

Coal Production Assistance Act

Some hon. Members: Carried.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. member for York South.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, I will not take more than a minute of the time of the house in order to say merely this. I do not represent a coal mining district in Canada—

An hon. Member: Then why are you talking?

Mr. Lewis: I am talking because I believe the bill before the house concerns an industry which is and for many years has been of vital interest to the country as a whole. Since the Carroll commission report, from which the legislation which is being amended by this bill originally derived, there has been another commission and another report, namely the Rand report. Prior to the Carroll commission there were a number of other commissions inquiring into the coal industry of the country and, particularly of the Atlantic provinces.

Over the years those of us who have tried to understand the economy of Canada a little bit have read some of these commission reports. We have found that from time to time some legislation is passed patching up some immediate difficulty, making some improvement here, or providing some kind of financial assistance there. However, at no point in the history of the past decades has any government or parliament of this country done that which in my respectful submission is essential, namely to evolve for the coal industry of Canada a program which, as far as human beings can do so, will take care of the industry and of the people dependant on it in a long range way.

Despite all the legislation we have passed, one reads in the papers of continuing and increasing unemployment in the coal areas. One sees, as I did about a year ago when I visited Cape Breton island, that mines are still being closed, with the miners working about half the time during the year. They take turns at being employed and turns at being unemployed. We hear that the industry is still in an unhealthy state, and that we have to continue giving assistance from year to year. I rose merely to express the wish that I am sure is shared by many members in this House of Commons, namely that the time may come when the government of this country will sit down and work out a program for the industry; will seek new markets for the products, and new ways of dealing with coal; and will set up a program that would make the industry a viable one that would not require the kind of assistance that has been required in the past. In the meantime, it requires that help. We will, of course,

[Mr. Fairweather.]

support the bill before the house as it improves the situation a little bit more, just as legislation has done over the years.

When another matter comes before the house in the next day or two I hope that some more long range plans will be presented to deal not only with the whole of the Atlantic provinces but with the coal industry, which is the basis of the principle of this bill.

Some hon. Members: Carried.

Mr. Speaker: I must warn hon. members that if the minister speaks now he will close the debate.

Some hon. Members: Carried.

Hon. Paul Martineau (Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys): Mr. Speaker, I wish to be very brief at this time. First, may I thank all hon. members who have participated in this debate. Their contributions and suggestions have been most useful. I regret that the hon. member for Inverness-Richmond (Mr. MacEachen) is unavoidably absent tonight because I know he would have had certain points of view to put before the house on this matter.

With regard to remarks of the hon. member for Gloucester (Mr. Robichaud), the purpose of the present legislation, as he mentioned, is to implement minor amendments to the Coal Production Assistance Act. These amendments are designed specifically to help those companies which have already contracted loans under the terms of the act to meet their commitments with greater ease and to fulfil more adequately the purpose of the legislation, that of providing financial means for the operators to produce coal more efficiently. The hon. members for Cape Breton North and Victoria (Mr. Muir), Moose Mountain (Mr. Southam), Pictou (Mr. MacEwan), Macleod (Mr. Kindt) and Royal (Mr. Fairweather), who spoke on the bill, have shown by specific examples how this legislation has helped the coal industry in their respective constituencies, areas or provinces.

I should like to refer in a little more detail to the remarks made by the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Herridge). Although under the present bill we are providing financial assistance to coal operators, he may be assured that we are still committed to the system of free enterprise. I can assure the hon. member that the bill, far from impairing that system or philosophy, tends on the contrary to reinforce it because it provides a means for private operators to produce more coal at cheaper rates and also to assist them in developing proper markets. The hon. member for Kootenay West was a bit worried