

AUSTRALIA AND WAR MUNITIONS

LITTLE or nothing has been told in Canada as to what has been done in our sister Dominions of Australia and New Zealand in the manufacture and delivery of shells and other munitions of war. It may therefore come as a surprise to many to learn that, despite many natural difficulties not known in Great Britain nor in Canada, the Federal Government of Australia has grappled energetically and successfully with the problem and that the resources of the Island Continent are being worked to their utmost in order to render the maximum of aid to the Mother Country. When the call for shells came from Great Britain in the early summer of 1915, the Federal Government immediately appointed a Federal Munitions Committee, and co-operation with the different States of the Commonwealth resulted in each of these forming State Munitions Committees which at once got actively to work. Munition Bills were passed by the Federal Parliament, giving the Government the power to manufacture and contract for the manufacture of munitions, and the different States also passed similar regulations giving them similar powers. The work was thus entered upon in a public and official and thoroughly systematic manner.

Serious Difficulties Overcome.

The great difficulty encountered from the first lay in the fact that Australia, unlike Canada and unlike the United Kingdom, is not a mechanical manufacturing country. The necessary tools and machinery did not exist in that country and the tremendous distances from countries where these necessary supplies could be secured caused much vexatious delay. While this problem was being solved, however, active preparatory steps were taken in all other possible directions.

The leading engineers of the Commonwealth were called into conference to canvass the situation and supply all possible information on which actual progress could be based.

A Metal Exchange was established by the Federal Government to arrange for the control of metals produced in the country, so that all supplies would be readily available as required.

The Munitions Committee was instructed and proceeded with the formation and enrollment of a Munitions Workers Corps, to include all men of military age who are indispensable for the manufacture of munitions, and these men were given certificates to indicate that they have performed their full share of work in defence of their country.

Steel Supply Quickly Found.

The Federal Defence Department early made arrangements for the first supplies of steel for shells, contracting for the necessary quantity at the lowest price from the Broken Hill Proprietary at its Newcastle works. Early in November, 1915, the first steel, after exhaustive Government tests, was shipped to the different States. Samples were also sent to England with a view to supplying Great Britain and her Allies, and arrangements were also made for shipment to New Zealand where there is no steel available.

After due enquiry and consultation with the British War Office, the Federal Munitions Committee decided that the Dominion of Australia could best serve the needs of the Empire by the manufacture of 18-pound high-explosive shell bodies. A price of \$5.05 per shell, including the cost of the steel, was set, and all contractors willing to accept this price were given open contracts to supply **all the shells they could manufacture up to June 30th, 1916**, with the provision that this price might be revised, if so decided by the government, on or after March 31st, 1916. It was also undertaken that the British Government should give three months notice when no more shells were required.

On this basis, 31 tenders had been received up to November 1st, of which 19 had been formally accepted, the balance being still under consideration.

Shell-making at Actual Cost.

These tenders revealed one very significant difference between shell-making in Canada, which is apparently inseparable from huge and unreasonable profit-making, and shell-making in Australia, where national service and the good of the Empire is apparently the first consideration.

Four of the tenders were from the State Governments of New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria and Queensland, the contract for the latter State being undertaken by the State Government Railways Department. In each of these cases the larger part of the work was to be done **AT ACTUAL COST** in Government owned and Government operated shops, most of which are part of the equipment of the Railways Departments and other government departments. As all the railways of Australia are owned and operated by the State, the extent of the work undertaken in Government shops can be readily understood.

West Australia came forward with a unique organization known as the West Australia War Munitions Company, Limited, a company organized under State supervision by leading public and business men of the State, the whole capital of which was furnished by public subscription on the understanding that there should be no dividends, that pay for shells should be accepted at a price as nearly as possibly approximating actual cost, and that any profits remaining after the repayment of the paid-in capital after the War should be devoted to charitable or patriotic purposes incidental to the War. Shares in the company could be secured with as small an amount as five shillings. The spirit animating this company and the success which attended its organization should be a humiliating lesson to Canada, where shell contractors have got rich almost over-night through capitalizing their excessive profits.

Private Firms Decline Profits.

But the State governments were not alone in their offers to manufacture shells at cost. Several