

Coal Production Assistance Act

regret of the hon. member for Inverness-Richmond (Mr. MacEachen) who had intended to speak on second reading of this bill, but he is unable to be present tonight on account of illness. In introducing the resolution prior to the moving of this bill the Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys explained the purpose of the bill, which is to amend the Coal Production Assistance Act.

The amendments contained in the bill are of a minor nature, being to reduce the minimum rate of repayment in respect of a loan made by a mine producing sub-bituminous or lignite coal, which brings a lower price on the market than bituminous or semi-anthracite coal, and furthermore the extension of the agreement made with the Avon Coal Company of New Brunswick.

It is evident, Mr. Speaker, that this bill will by no means solve the serious problems of the coal industry in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Fortunately, in New Brunswick we now have a provincial government that is co-operating with the coal industry and at the present time we have under construction at Grand Lake a thermal generating plant which will use coal. It is estimated that approximately 100,000 additional tons of coal will be used annually when this plant is in operation. This policy is quite different from the policy which existed under the previous provincial government of New Brunswick, when they were building plants to use oil instead of coal.

Before this bill receives second reading I would hope the minister would expose to the house the position of the government on the recommendations contained in the report of the Rand commission. This report has been in the hands of the government for over two years. It was followed by a study by an interdepartmental committee appointed by the government to study the recommendations of that report. When I asked the minister just a few days ago what position the government had taken on the recommendations of the Rand commission, the only reply I could get was that, following the practice of the government such announcements would be made in due course. We feel that two years has been long enough for the government to arrive at a decision.

If this is the position this government intends to take on reports from royal commissions, we ask ourselves what is the use of appointing royal commissions. Is it only a delaying tactic? Is it only being done previous to an election in order to change the minds of the people or to distract them from the serious problems which are affecting a certain industry at a particular time? Therefore I hope that before this bill receives second reading the Minister of Mines and Technical

Surveys will agree to inform the house on the position of the government. After all, it has been promised to this house on three or four different occasions by his two immediate predecessors. I hope we now have a minister who will keep the promise made by his predecessors and will tell us the position of the government on the recommendations contained in the Rand report.

Mr. R. R. Southam (Moose Mountain): Mr. Speaker, on rising to speak on this occasion in support of the amendments to the Coal Production Assistance Act as set out in Bill No. C-64 which is at present before us, I first want to commend our Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys (Mr. Martineau) for the alacrity he has shown in getting this very necessary piece of legislation before the house. I would also like to congratulate the minister on his appointment to the portfolio of mines and technical surveys. I am sure he will enjoy every success in carrying out these new responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, some of the members of this house, and particularly the new ones, may not appreciate my interest in this particular bill, but I would like to point out for the benefit of those members and for the sake of this discussion that approximately 20 per cent of Canada's total coal deposits lie within the boundaries of my great riding of Moose Mountain in southeastern Saskatchewan. This coal industry is situated close to and in the general area of Estevan, Bienfait and Roche Percée and is developed by several well known companies, including the Great West Coal Co. Ltd., the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Coal Co. Ltd., and the Dominion Briquettes and Chemicals Ltd. The former two companies employ 75 to 95 men and are capable of turning out, or have a capacity of 100 railroad cars of coal per day in peak periods. The Dominion Briquette plant turns out the only carbonized briquette manufactured in Canada and is well suited for home and industrial use. This plant has also recently become well known for its high quality Rodeo brand barbecue briquettes, which are finding a very important place in the new and expanding market in North America for this popular necessity.

This lignite industry, like a great many other industries has had to meet the competition that has become so prevalent in this modern world. In this case large sources of gas and oil have been developed in the same general area as the lignite coal deposits, and as a result have complemented or to a large extent have replaced the fuel supply in both the domestic and commercial fields. It is this situation which has not only affected the coal industry adversely in my area of Saskatchewan, but also the industry in other