

Mr. NOSEWORTHY: What is the nature of the operations?

Mr. CRERAR: Some of them are cutting cordwood; others are cutting pit props; others are cutting fence posts and some are doing other lumbering operations.

Mr. NOSEWORTHY: It is useful work?

Mr. CRERAR: Useful and necessary work.

Mr. SHAW: What is the government policy with respect to the sale of posts, pit props, mine ties and so forth? We have a peculiar situation here. The government is not paying wages comparable with those being paid by companies engaged in this work. Are you selling the product at a price comparable with that being charged by those regularly engaged in this type of work?

Mr. CRERAR: The prices at which props or wood or anything else is sold are fixed by the timber controller or the fuel controller, as the case may be. I think that gives the information asked by my hon. friend.

Mr. SHAW: Back in 1942 there developed an acute shortage of pit props, ties and so forth in the minefields of western Canada. I think that shortage was owing to the fact that the price which the producers were able to charge did not enable them to secure labour; in other words, they could not afford to pay the wages asked. At that time the government adopted the policy of paying a subsidy of \$3.50 per thousand lineal feet and at the same time they put conscientious objectors and prisoners of war at work producing these commodities. Then in January, 1944, after more than a sufficient quantity of these products had been produced to meet the demand, without notice the subsidy was terminated. The producers of these products had responded to the request of the government and had produced thousands of lineal feet of mine ties and pit props, but before they could deliver them the government notified them on January 20 that the subsidy had been discontinued as of the previous day.

Mr. CRERAR: I do not wish to interrupt my hon. friend, but I think he is talking about something that is not concerned with this vote. There are no subsidies paid under this vote. For one reason or another a number of people were interned, or a number of prisoners of war were available, and they were put to work cutting cordwood, pit props, lumber, fence posts and so on. The Department of Mines and Resources has control of the forest experimental plots or areas and supervises this work. The material produced is disposed under terms

set by either the timber controller or the fuel controller. No question of subsidy enters into the matter.

Mr. SHAW: I quite recognize that fact.

Mr. CRERAR: My hon. friend has certainly been good throughout the debate, but I doubt if he is in order in discussing this matter on this item.

Mr. SHAW: Then I will put myself in order by taking the minister's own words that these commodities are disposed of by the department over which he presides and I shall develop my argument on that basis. While I shall not say all I had intended to say, I object to the government utilizing prisoners of war or conscientious objectors to produce a commodity which I believe they have put on the market at a lower price than regular producers can afford to offer it at. I have no objection to these people being put to work; in fact I believe it should be done, but it is not right to compete with established businesses upon an unfair basis. Perhaps I may just mention that while it is true that the pit-prop producers, when the \$3.50 subsidy was withdrawn, were allowed to raise their own price by \$3.50, when they tried to deliver their materials to the mines they were told by the mine owners, "We do not want your product, because we can buy it from the government at a lower figure." That in itself justifies the criticism which came from the Alberta Mine Timbers Retail association. They protested most vigorously against the use of this type of labour to produce a commodity which, by reason of the circumstances under which it is produced, can be sold at a lower price than regular producers can afford to charge.

While I recognize that the wartime prices and trade board and the Commodity Prices Stabilization corporation are tied in with this, it is sometimes extremely difficult, especially with the set-up as it is to-day, always to be in order when one discusses it, because there are three organizations involved—the two I have mentioned, and a government department. I object to any policy whereby the government puts prisoners of war and conscientious objectors at work to produce a commodity and thus undersell persons who are regularly engaged in that type of work. The minister suggested that that was not being done. I hope not, but we have reason to believe that it is.

Mr. MITCHELL: Prisoners of war and conscientious objectors come under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labour, and I

[Mr. Crerar.]