies to protect their economic interests. Membership of the Northern Colliery Proprietors' Association made possible a common price policy, and in 1929, membership totalled twenty-three, and members controlled collieries which produced eighty-five per cent of the whole Northern output and employed 11,600 men. (65) A significant feature of the 1929 Lockout was that the South Maitland coal owners acted together in closing their mines, the only exceptions being Hilldale, Hillend and Millfield Greta Collieries. According to Mauldon, the Association had co-ercive power to compel adherence to a common policy which maintained a high selling price:

The common bond which has so far effectively held together both great and small, has been high price maintenance on the naturally protected Australian market, to which the Association's members are the chief purveyors. (66)

Affiliations with shipping companies, and common policies, placed the members of the Northern Colliery Proprietors' Association in a particularly strong position. Undoubtedly members were strengthened even further by the size of the collieries controlled by the Association and the quality of Greta coal, which for many years was in high demand and was used to set the rate for all coal. This was emphasised by the 1929 Royal Commission when discussing the activities of the Association. The Commissioner held that the combination

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65. Report, Davidson Commission(1930). p. 140  
66. F.R.E.Mauldon, The Economins of Australian Coal. Melbourne, 1929. p.79.

enabled the coal owners to have a common policy during industrial troubles and that the quality of South Maitland coal set the price for all other coal. (67) However, the Commission did make it clear that despite the close association of the owners on the Northern field, there was some element of competition for the available markets, (68) and particular collieries concentrated on certain classes of trade, thus removing the suspicion of absolute monopoly. It was also emphasised that the owners maintained their association for the obvious purpose of keeping the price of coal at a high level and presenting a common front to employee demands. Nevertheless, after World War I, when depressed conditions affected the coal industry, the tendency was for owners to act independently of the Association, thus reducing its influence as competition became stronger. At present the tendency is for separate colliery companies on the South Maitland field to merge, so that the position has been reached where Coal and Allied Industries controls the bulk of the coal produced, although Pelton, Ayrfield, Maitland Main and Bellbird Collieries are still outside its control. (69)

#### THE SOUTH MAITLAND RAILWAY NETWORK.

As is shown above the coal industry on the South Maitland field had been closely associated with shipping companies engaged in the interstate trade, an arrangement intended to provide economic advantages. The links between coal companies and shipping concerns were paralleled on the South Maitland field itself where the development and expansion of coal mining in this century had resulted in a network of private railway lines constructed to carry coal from the points of production to the main Northern Railway and thence to either the

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67. Report, Davidson Commission ((1930). p. 140.

68. Ibid., p. 141.

69. Pelton Colliery is now controlled by The Peko-Wallsend Co., Ayrfield by the R.W. Miller group, Maitland Main is a very small producer, and the Hetton Bellbird Co. is in liquidation, the assets having been sold.



point of loading on ships or to the various consumers. The railways on the South Maitland field were originally built to carry coal only, but as the population of the coal towns grew there was a demand for the provision of a passenger service which was provided from Maitland to Cessnock. At present (1967) the South Maitland Railway Company Limited is the controlling body for the line from East Greta Junction to Cessnock and other companies control spurs off this line or extensions of it. Only recently the South Maitland Railway Company Limited decided to cancel all passenger arrangements on the line leaving the coalfields without a direct rail link with the New South Wales Railway system, the argument in support of cessation being that declining patronage made the running of passenger cars uneconomic. There is some doubt whether the terms of the original agreement to allow the building of the private line permit the closure of the passenger service, but it would be unreasonable to force the railway company to provide a service which the public has shown little desire to use in recent years.

The history of the railway development on the South Maitland field is outlined here for three reasons; first, the amount of relevant published material about the private lines is negligible; (70) secondly, the network, being privately owned and operated, is unique in the development of railways in New South Wales; and thirdly, the lines have been of the greatest significance in the commercial and social life of the South Maitland area, especially as successive governments have shown little or no interest in the transport needs of the coal industry and the large population associated with it.

As coal mining enterprises extended along the Greta seam outcrop west of Maitland in the early years of the twentieth century, the railway was extended too, in order to cope with the increased production, until it reached

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70. Heavy reliance for the information in this section has been placed on notes supplied by J. Delaney, Copper Street, Cessnock and on word of mouth evidence given to me by others.

Cessnock early in 1904,<sup>(71)</sup> at about the time the coal leases around that town and to the west were being opened up. However, the first coal produced from the Greta seam was not hauled by train; horse teams were used from about 1889 to carry coal from the East Greta Coal Mining Company's pit at East Greta to the railhead at Maitland. About that date (1889) the Silkstone Coal Company had taken up coal leases near the future site of Abermain No. 1 Colliery, and despite the fact that its operations were superficial and a commercial failure, the company did foresee transport difficulties if and when large-scale production became a reality. Consequently, the Silkstone Coal Company approached the New South Wales Government for permission to build a railway line from the Great Northern Railway to their coal lease at Abermain. Permission was given in the form of the Silkstone Coal Mine Railway Act,<sup>(72)</sup> but before any steps were taken to commence the project, the Silkstone Coal Company was sold to the Clyde Coal, Land and Investment Company, which sought successfully, an extension of time for completion of the railway allowed under the Act of 1889.

It was at that time that the East Greta Coal Mining Company became interested in a railway and on June 7, 1892, completed arrangements with the Clyde Coal, Land and Investment Company to build a line under the charter of the Silkstone Act from near Maitland to the colliery at East Greta.<sup>(73)</sup> The junction of the new railway with the New South Wales Government's line was at a point twenty-one miles from Newcastle, close to the present Government Railway's East Greta Exchange Signal Box, and was a single line only, the amount of traffic not warranting duplication at that stage.<sup>(74)</sup> The single track line made a loop siding necessary on the East Greta side of

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71. The first train reached Cessnock on 16 February, 1904 and the first passenger travelled over the line on 1 March the same year.

72. 30 September, 1889

73. The line was begun on 20 July, 1892.

74. The new siding was officially opened on 26 July, 1893.



the junction, and main line signals protecting the junction, the points on the main line, catch points on the siding, and the branch lines were all operated from an interlocked ground frame. The new siding was soon known as 'East Greta Siding', and early government trains to the siding were accompanied by a 'points' man from West Maitland. With the installation of electric train staff working between Maitland and Farley<sup>(75)</sup> the signals were removed and the points fitted with an Annette lock freed by a key on the staff.

Further mine development did not take place until 1898 when coal leases at Stanford Greta No. 1<sup>(76)</sup> (later Stanford Merthyr No. 1) and at Heddon Greta were opened up and as a result of the expected coal traffic, Parliament gave permission under the Stanford Coal Mining Railway Act (25 July, 1900) for an extension of the railway from East Greta to Stanford Merthyr. The extension was completed and ready for traffic on September 6, 1901 and two months later the line was taken to Stanford Greta No. 2<sup>(77)</sup> (later Pelaw Main) where sinking operations had begun in December, 1900. The first train of coal from Stanford Merthyr was hauled in January, 1902, and later in the month coal was transported by rail from Heddon Greta Colliery.

The rapid growth of population to the south and west of Maitland created a definite need for a goods and passenger service, a need which was fulfilled on June 14, 1902 when the first passenger service was begun. Sixty passengers were carried on the second day of operation from East Greta Junction to Stanford Merthyr. <sup>(78)</sup> At first there were two trains a day each way on weekdays and one on Sundays, the journey taking thirty minutes. Station staff was provided at East Greta Junction, East Greta, and Stanford Merthyr, but

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75. On 9 February, 1894.

76. Originally owned by the Stanford Greta Coal Company, and later by the East Greta Coal Mining Company, until the holding was divided. The colliery was then renamed.

77. Sold to J. and A. Brown when the East Greta Coal Mining Company divided its property.

78. Maitland Mercury. 15 June, 1902.

Aberdare Junction and Heddon Greta were unattended platforms.

In the meantime, progress was being made on the line to Cessnock. During 1900 the Aberdare Colliery Company of New South Wales Limited was formed to work leases in the Cessnock area<sup>(79)</sup> and these were taken up in the parishes of Stanford Merthyr and Cessnock on June 7, 1901. About the same time, the Australian Agricultural Company extended its Newcastle interests to the South Maitland field by purchasing leases and commencing developmental work at Hebburn Colliery near the present site of Weston. Because of the opening up of the outcrop to as far as Cessnock, and the consequent need for transport another railway act was passed by the New South Wales Parliament on December 27, 1901, granting permission for the construction of a railway from the Cessnock leases to the East Greta Coal Mining Company's railway at Aberdare Junction. The original survey made by the Silkstone Company was altered,<sup>(80)</sup> but as the new route would have by-passed Hebburn Colliery, the Australian Agricultural Company signified its willingness to become joint owner of the new section of line.<sup>(81)</sup> Accepting the offer, the Aberdare Board of Control reverted to the original Silkstone survey and commenced the building of a single track railway from Aberdare Junction early in 1902. The line was completed as far as Weston in December of the same year, the first coal being despatched by rail from Hebburn in April, 1903, although coal from the pit's second tunnel, commonly known as "sore-eye" tunnel, had been transported by rail for some time previously.

Progress was rather slow, but gradually the line was extended to Abermain. Abermain No. 1 Colliery was opened in April, 1903, by the Abermain Coal Company which had acquired the leases previously bought from the Silkstone

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79. The company was formed at Newcastle on 24 January, 1901.

80. i.e. from Aberdare Junction to Cessnock.

81. From East Greta Junction to the Company's leases at Abermain

Coal Company by the Clyde Coal, Land and Investment Company. The Abermain leases were quite extensive and the siting of the railway most significant, as it was to traverse the Abermain leases from beginning to end. (82)

In terms of time the Aberdare railway was still six months away from Cessnock when important developments occurred on the original line to Stanford Merthyr and Pelaw Main. As production from all pits on the Maitland field increased, an extension of the railway was necessary to cope with the heavier traffic. It was for this reason that the line between East Greta Junction and East Greta was duplicated in July, 1903, although passengers travelling from or to the coalfields were still compelled to make the journey from East Greta Junction to West Maitland by the best means they could, often on foot, in inclement weather through mud up to the ankles. Passenger traffic increased rapidly after the opening of the Stanford Merthyr line in 1902 and consistent public demand and agitation resulted in the Stanford Merthyr train being extended to West Maitland. (83) Better facilities for passengers were also provided at Stanford Merthyr, and a short branch line was built from Stanford Merthyr to a point one - quarter of a mile closer to the township of Kurri Kurri, this new railway station being the first to provide coalfields' people with a covered platform and other facilities, including a goods shed and siding.

Although traffic on the Stanford Merthyr line was increasing in 1903, the amount of coal being hauled on the Aberdare line from Abermain to Aberdare Junction was still slight. Abermain Colliery had begun sinking operations in April, 1903, but coal was not produced in any volume until early in the following year. The only coal carried on this section of the line in 1903 was from the two Hebburn pits, Hebburn locomotives being used to Aberdare

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82. Maitland Mercury, 22 August, 1903

83. 20 August, 1903.

Junction, where the East Greta Coal Mining Company took over the haulage. This arrangement was suitable apparently, while output west of Aberdare Junction was small, but the prospect of increased production brought an agreement between the Aberdare Railway Board of Control and the East Greta Coal Mining Company whereby the last named company agreed to haul coal from all points on the Aberdare Railway.<sup>(84)</sup> It was also determined that the East Greta Company should provide the staff and employees for the working of stations and signal boxes. Shortly afterwards <sup>(85)</sup> a passenger service was commenced between Aberdare Junction and Abermain, passengers having to change trains at Aberdare Junction. The journey to Cessnock in 1903 required the spirit of adventure! To West Maitland travellers were conveyed on the New South Wales Government train. There they alighted and joined the East Greta Coal Mining Company's train for the trip to Aberdare Junction. At this 'remote' station passengers boarded another train to be carried to the terminus at Abermain. From Abermain to Cessnock travellers were conveyed in quite a leisurely manner by "Joe Doyle's Horse Coach".

Realising the increasing significance of its railway enterprise, the East Greta Coal Mining Company issued to its staff in 1903 a distinctive uniform, consisting of a navy coat, two pairs of trousers and a matching vest. Down the side of each trouser leg was a three inch blue stripe, while each station employee was given a hard round peaked cap, with a red band on the stiff upright side, resembling the type of headgear worn at that time by members of the French Army. Silver buttons, to be worn on the uniforms were issued later, and bore the inscription " E.G.C.M.Co. Ltd. " half surrounding an embossed design of a skip of coal, a reminder of the close connection between the railway and the industry it served.

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84. Maitland Mercury, 11 December, 1903.

85. 21 December, 1903.

The first fatal accident on the Stanford Merthyr line occurred the day after the celebrations at Cessnock to mark the completion of the line and the initiation of the passenger service. John Murray, a wheeler at Stanford Merthyr Colliery was struck by a train of empty wagons. Later in the year, by way of contrast, the railway was used to help save the lives of men injured in an explosion at Aberdare shaft <sup>(86)</sup> on November 4, one of the East Greta Company's engines being used to haul a wagon conveying the injured to the level crossing at Weston, whence the men were taken by horse and cart to the newly established hospital at Kurri Kurri. Just as the mines on the South Maitland field have contributed their piece to the drama of life and death always evident where miners are, so the South Maitland Railway was responsible for a death and the saving of lives in the first year of its completion.

Increased production and the rapid development of mines in 1904 and 1905 necessitated changes and to overcome the traffic congestion, the signal box at East Greta Junction was remodelled and three extra sidings added for the storage of coal trains or empty wagons. New interlocking signals were installed and a boom gate, operated from the signal box and the first of its kind in New South Wales, was brought into operation. Coal continued to pour out of the collieries around Cessnock and by 1906 changes were necessary to improve the Cessnock - Aberdare Junction section of the line. In that year, the Wickham and Bullock Island Coal Company began to open up Neath Colliery and a branch line was built from Abermain to the pit. The first coal from Neath was hauled over the new section of the line on February 26, 1907. <sup>(87)</sup> Some months prior to this <sup>(88)</sup> the Australian Agricultural Company became the sole owners of the Aberdare Railway from Aberdare Junction to Cessnock, and had

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86. Where sinking had begun on 15 March, 1904.

87. F. Danvers Power, Coalfields and Collieries of Australia. Melbourne, 1912. p. 353 et seq.

88. 1 June, 1906.

made an agreement with the East Greta Coal Mining Company to run the passenger services for them, thus giving the East Greta Company running control over the whole of the South Maitland line to Cessnock, so far as passenger traffic was concerned. The opening of new pits such as Aberdare Extended, after 1907, and the continued rise in coal production, brought new extensions and alterations to station layouts, the most important being the extension of the line to Bellbird, three miles to the west of Cessnock. Bellbird Colliery had been commenced in 1908, but the first coal was not brought to Cessnock by rail until 1911, although it had been carted by road before that. Other changes about that time included a 'through' passenger service from Maitland to Cessnock; duplication of the line from Aberdare Junction to Weston (1909) and to Neath (1909); remodelling of the station at Stanford Merthyr to handle increased quantities of coal (1910); and in 1912, almost twelve years to the day from the arrival of the first train at Cessnock the second track was completed, thus duplicating the entire line from Maitland to Cessnock. In the meantime there had been some agitation to have the East Greta Coal Mining Company's line extended via Pelaw Main to the Aberdare Railway at Weston, but the agreement between the East Greta Company and the Australian Agricultural Company to run traffic from Weston to Aberdare Junction over the Aberdare Railway precluded the building of such a line at that time.

The ownership of coal leases and collieries and railway lines had changed considerably before the advent of World War I and those changes culminated in two important developments in 1914: in March the Caledonian Coal Company became known as Caledonian Collieries Company Limited, a name synonymous with coal mining on the South Maitland field; and in July, a new group, Hebburn Collieries, took over the coal operations of the Australian

Agricultural Company on the South Maitland field. The war years continued to see the opening of new collieries, despite the intermittency of work in the Newcastle mines: Abermain No. 3 and Pelton Collieries were begun in 1916, a branch line being constructed from Bellbird to accommodate the traffic from Pelton; and Aberdare Central, where sinking had commenced in 1914, sent its first coal out on the newly built line from the pit in 1916.

At the conclusion of the war there were further developments which affected the railways on the field. The South Maitland Railway Company was formed on November 22, 1918 to take over the railways formerly held by the East Greta Coal Mining Company and the Aberdare Railway Company. The flow of coal was maintained as new collieries were opened to meet the demand for Greta seam coal: Stanford Merthyr No.2 (later Stanford Main No.2), Greta Main (later Maitland Main), and Millfield Collieries were opened and linked to the railway line in 1922 and 1923. However, economic conditions after that period caused a ban to be placed on the opening of new mines, and a slackening in demand for South Maitland coal. The period was also marked by severe industrial strife which harmed the coal industry's capacity to meet what demand there was.

An era appeared to have closed in the history of mining on the South Maitland field on September 24, 1929, when the original company on the field, the East Greta Coal Mining Company ceased operations. The company had been mining the area from 1888 and had been instrumental in organising the first railway development south of Maitland. The real significance of the Company's passing however, was probably lost in view of the industrial strife then taking place on the field. The Lockout gave way to depression and the railway company did not pass unscathed through the turbulent times:

The sixteen mile South Maitland Railway in New South Wales had its own tempestuous moments in the depression year of 1930 when hundreds of aggrieved miners wandered through the idle coalfields. One night, (89) the South Maitland's carriage shed and all the rolling stock inside it mysteriously went up in flames. A reward of £600 offered by the Government for information on the alleged sabotage was never claimed, nor did the South Maitland [Company] operate passenger trains of its own for another thirty years. (90)

Temporary arrangements were made to operate the service after the disaster by hiring carriages from the New South Wales Department of Railways, but agreement was reached in April, 1930 between the South Maitland Railway Company and the the New South Wales Government, under which the Department of Railways was to operate the passenger service between Maitland and Cessnock, using its own carriages and engines worked by its own drivers, firemen and guards. The Company was to provide staff at the stations along the route.

With the depression making its impact on the economic life of the coalfields it seemed unlikely that further colliery development would take place, but an important link was added to the railway network in 1936 when Weston and Pelaw Main were connected by a line passing behind the presents site of the K urri Kurri - Weston swimming pool. This line connected the South Maitland railway system to the New South Wales railway at Hexham, thus providing an alternative route from the coalfields over what was known as the J. and A. Brown line, via Richmond Vale to the coal loading point at Hexham. During the Second World War coal and passenger traffic were very heavy, the average daily number of trains using the line to Maitland being one hundred, of which about eighty were coal trains and the remainder passenger trains.

The practical importance of the Weston - Pelaw Main link was realised in June, 1949, when disastrous floods in the Hunter River Valley caused a

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89. 1 March, 1930

90. C.C.Singleton and D. Burke, Railways of Australia. Sydney, 1963. p.133.



suspension of normal traffic on the South Maitland Line. John Delaney, then Union Secretary of the South Maitland Railways Officers' Association, made the suggestion to J. Bowdler, then Joint Coal Board Engineer in charge of the Cessnock District, that all coal traffic could be handled by utilising the Richmond Vale line to Hexham. The suggestion also envisaged the use of some Government engines, manned by South Maitland Railways' locomotive crews. In addition, the South Maitland Railway Company was to provide some of its employees to work as signalmen and officers on the Richmond Vale railway. All suggestions were acted upon and up to twenty-three locomotives from Government, South Maitland Railways and Richmond Vale Railways were associated in the emergency undertaking, a procedure which was adopted on later occasions when flooding hampered coal haulage from the South Maitland field.

After thirty years, the South Maitland Railway Company, in 1961, reverted to operating its own passenger service using its own vehicles. Three diesel-powered passenger cars were brought into service to operate a time-table similar to that previously provided by the government, but the disruption of production, the reduced manpower in coal mines and the opening up of better roads gradually reduced the number of passengers using the line. To meet the lowered demand, services were reduced and finally terminated in 1967. There is little indication that the service will re-open.

The contribution of the Railway Companies to the development of coal production of the South Maitland field cannot be over-estimated. However, it should be remembered that the coal companies themselves began and operated the lines and it was only just that they should have received any profits made. It was the merging of interests involving producers and distributors which enabled the colliery companies to remain solvent during the many years when production of coal alone was not an economic venture.

CHAPTER III.

INDUSTRIAL STRIFE 1900 -1928.

Wherever there is a coal industry there is a field ready for the seeds of dissidence or already ripe with a harvest of troubles. Even when coal mining is for the time being in comparative repose after one of the great scale struggles which it periodically contributes to the industrial drama, it is never entirely quiescent. It is indeed, an industry in which disputation, if not disputes, enter into normal relationships between the managerial and operative factors in a degree that for other industries would be quite abnormal. (1)

F.R.E.Mauldon wrote these words against the background of the impending Lockout of 1929, and taking into account the industrial difficulties experienced in the coal industry of New South Wales previously. Mauldon did not regard the owner-investor in the coal industry, as a class, any more than investors generally, as economic oppressors, but his opinion was that because their investment was in coal mining they " are assumed to have inherited the guilt of forerunners back as far as the bad old days of female and child labour in the mines, and that is a guilt from the tradition of which the miners are in no hurry to grant employers in coal winning an entire absolution." (2)

Judge Drake-Brockman, in handing down an award to mine-workers in October, 1940<sup>(3)</sup> commented that the history of the coal mining industry, from its very inception, could be described as an unbridled and unregulated contest between employers and employees. (4) Employers have held that because miners were different from other people there was no possibility of regulating coal winning activities, but Judge Drake-Brockman dismissed this idea, stating that there was no difference between Australians engaged in coal mining and Australians engaged in any other occupation. (5)

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1. F.R.E.Mauldon, The Economics of Australian Coal. Melbourne, 1929. p.157.

2. Ibid., p. 162

3. This award gave a 7/- per week increase to employees on a daily wage,

4. Cited in Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963 p. 214.

5. Ibid.

Despite the assurances that miners were not any different from other workers, a kind of hysteria had developed relative to coal mining in Australia generally, and perhaps on more militant fields like the South Maitland field, in particular. The type of emotionalism associated with the industry was illustrated in Alan Walker's sociological survey of Cessnock (6), where evidence was quoted to give the impression that fear of the underground and hatred of the owner were inextricably associated with coal mining and industrial discord. However, Judge Davidson in his report on the coal industry in 1946, did not subscribe to this view of the mineworker, and cited his own evidence to support the contention that Walker had been " obviously misled in some respects by inaccurate propaganda which is circulated in all the coalfields of the Commonwealth by disgruntled persons, and is frequently, in one form or another, re-iterated by leaders of the Miners' Federation both in their own statements and in ~~the~~ <sup>their</sup> newspaper Common Cause. (7) It is far too simple, however, to blame the Miners' Federation for all the industrial unrest, just as it would be incorrect to accuse the mine owners of consistently exploiting labour regardless of fair play or miners' working and living conditions. Many have held the view that in the Northern field, of which the South Maitland field is a part, migrating miners from Great Britain brought their traditional hostile attitude with them, being convinced that the mine owner was the natural enemy and that the miner's duty was to defeat him. Such critics, including the more militant members of the Miners' Federation (8) associated mining with a bitter struggle to wrest concessions from the management. Others have been inclined to sympathise with the miner, holding the view that the arduous and dangerous nature of his occupation had been responsible for his many

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6. A. Walker, Coaltown: A Social Survey of Cessnock, N.S.W. Melbourne, 1945.

7. Report, Davidson Commission (1946). p.163.

8. Whose extremist views may be seen in almost every copy of Common Cause, the Journal of the Miners' Federation.

shortcomings and privileges, his habit of absenteeism, his relatively high wage, the shortness of his working week and his holidays with pay. Nevertheless, there is certainly ample evidence to support the claim that the miners themselves had been responsible for much of the industrial unrest in the coal industry. N.R. Mighell, Commonwealth Coal Commissioner, had this to say in 1945:

I have no hesitation in saying that the great majority of strikes have been due to ill considered action taken by members of the Miners' Federation, and a surprisingly large number are related to matters which appear to have no association whatever with owner-employee relations. Protests against Governmental regulations, against decisions of Industrial Authorities, against instructions or actions of District or Federal Executives of the Union itself, have been far too common a feature of the industry over recent years. (9)

A disturbing feature of the coal industry had been the tone with which contending parties put their claims: highly provocative, charged with emotion; and often in the nature of threats, violence, recriminations and retaliatory actions. One of the causes of the antagonism was the effect of intermittent working on the coal miner. Stoppages of long duration<sup>(10)</sup>, leaving aside those of a minor nature, were responsible for the loss of millions of tons of coal, hastened the use of substitute fuels, made it impossible to compete successfully for overseas markets and finally forced the Australian States, other than New South Wales, to turn to alternative sources of coal and power. On a more local level, stoppages disrupted the coal industry, brought the economic hardships associated with part-time working, caused the closure of some pits and introduced periods of under-capacity, problems which were not solved until the coal industry of New South Wales came under the supervision of the Joint Coal Board. (11)

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9. N.R. Mighell, Coal and Australian Industry. (An address to members of the Institute of Industrial Management. Sydney, 19 November, 1945. Mitchell Library, 651.06/7.

10. Such as those of 1909-10; 1914; 1916; 1923; 1929; and 1949.

11. Control was assumed in 1947, but it took some years to achieve results.

Although the miners do not lack critics, it would be only just to point out that on almost every occasion, claims for increased wages and shorter hours have been resisted by employers, the strength of their resistance being determined by the relative prosperity of the industry at the time. On the other <sup>hand</sup> employees have consistently opposed the reduction of wages or increases in hours worked. It is also important to notice that with only two exceptions, in 1922 and 1928, <sup>(12)</sup> the mineworkers were forced to take the initiative in making claims and it would be reasonable to suggest that many of the grievances embodied in logs of claims were apparent long before the demands were actually set down and served on the employers by the Miners' Federation.. A number of serious strikes and many smaller stoppages might have been prevented by a more realistic appraisal, on the part of the employers, of conditions which led to strike action. In defence of the owners, it can be said however, that they were concerned primarily with maintaining existing conditions and they feared that any concession at all would be construed as weakness on their part and so would lead to further demands.

It is not intended to apportion blame for strikes on the South Maitland field, but rather to consider the reasons for discontent, the incidence of stoppages and their effect on the economy, and the tactics used by all parties to resolve industrial disputes. However, before considering details of the major strikes on the South Maitland field, a brief economic review of the New South Wales coal industry from about 1900 to the establishment of the Joint Coal Board in 1947, is necessary in order to put the strikes into their proper perspective.

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12. When economic conditions brought a fall in coal prices, thus forcing the owners to reduce costs by lowering miners' wages.

Since the discovery of coal near ~~what~~ is now the city of Newcastle, in the early years of settlement in the Colony, up to relatively recent times, the export trade, both overseas and interstate, was almost the exclusive monopoly of the Northern Collieries of New South Wales. The quality of Northern coal, its accessibility, and its proximity to adequate port facilities gave it advantages over competitors, a position strengthened by the coal Vend in 1906 and the merging of shipping and coal interests on the Maitland field after 1912. Colliery proprietors, by forming the coal Vend, solved the problem of severe competition among owners by combining to fix prices at an economic level for the producer, while the alliance of shipping and coal interests had the effect of giving the Northern coal companies a monopoly of the interstate cargo trade, thereby maintaining freight charges in <sup>h</sup>their favour. <sup>(13)</sup> In the years immediately prior to World War I, the coal industry was in a sound position: the interstate market had risen from 2,260,090 tons in 1906 to 3,465,787 tons in 1913; overseas exports had increased from 2,701,450 tons to 2,765,937 tons; there was an upward trend in domestic consumption in New South Wales from 2,664,822 tons in 1906 to 4,182,441 tons in 1913; and the price of coal was pitched at a fairly high level, the selling price per ton rising considerably after the Vend was formed in 1906. <sup>(14)</sup>

During World War I a number of factors combined to bring about a dramatic change in the coal industry's prosperity. The prolonged stoppage of 1914 caused a reduction in output and was responsible for serious loss of markets, while the Federal Government's embargo on coal exports to South America, and its requisitioning of ships further reduced foreign exports which dwindled from 2,646,250 tons in 1914 to a mere 724,643 tons in 1918. Interstate trade

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13. Details of the Vend and shipping colliery alliances were discussed above in Chapter III.

14. Figures from Reports, Department of Mines, N.S.W.

in coal also fell from 3,221,783 tons to 2,697,033 tons in the same period.<sup>(15)</sup> Although local New South Wales consumption of coal did not increase to compensate for lost markets the price of coal rose by three shillings per ton after the successful miners' strike of 1916. During the war period of slack trade intermittent working was typical of the industry, particularly in the Newcastle district, its coal not being in such demand as coal from the adjacent South Maitland field. In those years of crisis and over-production the better organised companies and those with lower production costs managed to acquire what coal trade there was conditions also favouring companies with shipping connections

The post-war recession worsened the prospects of selling coal as miners' discontent had led to an increase of 2/9 per ton in the price of coal in 1919, and another 4/- per ton in 1920.<sup>(16)</sup> despite intermittent working on the Newcastle field. On the other hand, the South Maitland field still enjoyed a fair degree of prosperity as it increased its share of total New South Wales production from 42 per cent in 1914 to 69 per cent in 1927.<sup>(17)</sup> The haphazard working of mines caused by fluctuating markets during the period 1913 to 1919 led to a reduction in the work force of nearly three thousand miners in New South Wales<sup>(18)</sup> although the Cessnock Eagle was able to point out that the South Maitland mines had been working consistently although those on the Newcastle field had worked poorly.<sup>(19)</sup> It was further reported in 1921 that Cessnock was in a happy position owing to the constant employment at the mines. The town was not feeling the unemployment trouble as other towns were, but there was a number of unemployed moving into the Cessnock area in

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15. Ibid.

16. D.J.Davies, A Review of the Coal Question: Preceding and During the Lockout on Northern Coal Fields. 1929. p. 19. Mitchell Library. (331.818/D)

17. Annual Reports, Department of Mines(N.S.W.)

18. Cessnock Eagle. 19 September, 1919.

19. Cessnock Eagle. 2 September, 1920.

search of employment. (20) The opportunities on the Maitland field for employment soon attracted more job-seekers, and later in the same year there was an unprecedented building boom in Cessnock, where Vincent Street was in the hands of "brikies" [sic] (21) and the population of the town had almost doubled itself since 1911. (22)

The interstate market rose slightly from 1920 to reach just over three million tons in 1924, a figure reached again in 1925, but after that there was a slow decline to 2,209,981 tons in 1928, (23) and a further drop the following year when the Lockout hindered coal production. Home consumption continued to fluctuate, the tonnage used in 1929 being slightly below the amount consumed in 1920. (24) Prices however, continued to rise, by 1/6 per ton in 1925, following an increase in miners' pay, and by 1/- per ton later in the same year. From the short term point of view the virtual monopoly of the export trade held by the members of the Northern Collieries' Association was all very well for the South Maitland field, but the steady rise in coal prices stimulated the search for substitute fuels and alternative coal sources. Other Australian states began to develop inferior coal deposits at Wonthaggi in Victoria and Collie in Western Australia. (25) Similarly, countries to which New South Wales had made large-scale exports of coal previously (Japan, China and South America), began to develop their own deposits, which, although inferior in quality to New South Wales coal, at least had the merits of being cheap and available regularly. The interstate market never recovered, and the export market overseas only became important again after a period of some forty years. (26)

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20. Cessnock Eagle. 29 April, 1921.

21. Cessnock Eagle. 18 November, 1921.

22. The population of Cessnock in 1921 was over nine thousand.

23. Annual Reports, Department of Mines (N.S.W.)

24. Ibid.

25. The Economic Record, Vol. IV No. 7.

26. i.e. not until the 1960's.



The importance of oil for bunkering purposes<sup>(27)</sup> and an increase in electric power generated in Australia from brown -coal deposits and hydro-electric resources<sup>(28)</sup> was a further indication in the decade after World War I that coal would have to meet ever increasing competition. It was even more apparent with the onset of the depression in 1927 when former large-scale coal users in the iron, steel and engineering industries required less coal, as did the New South Wales Railways whose annual increase in coal consumption evident in previous years was not maintained.<sup>(29)</sup>

The shrinking export market and reduced local consumption increased the problem of over-capacity which had plagued the industry for so long. "Over-capacity was defined by the 1930 Royal Commission as " the term employed to express the excess of production that would result from the operation of all producing units engaged for reasonably full time, over the actual demand for the product." <sup>(30)</sup> Over - capacity was a marked feature of the Newcastle mining field long before the term was defined by the Royal Commissioner, and the effect of over production had been the principal factor in speeding up industrial combination on the South Maitland field from 1906, by which time large -scale production of Greta seam coal was under way.<sup>(31)</sup> As production on the South Maitland field increased, over-capacity in the industry, generally, became worse , a position aggravated by the opening up of no fewer than five mines on the South Maitland field after 1918.<sup>(32)</sup> It must be emphasised again that up to 1927 the South Maitland field was hardly affected by intermittent working caused by over-capacity. The main problem on that field was concerned with strikes and stoppages while the problem of over-capacity belonged to the Newcastle field.

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27. Report, Davidson Commission (1930). p. 105

28. The Economic Record. Vol. IV No. 7. p. 179.

29. Ibid., p. 180.

30. Report, Davidson Commission (1930). p. 302.

32. Production of Greta seam coal in 1906 was already 24.69% of Northern output.

32. Report, Davidson Commission (1930) pp. 302-304.

As the effect of over-capacity continued to spread through coal mining areas of New South Wales two measures were taken to arrest over-production: the first has been discussed above, that is, the decision of the New South Wales Government to grant no further leases for mining development for five years from 1925; (33) the second measure was taken by the Miners' Federation, its membership 'books' being closed. (34) The first 'remedy' did not achieve anything and the second was just as useless because pressure exerted by the owners forced the Federation to change its policy, (35) with the result that four thousand men were admitted to union membership at a time when the labour force was already excessive. (36)

The full effects of the world-wide depression, following so soon after the Lockout of 1929, had a most serious effect on the coalfields of New South Wales. During this period, mine-workers along with most other members of the community, suffered so severely in the loss of their savings and earnings because of lack of employment that Judge Davidson felt compelled to draw attention to their misfortunes so long after the depression as 1946, when he claimed there was "some justification for the apprehension which they express now, that future fluctuations in the demand for coal after the termination of the war may lead to a repetition of the misfortunes they encountered in the past." (37)

The effect of the closure of pits during the depression upon the numbers of men employed in the New South Wales coal industry, the annual output of coal and the amount of money that was available to meet wages and other charges may be seen in the following table:

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33. Ibid., pp. 318-319

34. i.e. the union refused to enrol new members.

35. Report, Davidson Commission(1930). p.304.

36. Ibid.

37. Report, Davidson Commission(1946). p.14.

TABLE III.

Table Showing Output of Coal, Men Employed in Coal Mining, the Value of Coal and Salaries and Wages per Ton of Coal Raised in New South Wales in the Years 1927 to 1938.

Year	Output in Tons	Men Employed	Value of Coal Per Ton at Pit Mouth	Salaries and Wages Per Ton of coal raised
1927 <sup>(38)</sup>	11,126,114	24,494	17 4	11 8
1928	9,448,197	21,468	17 6	11 3
1929	7,651,373	14,577	16 6	10 7
1930	7,147,127	16,650	15 5	10 5
1931	6,487,992	15,667	13 8	9 11
1932	6,719,706	14,275	12 2	9 0
1933	7,162,655	13,349	11 6	8 4
1934	7,946,530	13,463	10 11	7 11
1935	8,714,472	13,327	10 6	7 9
1936	9,213,150	14,221	10 8	7 7
1937	10,084,261	14,981	11 0	7 10
1938	9,613,385	15,815	11 9	8 4

Source: Report, Davidson Commission(1946). p.14

The question of profitability of coal mining has recurred frequently in employer - employee relationships, The Miners' Federation has maintained consistently that the industry could afford to pay more. The profits made by coal owners for the period 1931 to 1937 were examined by Judge Drake-Brockman of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court in 1939 when he was investigating the New South Wales coal industry. An examination of some thirty of the principal collieries showed that, generally speaking, substantial losses had occurred in the seven years before 1939. The average loss from coal production appeared to be about three per cent per annum on invested capital. In the group investigated, seven of the largest producing companies in New South Wales made an aggregate loss of £832,000, or an average loss of aver £117,000 annually. <sup>(39)</sup> However, the companies, in their published balance

38. The 1927 output had only been exceeded twice before, in 1924 and 1925, when total N.S.W. production was 11,618,216 tons and 11,396,199 tons respectively.

