

Special Correspondence

BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Changes in Examination Boards for Miners' Certificates.

In accordance with amendments to the Coal Mines Regulation Act enacted at the last session of the Provincial Legislature, the system of examining officials and men employed in and around the coal mines of the Province as to their competency to hold positions of responsibility will be radically changed from the 1st of July next. For some time Mr. Sloan has been engaged in perfecting the organization which is to supplant that of the past, and today he stated that all arrangements were complete and that everything was in shape to launch the new and less cumbersome method of holding examinations and issuing certificates of competency.

Henry Riard, of Coal Creek, B.C., and James Dixon, of Nanaimo, B.C., are the examiners appointed. Both are well and favorably known among all associated with the coal mining industry in the Province. Mr. Riard has been a resident of Canada for over 20 years, and since 1911 has been the miner's representative on the retiring Board of Examiners. For nearly 20 years he has worked in the coal mines of the Crow's Nest Pass Field, and at the time of the outbreak of the war was employed as Overman at No. 3 Mine, Coal Creek Colliery. No sooner did hostilities break out than he was on his way to Europe, reaching the front in the early stages of the great war, and was in the defensive battles at Verdun. Finally he was taken prisoner and held for 27 months in South Westphalia, where he served as interpreter, bookkeeper, timekeeper and in other capacities in a pyrites and barytes mines. He returned to British Columbia about a month ago and is the holder of a First-Class Certificate of Competency in this Province. James Dixon is mine manager at the Reserve Mine operated by the Western Fuel Company, Nanaimo. For several years Mr. Dixon held important official positions in Great Britain. He has been appraiser for the Board of Examiners of B.C., examining the papers of candidates for Certificates of Competency, and both by training and experience is highly qualified for the duties of his new office. He was a teacher in connection with the Technical Mining Classes conducted at Nanaimo and is the holder of a First-Class Certificate of Competency for British Columbia and Great Britain.

Mr. Sloan feels that he is fortunate in being able to obtain two men, so well qualified in every way, to handle the work of examining officials and men wishing to qualify for employment in the coal mines of the Province. He wishes also to make clear a point, in connection with the new system, over which there appears to be some misunderstanding. These two appointments are all that are required for the operation of the change provided for by the amendments to the Coal Mines Regulation Act of last session. Messrs. Riard and Dixon will act in a dual capacity. Firstly they are members, with the Chief Inspector of Mines as chairman, of the Board of Examiners charged with the examination of candidates for Certificates of Competency as coal mine officials. Secondly, they are members, with the Inspectors of Mines of the various districts as chairmen—the personnel of the chairman depending on

the particular district in which the examination happens to be in progress—of the Board for the examination of candidates for certificates of competency as coal miners. Thus, Mr. Sloan explains, there is really only one Board, supplemented in the manner indicated by permanent officials of the Inspection Staff of the Department of Mines. This Central Board supersedes the top-heavy machinery which has existed consisting of a Mine officials' Board of six members and nine Miners' Board of three members each, and it permits the reduction of the personnel of the Examining Administration from 33 to 3, enabling the Government to dispense with the services of 27 officials, and at the same time gain increased efficiency.

The formation of this Central Board will remove the difficulties encountered in the satisfactory maintenance of nine Board of Examiners for the examination of coal miners and one Board for the examination of Coal Mine Officials. At present the latter Board consists of three coal mine managers, and three representatives of the men from different parts of the Province, together with the Chief Inspector of Mines. Its headquarters are in Nanaimo, B.C. Two of the men's representatives are of the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Field and, in the course of the past five years only on one occasion has one of these representatives been able to attend a Board meeting. While provision was made to pay the travelling expenses of those coming from a distance, this reimbursement by no means covered the loss of time which trips from various parts of the Province to the Coast entailed. The result was that the Board often found it difficult to obtain a quorum. Its duties, too, have been merely of a supervisory character in connection with examinations. It called a meeting, set a date for examinations, appointed outside parties who had to be paid very highly for their services, to prepare examination papers and examine the answers of candidates. The Board then forwarded the results to the Minister of Mines. Mr. Sloan, when considering reorganization, felt that much of this procedure was useless, besides having the effect of leaving functions of vital importance in the hands of a few, it being impossible in many instances, as has been shown, for the men's representatives to be in attendance at regularly called meetings. Under the new arrangement the two examiners just appointed, with the Chief Inspector of Mines as their chairman, will conduct examinations of candidates for Certificates of Competency as officials in coal mines, wherever it may be most convenient to all concerned.

As stated there now are nine Boards of Examiners for the conduct of examination of candidates wishing Certificates of Competency as coal miners. If the old system were to be continued it would be necessary to augment this number by at least five more and, as the extent of coal mining in the province widened, it would be essential to continue adding to the Boards ad infinitum. This point is illustrated by the present situation. Under the unamended Coal Mines Regulation Act most of the collieries had their own Boards for the examination of men, the membership of which consisted of a secretary appointed by Lieut.-Governor-in-Council, a representative of the mine management, and another of the men. This arrangement, no doubt, was satisfactory so long as there were only a few operating mines in the province. Conditions, however, are changed. There now are a considerable number of small collieries and, if each of these were given a Board, to which they were