

## STATE OWNERSHIP IN AUSTRALIA

Management of Coal Mines An Example

### INEFFICIENCY MARKED


Political Influence Proved Unfavorable to Economical and Business Like Administration

(Toronto Mail and Empire.)

Scant space was given by those English newspapers which, with "ear to the ground," were eager to make a case for the nationalization of coal mines, then erroneously supposed to be popular, to the testimony of a witness before the Coal Commission in regard to nationalization in New Zealand and Australia. It was shown that industries there nationalized were made inefficient by that political control which is inevitable to nationalization. The workmen had no reason to be industrious. They manifested no energy. They didn't have to. They lost the power of initiative. Jobs crept into the management. The Government was in a permanent state of guess-fish. When a decision was absolutely necessary it didn't dare to make it, says the New York Times.

Heads I Win, Tails Also.

In his book on Australian "Problems and Prospects," Sir Charles G. Wade, Agent-General for New South Wales and sometime its Prime Minister, gives first-hand evidence to the same effect. It might have been supposed that the working of the famous, or once famous, Industrial Arbitration Act in that State would have been sufficiently instructive as to the result of Labor in politics and the Government bedeviled by Labor. The court established to compose labor controversies under the Act held that union laborers must be preferred by



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it to non-union laborers. Of course, the non-union men swarmed into the unions, and the unions forced their members to vote the Labor party ticket. Decisions against employers could be enforced. Decisions against employees not. Such is the case, for that matter, in Great Britain, since the passage of the Trade Disputes Act in 1906 made it impossible to get any satisfaction from trade unions by damages or in tort.

The Industrial Arbitration Act failing, Wage Boards of employers and employees, with an impartial chairman, were tried. According to Sir Charles, the union men would take all the boards could be persuaded to give them and then strike to force the Government to take a hand in the dispute and grant their demands. "The penalty imposed for firmness on the part of the Government was severe," says Sir Charles.



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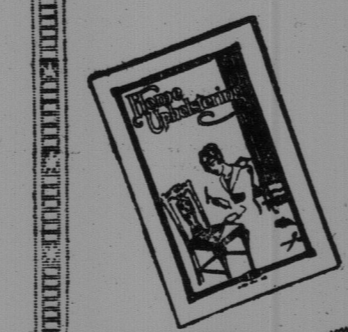
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Strikes were numerous. The law was scorned and the peace broken. What can you expect when Government caters to a class? The results of Government intervention in labor disputes in New South Wales tell us what was to be expected of the Government essays in various industries. From 1911 to 1917 there were sixteen of these. They must have been on a small scale, for the Government seems to have been only some \$100,000 out of pocket by them; but the causes of the failure are significant.

### Political Influence

The management was incompetent because, though the managers were efficient the political influence was continually going over their heads. Unit men were foisted upon the various establishments. It was useless to discourage them, because they were sure to be brought back by the politicians. Discipline broke down. Cost increased. Strikes occurred as in private concerns. "Experience shows," writes Sir Charles, "that if a strike takes place in a Government establishment, Ministerial intervention is enforced and a concession made to the strikers. The Government position is always difficult. If the Ministry resists the demands, votes may be imperilled; if they yield, discipline may be threatened. Where the State is the largest employer of labor and the franchise is adult, any action of the Government which displeases the employee might be resisted not only through the weapon of the strike immediately, but punished at the ballot-box when the general election takes place."

Sir Charles is very proud of Australia. It is the freest and most democratic country in the world to him. Yet his own testimony proves that a State which owns or controls industry, even a State which is an intervenor, in industrial controversies, promotes a class, strays from democracy, injures industrial efficiency, increases cost and diminishes production. The United States and Great Britain should heed the lesson from the Antipodes.