39. Report, Davidson Commission(1946). p.15.

sheets, showed aggregate profits for the same period of £286,000.<sup>(40)</sup> The Judge assumed that the companies had been living on their investment income and on non-coal-producing enterprises, and came to the conclusion that many of the colliery companies had in the process<sup>(41)</sup> been brought perilously close to financial disaster.<sup>(42)</sup> However, when it is remembered that the years under review were depressed and that practically every Australian industry suffered reduced incomes, it is difficult to see how the position of the coal proprietors was any worse than the situation of the coal miners, many thousands of whom had been unemployed for long periods, and without the solace of incomes derived from a secondary source.

As is shown above<sup>(43)</sup> the period from 1934 to 1937 showed a steady improvement in output and an increase in the numbers employed, but there was no corresponding rise in coal prices or in wages, and the recovery was only temporary and partial as another financial reverse followed. A stoppage on the Western field over Health and Safety issues held up production for some weeks in 1938. The result was a decline in coal produced in that year<sup>(44)</sup> although a significant rise in coal prices raised total receipts above those of the previous year.<sup>(45)</sup> A Royal Commission was ordered to inquire into the Health and Safety of Workers in Coal Mines<sup>(46)</sup> and as a result of the strike, the terms of settlement included the reference of industrial matters to the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court. The Court's pronouncement and the Commissioner's report were made public in June, 1939 and July, 1939, respectively. Some concessions were made to miners: hours were reduced to

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40. Ibid.

41. i.e. in the circumstances mentioned previously.

42. Report, Davidson Commission(1946). p.15

43. cf. Table III.

44. Report, Davidson Commission(1946). p.16.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., p. 17.

forty-five per week, and conditional leave on full pay was granted. Nevertheless the Miners' Federation was not satisfied and during the war period which began soon afterwards there was a series of strikes and stoppages; discontent and disorder flourished; and militant miners and frustrated producers quarrelled so that the coal mining industry fell into greater disrepute than ever.

Because of this background of bitterness, under-production and conditions bordering on the anarchic, the Commonwealth Board of Inquiry into the Coal Mining Industry was constituted on January 12, 1945, under the chairmanship of the Honourable Mr Justice Davidson, the terms of reference covering every aspect of the industry. (47)

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Coalfields all over the world have been notorious for the bad industrial relations between employer and employee and the South Maitland coalfield has not been an exception. It was on ~~that~~ field that the most intense dramas of the New South Wales coal industry were presented. The older miners and residents of Cessnock and Kurri Kurri still speak with a certain awe of the major strikes and stoppages associated with the field's history. Mention of each of the big strikes, such as the 'Peter Bowling' Strike of 1909-10, evokes its own responses, but none has the power to stir up old hatreds and long forgotten bitterness as does reference to the '1929 Lockout'. It represented the high mark of industrial unrest on the Maitland field and in a sense, also marked half way in the story of industrial relations in the area, occurring as it did, some thirty years after the opening of the field and a little over thirty years before the achievement<sup>en</sup> of relative industrial harmony. At Rothbury, near Branxton, in 1929, the mounting discontent erupted as a result of the lockout of miners and the plan to use non-union labour to work the pit. It was the

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47. The Report was presented in March 13, 1946.

'Rothbury Incident' during which one man was killed and several wounded by police sent to protect 'scab' miners recruited to work the pit, which showed quite clearly that irrespective of injustices or alleged illegal actions on the part of the owners, the Government was aware that its primary function in industrial struggles was to defend law and order. The failure of the 'lockout' struggle, from the miners' point of view, did not end industrial disputes. The depressed period which followed brought more problems of unemployment, which hastened the election of communists to the Executive of the Miners' Federation and intensified miners' hatred of the owners. The war years and the post-war period saw an increased militancy on the part of the communist dominated Miners' Federation which culminated in the '1949 strike', the last great struggle on the South Maitland field. In the following section it is intended to examine the more significant strikes and stoppages which have plagued the coal industry on the Maitland field for more than fifty years.

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The opening of the South Maitland field co-incided with a short period of stability in the coal industry, but by 1902 there was a decline in demand and coal prices began to fall. By that time, too, the miners' union had regained strength and increased its membership which had suffered severely during the disastrous strike of 1896 on the Northern field. Working conditions were based on the agreement drawn up after the strike of 1893 and that agreement formed the basis for future awards in the industry. (48) The main features of the the award were: wages were regulated by the selling price of coal and rose and fell with it, the selling price being fixed by the Associated Masters; the standard hewing price was 4/2 per ton for clean round coal (49)

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48. Report, Davidson Commission(1930). p.482.

49.Round coal was simply large coal and at that time was in greater demand than small coal. Today coal is considered 'small' if it goes through a mesh of one inch in diameter.

when the selling price of round coal was 11/- per ton. The filling price of small coal was the same as that which existed at the collieries prior to August 1, 1888, when the selling price was 5/6 per ton. Wages were determined according to a complicated scale with special arrangements for 'yard work',<sup>(50)</sup> 'heading work'<sup>(51)</sup> and for the filling of small coal. Other parts of the award concerned the number of hours to be worked and provision for the settlement of disputes.

The rapid growth of the Maitland field had made a big impact on coal output by 1905 and had been the cause of over-production which in turn, had brought a reduction in the selling price of coal. So, in accordance with the agreement outlined above miners' wages and contract rates were reduced. A further reduction in wages caused intense dis-satisfaction in May, 1905, among employees of Hebburn Colliery which led to strike action lasting for four months.<sup>(52)</sup> Hebburn was the only colliery where action was taken, although discontent was widespread. Peter Bowling, at that time district treasurer of the Colliery Employees' Federation, claimed that the Federation was quite active in trying to solve the many disputes at the time. He also maintained that the mine workers were not prepared to meet the owners' representatives in conference to discuss proposals for a new agreement.<sup>(53)</sup> It was obvious to Bowling, and it must have been clear to the men as well, that increased use of machines had brought new conditions which would increase production and lower costs, thus making a new agreement necessary. At first, the colliery owners stood by the reductions in wages already imposed,

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50. A term used when payment was made in terms of yards driven forward. This was designed to keep the working place narrow so that progress forward would be faster.

51. A heading in a mine is a main tunnel driven in the initial stage, and since it was in the interests of management to open up the mine quickly, a larger rate was paid for this work.

52. Newcastle Morning Herald. 3 July, 1936.

53. Ibid.

and based their decision on the low coal prices and the sliding scale system agreed upon in 1893. However, the length of the stoppage at Hebburn and the possibility that the incidence of strikes would extend, apparently convinced the owners that some purpose would be achieved by conciliation. Subsequently, W.P. Cullen, <sup>(54)</sup> who presided over the Board of Conciliation, made a determination when owners and miners' representatives failed to agree.

The Cullen Award of 1905 was based on the previous agreement of 1895 and provided the foundation for all subsequent awards governing working conditions on the Maitland field to 1930. In a judgment favouring the employees, a basic wage was set, fixed on a minimum selling price of 7/6 per ton f.o.b. Newcastle. This award exceeded the basic wage for Newcastle miners which was fixed on a minimum selling price of 8/- per ton <sup>(55)</sup> and also determined for the first time, rates for machine work in the Maitland district. <sup>(56)</sup> These agreements, particularly satisfying to the Maitland miners, did not, however, keep industrial peace for long. Maitland miners began, in 1907, to demand cessation of the 'dogwatch' shift, a most unpopular one, as the shift began at 11.00 p.m. and ended at 7.00 a.m. Moreover, the 'dogwatch' shift had not been worked on the Newcastle field for some time, while even the afternoon shift (3.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m.) had been abolished there. The explanation for the variation was that the better coal and better equipment on the South Maitland field made three-shift working a most economic arrangement, and the competition from that area had caused a decrease in demand for Newcastle coal. In an article in the Newcastle Morning Herald in April, 1936, A.C. Lewis commented that in 1905, the three-shift system on the

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54. Later, Chief Justice of New South Wales.

55. Newcastle Morning Herald. 3 July, 1936.

56. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.120



Maitland field had resulted in other mines in the Newcastle area working intermittently and that a number of miners had gone to the Maitland field in search of work. (57)

Not willing to surrender any concessions at all to the miners, the owners refused to abolish the 'dogwatch' shift. Their refusal resulted in a protracted strike in 1907 which eventually led to the abolition of the shift for production purposes. (58) Workers made further gains towards the end of 1907 when wages for Maitland miners rose by twenty-five per cent. Aggregate meetings in support of the wage demands also had asked for shifts of eight hours 'bank to bank', (59) but found the owners resolutely against the proposal. What in fact was happening was that the stage was being prepared for the 'Peter Bowling Strike' of 1909-10, a stoppage which involved all three mining areas of New South Wales.

After the wage rises referred to above Peter Bowling was of the opinion that the proprietors " still felt and resented the humiliation which they had suffered in 1907, and were determined to have some of their own back by exercising their powers under the Coal Mines Regulation Act and the special rules of the colliery which have all the force of law behind them." (60) Although gains had been made in wages, the miners had other claims, including the question of working eight hours 'bank to bank', but Judge Heydon refused to make a decision on a claim while sectional stoppages were taking place. Apparently, the management committee of the miners was either unwilling or unable to prevent irregular stoppages as they continued until the outbreak of the strike itself in 1909. (61)

To see the 'Peter Bowling Strike' in its proper perspective, it should be

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57. Newcastle Morning Herald. 18 April, 1936.  
58. The shift was abolished from 1907.  
59. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.121. ('Bank to Bank' working refers to the time between the entry of a minor to the pit and the time he leaves it, and therefore, would be different from the time a miner is actually at his working place in the pit.)  
60. Newcastle Morning Herald. 3 July, 1936.  
61. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.121.

considered against the general background of the Trade Union movement at <sup>62</sup> that time. Robin Gollan <sup>(62)</sup> has pointed out that militant socialist ideas of Marx and other revolutionary thinkers had played a part in the formation of the Labour Party in Australia and that it was the Australian Socialist League which propagated these ideas, <sup>(63)</sup> the League's main support coming from the Sydney unemployed and the Newcastle miners. <sup>(64)</sup> "The importance of the Socialist League and its propaganda is that it articulated a criticism of the Labour Party and its policies. In particular, it attacked Labour's support for arbitration as a complete abandonment of the class struggle and as a placing of the workers' welfare in the hands of the capitalist state." <sup>(65)</sup> It was these critics of the Labour Party who, in 1907, supported the ideas of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) which have been summarised by B. Fitzpatrick:

The agitators of the I.W.W., founded in the United States in 1905, and rapidly extended throughout Australia from 1907, preached industrial unionism - the organisation of workers according to industry and not craft - and industrial action, the strike, rather than political action, and the education of workers through I.W.W. 'locals' and clubs, in socialism. <sup>(66)</sup>

Under the influence of these ideas the various coal districts had amalgamated under one union, The Coal and Shale Employees' Federation, in 1908. Peter Bowling, president of the Northern miners <sup>(67)</sup> was also associated with the Industrial Workers of the World <sup>(68)</sup> and it was not surprising that the new organisation and its militant attitudes transformed the strike of 1909-10 into a general one, the men of other districts ceasing work in sympathy with their Northern colleagues, and not because they had grievances of their own. The strike began in November, 1909, when a stalemate had been reached in

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62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., p. 122

66. B. Fitzpatrick, Short History of the Australian Labour Movement. Melbourne, 1944. p. 121

67. From 1906

68. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.125.

arbitration: Judge Heydon refused to make any decisions while strikes were taking place, and the miners' representatives would not agree to the appointment of a Commission to investigate miners' grievances, as suggested by the proprietors. The 1909-10 strike seems to have been caused by an accumulation of grievances and antagonisms towards the employers; the determination of the owners to concede nothing; and the belief of miners' leaders that an all out attempt to gain concessions would end in victory. Prior to the stoppage (On November 8) at a meeting of the Trade Union Congress in Sydney, an attempt had been made to create a central organisation of all unionists in Australia. Although the move failed it was significant that two officials at the Congress, the President and the Secretary of the Mount Kembla Lodge in the Southern district, subsequently notified the mine manager that they intended to cease work until the Northern issue was settled, and also suggested that transport unions would strike in sympathy. (69)

It was not long before the government made it clear that it intended to act as a strike breaker. Gollan has commented that as the strike developed it became a fight between the union and the government with the proprietors in Wade's (the Premier) corner waiting for the inevitable victory. (70)

Bowling was arrested, as were other members of the miners' union, at Newcastle on December 4, 1909, under the New South Wales Industrial Disputes Act of 1908, (71) and in order to have more power, the Wade government rushed through the Industrial Disputes Amendment Act (1909),

providing for a heavier penalty of twelve months imprisonment for any attempt to instigate or aid in anything in the nature of a strike or lockout, or discontinuance of work in any industry. It empowered police officers to enter buildings, by force if necessary, and to seize documents when there was reasonable ground for the belief that such buildings were being used for the purpose of fostering the continuance of a strike or lockout. (72)

69. J.T. Sutcliffe, A History of Trade Unionism in Australia. Melbourne, 1921. p.179

70. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p. 131.

71. B.C. Fitzpatrick, Short History of the Australian Labour Movement. Melbourne, 1944. p124

72. J.T. Sutcliffe, A History of Trade Unionism in Australia. Melbourne, 1921. p.180.

In accordance with Section 42 of the new Amendment Act, the government moved quickly and on December 30, 1909, imposed fines on thirteen members of the delegate board of the Miners' Federation and then sent nine of them to gaol for failing to pay the fines of one hundred pounds each. Peter Bowling was sentenced to twelve months in prison (the maximum penalty) under the new 'Coercion Act' <sup>(73)</sup> and to a further twelve months in gaol for inciting to strike. Four other Federation officials who had been arrested in December, 1909 were also given prison terms.

In the meantime, the government threatened to work the mines with 'scab' labour <sup>(74)</sup> and police were sent to Cessnock to guard against disturbances while 'coal at grass' <sup>(75)</sup> was being loaded into trucks. An attempt by the miners to work two pits (Young Wallsend and Ebbw Vale) proved abortive when the government took action to prevent coal haulage by rail and to commandeer all 'coal at grass' at the normal price. <sup>(76)</sup> The government's coercive action broke the strike, first in the Western field, where the miners returned to work in December, and then on the Southern field in February and the Northern field on March 5, 1910. <sup>(77)</sup> The part played by the politicians has been summed up by Gollan:

The political action of the employing class had proved more effective than the industrial action of the workers. The politicians led by Hughes scored a distinct victory over the I.W.W. in the defeat of the workers. The debacle damped the enthusiasm of the direct actionists and encouraged unionists to concentrate once again on capturing the legislature. <sup>(78)</sup>

From the point of view of the Miners' Federation, the 1909 strike was noteworthy for four reasons: first, it marked the highest point of industrial

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73. The name applied to the Industrial Disputes Amendment Act by the miners.

74. i.e., non-union labour

75. i.e., coal which had been stock-piled on the surface.

76. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales, Melbourne, 1963. p.133.

77. Report, Davidson Commission (1930). p.54.

78. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales, Melbourne, 1963. p.133.

militancy reached since the nineties and its failure meant a swing away from industrial as opposed to political action; secondly, the failure of the strike led to the collapse of the newly formed Coal and Shale Employees' Federation and it was not until 1916 that the Federation was placed on a firm basis; thirdly, the strike was marked by violent and open disagreements amongst the miners' leaders, the rank and file supporting the more militant on the Executive; and fourthly, the strike showed the government as more openly on the side of the owners than in any previous industrial quarrel.<sup>(79)</sup>

Between the 1909-10 strike and the outbreak of World War I, there were no major issues to fight about. In the months following the return to work, the miners worked full time to recoup losses both in money and coal and the familiar story of over-capacity was soon heard again. Dis-satisfaction was expressed in sectional unauthorised stoppages and in moves to form separate unions of wheelers and shiftmen<sup>(80)</sup> and in attempts to abolish the afternoon shift on the Maitland field, this particular claim being settled in favour of the miners in 1915 when it was announced that " after months of strife over the afternoon shift trouble it is indeed a pleasure to be able to report that the trouble is at an end .... The abolishment of the afternoon shift at all Collieries is assured, and in each instance the time is fixed when the abolishment shall operate. "<sup>(81)</sup> It is probable that the proprietors assented to that action because World War I (unlike World War II) actually depressed the coal market. Strikes in 1916 and 1917 helped to reduce production, but loss of export markets and a decline in local consumption kept the annual output from 1915 to 1919 below the amount produced in 1914.

The agreement to abolish the afternoon shift was officially ratified as from January 1, 1917, by an order of Mr Justice Edmunds,<sup>(82)</sup> but before the order

79. Ibid., p. 128

80. Ibid., p. 133

81. Cessnock Eagle. 19 March, 1915

82. Report, Davidson Commission (1930). p. 129

could become effective, the coal industry was to witness another of its periodic major upheavals. As the wartime inflationary trend made itself felt in 1915, mineworkers on the South Maitland field and the Newcastle field demanded higher wages because of spiralling costs and intermittent working.<sup>(83)</sup> Two stoppages in July at Bellbird Colliery were reported<sup>(84)</sup> and the combined unions engaged in the coal industry demanded (in August) increases of twenty per cent in the case of miners and twenty-six per cent for other (off-hand) labour, without an alteration in working hours.<sup>(85)</sup> The ensuing conferences between owners and employees achieved nothing and a compulsory conference was called by the President of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court. Although an agreement was made, the miners' rank and file rejected it, whereupon the owners conceded an increase of from fourpence to sixpence per ton in the hewing rate and from sixpence to one shilling and one penny per day to the 'off-hand' labour.<sup>(86)</sup> The rise in wages was followed inevitably by an increase of one shilling in the price per ton of Northern coal bringing its price to 12/- per ton f.o.b. Newcastle.<sup>(87)</sup> The agreement was to last for three years, but the unions made further demands in March, 1916:

That eight hours bank to bank including half an hour for meals shall constitute a full working shift on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and that six hours inclusive of one half hour for meals shall constitute a full working shift on Saturday, Sunday and holidays.

That overtime at the rate of time and a half shall be paid to all employees working in excess of those hours on any shift, Monday to Saturday inclusive.

All work other than overtime performed on Sundays and holidays shall be paid for at three times the ordinary rates. <sup>(88)</sup>

At a compulsory conference in July, 1916, employers granted a reduction of

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83. Cessnock Eagle. 25 June, 1915.

84. Cessnock Eagle. 9 July, 1915.

85. Report, Davidson Commission (1930), p. 130.

86. 'Off-hand' labour was labour not directly concerned with cutting coal.

87. Cessnock Eagle. 24 December, 1915

88. Report, Davidson Commission (1930). p.130

working time amounting to approximately one half hour per day in the winding time<sup>(89)</sup>, which had the effect of reducing hours of 'off-hand' labourers only, who at that time were working a nine-hour shift. This arrangement was incorporated in an interim award granted by Mr Justice Higgins,<sup>(90)</sup> but it did not settle the discontent on the Northern field in particular where mineworkers were generally ignoring the Court and working the hours they sought. A general strike began in October, in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria whereupon Higgins refused to proceed with the Arbitration Court hearing maintaining that he would not go on with the case with his hands tied if the men were getting by direct action that which they were asking for in the Courts.<sup>(91)</sup> Another compulsory conference was called, this time by W.M.Hughes, under the provisions of the War Precautions Act, to state the government's proposals, which were that the case should be heard in Sydney before the President of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court on condition that the men returned to work immediately, under pre-strike conditions and that the decision of the Judge be accepted.<sup>(92)</sup>

The miners showed their attitude to those suggestions by rejecting them without even taking a ballot. Meanwhile, the months' stoppage was disrupting transport and industry. An estimated twenty-five thousand to thirty thousand workers in New South Wales were idle for various periods, twenty thousand more in Victoria and corresponding numbers in the other states.<sup>(93)</sup> Hughes, no doubt feeling that the deteriorating position called for desperate measures, in view of Higgins's obduracy and mounting unemployment, agreed to the "claims of the miners and mine owners, to be granted without evidence<sup>(94)</sup> and

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89, i.e., the time taken for hauling coal to the surface.

90. Report, Davidson Commission(1930). pp.130-131

91. H.B.Higgins, A New Province for Law and Order. Sydney, 1922. p.62.

92. J.T.Sutcliffe, A History of Trade Unionism in Australia.Melb.,1921. p.186

93. Ibid.

94. According to Gollan(op.cit. p.147) however, there was one day's hearing.

without argument as to the eight hours, the union undertaking that there<sup>68</sup> should be no further trouble during the war." (95)

A special tribunal under Mr Justice Edmunds was appointed and a direction on hours made on December 8, in accordance with the miners' previous demands.<sup>(96)</sup> A further order was issued on December 20, granting a fifteen per cent increase in wages and rates for all employees on contract work and an increase of twenty per cent for all 'off-hand' labour. This order included all mineworkers in New South Wales and Victoria, and abolished the sliding scale system of wage adjustments. It also authorised producers and vendors of coal to increase the selling rate by three shillings per ton.<sup>(97)</sup> The 1916 strike was an unqualified success for the miners and convinced the less militant that strike action was the most efficient way to obtain industrial justice. Not only had all claims been met, but the Commonwealth Government had been forced to accede to the demands of workers who were still on strike. In the process the Miners' Federation had been strengthened substantially and the authority of its leaders, J.M. Baddeley and A.C. Willis undeniably established.

The industrial struggle in the following year (1917) was not of the miners' making, although it provided an opportunity for the Miners' Federation to support a cherished aim of union solidarity. The 'Big Strike' of 1917 was seen by the New South Wales Government as a conspiracy to overthrow the constitutionally established government and to undermine the war effort, although, according to Gollan, this was not a correct description of the majority of workers who "were simply defending a trade union principle against what they considered to be the aggression of the government."<sup>(98)</sup> Defeat in the 1916 strike and the bitterness of the conscription referendum campaign, together with the provocative words and actions of the Acting-Premier,

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95. H.B. Higgins, A New Province for Law and Order. Sydney, 1922. p.63

96. The award covered all coal mines in the Commonwealth.

97. Report, Davidson Commission (1930). p.131

98. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.149.



George Fuller<sup>(99)</sup> turned the railway strike of 1917 into a political affair rather than an industrial one. In a Cabinet proclamation the government declared that it was dealing with what was in effect a rebellion against the orderly government of the community,<sup>(100)</sup> and then pursued its policy of strike - breaking, a course of action it had taken in the 'Peter Bowling Strike' and a policy it was to follow more actively in the 1929 lockout. Of course, the government's claim was that **it had a duty to preserve law and order** and that a relatively small section of workers should not be allowed to hold the state to ransom, but the rights or demands of even a small minority must always be considered carefully by any government which claims to be democratic.

Details of the 'Big (Railway) Strike' are outside the scope of this thesis, although the Miners' Federation became involved in sympathy strikes, and protests against the handling of 'black' commodities, and against the employment of non-union labour in coal mines. The Illawarra miners refused to cut and load coal for transport on trains manned by strike-breakers and most of the Southern and Western miners came out in the first week of the strike, the remainder in the second week.<sup>(101)</sup> The government retaliated by seizing all "coal at grass" or in trucks on the Southern field and then passed with more than usual alacrity an Act to amend the Coal Mines Regulation Act, so that inexperienced men could work at the coal face.<sup>(102)</sup> The next move was to commandeer all coal mines in the state with a view to working them with non-union labour. During the course of the struggle, which lasted from August 2 until September 10,<sup>(103)</sup> two collieries on the South Maitland field

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99. Ibid., p. 150

100. Pronouncement and Appeal by Cabinet. 6 August, 1917. N.S.W. P. and P. 1917-18. II (Cited in Gollan, op.cit., p.151.

101. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.153.

102. Ibid.

103. The Railway Strike ended officially on September 10, but the miners did not resume for another month.

worked by the state were J. and A. Brown's pits at Pelaw Main and Richmond Main near Kurri Kurri. Non-union labour from Vistoria was used for coal cutting (104) and the owners were paid thirteen thousand pounds as compensation for production losses. (105) When the railway unions accepted a settlement<sup>en</sup> proposed by the Industrial Commission on September 10, the strike was broken, (106) but the miners, still dis-satisfied, stayed out. Their terms of settlement as proposed by the government were that the Miners' Federation would continue to work all mines. No mines were to be declared 'black' and the 'loyalists' (107) who desired to remain in the mines were to be granted priority in employment. A further condition was that no guarantees were to be given to miners employed previously that they would be re-engaged. (108) In a strongly worded statement, the Federation replied: "We are now fully convinced from the Government's latest proposals that the Government has no desire to effect a settlement except on conditions which we consider humiliating and degrading." (109) The government's subsequent attitude indicated the extent to which animosity had entered the whole affair:

When the Coal Miners' Federation deliberately challenges the community and states that it will not cut coal to meet our necessities unless its own terms in detail are granted, we can only accept this challenge in the same way as we accepted the challenge of the railway employees. Just as we have proved to the community that we can run the railways without the concurrence of a strike committee, so we must establish that we can get sufficient coal for the needs of the community without the consent of the Coal Miners' Federation. (110)

With the government's terms likely to become more severe, union funds exhausted, credit hard to obtain and coal being produced by government

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104. B.C. Fitzpatrick, A Short History of the Australian Labour Movement. Melbourne, 1944. p.145.

105. Cessnock Eagle. 18 July, 1919.

106. An interesting account of the government's methods used to break the strike is given in Gollan's book, The Coalminers of New South Wales. op.cit., pp.149 -156.

107. Those who had worked the mines for the government.

108. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales, Melbourne, 1963. p.154

109. Sydney Morning Herald. 14 September, 1917.

110. Cited in Gollan, op.cit., p.155

controlled mines, there was no alternative for the miners but to accept the terms of settlement, harsh though they were. The 'Big Strike' was an unqualified defeat of the trade unions, leaving them disorganised and discouraged, but the Miners' Federation remained intact and with none of its hard - won working conditions touched.

When the initial resentment died away, the South Maitland coalfield enjoyed six years of comparative peace, with no major industrial action before 1923, either to better or to maintain general working conditions. Towards the end of 1918 the South Maitland miners shared the increases in wage and contract rates won by all New South Wales mine employees as a result of an application by the Federation. In the discussions about the claim, the owners conceded nothing, but the Acting Prime Minister, W.A.Watt, acting under the War Precautions Act, acquired all coal on behalf of the Commonwealth and increased the wages of all contract miners by fifteen per cent, those of adult 'off-hand' labourers by 2/6 per day, and boys' wages by twenty per cent. The selling price of coal was raised in all districts, the increase on the Northern field being 2/9 per ton. <sup>(111)</sup>

In the following year the Federation moved again to improve conditions, South Maitland men voting for a six - hour shift, abolition of the contract system and the participation of the Federation in the recently **proposed One Big Union**. <sup>(112)</sup>

No comment is required about the men's decision in favour of the first two matters beyond saying that the six-hour day was wanted because of the arduous and dangerous nature of the work, and the contract system had many anomalies, such as the frequent inability of miners to fill their quota on 'darg' <sup>(113)</sup> because of shortages of skips. The decision to join One Big Union, however, was quite significant. The defeat of organised labour in New South Wales during

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111. Report, Davidson Commission (1930). p.131

112. Cessnock Eagle. 5 December, 1919.

113. The amount set for a miner to produce .

the 1917 strike had hastened moves in that direction although its origins were to be found as early as the 1880's when co-ordination and centralism were manifest. In 1921 the One Big Union scheme was adopted by the Melbourne All-Australian Trade Union Congress and a Council of Action elected, with J.M.Baddeley, President of the Miners' Federation and a native of Cessnock, as Chairman. (114) However, the plan failed to materialise: vested interests of craft union officials, the opposition of officials to the Australian Workers' Union, and fear of bureaucracy strengthened the opposition and the One Big Union plan expired quietly a few years after its enthusiastic conception. (115) The main purpose of this chapter is to discuss major issues, but some minor struggles have been included to show that the coal industry on the South Maitland field, although passing through a period of relative stability and prosperity, was not entirely quiescent, and dis-satisfaction with existing wages became evident again in 1919. 'Off-hand' labourers, whose incomes were below those of the men on contract rates, met at Weston in January, 1919, and resolved to demand a minimum wage of 15/- per day. (116) By May, there was more discontent among the 'mechanics', all of whom were asking for increased rates. (117) The position of the 'off-hand' worker was no better in July, 1920, when aggregate meetings of miners were called at Kurri Kurri, Cessnock and Greta to discuss the proposal that the lower-paid workers' wages be increased to one pound per day. (118)

After the passage of the Commonwealth Industrial Peace Act of 1920, by which special machinery to determine mining questions was provided, the Miners' Federation presented to the Hibble Tribunal (119) a twelve - point log of

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114. Common Cause. 15 July, 1921.

115. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963, p. 167.

116. Cessnock Eagle. 24 January, 1919.

117. Ibid., 9 May, 1919.

118. Ibid., 2 July, 1920.

119. Charles Hibble was Chairman of the Tribunal set up under the 1920 Act.

claims<sup>(120)</sup>, the most significant demands being for a six-hour working day, a five-day working week and abolition of the contract system.<sup>(121)</sup> The full claim, as Gollan has pointed out<sup>(122)</sup> was not seriously considered by the Tribunal, as the demands were more in the nature of "long term statements of policy"<sup>(123)</sup> rather than demands which required immediate assent. In fact, the requests for adequate bathing facilities and change houses in all mines,<sup>(124)</sup> and proper sanitary arrangements above and below ground, were carefully ignored by governments and owners until the Joint Coal Board required the provision of those amenities in mines almost thirty years later. At the time the log was served, discontent was mounting among miners on the Newcastle field where the effects of over-capacity were being felt quite acutely. Perhaps the fear of a general strike caused the grant of an interim award, operative for one year from December 17, 1921, but which in actual practice, operated until 1925.<sup>(125)</sup> Under the award contract rates were increased by 17½ per cent, 'off-hand' labour rates by 3/- per day, and the wages of youths and boys by twenty per cent. An increase of 4/- per ton in the selling price of coal was granted subsequently.<sup>(126)</sup> However, the rise in wages did not relieve conditions in the mining industry, and the Federation as a whole, including the South Maitland miners who had not suffered the intermittency experienced on the Newcastle field, was from this time placed on the defensive, as the recession in Australian industry, generally, in 1921 and 1922, aggravated the effects of the already serious over-capacity. Hundreds of miners flocked to the South Maitland field in search of work<sup>(127)</sup> and by August, 1921, three thousand

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120. Details of the log appear in Gollan, op.cit., p.170.

121. Report, Davidson Commission(1930). p.132.

122. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.171

123. Ibid.

124. Point nine of the log.

125. Gollan, op. cit., p.172.

126. Report, Davidson Commission(1930). p.133.

127. Cessnock Eagle. 13 May and 3 June, 1921.

Newcastle miners were unemployed; by the end of the year Neath and Bellbird Collieries on the South Maitland field were also working intermittently. (128)

A conference of lodge delegates from the Northern field was held in September to consider a better distribution of work and ways to ease the strain which levies and relief allowances were imposing on Federation finances. The conference recommended a nine-day working fortnight until there was an opportunity for members to work more. (129) The proprietors' reaction was immediate; some of the larger companies threatened to close their pits if the miners tried to take action. (130) A subsequent ballot of the rank and file rejected the resolution of the lodge delegates and the initiative passed to the employers. The owners were determined to save the coal trade at the miners' expense; believing that the miners' decision not to take action on the nine-day fortnight was a sign of weakness, the employers served a log of claims on the miners for the first of the only two occasions in South Maitland mining history. (132) The owners' demands involved not only a substantial reduction in wages, but the abolition of conditions and safeguards won by mineworkers over decades of industrial struggle. (133) Since the event was so historic the complete demands are recorded:

That present rates paid to all contract workers be reduced by  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent.

That the present rate paid to all "off-hand" employees, including boys and youths be reduced by  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent

In the case of miners, machinemen, wheelers and similar contract workers where there is an existing minimum day wage, including the minimum paid for deficient places, such minimum wage be reduced by  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent.

The working day to be two shifts of eight hours, the miners to change shifts at working places, and where more than two shifts are worked the same practice shall be continued [i.e., abolition of gains made in 1886, 1914 and 1916]

128. Ibid., 11 November 1921.

129. Common Cause. 30 September, 1921.

130. Cessnock Eagle. 30 September, 1921.

131. Ibid., 20 January, 1922.

132. The second occasion was in 1929.

133. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales, Melbourne, 1963. p.172.

That front and back shifts be restored [i.e.; dogwatch' and afternoon shift] (134)

That the hours on 'back Saturday' shall be eight, bank to bank [this had been abolished in 1886] (135)

That pillars and special places be worked three shifts when required by the management [this would have led to over-production and the unemployment of miners]

That the cavilling system be abolished, or a twelve months' cavil instituted [thus allowing favouritism and victimisation by managers to occur] (136)

That when the general cavil has been drawn and work commenced on a new cavil, the management have the absolute right to fill any vacancies that arise or put additional men on as required.

That wheelers are to wheel from as many men as is required by the management to keep them fully employed. [This would have broken a long established principle.]

That employees shall be paid fortnightly on pay Saturday.

That machines be used in pillar work when required by the management [It was believed by the miners that this practice would increase greatly the risk of accident.]

That if required by the management all employees shall work on six days a week.

That the hours of employment of all surface workers shall be calculated as exclusive of meal time [A change in a condition won in 1916.]

That the hours of employment of underground contract or day labour employees shall be calculated as from the time the last man descends until the first man ascends in each shift. [i.e., abolition of the eight hours 'bank to bank' working day won in 1918.]

That the practice of giving free coal or coal at less than current selling rate to householders be discontinued. [i.e., abolition of a privilege confirmed in 1905.]

That the following shall be the only holidays observed in this industry: New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eight Hour Day, Christmas and Boxing Day. (137)

Preliminary skirmishes were those of a legal nature, and the owners, claiming that a dispute existed, brought their claims before the Coal Tribunal, while the Miners' Federation sought a High Court injunction against the Tribunal contending that a claim submitted by the Southern district miners in

134. This clause and the previous one appear to be contradictory, but they probably make allowance for working shifts on different fields.

135. 'Back' Saturday was the Saturday following a non-pay Friday.

136. Cavilling was the allocation of working places by lot so that poor or good working places could be shared. A day's work was usually lost when a new cavil was made.

137. Common Cause. 5 May, 1922.

April, 1921, <sup>(138)</sup> should have precedence over the owners' demands. An interim injunction was granted to the miners, but when further injunctions were granted to the employers, the union " withdrew its objection to the hearing for fear that the legislation setting up the tribunal should be declared invalid ". <sup>(139)</sup> In September, Charles Hibble, Chairman of the Coal Tribunal decided to proceed with employers' claims for wage reductions <sup>(140)</sup> after the High Court upheld the application of the Southern New South Wales Colliery Proprietors for prohibition of the hearing of the claims of the Southern miners, on the grounds that no dispute existed beyond the limits of one state. <sup>(141)</sup> Following a lengthy hearing, Hibble refused to grant the employers' demands using the argument that the employees, because of intermittent working conditions were not receiving the full benefit of the award rates. <sup>(142)</sup>

Intermittent working had certainly been increasing and this was indirectly responsible for the strike of 1923 on the South Maitland field. When out-of-work miners from the Newcastle district went to the Maitland field in 1921 and 1922, to seek work, there was some agitation over the question of sharing work at South Maitland Collieries with unemployed Newcastle miners. The men employed at Abermain No. 1 and Abermain No. 2 went on strike in June, 1922 for one day in protest against the refusal of the Abermain-Seaham Company to employ in its South Maitland mines, men who had lost their jobs in the company's Seaham Colliery on the Newcastle field. <sup>(143)</sup> The subsequent conviction of W. Nelson, Secretary of the Abermain No. 2 Lodge, under the Masters and Servants' Act (for having absented himself from work without reasonable excuse) <sup>(144)</sup> caused widespread unrest in the district and led to a

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138. Ibid., 14 July, 1922.

139. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.172.

140. Common Cause, 1 September, 1922.

141. Ibid., 18 August, 1922

142. Report, Davidson Commission (1930). p.133.

143. Common Cause, 14 July, 1922.

144. Ibid.



number of protest strikes of short duration at the various collieries.

Stoppages also occurred at the Aberdare Collieries over the same issue, that is, the refusal to offer work to men thrown idle at the Caledonian Company's West Wallsend Colliery. (145)

Dis-satisfaction continued into 1923, with strikes at numerous mines on Court Sitting days as a protest against Major Crane, the magistrate who had fined Nelson, (146) and proprietors, while maintaining that the Crane issue was not one in which the industry should be involved, also threatened to question the legality of the Tribunal which had refused their demands on the workers in 1922. (147) Moreover, the proprietors were more openly belligerent and probably felt they would be better off to close the mines until market prospects improved. One member of the proprietors' association expressed the opinion that if ordinary work were not resumed at the collieries, the association would refuse to meet the Federation and would consider seriously the closing of every colliery on the field. (148)

The whole of the South Maitland field was plunged into a strike in April, 1923 and the proprietors did not seem in any hurry to settle it. (149) A most significant aspect was that large consumers such as the Broken Hill Proprietary Company and the gas companies were holding extraordinarily large stocks of coal at the time. (150) A conference between the contending parties was held in May and the real motives of the colliery owners became evident when they demanded full right to 'hire and fire' and an assurance that unauthorised stoppages would cease. (151) Although the Federation resisted the demands, the Central Council of that body later passed a motion making it an offence against the

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145. Cessnock Eagle, 29 September, 1922.

146. Ibid., 1 May, 1923.

147. Ibid., 6 April, 1923.

148. Ibid., 6 April, 1923.

149. Ibid., 20 April, 1923.

150. Ibid., 16 April, 1923.

151. Ibid., 1 May, 1923.

union to strike without its authority.<sup>(152)</sup> When no settlement was reached Cessnock people, not involved in the strike, sent a deputation to Prime Minister Bruce asking for government intervention,<sup>(153)</sup> but without success.<sup>(154)</sup> It was not long before the Federation found it practically impossible to finance the dispute by levies (on its non-striking members) which had already reached the twenty per cent mark.<sup>(155)</sup> Moreover, the Federation had been making relief payments to some of its Newcastle miners almost from the beginning of World War I<sup>(156)</sup> and if the Federation were to survive, the only hope was for the men to return to work. The strike resulted in a decisive victory for the proprietors. Rates and pay generally were to be those in force before the strike, but the miners were made to concede two vital points: the cessation of pit-top meetings except with the concurrence of the management, and the recognition that the colliery managers had the legal right to dismiss employees.<sup>(157)</sup>

Mine working was resumed in August with the owners in a much stronger position and the Federation weakened financially. However, a general improvement in the Australian economy after 1924 was reflected in the relative peace which existed on the South Maitland field to 1928., there being no major industrial disturbance in the period.

In the year following 1923, there was a record coal output from the Greta seam (5,448,111 tons) and in 1925 the Miners' Federation presented to the Coal Tribunal demands for a weekly minimum wage and a working day of seven hours "bank to bank". The demands were refused by the Tribunal, but an order was made increasing wage rates from 16/6 per day to 18/- per day and the wages of youths

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152. Ibid., 19 May, 1923.

153. Ibid., 25 May, 1923.

154. Ibid., 8, June, 1923.

155. Ibid., 6 July, 1923.

156. On 23 March, 1923, Common Cause asked the men not to strike as the payment of fines was dissipating union funds,

157. Common Cause, 25 July, 1923.

and boys by five per cent. At the same time, the price of Northern large coal was raised by 1/6 per ton to 25/6 per ton. Short strikes of the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemens' Association in 1926, and the miners and deputies in 1927 occurred, but no great improvement was made in wages or conditions, despite the high prices being obtained for coal in those years. The Maitland field continued to work regularly, but the Newcastle field still suffered the effects of over-capacity because of a decline in the export trade on which it was heavily dependent. However, by 1927, the higher coal prices were beginning to price Northern coal out of the foreign and interstate markets and even the South Maitland field began to feel the effects of trade fluctuation in the following year.. Among the collieries forced to close for lengthy periods in 1927 were Stanford Merthyr (closed for eleven months); Aberdare South (closed all the year ~~has not~~ re-opened since); Aberdare Central (closed for six months); and Millfield Greta (idle for the previous three years) remained ~~closed~~. (158)

Economic conditions on the South Maitland field worsened in 1928 as the gradual onset of the depression made itself felt, particularly in the coal industry of New South Wales, where high coal prices and decreased demand for coal precipitated the Lockout of 1929, during which all the accumulated hatred and bitterness of thirty years' struggle between owner and worker burst on the Maitland field. The result ~~was a~~ further twenty years of economic chaos and industrial anarchy, (159) compared with which, the previous antagonisms and hardships paled into insignificance.

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158. Annual Reports, Department of Mines (N.S.W.)

159. Culminating in the Strike of 1949.

INDUSTRIAL STRIFE 1929 - 1949.

As is shown above the coal industry of New South Wales was moving towards a crisis in 1927, and by early 1928 the employment position and the decreased coal market had begun to worry the government of New South Wales, then under the leadership of T.R.Bavin. Consequently, a conference was called of the representatives of the proprietors and the unions operating in the coal industry. At the meeting, which was chaired by E.Farrar, Minister for Labour and Industry, the owners argued for a reduction of wages, and at the same time, took the opportunity to condemn the government's high freight charges on the railway. Owners claimed that the charges had contributed to the depressed state of the coal industry. The union representatives accused the owners of contributing to the over-capacity by opening more mines than were necessary<sup>(1)</sup> and suggested that a Royal Commission be appointed to inquire into the coal industry. In August of the same year Bavin submitted a plan to reduce Maitland coal prices by four shillings per ton<sup>(2)</sup> so that the selling price of coal f.o.b. Newcastle would be reduced from 25/- per ton to 20/- per ton for overseas exports and to 21/- per ton for local consumption. The reduced selling price was to be effected by concessions from all parties associated with the industry.<sup>(3)</sup> The proposals were as follow: the New South Wales government was to reduce its freight charges by two shillings per ton; a Commonwealth bounty of one shilling per ton on all coal exported overseas and interstate was to be paid to the owners; the producers were to give up one shilling per ton of the alleged average profit of two shillings per ton; and mineworkers were to accept one shilling per day reduction in wage rates and 12½ per cent in

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1. Two mines (Kalingo and Elrington) on the Maitland field were then being developed.

2. Plus an additional 1/- per ton for coal exported.

3. D.J. Davies, A Review of Coal Question. Preceding and During the Lockout on the Northern Field, 1929. p. 2. (Mitchell Library, 331.818/D. Most biased in favour of the miners.)

contract rates. <sup>(4)</sup>

The Premier also stated at the conference that an investigation of the owners' books by Treasury officials had shown that wages' costs averaged 12/8 per ton of coal for the Northern field, but as that information was strictly confidential, he could not show individual colliery figures to the Miners' Federation. <sup>(5)</sup> The Premier insisted that the wage reductions would have to be accepted before an inquiry would begin <sup>(6)</sup>, further stating that his proposals had been based on the report of an accountant who had been appointed by the government to examine Colliery accounts. However, he could not allow a Miners' Federation accountant to examine the books. It was not without cause that the miners regarded Bavin's attitude of secrecy with some suspicion, and their fears appeared to be justified when it was stated in a subsequent session of Parliament that,

Mr Barton, the Government accountant, when giving evidence on oath before the Davidson Commission, said that 'at no time did he see the coal mine owners' books, and had not ascertained the amount of profit from them. The only figures he had seen were the collection of figures by Treasury officials.' The speaker continued that 'this was the opposite of what had been said by Mr Bavin', and stated 'I suggest the late Premier did not speak the truth' - a statement which was not denied. <sup>(7)</sup>

At its meeting in February, the Central Council of the Miners' Federation rejected Bavin's proposals and asked the Commonwealth Government to set up a Royal Commission to inquire into the industry, the terms of reference to include an investigation of the owners' profits. <sup>(8)</sup> Ten days later the Associated Northern Collieries gave their employees two weeks' notice, and announced that they would re-open the mines when the men accepted reductions

4. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.188

5. D.J. Davies, A Review of Coal Question .... p.2

6. Ibid., p.3.

7. N.S.W. Parl. Debates. Vol. CXXVI p.2825. Cited Shaw and Bruns, op.cit., pp.141-142. The Davidson Commission confirmed that the owners' profit was about 2/- per ton, but was his source of information the same as Bavin's?

8. Central Council of the Miners' Fed. Minutes (5 February, 1929). Cited Gollan, op.cit., p. 188.

of  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent for piece work and 1/- per day for daily wage workers. (9) There was no chance of a compromise and the mines closed. Prime Minister Bruce called a conference of owners and miners' representatives (Bavin also attended) , but neither party at the meeting could agree on details of a proposal to examine Bavin's assertion that colliery owners were making a profit of only two shillings per ton after paying 12/8 per ton in wages and 11/- per ton in overhead costs. (10) The miners " were prepared to agree to an inquiry by accountants provided they **were allowed to choose their own accountant** who would be a competent public accountant." (11) The Prime Minister, the Premier and the owners would not agree to that suggestion and McDonald , Secretary to the Northern Collieries' Association stated in the press that " there would be no accountants' inquiry into the owners' books " (12) . There was perhaps, some significance in the later discovery that forty-seven members of the Institute of Chartered Accountants from which the Prime Minister suggested an accountant should be selected, owned shares in the coal companies, while others were closely connected with the companies or their **allies in the shipping business**. (13) In the meantime, the Combined Unions' Committee had engaged E.S. Miller, a member of a firm of public accountants, which had conducted audits of many of the big coal companies on the Northern field, to investigate the cost structure of the various coal companies.

Miller and Davies were later instructed by the unions to prepare a series of articles for the Sydney Evening News (14) in which they claimed that the colliery companies were actually showing a net profit of 8/8 per ton, or one-third of the selling price of 25/- per ton. These figures were not

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9. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales, Melbourne, 1963. p.188

10. D.J. Davies, A Review of Coal Question.... p.3

11. Ibid., p.3.

12. Ibid., p. 13

13. Ibid., p.11

14. Ibid., p. 3

contradicted by the owners.<sup>(15)</sup> The proprietors however, showed their disapproval of Miller by having him excluded from the April conference which he was attending in his capacity as union adviser.<sup>(16)</sup> At that conference the Prime Minister announced that the Commonwealth Government was not proceeding with the summons it had taken out against John Brown for breach of the penal clauses of the Arbitration Act, in causing a lockout in his mines.<sup>(17)</sup> The conference ended in deadlock, although the proposals put forward by the union representatives seemed to indicate a weakening on their part. Miners' recommendations to the conference included re-opening the mines on a pre-lockout basis, allocation and control of output, investigation of profits and costs and the establishment of a strike alleviation fund.<sup>(18)</sup> The owners countered those proposals by demanding the right to 'hire and fire', the removal of all restrictions on output, a reduction of contract rates by twenty per cent, and reduction of day wages by 1/6 per day.<sup>(19)</sup> In view of the stalemate, the Federation resorted to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court and Judge Beeby granted miners an interim award, on the basis of the old, in December, 1929. The Judge indicated his attitude clearly:

I ... think that the present dispute is founded on an illegality - that is on a combined effort to reduce wages without the authority of one of the tribunals created by State or Federal laws .... The present industrial policy of the Commonwealth, as expressed in Federal or State laws, is that organised disturbance of labour conditions shall not take place without the authority of some tribunal appointed by law. (20)

Unfortunately for the miners an appeal to the High Court brought an invalidation of the award on grounds that the dispute was not an interstate

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15. Ibid., p.3

16. Ibid., p.12

17. Cessnock Eagle. 22 March, 1929

18. Ibid., 12 April, 1929

19. D.J.Davies, A Review of Coal Question.... p.17

20. A.G.L.Shaw and G.R.Bruns, The Australian Coal Industry. Melbourne, 1947. p.144. (Quoted from Aust. Coal and Shale Employees' Federation v. Northern Colliery Association. No. 200 of 1929, 28 C.A.R. pp.538-540)

one and that therefore the Commonwealth Court had no jurisdiction. Mr Justice Isaacs, in dissenting, supported Judge Beeby, who had argued that because the Wonthaggi (Victoria) miners had struck in sympathy with the Northern New South Wales miners, the dispute was of an interstate nature. (21)

To overcome the unfavourable ruling of the High Court, the Miners' Federation served a Commonwealth-wide log of claims for wage increases on the owners, the rejection of which, led to a 'new' dispute reaching the Arbitration Court. Again, the judgment was in favour of the miners and once more an appeal to the High Court invalidated the decision, the Court's view being that the dispute was not genuine. Justice Isaacs again dissented:

This controversy has certainly reached an amazing position. For the second time, in the name of the law of the Commonwealth, the coal miners and the proprietors have been compulsorily brought into the Arbitration Court to compose by impartial methods a serious industrial quarrel that has caused, and is still causing, widespread injury in the community; and for the second time, in the name of the same law, they are summarily ejected from that tribunal, with the conflict still active and its consequences unaverted. (22)

With all chance of conciliation and arbitration out of the question and the likelihood that the stalemate would only be ended by exhaustion, the Federation tried to compromise. (23) In November, the owners had offered to re-open the mines for a reduction of  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent in contract rates and sixpence a day for 'off-hand' labour, an offer which was acceptable to the miners' Central Council, but not to the rank and file. Nevertheless, by May 1930, the miners realised that worse might eventuate and accepted the offer. The worst industrial struggle to that date on the South Maitland field was ended, but not before the 'Rothbury Incident' was, in the opinion of extremists, to add murder to the already pernicious record of the colliery owners.

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21. A.G.L. Shaw and G.R. Bruns, The Australian Coal Industry. Melbourne, 1947. p.145.

22. Gollan, op cit., p.190. Quoted from Caledonian Collieries Ltd. v. Australasian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation. [No 2] (1930)42 C.L.R. 558

23. Gollan, op.cit., p.191.



The Lockout of 1929 has, so far, been described in general terms of conferences and legal wrangles, but the real effects of the dispute were to be found in the everyday lives of the **inhabitants** of the South Maitland towns where misery, humiliation and starvation produced the bitter cynicism which was not to lessen until a new generation, too young to know the privations of the Lockout, had grown up. South Maitland mines had begun to feel acutely the results of lack of trade by the middle of 1928 and some mines were closed and others partially so. Relief work and assistance for the unemployed were requested by mineworkers, business people and G.Booth, M.L.A. for Kurri Kurri.<sup>(24)</sup> Booth also appealed for food and clothing for the children of unemployed in the Kuuri Kurri and Weston districts where some fathers had been out of work for from eight to eighteen months.<sup>(25)</sup> In the Cessnock area about one thousand men had been thrown idle by the closure of Aberdare South and Aberdare Central Collieries, and in other mines, intermittent working was the rule rather than the exception. The refusal of the Aberdare Colliery management to consider any suggestion that work should be shared, despite the fact that its two mines Aberdare and Aberdare Extended were working at full production speed for ten to eleven days per fortnight,<sup>(26)</sup> aggravated the unemployment position. When Aberdare Central was re-opened in August, it was on the owners' terms, which included abolition of the "darg", and the employment of an inadequate number of shiftmen, thus imposing extra work on the miner. The acceptance of work under those conditions was necessary because of the government's refusal to pay relief money to those who refused work.<sup>(27)</sup> When three hundred men were dismissed from Hebburn N6.1 at about the

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24. Cessnock Eagle, 7 August, 1928

25. Ibid., 17 August, 1928

26. Ibid., 17 July, 1928

27. Ibid., 21 August, 1928

same time, J.M.Baddeley, M.L.A. for Cessnock, estimated that the unemployed in his district numbered two thousand, of whom only fifty had been given relief work. (28) Local business people and Local Government bodies began to feel the strain on their financial resources and at the end of August, the Kearsley Shire Council, in whose area much of the South Maitland field lay, was obliged to dispense with the services of twenty-seven workers. (29)

In an atmosphere of worsening industrial unrest the more militant and radical workers turned to left-wing organisations. The Australian Communist Party, although not strong in organisation or numbers, began in a small way, a campaign of education and propaganda through an auxiliary, the Militant Minority Movement, which discussed industrial tactics, conducted lectures and education courses, and urged the Miners' Federation to take a more purposeful and militant approach to the deteriorating industrial crisis:

A portion of the workers in ever increasing numbers recognise the fact that the working class have nothing in common. The members of the M.M.M. realise this fact and have directed their attention upon the ever-growing intensification of the class struggle caused through the fight for economic existence. On the one hand, the capitalist class are deciding on how they can accumulate vast wealth by doing away with manual labour whenever and wherever possible. On the other hand industrial organisations are perpetually fighting to live in reasonable decency and maintain their existence as workers. (30)

The crisis grew worse in September when a stoppage at Abermain No. 2 was called because six men were suspended for allegedly filling dirty coal. The management's response was to bring the pit horses to the surface and turn them out, an indication of the owners' apparent lack of concern. (31) At the end of the month aggregate meetings were called to discuss the Premier's proposals for wage and price reductions referred to above. (32) Against the advice of their

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28. Ibid., 24 August, 1928.

29. Ibid., 31 August, 1928.

30. Ibid., 4 September, 1928.

31. Ibid., 7 September, 1928.

32. cf. Page 80.

leaders (33) the rank and file rejected the proposals and by the end of the year (1928) unemployment and hardship were growing steadily worse. Hebburn No.1 and Hebburn No. 2 had begun to share the work available by working on alternate fortnights; (34) Aberdare Extended and Aberdare Central were both idle because of lack of trade; and disputes had brought Aberdare and Bellbird to a standstill. (35) November was marked by further unhappiness when one hundred men were offered relief work at Wauchope, preference being given to married men, and single men with dependants. (36) Victimisation was also attempted by the management when Stanford Merthyr was re-opened. The owners were showing no sympathy at all and they were charged by G.Booth (M.L.A. for Kuuri Kurri) with taking advantage of starving women and children in order to smash union tradition. (37) Meanwhile the Militant Minority Movement had become more active and the Cessnock Eagle reported that,

The M.M.M. intends to do some extensive organising in the near future to make the working class thoroughly conversant with the movement's policy. The members realise that sooner or later an attack will be made on wages and conditions and in anticipation of this coming about preparations have got to be made to meet the onslaught of the owning class. (38)

Increased pressure was exerted on Bavin, the Premier, to visit the coalfields and see for himself the hardships being endured. It was claimed that over one thousand men in Cessnock were unemployed, some having been out of work for two years, the majority for periods of from twelve to seventeen months, during which none of them had found twenty days' work. (39) Relief orders issued at the principal South Maitland towns during 1928 totalled nearly fifty thousand pounds: Cessnock, (£20,000); Kurri Kurri, (£10,000); Weston, (£9,500); and

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33. The rank and file usually met in an atmosphere of emotion. Under those circumstances the moderates were easily swayed by the more vociferous extremists.

34. Cessnock Eagle, 30 October, 1928.

35. Ibid., 9 November, 1928.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., 16 November, 1928

38. Ibid., 27 November, 1928

39. Ibid., 7 December, 1928.

Abermain, (£7,250). (40)

Despite the rigours of living on the South Maitland field, the resistance of the rank and file to any weakening on the part of the Executive was still very strong according to the Cessnock Eagle and it reported in the same issue that the Militant Minority Movement had formed a Council of Action to **combat anti-working class laws**, and to work for the release of political and industrial prisoners. (41) The Council's attitude was expressed by D. Hunter, Mayor of Cessnock, who, when speaking against **anti-working class legislation**, said:

Many workers are inclined to view any expressed revolutionary idea with apprehension, but no revolution was ever made a bloody revolution by those in revolt against oppression, but always by those who upheld such oppression. The opinion was expressed that the uniting of labour organisations in this Council of Action is certainly a gesture of revolt and every effort must be made to combat the attacks of the Bruce Government upon working-class education and progress. (42)

Just one week before the report of Hunter's speech, all employecs of the Northern Collieries Association's pits **which** were still working were given notice that production would stop. Only three small mines remained operational: Hilldale, Hillend, and Millfield Greta. Eight thousand **five** hundred men on the South Maitland field were thrown out of work, as well as another one thousand or more on the Newcastle field. (43) A steady deterioration in living conditions followed throughout 1929. Business houses dismissed many employecs, and in the first week of May, no fewer than nine hundred applied to the Kurri Kurri Police for relief. (44) Nevertheless, the will to resist was strong and at an **aggregate meeting held** at Cessnock towards the end of April, miners rejected the owners' proposals for resumption. (45) Later on, a mass

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40. Ibid., 4 January, 1929.

41. Ibid., 15 January, 1929.

42. Ibid., 22 February, 1929

43. Ibid., 15 February, 1929

44. Ibid., 3 May, 1929

45. Ibid., 30 April, 1929

meeting of locked-out miners and other unemployed resolved unanimously:

That in the opinion of this meeting the time is now ripe for the rank and file of the working class in this, and other districts, to demand the right to live, either by work, or if that cannot be done, by full relief from the Government. With this in view, we pledge ourselves to do our utmost, by demonstrations or public meetings, and by other means which we see fit to adopt, to force the Government to provide for those, who by no fault of their own, are today unemployed; further, that unless we receive adequate assistance, we will not be responsible for anything that may happen. (46)

By this time, the Government, realising that no compromise was possible, had begun to apply pressure on the workers, deducting the value of endowment, soldiers' pension or other government allowance, from the regular dole of those applicants for relief who were previously eligible for the pension as well. (47)

By July, sterner measures were being taken and those who applied for dole had to sign a declaration that not more than two pounds **per week from any source** had come into the house, in the case of a married man with one child; two pounds ten shillings for a married man with four or five children; and three pounds ten shillings for a married man with six or seven children. Youths and girls between the aged of fourteen and twenty - one, who had been drawing a single man's allowance were issued with a dole order on July 24, but with the proviso that they register immediately for work with the Department of Labour and Industry. Special food for infants and extra food in the case of sickness were eliminated from the dole order of many families. Numerous other methods were tried to get young people to leave the coalfields: in August, Cessnock youths were offered farm jobs, while young girls were offered domestic jobs in Sydney at 25/- per week to 30/- per week; and in November, many of the Cessnock unemployed were given 'track' rations and told to look for work. (48)

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46. Ibid., 10 May, 1929.

47. Ibid., 17 May, 1929.

48. Ibid., 19 November, 1929.

Harassed by a hostile government in their attempts to subsist on the smallest living in very difficult circumstances, the miners, not surprisingly, turned to mass demonstrations and picketing in an effort to retain their hard-won industrial conditions, although, by ~~that~~ time, the preservation of rights was of secondary importance to the problem of defeating the coal owners at any cost. When it was alleged that members of the craft unions were still working in some mines a Lodge Conference on May 23 recommended the withdrawal of safety men from the collieries.<sup>(49)</sup> In June, members of Hebburn No.1 and Hebburn No.2 Lodges picketed their collieries in an attempt to prevent the handling of coal by members of the Colliery Staff Association,<sup>(50)</sup> their example being followed later by the ~~Lodge~~ members of Bellbird, Stanford-Merthyr No. 1, Pelton and Kalingo Collieries. In the midst of the turmoil, the Royal Commission which had been investigating the coal industry announced (in September) that its inquiries had revealed that the average profits in the coal industry were about two shillings per ton. Following this, the Chairman of the Coal Tribunal<sup>(51)</sup> declared that the men must accept a decrease of one shilling per ton in wages.<sup>(52)</sup> Sensing the time was right for action, the State Government declared its intention to open Cessnock, Pelton and Rothbury Collieries at the reduced rates,<sup>(53)</sup> whereupon the Committee of the Combined Mining Unions threatened to call a general strike if non-union labour were used by the government. However, the Executive of the Miners' Federation was in favour of capitulation and reached a compromise with the owners, wage deductions being fixed at ninepence per ton instead of one shilling per ton, and giving the owners the right to 'hire and fire'.<sup>(54)</sup>

The struggle appeared to be over, but the Executive had reckoned without

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49. Ibid., 24 May, 1929.

50. Ibid., 7 June, 1929.

51. Charles Hibble

52. Cessnock Eagle, 15 November, 1929.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., 3 December, 1929.

the rank and file. Representatives of Hebburn No.1, Hebburn No.2, Aberdare, Aberdare Extended, Stanford-Merthyr No.2, Elrington, Kalingo, Bellbird, Greta Main, Pelton and Cessnock Lodges repudiated the Executive's decision on December 2, <sup>(55)</sup> and at aggregate meetings later, miners at Kurri Kurri and Cessnock voted overwhelmingly against the proposed reduction. <sup>(56)</sup> Undaunted by threats the government proceeded to open Rothbury Colliery despite Baddeley's warning that the mine was dangerous and that the use of 'free' labour could prove disastrous. He said that if the Government opened Rothbury, which was one of the most dangerous mines, the members of the Government " ought to be tried for murder. " <sup>(57)</sup> A further criticism was directed against Bavin by Baddeley because of the Premier's decision to pay deputies, mechanics and engine-drivers State awards, although reducing the wages of miners, wheelers and 'off-hand' labourers, which had been governed by Federal awards. <sup>(58)</sup> The bitter struggle was nearing its climax: the Premier announced that Rothbury would open on December 18, and when a call to the Miners' Federation for men proved abortive, three hundred and fifty non-unionists were drafted into camp under heavy police protection <sup>(59)</sup> at Rothbury, and members of the Federated Engine-Drivers and Firemen's Association signed on for work at award rates. The opening of Rothbury was clearly a government tactic to provoke a 'showdown', and five thousand miners from Cessnock, Kurri Kurri and adjacent towns on the South Maitland field accepted the challenge. They converged on the colliery at dawn on December 16, to demonstrate against the use of 'free' labour. Skirmishes with police followed, as the miners charged the colliery fence, only to be beaten back,

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55.Ibid.

56.Ibid., 6 December, 1929.

57.Ibid.

58.Ibid.

59.Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.195

although according to some information, the fence was uprooted and carried forward for some yards by the men. Punches were thrown, stones were hurled and police opened fire with revolvers and drove the men back. When another attempt was made to enter the colliery grounds about 9.00 a.m., the miners were met with a volley of fire. Norman Brown, a demonstrator, was killed and several others wounded seriously. Earlier, boulders had been placed on the nearby railway line to prevent movement of trains to and from the colliery. Six policemen were injured, eleven arrests were made and Baddeley, endeavouring to persuade the men to refrain from violence, was also injured. (60)

Emotional scenes and acrimonious debates occurred all over the state as the news of Rothbury spread. The Government was accused of murder and law-breaking and the Miners' Federation was charged with having pre-arranged the demonstration and violence. In the month after the incident feelings ran high as the Government and the miners attempted to justify their particular part in the struggle. Large numbers of police remained on the coal field after December and appeared to go beyond the point of legality when meetings and demonstrations were broken up. The police were treated as outcasts and coalfields' families hardened in their determination to resist all authority: police, owners and government. (61)

Unsuccessful Court moves and the plight of the miners, which had worsened considerably when all unemployment relief on the Northern field was stopped, left miners with the choice of an 'all out' strike or acceptance of the November compromise. (62) Rank and file members favoured the 'all out' policy, but the decision of the craft unions to return to work, and the recommendation of the Central Council in May to do likewise, brought a reluctant return to

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60. Cessnock Eagle, 17 December, 1929.

61. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales, Melbourne, 1963. p.196,

62. Ibid.



work for all miners in June, 1930, on the owners' terms, namely a reduction of  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent in contract and sixpence per day in day rates. (63) In their book on the Australian coal industry (64) A.G.L. Shaw and G.R. Bruns pointed out that in the Lockout struggle, the arbitration system failed "to support the men when they were legally in the right" (65) and contrasted the situation of 1929-30, when owners were allowed to defy the courts for fifteen months, with the position during the general mining strike of 1938, when the miners were urged to go to the Court, although that dispute had lasted for six weeks only. The significance of the Lockout to the attitude miners adopted later has also been explained by Alan Walker: (66) "It was the longest and most bitter industrial stoppage in the district. It did incalculable harm to the mining industry, and deepened immeasurably the antagonisms separating masters and men." (67)

The Lockout was over, but its repercussions were not. Like a ghost come back to haunt the living, the memory of the Lockout is still able to stir emotions on the South Maitland field where the words 'remember Rothbury' can, not only serve as a warning, but also as a rallying call to resist encroachments by employers on hard-won working conditions. With the men back at work the immediate problem of earning a living began, but the difficulties encountered were those of a different nature; the effects of the depression and the break-up of the Labour Party over the question of reduced wages. For some time, J.T. Lang, elected to the office of Premier in October, 1930, on a platform opposed to Bavin, (68) enjoyed the support of the rank and file of Labour supporters and acceded to the miners' demands by having passed in both Houses

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63. A.G.L. Shaw and G.R. Bruns, The Australian Coal Industry. Melb., 1947. p.147

64. Ibid., p.147

65. Ibid.

66. Alan Walker, Coaltown. A Social Survey of Cessnock, N.S.W. Melb., 1945.

67. Ibid., p.8

68. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.197.

of the New South Wales Parliament a Bill to re-organise the coal mining industry, a Bill however, which never became law. (69) Lang's parliamentary defeat coincided with the rise of greater militancy in the Miners' Federation and in 1934, first W.Orr, Chairman of the Militant Minority Movement in the Western district, was elected General Secretary of the Federation, and then the death of Dan Rees enabled C.Nelson to take the office of President, thus re-uniting the team which had led the Militant Minority Movement in the west. Their leadership introduced a new era in the affairs of the miners' union. A more positive militant approach was evident as the communist leaders, by a system of propaganda and organisation reformed the machinery of the union so that it could act quickly and decisively, (71) and through pamphlets (72) and Common Cause, (73) aimed at securing as much support as possible for the miners' case.

The economy as a whole, began to lift from 1934, and the improvement was steady until 1937, the period being marked by increased output and a rise in the number of employees in the coal industry, although prices of coal and wages made only slight advances. (74) Unfortunately, the progress did not last and in September, 1938, issues relating to health and safety caused a stoppage of several weeks on the Western field. (75) Production of New South Wales coal fell in 1938 to 9,613,000 tons from the previous year's figure of 10,084,000 tons although the average number of employees in the same two years rose from 13,828 to 14,864. (76) Unsettled conditions prevailed as Australia entered the Second World War, and persisted throughout 1940, causing deep

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69. When Lang was dismissed by Sir Philip Game the Bill had not received the Governor's assent and so lapsed.

70. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales, Melbourne, 1963. p.200

71. Ibid., p. 210

72. e.g. Coal; Coal Facts ; Mechanisation.

73. The official organ of the Miners' Federation .

74. Report, Davidson Commission (1946). p.16.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

concern to the Federal Government as an 'all-out' war effort necessitated maximum coal production. In order to increase its control of the industry, the Commonwealth Government appointed the Commonwealth Coal Control Board<sup>(77)</sup> to supervise output and distribution. The entry of Japan into the war late in 1941 and the fall of Singapore early in 1942 no doubt contributed to the record coal output in 1942 of 12,458,140 tons in New South Wales,<sup>(78)</sup> but a downward trend began after that which was to continue until the end of the war.

Details of the coal industry in New South Wales from the outbreak of World War II will be discussed below, in Chapter VII, when the role of the Joint Coal Board and the rehabilitation of the South Maitland field are being considered, but it is appropriate to examine in this chapter the events which led up to the last strike of major importance on the field, the strike of 1949. The war years were marked by a series of strikes and by much government legislation affecting the coal industry as miners seized the opportunity to improve their conditions, while the government attempted to increase coal production in the national interest. From 1942 onwards coal output decreased to just over ten million tons in 1945.<sup>(79)</sup> The number of man - working days lost because of strikes was 177,656 in 1942; 326,231 in 1943; and over 300,000 in 1944.<sup>(80)</sup> Although the Federation Executive repeatedly exhorted the men to work<sup>(81)</sup> they did not do so, and miners were criticised severely for hindering the war effort and for using the disturbed wartime conditions to extract concessions from the owners. In defence of the miners however, it should be said that for twenty years they had found it extremely difficult to earn a livelihood. Thousands of workers had suffered

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77. Replaced by the Coal Commission in October, 1941.

78. Report, Davidson Commission(1946). p.16.

79. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.225

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

great hardships while coal owners had used the economic situation to their own advantage, largely ignoring the distress of the workers. The government had been similarly lacking in sympathy and it was not surprising that the miners used the war crisis in an attempt to recapture some of their lost conditions. In doing this they left themselves open to charges of indifference to the national war effort, but it was quite ridiculous to brand them as traitors, as some critics did. Alan Walker, in his social survey of Cessnock,<sup>(82)</sup> quoted answers given to his questions about the war and politics, which tended to be critical of Australia's involvement in the conflict, but Robin Gollan appeared to give the most reasonable view of miners' attitudes:

" The common view was a scepticism about the war, based on a long tradition of anti-war feeling and hostility to the bosses, coupled with a reluctant belief that the war must be won." <sup>(83)</sup> As the international conflict dragged on, control of the Executive over the rank and file of the miners' union decreased and it was obvious that if it were to retain general support the Central Council would have to " adopt a more active policy of supporting grievances even though it led to stoppages. " <sup>(84)</sup>

By the end of the war the coal industry of New South Wales was in chaos. A perusal of the grievances and stoppages listed in the Davidson Report(1946), gives an idea of the discontent evident on the coalfields, and on the South Maitland field in particular. <sup>(85)</sup> In order to remedy the dangerous position, many of Justice Davidson's recommendations were implemented by the Governments of New South Wales and the Commonwealth, the principal action taken being to constitute the Joint Coal Board in 1947., charged with the immediate task

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82. Alan Walker, Coaltown. A Social Survey of Cessnock, N.S.W. Melbourne, 1963. pp. 89-90  
 83. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.222.  
 84. Ibid., p. 226.  
 85. Report, Davidson Commission(1946). p.170 ff.

The Board's inability to do so for some years may be attributed to a number of factors: the owners were reluctant to modernise their mines; mines which had been planned inefficiently and worked by wasteful methods were difficult to re-organise; it took a long time to receive any new equipment ordered; and natural disasters, such as the South Maitland flood of 1949, hampered production and disrupted transport. Robin Gollan has added to these, the attitude of the miners and the policy of their leaders which led to the significant strike of 1949. (87) Gollan's view was that the Communist Party played an important role in bringing about the strike, as it believed itself to be the only party capable of producing a socialist society: " Our propaganda is to bring out the leading role of the Communist Party as the vanguard of the working class. " (89) In its attempt to seize leadership of the labour movement, the Communist Party gave the Miners' Federation a central role. The failure of the government to nationalise the coal industry (90) and the policy of mechanising it at the expense of miners (or, so they thought), left the communists in the Miners' Federation no alternative but to precipitate a major industrial struggle. (91)

The job is to seize the initiative, to present a positive programme on the way to win more coal, expose provocation, expose the fatal limitations of the Coal Board - while not supporting a return to the previous set - up, the jungle set- up, when the coal owners had no check on their activities at all emphasising the need for nationalisation. (92)

Although the Communist Party played a most positive part in the 1949 strike, the real causes were rooted deep in the history of the coal industry and were a continuation of the struggle which had marked employer - employee relations

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86. Report, Joint Coal Board (1947-48). p.5.

87. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p. 228.

88. Ibid., p. 233

89. Report of L. Sharkey, Gen. Sec. of the Communist Party. April, 1949.  
(Cited in Gollan, op. cit., p.232.)

90. A persistent demand of the miners during and after World War II.

91. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales Melbourne, 1963. p.233.

