

The Address—Mr. Gillis

It appears that the Minister of Trade and Commerce is able to see what is coming, but he seems to be powerless to influence anyone in the government to do something before it hits us.

Mr. MacInnis: Leaving out the Minister of Justice (Mr. Garson).

Mr. Gillis: I am not going into that now. I have a copy of a statement made by the Minister of Trade and Commerce on February 13, 1947, during a speech to the Empire Club in Toronto. This article appeared in the *Toronto Star*. It reads as follows:

"Mr. Howe noted the United Kingdom's plight today as what would result from even a temporary shortage of coal without constant vigilance on the part of those responsible for our continuing coal supplies. Canada may yet be in a similar position. Our coal industry has a responsibility to the nation of no small magnitude," he said.

"The maritime situation," he said, "has presented an increasingly difficult and distressing problem. Unless the problems facing the industry are quickly solved the industry is headed for disaster."

But the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe) in 1947, looking at the fuel situation in Canada, told the Empire Club what could happen in this country in the event of a shortage of coal. I think every member of this house realizes what could happen if coal supplies from the United States were completely cut off. Industry in this country could be closed off, and the railways could be stopped; we depend to that extent on United States fuel.

The point I want to make is that this situation did not creep up overnight on the Canadian National Railways or the government. They were watching the coal situation in 1947. The Minister of Trade and Commerce knew what could happen, but nothing appears to have been done about it.

Then again, I would ask hon. members to let their memories go back to the last session, to June of 1949, July and on to the end of the year. Hon. members will recall that I rose on several occasions and asked the Minister of Transport (Mr. Chevrier) why some of the coal mines in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were not operating at all at the time, but were shut down completely, and why others were working part-time. Hon. members will recall the answers we received at that time. As indicated this afternoon by the hon. member for Inverness-Richmond (Mr. Carroll), when he pointed the matter out to the Minister of Transport, a coal contract in the maritimes between some of the small operators and the Canadian National Railways, for 65,000 tons of coal a year, was discontinued last June when this situation was developing, and these mines were idle.

The alibi given to us at that time by the Minister of Transport was that the railways were not using as much coal, and that was why they were not taking the coal from the maritimes operations. The reason they were not using as much coal was that it was a mild winter. That was rather nonsensical, was it not? It would take as much coal to run an engine in the summer as it would in the winter. But that was the excuse given at that time.

This afternoon the minister says that if our contracts had been filled and our stockpiles kept up we would not have had to curtail traffic. The answer that Mr. Vaughan has to give to this house, as far as I am concerned, is why they did not get their stockpiles and keep them up from mines in the maritime regions that were close, economic and available to them and why their stockpiles were not built up there when mines were working half-time in that area. He has to answer that question, and he has not answered it yet. There is no excuse for the answers we have received from both Mr. Vaughan and Mr. Gordon on this particular question. They are ducking the issue. The whole thing adds up to a faulty fuel policy on the part of the federal government and no policy at all on the part of the Canadian National Railways, except to market United States coal.

There is no excuse at this time for the curtailment of traffic by twenty-five per cent in the maritime provinces. As to the minister's statement that we had to hit everyone in the country to the same extent, in order to equalize the situation, that is nonsense. Why should you have curtailment of services where coal is available either in the west or in the east? I can understand it in central Canada where the railways depend completely on the United States for their fuel.

Yesterday, in a short answer to me, the minister indicated that coal was not available in the maritimes. We have a dominion coal board, and the function of that board is to provide subventions, allocate markets and all that kind of thing. They have that authority under the act that sets them up. The member on that dominion coal board who represents the maritime provinces, clear of the operators, is D. W. Morrison. Just a few days before this house opened, in commenting on this particular question of the availability of coal in the maritimes, Mr. Morrison as a member of the coal board stated that there was no shortage of coal in the maritimes, but that plenty of coal was available. The head of the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation, when questioned, made the same statement, namely, that there was in the maritimes plenty of coal available to the Canadian National Railways