

Report Holds Lignite Not Commercial Fuel; Committee to Consider

A committee of the Legislature will be named to consider the Ontario Fuel Commission's report on lignite, which was tabled in the House yesterday. Appointed last October, the three-man commission headed by Dr. H. B. Speakman, presented to the Government a voluminous report covering all phases of the subject.

In its summary the commission found:

That raw lignite can only be used at the deposit and it is not a commercial fuel. When processed, or used with bituminous coal, it can be used for domestic and certain industrial purposes, provided the economic factors involved are sufficiently favorable. Processed lignite should not be regarded as a potential fuel for use in locomotives of the Government-owned railway, the T. & N.O.

That the cost of completion of the experimental plant and a nine-months' program of mining, processing and market investigation would be \$215,000. Up to the end of 1943 total Government expenditure was \$855,851.

Reliable Data Expected.

That with adequate technical and managerial supervision this program should produce reliable data in regard to the characteristics of the Northern Ontario deposit, mining problems and costs, processing methods, consumer reaction in the industrial and commercial fields, provided the fuel is sold at a cost which is based on estimates for a commercial operation.

As far as estimates of production cost are concerned, the committee says they vary from \$4 to \$5.30 a ton. At the lower figure processed lignite could compete with coal at prevailing prices, but at the higher figure it could not.

In its concluding remarks the commission points out that the fuel problems for 1944-45 are not clear and it is not known whether the lignite development should still be regarded as a potential fuel reserve for Northern Ontario. Production on a commercial scale could not be achieved before the season of 1945-46.

First Detailed Facts.

Premier George Drew, in tabling the report, said the findings of the commission gave the Legislature the first detailed factual information that has been available to this or any other Government. A committee of 15, seven from the Government, five from the C.C.F., two from the Liberals and one from the

Labor Progressives, was suggested by the Premier to study the report. The Premier proposed Kelso Roberts (P.C. St. Patrick) as chairman.

The Opposition groups in the House offered no objection to this course. C.C.F. Leader E. B. Jolliffe asked if the scope of the committee would be limited to lignite or whether other related fuels could be considered. The Premier replied that the report before the House dealt only with lignite and this would be the sole subject up for study.

Mines Minister Leslie Frost gave a lengthy review of the lignite situation and what had been done in past years. It was with the idea of relieving what appeared to be an imminent fuel shortage this winter that steps were taken to investigate the possibilities of lignite being used in such an emergency, Mr. Frost said.

Deposit on Abitibi River.

The lignite deposit in Northern Ontario is situated on the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway on the west bank of the Abitibi River, 126 miles north of Cochrane and 380 miles north of North Bay. The raw lignite is 50 per cent moisture. For the same available heat units as United States bituminous coal, 1.6 times the weight and 2.5 times the volume of processed lignite is required.

Premier Drew said the three interim reports prepared by the Commission of Mining and the report from the Fuel Commission were the result of long and detailed study of the problems under investigation.

"There is some misunderstanding as to the functions of a commission and the part such commissions play," said the Premier. "It does not imply shelving of responsibility by a Government. I take no offense at the criticism often directed at Royal commissions, but I wish to point out that there are two types of Royal commissions. One brings together people with special qualifications for a particular task who are able to devote time and study to it, and then bring an analysis before the Government.

"There is another type which often has fallen into disrepute," continued the Premier. "The very useful power of creating a Royal commission has been abused when a commission is set up to which facts are referred for the purpose of efficiently embalming them. In these cases the matters referred to them should have been referred to the Legislature."

Won't Evade Responsibility.

An Opposition member murmured "Hong Kong," referring to the Royal Commission inquiry on this matter, and the Premier nodded emphatically.

"Yes, Hong Kong," he agreed. "We will never resort to that type of a commission to evade responsibility here. But there are matters which, with all respect to members of the Legislature, they are not in a position to deal with. There is the matter of the time needed, and there are certain subjects which members have not the special skill to permit them to arrive at the basic conclusions so necessary to a decision."

Neither the Mines Commission nor the Fuel Commission was an administrative body in any sense, the Premier said. Their function was to inquire into certain facts and report back to the Government.

Recommendations Clear.

"Now may I say with regard to the three preliminary interim reports which were tabled yesterday from the Mining Commission, that they have presented to us very clear recommendations regarding the different phases of the activities in this Province related to the mining industry, covering a very wide field, not merely mining itself, but the financing of mining, education in relation to mining, health in relation to mining, and so on. It would have been extremely difficult to have achieved the same results by the appointment of any parliamentary committee," he continued.

"I do want, on this occasion, to pay tribute to the members of the Mining Commission, to the chairman, Mr. Urquhart, and all the members of that Commission, for the splendid work they have done in conducting this impartial inquiry into every aspect of our mining problems. They have not finished their work. They still have much to do, but what they have presented will make it possible for us to deal with certain aspects of that problem immediately.

Report Praised.

At this point the Premier referred to the decision to reopen the school of mines at Haileybury as a technical institute of mining and metallurgy.

"There is a very proper and useful place for a Royal Commission when it is properly constituted on an impartial basis," the Premier said.

The Premier praised the work of the Fuel Commission, declaring that it was the first time a Government in Ontario had been given a decision on the basis of facts "regarding this most important but intricate problem."