92. E. Ross, Communist Review. April, 1949. p. 115. Cited in Gollan, op. cit., p.233

for so long. The initial attack was made on April 19, 1949, when the Combined Mining Unions' Council adopted a log of claims demanding: a thirty-five hour working week; long service leave of three months for every seven years served in the industry; a wage increase of thirty shillings a week; and improved pit and town amenities.<sup>(93)</sup> It was demonstrative of the Federation's aggressive attitude that the questions of hours, wages and leave were before the Coal Industry Tribunal prior to the beginning of the strike: the demand for the wage increase was withdrawn by the Federation about three weeks before the strike; the hearing on long service leave had been completed and a draft award promised for June 14, 1949, two weeks before the strike, but the Tribunal refused to publish it when aggregate meetings were called for June 16 to discuss strike action.<sup>(94)</sup> The Joint Coal Board had also called several conferences between the unions and the proprietors, but all proposals ended in stalemate.<sup>(95)</sup> At the aggregate meetings which were held as planned, only thirty-seven percent of the membership attended and the voting was at the rate of nine to one for a general coal strike to begin on June 27.<sup>(96)</sup>

Government attitude was defined at once when on June 20, the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth and the Premier of New South Wales issued a joint statement which made it clear the the " dispute should be settled only by the processes of conciliation and arbitration and not otherwise. "<sup>(97)</sup> During the ensuing week other conferences were arranged by the Joint Coal Board and the Coal Industry Tribunal, at which the Federation offered to call off the strike if the Joint Coal Board would support its modified claim before the Tribunal. The claim was:

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93. Report, Joint Coal Board (148-49). p.30  
 94. Ibid., p. 30.  
 95. The Miners' Federation refused to consider any matters not mentioned in the log.  
 96. Report, Joint Coal Board (1948-49) p.32.  
 97. Ibid.

- (a) Long service leave provisions to be:
- (i) six months for twenty years' service;
  - (ii) twenty years' service accepted retrospectively; and
  - (iii) except on retirement, no leave to be taken before January, 1951.
- (b) A 35 hour week to be accepted in principle, but 40 hours to be worked on an overtime basis for one or two years. (98)

In return the unions agreed to 'consider' the mechanical extraction of pillars and some relaxation of compulsory retirement at the age of sixty, but would go no further. These conditions were unacceptable to the owners and on June 27 work ceased in all coal mines throughout Australia manned by members of the Miners' Federation. (99)

Both Governments concerned acted decisively and within two days of the commencement of the strike, the Commonwealth Government passed the National Emergency (Coal Strike) Act, 1949, retrospective to June 16, 'freezing' miners' union funds and prohibiting the union from assisting the strike financially. (100)

Other organisations or persons were also forbidden to assist the striking unions or their members. (101) The New South Wales Government passed the Emergency Powers Act, 1949, with effect from June 30. Under this act the government was given authority to maintain essential services. (102)

Anticipating government legislation to combat the strike, the Miners' Federation and supporting unions had withdrawn £54,700 from the banks prior to the passing of the Commonwealth act, and refused to pay any of the money into Court or to reveal its whereabouts. At subsequent Court proceedings, heavy fines were imposed on the Miners' Federation, the Waterside Workers' Federation and the Federated Ironworkers' Association. (103) In addition, five

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98. Ibid.

99. Ibid., p.33

100. Ibid.

101. Ibid.

102. Ibid.

103. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales, Melbourne, 1963. p.234.

officials of the Miners' Federation and two of the Waterside Workers' Federation were each sentenced to twelve months' gaol, and one official of the Federated Ironworkers' Association to six months' gaol. Other union officials were each fined one hundred pounds, all fines and sentences being imposed because officials acted in 'contempt of court' for refusing to pay into court, funds withdrawn from the bank.<sup>(104)</sup> (When the strike ended imprisoned union officials were released on payment of twenty -five pounds costs each, but the Court refused to remit fines imposed on the unions.)<sup>(105)</sup> Other positive steps taken by the government included a campaign of propaganda desgned to show the strike as " communist -led subversion of arbitration." <sup>(106)</sup> Troops were put into open-cuts to produce coal<sup>(107)</sup> and both Federal and State Labour Party Governments attacked union officials and called on the miners to submit their claims to arbitration.<sup>(108)</sup> " The strike had the most devastating effect on the community; use of gas was rationed to as little as one hour a day, railway services were cut to vanishing point, and registered unemployed rose from less than a thousand to more than a hundred and twenty thousand." <sup>(109)</sup>

Soon after the strike began it was apparent that the rank and file of the various mining unions were anxious to return to work. A number of small mines in Queensland re-opened early in July, and by the middle of the month, thirty-eight mines were operating there. Western Australian miners decided to return to work on July 17, and all miners in Tasmania returned to work on July 25, although they did go on strike again the following day on another issue. <sup>(110)</sup>

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104. Report, Joint Coal Board (1948-49). p.33

105. Ibid.

106. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.234.

107. 101,400 tons were produced from August 1-14. The army worked a three-shift, six day week.

108. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales, Melbourne, 1963. p.234.

109. Ibid.

110. Report, Joint Coal Board (1948-49). pp.33 -34.



The New South Wales miners, however, on July 20, rejected settlement terms proposed by the Australasian Council of Trade Unions, although the numerous meetings on the coalfields appeared to favour a return to work. Sensing that the men were becoming more hostile to the strike, the Northern Executive of the Miners' Federation stated that it had opposed the strike before it had begun and demanded a review of the whole situation.<sup>(111)</sup> Consequently, the Central Council of the Miners' Federation called aggregate meetings for August 9 and 10. At these the rank and file rejected the proposals that "active steps should be taken to re-open negotiations with all parties,"<sup>(112)</sup> thus giving the Miners' Federation no alternative to ordering a resumption of work on August 15.<sup>(113)</sup>

The strike resulted in unqualified defeat of the miners, but this applied more particularly to the communists within the union. An anti-communist opposition rose within the mining unions so that "by 1951, for the first time since 1934, communist policy was being out-voted in the Central Council of the Federation."<sup>(114)</sup> Communists have remained a powerful group in the Federation, but their policies have been more in keeping with the realities of the situation, and the tactical blunder of 1949 has not been repeated.

The strike of 1949 was a turning point in union history not only because of the political implications of the defeat, but also because during the next decade the industry underwent changes which radically altered the working and community lives of the miners. Rationalization and mechanization, long expected, became a fact. The union had to find ways by which it could continue to pursue its fundamental objective of ensuring that the cost of economic progress should not be borne exclusively by its members, and that increased productivity would result in an improvement, not a deterioration, in the lives of the miners.<sup>(115)</sup>

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111. Ibid. p. 34

112. Ibid.

113. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of Australia. Melbourne, 1963. p. 235.

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid.

CONSERVATION AND MECHANISATION.A. Conservation and Wastage.

The history of mining on the South Maitland field has been a story of wastage and inefficiency, despite the facts that numerous warnings were issued, both before and after coal getting operations began in the area, and that dissipation of coal resources would cause significant economic loss and social disruption. The task of mining the thick Greta seam without leaving a considerable amount of coal underground has been a difficult one, and perhaps an impossible one, but the truth is that coal proprietors have not really considered the problem of wastage. When one speaks of inefficient mining methods, it must be clearly understood that the word inefficient does not mean uneconomic from the point of view of production to meet demand. The colliery owners have in fact been most anxious to obtain maximum production at minimum expense, but in doing this, have been responsible for the loss of enormous amounts of coal on the Maitland field. For example, when Aberdare South Colliery (at Abernethy) was closed in 1927 because of the general economic situation, over one hundred and fifty million tons of coal were left underground. However, it would be unrealistic to expect coal companies to mine areas where the winning of coal was uneconomic. It is for this reason that no one attempts to mine the deeper lying parts of the Greta seam south of the South Maitland area. Such operations would not be economic and coal companies must operate on the basis of profitability. What the critics of coal mining methods on the Greta seam have complained about has been the apparent lack of interest of the coal companies concerned in giving the question of wastage any consideration at all.

The problems of conservation and wastage have been the object of much

criticism and investigation, but very little has been done to conserve coal or prevent wastage of it. Critics of mining methods on the South Maitland field had always claimed that incorrect and haphazard mining of the field would lead to dissipation of the nation's resources, a disaster which would become apparent only when dwindling supplies would be unable to meet the demands of consumers.

Warnings had been based on two inter-related aspects, the dangers of spontaneous combustion and the loss of coal because of the methods used to work the thicker seams of the Maitland field. In the early days of mining near Newcastle, the Australian Agricultural Company, which enjoyed a monopoly of coal mining in New South Wales <sup>(1)</sup> did not worry about the best means of working the seams, which were up to ten feet six inches thick. In fact, when F. Odernheimer, a visiting geologist, inspected the Company's pits in 1896<sup>(2)</sup>, he found them in great confusion. There was little evidence to suggest that accurate surveys had been made or that maps were drawn of the worked areas, and estimated that some seven hundred thousand cubic yards of coal were lost beyond recovery in the old A, B, and C pits <sup>(3)</sup>. When commenting on this Jesse Gregson, Superintendent of the Australian Agricultural Company said:

In the early days the trade was perhaps too uncertain, if not insignificant, to have justified the expense of putting a skilled manager in charge....<sup>(4)</sup> As events have since abundantly proved, such expenditure <sup>(5)</sup> would have saved the Company immense sums of money; without the knowledge it would have afforded, their mining enterprise was entered upon in an haphazard fashion, and was now so far established that the blunders which had been made were irremediable. <sup>(6)</sup>

Little attention was given to Odernheimer's findings, but his view was

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1. Up until about 1847. R.A.H.S. Journal and Proceedings. Vol XVI, Part III. 1930. p.153.

2. In the Newcastle area.

3. Jesse Gregson, The Australian Agricultural Company, 1824 -1875. Sydney, 1907. p.167.

4. Ibid., p.168

5. i.e., skilled managers and surveyors.

6. Jesse Gregson, The Australian Agricultural Company. op.cit., p.169

confirmed by William Armstrong in October, 1874, when he claimed that pillars of coal which were being left in the mines after the first working were too small to allow for their subsequent removal, so that a great proportion of the seam would be lost. As Armstrong predicted, much coal was lost and it is most instructive to examine Gregson's explanation of coal wastage. He claimed that the primary motives which determined the policy of those who exploited the Newcastle field revolved about the costs of production:

Exigencies of trade can seldom be altogether disregarded and the demand for the Company's coal had always been quite equal to the supply. To have left larger pillars would have involved a smaller output and a heavier charge for getting; trade once lost cannot always be regained, and it may very well have been a question whether present urgent requirements should not properly over-ride considerations of future advantage. (7)

A similar policy determined the mining methods to be used in the following century on the South Maitland field, where the damage done was to be considerably greater. Confirmation of the tremendous wastage on the Newcastle field and comments on the Maitland field were made by J.T.Watson in a paper, Waste of Coal, delivered in 1924, to the Newcastle Division of the Institution of Engineers:

Up to the end of 1922 ... some  $57\frac{1}{2}$  million tons only have been taken from this area (8) although assuming the seam to be seven feet thick and working on a basis of one hundred tons per acre inch, the quantity which might have been taken was about 134,400,000 tons ... the actual loss was 76,900,000, or about 57 per cent of what was available.... On the South Maitland field the waste is no less evident. As the mines are being worked at present, it is questionable if 50 per cent of the available coal will be brought to the surface... the probable loss on the field if present methods are continued will be about 700,000,000 tons. (9)

Watson also pointed out that mining practice overseas, particularly in Great Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, the United States of America, India and

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7. Ibid. p.267

8. Watson was referring to the Borehole seam, Newcastle.

9. J.T. Watson, Paper No. 11, Vol. V, 1924. Institution of Engineers of Australia. pp.196-200. (Paper entitled, Waste of Coal)

the Straits Settlements, had shown the advantage of stowage in conserving coal, and suggested that hydraulic stowage could prove of value on the South Maitland field.<sup>(10)</sup> Having made the observation that something could be done to improve winning methods in New South Wales, Watson concluded by recommending methods of working which would guarantee against loss of coal as a result of fires, and reduce the dangers of work in seams affected by spontaneous combustion. He also recommended that royalties be paid on all coal in the area controlled, not merely on the amount of coal won. Watson claimed that this would result in maximum extraction of coal.

It is clear that during, and long before the opening of the South Maitland field, adequate and persistent warnings were issued that inefficient mining would cause tremendous wastage of an irreplaceable national asset, and therefore, it is hardly to the credit of mining operators or governments that the valuable coal of the Greta seam has been worked by methods which had already proved wasteful on the nearby Newcastle field. Even after the South Maitland field was well established more warnings were issued, but to little avail. It appears now that nothing will be done; it may well be that nothing can be done in workings which have been closed for years. Moreover, since a greater percentage of available coal is now being recovered because of faster working brought about by widespread mechanisation and double-shift working, the problem seems to be less urgent, but only comparatively so, because the percentage of coal being lost is still very high. Other factors which have hastened the rate of extraction and thus reduced the chances of loss, have been the improved market situation and the lower incidence of intermittency brought about by closer co-operation between worker and owner,

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10. Hydraulic stowage and the attempts to implement it on the South Maitland field will be discussed in Chapter VII. It is not examined here as the experiment was supervised by the Joint Coal Board. Moreover, from the point of view of chronology it is more appropriate to discuss it later.

evident in recent years.

Before discussing in detail the principal criticisms made of mining methods, an examination will be made of the actual methods of mining employed on the South Maitland field, and of the ~~advantages~~ and disadvantages of the Greta seam which have governed the exploitation of the measures.

The Greta seam has been renowned for its thickness. Almost without exception, the mines on the South Maitland field have worked seams no less than six feet thick and in most cases, ranging from eleven feet to thirty-four feet. The thickness of the seam gives it distinct advantages over the somewhat thinner seams of England. On the South Maitland field, the miner, being able to stand erect, enjoys a better working position which permits greater productivity. The thick seam has further advantages when mechanised, and adaptation of overseas machines has been accomplished without serious difficulty. The field has other distinctive features: there is little water seepage; there is a plentiful supply of timber for props, often on the actual leases; and the roof of sandstone or conglomerate is sound enough to be regarded as one of the best in the world. These advantages manifested themselves quite early: the statistics for 1914 show that the annual output per man was 741 tons on the Northern (N.S.W.) field, compared with 311 tons per man in English mines. (11) Production from the South Maitland pits has represented a good return on investment: the initial outlay (when driving tunnels into the outcrop was relatively inexpensive) was not high and mining, under these conditions was a more prosperous venture than on other fields.

However, the Greta seam does have its drawbacks, and those have been responsible for a considerable part of the wastage referred to above. The

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(1) Maitland District Scientific and Historical Research Society, A Handbook of the Maitland District, Compiled for the British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1914. p. 43. Mitchell Library No. 981.4/M

liability of the seam to spontaneous combustion has always been a problem: when the coal, which is highly volatile, comes into contact with air, heatings, fires and explosions are likely to result. Professor David was well aware of the problem:

The fact that these splendid seams have been on fire in pre-historic times, on a very large scale, is one which I should like to impress very strongly on the proprietors and managers of collieries in this important coalfield. There can be little doubt...that the fire... resulted from spontaneous combustion.... But the evidence is of much wider significance as a warning to colliery managers and owners of the great risk they run if they neglect to take all possible precautions against outbreaks of fire through spontaneous combustion in this part of the field. (12)

The problem of spontaneous combustion was examined at length by the South Maitland Coalfield Coal Conservation Committee in 1951 and a number of references were made to occurrences of spontaneous combustion on the Maitland field. (13) The earliest collieries to work the Greta seam, that is, Anvil Creek and Greta Collieries, were abandoned because of fire after a number of years' working. (14) The seam worked at the Greta Colliery was approximately fifteen feet thick, and in the last years of the pit's existence, when extensive pillared areas had been developed, fires became more frequent until the whole mine was sealed in December, 1900. Subsequently, other collieries in the Greta-Branxton area were developed, and one of them, Whitburn Colliery, was also abandoned because of fire. In that particular part of the Greta seam, mining activities are now confined to Ayrfield No. 3 Colliery, which is working the Main Greta seam along the line of the outcrop to the west of the Lochinvar Dome, where the coal measures incline at from twenty-seven to forty-three degrees. In that area the seam has been split into a number of

12. T.W.E.David, The Geology of the Hunter River Coal Measures, New South Wales. Sydney, 1907. p. 144.

13. Report of the South Maitland Coalfield Coal Conservation Committee. Sydney, 1951. (Henceforth cited as, Report, S.M.C.C.C.C.(1951).)

14. Report, S.M.C.C.C.C.(1951) p.22.

layers and is being worked by a series of dip-tunnels<sup>(15)</sup> driven from the outcrop along the grade of the seam and by bords<sup>(16)</sup> driven on level course on each side of the main dip -tunnel. Coal in the Middle and Upper layers is subject to spontaneous combustion which has necessitated some sealing of the dip-tunnel concerned. The collieries to the south-west of the Lochinvar Dome<sup>(17)</sup> constitute the latest group to develop the Top or Main Greta seam in the southern portion of the Maitland field. Owing to splitting of the top portion of the seam with varying thicknesses of intervening rock bands and absence of some of the splits in some areas, operations in these mines are mainly in the lower portion of the Greta seam and spontaneous combustion has not been a troublesome feature.<sup>(18)</sup> At Aberdare South Colliery, fairly close to the collieries mentioned above, where the seam is at its full thickness and at a depth of nearly fifteen hundred feet, spontaneous combustion was not a problem either, but in the collieries in the immediate vicinity of Cessnock, where the Greta seam is also at its maximum thickness, serious fires have occurred. Spontaneous combustion was prevalent at Neath Colliery when pillars were being extracted in its closing years,<sup>(19)</sup> and at Aberdare Colliery there was a serious fire as a result of spontaneous combustion in 1920, after which it was necessary to seal off the district affected. Bellbird Colliery experienced a severe fire in 1923 when naked lights were being used, and although that particular fire may not have been caused by spontaneous combustion, subsequent fires in the years of pillar extraction were caused by heatings. Spontaneous heatings also occurred at Aberdare Central Colliery in

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15. Main development tunnels usually on the steepest part of the seam.

16. Tunnels used as main entries to panel development.

17. viz., Pelton, Maitland Main, Millfield Greta, Stanford Main No. 2, Kalingo.

18. Report, S.M.C.C.C.C. (1951) p. 22

19. Closed in 1961.



1943 when a large fire caused the mine to be sealed off for eleven months; fires occurred at Cessnock No.2 Colliery during pillar extraction under shallow cover when falls of strata extending to the surface allowed air to enter the workings.

In the early development of the South Maitland field, fires, generally speaking, were not particularly hazardous when coal - getting operations were confined to the lower ten feet or so of the seam in bords and cut-throughs.<sup>(20)</sup>

However, during the second phase of operations, which consisted of falling the top coal to a parting<sup>(21)</sup> some fourteen to eighteen feet up the seam, heatings and fires occurred frequently in the falls of the upper portion of the seam, which usually contained a good deal of iron pyrites.<sup>(22)</sup>

During pillar extraction there is a greater risk of heating and it follows that the greatest amount of coal lost irretrievably will be lost during that phase of working. Because the greatest amount of coal lost has occurred in the stage of pillar removal, most of the criticism of working methods has been directed at that stage of mining operations. The thickness of the seam on the South Maitland field has introduced universal use of the 'bord and pillar' method of extraction, as opposed to the 'long wall' method used in the thinner seams of England and in some mines on the Newcastle and South Coast fields of New South Wales. In 'long wall' mining all coal is removed in the first working, but in the 'bord and pillar' method, coal is removed in two distinct stages.<sup>(23)</sup> In the first stage, or solid working, fifteen to fifty per cent of the mineable coal is removed by driving a series of evenly spaced tunnels called bords through the solid coal.

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20. The connections which are cut through from one tunnel to the next.

21. A parting is a well defined layering - a convenient roof to mine to.

22. Otherwise known as 'brassy tops'. When in contact with air it is subject to heating.

23. In the thick seams of Southern Siberia however, 'long wall' mining has been attempted with remarkable success, Russians claim that the extraction rate is 100 per cent in seams of 34 feet.

Between the bords solid coal pillars are left in position to support the roof. At intervals the bords are connected by openings known as 'cut-throughs', the size of the bords, pillars and cut throughs being determined by the Department of Mines and based on the thickness of the over-lying **cover** and the nature of the roof and floor. In the second stage of working the pillars are removed along a planned line of retreat, but in the past this **stage** had occurred years after the initial working, by which time pressure on them had caused crushing and heating. When this happened the area had to be sealed off.

The Department of Mines in New South Wales is responsible for regulations governing the amount of coal left in pillars, The stipulations issued in 1912 were: at a depth of 200 feet (50 per cent); at a depth of 200 - 500 feet (50 - 60 per cent); at a depth of 500 - 1000 feet (60-70 per cent); and at a depth of 1000 - 2000 feet (70 - 85 per cent). As most mines on the South Maitland field were from 500 to 2,000 feet deep it can be seen that the amount of coal left in pillars during the first working would not be less than 60 per cent. However, this initial restriction would not have been important if at the subsequent **stage** of pillar extraction all the coal could have been removed, but in practice that had never been possible. The 'bord and pillar' method has been slightly modified on the South Maitland field. Initial workings have been on the lower part of the seam, coal having been removed to a height of from eight to ten feet. The top portion of the seam had ~~then~~ **been** extracted. "The so-called tops do not always include the whole of the upper portion of the seam, which, depending upon the quality, condition of roof and other factors, may or may not, be won when pillars are being worked. From two to ten feet of coal may thus be left in the ground." (24)

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24. New South Wales Mineral Resources No. 37. The Coal Resources of the Southern Portion of the Maitland-Cessnock-Greta Coal District. Sydney, 1939. p. 84.

Moreover, the prevalence of spontaneous combustion had often made it impossible to remove pillars and even when some pillar extraction could be effected, the pressure on these remaining invariably produced self-heating when the de-pillared area reached a few acres in extent. When this happened the area had to be sealed off to prevent actual fire occurring and any future operations in the area were then most unlikely. (25)

So much wastage had occurred on the South Maitland field by 1911 through the use of mining methods outlined above that a Royal Commission was appointed to investigate the methods of extraction practised on the field. (26) The Report of the Commission re-iterated the warnings given previously and criticised mining methods:

In the past coal from these valuable coal seams has been so easily produced by the present methods, which the management generally considers to be 'the safest and most economical that could be adopted', that there has been no incentive to devise any different or original scheme for working them.... This method of working is, in many instances, simply taking what is most readily got and leaving the rest- perhaps for ever; besides, the thicker the seam the greater the loss. To cling to a system which may be good for the present, and not have a single accident recorded against it, but which would lead to serious difficulty in the subsequent operations, is not in the interests either of safety or economy, and disinclination in such a case to test other methods, even at increased expense, is no reason for persisting in practices involving danger or waste. (27)

These warnings went unheeded and by 1924, the wastage which had occurred because of heating and inability to remove pillars prompted J.T. Watson to condemn mining practices on the South Maitland field which led to "the easily avoidable and almost criminal waste of a national asset due to improper and out-of-date methods of mining. " (28)

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25. Ibid., p. 85

26. Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Best Methods of Working the Thick Coal Seams of the Maitland-Cessnock District, etc. Sydney, 1911.  
(Henceforth cited as, Report, Royal Commission Thick Coal Seams (1911)).

27. Ibid. p. 63.

28. J.T. Watson, Waste of Coal. op. cit., p.196.

The problem was much more acute than it had been in 1911. At the earlier date the mines under consideration had been Pelaw Main, Stanford Merthyr, Hebburn and Abermain Collieries where the seam ranged from eighteen to twenty feet thick. The Aberdare Collieries were then only in their early stages of development and pillar extraction had not been attempted. Moreover, the amount of cover in the mines working in 1911 varied from ninety to four hundred feet and exerted little pressure on the roof. However, by 1924, the seams being worked closer to Cessnock showed a variation in thickness of from twenty-four to thirty-four feet and the amount of cover was up to 1,250 feet. The amount of pressure on the roof at that depth led to heating and falls and to the loss of considerable coal. In fact, Watson maintained that it was doubtful whether fifty per cent of the coal could be won on the Maitland field and estimated that the loss up to 1924 was about 700,000,000 tons.<sup>(29)</sup> The significance of that figure may be appreciated when one realises that in 1924 coal production in the whole of New South Wales was under twelve million tons, of which 67.45 per cent, or 5,448,111 tons, was produced from the Greta seam.<sup>(30)</sup>

On the question of spontaneous combustion Joshua Jeffries, then Superintendent of Abermain Collieries Limited, made the following statement before the Royal Commission(1926) into Shale and Coal Mines:

I have no doubt that...in the Maitland field, it is fairly certain that every goaf (31) will heat spontaneously under the existing methods of working the seam....I am afraid therefore that unless some radical change in methods is adopted, great loss of coal is certain ... in some cases 70 per cent will be lost. (32)

The Commission examined the possible tonnage available for extraction in the

29. Ibid., p. 196 ff.

30. Annual Report, Department of Mine(N.S.W.), 1924.

31. An area from which all available coal has been taken.

32. Report of the Royal Commission into Coal and Shale Mines in New South Wales. Sydney, 1926. p.3

virgin coal areas of ten South Maitland Collieries and arrived at the following figures:

TABLE IV

Table showing estimated reserves of virgin coal in ten South Maitland collieries as at 1926.

COLLIERY	RESERVES IN TONS
Aberdare	67,735,406
Aberdare Central	63,728,552
Aberdare Extended	73,738,911
Aberdare South	153,901,181
Abermain No. 1	23,757,002
Abermain No. 2	55,002,429
Bellbird	61,713,358
Cessnock	11,082,647
Neath	19,111,492
Stanford Merthyr	34,015,343
Total	562,786,321

Source: Report, Royal Commission into Coal and Shale Mines in New South Wales. (1926). p.3.

Of the total reserves indicated above, Jeffries estimated that only three-tenths would be recovered by mining methods then in use and made a most gloomy forecast: " I have taken into consideration the length of life of the collieries on the Maitland coalfield under the present system of operating them. It is very limited. I should say in ten years some of them will be very sick properties. " (33) Although many of the collieries examined worked for periods longer than the ten years estimated by Jeffries, his point was generally valid. By 1927, Aberdare South, holding over one quarter of the coal referred to above had ceased production, and by 1965, of the ten collieries investigated in 1926, only Bellbird was still operating. Enormous quantities of coal had been left underground.

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33. Ibid., p.6.

The problem of wastage was investigated further in 1927 when J.M.Baddeley, Minister for Mines, presented a report to the Legislative Assembly concerned with the winning and working of the thick coal seams and the utilisation of the coal and oil-shale resources of New South Wales. In the report Baddeley emphasised the disadvantages of existing mining practices and stated that in his opinion, the original object was to produce as much coal as possible without any consideration being given to the most efficient method of laying out and working the whole seam so as to provide supplies for the future. (34) Baddeley estimated that coal reserves stood at 2,665,000,000 tons, and that a loss in excess of 500,000,000 tons could be expected. The magnitude of such losses can only be seen in its proper perspective when it is realised that the estimated loss represented 177,000,000 tons more than the total production of New South Wales up to the end of 1926. (35)

The position had worsened by 1929 and the Royal Commission which inquired into the coal industry that year (36) was given evidence to show that Jeffries and Baddeley had erred and that the expected loss would be worse than the estimates given previously. Ten South Maitland mines were investigated and it was discovered that only a very small percentage of the seam was being worked. Baddeley had taken fifty per cent as an average percentage worked in 1927, but as Table V shows, the actual amount of the seam being worked in 1929 did not exceed thirty-six per cent in any of the collieries examined.

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34. Report on the Winning and Working of the Thick Coal Seams and the Utilisation of the Coal and Oil Shale Resources of New South Wales. Sydney, 1927. p.8. (Henceforth cited as Baddeley Report (1927))

35. Baddeley Report (1927). p.8

36. Report, Davidson Commission (1930).

TABLE V.

Table showing the percentage of seam being worked in 1929 by ten collieries on the South Maitland Field.

Colliery	Approx. thickness of seam in feet.	% of seam worked	% of seam unworked
Aberdare	22	36-25	64-75
Aberdare Central	24	18	82
Aberdare Extended	24	32-24	68-76
Aberdare South	24	17	83
Abermain No.2	18	22	78
Ayrfield	32.25	16-11	84-89
Ayrfield No.2	31.75	13-17	83-87
Bellbird	24		
	13.75	28-23	72-77
East Greta	31.5	21	79
Hebburn No.2	15	13	87

Source: Report, Davidson Commission (1930). p.59.

Warnings that coal mining in the Hunter Valley was unnecessarily wasteful were also given by F.R.E. Mauldon in 1927 and 1929. After giving his warning ~~that~~ "the consciousness of abundant possession ~~was~~ producing prodigality" he warned that only when the easily accessible coal had disappeared would the loss be realised. (37) Because Mauldon's criticism was so strong, his indictment of the colliery owners is worth recalling:

Coal proprietors in the Northern District of New South Wales, where the need of coal conservation is most apparent, have shown no enthusiasm for the suggested reforms. The method of sealing off areas underground has been expertly criticised since as early as 1904, but despite the numerous fires that have plagued the collieries of the Maitland field and the consequent losses of coal reserves, the profitable returns from mining enterprises have been sufficiently high to lull any fears of necrosis which may have been inspired by the critics. The coal industry on this field has enjoyed to the full its income of economic rent. (38)

None of the early critics, Watson, Mauldon or Baddeley (and there were others), left any doubt that the responsibility for coal wastage on the South Maitland

37. F.R.E. Mauldon, A Study in Social Economics: The Hunter River Valley. Melbourne, 1927. p.62

38. F.R.E. Mauldon, The Economics of Australian Coal. Melbourne, 1929. p.35

field lay with the coal companies whose desire to seek maximum return on investment brought about a type of mining which led to immense waste. At a later date (1930) Justice Davidson confirmed the views of previous Royal Commissioners and especially referred <sup>to</sup> the Commission of 1911. He made it clear that " the system of working has continued the same as it was prior to the 1911 Royal Commission " ,<sup>(39)</sup> although he did admit that " owing to its thickness and liability to spontaneous combustion it is more difficult to recover a high percentage of the seam with safety to the workmen." <sup>(40)</sup>

It would appear however, that Davidson was evading the issue: as shown above, the cause of wastage was really to be found in the first working. It is true that later, after falls and heating had occurred, mining became more dangerous, but it is wrong to link wastage with unsafe working conditions, even by implication. Conservation of coal can only be effected when mines are planned properly, in the initial stages of working and when some attention is given to stowage, so that pillars may be extracted later.

It would be incorrect to assume that wastage has occurred only in New South Wales: in 1949 Powell Duffryn criticised methods of mining in Queensland and stated that " in many cases little consideration has been given to the desirability of extracting the pillars and as a result, large quantities of coal have been lost forever." <sup>(41)</sup> The same critic also commented on the methods of dealing with the problem of spontaneous combustion and recommended, in the national interest, that " the method of mining should aim at the complete extraction of the seam, particularly in coal fields where reserves are limited or uncertain or of special qualities

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39. Report, Davidson Commission (1930) p.395 .

40. Ibid.

41. Powell Duffryn, First Report on the Coal Industry of Queensland.  
London, 1949. p.40



such as coking coal or gas coal. (42)

South Maitland coal was of a special kind and the problem of its conservation became so urgent that the Minister for Mines and Immigration (J.C.Arthur), in 1950, appointed the South Maitland Coalfields Coal Conservation Committee to examine the collieries of Bellbird, Aberdare, Aberdare Extended, Elrington, Aberdare Central and Abermain No .2. (43) The Committee, which was to concern itself with " the circumstances associated with the methods of working in the collieries specified... with regard to ... optimum coal conservation [and] efficient and safe working", (44) reported to the Minister early in 1951 and the conclusions reached formed the basis for the beginning of a stowage experiment. The Committee concluded that, " for the exploitation of the maximum percentage of the coal in existing pillar areas, the most effective method is the establishment by power-operated means, of a substantial width of a continuous barrier." (45) It was also suggested that because the question of conservation was of national significance, the financing and control of stowage should not be left to the individual colliery. The Committee recommended that the Joint Coal Board, on behalf of the government should be responsible for preparatory and exploratory work. (46) On the actual methods of mining used the Committee was most explicit. It recommended that the "forming of large areas of pillars should be discontinuous" (47) and also maintained that the practice of using hand labour was " inadequate to cope with the mining features necessary for maximum extraction of pillar coal in such a thick seam as the Greta." (48)

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42. Ibid., p.47

43. At the request of the Committee the following mines were included in the investigation: Abermain, Hebburn No.2, and Ayrfield No. 3.

44. Report, S.M.C.C.C.C. (1951) p.3.

45. Ibid., p. 31

46. Ibid., p. 32

47. Ibid., p. 31

48. Ibid., p.32

Up until the time when the Report was issued the Miners' Federation had resisted the mining of pillars by machines and had claimed that such practices endangered both life and livelihood of the miner. The problem of removing pillar coal by machine will be examined below in this chapter, but it is necessary to point out here that the opposition of the Miners' Federation to mechanical extraction of pillars was supported by the Coal Mines Regulation Act (49) which expressly forbade the practice except with the Minister's consent. There were three problems concerned with the mechanical extraction of pillars: first, the necessity to increase coal production to meet increased consumer demand; secondly, the necessity to remove pillars as quickly as possible to reduce the risk of coal losses or danger to miners; and thirdly, the necessity to conserve as much coal as possible. It appeared that these problems could only be overcome by a compromise whereby the Miners' Federation would have to lift its ban on mechanical extraction of pillars in return for the implementation of solid stowage to conserve the state's coal resources. The Committee did not recommend an immediate change to 'long wall' mining although it recognised the fact that the 'bord and pillar' method had led to tremendous wastage. The reason for this was that the Committee thought there would be difficulties if the miners were to change to a new system, especially in the "more difficult circumstances of the thick coal seam." (50)

In an addendum to the report, J.B. Barrett stated the miners' view in precise terms: "I have stated before that when the high seams are worked by solid stowage, the Miners' Federation will agree to the extraction of the pillars by machinery!" (51) From that date it was clear that the Federation would not co-operate in mechanised pillar extraction until some positive action was

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49. The Act of 1912, as amended Section 40 a. 9 September, 1941.

50. Report, S.M.C.C.C.C. (1951). p. 34

51. Ibid., p. 35.

taken to implement stowage in the form recommended by the Coal Conservation Committee inquiring into the Greta seam. Consequently, the Joint Coal Board, in December, 1951, arranged a voluntary coal conservation agreement with each of the five colliery proprietors operating mines working the thick Greta seam<sup>(52)</sup>. The agreement was to last for two years and was to commence on February 4, 1952. However, the plan to raise the necessary finance for the experiments by adding four shillings per ton to the price of coal won from mines selected for stowage, was regarded with some apprehension by the Miners' Federation, which feared that South Maitland coal prices would be forced to a level where they could not compete satisfactorily for the available markets. Therefore, the miners suggested that the stowage money should be raised on an industry-wide basis or be guaranteed by the Commonwealth Government. The last suggestion was accepted by both governments concerned and they gave a joint undertaking in relation to the Federation's demands. The plan was to operate from the end of the voluntary stowage agreement, on the understanding that the Federation give its full support to immediate mechanical extraction of pillars, subject to appropriate safety considerations. The miners replied that they would not begin mechanical extraction until the scheme for stowage had begun and also stated that they were not happy with the voluntary plan as the colliery owners were not attempting to implement complete stowage. In an effort to resolve the apparent impasse colliery proprietors informed the Federation early in 1953 of their intention to operate machinery in pillars. Numerous meetings and discussions were held, including compulsory conferences before the Coal Industry Tribunal in 1954. Ultimately, ~~an~~

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52. Caledonian Collieries Ltd; J. and A. Brown and Abermain-Seaham Collieries Ltd; the Hetton Bellbird Collieries Ltd; B.H.P. Collieries Ltd; and Hebburn Ltd.

an agreement was reached on the extraction of pillars, the miners stating that they agreed to the mechanical extraction of pillars provided that proper safeguards were taken in relation to the health and safety of miners, and that stowage would be progressively introduced into the industry. (53)

Mechanical extraction began at three mines **working the Greta seam** on September 20, 1954. (54) Ironically, the relaxation of the ban on pillar extraction did not lead to mass winning of pillar coal. The market for Greta coal was severely contracted during the last years of the 1950's and it was found that mechanised pillar extraction was economic only in workings which were relatively free of coal falls; where efficient haulage arrangements could be provided; and where mines were reasonably free of the threat of creep. Consequently, there has been only a limited amount of coal won from pillars. Most of the potential sources have been abandoned and what pillar extraction there was took place near the surface areas of the thick seam collieries. At present two-shift production in pillar working has become essential and is general practice on the South Maitland field. The faster rate of extraction thus brought about has, to a certain extent, eliminated the likelihood of progressive, extensive and irretrievable loss, by lessening the chances of spontaneous combustion.

