

*Supply—Mines and Technical Surveys*

**Mr. Starr:** If they come from straightforward people.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** It was a very different answer from the answer he gave to the delegation that he let go home believing that he meant what he said.

Here is the question and the answer. This is on pages 5096 and 5097 of *Hansard* for May 20, 1961:

Hon. J. W. Pickersgill (Bonavista-Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Minister of Labour. Did he recently give an assurance to a delegation from Cape Breton that if Dosco would keep the coal mines open the government would pay the bill?

That is the question and those are the exact words of Mr. Shea's report. Here is the answer:

Hon. Michael Starr (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, up until now we have been paying subventions on the coal sold in that area by the mines, and my statement related to those subventions.

Apparently the reporter did not understand it that way; apparently the people who were there did not understand it that way. There is nothing at all about subventions in the words attributed to the minister. He said, "If they will keep the mines open, we will pay the bills". The bills are not subventions; the bills are the cost of keeping the mines open. Then I asked this question:

Mr. Pickersgill: Will the minister comment on a statement which appears in the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* to the effect that labour minister Starr said:

The big problem is to convince the company to keep the mines open. We will pay the bill.

We all remember what happened at that point. The Minister of Finance turned around and glared at the Minister of Labour, and here is what the Minister of Labour then said:

Mr. Starr: Mr. Speaker, the keeping of the mines open is, of course, a decision of management. We would like to see the mines kept open if possible. We have paid subvention bills and are prepared to continue to pay them if they keep those mines open.

Mr. Pickersgill: May I ask a further supplementary question. Does the minister mean that the government is prepared to pay the cost of keeping the mines open?

At that point the Speaker intervened and there was no answer given to that question, which was the original question. This, of course, is typical of the way in which this government treat these problems. They give an assurance to the public and get the delegation away out of Ottawa and back to Cape Breton, and then they repudiate it in that indirect fashion here in the house. That is really what happened in this case. Those people went away thinking that if Dosco kept the mines open, the government would pay the bill.

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

I do not think there is any doubt that the Dominion Coal Company would have kept those mines open if the government had been prepared to pay the bill.

**Some hon. Members:** No.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** I am not saying that should have been done, but I am saying that is what they were told. We were told something else too, after the Minister of Finance had glared at the Minister of Labour.

The plain fact of the matter is that instead of making up their minds months ago that they would either let these mines close or that they would pay the cost of keeping them open, this government tried to keep fooling the people and fooling the people, and then finally they let two of the three mines close.

I say it is a good thing they did not let the other one close. But when you compare that with what was promised by the Prime Minister, not in the first election but later on between the elections—no; this was in fact before the first election; this was on Thursday, May 21, 1957. This is from the *Cape Breton Post* and these are the words of the present Prime Minister:

National leader of the Progressive Conservative party, John Diefenbaker, Wednesday night, told an overflow political rally at the Riverview high school here that a national fuel policy is high on the program of the national policy.

Then later on there is the following paragraph:

Implementation of a national fuel policy and its particular relation to Nova Scotia was discussed by Mr. Diefenbaker who stressed the important need of aid to the coal mines of the province.

That was in 1957, and we are still waiting for that policy. Indeed, the minister told us yesterday—I had better use his exact words—that you could not have such a policy. After four years of promises and evasion the minister says:

In presenting these estimates to this committee, I regret to report that the coal situation in Canada in the past year has grown more and more difficult as the competition from other fuels has intensified.

Well, that is true; everybody recognizes that is true:

It is becoming clear that the long established policy of providing assistance in the amount necessary to enable Canadian coal to meet the competition of imported coal in the markets of central Canada is no longer sufficient.

That is what we have been saying since 1958. That is one of the reasons why we had this thermal power policy:

The chief competition in these central markets and also in the home markets is no longer imported coal but other fuels.

It is open to question whether under the present rapidly changing competitive conditions a sound basis can be found for a long range basic policy.