

Customs Tariff

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I do not know that any of these industries are located in the maritime provinces. There are various Canadian industries that are interested in this. The point on which I put some emphasis when the subject was before the committee of ways and means on June 8 was that this had been studied by the dominion coal board and the board had satisfied itself and satisfied us that this change would have no adverse effect on Canadian producers.

Mr. Winch: That is the point I do not understand, and I was not present at the time. I recently visited Nova Scotia and am interested in the coal mining industry. I understand the use of this commodity is for heat, and that it is largely used on an industrial basis. Is the minister telling us that the report of the board, accepted by the government, was to the effect that the coal of the maritimes is not of such a nature that when made into screenings or dust it can be used for heat purposes, domestic or commercial? I am more interested in the commercial aspect, of course.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): The report does not go that far. There are geographical factors involved here and questions of marketing, I presume. The coal board, which after all has always before it the problem of markets for Nova Scotia coal, has studied this matter and reported to us that this change in the tariff rates on the screenings and dust would have no adverse effect on Canadian production.

Mr. Benidickson: Is this a public document? Has the report been made public?

Mr. Winch: Would the minister explain why a document of this importance has not been made public so we can see the basis on which the recommendation was made and accepted?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): A great deal of information of a departmental nature comes to ministers which is used in giving statements to the house when the original information, in whatever form it may come, is not producible. That happens all the time.

Mr. Winch: Yes, but—

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): The hon. member realizes, I am sure, that when a proposal comes forward with respect to a matter of this kind, for a change in the tariff on coal in any form, we would not think of bringing it to the house without first having consulted the coal board. We consulted the coal board about this, and I have given the house the answer that the coal board has given us in relation to the inquiry we made of them.

Mr. Winch: The point that stumps me is that a change in the tariff is being recommended, as the minister admits, on the basis of information from the coal board, yet we cannot find out anything about the reasoning or purpose of the recommendation of the coal board which will permit the importation into the maritime provinces, a coal mining area, of anthracite coal screenings and dust. We do not understand how it can be said that it will have no effect on the coal mining industry. Surely it is reasonable for a member to ask the minister to tell us just on what basis the coal board says this change will have no effect. Surely we are entitled to know on what basis this finding was made. How can we accept or reject this change without knowing the basis upon which it is being made?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I hope the hon. member is not going to go off on a tangent on this subject. I have made the sequence of events with respect to how this comes about quite clear. This is not a matter that arises from the coal board in the first place. The coal board did not initiate this matter by writing a formal report and sending it to us. We had representations from a number of Canadian producers who are interested in products in the production of which anthracite screenings and dust are employed. They asked for the removal of the tariff of 50 cents per ton. We examined the matter. Obviously there was some merit in the proposal, but before we took any action we consulted the coal board to ascertain whether, having regard to all the factors in the situation, the removal of the tariff of 50 cents per ton on anthracite screenings and dust would have any adverse effect whatsoever on Canadian production. After giving the matter due consideration their report to us was that it would not have any adverse effect on Canadian production. That is the whole story.

Mr. Benidickson: Is there any possibility of the committee obtaining a copy of the report, in view of the fact—

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): No, Mr. Chairman. It was a specific inquiry which was directed by my department to the coal board, and they have given a specific reply. It is not a case, as I pointed out, of some formal written report. It is not a communication of that nature. We would not think of moving in a situation like this without consulting the coal board in relation to the interests of Canadian producers, and nobody in the country is in closer contact with this situation than the dominion coal board.

Mr. Benidickson: I think the minister's words were that this change in the tariff did