

THE COAL QUESTION.

A Convincing Speech from a Hon. Member of the Legislature.

At the close of the Budget debate, Mr. Cameron (Huron) said that not long ago the gentleman who spoke last (Mr. Hackett) was a violent opponent of the policy as being injurious to Prince Edward Island. It was unavailing of the Minister of Public Works to allude to the change of opinions on the part of the member for Quebec East (Mr. Laurier), even if there had been such a change, for on either side of the hon. Minister were his own colleagues, who were at one time free traders. The Minister differed among themselves on the subject of coal duties. The Minister of Public Works admitted that Canadians paid all the duty, the Minister of Finance said they only paid half of it, while the Minister of Railways said he could prove that every cent of the duty was paid by the producers on the other side. The Ministers should meet together and find a platform on which they could agree. He (Mr. Cameron) proposed challenging the statement of the Minister of Railways to prove by figures that the tables he had submitted to the House were cooked by the person who prepared them for the purpose of such an argument. As this argument was that because we imposed a duty on coal the price of the imported article was necessarily reduced by the amount of duty, to make it worth anything he must show that the competition was much keener than before the tariff. The sales of Nova Scotia coal in 1876 were 881,186; in 1878, 963,611 tons. In 1879 the sales were 688,624, and in 1880 amounted to 954,109 tons, and in 1881 to 1,034,900 tons. This showed that in 1880, with the N. P. in full force, the increase was 73,550 tons over 1876, and that in 1881, with the N. P. still in full force, and with the country prosperous, as hon. gentlemen opposite claimed, it was 153,694 tons over those in 1876. There was at the same time a marvellous increase in the importation of American coal into Ontario. The 1877 imports were 470,715 tons; 1878, 588,412 tons; 1879, 643,285 tons; 1880, 667,164 tons; and in 1881, when the marvellous competition from the Nova Scotia was in full force, the imports from the United States were 810,970 tons. In other words, we imported 220,558 tons more in 1878, before the National Policy was in force. Take the prices of coal in the three great markets of the United States—they made no distinction in them; they asked their price and they got it, no matter where the coal was to be sent. On the first day of every month the price of coal was fixed by the producers and it remained at that for the rest of the month. The three great markets were Buffalo, Cleveland and Oswego. The figures he quoted were from the Secretary of the Boards of Trade of Cleveland and Oswego, and manager for the coal dealers in Buffalo. The price of the best hard coal in Buffalo, where the price of that article was regulated in 1876, was \$4.80; the price now was \$3.55 a long ton, \$4.96 for a short ton. To show the utter dishonesty of the Minister of Railways' figures, whoever had prepared them, it was only necessary to mention that he quoted for a long ton in the United States when it was well known that coal was sold here by the short ton. In 1877 the price was \$4.60 per short ton, in 1878 \$4.40, in 1879 the price went down to \$3.05, in 1880 it was \$4.80, and in 1881 \$4.95, or fifteen cents a ton more than in 1880. For the last three years, as would be seen, the price had gone up regularly. If increased duty stimulated the production, making competition greater and so reducing the price, how could this increase be explained? Take the different kinds of coal, and this was a distinction which the hon. Minister cautiously failed to make. The only fair way to make a comparison was to compare the prices of each grade on both sides of the line. The Minister of Railways spoke as if our increased output of coal, which, for all the boasted advantages of the National Policy, was only seventy-three tons over the output in 1873, had the effect of reducing the price of American coal. He might as well say it had the effect of reducing the price throughout the world. Take the price of grate coal in the market in Buffalo. In 1877 the price was \$4.45 per ton; in 1878, \$4.55; in 1879, \$2.90; in 1880, \$4.55; in 1881, \$4.65; showing a higher figure the last year than it has reached in six years. The same was true to about an equal extent of the other varieties of coal at different points. In the table he had quoted the Minister of Railways had quoted the price in 1878 at \$3.85, but he left out 1879. Why? Because the price dipped down that year. In 1880 the price quoted by the Minister was \$3.04 and in 1881 \$4.25. This table was wholly wrong, for in 1880 the price was \$4.55 or \$1.01 more than quoted by the Minister. The hon. Minister made a very interesting calculation. He put the price of coal at Oswego at \$5.75, the freight from Oswego to Belleville 40 cents, warehouse dues 28 cents, and if the duty was paid, \$6.93, allowing no profit to the dealer while the price was \$5.50, showing that the price of coal was not increased by the duty. But in order to make his argument good, the Minister quoted coal at Oswego \$1.50 beyond the price he himself had quoted when trying to prove something else. In order to prove his position, the hon. Minister had put the price of coal in the American market at \$1.50 more than his quotation when he tried to prove that competition had reduced the price of coal. The hon. gentleman was unable to prove to the House that at any time in 1880 or 1881 did coal sell in Oswego by the short ton at anything like the price he had stated. He read from the Secretary of the Board of Trade saying that the tariff did not affect the price of coal there, as the duty necessarily fell upon the consumer. During every year from 1873 down to 1882 the price of coal had increased, except in 1879, when it went down to a very low figure in the United States. The Minister of Railways, regardless of the facts, had tried to make the people of Ontario believe that they did not pay the tax on the breadstuffs sent to the Lower Provinces, while he tried to persuade the people of the Maritime Provinces that the tax on coal came out of the pockets of the people of Ontario. He thought he had now shown that the coal and flour duties were illusory

and a burden on the people, and with an abiding faith in the common sense of the people of the country he looked forward with confidence to the result of the approaching appeal to the country. (Cheers.)



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