

Subsection 4.—Coal

The continuing conversion to oil and gas by the railways, various industries and commercial and household consumers, aided to some extent by the general recession in 1958, resulted in further contraction of the Canadian coal industry.

In 1958 the industry suffered its greatest loss in eight years; production dropped to 11,687,110 tons, 11.4 p.c. from 1957 and 38.9 p.c. from the record of 19,139,112 tons in 1950. Production in 1958 was the lowest since 1912. Of the 1958 output, 66.3 p.c. was bituminous coal, 14.5 p.c. subbituminous and 19.3 p.c. lignite. Nova Scotia contributed about 45 p.c. of the total, Alberta 22 p.c., Saskatchewan 19 p.c., British Columbia and Yukon Territory over 7 p.c. and New Brunswick just under 7 p.c. Whereas Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Alberta, British Columbia and Yukon Territory showed, collectively, a decrease of 14 p.c. compared with 1957, Alberta's change, the greatest in volume, amounted to a decrease of 20.2 p.c., bituminous coal accounting for 68 p.c. of this decrease. For the country as a whole, the production of bituminous coal decreased by about 15 p.c. and of subbituminous coal by about 11 p.c. Saskatchewan's output, consisting entirely of lignite, remained practically unchanged at 2,253,176 tons.

The apparent total consumption of coal in Canada amounted to 25,208,878 tons in 1958, a drop of 20 p.c. from 1957 and of 43.8 p.c. from 1950, the year of record production. Whereas in 1957 just over 60 p.c. of the coal consumed was imported, in 1958 the percentage was down to just over 56 p.c., of which about 89 p.c. was bituminous coal used in Central Canada. Some 4,000,000 tons, or almost 32 p.c. of the total bituminous coal imported, were used in the manufacture of metallurgical coke in Central Canada. Coal imports decreased by almost 26 p.c. from 1957, while the indigenous production decreased by about 11 p.c. Coal sales made by retail fuel dealers decreased 15 p.c. from 1957, railway coal decreased by over 58 p.c., and coal used for industrial purposes by 5.5 p.c. It may be noted that, as a result of dieselization, the annual consumption of coal used by railway locomotives decreased from 11,444,251 tons in 1949 to 1,393,823 in 1958. Whereas in the recent past the industrial coal market seemed to have levelled off, it now appears that this market is again yielding to liquid and gaseous fuels.

The consumption of briquettes, of which about 62 p.c. are made from bituminous coal, decreased sharply from 467,825 tons in 1957 to 239,770 tons in 1958. About 46 p.c. of the amount marketed (54 p.c. of the Canadian output) was used by railways in Western Canada mainly as locomotive fuel. However, the railway market for this type of fuel dropped from 287,000 tons in 1957 to 110,607 tons in 1958 and household and commercial consumption decreased from 180,825 tons to 129,163 tons.

Although the coal industry's economic position continues to be weakened, necessitating the closing down of mines in both Eastern and Western Canada, efforts are being made to improve its competitive position in the market by reducing costs of production, improving quality, and tailoring the types and grades of coal to suit varied consumer requirements. Mechanization of underground mining is progressing, especially in eastern collieries where most of the coal is mined mechanically. The Dosco ripper-type continuous mining machine is used in most of the mines of the Dominion Coal Company Limited on longwall faces. A newly developed machine equipped with a wedge and shearing bar is being used to increase the quantity of coarse coal. Dominion Coal also uses Joy ripper-type machines for development work, and a smaller company uses a similar type machine as well as two auger-type machines for room and pillar mining.

Strip mining, practised in all provinces except Nova Scotia where conditions are not suitable for such mining, also aids in reducing costs. Over 36 p.c. of Canada's 1958 output was produced by this method; the whole of Saskatchewan's lignite output was strip mined, 83.5 p.c. of New Brunswick's, almost 50 p.c. of Alberta's and 12.5 p.c. of British Columbia's. On an average the output per man-day in strip mining increased from 14.3 tons in 1957 to 15.3 tons in 1958, compared with a slight decrease from 2.89 tons to 2.87 for underground mining. The over-all output per man-day increased by over 2 p.c.