The amount of coal still in reserve has been a continuing problem for the Joint Coal Board and the inadequacy of knowledge of coal reserves in New South Wales led to the issue of a requisition to all colliery owners (in July, 1965) seeking information on in situ and recoverable reserves within colliery holdings. By June, 1966, ninety-two of the 114 collieries from which information had been sought, had replied, (55) and from the figures supplied the

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53. Miners' Federation National Convention. Sydney. August, 1954.

54. Thirteen years after the ban had been placed on mechanical extraction of pillar coal.

55. Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66). p.55

the following table was compiled:

TABLE VI.

Table showing coal reserves within colliery holdings in New South Wales - in million tons.

	<u>In situ</u>	<u>Recoverable</u>
<u>COKING</u>		
Measured and indicated	2,028.3	1,121.6
Assumed	<u>1,280.3</u>	<u>782.8</u>
Total	<u>3,308.6</u>	<u>1,904.4</u>
 <u>NON-COKING</u>		
Measured and indicated	1,348.7	622.2
Assumed	<u>607.5</u>	<u>316.7</u>
Total	<u>1,965.2</u>	<u>938.9</u>

Source: Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66). p.55

From these findings it can be seen that the amount of recoverable coal is estimated at approximately 54 per cent of the resources: this does not show any substantial increase on the rate of recovery criticised so often in the past. In fact, a dissection of the figures available to the Coal Board, but not published, would probably show that the collieries on the South Maitland field would not estimate a recovery of 54 per cent. The problems of wastage and conservation on the Maitland field have certainly not been solved, although the importance of conservation was obvious before the field was opened and although many warnings have been issued that a great national asset was being dissipated beyond recovery.

That these warnings were not, or could not be heeded, has been amply demonstrated. Coal conservation as a policy implies a foreseeable limitation of coal supplies and justifies the taking of special action to prevent mis-use or destruction of the resources. The mere fact that coal resources have been

and are being lost through the agency of natural forces or prevailing mining practice does not, in itself, demand that action be taken to arrest the trend, as the cost of appropriate arrestive action can never be disregarded. However, the absence of conservation action attracts justifiable criticism if it can be shown that more coal could be recovered with a change in mining practice, the cost of which, did not increase beyond reasonable limits.

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### B. Mechanisation.

The fear of the consequences of mechanisation has haunted the South Maitland miner to such a degree that for many years, he resolutely opposed the extension of mechanisation into the cutting and filling of coal, and is only now beginning to appreciate its advantages. His belief was fostered by the Miners' Federation - a belief which maintained that mechanisation would reduce drastically the work force used in mines. Indeed the machine was regarded as the miners' enemy, and as such, had to be resisted strongly. There were also the questions of safety and economics to be considered, Safety, of course, affected every miner and economics was the concern of the owner, although the miner could argue that he had a vital interest in the economics of the coal industry.

The colliery owners favoured mechanisation of the mines for three reasons: first, as demand for coal increased, especially after 1946, greater production was needed; secondly, as machines would replace many of the men, owners' costs would be lowered and coal prices could be kept at a competitive level; and thirdly, the owners believed that the use of machinery would lead to regular

working, which had not been characteristic of the South Maitland field throughout its history, and certainly not so in the case of the Newcastle field. A decreased incidence of intermittency would allow coal vendors to meet orders on time. The importance of ~~that~~ could not be stressed too much as overseas and interstate users of New South Wales coal could not be expected to arrange long-term contracts with what had been a most unreliable source of supply.

Given the importance of mechanisation to economic coal production, one might well ask why the colliery proprietors had not, in the pre - World War II period introduced machines into their mines on a larger scale. The answer to the question is a simple one of cost: the introduction of machines, the alteration to mine lay - outs, **and the high cost of machinery** presented an almost insuperable problem to the smaller company, and all companies had to face the unpalatable fact that markets were declining **and demand for coal** did not warrant heavy capital expenditure. Before a company would embark on such capital investment as was required to mechanise mines, it would have to be assured that intermittency would cease, that production would rise, that costs would remain low and that markets would be expanded. Only the most optimistic would have forecast such a state of affairs, and it was no wonder that colliery owners were reluctant to undertake large-scale mechanisation in the uncertain economic climate before 1946. Furthermore, the mines on the South Maitland field had not been developed with complete mechanisation in mind, and the methods of mining in use often made the introduction of machines very difficult. In some cases, wholesale modification was necessary; in all cases, some difficulties - financial or technical, or both - militated against the introduction of machinery.

In the post World War II period the question of mechanisation has featured in employer-employee relations. Employee opposition to machines was based on the belief that mechanisation would bring mine-closures, loss of work and dangerous working conditions. However, the miners' resistance to mechanisation often appeared to be a conditioned response, an objection on principle, supported by the mistaken idea that mechanisation would aid the owners at the expense of the workers. It would be well to examine just what is meant by the term 'mechanisation', before tracing the history of its introduction to and use on the South Maitland field where today, almost the total production is achieved by mechanical means.

Some incidence of mechanisation had been evident on the South Maitland coalfield from the beginning of coal operations there some sixty years ago. In the first decade of mining on the field, references were made to mechanisation, but the word then did not embrace the multiplicity and type of machinery used in later years. Modern coal mines are equipped with mechanical aids from the coal face itself to the transport and distribution stages at the surface.

Underground haulage is usually driven by electricity or internal combustion power and is, as one would expect, all of a mechanical nature, although horses may still be used in isolated tunnels to reach the main haulage ways. Cables are used to drive the skips or trucks carrying coal to the surface. In mines operated from tunnels or drifts, the main haulage system is, more often than not, an endless rope which draws full skips to the surface and returns the empty wagons to the working places. In recent years, the use of conveyor belts has become widespread in the raising of coal to the surface. Shaft mines, of necessity, use a cage to raise coal vertically to the surface, although, invariably the system is supplemented by minor haulage systems which bring coal from the various working areas to the cage area. In the South



Maitland field, at present, the cage system of haulage is used at the shaft mines of Richmond Main, and Hebburn No. 2, but at one time shaft mines included Abermain No.1, Abermain No. 2, Aberdare, Aberdare Central, Aberdare South, Cessnock No. 1 (Kalingo), Stanford Main No.2 (Paxton), and Elrington. All of these raised coal to the surface by vertical lift. At the surface coal is subjected to further mechanisation: it may be screened, washed, loaded or stored. Any suggestion that the last mentioned operations should be done manually would be laughable. Haulage and surface operations have been, and must remain mechanised, and in fact, there has been no argument about that.

Where differences of opinion have occurred is in the actual cutting and loading of coal underground and only to a minor extent in the haulage. So, it is to the cutting and loading of coal that the term mechanisation should be applied. It was the change from hand mining and filling of skips, to the use of mechanical cutters, borers and loaders, to which the men objected. (An extension of mechanical devices in modern mining practice concerns mechanical timbering and roof bolting). Records of the number and type of machines used in individual collieries are not readily available, but it is generally possible to find the overall figures from the Annual Reports of the Joint Coal Board or the Department of Mines. From the same sources it is also possible to obtain statistics relative to the amount of coal mechanically won and loaded in New South Wales, although the individual colliery details are not easy to procure.

Chart III indicates the increase in the percentage of coal being produced and loaded mechanically during the years between 1952 and 1966, and the rate at which hand mining and hand loading of coal is disappearing.

However, it would be wrong to assume that mechanical coal cutters were introduced only in recent years. As early as 1911, when the South Maitland field was in its infancy, the Royal Commission noted that the following South Maitland collieries were equipped with coal cutting machines: Pelaw Main, (100 per cent of output produced with machines); Hebburn, (nearly 100 per cent); Abermain, (100 per cent); Neath, (85 per cent); Aberdare, (85 per cent); and Aberdare Extended, (60 per cent). (56) Mechanisation at Pelaw Main Colliery had been introduced soon after the beginning of coal winning operations there. Coal cutting machines were placed in the mine late in June, 1903, (57) but within a fortnight of their introduction had caused a dispute in which involved wheelers and fillers. (58) Before machines were used fillers were paid seven shillings a day for twelve skips, as much as could be done, but the machines produced enough coal for fillers to load fifteen or sixteen skips in eight hours. However, the fillers wanted to fill the usual twelve skips: this, they considered to be a fair day's work. After some minor disputation between the manager and fillers, it was agreed that fifteen skips would be filled. (59) The attitude of at least one miner towards the machines was shown in a letter to a local newspaper shortly after the argument referred to above:

Pelaw Main and Stanford Merthyr cockyville pits are both working full time since the wheeler strike shivoo. The 'iron man' from Yankeeland is at work at the former pit. Opinions differ as to its utility: I suppose time will prove whether it injures the ordinary working miner or not. New introduced labour-saving machinery generally" stirs the 'possum up" of the worker. But in this marvellous age of invention one must hourly expect new "capitalistic fakements". The dreaded 'iron man' is one of them, but in my humble opinion the hard up, weedy, cheap inexperienced cocky (60) is more to be dreaded by the bona-fide pitman than all the iron men from Japan to Jericho. (61)

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56. Report, Royal Commission, Thick Coal Seams (1911). p. 13 ff.

57. Maitland Mercury, 1 July, 1903.

58. Ibid., 13 July, 1903.

59. Ibid., 15 July, 1903.

60. 'Cocky' was a name given to a small farmer, and in this letter refers to the small farmers who had decided to try their luck in the new mines. Their presence in the mines was resented by the experienced miner.

61. Ibid., 29 July, 1903.

Even before the opening of the South Maitland field machines were recommended to colliery owners as an answer to labour problems:

In view of the approaching trouble with miners, we beg to advise you, that we have under our control a Jeffrey Coal Cutting Machine for operation by compressed air...it is beyond doubt, that the introduction of these machines would reduce the getting price of coal about 1/- per ton. Only two men are required to operate the machines, one of whom must be an engineer and would therefore cost 10/- per day. His assistant need only be a labourer.... (62)

The machine was recommended to cut production costs and labour and there appears to be an implication that such machines would serve as a warning to potential strikers, that they could be replaced. However, the real reasons for the introduction of machines to the South Maitland field would have been economic and technical: mechanisation, it was hoped, would lower the cost structure, and increase productivity so that the competitive position of the industry could be maintained; considered from the technical viewpoint, the thick seams of the Greta measures lent themselves to mechanical cutting, and it was natural that the companies on the field, being well organised and with adequate resources, would endeavour to produce coal as quickly as possible and on a sound economic basis. (63)

Early trends towards mechanisation did not continue and by 1929, the incidence of machines in South Maitland pits had decreased: Hebburn was then producing only 10 per cent of its output by machines; Abermain had dropped from 100 per cent to 85 per cent; Abermain No. 2 to 33 per cent; Aberdare to 45 per cent; and Aberdare Extended to 25 per cent. Aberdare Central had used coal cutters, but by 1929, they had been withdrawn. In that year, Pelaw Main and Richmond Main were the only collieries on the field with 100 per cent

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62. Letter to the Australian Agricultural Company from an engineering firm. Cited in Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales, op. cit., p.115.

63. The most important colliery owners, in the early part of the century, on the Maitland field were the Australian Agricultural Co; J. and A. Brown; Abermain Collieries Ltd; and the Caledonian Coal Co.

mechanical production. (64) The pattern evident on the Maitland field was indicative of the trend in New South Wales as a whole. Coal production by machines had been steadily declining since the Royal Commission reported in 1911. In that year 202 coal cutting machines had produced 2,637,672 tons of coal, but in 1928, 320 machines produced only 2, 210,073 tons, an increase in the number of machines used, but a decrease in the coal cut. (65) The situation in other coal producing countries where mechanisation had been introduced was altogether different: in 1913 only five per cent of the coal produced in the Ruhr coalfield was extracted mechanically, but in 1925, the percentage was fifty; (66) in roughly the same period, Great Britain increased her proportion of machine - cut coal from 8.48 per cent to 18.69 per cent; and the proportion of coal produced by machines in the United States of America in the same period rose from 50.7 per cent to 69.5 per cent. (67)

However, the pressure to mechanise in the overseas countries referred to was much greater than in New South Wales: Germany wanted to speed up production to compensate for the loss of over one - quarter of her coal resources after the Settlement of 1919; Great Britain was being forced to reduce costs in order to maintain her position in the world markets, and in some difficult mining areas machinery was necessary to produce coal economically; (68) and in the United States of America, ~~abnormal~~ **abnormal** competition, resulting from over-capacity hastened mechanisation so as to lower costs. (69) In Great Britain and the United States of America, over-production gave rise to severer competition, but in the Northern Coal District of New South Wales,

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64. Report, Davidson Commission (1930). p. 397 ff.

65. Annual Reports, Department of Mines (N.S.W.).

66. Ibid., 1928. p. 47

67. F.R.E. Mauldon, The Economics of Australian Coal. Melbourne, 1929. p. 40

68. This applied particularly to the hard thin seams of Scotland.

69. F.R.E. Mauldon, The Economics of Australian Coal, Melbourne, 1929. p. 41.

the <sup>S</sup><sub>A</sub> association of coal proprietors and their close ~~union~~ with the interstate shipping companies, and railways on the Maitland field, together with the superiority of the coal produced, made it possible for the largest producers in the district to monopolise the Australian market and keep prices high. Nevertheless, this does not explain the downward trend in mechanisation after the early tendency to use machines. The only satisfactory explanation for the decline in mechanisation was to be found in the strong opposition of the miners to attempts by the owners to extend mechanical cutting and loading of coal. Mauldon had this to say: "The miners of New South Wales are strongly organised in hostility to the machines, more particularly to those electrically driven if proposed to be used in 'safety-lamp' mines. The objection is taken ostensibly on grounds of safety." (70) Undoubtedly, safety factors were involved, but the real objection was based on the fear that machines replace men, and on the lack of interest shown by owners in spending money on machines when the industry, as it was already organised, was producing an adequate return on investment. This was Mauldon's view:

But the real grounds [of objection to machines] are the fear of mechanisation as a displacer of labour....Enterprising proprietors, on the other hand have wished to extend the use of machines. But the opposition of the miners, and until recently, the enjoyment of the returns in the gift of an adequate monopoly have together discouraged a growing use of machines even in those collieries well able to afford their installation. (71)

Although the future could not be foreseen in 1928, the miners' fear of unemployment was well grounded, in the light of events on the South Maitland field after World War II. The whole question of mechanisation and its effect on employment was examined by the Royal Commission which reported in 1946. (72)

The Commissioner concluded that increased mechanisation alone would not

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70. Ibid., p. 41.

71. Ibid., pp 41-42.

72. Report, Davidson Commission (1946). Preamble.

guarantee increased production: the miners had to play their part by co-operating in such a way that the machines could be used to their full capacity. Davidson commented further:

...the Coal Industry is not only inefficient, but is affected with a form of creeping paralysis. On all sides, mechanisation is admittedly indispensable. Yet its introduction is attacked by arguments that it will reduce employment, will render the miners' work unsafe and will cost so much that the money will not be forthcoming from the industry. (73)

The miners had no doubt that the introduction of machines on a large scale would result in much unemployment so they continued to resist the machines. The miners' recollections of the past, with its background of strikes, lockouts and depression, did not make them disposed to bring about their own dismissal by endorsing mechanisation, although the miners must have been aware of the advantages of machine labour, compared with manual work. During the Second World War a great deal of pressure was put on the miners by those who saw mechanisation as the only way to increase production. Under the circumstances the rigid attitude of the miners had to give way to a more reasonable view, and by 1946, the Federation had begun to give approval in principle to the use of machines, but their acceptance was still reluctant and conditional. The 'good faith' of the miners was called into question after this when the conditions attached to the use of mechanical borers, cutters and loaders, and the passive resistance on the part of the rank and file to their use, made mechanisation largely impracticable. (74)

Besides the fear of unemployment, there was the belief that mechanisation increased the danger level. Justice Davidson examined the question. His findings, and an examination of the effect of mechanisation on safety will be

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73. Ibid., p. 88.

74. Ibid., p. 89.

made in Chapter VI, but it should be noted here that Davidson quoted extensively from information regarding mining practices in Great Britain and the United States of America and concluded that mechanised mining reduced the incidence of accidents by a large percentage . (75) He recommended that in the interests of the nation, mechanisation should be accelerated and that the Commonwealth Government should assist owners financially to install machines. (76)

After 1946, the progress of mechanisation was slow, but it did proceed as the attitude of the miners became less rigid and the financial and technical assistance given by the Joint Coal Board to the owners enabled them to re-organise their mines. The fear of unemployment became a reality as hundreds of miners lost their jobs on the Maitland field. The dismissals resulted in a general lack of confidence in the future of the larger towns on the coalfields and government assistance was required to promote job opportunities, either in new industries on or near the coalfields or in mines in other districts. The question of pillar extraction has been, and still can be, controversial, but mechanisation is now accepted. Its advantages are well known in matters concerned with production and working conditions, and a more harmonious relationship between owner and worker now exists on the Maitland field. In 1965/66, 95 per cent of all coal cut underground in New South Wales came from fully mechanised modern mines. (77) The Joint Coal Board has taken a most active part in stabilising the industry. Its encouragement and resources have enabled full use to be made of the "continuous miner", and in 1966, this resulted in a pronounced upward trend in pillar working. In that year, 81.5 per cent of all underground coal produced in New South Wales came from

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75. Ibid., p. 104

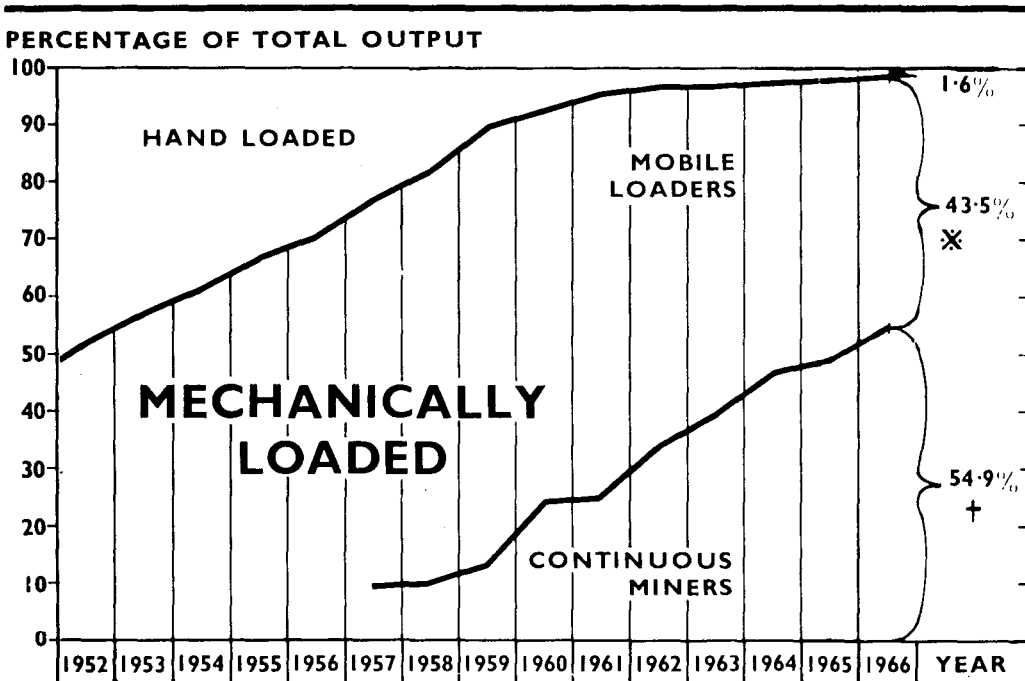
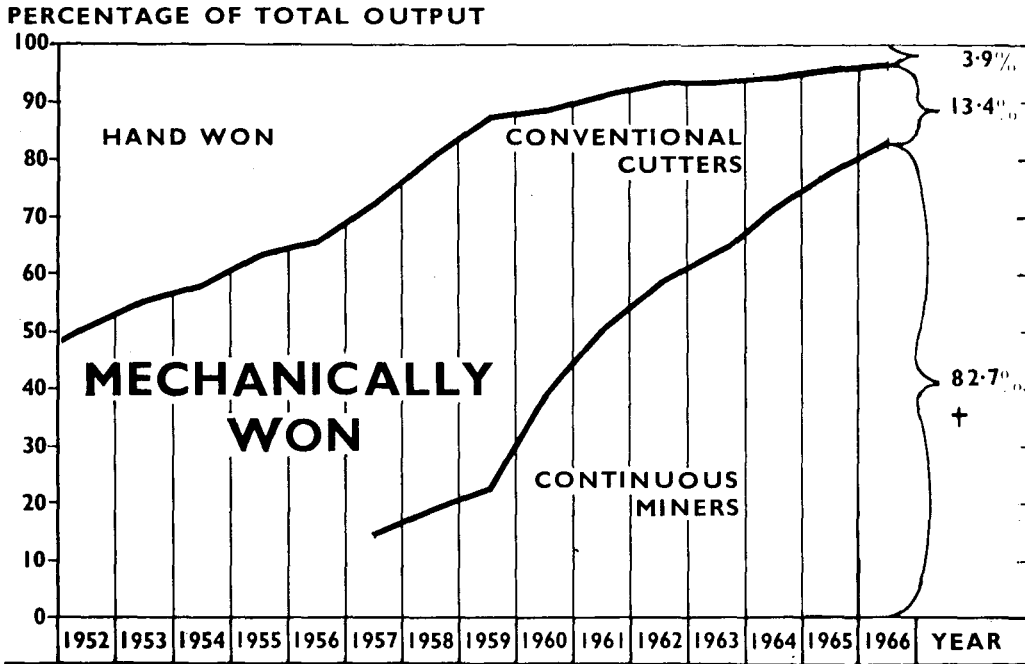
76., Ibid.

77. Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66). p.29

CHART III.

MECHANICALLY CUT AND LOADED COAL IN N.S.W.

1952 - 1966



Source: Report Joint Coal Board (1965-66)



pillars. On the South Maitland field the coal produced from pillars was 77.9 per cent of the total. The Board also announced in 1966 that the number of "continuous miners" had increased to 146, fifteen above the number used in the previous year. (78) Another feature of mechanisation has been the gradual extension of machines to two-shift working. The cost of mining equipment has been very high and can be more easily defrayed if the plant operates for a higher number of hours. The increase in double-shift working has been seen by the Joint Coal board as an indication of improved relationships: " This state of affairs reflects well on management and union leadership - there has been a co-operative and constructive response to the big change brought by mechanisation. " (79)

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78. Ibid., p. 30.

79. Ibid., p. 16.

CHAPTER VI.HEALTH AND SAFETY IN COAL MINES.

The questions of health and safety have been mentioned in nearly every Report on the coal industry and in most of the books written about coal mining in Australia. The health and safety of miners are real problems which in the past have led to much industrial strife. Not only have the problems of health and safety worsened relations between management and workers; they have also led to a fear of the industry and an insistence that miners working underground require the most adequate recompense that the industry can afford to pay.

There were twenty-nine men killed in mining accidents in New South Wales in 1966,<sup>(1)</sup> a figure which in no way can be regarded as satisfactory. The Minister for Mines in New South Wales (T.L.Lewis) claimed that most of those accidents which caused death could have been avoided by compliance with regulations covering working methods and good mining practices.<sup>(2)</sup> He maintained that " The prevention of accidents must begin with the individual.... If good mining practices and regulations governing safe working methods are disregarded or not rigidly followed by either employer or employee then accidents must inevitably result." <sup>(3)</sup> It is interesting to compare Lewis's comments ~~made~~ in 1967 with the view expressed by Justice Davidson in 1946 which was that the fatal accident rate in the collieries of New South Wales was too high. <sup>(4)</sup> Davidson indicated that there had been twenty-six fatalities in 1944, a number which had not been exceeded since 1925 when twenty-seven miners lost their lives. The seriousness of the

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1. Sydney Morning Herald, 22 February, 1967.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Report, Davidson Commission(1946). p.221.

position was emphasised by the fact that the number of men employed in coal mines in 1925 was 24,049, whereas the number employed in 1944 was only 17,468. What was even more significant was that the number of miners employed in 1966 was only 11,905. (5)

The attitude of T.L. Lewis is worth considering further: in a written reply to a question on notice in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, he refused to appoint a Royal Commission to investigate mining accidents and claimed that such an inquiry would have little value in preventing accidents. (6) In making the statement that most of the accidents were 'avoidable' and by refusing to appoint a Commission, Lewis was really evading the issue. Such an attitude could not promote a feeling of security among those who face the dangers of mining. The latest statistics and those given by Davidson in 1944 show that the fatality rate is too high, and in relation to the number employed is not at all satisfactory as Table VII shows.

TABLE VII.

Table showing persons employed and persons killed in bituminous coal mines in N.S.W., 1925 to 1965. (Figures given for each fifth year.)

Year	Persons employed	Persons killed
1925	24,049	27
1930	16,624	16
1935	13,337	11
1940	17,337	20
1945	17,676	14
1950	18,620	15
1955	19,417	22
1960	13,315	14
1965	11,660	16
1966	11,905	29

Sources: Annual Reports, Joint Coal Board; Annual Reports, Dept. of Mines, (N.S.W.)

5. Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66). p.171

6. Sydney Morning Herald, 22 February, 1967.

During the period of the Second World War(1939-1945) the death rate in New South Wales coal mines was very much greater than the corresponding figures for Great Britain and ~~the~~ United States of America, <sup>(7)</sup> and the question of 'preventable' accidents was examined by Justice Davidson. He was supplied with the following figures by the Department of Mines , New South Wales:

TABLE VIII.

Table showing the number of fatal accidents and those considered by the Department of Mines (N.S.W.) to have been avoidable, 1939-1945.

Year	Fatal accidents	Avoidable
1939	15	6
1940	20	8
1941	25	16
1942	23	7
1943	19	5
1944	26	13
1945	13	3

Source: Report, Davidson Commission(1946). p.223

It is obvious that in every large industry where a considerable number of men is employed, accidents will **occur** no matter what degree of care may be exercised. It is more or less axiomatic that injuries sustained by workers are generally in proportion to the nature and number of hazards to which they are exposed, so it is not surprising that in coal mining, where hazards are both numerous and serious, a high **accident** rate occurs; and because the intrusion of the human factor cannot be eliminated, **many** of the accidents could be classed as 'avoidable'. Nevertheless, this can not discount the dangers present in coal mining and it is invalid to compare the incidence of injury in coal mines with the **rate** of death on the roads (as do some apologists who claim that a miner is more likely to lose his life in a road accident than in the mine), or with other industries or

occupations where there are fewer potential hazards.

There is little doubt that the traditional 'fear' of coal mining has been the cause of highly emotional, almost hysterical utterances by those who condemn the industry. However, Alan Walker, in his social survey of Cessnock, appears to have an exaggerated idea of the 'fear consciousness' he associated with the coal industry.<sup>(8)</sup> Nevertheless, there ~~is~~ some fear associated with mining underground and there are some explanations of it: first, the usual practice of coal miners has been to live near the pits and so their families have been closely associated with the drama at the pit -top when an accident has occurred; ~~secondly, the tragic fact that a mine accident can~~ claim the lives of many people at once makes a tremendous impact on the community when a disaster takes place. ~~Disasters such as the Bellbird~~ explosions, when twenty - one men lost their lives in 1923, are never quite forgotten and serve as a constant reminder to coalfields' people that they are concerned with a dangerous occupation. Such disasters demand a long accident-free period before the dangers of the work can be pushed into the background, but unfortunately, such periods occur all too infrequently, as the record of fatal accidents testifies.

#### Mechanisation and Safety.

The danger associated with mechanised mining, always a contentious matter on the South Maitland coalfield, will be examined before consideration is given to the commonest causes of fatal accidents. A brief description of ways adopted in the past two decades to combat the accident rate will be followed by a discussion of health matters as opposed to accidents. The chapter will conclude with a comment on the work of the Joint Coal Board in promoting the health of coal miners.

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8. Alan Walker, Coaltown: A Social Survey of Cessnock, N.S.W., Melb., 1945.

Coal mining is an occupation which exposes its workers to a great number of hazards: practically every phase of the industry involves consideration of the consequences to the health and safety of mine - workers. The occurrence of inflammable and poisonous gases, the explosive nature of the coal dust, as well as the dangers inherent in traditional mining methods, have led to an elaborate system of control and supervision. The friability of the coal itself in contrast with the surrounding strata, the varying thickness of the seams and depth of cover above, also present to those in charge of mining operations numerous other risks, some of which are peculiar to individual mines. Methods used to combat mining hazards have been evolved over a long period: they found their origins in the coalfields of Great Britain, where mining practice has varied only slightly until recent years. The introduction of mechanisation above and below the surface has introduced new problems to which the older methods of control can not be applied. On the South Maitland field, mechanisation has been a most contentious issue, and although this problem was examined at length in the previous chapter, it is necessary to discuss the subject in relation to health and safety of miners.

Mechanisation became a cause of discontent in the mining industry after 1935 when Common Cause, and pamphlets written to publicise the problems of the coalfields<sup>(9)</sup> criticised the effects that mechanisation would have on the coal mining industry.<sup>(10)</sup> So bitter was the opposition of the Miners' Federation to the use of machines that no real progress was made in that direction until after the coal miners' strike of 1949. The miners' attitude to mechanisation was that although the application of machinery to the industry was probably inevitable and desirable, the Federation was "not prepared to have progress

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9. W. Orr, Coal Facts, Sydney, 1937. . . . .

W. Orr, Mechanisation: Threatened Catastrophe for Coalfields, Sydney, 1935.

W. Orr and C. Nelson, Coal: The Struggle of the Mineworkers, Sydney, c.1935.

10. At that time mechanisation was widespread in the United States of America.

at the expense of the miners." (11) One of the purposes of the Royal Commission, 1939, appointed to inquire into the health and safety of miners<sup>(12)</sup> was to determine whether the introduction of machines had increased the accident rate. However, because the incidence of mechanisation was so small in New South Wales, and as there were no published figures to distinguish between accidents in mechanised and non-mechanised mines, the Commission could not reach a conclusion, but it did show how New South Wales compared with Great Britain and the United States of America in machine-cut coal. The comparisons are shown in Table IX:

TABLE IX.

Table showing percentage of coal output cut by machines in New South Wales, Great Britain and the United States of America in the years 1925 to 1938.

Year	New South Wales	Great Britain	United States of America
1925	20.5	20	70.6
1926	20.7	22	71.7
1927	20.5	23	72.2
1928	23.4	26	73.8
1929	12.6 *	28	75.4
1930	16.3	31	77.5
1931	21.4	35	79.1
1932	20.8	38	78.8
1933	24.2	42	80.0
1934	23.7	47	79.2
1935	22.6	51	79.3
1936	26.8	55	**
1937	27.7	57	**
1938	28.4	**	**

\* The 1929 Lockout on the Northern field affected output in 1929 and 1930

\*\* Figures not available

Source: Report, Royal Commission: The Health and Safety of Workers in Coal Mines (1939). p. 108

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11. Robin Gollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p. 202.  
 12. Report of the Royal Commission on Safety and Health of Workers in Coal Mines. Sydney. 1939. (Cited henceforth as Report, Health and Safety (1939).)

Because most of the American output of coal was cut by machines, as shown in the table above, the Commissioner reporting on health and safety quoted extensively from American sources and concluded that it was quite clear that in the United States of America mechanisation had "not altered the accident ratio for the worse". (13) A similar note of satisfaction was expressed for the future of mechanisation in New South Wales:

There does not seem to be any reasonable ground for fear that if mechanisation were increased in the mines of New South Wales whether in the form of electrical or compressed air machines, there should be any increase in the accident rate. On the contrary, if proper supervision and other safety precautions are insisted upon, there seems to be every reason to anticipate a reduction of the accident rate. (14)

A further statement was made by Justice Davidson in 1946: he said that the arguments against mechanisation which were being submitted by the Miners' Federation had been "demolished years ago in America and Great Britain". (15) Davidson also quoted from the Report on health and safety (1939) to confirm the view expressed above, and added that information which had been obtained after 1939 indicated that mechanisation actually decreased the risk of accident. (16) He went on to compare New South Wales with Pittsburgh in the United States of America:

In 1944 in New South Wales there were twenty-six fatal accidents which is an unduly high figure. But in a group of highly mechanised mines at Pittsburgh in the United States of America, producing 9,342,263 tons annually, the figure was one fatal accident per 1,334,609 tons of output, as compared with one fatal accident for 424,728 tons in New South Wales. (17)

To relate fatalities to output does not appear to be completely valid as there are many other factors to be considered beside production, including

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13. Report, Health and Safety (1939). p. 110

14. Ibid., p. 115

15. Report, Davidson Commission (1946). p. 90

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.



thickness of seam, condition of the roof and numbers of men actually at the coal face. It would be more realistic to relate fatalities to man-hours worked. In fact, Davidson pointed out that although the fatality rate in the United States of America was lower than the rate in Great Britain, in terms of output, the fatality rate was not lower in terms of man-shifts worked. Table X indicates the comparison referred to:

TABLE X.

Table showing the rate of fatalities in Great Britain and the United States of America, based on production and man-shifts, 1937 to 1940.

Year	Number of fatalities per million tons of coal produced		Man -shifts of labour per fatality.	
	G.B.	U.S.A.	G.B.	U.S.A.
1937	3.47	2.83	250.951	81.295
1938	3.67	2.82	241.652	81.000 Approx.
1939	3.29	2.50	270.413	71.200
1940	3.99App.	2.73	229.788	88.600

Source: Report, Davidson Commission (1946). p.92

The cause of the difference shown above was explained partly by the electrical and haulage methods employed: some practices were allowed in the United States of America which were not tolerated in Great Britain or Australia. The full effects of mechanisation on the accident rate in New South Wales cannot be examined here, but in view of the statistics given for 1966 (29 fatalities) when 93 per cent of all underground coal mined came from fully mechanised modern mines<sup>(18)</sup>, and when the number of mines numbered fewer than in previous years, it is difficult to substantiate the argument that mechanisation

18. Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66) . p.29

decreases the hazards of coal mining.<sup>(19)</sup> The following table shows the causes of underground fatalities<sup>(20)</sup> and non-fatal accidents in New South Wales coal mines for 1962:

TABLE XI.

Table showing the causes of accidents in New South Wales coal mines in 1962.

Causes of accidents	Underground	
	Fatalities	Men injured in non-fatal accidents
Falls of roof and sides	9	14
Haulage	4	11
Explosives	0	2
Electricity	1	1
Machinery	0	10
Miscellaneous	1	6
Shaft accidents	1	0
	16	49

Source: Report, Department of Mines (N.S.W.), 1962 p.62 ff.

Fatal accidents on the South Maitland field in the year 1962 occurred at the following collieries: Ayrfield No.3;Aberdare No.7 (3 deaths); Abermain No.2; Pelaw Main; and Bellbird. The total of seven represented almost half of the number killed in mines that year when the work force on the South Maitland field was considerably fewer than half the total employed underground in New South Wales mines. <sup>(21)</sup>

Mechanisation of mines has eliminated certain types of hazards<sup>(22)</sup> which had come to be regarded as unavoidable sources of accidents , but at the same

19.The statistics indicate that mechanisation has increased output and therefore in terms of production the fatality rate may not be considered excessive.

20.One man was killed and six injured in above-ground accidents in 1962.

