THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT.
By Congressman Everett M. Dirksen
16th (Ill.) District

Mr. ICKES SAYS A COLD WINTER AHEAD.

As this is written, the morning radio announced that the temperature was 59. It gives a hint that autumn and winter are just around the corner. It also suggests thoughts of a winter coal pile. And that in turn reminds us that Secretary Ickes stated recently that we must send 6,000,000 tons of coal to Europe to avoid chaos and revolution. The Secretary sent Mr. C. J. Potter, chief of the solid fuel division to make a survey of conditions and bring back a report. Mr. Potter reported to the Secretary and also to a Senate Committee. In connection with all this, the Secretary stated that this would be one of the coldest winters of the war from the standpoint of fuel supply. In fact, he went so far as to say that some of our industries might have to go on a 4-day week because of a fuel shortage. This is indeed a gloomy prospect when we seem to be on the very threshold of final victory and deserves a bit of analysis.

HOW MUCH IS SIX MILLION TONS.

Six million tons is a lot of coal. At the rate of 20 tons per household, it would warm 300,000 families for a whole winter. Or it would reduce the winter’s coal supply of 600,000 families by one-half. Or of 1,200,000 families by 25%. But let’s look at another aspect of the problem. First, that coal must be mined. About 19,000 miners, producing 4 tons per day per man would be needed to produce that coal in the months of September, October, November and December. It would take 130,000 coal cars, carrying 40 tons per car to get it to a port for loading on vessels. It would require 130 Liberty Ships, each making three round trips to get it to Europe. There it must be unloaded, transferred to coal cars and forwarded to destination. Now the point in all this is that there is to be a coal shortage in this country, if railroad traffic has already reached a peak load, if we are already short on miners and an effort is being made to secure the release of 30,000 miners from the military forces, if there is a shortage of shipping space in vessels - then, every alternative should be examined before this additional burden upon our own economy is undertaken.

AND THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE.

First as to supply, it is well known that there is an abundant supply of coal in Wales, in Holland, in the Ruhr area of Germany, now occupied by Britain, in the Saar area of Germany now occupied by France, in the Silesian area now occupied by Russia, in Belgium and in France. Secondly, it is disclosed that only about 10% of Germany’s potential production of coal is being produced, in France only 50%; in Belgium only 50% and in Italy only 30%. The coal is there right close to where it is needed. It is not being produced. There are a number of reasons. One is that some of the mines have been destroyed or impaired but most of them are in working condition. The second is that many of the mines are not modernized. This is the fault of the operators. The author of the FRONT talked with a number of mine operators abroad and was astonished to learn how little interest there was in modernizing those mines. The result of this neglect is that an American miner produces nearly four times as much coal as an European miner. Still another reason is strikes among miners. All this raise the very interesting question of whether we should penalize American industry which is expected to provide jobs and whether we should penalize American citizens by curtailing their fuel supplies this winter because of the failure and neglect of both miners and mine operators abroad. There is an undoubted need for coal in European countries. Moreover, it is well recognized that there will be hardship. But isn’t it about time that we encourage them to self-help by offering to provide them with coal only after they have developed maximum production from their own mines, making due allowance of course for mining conditions. If American coal were used as a bonus for production in European countries, it might go far toward meeting the fuel problem of those countries but more important than that, it would be a step toward the development of a spirit of self-reliance in those countries, without which they are bound to fail in rehabilitating their own fortunes.