

Unemployment in Alberta Coal Mining Areas

we get? If we should appeal for a greater war effort, Mr. Speaker, do you not think people will view any such appeal with a little doubt?

I think this matter should have been attended to long ago. It has been pointed out to me that these men have no hope of relief unless something drastic is done immediately. Not only will these men be out of work, but during that period of time even those who are now working will not be employed full time. Some of the provincial governments are doing what they can to assist in this crisis. For instance, I am informed that the government of Alberta has ceased operating its strip mines and has been buying coal from the Drumheller valley in order to provide jobs for these men. There is also another angle which is exceedingly disturbing. These men who have come back from the army or who have left their farms to dig coal, following the appeal of the government, are now walking the streets looking for jobs. When they endeavour to leave the Drumheller valley to search for employment elsewhere I am told that they cannot obtain releases from selective service. That makes the situation even more difficult. If that is true, as I am informed, we have these men forcibly put out of their jobs, with the selective service refusing to give them permission to leave that area. How are these men to maintain themselves?

I believe the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mitchell) should look into this situation immediately. The astonishing thing about it is that while this condition exists in western Canada it is still the policy of this government to import a great tonnage of coal from the United States. Speaking from memory, I would say that our imports are about 30,000,000 tons a year, and we are producing about 20,000,000 tons. While we are importing a tremendous amount of fuel from the United States, and miners in the United States are working six or seven days a week, here we have forced our men out of employment. That does not look good, so far as the government's policy is concerned, and it certainly will not build up the morale of our Canadian citizens. It is time the government began to establish a national fuel policy for Canada.

We are going to have conditions like this, not only now but to a greater extent as summer approaches, unless the government adopts a proper fuel policy. This is the situation to which I say the government should give immediate and serious attention, so that the men in the area to which I have referred may have some relief.

[Mr. C. E. Johnston.]

Mr. E. G. HANSELL (Macleod): Mr. Speaker, coming from a constituency in which there is a good deal of coal mining, I wish to support the hon. member for Bow River (Mr. Johnston) in what he has said. For the most part, however, my constituency is engaged in mining bituminous coal, and perhaps the situation there is not as acute as it is in the Drumheller mines. Nevertheless in certain parts of my territory we find mines producing domestic coal. It has been brought to my knowledge that many of those local mines have closed down, and the miners have either moved away or had to seek some other type of employment.

I know the problem is not an easy one, particularly when the weather has a habit of playing pranks on us. But the fact that we have had a mild winter does not make any difference to the situation described by the hon. member for Bow River. The fact is that conditions are such, for one reason and, I believe, one reason only, namely, that the government have not yet determined on an adequate and proper national fuel policy. They never have had one; they have never seemed to be trying to get one, and I do not know that there is much hope of the present government ever getting one.

We have unemployment in a time of war. The telegrams referred to by the hon. member reminded me of depression days. That was the kind of telegrams we used to get in those days, and it seems strange that in a time of war, when industry should be working at full capacity, there should be such unemployment in those industries. I support the hon. member, and I say the time is long past due when the government should have announced something of a permanent nature in respect of a fuel policy for Canada.

Motion agreed to, and the house went into committee of supply, Mr. Bradette in the chair.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

359. Departmental administration, \$425,590.
Item stands.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

258. Departmental administration, \$191,595.
Item stands.

Mr. JOHNSTON (Bow River): May I ask through you, Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Labour will make a reply to the questions I raised?

Progress reported.

At eleven o'clock the house adjourned, until Thursday, at 3 o'clock p.m., pursuant to special order made Monday, February 21, 1944.