21.Annual Report, Department of Mines (N.S.W.). 1962. p.7

22.For example, the absence of skips has removed a risk of accident.

time has created new dangers, and it seems that the only way to overcome the high fatality rate is to publicise the risks and educate workers in safety matters so that many of the 'avoidable' accidents may be avoided. The Joint Coal Board, Department of Mines' officials, managers and workers all have a part to play in making coal mining as safe as possible. In the meantime, the high accident rate cannot be ignored and the question of safe working is the responsibility of all concerned with the industry, the Minister for Mines included.

### Sources of Accidents.

The Report of the Royal Commission (1939) stated that falls of roof and sides contributed most to the high accident rate in coal mines and this applied not only to New South Wales, but to Great Britain and the United States of America as well.<sup>(23)</sup> Such falls occur because of defects in the roofing strata, inadequate provision for support, entirely unpredictable events, or to neglect on the part of management or employees. The Commissioner also thought that there was little to choose between traditional mining techniques when the causes of accidents were being considered. The fatal accident rate caused by falls of roof and sides in mines in Great Britain where the 'long wall' method was used, was substantially the same as the rate in New South Wales where the 'bord and pillar' method was widely practised, when compared on the basis of personal exposure to risk.<sup>(24)</sup> However, the thick seams of the Greta measures have provided additional potential risk on the South Maitland field: the main danger occurs when the 'top' coal is being removed. The first working presents no special difficulty as the height

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23. Report on Health and Safety. (1939). p.39

24. Ibid., p.40.

worked is about eight to ten feet. In the second working when the top section of coal is being removed, the value of props as a means of supporting the roof is reduced considerably. The Royal Commission (1939) was rather critical of the provisions of the Mines Regulation Act which concerned the dangers of working thick seams. The regulations provided for pillars of coal to be left in order to support the roof, but where mining operations have taken coal from the bords to the full height of the seam, pillars of up to thirty feet high are left, making it "extremely doubtful whether the pillars can ever be extracted without exposing the workers to excessive hazards from falls of the roof, the sides and the working faces." (25)

The suggestion was made that some of the dangers and difficulties would be overcome if managers were allowed to adapt the shape of pillar supports to the prevailing circumstances. (26) Action such as that however, could place managers in an awkward position if the Mines' Inspector were to disagree with them. Falls were still a problem in 1962. The Annual Report of the Department of Mines stated that the highest incidence of fatal accidents that year had resulted from failure to comply with long established safe working practice. "... in practically every instance inadequate roof support had been erected and as a consequence the roof falls occurred with little or no warning. " (27) It is obvious that in the past, accidents classed as 'avoidable' have occurred, and if a greater measure of safety is to be achieved in New South Wales mines there will have to be greater compliance with recognised safe working practice on the part of management and worker.

During the last ten years underground haulage systems have been transformed: an increasing use has been made of shuttle cars and conveyor

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25. Ibid. p. 44.

26. Ibid.

27. Annual Report, Department of Mines (N.S.W.). 1962. p.65.

belts. Despite the rapid changes in haulage systems, which almost of necessity should have increased potential danger, the fall in the accident rate associated with haulage has been halved. The number of 'lost-time accidents per million man-hours worked' has fallen from 36.6 in 1958-59 to 18.1 in 1964-65.<sup>(28)</sup> The Joint Coal Board has attributed this most satisfactory decline in accidents to preparation of safety posters and their distribution to collieries, and to the co-operation of colliery management in the conduct of safety - courses designed to produce an awareness of danger. Moreover, frequent inspections by officers of the Department of Mines have helped to promote an awareness of danger and have often resulted in the detection of dangers which had gone unnoticed by the men.

In the period 1926 to 1935 underground fatal accidents connected with haulage operations represented 7.48 per cent of the total of all fatal accidents in New South Wales coal mines. This percentage compared more than favourably with the rate in Great Britain (20.36 per cent) and the United States of America (18.36 per cent).<sup>(29)</sup> The Royal Commission (1939) attributed the relatively low accident rate in haulage operations in the period referred to above to the use of larger coal skips; these necessitated higher and wider haulage roads which provided safer working conditions. The fact that youths employed in coal mines in New South Wales were generally of maturer age than the youths employed in Great Britain was also a factor which contributed to the lower incidence of accidents in New South Wales.<sup>(30)</sup> During recent years most of the haulage systems in New South Wales have been re-organised to meet increased output and mechanisation.

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28. Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66). p.111

29. Report on Health and Safety (1939). p.69.

30. Ibid.

As shown above, the accident rate has been halved, but there is no reason for complacency: haulage operations were responsible in 1962 for four deaths of a total of seventeen, and for eleven of the fifty-five persons injured<sup>(31)</sup> in New South Wales coal mines .

Accidents of the miscellaneous and surface type have shown the largest death rate, next to falls of roof and sides, each of the groups having accounted for 12.4 per cent of the total number of deaths in the period 1926 to 1938 in New South Wales.<sup>(32)</sup> Of the miscellaneous group, 3.3 per cent were caused by the use of explosives, 1.7 per cent by electricity and 6.7 per cent by other causes.<sup>(33)</sup> As to the surface accidents, 29.4 per cent occurred in connection with machinery, 58.8 per cent were as a result of railway and tramway accidents and a further 11.8 per cent were described as 'unclassified'.<sup>(34)</sup> The view of the Royal Commission (1939) was that most of the accidents which fell into these categories were 'avoidable', and recommended that the coal industry adopt safety methods similar to those used by the Government Railways of New South Wales. He indicated what they were:

The reduction of the death rate in the railways in the second five - yearly period [1933 -1937] was 25 per cent, whilst there was an increase of 30 per cent in the coal mines. The reduction in the accident rate in New South Wales Railways has been brought about by the operations of a 'safety-first' council, which arranges for mass meetings of employees to be addressed on the principles of 'safety-first'. The screening of films , distribution of literature and the display of bulletins have also assisted to impress upon the staff the importance of the movement. (35)

These recommendations were adopted by the Joint Coal Board, the Department

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31. Annual Report, Department of Mines (N.S.W.) 1962. p.73

32. Report on Health and Safety (1939). p.75

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., p. 21

of Mines (which is responsible for safety), and by management, and all associated with the industry are aware that constant alertness is required to reduce the risk of injury or death.

The accident rate in New South Wales coal mines is declining although the fatality rate remains high. In the period 1955-56 to 1964-65 the number of persons employed fell by 35 per cent, whereas the number of claims for compensation fell by 55 per cent. There was also a reduction of 32 per cent in the number of claims per 100,000 man-shifts worked in the same period. (36) The improvement in respect of lost time accidents at underground mines has been even more marked: the number of such accidents has fallen from 8,079 to 2,968, a reduction of 63 per cent. Part of this reduction may be attributed to the fewer persons employed, but the frequency rate, that is, the number of lost-time accidents per million -man-hours worked has fallen from 265 to 140, a reduction of 47 per cent. The proportion of working time lost as a result of the absence of injured personnel over the same nine years referred to above has been reduced from 2.88 per cent to 1.53 per cent, also a reduction of 47 per cent. Table XIII below demonstrates fully the falling incidence of accidents in New South Wales coal mines as outlined above.

The proper use of mining equipment, combined with modern mining methods, has lowered the risk of injury to which workers are exposed. At the official level the Coal Mines Regulation Act and regulations made under the act provide a sound basis for safe operation. The regulations are applied by Mines' Department inspectors and the co-operation between the officers of the Department and mine managers which exists at present should continue to reduce the incidence of injury to mine workers.

TABLE XII.

Table showing the incidence of accidents in New South Wales coal mines, 1955 to 1965.

Year	No. employed at end of year	Claims Received		Lost Time Accidents (a)		
		Total Number	Per 100,000 M/Sh. Work.	Total Number	Frequency Rate (b)	Manshifts Lost (c)
1955-56	17,934	9,445	233	8,079	265	2.88
1956-57	16,749	8,169	206	7,177	232	2.52
1957-58	15,428	7,721	210	6,654	232	2.68
1958-59	13,380	6,359	191	5,152	198	2.57
1959-60	13,315	5,277	163	4,343	171	2.28
1960-61	12,589	5,244	172	4,089	172	1.98
1961-62	12,098	4,935	173	3,628	166	1.89
1962-63	11,492	4,654	170	3,333	158	1.78
1963-64	11,414	4,384	164	3,012	143	1.67
1964-65	11,660	4,240	158	2,968	140	1.53
Reduction 1955-56 to 1964-65	35%	55%	32%	63%	47%	47%

(a) Underground mines only.

(b) Frequency rate equals the number of lost-time accidents per million man-hours worked.

(c) Manshifts lost by men on compensation expressed as a percentage of manshifts possible. (Underground mines only)

Source: Report, Joint Coal Board (1964-65).



Mine Rescue Organisation and Colliery Inspections.

Coal mining anywhere is a dangerous occupation and an industry in which workers risk their lives every day. In New South Wales where the area being mined is so small and where mineworkers are so few, compared with major coal producing countries, the incidence of fatal and non-fatal accidents has been too high. The dangers associated with mining operations fall into two parts. First, there is the risk of sudden explosion or fire, and secondly, there are the day to day risks involving falls, the use of electricity, haulage operations, and the many other activities associated with underground mining. The major disasters which have resulted in heavy loss of life have produced the 'fear' of coal-mining referred to above. In New South Wales there has been a number of major disasters: a serious explosion at Bulli Colliery in 1887 resulted in the loss of eighty-one lives; another ninety-five lives were lost at Mount Kembla Colliery in 1902; and the last major disaster occurred at Bellbird Colliery in 1923 when twenty-one men ~~w~~<sup>e</sup>re lost. There have also been many smaller, though none the less tragic, accidents which have caused serious loss of life such as the Stanford Merthyr explosion in 1905 (five killed), the Bulli fire in 1965 (four deaths) and the Wye State Mine accident in 1966 (five killed).

Following the Bellbird fire of 1923 a great deal of interest was shown in the problem of mine rescue organisation. At the inquest, evidence was given by experienced mining personnel on the questions of rescue work and rescue apparatus, but their views differed considerably as to whether rescue apparatus would have been useful in the early stages of the fire, although all agreed that the establishment of central rescue stations ~~was~~ desirable. Recovery operations at Bellbird had been carried out with the aid of self-contained breathing apparatus, but it had been necessary first to obtain the apparatus and auxiliary equipment and then to train men in its use.

During the eight months of recovery work however, there had been no serious accident and there was general satisfaction with the work done and the equipment used.

Subsequently, the Mines Rescue Act was passed in 1925. Under the act four districts were proclaimed, in each of which there would be stationed a permanent rescue corps. The act provided

for rescue operations in coal and shale mines; for the establishment, maintenance and control of rescue stations and rescue corps; for the payment by the owners of mines of certain contributions towards Mine Rescue Funds to be devoted to the foregoing purposes; for the establishment at mines of rescue brigades; for the provision at mines of certain apparatus and the training of men in the use thereof; and for purposes connected therewith. (37)

Regulations under the Mines Rescue Act came into force on the last day of 1925, with provision for additions and amendments to be made in future by publication in the Gazette.

The South Maitland Mines Rescue Station is located at Abermain, approximately at the centre of the South Maitland field, and all major coal producers are within twenty miles of the station by road. In the other coal districts Rescue Stations were set up at Cockle Creek (Newcastle), Bellambi (South Coast) and Lithgow (Western). Under the Mines Rescue Act, the owner of each mine in a proclaimed district was required to provide and maintain certain items of equipment, including at least two complete 'proto' suits<sup>(38)</sup>, one oxygen-reviving apparatus with a fully charged spare cylinder, an approved electric safety lamp for each trained man at the mine, two approved oil flame safety lamps, two small birds in suitable cages, a first - aid box stocked to the satisfaction of the Inspector of Collieries, three stretchers and six blankets. At the surface of each mine there was to be a first-aid and rescue room close to the main entrance and accessible

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37. M.R. McKeown (Ed.), Coal in Australia. Vol. VI. pp. 308-319. (Paper delivered by R.R. Harvey to the Fifth Empire Mining and Metallurgical Congress, Australia and New Zealand.) Melbourne, 1953.

38. Self contained breathing apparatus to protect rescue teams.

to road traffic. Telephone communication was to be maintained between the mines and the rescue station.

In mines outside a proclaimed district the owner was required to organise and maintain competent rescue brigades, each consisting of a leader appointed by the owner, and at least four men employed at the mine. A brigade was not deemed to be competent unless its personnel had undergone the prescribed course of training under a person approved by the Minister for Mines. The brigade should also have undertaken regular practice with breathing apparatus. It would be most unlikely that such brigades could not be provided by the mine workers, but in the event of miners refusing to volunteer, the owner was not subject to penalty if he could show that he had endeavoured to comply with the regulations of the act, and that as an alternative, he had applied for the services of an existing central rescue station and had contributed to the statutory fund as if his own mine were within that district. The mine owner was also required to provide and maintain at least five sets of breathing apparatus and certain other items of rescue and first-aid equipment.

A Mines Rescue Station is governed by a committee which is responsible to the Minister for Mines, its powers, duties and responsibilities being concerned with the control and administration, maintenance and general upkeep of the central rescue station under its charge. On each district committee there are four representatives elected by the owners of mines in the district, and a representative of the mine employees. Each year the committee submits an estimate of its proposed expenditure for the ensuing twelve months to the Minister. The owner of each mine is also required to contribute whatever sum is prescribed towards the maintenance of the rescue station. All contributions from mine owners, or any other sums which may be

voted by Parliament to help in equipping the station, or any other sums raised from any source, are used for general maintenance, administration, wages of station personnel and for the purchase of necessary stores and equipment.

In each of the Mines Rescue Stations the buildings are of brick, and comprise the Administration Block, Training Gallery, Garages, Minor Structures and Station Cottages. The Mines Rescue Station at Abermain on the South Maitland field is extremely well cared for and indicates the energy and enthusiasm of the personnel concerned.

In regulations gazetted under the provisions of the Mines Rescue Act, a code of rules for use in all mines is laid down for the conduct and guidance of persons engaged in mine rescue operations. Fortunately, mine disasters are rare, although major and minor mishaps are frequent. Consequently, colliery staff do not obtain practical experience to guide them in major emergencies. However, all concerned with Mines Rescue have to undergo frequent medical checks, periodic simulated rescues, and practice in using rescue equipment. The regulations adhere closely to the Rescue Regulations of the Coal Mines Act (1912) and have been well tried in practice. General modifications have not been considered necessary, although practice in New South Wales has developed along lines made necessary by special conditions to be met in individual mines.

Under the Coal Mines Regulation Acts (1912-1941), the Minister for Mines in New South Wales is required to arrange for the appointment of Government Inspectors and Workers' Check Inspectors to undertake the supervision of the health and safety provisions of the act. Mines' Inspectors are required to examine and inquire into the state and condition of coal mines without impeding or obstructing their working, in order to determine whether the conditions regarding ventilation of mines and safety

of workers and animals are satisfactory. Regular inspections must be carried out and reports made on any matter (relative to working practice in mines or to their control or management) which is dangerous or defective or threatening danger to persons. If notified defects are not remedied the men may be withdrawn from the mine. In actual practice, relations between Inspectors and colliery managers have been so harmonious that recourse to serious acts of compulsion have not been necessary. Inspectors report annually to the Chief Inspector, but in addition, make reports on the occurrence of explosions or accidents and on any potential danger which may be noticed during periodic colliery inspections. Inspectors must be competent within the meaning of the Act and must be without private interests of specified types concerned with coal mining.

Check Inspectors are appointed by mines' employees to carry out inspections of mines, and were provided as an extra 'check' to ensure the health and safety of workers. Reasonable notice of intended inspections must be given to the colliery management, and a report on the inspection is necessary. Justice Davidson reported in 1946 that with few exceptions Check Inspectors had carried out their duties conscientiously and with little friction, although he recommended against the granting of greater powers to them. He was critical of those who did not, in his opinion, act properly. He said that " under the guise of arguments based on questions of safety, managers, against their will, have been forced into bad mining practice under fear of industrial dislocation, and progress in mechanisation has been retarded until the mines in New South Wales in this respect are the most backward in the civilised world ". (39) However, the work of inspectors has been extremely valuable, not only in reaching a high standard of safety

in coal mines, but also in creating a situation where co-operation and safe -working will provide the basis of a stable and economic industry.

#### Health of Mineworkers .

The effect of working conditions in coal mines on the health of workers had been a source of anxiety to workers in the industry before 1945 and with some reason. Safety and Health had repeatedly been issues in disputes: there had been many interruptions to production over small matters and a great number of miners had suffered from the various diseases such as nystagmus, 'pink eye', dermatitis and chest complaints, associated with work in underground mines. As a result, the Commonwealth Government decided to set up a separate committee to inquire into health matters at the same time as the Davidson Board of Inquiry was appointed to report on the coal industry. The Health Committee was presided over by Sir Raphael Cilento, Director-General of Health and Medical Services in Queensland.<sup>(40)</sup> The Health Committee's Report was published before the Davidson Report was presented<sup>(41)</sup> and Davidson relied heavily on the Cilento Report when he formulated his recommendations on health matters. Although Justice Davidson did not accept the Health Committee's findings unreservedly, they did provide the basis on which the medical service was established in due course by the Joint Coal Board.

An earlier inquiry in 1939 into the health and safety of miners was a most comprehensive investigation in which the causes and incidence of dusting were examined in detail, as well as diseases relating to eyes and skin. The Royal Commission (1939), the Cilento Report and the Davidson Report (1946) made a thorough examination of the whole question of disease

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40. Statement tendered by B.W.Hartnell to the Joint Committee of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly upon the Coal Industry. Sydney, 1964. 13.1. Cited hereafter as Joint Committee(L.C.andL.A.)

41. The Health Report entitled, A National Survey of the Health of Coalminers, 1945, was presented in April, 1945.

among coal miners, so it would be superfluous to repeat their findings here. However, a brief survey of matters pertaining to health during the past twenty years should be of some interest.

The Joint Coal Board, in 1948, commenced its regular examinations of mineworkers at its four medical centres at Newcastle, Cessnock, Corrimal and Lithgow, thus implementing the recommendations of the Cilento Committee which had suggested that periodic and pre-employment medical examinations were in the best interests of the industry and the workers employed in it. In addition to the recommendations referred to above, 'special request' examinations are carried out, and mineworkers who have suffered previously from tuberculosis, are required to submit themselves for frequent checks. In the interest of preventing the spread of tuberculosis amongst miners and of reducing the incidence of progressive pneumoconiosis, the Coal Board introduced a tuberculosis withdrawal scheme in 1949, under which mineworkers suffering from active pulmonary tuberculosis were withdrawn from mining work and paid an allowance by the Board. (42)

One of the early tasks undertaken by the Chief Medical Officer of the Joint Coal Board (43) was to make a survey of a cross-section of the coal mining community throughout Australia as proposed by the Cilento Committee. In the survey 1,555 mine employees in New South Wales were medically examined: this represented about ten per cent of the total number of mineworkers in the state. (44) Follow - up examinations were carried out and they revealed that there had been no progression of pneumoconiosis. In fact, there had been a substantial general improvement in the health of miners at present working

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42. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) 1964. 13.5

43. Dr W.E. George .

44. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) 1964. 13.7

in the industry compared with the position in 1948. The improvement is shown in the following table:

TABLE XIII.

Table showing abnormalities found at periodical routine examination of working miners in N.S.W. A comparison of figures for the years 1948 and 1961-62.

Disease	No. Examined		Cases		Per Cent	
	1948	1961/62	1948	1961/62	1948	1961/62
Pneumoconiosis	1,555	4,268	251	130	16.0	3.0
Chronic bronchitis- emphysems -asthma	1,555	4,268	141	208	9.0	4.9
Tuberculosis -Active *	-	4,268	-	1	-	0.02
Tuberculosis -Inactive	-	4,268	-	54	-	1.3
Cardio vascular diseases	1,555	4,268	141	215	9.0	5.0
Neurosis	1,555	4,268	134	9	8.6	0.2
Hearing defect	1,555	4,268	9	14	0.6	0.3
Visual defect	1,555	4,268	-	129	-	3.0
Epilepsy	1,555	4,268	2	6	0.13	0.14

\* New incidence

Source: Report, Joint Coal Board (1961-62)

Pneumoconiosis, caused by the presence in mines of excessively dusty conditions has not always been recognised as a danger to health. In the early part of this century it was widely believed that coal dust was non-injurious and it was only from about 1938 that it was appreciated that coal dust was able to cause a disabling pneumoconiosis. As this knowledge spread miners and their families developed a fear of dust of any kind, amounting to a 'dust phobia' which produced frequent stoppages, particularly



on the Southern field. However, the reduction of pneumoconiosis ~~since~~ since 1948, the widespread use of effective dust suppression techniques and the recognition by mine workers that the risk is minute, have removed the 'phobia', thus bringing about improved industrial relations and a greater degree of stability in the coal industry.

The Cilento Committee had viewed the presence of pneumoconiosis with some concern and had recommended that,

Regular dust counts on an improved and comparable basis should be made in all mines and that, in view of the extreme importance to the health of the miner of the control of microscopic dust, and in view of the psychological and practical importance of the control of visible dust, all engineering measures which have been found successful in dust control should be extended to all mines to which they are applicable subject to strict engineering supervision and technical inspection. (45)

The Joint Coal Board, since 1950, has carried out these recommendations and has done most significant work to reduce the risk of disease. Dust counts have been made and the results analysed and evaluated so that overall trends in individual collieries, seams and districts can be measured. The Board has also established a Standing Committee on Dust Research and Control <sup>(46)</sup>, whose function it is to investigate new methods of measuring and controlling dust to examine new mining methods for dust creating propensity and to issue bulletins concerned with water infusion, ventilation, water sprays, dust counts and statistics on pneumoconiosis. The effect of such persistent and thorough work in connection with the problem of dust in mines has been so successful that " airborne dustiness in mines generally in New South Wales remains almost constantly well below the permissible dust standard." (47)

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45. Ibid. 13.8  
 46. Ibid. 13.11  
 47. Ibid. 13.12

The sample survey of 1,555 workers in the industry revealed the existence of some cases with skin abnormality, but no particular skin disease could be traced to the coal mines. About twenty per cent of men with skin complaints were regarded as suffering from true dermatitis, thus confirming the findings of the Royal Commission (1939) that cases of dermatitis had occurred in the coal industry, but not in large numbers. (48)

In fact, the causes of skin complaints were so various, ranging from insect bites to abrasions that the Commission found it "impossible to make any definite finding on this branch of possible injury to health in the mines." (49)

The provision of adequate bath and change facilities since 1946 has no doubt reduced the incidence of skin complaints so that in recent years the occurrence of dermatitis has not been such as to warrant action as a major problem. (50)

A further recommendation of the Cilento Committee, acted upon by the Joint Coal Board, was the establishment of a research organisation for industrial medicine and hygiene in each state. In this regard much work has been done by the Board's Medical Division itself, but the Board has also encouraged research into industrial medicine by various organisations in New South Wales. The Joint Coal Board has been concerned with :

rehabilitation of sick and injured; noise measurement and hearing; pathology of lung disease by examination of post mortem material; analysis of lung dusts and preparation of whole lung sections; and manning and supervision of Pulmonary Clinics for treatment of dusted miners. The University of Sydney has assisted by working on the following: respiratory function analysis; safety instruction; resuscitation research; instantaneous

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48. Report on Health and Safety (1939). p.259

49. Ibid., p.260

50. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) 1964. 13.20

outbursts of gas and coal; and investigation of water sprays. The New South Wales Department of Health has also made investigations of dust sampling instruments and conducted a bronchitis survey. (51)

Support has also been given by the Joint Coal Board to the Post - Graduate Medical Foundation, the Heart Foundation and the Asthma Foundation; liaison is maintained with the Commonwealth and New South Wales Departments of Health, especially their Occupational Health Divisions, and with appropriate University Departments. " In some ways the Medical Service and Health activities of the Joint Coal Board represent an advance on most other industries in Australia. " (52)

However, there is no complacency among those interested in dangers affecting the health of miners. Many hazards have been considerably reduced, but the potential danger still exists and changing mining methods and increasing output require constant vigilance to protect and improve the physical well - being of mine-workers.

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51.Ibid., 13.22

52.Ibid., 13.39

CHAPTER VII.THE ROLE OF THE JOINT COAL BOARD.

The formation of the Joint Coal Board in 1947 and its subsequent work of supervising the Coal Industry of New South Wales ended the conditions which had brought the industry into so much disrepute, and had engendered hatred and antagonism between employer and employee. From the chaos and bitterness of the period before and during the Second World War the industry has been guided by the Joint Coal Board to a position where economic stability, good industrial relations, and interest in employee welfare are most satisfactory. In this chapter it is intended to examine the reasons for the Board's foundation, its aims and its success in establishing the coal industry on a firm basis.

During the Second World War the problems of the coal industry in New South Wales had manifested themselves more than ever, and towards the end of the war serious disquiet was felt by governments and miners about the future of the industry. The miners had caused serious dislocations when increased production in the national interest was absolutely necessary; relations between employer and employee had worsened; and there was the prospect of under - production as output per man decreased, at a time when it was anticipated that post-war industrial expansion would demand a higher rate of output than was necessary before.

It was for those reasons that the Commonwealth Board of Inquiry<sup>(1)</sup> was set up by the Acting Prime Minister<sup>(2)</sup> to inquire into the coal industry. The Commissioner, Mr Justice Davidson, in his findings, supported the views held by most responsible and knowledgeable people in the industry itself:

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1. Notified in Gazette No. 10 (12 January, 1945)

2. The Hon. F.M. Forde.

" The facts and figures gathered by the Board of Inquiry<sup>(3)</sup>... should prove clearly that in the Coal Industry serious disturbances exist which threaten to overwhelm it and to cause increasingly grave concern to the whole economic life of the Commonwealth." <sup>(4)</sup> Justice Davidson was most emphatic that,

A stage has been reached in the industry which borders on disaster and threatening crisis demands bold measures. If, therefore, the Commonwealth Government can offer a comprehensive proposal which bears within it the means of regeneration, the interests of the community as a whole calls for the fullest co-operation from all alike. If that concerted action be forth coming, and if the Controller and his advisers are persons who can command universal confidence and respect by reason of their integrity, ability and freedom from all political affiliations, then it would not be too optimistic to predict that the scheme would ensure stability in the industry, security of employment in the best conditions for mine workers, a fair return on their investment for shareholders, and a favourable verdict from the people of Australia. <sup>(5)</sup>

Bold measures were certainly needed to safeguard and stabilise the industry, and the precedent of government intervention had been set during the war when the Commonwealth, acting under its defence powers, took over increasing control of the coal industry which culminated in the Coal Production (War Time) Act of 1944. <sup>(6)</sup> Under that Act the Commonwealth Coal Commissioner was given wide powers to control production, distribution and prices throughout Australia. The war years from 1941 to 1944 were years when maximum coal production was needed and in fact, in one of those years (1942) production reached the highest figure recorded to that date. <sup>(7)</sup> However, the output in 1941<sup>(8)</sup>, although representing an increase compared with the previous year, was achieved with an actual decrease in the output per man per day from 3.41 tons in 1940 to 3.34 tons in 1941. <sup>(9)</sup> Although

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3. The Report was completed and presented by Davidson as Sole Commissioner.

He was Chairman of the original Board until March 4, 1946.

4. Report, Davidson Commission (1946). p.315.

5. Ibid., p.342.

6. Robin Dollan, The Coalminers of New South Wales. Melbourne, 1963. p.17

7. Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66). p.154

8. 14,213,000 tons for the whole of Australia.

9. Report, Davidson Commission (1946). p.21

total production in 1942 was high the rate of output did not keep pace with the demand as stoppages occurred even more frequently, with the consequent loss of thousands of tons of coal. Not only did stoppages cause production losses, but they caused a deterioration in relations between owner and worker which in turn brought about something less than full-hearted working. Stoppages were not always caused by the miners, nor were they always concerned with trivial matters: cessation of work could be brought about by individuals, groups or Lodges; there were stoppages over safety issues; there were stoppages over the demands of the owners; there were pit-top meetings which halted production; and the mine managers often took retaliatory action to counter alleged grievances.

Justice Davidson quoted many instances where miners were unreasonable in their demands and actions: <sup>(10)</sup> At Abermain No.1 (8 November, 1944) the Lodge requested that wheelers be supplied with lighter head lamps whereupon the manager sought a list of names and arranged identification tags, but the wheelers went home, although the lamps were promised for the next day; at Richmond Main (7 February, 1944) a stoppage occurred because of an allegation that there had been an increase in the price of powder <sup>(11)</sup> despite the manager's assurance that there had not been an increase; at Pelaw Main (10 July, 1944) a wheeler complained that his horse had a sore shoulder, and while a replacement animal was being found, all the other workers went underground except this wheeler's pair of miners, but when their absence was discovered, the rest came to the surface and went home without investigating the cause of the trouble. Such stoppages must be regarded as totally unwarranted, without however, denying the right of strike action when grievances were of a more serious nature. The incidents referred to above

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10. Ibid., p. 170

11. The miner was required to purchase his own powder for blasting purposes.

occurred on the South Maitland field, but Davidson did not confine his examples to that area. In all other coal mining districts of New South Wales stoppages occurred for reasons equally as frivolous as those mentioned, and the number of working days lost through stoppages in 1944 in New South Wales was 2,719 of which 648 were on the Maitland field. (12)

It was not without reason that the Governments of New South Wales and the Commonwealth viewed with some anxiety the worsening position in the coal industry, and because of their conviction that if nothing were done the coal industry would collapse, they agreed it would be unwise to allow the industry in New South Wales to revert to a situation of unfettered private enterprise when the Coal Production (Wartime) Act ceased to be effective. It would be necessary, they thought, not only to retain their wartime authority, but to extend it. However, under the Federal Constitution it was not possible for the two governments to act separately, the Commonwealth interest being confined to interstate and overseas trade. The New South Wales Government had the constitutional authority, but lacked the necessary capital to undertake a programme of rehabilitation, so, to overcome the constitutional difficulties on the one hand, and the financial problems on the other, the two governments decided to establish jointly, a permanent authority to re-organise and aid the coal industry in New South Wales.

The Joint Coal Board was established by the Coal Industry Act (No. 40, 1946) of the Commonwealth and the Coal Industry Act (No. 44, 1946) of New South Wales, two acts which were generally identical except that " the powers granted to the Board to 'control' collieries and compulsorily to requisition and resume land, buildings, plant, machinery and equipment were contained only in the New South Wales Act." (13)

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12. Report, Davidson Commission (1946). p.172  
 13. Report, Joint Coal Board (1947-48). p.4

The new authority operated from March 1, 1947, after a considerable amount of preliminary action such as the proclamation of some sections of the acts; the appointment of the Board and its officers; and the regulation of the financial provisions. As all the preliminary organisation had been accomplished by March 8, 1947, the Coal Production (Wartime) Act of 1944 was repealed, this legislation concerned with the establishment of special industrial arbitration machinery for the coal mining industry, having been superseded by the industrial provisions of the new Coal Industry acts of 1946. The general aim of the Coal Industry acts was " to regulate, assist and rehabilitate the coal industry within the framework of private ownership, with the proviso that where necessary the Board has power to step in and to control and operate coal mines and ancillary enterprises ".<sup>(14)</sup> The broad objectives of the Board were set out in Section 14 of the Commonwealth Act and Section 11 of the State Act, both Sections stating in identical terms that,

the powers and functions of the Board are to include the taking of such action as in the opinion of the Board is necessary or desirable -

- (a) To ensure that coal is produced in such quantities and with such regularity as will meet requirements throughout Australia and in trade with other countries;
- (b) To ensure that the coal resources of the State are conserved, developed, worked and used to the best advantage in the public interest;
- (c) To ensure that coal produced in the State is distributed and used in such manner, quantities, classes and grades and at such prices as are calculated best to serve the public interest and secure the economical use of coal and the maintenance of essential services and industrial activities; and
- (d) To promote the welfare of workers engaged in the coal industry in the State. <sup>(15)</sup>

The Joint Coal Board was to concern itself with the technical, economic and social aspects of the coal industry and was not really concerned with basic

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14. Ibid., p.5

15. Ibid.



safety matters as they came under the jurisdiction of the Department of Mines. The Board however, was to have full power with regard to health. The Coal Industry Acts also established the Coal Industry Tribunal to deal with matters affecting members of the Miners' Federation. The **Tribunal** was to have the power of the Industrial Commission of New South Wales in intrastate affairs and of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court when the issues were interstate.

The Miners' Federation, or at least the more extreme members of the union, did not view the foundation of the Joint Coal Board with complete satisfaction because miners were not represented on it. Common Cause had this to say: "The Federation cannot be pleased at the failure of the Government to see the need for representation by the mineworkers in the new coal set-up, which clearly forces the union into a position of insisting upon freedom of action in regard to the Board's work." (16) However, in the next issue of the miners' paper, it was reported that the Central Council of the Federation had resolved to "accept the Bill... as the best measure yet introduced to bring the coal industry into line with the expanding national economy and to improve working conditions in the pits." (17) This could have been interpreted as an acceptance by the Federation of the Board but the miners' real attitude was voiced by the General President of the Miners' Federation (18) a little later:

The measure is not nationalisation of the coal industry - it is very far from that. It could more correctly be described as a bill to provide the coal owners of New South Wales...with advice, money and general assistance to rehabilitate their industry, re-equip their mines with new and up-to-date machinery and to provide (in spite of themselves) a sure, ready market for all the coal they can produce. (19)

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16. Common Cause, 10 August, 1946.

17. Ibid., 17 August, 1946.

18. H. Wells.

19. Common Cause, 7 September, 1946.

The creation of the Joint Coal Board was certainly not a measure of nationalisation, although its purpose was to exercise a large degree of control over the industry. Its fundamental tasks <sup>(20)</sup> were concerned with output, conservation of coal resources, marketing, and the welfare of miners, their families and their communities. The Board has not found its task an easy one and there were particular problems on the South Maitland field where the closure of inefficient and uneconomic mines, and the fluctuating demand for coal reduced the labour force thereby causing an upheaval in the traditional working pattern of men in the townships strung along the outcrop of the Greta seam. Despite the difficulties encountered the Board's record has been meritorious: the coal industry has been stabilised; the changeover to mechanisation has been accomplished to the satisfaction of all; amenities have been introduced at pits where none existed before; and substantial grants have been given to encourage better educational, cultural and social facilities on or near the coalfields. One of the Board's most significant achievements has been in the promotion of better relations between mine owners and managers and those who work for them. Universal animosity in the industry has been overcome although there are still some who see the Joint Coal Board purely as a government instrumentality set up to assist the colliery owners at the expense of the workers. However, the majority of mineworkers would appreciate the dramatic changes which have come to the coalfields. After years of depression, intermittency and industrial strife unparalleled in any other industry in New South Wales, the miner can now view with optimism the future which once looked so hopeless. For this state of affairs credit must be given to the Joint Coal Board for its activities in the spheres of production, conservation, marketing and welfare, which will be examined in detail below.

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20. Report, Joint Coal Board (1947-49).

Production.

In its first report the Joint Coal Board showed that the productive capacity of the coal industry was inadequate in relation to Australia's coal requirements and that it was a problem altogether separate from the matter of industrial disputes.<sup>(21)</sup> The loss of coal sustained during the period of the Second World War as a result of disputes continued into the post-war years, and in 1947 there seemed little likelihood that this state of affairs would come to an end. However, whether coal was lost through industrial strife or not it was obvious that ways had to be found to meet increasing consumer demand in an expanding economy.<sup>(22)</sup> Up until 1951 the Coal Board was forced to place its emphasis on increased production in order to stabilise the industrial situation. To achieve this it had to reduce stoppages; eliminate technical problems in the industry itself; develop open-cut mining; re-organise underground mines; and open up new pits or expand old ones. The Board's programme was so effective that by 1952 it was able to report<sup>(23)</sup> for the first time, that the coal shortage had been overcome, with the exception of gas coal, and even the shortage of that was expected to be short-lived. It could be claimed that the Board had taken far too long to increase production to the desired level, but the Board had realised from its inception that its task would not be easy, and that little impact would be felt in the **initial stages**.

