

TRANSFER OF MINERS TO COAL MINES FROM
OTHER INDUSTRIES

On the orders of the day:

Mr. CLARENCE GILLIS (Cape Breton South): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Labour arising out of two telegrams I have received, one from the steelworkers union and the other from the mineworkers union of Nova Scotia. Copies of these telegrams have been forwarded to the Prime Minister. The telegrams express apprehension if the order regarding the transfer of miners from other essential industries is put into effect immediately without due investigation into the physical capabilities of men so transferred. They are requesting an extension of the date at which the order becomes operative and suggest that a representative of the Department of Labour should proceed to the Pictou shipbuilding plant to conduct such an investigation. Will the minister explain to the house the machinery that will be used in applying this order? Are the miners' union and the steelworkers' union and the shipbuilders' union in Nova Scotia being consulted and working with selective service in the application of the order in council? If not, why not?

Hon. HUMPHREY MITCHELL (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Cape Breton South (Mr. Gillis) for giving me notice of his question regarding the transfer of miners from other essential industries, and in respect of the physical capabilities of men transferred to underground work who are physically incapable, and in regard to those who feel that a transfer even to surface work would be detrimental and would like to have their cases investigated and if necessary a medical examination made.

The hon. member asks as to the machinery which will be used in implementing the government's decision in regard to moving coal miners back to coal mines. The answer, of course, is that our chain of employment offices across Canada will be used. At the moment, as hon. members are aware, the order is not effective and does not become effective until June 1, 1943. However, any men who report for work are being placed. When the compulsory features of the order become effective it will be the duty of each employer to send any ex-coal miners he has in his employ to the employment offices, and it will be the duty of the employee to report. At this stage he will be immediately

[Mr. Graydon.]

placed in the coal mines if there is an opening for him and if he is found to be fit and capable for the work. If there is no immediate opening for him he will be allowed to resume his former employment on a temporary permit. Transportation will be supplied and the other conditions set out in the order in council will go into effect.

If the man objects to the transfer he has a right of appeal to the court of referees, whose decision is final. At this stage if there is any question in regard to physical capabilities, a medical examination will be arranged.

Before the government decided to pass the order in council it was considered by the national selective service advisory board, on which labour is represented, and the board approved the recommendation in principle. A further conference was held with the coal mining industry advisory committee, on which are representatives of coal mine operators and coal mine workers.

As stated in answer to a question raised by the hon. member for Cape Breton South the situation at Pictou, where a large number of men from the coal mines who have engaged in shipbuilding are required to return to coal mining, will be investigated. As a matter of fact arrangements to this end have already been made.

Mr. GILLIS: Would the minister mind explaining who comprise the court of referees?

Mr. MITCHELL: It was established under the unemployment insurance legislation, as my hon. friend no doubt knows. We are using these courts all the time right across Canada as appeal courts for men who feel that their transfer to some more essential industry is not fair or in keeping with the principles underlying the order in council.

Mr. GILLIS: Rather slow for an emergency.

Mr. McGARRY: I wish to ask a question of the minister relating to the fuel shortage so far as the supply of labour is concerned. In the effort to deal with the fuel shortage crisis, does the minister deem it necessary that all men who in peace time were engaged in mining, but are now employed in other industries, should be reverted back to the mines?

Mr. MITCHELL: My reply to my hon. friend is, yes. Further, replying to the hon. member for Cape Breton South, whose question I did not quite catch, but who asked, I believe, whether the board of referees would rule on the case of a man who thinks he has