

Supply—Mines and Technical Surveys

Hansard for 1956, as reported on page 5738 the then minister of mines and technical surveys from the province of Alberta, Mr. Prudham, had this to say:

Alberta has been the most depressed section of the Canadian coal industry but this past year has seen at least a slowing up in that trend, although I am not trying to minimize the seriousness of the situation in Alberta. The bituminous mines in this area have been largely dependent on the railway market. The switch to diesel locomotives and to oil burning steam engines continued, causing some further loss of markets.

The reason I am referring to these words is that the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate left the impression that all this had occurred since 1957. I have some statistics to show that the coal mining industry was in a mess when this government took office, and it was because of the steps this government took that in some measure not only the coal mines but also the men who work in them have been rehabilitated so they can live in dignity with their families.

In other words, Mr. Prudham stated in 1956 that there was nothing they could do for the coal mines as far as obtaining a market for Alberta coal was concerned. The hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate, as usual, attacked the Prime Minister when he was absent from the house last evening. He said the Prime Minister made certain promises, and broke them. I should like to tell the hon. member now that I was on a platform in 1957 when the Prime Minister made certain promises. One of those promises was that his party would try to get a market for western coal. That is why I brought to the attention of the committee that in one year we sold 677,000 tons of coke and coal to Japan. That was a promise made; that was a promise kept. This was the kind of promises made by this government, and they have been kept.

The hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate talks about the coal situation, and I think we should get down to some statistics. Let us look at the figures filed by the coal operators in Alberta before the royal commission in 1947. There were 11,042 men employed in the coal industry. Man shifts worked amounted to some 2,464,931 hours and earned some \$25 million. By 1956 the number of men employed had dropped to 4,814. Their wages had dropped to \$16 million. If I had time—and I do not want to take the time—I could show that from 1947 to 1957 while the Liberal government was in office there was a steady decline in the coal industry in Alberta.

Mr. Hellyer: And a steady rise in gas and oil.

Mr. Woolliams: Yes, and I intend to deal with that in a few minutes. But the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate placed all the blame on the government, not on the

competitive nature of the industry. I want to place the blame on the brigadier as far as that is concerned—

An hon. Member: Lance corporal.

Mr. Woolliams: I want to repeat that there were 640,000 tons of coal shipped in one year from Alberta to Japan, coal on which several million dollars of subvention were paid.

Let us look at the situation in 1949. Production in Alberta during that year amounted to 3,484,000 tons. By 1956 it was only 564,249 tons, and that was used by the railways. Man hours had dropped from 754,000 man days worked to 109,000. This was why places such as Canmore, Rosedale and East Coulee were reduced to the poverty I found there when I started to campaign for the first time on behalf of this government.

I should like to describe some of the conditions I found there. I went into homes in East Coulee where they did not have blankets on the beds. The men had exhausted their right to unemployment insurance benefits because, as hon. members know, miners work their shifts in the winter and are laid off in the summer months. Such was the poverty which existed in Canmore and these other places, and it was the step taken by the present government with regard to find a market for coking coal which gave these people employment and a chance to live in dignity with their families.

While I was listening to the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate talking about the coal situation I found it interesting to recall what Mr. Drew told the Liberal government as far back as 1955. He warned them of what was happening. Here is what Mr. Drew said on July 25, 1955:

Undoubtedly the situation is serious. It is likely to become much more serious unless positive and vigorous policies are adopted by the government. The subventions which have been paid by the government and the increased subventions now being asked for have not prevented a reduction in the use of coal as a result of increasing competition by other fuels.

If at that time, or earlier, the Liberal government had taken positive steps to find a market for our coal, or to encourage industry to move to that area, the coal mines of Alberta would not have been in the plight they were in 1957, and they would not be in the shape in which they find themselves today.

There is no doubt that in making criticisms one should bear in mind that constructive work can be done. I have called attention to what has happened in the past. Now I should like to speak for a few moments on what positive steps can be taken. I remember saying in this house, when speaking in