Monetary Times

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of Canada

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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

FUEL SITUATION CRITICAL FOR CANADA

THE possibility of a widespread strike of coal miners in the United States, coupled with the fact that the supply of coal already is none too large, again brings home to us the unsatisfactory position of a large part of Canada as regards fuel supply. Thoughtful Canadians who have given this question consideration continually urge the necessity of developing all domestic resources; A. V. White, consulting engineer of the Commission of Conservation, has especially advocated the further use of the water powers of the St. Lawrence. Our large purchases of coal in the United States are one of the most important factors keeping New York exchange at a high premium.

A circular issued a few days ago by the Canadian Railway War Board advises that fuel stocks be laid in just as early as possible. The circular says in part:—

"Canada's main sources of coal supply are, roughly, four in number. The Pacific coast is supplied from Nanaimo, Washington, and, to some extent, Alberta; the prairie provinces receive their logical supply from the Alberta and British Columbia mines; sections of eastern Canada are taken care of by the Nova Scotia fields; but the chief supply, and almost the entire amount of anthracite coal, comes from the various mining regions of the United States. As it is in eastern Canada that the density of population and industrial development is highest, a coal shortage in the United States has very serious aspects for a great proportion of Canadians, and for a heavy percentage of their industries.

"The coal supply situation on the Pacific coast and in the maritime provinces may be dismissed as being reasonably satisfactory. On the prairies a serious shortage exists. The fuel year in the Alberta coal-fields commences on April first. Last year, which was by no means a record year for coal-producing efficiency in the west, there had been shipped between April first and the second week in September 1,313,421 tons of 'commercial' coal—as distinguished from coal for railway service. In the same period of the present year only 529,522 tons of 'commercial' coal had been shipped. The volume of railway coal shipped was equally low by comparison. This shortage on the prairies was, and is, extremely serious. In pre-war years a certain amount of anthracite found its way to the Canadian west, via Ontario, from the American fields. This movement was cut off by war conditions last year, and this to Canada was thus increased materially, so that to-day there are approximately 43,000 Canadian box-cars in the United States as against 19,000 American box-cars in Canada; a net balance of 24,000 cars due Canada and unlikely for some time to be available to this country. This figure, it should be observed, is equal to over 16 per cent. of the total Canadian box-car supply.

"While this loss of cars to the United States has been checked and will ultimately be rectified by the return of the Canadian cars, serious additions to the volume of traffic to be handled by the Canadian roads are imminent. The shipment of coal from the western Canadian mines since the beginning of the fuel year, on April 1st, is to date, only one-third of the amount forwarded in the same period year. Movement by rail is correspondingly delayed and cars will be detained in the west accordingly. More serious still is the prospect that American ports will be closed this winter to Canadian exports. Sixty per cent. of Canada's export grain usually passes out by American ports. This will remain to be handled across Canada to Montreal, St. John and Halifax in Canadian box-cars—adding one hundred and fifty per cent. to the volume of export grain now taken care of through the ports of the Dominion, and adding much more than 150 per cent. in terms of car-mileage.

"The seven thousand new freight cars built since last year are not one-third of the number now detained in the United States. The additional requirements for coal carrying and for the wheat trade—if the proposed American action is taken—will be extremely serious. At this time of year too, comes a heavy movement of perishable farm produce, moving before the cold weather will necessitate using special cars. Yet, in the face of these factors, the average load per car in Canada has fallen three tons!

"The very serious attention of all Canadian shippers is called to this fact. It means that where eight cars were formerly required, nine are now necessary! Where 160 tons of tare-weight were thrown upon an engine for every 216 net tons of freight, there are now 180 tons! Labor scarcity, once the excuse for the light loading, is no longer a fact. It is important in the interests of the country, that the heavier loading practices be restored. Railway efficiency is part of your factory, mine, mill or warehouse efficiency!"