Coal produced in 1948 was below requirements, but output for 1949 ~~was~~ about 900,000 tons below the previous year and fell drastically short of requirements.<sup>(24)</sup> The deficiency in 1949 was largely caused by the general

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21. Report, Joint Coal Board (1947-48) p.6

22. The Board estimated that 13 million tons would be needed in 1948, but up to July, only 5.4 million tons had been produced.

23. Report, Joint Coal Board (1951-52). p.5

24. Report, Joint Coal Board (1948-49). p.6

strike during the winter, but even if the year had been completely free from strikes, production would have still been about one million tons below what was needed. (25) Those two years (1948 and 1949) were recognised by the Board as years of crisis when the Central Council of the Miners' Federation "lent its support to a policy of sharpened militancy". (26) In this period the Federation began a campaign of agitation and accused the Board of having done nothing to re-organise the industry. Obviously the miners' had not taken notice of the editorial in Common Cause in 1947 when they were asked quite clearly to support the Board:

But within the limits specified it does put on trial a set-up of national direction of the industry through an instrument set up by a Labour Government, as against the system of completely unrestricted private ownership and control. Hence, this Joint Coal Board must succeed within the limits inevitably set and we have a responsibility to see that it succeeds in our own immediate, material interests and future security.... we must support it while urging an extension of national control to the point of complete people's ownership. We stand by the side of the Coal Board, to ensure its survival .... Number 1 job for us in that fight is to ensure that the Coal Board has at its disposal sufficient coal to meet the requirements of the country.... (27)

The support promised apparently did not last long : by 1949 the Coal Board was being condemned for having shown "too much of a tendency to capitulate to reactionary propagandists playing into their hands by lop-sided measures against mineworkers , and an unreal approach to the industry's problems. (28) In fact, the co-operation promised in 1947 by the editor of Common Cause had never eventuated. As early as May, 1948, Common Cause was criticising what it called the "new policy of the Coal Board", and complained that the Board, the Industrial Tribunal and press were conducting a "war of nerves" against miners :

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25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., p.19

27. Common Cause, 11 October, 1947.

28. Ibid., 5 February, 1949.

Last year it was a case of rosy pictures of a coming New Deal, promises to "change the face" of the coalfields, pledges to re-organise the coal industry, and the granting of economic conditions to mineworkers, comparable to those enjoyed by other workers.

What a different story this year! Setting its course to reach the objective of impracticable "targets", the Coal Board rails against stoppages, lectures our members, threatens penalties.... (29)

More criticism had been levelled at the Joint Coal Board when its first Annual Report had been published:

The Report reveals the Coal Board's merely scratching the surface of fundamental problems and in default of doing basic things; tending to seek results by methods long demonstrated as bankrupt.... Then, failing to get those results contriving to shift blame from its own shoulders and capitulating to reactionary promptings from outside the industry. With power to do almost anything, as its Chairman once remarked, the Joint Coal Board has not been prepared to exercise its powers to alter in any significant way the set-up in the industry responsible for its difficulties. The Report is really a smashing indictment of the coal owners, but reveals the fatal limitations of the Coal Board when it comes to any expectation of basic correction of coal owners' methods. (30)

During 1948-49, 1,955,000 tons of coal, or 14.2 per cent of possible production was lost through industrial disputes, and that figure included only the first few days of the general strike of 1949. The types of industrial stoppages which caused losses during 1948-49 are shown in Table XIV below:

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29. Ibid., 29 May, 1948

30. Ibid., 18 December, 1948.

TABLE XIV.

Table showing the types of industrial stoppages in coal mines in New South Wales during the year 1948-49.

Type of Stoppage	'000 tons lost	Losses as a % of total losses	Losses as a % of possible production
<u>INDUSTRIAL STOPPAGES -</u>			
1. Mine accidents resulting in death	16.5	0.8	0.12
2. Funerals not arising from mine accidents	17.3	0.8	0.13
3. Safety and alleged safety disputes	79.1	3.8	0.58
4. Disputes (including Item 6) originating with unions other than the Miners' Federation	147.1	7.0	1.07
5. Protests against delays in Board's programme, delays in industrial decisions, and political protests.	168.7	8.1	1.23
6. Demarcation disputes involving Miners' Fed.	405.7	19.4	2.95
7. Disputes regarding hours and rates of pay.	474.2	22.6	3.45
8. Seniority disputes.	42.3	2.0	0.31
9. Not readily classifiable.	535.2	25.5	3.89
10. Reason not known.	69.2	3.3	0.50
<b>TOTAL INDUSTRIAL STOPPAGES</b>	<b>1955.3</b>	<b>93.3</b>	<b>14.23</b>

NOTE: Non-industrial stoppages (e.g., breakdowns, weather, etc.) were responsible for 6.7 per cent of total losses

Source: Report, Joint Coal Board (1948-49). p.19

As a result of these stoppages over 1,100,000 tons of coal were lost through

minor strikes, while the five major strikes<sup>(31)</sup> caused a loss of 833,000 tons. The Northern district, which included the South Maitland field, was involved in all five major disputes. It can thus be seen that the Miners' Federation, while accusing the Board of doing nothing to re-organise the coal industry, was in actual fact doing a great deal towards dis-organising it.

As shown above in Chapter IV, the Joint Coal Board took a very active interest in trying to reconcile the conflicting parties during the 1949 Strike. The Board acted as a mediator, but in spite of its efforts the general strike began on June 27 in all coal mines in Australia manned by members of the Miners' Federation. Coal winning operations were re-started in New South Wales on August 15, but not before a number of union officials had been imprisoned, substantial fines imposed on unions and the army called in to work open-cuts.<sup>(32)</sup> Coal production lost as a result of the strike was as follows:

TABLE XV.

Table showing total tonnage of coal lost in Australia as a result of the 1949 General Strike.

STATE	TOTAL TONNAGE LOST
New South Wales	1,889,100
Queensland	261,000
Victoria	22,500
Western Australia	48,600
Tasmania	29,100
	TOTAL 2,250,300

Source: Report, Joint Coal Board (148-49). p.34

31. The General Strike; Kemira Tunnel Dispute; two concerning Hebburn No.2 (and two other collieries); dispute at pits of J. and A. Brown.  
32. Army production totalled 101,400 tons.

Although the General Strike caused the most severe coal, electricity, gas, and transport restrictions Australia had ever known, there was one important effect which was to have much to do with production in later years. The Miners' Federation agreed to multiple - shift working of open - cut mines which not only had the effect of increasing output, but also removed one of the long standing contentious issues which had plagued the industry for many years. Coal losses continued after the general strike and the familiar pattern of minor industrial stoppages was evident in 1949-50, the position being worsened by the flooding of the South Maitland Railway, which reduced coal deliveries at a critical time. In the period 1949-50 estimated losses were 2,000,000 tons as a result of industrial stoppages, and a further 360,000 tons because of abnormal weather conditions. To add to the Coal Board's difficulties, the productive capacity of the Maitland field showed a steady decline, largely because reduction in manpower had not been offset to any appreciable extent by increased output per man. The quality of Greta coal for gas making and steam raising was well known and the Board was also well aware that South Maitland coal would be very important for the export market when local needs were satisfied, but the liability of the seam to spontaneous combustion and the earlier methods of development made the introduction of modern mining methods very difficult.

From its inception, the Coal Board had struggled to raise production figures, but it knew that conventional mining methods were not likely to increase output in a dramatic way. The Board was convinced that mechanisation was essential to produce the large quantities of coal required by consumers and that the use of machinery would do away with the contract system of mining which had been such a "fruitful source of industrial



disputes". (33) In fact, in its first four years of operation the Board had made a great contribution to mechanisation by providing money, buying equipment and assisting technically the mining companies willing to co-operate. One of the most significant aids given to collieries was the establishment of an equipment 'pool', for which in 1948 alone, equipment to the value of £2,200,000 was ordered. (34) Nevertheless, the coal situation in 1950-51 was far from satisfactory. Although the Coal Board had given substantial aid, machine - cut coal in 1950 was only 38.8 per cent of underground coal produced in New South Wales and only 38.3 per cent of total production was machine loaded. (35) At that time in the United States of America ninety per cent of underground coal produced was cut mechanically and sixty per cent of total production loaded mechanically. The small extent to which mechanisation had proceeded in New South Wales may be gauged from the fact that by June, 1951, only thirteen mines were completely mechanised from face to surface on modern lines. (36) The colliery owners generally were reluctant to spend huge sums of money to mechanise face and haulage equipment to mine coal from bords and cut - throughs if that same equipment could not be used to extract pillars. Colliery owners were supported by mining engineers who, although not so concerned with the economics of the problem, claimed that mechanised pillar extraction demanded different design and layout of equipment from that required for solid working only. The Miners' Federation, however, had placed a ban on mechanical pillar extraction before the foundation of the Coal Board and in its stand had been supported by the State Government in September, 1941, when General Rule 40a was added to the Coal Mines

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33. Report, Joint Coal Board (1955-56). p.14

34. Report, Joint Coal Board (1950-51). p.14

35. Ibid., p.15

36. Ibid.

Regulation Act. The miners' opposition to mechanical pillar extraction was confirmed in August, 1948, when the National Convention of the Federation resolved to re-affirm " the Federation's opposition to mechanical loading in pillars " (37) and stated that the Federation " was not prepared to sacrifice the health and safety of members under any ill-conceived demands to extract [pillars] at this stage ". (38) Prior to 1951 the Board had tried to persuade the Miners' Federation to change its views, but without success, although the Board noted a softening attitude on the part of the miners, an attitude which it attempted at all times to promote. (39) The changing attitude of the miners can be explained partly by a gradual realisation on their part that the apprehensions of danger previously attributed to mechanised pillar extraction were not well founded, and perhaps more importantly by the knowledge that the South Maitland field (40) would have a very limited life if no agreement to cut pillar coal mechanically could be made. Moreover, the agreement made by the Colliery Companies and the Coal Board to implement stowage schemes on the South Maitland field did a lot to allay fears about safety and conservation. (41)

In an attempt to reach some agreement and to discuss some pertinent questions with the Miners' Federation, S.F.Cochran, Chairman of the Joint Coal Board, visited the Central Council in August, 1950. At the meeting he criticised the production position and stoppages and the policy of the Federation towards the Board as expressed in Common Cause. (42) Cochran made it clear that each party to the coal industry was motivated by a special interest. The Coal Board's interest was to get sufficient coal to meet the nation's requirements; the colliery proprietors did not necessarily want to

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37. Report, Joint Coal Board (1949-50) p.33  
 38. Ibid., p.33  
 39. Report, Joint Coal Board (1950-51). p.22  
 40. South Maitland miners had been particularly opposed <sup>to</sup> ~~the~~ mechanisation.  
 41. Mechanical extraction of pillars began in September, 1954.  
 42. Common Cause. 26 August, 1950,

get more coal, their special interest being to secure an adequate return on investment then and in the future. Cochran claimed that Common Cause was going out of its way to cloud coal issues and that it rarely reported progress in the industry.<sup>(43)</sup> In his reply, I. Williams, the miners' General President, maintained that the Coal Board was in the "pockets of the coal owners" and that it had aligned itself with the proprietors in attacking the workers' annual leave and statutory holiday awards. Edgar Ross, Assistant Editor of Common Cause, stated that although the Board claimed to be a third party above the battle,

its deeds showed that it was fundamentally the instrument of the owners, who at present were concerned with rationalising the industry at the workers' expense. So, the Board had lined itself up with the owners against the workers on every major industrial issue. Its amenities programme was really a means to an end - to assist to achieve its main purpose, but it had even fallen *down* on its job in regard to that. (44)

Despite Federation opposition the Coal Board continued to make every effort to increase production, until in 1953 it was announced that "the coal shortages of former years have been beaten".<sup>(45)</sup> The Board was certain that coal production had entered a new phase and that output would be more than sufficient to meet immediate demands. What was worrying however, was that markets might shrink as coal met strong competition from other fuels. With this possibility in mind the emphasis on expansion was reversed during 1952.<sup>(46)</sup> Factors which had contributed to the satisfactory production in 1950-51 had been concerned with open-cut and underground mines. An analysis of the improvement made in output is interesting and is demonstrated in Table XVI below:

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43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Report, Joint Coal Board (1952-53). p.5

46. Production in 1951-52 had been 2,050,000 tons above the previous year.

TABLE XVI.

Table showing an analysis of the way in which coal production in the year 1951-52 exceeded the production for the year 1950-51.

Causes of increased tonnage	Increased tonnage
<u>In underground mines</u>	
More men	300,000
Mechanisation and higher efficiency	320,000
Fewer strikes	450,000
Drier weather	130,000
	1,200,000
<u>Open cut expansion</u>	850,000
Total =	2,050,000

Source: Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) 1964. 9.129

The output for the year 1951-52 was well in excess of the market and stocks on hand increased so that New South Wales coal held interstate was 126,000 tons, and within the state 1,125,000 tons.<sup>(47)</sup> The year also saw significant imports of coal which raised stocks well above those of the previous year.<sup>(48)</sup> The sudden abundance of coal, so astonishing after the many years of shortage, was embarrassing. Besides the factors referred to in Table XVI above, factors which could be described as positive, other reasons for the abundance were of a negative type. An economic recession in 1951-52 had led consumers to cut back on estimated requirements, and other users of coal, who, in the years of coal shortages had switched to substitute fuels, did not revert to the use of coal.

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47. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) 1946. 9.130

48. Ibid.

It was obvious that the Board would have to take corrective action, but in ways designed to minimise hardship and dislocation of the industry.

Therefore, towards the end of 1952, when coal held in dumps by the New South Wales Mining Company Proprietary Limited<sup>(49)</sup> amounted to 900,000 tons<sup>(50)</sup> the Commonwealth Government agreed to contribute financially to stock - pile up to 1,500,000 tons, and in addition, to meet the costs of stock-piling together with any loss on subsequent sales of coal. Most of the coal stock-piled was from open-cuts, but various privately owned collieries, by April, 1953, had accumulated 22,000 tons of "coal at grass" in an attempt to ease the effects of over-production.

At that time the Commonwealth Government's stock-pile amounted to 1,259,000 tons<sup>(51)</sup> but it has been a continuing policy of the Coal Board to reduce this tonnage. Favourable circumstances, such as the improvement in overseas markets, have combined to reduce the stock - pile in 1964 to 854,000 tons.<sup>(52)</sup> Since 1952 the tendency has been for coal stocks, especially those held by collieries, to increase, so that in the eleven years from June, 1952 to June, 1963, stocks of New South Wales coal rose in eight years and fell in three. Total stocks held in 1963 stood at about 3,540,000 tons, equivalent to one -sixth of the production for the year 1962-63 in New South Wales.<sup>(53)</sup>

In line with its policy after 1952, the Coal Board restricted open-cut mining<sup>(54)</sup> and reduced output from its own collieries. Following the lead given by the Board, private colliery owners made voluntary limitations on output designed to meet the market they could individually command.

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49. The company set up by the Board to mine coal from Board mines.

50. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) 1946. 9.132

51. Ibid., 9.134

52. That is, in the Commonwealth stock - pile.

53. Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66). p.155.

54. Open - cut production in 1944 was only 0.2 million tons. After rising to 2.5 million tons in 1952, open-cut production fell to 0.6 million tons in 1963.

Restricted output may be regarded as a negative step, but a more positive approach to dispose of surplus stocks was to explore the possibility of finding new markets overseas. In this the Joint Coal Board played a conspicuous part by making contacts, opening up negotiations and arranging contracts. During 1953 shipments of coal were made to Japan, Malaya and South Korea, the beginning of the post-war export trade which now provides a significant outlet for coal from New South Wales. (55)

The policy of the Coal Board was first to increase production to meet demand and having achieved that, to restrict production and find more markets without disturbing to any great extent the employment pattern. In order to increase production before 1952 the Board had made special efforts to recruit labour from the United Kingdom and also from Sydney to the South Coast collieries. These measures were discontinued after 1952, (56) and in September of that year the Miners' Federation "closed its books". (57) No new members were accepted and all vacancies in the coal industry were reserved for those who had been displaced because of economic difficulties or mine closures. The introduction of long service leave to mineworkers from January, 1953 also helped to ease the problem of over-production, as an average number on leave in the first ten months of 1953 was 618. (58)

The implementation of the Board's policy to restrict output did not result in a spectacular decline. As Table XVII shows, total stocks held actually increased although production decreased temporarily. However, the rate of increase in 'stocks - held' dropped after the year 1951-52 and that situation was regarded as satisfactory. The situation during the critical years 1950 to 1954 is summarised in Table XVII:

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55. Details of the overseas market will be discussed later in this chapter

56. In October, 1952, 20,802 were employed in the N.S.W. coal industry.

By July, 1966, the number had fallen to 11,905.

57. New members were admitted from October, 1953.

58. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.). 1964. 9.145

TABLE XVII.

Table showing production, exports, consumption and stocks of New South Wales coal in the years 1950-51 to 1953-54.

	1950-51	1951-52	1952-53	1953-54
<u>Production</u>	12,683,000	14,733,000	14,264,000	14,926,000
<u>Exports</u>				
Overseas	67,000	127,000	233,000	390,000
Interstate	1,956,000	2,494,000	2,334,000	2,461,000
<u>Consumption</u>				
Interstate	1,943,000	2,368,000	2,360,000	2,370,000
In N.S.W.	10,443,000	10,926,000	11,163,000	11,599,000
<u>Change in Stocks</u>				
Interstate	+13,000	+126,000	-26,000	+91,000
In N.S.W.	+206,000	+1,125,000	+467,000	+308,000
<u>Total Stocks</u>	692,000	1,942,000	2,384,000	2,783,000

Source: Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66). p.161.

Despite its efforts, the Joint Coal Board was not able to implement its policy without causing some hardship. Necessary re-adjustments were not spread evenly over the coal fields and special problems arose in certain areas, particularly on the South Maitland field where the number employed in June, 1964, was only 21.1 per cent of the number employed in October, 1952.<sup>(59)</sup> In terms of numbers the fall was from 6,721 in 1952 to 1,421 in 1964.<sup>(60)</sup> The problems resulting from dismissals were met by various means: on the

59.Ibid. 10.44

60.Ibid.

South Maitland field many of the men displaced found permanent employment in Newcastle heavy industries and at power stations around Lake Macquarie. The stability of the new jobs resulted in a rise in the prosperity of towns on the Maitland field which had not seemed possible in 1953; large consumers, such as the Broken Hill Proprietary Company, the Electricity Commission of New South Wales and the New South Wales Government Railways, made valuable contributions to ease the effect of over-production by accepting tonnages of coal above their immediate requirements and in some cases by taking inferior coal or by paying higher prices for it than they need have. In doing this they were encouraged by the Coal Board to make a small contribution to the coal industry on which they relied.

During the period of exceptionally difficult problems resulting from over-production the Coal Board had discharged its functions without detriment to the industry's technological growth and assumed the difficult task of reviewing constantly the marketing situation, by regular consultations with producers and consumers. The Board's attempts to save the industry from dislocation were criticised by frequent articles in Common Cause. In 1953, for instance, this journal wrote:

... it must now be remembered that this is a body **which, despite vast volumes of propaganda and assurances of ten years' security, is responsible for the dismissal of many miners. It plans to dismiss more. It will further plan to get the co-operation of the Central Council and the Federation to achieve this. Therefore it is important for miners to assess whether the talks to which the owners are to be invited will aim at their security or tend to decide how many more must be paid off.**(61)

When the Board was established in 1947, output for the whole of New South Wales was 11,683,000 tons for the year, whereas production for the year 1965-66 reached 25,011,000 tons despite stoppages because of the Bulli fire

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61. Common Cause, 28 February, 1953.



the fire at Aberdare North, which closed the mine for several months, and various other industrial stoppages. (62) The Board has attributed its success in raising production to the use of high - capacity plant, operated skilfully by willing workers with proper attention given to safety measures by mine officials and mine workers. (63) An article in Common Cause was not so complimentary:

...and that's about all the Coal Board has done since its birth, develop open cuts... and develop them with complete disregard of the interests of citizens living in the area, the question of expenditure of public money, and the economics of the industry.... So much so, that now that the crisis of over-production has caught up with it, the Coal Board is frantically closing down the cuts, "unloading" the millions of pounds' worth of machinery purchased, leaving a trail of ruin behind... (64)

On the South Maitland field the latest annual coal production figure of 2,502,000 tons (65) was very close to the peak output of 1962-63, even though fire had closed Aberdare North for some months and depleted reserves led to the closure of Aberdare Extended in 1966. The re-opening of Aberdare West and Caledon open-cut, to some extent, compensated for losses caused by closures. The number employed on the field in 1966 rose by forty- three over the previous year, the first increase for some time, and output per manshift also increased although the rate was still not commensurate with the level achieved on other fields. Having overcome the problems of production, the Coal Board's task now is to supervise the industry so that the rate of production will be increased to meet consumer demand, both in quality and quantity, whilst endeavouring to reduce costs and increase markets in such a way as to avoid dislocation of mines or workers.

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62. Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66) . pp24-25

63. Ibid., p.18

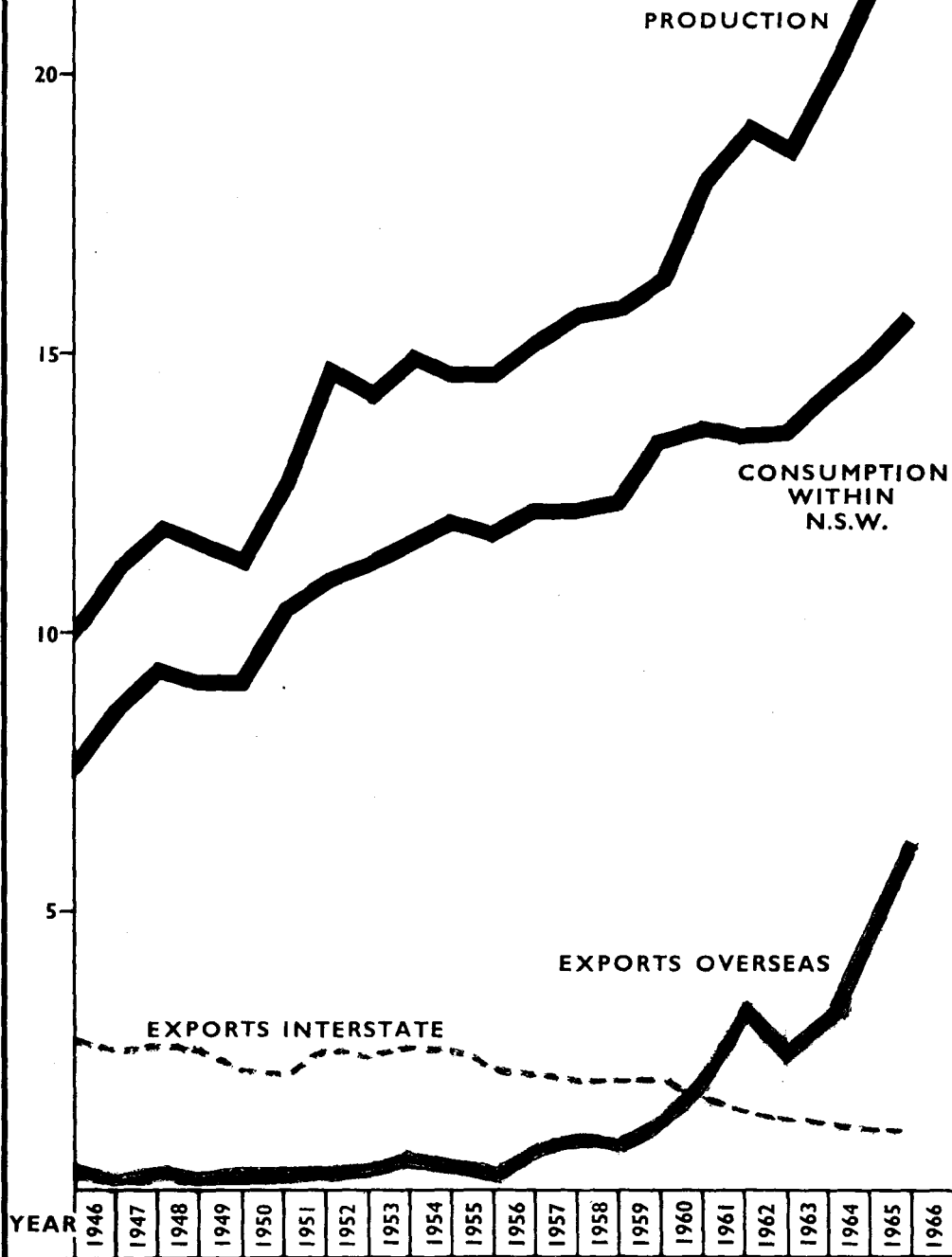
64. Common Cause, 2 May, 1953.

65. For the year 1965-66.

MILLION  
TONS

CHART IV.

# THE GROWTH OF THE COAL INDUSTRY IN NEW SOUTH WALES



Source: Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66)

## Conservation.

The problem of coal conservation was examined in Chapter V, where it was shown that the need for conservation of coal in New South Wales generally, and on the South Maitland field in particular, was of immense importance to the economic stability of the State. It was also shown <sup>that</sup> ~~shown~~ nothing had been done before the creation of the Joint Coal Board to remedy a situation where coal mining was being carried on without regard to the future, so that millions of tons of high quality coal were lost irretrievably. The Coal Board was charged with the task of taking action to ensure that the coal resources of the State would be developed, worked and used to the best advantage in the public interest.

The question of implementing stowage to conserve coal had been raised frequently during the years of mining the South Maitland field, where the safe and economical extraction of the maximum amount of coal from the thick Greta seam constituted a problem to which increasing attention had been necessary in view of the limited supply of good gas-making coal in New South Wales.<sup>(66)</sup> Stowage consists of refilling with rock or similar material the space left between the roof and the floor of a mine after coal has been extracted, in order to control subsidence of the underground strata, thereby controlling the forces incident on the working area. In overseas mining practice, there is normally complete stowage only in the thin seams, although stowage was implemented in Polish Silesia where seams worked varied from eighteen feet to nineteen feet seven inches in thickness.<sup>(67)</sup> However, the seams of Silesia enjoyed certain advantages over the Greta sea<sup>m</sup> the seam was considerably thinner than the Greta seam and large supplies of sand for

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66. Greta seam coal is ideal for gas-making.

67. Report, Davidson Commission (1946). p.80

stowage were available on the spot.<sup>(68)</sup> Moreover, mines on the South Maitland field had not been designed for the injection of stowage material and the previous extraction of millions of tons of coal left huge voids to be filled long after coal had been removed.

The Royal Commission of 1929 did not favour stowage because of the added expense involved when the industry was already under strain, but this was not the view of N.J.Clark, Superintendent of Caledonian Collieries on the Greta field. He supported the principle of hydraulic stowage<sup>(69)</sup> and stated in evidence that he had seen the system carried out successfully and apparently without undue difficulty, in France, Belgium and the Ruhr.<sup>(70)</sup> On the other hand, there were other mining superintendents who opposed the view of Clark and maintained that many European countries, notably Great Britain, had ceased to implement hydraulic stowage in favour of pneumatic<sup>(71)</sup> or mechanical<sup>(72)</sup> stowage. Justice Davidson recommended against the practice of hydraulic stowage on the grounds of expense and safety<sup>(73)</sup> although he did suggest that experiments should be made with other types of stowage.<sup>(74)</sup> The Joint Coal Board acted on his suggestion and gave early attention to the problem, when, in 1948, two experts, J.Hunter of the National Coal Board of the United Kingdom, and H.R.Houston, of the Ministry of Fuel and Power in the United Kingdom, were brought to Australia to report on

the necessity for and the probability of introducing and applying a system or systems of complete or partial stowage underground in relation to the extraction of the thick coal deposit of the

68.Ibid., p.81

69. Hydraulic stowage is the placing of material by water.

70.Report, Davidson Commission (1946), p.81

71.Pneumatic stowage is the placing of material by compressed air.

72.Mechanical stowage is the placing of material by machine - usually by a high speed conveyor belt.

73.Critics claimed that the high humidity created endangered the men.

74.Report, Davidson Commission(1946). p.82

Greta coal seam for the purpose of ensuring safe and efficient winning of the maximum amount of coal recoverable from the following types of areas -

- (a) areas of pillars already formed; and
- (b) virgin areas being developed. (75)

These two authorities recommended pneumatic stowage as the most efficient method developed; suggested that quick pillar extraction by mechanical means was the best way to recover the maximum amount of coal; and recommended that experiments in pneumatic stowage should begin. (76) Unable to obtain a suitable man from Great Britain to supervise the recommended experiments, the Coal Board sent M.J.Harris (77) to that country, Germany, Holland and Belgium (78) to study stowage practices at collieries bearing some similarity to those pits in New South Wales where stowage might be attempted. Following upon Harris's report in 1950, the Board prepared to make a detailed study of all aspects related to the implementation of stowage, but before a start could be made, other developments caused the Board to wait. The Minister for Mines in New South Wales, in August, 1950, established the South Maitland Coalfield Coal Conservation Committee which was required to inquire into and report upon a number of matters relative to the conservation of coal in specified collieries working the thick Greta seam in the vicinity of Cessnock. (79)

In its report, submitted in May, 1951, the Committee recommended that power-operated stowage should be undertaken at selected collieries in the Cessnock district for the purpose of conserving coal and to facilitate its speedy and safe extraction. (80) It was obvious from the Committee's findings and from earlier reports that the conditions of the thick Greta seam had no exact counterpart in other parts of the world so that any stowage scheme

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75. Report, Joint Coal Board. (1951-52). p.54

76. Ibid.

77. Now Superintendent of Caledonian Collieries Ltd.

78. In 1949

79. Report, S.M.C.C.C.C. (1951). p.3

80. Ibid., p.31

undertaken would be largely experimental and any such work would involve more expense than any individual colliery proprietor could be expected to bear alone. (81) As a result of the Committee's report, the Minister for Mines was inclined to set up a Coal Conservation Board to concern itself with conservation and stowage, a Board the activities of which would be financed by compulsory contributions from all New South Wales colliery proprietors. However, realising that such a procedure, involving legislation at both State and Federal levels, would take considerable time, the Joint Coal Board, with the Minister's concurrence, suggested that the colliery owners concerned should combine in a voluntary scheme which would give practical experience and which could be implemented almost immediately. (82)

Consequently, an agreement known as the "First Agreement", between the Joint Coal Board on the one hand, and J. and A. Brown and Abermain-Seaham Collieries Limited, The Hetton Bellbird Collieries Limited, Caledonian Collieries Limited, Broken Hill Proprietary Limited, Hebburn Limited and Muswellbrook Coal Company Limited, on the other, was completed on April 22, 1952, to operate for a period of two years and to introduce stowage into certain mines " for the purpose of conserving coal left in pillars and of extracting the same where appropriate by mechanical means. (83) The rate of contribution, based on coal produced and sold by the several participating companies, was fixed at four shillings per ton (84), but later increased to six shillings per ton. The "First Agreement" was based on a decision of the Minister for Mines to appoint a Technical Committee to advise him on matters concerning stowage, while the "Agreement" itself constituted a

81. Ibid., p.32

82. The owners were members of The Northern Collieries Proprietors' Assoc.

83. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) 1964. 9.114

84. This rate operated from 4 February, 1952 until 4 May, 1952.

further committee known as the "principal Committee", for the purpose of reviewing stowage operations and considering recommendations and reports from the Technical Committee, and generally, to administer and carry out the terms of the agreement. After reviewing a stowage proposal endorsed by the Technical Committee, the Principal Committee was required to submit the scheme with recommendations to an annual "Approving Conference" which met on August 4 and September 5, 1952. Six stowage projects were approved. (85)

However, stowage work under the terms of the "First Agreement" was not carried out because the Miners' Federation failed to give the proprietors assurances sought in respect to the introduction of machines in pillars. Stowage works proposed were deferred and temporary arrangements were made subsequently which resulted in the "Second Agreement" to last for five years from January 1, 1954. In addition to the six companies concerned with the "First Agreement" five other companies agreed to the stowage proposal: Cessnock Collieries Limited, ~~Maitland Main~~ Collieries Proprietary Limited, the Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company, Maitland Extended Colliery Proprietary Limited, and Millfield Coal Mining Company Proprietary Limited. (86) The "Second Agreement" really consolidated the "First Agreement" and the temporary arrangements arising from it. It also prescribed that the rate of contribution should be reduced to 1/6 per ton. It provided as well, for the President of the Northern Branch of the Miners' Federation to be a member of the Principal Committee, this appointment being made as the result of strong representations by the Coal Board, (87) a further example of the way in which the Board has consistently tried to promote happier relations between owners and workers.

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85. The Aberdare project was approved but the commencement date deferred.

86. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) 1964. 9.115

87. Ibid., 9.116

Although the "Second Agreement" made it possible for stowage works to be applied at twenty-two collieries which were then under the control of the respective parties to the agreement, it was decided that for experimental purposes, stowage, initially should be restricted to those projects which had already been planned for selected sections of Abermain, Aberdare Extended, Hebburn No.2 and Bellbird Collieries. However, further developments occurred to alter the "Second Agreement". Just before the agreement was due to expire <sup>(88)</sup> the contracting parties agreed to extend the terminating date to December 31, 1962, and to provide for the withdrawal of Hetton Bellbird Collieries Limited as from March 1, 1957.. The contribution rate was reduced to sixpence per ton in August, 1957, and reduced further to one penny per ton in July, 1958, this rate being maintained until the stowage agreement was terminated in December, 1963. The outcome of the various stowage projects is summarised:

Elrington, approved in 1952 and deferred in 1953, no works carried out; Abermain, approved in 1952, modified in 1955, preparatory work completed and first stowage placed in 1957, work continued until 1960; Aberdare Extended, approved in 1952, but no work done before the project was abandoned in 1956; Hebburn No. 2, approved in 1952, preparatory work begun, but abandoned in 1958; Aberdare No. 7, approved in 1958, the plan subsequently modified and completed in 1962.

Of these proposals only two, those concerning Abermain and Aberdare No, 7 had reached the stage where stowage barriers <sup>(89)</sup> had or were being formed. The Abermain project had reached the stage where small isolated areas had been formed by stowage, and mechanical extraction within those areas begun.

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88. 6 November, 1958.

89. Barrier between two areas, consisting of stowage material, and allowing more pillar extraction.



The **serious creep**<sup>(90)</sup> which had become evident in the mine in 1960 brought a cessation of mining operations and complete extraction from the stowage area was not possible. At Aberdare No. 7 where the stowage scheme replaced the one prepared for Aberdare Extended, the original proposal was abandoned because the pillars for isolation were extracted before the stowage barriers could be introduced. Work proceeded subsequently and "simple plugs"<sup>(91)</sup> in association with "log and loam seals"<sup>(92)</sup> were used. In the case of the Abermain project, the cost of stowage per ton of coal actually removed was 20/-, and 11/6 when applied to coal estimated to be extractable.<sup>(93)</sup> At Aberdare No.7, the cost per ton of recoverable coal was 4/9.

A sum in excess of one million pounds was expended on stowage including purchase of plant and equipment and administrative charges, an expenditure out of all proportion to the gain. The Joint Coal Board, realising that stowage costs were far too high to offer encouragement for future projects, experimental or otherwise, concluded that it could not "support any new stowage barrier schemes on the South Maitland field".<sup>(94)</sup> It based its decision on the following considerations: (a) Not one of the stowage schemes as originally envisaged was completed. The original schemes were planned on a long term basis and the forces of change overtook them. Rapid organisational changes, especially in relation to mechanical mining, combined with the inherent instability of the Greta seam, made stowage a most uneconomic business ; (b) The experiments indicated that some conservation of coal could be effected, but the cost was prohibitive in view of the prospective market for coal ; and (c) The Greta seam, although ranking

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90. A massive downward movement of strata caused by a weakening of the support offered by the coal seam.

