

DIRECTOR OF COAL OPERATIONS.

Hon. Arthur Meighen (Minister of the Interior) moved the second reading of Bill No. 153 (from the Senate) respecting the Director of Coal Operations.

Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING (Leader of the Opposition): This Bill comes from the Senate?

Mr. MEIGHEN: Yes.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Will the minister kindly explain the nature of it? Copies of the Bill have not been distributed.

Mr. MEIGHEN: The Bill, which is printed in English and French, is very simple. It maintains the effect of the Orders in Council that provided for the control of coal operations in district 18, under Mr. Armstrong. The Orders in Council are all referred to in the Bill, which confirms them and continues their effect in force until the end of the next session of Parliament.

Hon. RODOLPHE LEMIEUX (Maison-neuve): From what I can gather, having followed the discussion the other day in the other Chamber, this Bill will render more secure the operations in the coal mines in the West. By virtue of the Orders in Council those operations were made easier and the threatened coal famine has been avoided, and it is considered, therefore, that this arrangement ought to be continued in view of the many strikes which are impending in the neighbouring part of the American Republic. I understand that there is a gentleman, a Mr. Armstrong, who has been appointed and given certain powers as regards employment of men and that under his direction the operations have been fairly steady and have given satisfaction. I take some interest in this matter. Two years ago I made a motion concerning coal operations. During the summer our people do not think about what may happen in the fall or winter, and I believe we lack any adequate comprehension of the danger with which we are always threatened in having before us a very cold winter. Two years ago, when I made that motion, I thought that the Government ought to take all necessary measures in due time in order to maintain as far as possible the production of coal in those western mines so as to give the settlers and others out there the proportion of coal which must be distributed to every family. I am always nervous at the beginning of winter when I read in the newspapers that there are strikes here

and there and that there is not the proportion of coal which should be distributed in those far-away districts. There is no timber available for fuel purposes and therefore anything the Government can do to promote the operation of the mines in due season ought to be encouraged. I followed the discussion of the Bill the other day, and I approve of this measure.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Would the minister give an explanation of the Bill?

Mr. MEIGHEN: I really could not give as good an explanation as that which has been given by my hon. friend from Maison-neuve (Mr. Lemieux). I might say, however, that Mr. Armstrong has been the director of coal operations, and, by virtue, of an Order in Council, has been, in effect, the arbitrator between the coal operators and the men for the past two or three years. He has established a measure of confidence on both sides. I cannot say that the confidence is complete on either side, because I know both sides have complained, but nevertheless he has established a measure of confidence that makes him the best choice we know of for the work. If there is nobody to intervene then what the hon. member for Maison-neuve predicts is very likely to arise. Coal miners in that district are perhaps the most disposed of any of their class in this Dominion to have differences with the proprietors of the mines, and I would apprehend that we would very soon be in the position he describes unless some provision were made for a continuation of the control for a short time at least.

Mr. CURRIE: If I understand the matter correctly, the result of these Orders in Council is that the miners throughout a large section of the West persist in obtaining very large pay for the coal that is mined, and that the Government has been kind enough to pay them a certain amount for every day that they are idle. In this way these men have taken us by the throat. Is that policy still to be continued? Are the miners to work only an hour a day and get \$2, or \$2.50, or \$1.50 from the Government for being idle the remainder of the day? Are no steps being taken to bring about a condition whereby the mines can operate during the off season and have the coal stored? It must be apparent to the House that one of the difficulties in the way of getting this coal out for the western settlers is that of financing it. Could not the Government assist in financing coal operations in such a way that during the season when coal is not needed it will be mined and stored at