

Statement of John D. Battle, Executive Secretary of the National Coal Association [excerpts], in Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs, House of Representatives (74th Cong., 1st Sess., 1935).

[...] Appearing here today as spokesman of the bituminous coal industry of this Nation, I wish to make it clear that the coal industry is not opposed to the Government constructing dams designed to prevent soil erosion; is not opposed to the Government erecting dams to control flood waters; neither is it opposed to construction of dams to improve navigation on the rivers of this country. There is just one phase of this program to which we object most seriously, and that is the Federal Government spending the taxpayers' money for the erection of power plants which, as we feel, are not needed for the very simple reason that generally, throughout the country, there is an abundance of power capacity, and particularly in the Tennessee Valley region there is already an excess of capacity. We are at a loss to understand how the power generated at Government-built plants can be disposed of except to take the place of privately owned power plants now supplying that community – the great majority of which plants use coal in the creation of that power.

A great deal has been said about the social experiment. We approach this subject from the standpoint first of the employment of our people. There is a human element involved. There are about 400,000 men working in the coal mines of this country. It is their only means of livelihood. The program, as put forward by the Government, is calculated, in our opinion, to destroy the jobs of a number of these men. When the jobs are destroyed there is no sale for the coal, the investment in the property decreases or vanishes. Something like 65 percent of each dollar paid for the cost of producing coal goes to the mine worker; 20 or 25 percent of the dollar goes to the purchase of material and supplies; and there is a considerable portion of that sum that is paid indirectly to the worker employed in those industries supplying the mines.

I wish to call your attention to the fact that we cannot account for those employed by coal mines by the mere number of those directly engaged in mining operations. We have a situation analogous to a soldier in the trenches; to keep a man in the coal mines requires several people behind him; and when we consider those indirectly employed, this industry is directly responsible for several million peoples' livelihood. There are those who are not only direct dependents of the workers who are involved, but all of those engaged in the distribution of coal throughout the Nation, as well as those engaged in industries that supply the coal mining companies with the materials, who are also vitally affected.

It is our estimate that for each ton of coal displaced by some form of energy or fuel it means a loss of a day's work to some person either employed directly or indirectly in the bituminous coal-mining industry.

I also wish to call attention to the fact that the bituminous coal-mining industry is the only great natural resource industry that has gone along 100 percent with the administration in its program to reduce unemployment, to try to put people back to work. [...] it is greatly distressed over one branch of the Government cooperating with industry toward stabilization, while other branches of the Government are putting forth projects that, in our opinion, will eventually destroy a great portion of this industry.

[...] I repeat, we did not come here to go into very great detail, from a technical standpoint, on this proposition. I merely wanted to bring you an idea, an idea that this great

industry feels that it is being shoved off to one side by our own Government. We do not believe the Government has ever realized the serious implication of what it is doing. I speak, as I say, in terms of an industry, not just a section. T.V.A. exemplifies what it has been proposed to do throughout the Nation.

There is no disposition on the part of this industry to the electrification of America. We rather feel that there is a need for an extension of electrical current to the rural regions. But we do not feel that it is the function of the Federal Government to use the taxpayers' money for the promotion of these projects. We feel that the American business man is far more capable of visualizing the needs for electrical power and far more capable of designing ways and means by which it may be furnished to prospective customers than is the Government itself.

Just as there is a demand for power, I think we may well rely upon private industries to meet that demand. I wish it made clear here that we hold no brief whatever for the private power companies or the utilities of this country. Our interest is in the production and sale of bituminous coal. An enormous quantity of this coal is sold to the private utilities. They are among our very good customers.

When power can be produced by hydro on an absolutely business basis, all factors being taken into consideration, more cheaply than by coal, then we are willing to admit the justice of the competition. That is not the case generally today with Government hydro projects. [...]