91. A "simple plug" is a placement of stowage material in a cut-through for the purpose of isolating an area.

92. The placing of alternate layers of timber in-filled with loam to act as a plug.

93. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.). 1964. 9.123

94. Ibid., 9.125

among the world's best gas - making coals, lost its market position as a result of technological changes in the production of town gas, and a return to favour of coal was not a feasible prospect. (95)

The Joint Coal board lent its whole weight to the stowage project and really settled the question of stowage on the South Maitland field. In so far as the Greta seam was concerned the economic value of the coal could not support the cost of stowage and in any case, modern mining techniques and the prevailing industrial climate afforded much better opportunities for higher extraction percentages than were possible previously. It should be remembered however, that experimental stowage was agreed to by the colliery owners in return for the mechanical extraction of pillars by the Miners' Federation. Technically, therefore, the colliery owners have not kept faith with the miners. J. Comerford has insisted that the executives of the coal companies never intended to implement the plans of the stowage Technical Committee. (96) He claimed that the Federation had always wanted a statutory authority to compel the introduction of stowage, (97) and although the Joint Coal Board saw itself as such an authority, it could not really be so; by making itself a party to the stowage agreement, the Board had voluntarily surrendered its powers, especially when colliery owners had the right of veto in the Approving Conference. (98) Comerford cited the example of India to explain the type of organisation which was wanted by the Miners' Federation in New South Wales. He said that "unless something of that same nature is done here, we are faced with the destruction of our richest seams. In the wake of the destruction there is following a host of social and

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95. Ibid., 9.125

96. J. Comerford, Notes on the Current Position in the Australian Coal Industry. September, 1955. p.18 (Unpublished)

97. Ibid.

98. Set up under the Stowage Agreement to approve stowage plans.

economic problems inimical to the interests, not only of the coalfields' people but of the people of the Commonwealth". (99) Comerford's views on the stowage question have been overtaken by events, as stowage experiments after 1955 proved too costly. Whether his opinion on conservation may prove to be correct in the years to come remains to be seen, but at present, the realistic view, based on the evidence available, is that in practice, the limited benefit which might be derived from stowage on the South Maitland field cannot justify the additional cost.

### Marketing.

The problem of marketing is closely associated with production and is a problem which the Joint Coal Board inherited from the various colliery proprietors. The Board, under the Coal Industry Acts which incorporated it, was charged with taking appropriate action to ensure that coal produced in New South Wales was distributed and used in such a way as was calculated best to serve the public interest while, at the same time, interesting itself in the economical use of coal and the maintenance of essential services and industrial activities. For the first six years of its existence the Board's primary interest was in quantity, not quality, (100) but gradually, as the coal shortage was overcome and industrial processes became more sophisticated there was an increasing demand for special-type coals to suit individual consumers. In these early years distribution and rationing of coal, as in 1949, (101) was a part of the Board's function. Later, to meet the demand for special-purpose coals, the Board made appropriate arrangements by introducing the washing of coal to remove impurities.

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99. J. Comerford, Notes on the Current Position in the Australian Coal Industry. 1955. p.18 (Unpublished)

100. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) 1964. 9.158

101. When serious industrial unrest on the coalfields led to severe coal shortages.

Washeries were established at strategic points and the response from consumers was so good that practically all coal is now washed before sale.

Another task of the Joint Coal Board has been to watch the competitive position of coal as other fuels such as petroleum and hydro\*electricity have decreased demand for coal. The shrinking domestic market made it apparent that if the stability of the coalfields were to be maintained, it would be essential to find overseas markets for excess coal produced in New South Wales, and in this activity the Board has had considerable success. It has provided the unifying force which had been absent in the strongly competitive industry before 1947. The Board's approach to local industrialists, producers, and overseas buyers has been governed by a real concern with New South Wales coal production and the continuing welfare of miners and their communities. Economic progress has brought inevitable changes and nowhere were changes more significant than on the South Maitland field where the gradual loss of its traditional coal buyers threatened economic chaos as hundreds of miners lost their positions. Market changes since 1946 have been most significant: first, the availability of marketable supplies has more than doubled ; between 1946 and 1966; secondly, there has been a steady increase in domestic consumption, a decline in interstate exports and (lately) a rise in overseas exports; thirdly, production of saleable coal now exceeds local consumption and exports ; and fourthly, there has been a remarkable increase in the quality of coal as marketed.

Besides pursuing what was before 1952 its main task, increasing productivity, the Joint Coal Board had to plan distribution so as to provide adequate supplies of coal to all consumers, and in particular, to maintain the steel making plants at Newcastle and Port Kembla at the

highest possible level of production.<sup>(102)</sup> The Board did plan the distribution of available supplies, and as output lagged, advised the Commonwealth Government that importation of coal was necessary.<sup>(103)</sup> As New South Wales coal was vital for the steel industry, the Commonwealth Government, acting on the advice of the Board, arranged with Victorian and South Australian authorities<sup>(104)</sup> to import over one million tons of coal from India and South Africa, the cost of imported coal being subsidised by the Commonwealth Government.<sup>(105)</sup> The Board was also forced to assume responsibility for rationing coal supplies when difficulties arose. One particular difficulty was the continued shortage of certain types of coal. For example, Bunnerong Power Station depended almost exclusively on South Maitland coal (from Stanford Merthyr No. 2) and Burragorang Valley coal, and when **supplies** were unavailable extensive dislocation occurred.<sup>(106)</sup>

Open - cut mining was intensified between 1948 and 1955, over thirteen million tons of coal being won from this source,<sup>(107)</sup> a most valuable contribution in the circumstances. The Board also gave its attention to improving transport facilities **in an endeavour** to raise the rate of coal distribution. The electrification of the railway line from Lithgow to Sydney was meant to improve coal transport from the Western field and reliable coal loading facilities replaced the inefficient cranes at Pymont.<sup>(108)</sup> What could not be foreseen however, was the rapid improvement of Northern coal production<sup>(109)</sup> which provided coal cheaper and better than that from the Western field, thus reducing the intended effectiveness of the electric railway to Lithgow and the Balmain facilities.

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- 102. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) 1964. 9.158
  - 103. Ibid., 9.159
  - 104. In the year 150 - 51.
  - 105. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.). 1964. 9.159
  - 106. Ibid., 9.162
  - 107. Ibid., 9.164
  - 108. Ibid., 9.165
  - 109. Ibid., 9.166

South Maitland and Newcastle coal mines were particularly affected by two developments after 1950. The decision of the Department of Railways to replace steam engines was a special disaster for South Maitland mines which had been traditional suppliers of steaming coal. Diesel and electric locomotion reduced drastically the amount of coal used by the New South Wales Railways<sup>(110)</sup> from 1,014,000 tons in 1960-61 to a mere 496,000 tons in 1965-66.<sup>(111)</sup> Significant decreases in coal used by the railways of other states have also reduced the demand for coal, thus worsening the market position of those coals produced essentially for steaming purposes.<sup>(112)</sup> The second important development was the decision of the New South Wales Government to locate its power houses on the coalfields where coal could be obtained at a satisfactory price to cover the economic life of the power station. Coalfields adjacent to the coastal lakes have an advantage over inland fields because of the availability of water, so many mines were opened up to provide coal for these stations.<sup>(113)</sup> The opening of power stations at Wangi, Vale's Point and Munmorah around Lake Macquarie was accompanied by a substantial decrease in generation at the older metropolitan power houses with the result that many mines found themselves isolated, economically or geographically, from their former markets. The decrease in production of Zaara Street power station in Newcastle, a traditional outlet for South Maitland small coal, was typical of what has occurred to reduce the demand for coal for generation purposes.<sup>(114)</sup>

During the years of under-production the output of each colliery was distributed under the supervision of the Coal Board which

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110. The increase in electricity generation however, did demand the use of coal and so partly compensated for other lost outlets.

111. Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66). p.72

112. Ibid., p. 71

113. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) 1964. 9.167

114. Ibid., 9.168

specified consumer demands to colliery management taking into consideration the type of coal required. <sup>(115)</sup> Another directive function of the Board was the allocation of coals to all cargoes whether for intrastate, interstate or overseas destinations, as well as for ships' bunkers. The Board's policy on coal distribution was to combat under-production by direction, but this came to an end when the output of coal increased dramatically after 1951. As production overtook demand in New South Wales, the marketing question changed character and became more serious. Factors which had already caused loss of markets in New South Wales in relation to railways, town gas and ships' bunkers, applied with even greater force interstate, causing these markets to fall drastically. Listed by industries, the variations in consumption of New South Wales black coal interstate are shown below.

TABLE XVIII.

Table showing variations in interstate consumption of New South Wales coal for the years 1951-52 and 1962-63.

Consumption	Consumption in '000 tons.	
	<u>1951-52</u>	<u>1962-63</u>
Electricity generation	624	132
Railways	711	140
Town gas	953	541
Ships' bunkers	91	-
General industry	480	427
Total	2,859	1,240

Source: Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.). 1964. 9.186

The explanation of such a sudden reduction in the use of New South Wales coal was that electricity generation in Victoria had passed largely to brown coal and briquettes, while South Australia had begun to base its power generation on Leigh Creek coal used at Port Augusta power station. (116)

The interstate coal market also faced increased competition from fuel oil and from refinery gases emanating from the petroleum industry. In times of under-production and industrial dislocation the supply of New South Wales coal to other Australian States had not been reliable: this forced South Australia and Victoria in particular to take measures designed to make them independent of New South Wales coal.

Faced with the prospect of falling Australian markets, the Coal Board decided in 1952 that overseas markets merited special attention (117) and persuaded the New South Wales Combined Colliery Proprietors' Association, early in 1953, to participate in a Coal Export Committee to consider matters associated with the export of coal overseas. This was a most important development and saved the New South Wales coal industry from collapsing for want of markets. Exports of coal were made in 1953 to Japan and Malaya, (118) and to South Korea in 1954 (119), although Japan was regarded as the greatest potential market. (120) Australian coking coals were supplied to the Japanese steel industry for testing and a gradual interest in New South Wales coal developed. As a result of the visit to Australia in August, 1958, of a Japanese survey mission, long-term contracts for South Coast coals were signed. (121) Exports of coal to Japan have continued and and have grown from a mere 9,000 tons in the year 1955-56 to 2,726,000

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116. Ibid., 9.187

117. Ibid., 9.188

118. Ibid., 9.190

119. Ibid.

120. Ibid.

121. Ibid., 9.192



tons in the year 1963-64. (122) This would appear to be a most fortunate trend for New South Wales, but Queensland has also become a strong competitor for the Japanese market and so represents a threat to the traditional coal - supplying state of the Commonwealth. (123) Naturally, other markets have been tested and current exports of New South Wales coal also go to New Zealand, Korea, Pakistan, New Caledonia, Hong Kong, Ceylon, Malaysia, Fiji and Taiwan. (124)

Despite the strong upward trend in the disposal of New South Wales coal the benefits have not been uniform, either in the various mining districts or among coal producers. Suppliers to local markets have sometimes suffered and disproportionate losses and gains have occurred in the overseas markets. Many of the changes were concentrated with telling effect on the South Maitland field, a traditional supplier of gas, locomotive and bunker coals and also a large supplier of steaming coal. Although the overall shortage of coal had been overcome by 1952 it was not until 1954 that the demand for large coal from the South Maitland field was met in full. (125) Difficulty was experienced in that field in marketing the small coal which had no specialised outlets and had to compete with other coal and other fuels on the general market. As part of its policy on prices, the Joint Coal Board had fixed uniform charges for all coal sold by a mine thus making it nearly impossible for high priced Greta seam smalls (126) to compete with lower priced coals from other areas. To meet this problem a price differential, at first eight shillings per ton, between large and small coal was introduced on the South Maitland field in September, 1953, in an endeavour to encourage the proportion of large coal sold and to make the smalls more

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122. Ibid., 9.194 The market rose to over 6 million tons in 1966.  
 123. Improved transport and port facilities in Queensland will aid that State's export trade.  
 124. Report Joint Coal Board (1965-66). p.80  
 125. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) : 1964. 9.197  
 126. 'Small' coal is generally less than one inch in diameter.

attractive to consumers . (127) The policy was successful in the short term, but changes in the railway and gas market decreased the demand for large Greta seam coal and once again the Maitland field was in trouble. The decline in the demand for Greta seam coal may be seen in Table XIX.

TABLE XIX.

Table showing decline in demand for Greta seam coal from the year 1960-61 to the year 1963-64.

Year	'000 tons				
	N.S.W. Consumers	Interstate Consumers	Total Australia	Overseas	Total
1960-61	1,238	1,115	2,353	325	2,678
1961-62	1,107	905	2,012	475	2,487
1962-63	1,062	823	1,885	166	2,051
1963-64	910	770	1,680	150	1,830

Source: Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.). 1964. 9.198

The full effect of the declining demand for South Maitland coal over a longer period may be seen below.

TABLE XX.

Table showing decline in demand for South Maitland coal in the years 1954, 1963 and 1965-66.

	'000 tons		
	1954	1963	1965-66
<u>TO N.S.W. MARKETS</u>			
Iron and steel industry	117	37	7
Electricity generation	243	98	86
Railways	403	65	39
Town gas	825	560	524
Other industries	609	151	90
	2,197	911	746
<u>TO INTERSTATE MARKETS</u>			
Mainly Victoria and S.Australia	1,388	790	559
<u>TO OVERSEAS MARKETS</u>			
Japan	-	70	668
Other countries	7	73	117
Total	3,592	1,844	2,090

Source: Annual Reports, Joint Coal Board.

Exports of South Maitland coal to Japan, largely for Osaka gas works, reached 261,000 tons in the year 1960-61, and 412,000 tons in the year 1961-62, but the outlet was not sustained at the level anticipated from 1962 to 1964, although after that the Japanese market increased to 485,000 tons in the year 1964-65, and to 668,000 tons in 1965-66. (128) Meanwhile production on the South Maitland field continued to rise to 2,182,000 tons in the year 1963-64. Colliery stocks rose by 67,000 tons in the same year to 327,000 tons, of which 126,000 tons of fine coal were not readily marketable. The latest trend (129) on the Maitland field is for sales of coal to Australian consumers to decline steadily as the Greta seam coal is vulnerable not only to oil industry products, but also to cheaper coals from other Northern areas. The former applies particularly to the gas - making industry, one of the major outlets for Maitland coal. The advent of natural gas will only serve to accelerate the decline in demand. Interstate sales, once the biggest single market, continue to decline rapidly. If there had not been a continued growth in overseas exports the position of South Maitland coal would now be desperate. Japan, taking almost one-third of all deliveries is the most important consumer of Greta coal, but unfortunately there are no long-term export contracts, so it is impossible to forecast with accuracy how long this trade will continue and at what level. Much will depend on the producers' ability to hold their prices.

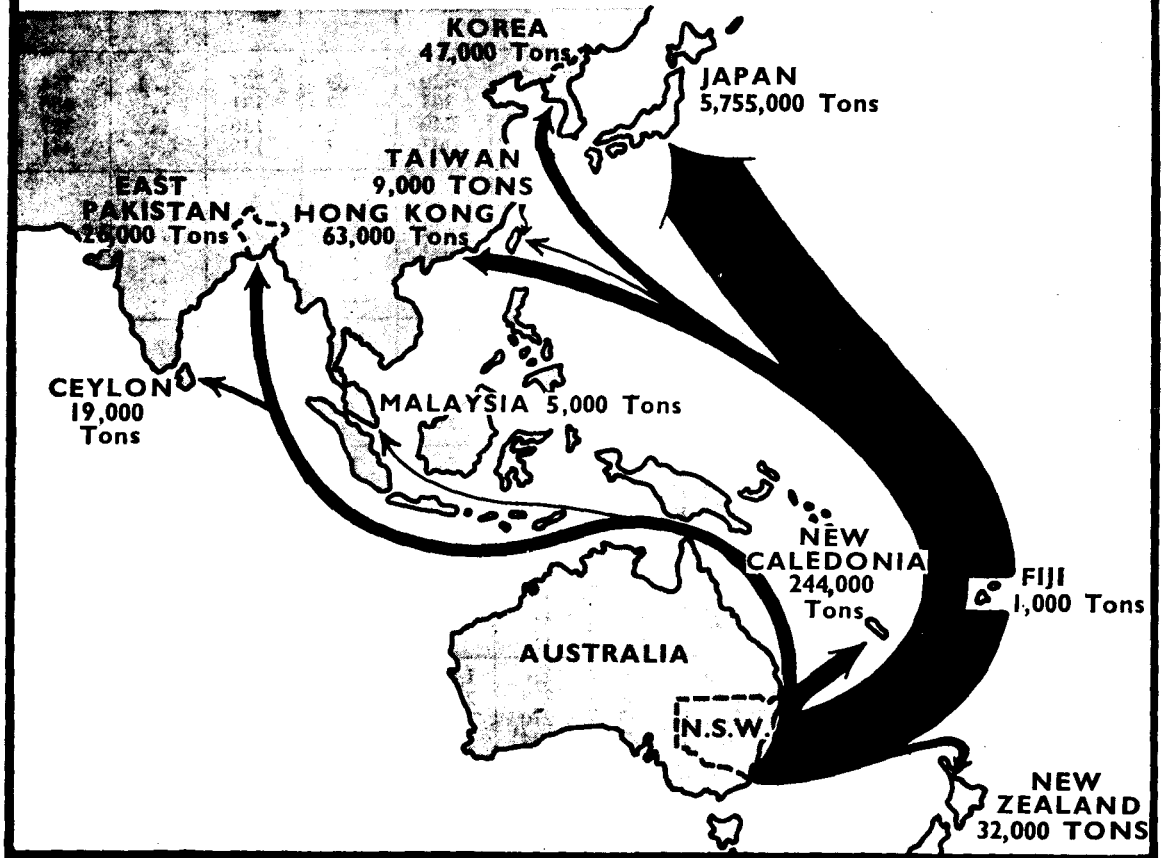
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128. Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66). p.85.

129. 1965-66.

CHART V.

## DISTRIBUTION OF N.S.W. COAL EXPORTS 1965-66



Source: Report, Joint Coal Board (1965-66)

Welfare.

Before the formation of the Joint Coal Board very little concern was shown in the coal mining industry for the welfare of the miner and his family, or for the conditions under which they worked and lived. Housing, most of it sub-standard in nature, was generally provided at low rentals near the collieries; the surroundings were rather drab and depressed; and local councils, with never enough income to improve the areas under their control, carried out essential works only. Working conditions in the mines and living conditions in the coal mining towns were of a low standard. As late as March, 1947, when the Coal Board came into existence, only three of the 140 mines in New South Wales had bath and change houses of a satisfactory nature, and at more than half of the mines there was no adequate drinking water at the pit - top. <sup>(130)</sup> Alan Walker's comments on Cessnock were not complimentary, <sup>(131)</sup> and he was criticised by Justice Davidson as being extreme. <sup>(132)</sup> However, anyone who cares to examine the improvements made in the city during the last twenty years could have no doubt that Walker's criticisms were justified. The number of fine public buildings erected in the Cessnock area during the last twenty years demonstrates two points: first, there must have been a lack of such buildings, and secondly, that a greater civic-mindedness is now evident.

The explanation for the lack of interest shown in the past may in part be the type of industry with which the towns were associated. Extractive industries, such as coal mining, are generally noted for 'mushroom' growth, a short and often violent history, as well as for a tradition of hostility and bitterness. The comparative shortness of mining enterprises has led to a feeling of insecurity and most of those involved in mining are willing to

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130. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.). 1964. 14.1

131. A. Walker, Coaltown: A Social Survey of Cessnock, N.S.W., Melb., 1945.

132. Report, Davidson Commission (1946). p.164

subject cultural and aesthetic interests to material existence. Added to the nature of mining and miners there are the traditional occupational "hazards" of the industry : depression , unemployment, lockouts, strikes and accidents, all of which had been conspicuous features of the South Maitland coalfield.

The relationship between industrial stoppages and discontent on the one hand, and the depressed living and working conditions of the miner, on the other, was recognised when the Joint Coal Board was given the responsibility of promoting the welfare of miners engaged in the coal industry in New South Wales.<sup>(133)</sup> The Board was also empowered to take action for the establishment of sound welfare practices, including the provision of amenities for employees in the coal industry.<sup>(134)</sup> Authority was also given to the Board to collaborate with other organisations in the establishment of health, educational, recreational, housing and other facilities for communities of persons in coal mining districts, and in the promotion of the development and diversification of industry, and of town and regional planning in such districts.<sup>(135)</sup>

To enable this work to be done, the Governments of the Commonwealth and of New South Wales agreed that the Commonwealth should contribute seventy thousand pounds per annum to the Welfare Fund.<sup>(136)</sup> The State was to provide one pound for every pound contributed to the Fund by the Commonwealth up to the stated maximum of seventy thousand pounds. The New South Wales Government's annual contribution to this fund has reached the stated maximum in every financial year since 1948-49, while the

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133. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.). 1964. 14.2

134. Ibid.

135. Ibid.

136. In fact, the Commonwealth Government has not limited its contributions to £70,000.

Federal Government's payments have varied from £280,000 in 1949-50 to £45,000 in 1963-64.<sup>(137)</sup> It was thought that improvements and additions to the existing amenities needed large sums of money initially with a gradual reduction as the more urgent facilities were brought up to standard by the Board. Up to June, 1964, over three million pounds had been spent as follows:

TABLE XXI.

Table showing government contributions to the Welfare Fund, 1947-48 to 1963-64.

Year	Commonwealth Govt.	N.S.W. Govt.
	£	£
1947	70,000	-
1947-48	51,500	51,500
1948-49	140,000	68,002
1949-50	280,000	70,000
1950-51	270,000	70,000
1951-52	258,200	70,000
1952-53	230,000	70,000
1953-54	91,200	70,000
1954-55	70,000	70,000
1955-56	70,000	70,000
1956-57	70,000	70,000
1957-58	60,000	60,000
1958-59	60,000	60,000
1959-60	60,000	60,000
1960-61	60,000	60,000
1961-62	50,000	50,000
1962-63	50,000	50,000
1963-64	45,000	45,000
Total	1,985,900	1,064,502

Source: Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.). 1964. 14.4

The Joint Coal Board, pursuant to the provision of the Coal Industry Act, has itself contributed to the Welfare Fund from monies under its control.<sup>(138)</sup> Allocations to the Welfare Fund from the profits of the Workers' Compensation Fund in 1962-63 totalled £92,739. This paid the cost of the Board's Medical Service, which up to 1954, had been met from the

137. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.). 1964. 14.4

138. Ibid., 14.5

government contributions to the Welfare Fund.<sup>(139)</sup> The Board's payments to the Welfare Fund also provided for the cost of research and investigation which it sponsored into matters affecting health and safety.<sup>(140)</sup> Other expenditure of the Board on matters pertaining to Welfare has been concerned with Continuing Commitments and New Commitments. Continuing Commitments included subsidies to Miners' Building Societies, University Scholarships, Production Grants, expenses incurred in transferring displaced miners, and administrative costs, New Commitments included all individual projects for which the Board was not obliged to make future payments. Under this heading consideration has been given to applications for assistance from local government bodies and properly constituted community organisations for projects in coal mining areas where at least twenty-five per cent of those to benefit from any grant approved were mineworkers and / or their dependants. The maximum grant approved by the Board has been restricted to fifty per cent of the actual cost of the projects,<sup>(141)</sup>

The Board's policy relating to **Welfare Fund** expenditure has not remained constant. Variations have been made to meet changing circumstances. For example, in the early period of the Fund's existence, when post-war conditions caused shortages of manpower and building materials, attention was concentrated on the preparation of ground works for recreational facilities, and grants of one hundred per cent of the cost of approved works not requiring scarce building materials were given. Such works included colliery access roads, land acquisitions, earthworks of various kinds, and tree planting. However, grants of one hundred per cent were given for a short period only and applied to works completed before December 31, 1949, the Board's object being to provide local authorities with an incentive

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139.Ibid., 14.5

140.Ibid.

141.Ibid., 14.6



to proceed as quickly as possible with works which did not conflict with the housing programme of the State Government. (142) Further variations were made in 1953 when a Welfare Advisory Committee was appointed by the Board in each of the four coal mining districts, to advise on the priorities of projects under consideration. Each committee consisted of representatives of the Local Government Authority, the Miners' Federation and the Department of Education, and two prominent citizens, one man and one woman, with the Board's District Mining Engineer as Chairman. All applications for assistance from the Welfare Fund were submitted through the relevant committee for examination and recommendation to the Board. Although valuable assistance was given to the Joint Coal Board by the committees they were disbanded on June 30, 1957 (143) when expenditure was curtailed on items which the Board deemed to have been amply assisted.

The Board anticipated that the greatest use of the Welfare Fund would be in the field of providing or sponsoring community projects, (144) but there were particular problems. The reason for the lower standard of living in coal field areas was the relative poverty of coalfields' local government authorities compared with similar bodies in more prosperous and stable areas. (145) The lack of financial strength was the result of the low rateable value of land around the coalfields' towns and the general lack of confidence prevailing in those places. (146) In order to remedy the situation the Board attempted to raise the living standards by the provision of community projects and by providing local government authorities with financial assistance. For this purpose Grant - in - Aid payments were

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142. Ibid., 14.7  
 143. Ibid., 14.10  
 144. Ibid., 14.14  
 145. Ibid.  
 146. Ibid.

established to increase revenue to the extent of one penny per ton of coal produced within the Shire or Municipal boundaries.<sup>(147)</sup> Under this scheme approximately fifty thousand pounds per year were given to local authorities to spend. The grants were subject to certain conditions: first, not more than one-third of the grant - in - aid received was to be spent on roads, bridges, footways, street lighting and similar work; secondly, an annual statement of account was to be presented to the Board; and thirdly, each local authority was to observe the spirit in which the grant was made, that is, that the grant be for the benefit of mineworkers and the communities in which they lived.<sup>(148)</sup>

Although payments under this scheme had supplemented local councils to the extent of £344,992 by 1953<sup>(149)</sup> the Board was not satisfied that councils were spending the grants received for the purposes intended, and so discontinued the payments. However, this type of support was not the only assistance given for community projects. Grants were approved for a wide range of individual and community services, such as libraries, baby health centres, halls, outdoor recreational facilities, ambulance services and hospital and school equipment. In fact, the Board was willing to support any project which was designed to improve the recreational, cultural and educational standards of mining communities, a generous and wide interpretation of its functions being the general rule. There is ample evidence in the towns of the South Maitland field of the Board's work in promoting welfare schemes, but an extract from the Board's Report (1958-59) will indicate the variety of undertakings completed in that year for which grants from the Welfare Fund were made:

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147. Ibid.

148. Ibid.

149. Ibid.

Cessnock District. (150)

- (a) Improvements to Branch Library at Branxton. Bookstocks for Cessnock Public Library.
- (b) Community halls at Mulbring and Curlewis. Public hall and shelter at Branxton. Improvements to Girl Guides' Hall and Rifle Clubhouse and Target shed at Muswellbrook. A Scout Hall at Weston.
- (c) Children's playground at Cessnock.
- (d) Tennis Clubhouse at Kurri Kurri and Tennis Club Shelter at Greta. Toilets for recreation areas at Paxton and Pelaw Main.
- (e) Improvements to Aged and Invalid Pensioners' Halls at Cessnock and Kurri Kurri.
- (f) Assistance to children of unemployed mineworkers for school fees and text books and entry fees for Abermain Eisteddfod. (151)

Mine facilities before the formation of the Coal Board were relatively unknown, very little having been attempted by mine owners. Initially, the Board investigated the working of the Miners' Welfare Commission in the United Kingdom, where financial assistance had been given to colliery owners for the provision of facilities on colliery property. However, the Board decided against following this procedure in New South Wales by placing the onus on the colliery proprietors. It was the opinion of the Board that the availability of adequate bath and change rooms, crib rooms, shelter for surface workers, clean drinking water, decent sanitation and good working conditions generally were necessities rather than amenities and that the coal industry should follow the lead of other efficient industries which considered such services to be part of the normal productive organisation. Colliery proprietors were informed of the basic standards adopted by the Board, and were required to bring their pits up to at least the minimum standard at their own expense. Naturally the cost of such installations was taken into account by the Board when fixing coal prices, and where the proprietor lacked the financial resources to meet the expenditure involved advances were made to them on commercial terms. (152) Colliery owners

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150. The Board's activities in the Cessnock District go beyond the South Maitland field.

151. Similar details are given by the Board for each District.

152. Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.) 1964. 14.12 ; 14.13.

reacted most favourably to the Board's policy, and by June 30, 1950, considerable progress had been made in providing facilities on the surface and underground. Twenty-seven bath and change houses were under construction and twenty-four had been completed during a period when there was a severe shortage of building materials. (153) Other amenities provided are shown below.

TABLE XXII.

Table showing improvements in facilities at New South Wales coal mines from 1947 to 1950.

	Up to Standard				Under Construction at June, 1950.
	June 1947	June 1948	June 1949	June 1950	
<u>SURFACE</u>					
Bath and change houses	3	8	9	24	27
Sanitation	14	15	24	33	13
Crib rooms	-	2	18	32	16
Weather protection	22	44	49	57	12
Cycle sheds	21	30	37	40	2
Water supply (bathing)	63	74	84	97	--
Water supply (drinking)	60	71	85	97	--
Dust suppression	13	39	47	71	3
Telephone	71	86	100	109	--
<u>UNDERGROUND</u>					
Water reticulation	7	29	43	59	3
Dust suppression	3	29	47	59	5
Crib rooms	-	12	21	28	14
Man transport	12	18	24	30	2
Sanitation	2	6	8	12	1
Telephone	58	74	92	94	--
Tea services	--	21	127	138	--

Note: Number of mines considered in 1947 was 149.

Source: Joint Committee (L.C. and L.A.). 1964.

Further improvements and additions were made in subsequent years and now the provision of these facilities is regarded as an integral part of colliery development, and in fact, some colliery surface areas (e.g., Pelton) indicate a pride altogether lacking in the years before the Coal Board began its supervision of the coal industry. The Board has given a great deal of advice

and practical assistance to the coal companies and as a result of the companies' response, a more harmonious relationship exists between colliery management and workers than was evident at any time before 1947.

### Review.

In its twenty years' supervision of the New South Wales coal industry, the Joint Coal Board has an outstanding record. Up to 1952 the emphasis was on increased production to meet rapid industrial expansion. To achieve this object the Board expanded open-cut mining, took control of prices and distribution, became a colliery proprietor and helped to bring about complete mechanisation of the mines. In the second period, from 1952, there was a steady decline in exports interstate until those exports were on the verge of collapse. On the other hand there has been a compensatory increase in overseas exports, there being a marked upward trend in recent years. In the meantime consumption within New South Wales has risen gradually the output of 1966 being double that of 1946. However, there have been the most significant changes in consumer consumption.

The Board has been vigilant in preparing for exigencies likely to affect the marketing of coal, thus helping to bring stability and prosperity to the coal industry. Experiments have been made in Stowage, but the cost of the work convinced the Board that no good purpose would be achieved by compulsory stowage on the South Maitland field. Instead, the Board gave its attention to mechanical extraction of pillars, seeing this as a way of producing maximum supplies of coal as quickly as possible while reducing the possibility of spontaneous combustion which in the past had caused the irretrievable loss of huge areas of good quality coal.

The amicable relations between management and labour so evident on the coalfields today are in no small way a result of the supervisory work of

the Joint Coal Board. Although the Miners' Federation has not given up the idea of complete nationalisation of the coal industry in New South Wales, and has been a persistent critic of the Coal Board, it cannot be unaware of the untiring efforts of the Board. Much of the suspicion and antagonism which had resulted in bitter industrial struggles on the coalfields have been pushed into the background, and the industry has reached a stage where the disrepute it suffered in former days has largely disappeared. After twenty years of intense activity on behalf of the coal mining industry of New South Wales, the Board is to be congratulated on its success in promoting stability and prosperity on the coalfields of the State and on the South Maitland field in particular where the problems to be overcome were of the greatest concern.

CONCLUSION.

The history of the South Maitland coalfield has been a short but remarkable one. The quality of the coal and the thickness of the seam enabled the field to become the foremost coal producing area in Australia. However, a number of factors combined to depress the industry thus causing New South Wales to lose its interstate market and its miners to work intermittently. The incidence of strikes and lockouts has been high with the result that coal deliveries became unreliable and industrial relations between employers and employees the worst in Australia. The problem of over-production began on the Newcastle field when the mines there could not compete successfully against the better organised mines and the better coal of the South Maitland area. It was not until the onset of the Depression in 1927 that the South Maitland field felt the rigours of unemployment.

The struggle between owners and workers has been a continuing one and some of the great industrial contests have taken place on the Maitland field. The miners' attempts to improve their working conditions during World War II brought them into much disrepute and at the conclusion of the war the industry was in chaos: production was well below requirements and the miners were extremely militant. The Joint Coal Board was appointed to supervise the coal industry although the miners clamoured for nationalisation. The introduction of mechanisation was resolutely opposed by the men until they realised that further resistance would lead to the closure of the South Maitland mines altogether. Having accepted mechanisation reluctantly the miners were quick to realise its advantages. The rate of production increased and the work of the miner became easier. However, the price was high and one which the men had always feared ; thousands of miners lost their jobs and a new way of life had to be started. In that task the men

were aided by the Government and the Joint Coal Board, although the change in work habits could not have occurred if there had not been a big expansion in job opportunities around the Maitland coal area such as the development of power houses and the increase in industry. Mechanisation increased output but this brought another problem : the disposal of New South Wales surplus coal. Traditional outlets to certain domestic users had closed and exports interstate had collapsed. Fortunately for the Maitland field the overseas trade had begun to rise and as it continues to do so the future of Greta seam coal is assured. Nevertheless, the inefficient and uneconomic mines have gone and the tendency is for mining companies to merge in order to make their enterprises financially sound.

Today the towns on the South Maitland field are showing signs of greater prosperity than at any previous stage in their history. The towns no longer have to rely on the vagaries of mining although the income from that industry is still high. Coal production is constant and new markets at home and abroad have been found. Relations between owners and workers have never been better and the physical appearance of the coalfields' towns has not been brighter as the inhabitants take a more active interest in their surroundings. The suspicions of monopoly, the bitterness engendered by strikes and the privations suffered during long periods of unemployment appear to have passed.

There is a new spirit in the coal industry, a spirit of toleration and co-operation and the realisation that industrial harmony, so essential for prosperity, stability and happiness, can only be achieved if men work together for their mutual benefit.



## COAL PRODUCTION AND NUMBER OF MEN EMPLOYED 1900 - 1965.

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Year	Production ('000 tons)	Average Number of Men Employed	Year	Production ('000 tons)	Average Number of Men Employed
1900	5,507	11,333	1936	9,199	14,221
1901	5,968	12,191	1937	10,052	14,981
1902	5,942	12,815	1938	9,571	14,864
1903	6,354	13,917	1939	11,196	16,144
1904	6,020	14,043	1940	9,550	16,717
1905	6,632	14,019	1941	11,766	16,812
1906	7,626	14,929	1942	12,206	16,634
1907	8,658	17,080	1943	11,474	16,808
1908	9,147	17,734	1944	11,043	16,839
1909	7,020	18,168	1945	10,176	17,020
1910	8,174	17,618	1946	11,186	17,008
1911	8,692	17,375	1947	11,683	17,204
1912	9,886	17,795	1948	11,722	17,757
1913	10,414	18,843	1949	10,736	18,245
1914	10,391	18,755	1950	12,798	18,338
1915	9,449	17,959	1951	13,513	18,697
1916	8,127	16,764	1952*	15,022	20,191
1917	8,293	17,197	1953	14,174	19,283
1918	9,063	16,744	1954	15,084	20,210
1919	8,632	18,041	1955	14,736	19,417
1920	10,716	19,800	1956	14,810	17,934
1921	10,793	20,784	1957	15,390	16,749
1922	10,183	21,551	1958	15,851	15,428
1923	10,479	23,037	1959	15,712	13,380
1924	11,618	23,200	1960	17,737	13,315
1925	11,396	24,038	1961	19,021	12,589
1926	10,886	24,125	1962	19,030	12,098
1927	11,126	24,483	1963	18,940	11,492
1928	9,448	21,468	1964	20,699	11,414
1929	7,618	14,577	1965	24,130	11,660
1930	7,093	16,650			
1931	6,432	15,667			
1932	6,784	14,275			
1933	7,118	13,349			
1934	7,873	13,465			
1935	8,699	13,337			

Sources: N.S.W. Department of Mines, Annual Reports;  
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\*From June 1952 number employed as at end of June.

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