

Private Bills

of the private members of this house, and we would be assisting the government in coming to a conclusion about those matters which it has not yet considered.

Mr. R. C. Coates (Cumberland): I should like to take a few minutes of the time of the house to make a few comments on this bill. First of all, I should like to indicate my surprise and shock at the attitude of the hon. member for Cochrane (Mr. Habel) when he spoke for the official opposition and indicated his opposition to this bill. In effect, the official opposition is saying that they oppose this 20 per cent preference provided for Nova Scotia coal which is moving to government institutions throughout Canada. This attitude is quite a shock to me because I would have thought that with the situation as it is at the moment the official opposition would be more than willing to adopt the attitude that this bill should be referred to the committee on banking and commerce in the hope that consideration would be given to increasing this 20 per cent preference rather than eliminating it altogether. The elimination of this preference would only result in far greater damage to an industry that is now having tremendous difficulty in finding markets.

I know when some people read this bill they might feel that the 20 per cent preference being provided for Nova Scotia coal is rather high. When we consider the tremendous benefit that the sale of Nova Scotia coal has on the economy of Nova Scotia, and indeed on the whole of Canada, I believe people would be more than willing to continue to provide this preference and, under present circumstances, give serious consideration to increasing it.

One of the main reasons why this 20 per cent preference has not accomplished all it might have accomplished is the tremendous transportation costs which coal is obliged to bear in order to arrive at the market where it is in demand. From the attitude of the hon. member for Cochrane I am forced to assume that he would be much happier if thermal plants and government institutions in Ontario and Quebec were to use United States coal. Certainly from his words it would be most difficult to assume otherwise. In his statement he said that this was the view of the official opposition. We must therefore assume that this is the view of Liberal members in general, namely to withhold this preference from Nova Scotia, even though we on this side of the house at least are aware of the tremendous difficulties being faced at the present time, with the closure of the mines imminent.

I should like also to say that it was this government that increased this preference from the former 10 per cent to the present 20 per cent, thus indicating our belief that at least 20 per cent in the way of preference should be placed on coal. Indeed, it is my feeling that an even greater preference should be provided at the present time.

I should like to go further and say that this bill in the form in which it is presented, contains many of the things that I feel are necessary. Certainly we have undertaken to do many of these things through treasury board and by other means. However, as the mover pointed out, there are many purchases made under the \$15,000 limit to which there is no positive direction given to those making the purchase on the 10 per cent preference that we feel is so necessary.

I can point out a specific example in my own constituency in which a great deal of reinforced steel is produced and sold to contractors in the Atlantic area. When I was first elected I immediately ran into the problem of European steel coming in and usurping a great deal of the market that had once been available to this firm that provided steady employment for over 100 of my constituents. This European steel was coming in and was being used in public works projects and in projects under contract to the Department of Transport. I learned of this situation and brought it to the attention of the departments. They acted quickly and saw to it that a 10 per cent preference was provided. In many instances I found this European steel was coming in at a price that even a 10 per cent preference could not look after. It could almost be said that it was being dumped in the country, having regard to the price being asked for it in comparison with the cost of production in Canada. However, I will say this. The departments of government acted quickly and efficiently, and today I am happy to report that on most of the contracts that are let in the Atlantic area Canadian materials are again being used. Certainly from an employment standpoint, from an income tax standpoint and in fact from every standpoint it is wise to use Canadian goods whenever possible.

I am certainly happy to support this bill and to support the recommendation that it be referred to the banking and commerce committee. Again I want to say how greatly shocked and alarmed I was to learn that the official opposition opposes this bill and opposes in principle the 20 per cent preference that is at present given to coal.

Mr. Habel: Never.

An hon. Member: You said it.