

to ship their coal over these lines at the same rate as the Government coal. I will not say any more on this matter at the present time. I have given my views in public on more than one occasion. I am satisfied that the day is not far distant when the Government will see the necessity of initiating some such policy to develop the industries of the great Northwest.

Mr. MEIGHEN: I am afraid the debate has travelled beyond the limits that I had come prepared to expect. There have been some phases of it, however, that have pertained directly to the Bill and I propose to refer to these first. The Bill provides merely for the retention of the powers of Mr. Armstrong until the end of the next session of the House. I can well recall that troubles in this coal district back over three or four years were about the most frequent and regular of the many difficulties that the Government of the day were confronted with from time to time. Just when things would seem to be going right for a few brief days, the news would come of another strike in district No. 18.

I do not know definitely what the hon. member for Simcoe (Mr. Currie) has in mind in reference to the Government paying men for being idle. There was never anything of that kind done even in the darkest days. I think he must have in mind an occasion some years ago, which can be more fully explained in committee by the hon. member for Elgin (Hon. Mr. Crofters), who at that time was Minister of Labour, when the situation in district No. 18 was pretty near the limits of tragedy, when homes in the West were without coal, a strike was on, and winter was approaching and indeed was upon them. There was a danger so immediate that anything we are confronted with to-day is small in comparison with it. The Minister of Labour of that day, the Hon. Mr. Crofters, went to the district, and after very difficult negotiations he made some arrangement by which the amount in dispute between the men and the operators, or a part of the amount, the extra wages that were claimed for the time they had worked, were for the time being advanced by the Government. The operators, including the Canadian Pacific, which I think was one of the largest, undertook to recompense the Government as time went on at a certain rate per man per day, or on some such basis, and the ultimate result was that the treasury came out nearly square, the money being refunded. I do not know what else can be

[Sir Sam Hughes.]

referred to. Certainly we have never at any time put a premium on idleness, nor have we felt it was our duty in any way to put a bounty in the hands of the coal operators of this district. We have simply sought, and sought with very great success, considering what had to be gone through, by the interposition of Mr. Armstrong to bring together the operators and the men, to keep the mines going and the men working, in order that there might be the maximum production of coal. That has been the one aim, and that aim we have for the most part reached. The other phases of the discussion have no direct connection with the merits of the Bill, but, nevertheless, are of paramount importance to the country.

Mr. CURRIE: There was no agreement to give the men any money in case of idleness?

Mr. MEIGHEN: No. It is argued that we in Ontario and Quebec to-day are in a serious condition as respects the coal supply in the immediate future. That has been true to too great a degree, but I do not know that the circumstances to-day are of such immediate and dire peril as might be inferred from the remarks of some hon. gentlemen. We are not likely to freeze for want of coal in the first half of the month of June, not, at all events, in Ontario and Quebec. Nevertheless, bituminous coal is a vital necessity to the industries of this country even in summertime. A committee of the Government has had the matter in hand. I am not a member of the committee myself, but the minister whom I represent in this discussion, the Hon. Mr. Robertson, is a member. The Minister of Railways is also a member of that committee, and from him particulars as to the work of that committee may be given in committee. I may say though, after speaking with the Minister of Labour only lately, that he stated the situation had of recent days been much relieved, and that very considerable shipments of coal had been made and were forthcoming. His own mind seemed to be much more at ease than it had for some weeks on this subject.

References have been made to the duty of the Government to adopt some policy—the outlines of policies that have been given, I am afraid, are rather vague—that will make available for the people of Ontario and Quebec, the coal of Western Canada and of Eastern Canada. It has been urged that we might finance the operators of Alberta in order that there might be