

COAL PRICE KEPT UP BY BIG CONSPIRACY.

The Rivers Lined with Full Barges, for Which the Owners Demand Famine Figures, Unmoved by Either Suffering or Death Which the Artificial Shortage Is Occasioning.

The coal famine which is making the rich shiver and the poor die in this city is not genuine. It is the result of a corner—a deliberate conspiracy on the part of coal operators to keep the supply short and force prices to the top.

Dwellers in New York who have listened to the long stories given out by the press agents of the operators about their herculean efforts to keep the city supplied may believe all these professions, but the business men who live in New Jersey and who come daily into New York as commuters on the different roads know exactly what the situation is.

Ask one of these men what the price is in any of the hundreds of New Jersey towns and cities within 100 miles of New York. He will tell you that he can get coal—al, he wants of it—for \$6.25 a ton. He will tell you that all along the Erie, Delaware, Lackawanna and Western, Ontario and Western, the Lehigh Valley and the other coal roads tracks there are thousands upon thousands of coal cars, filled with anthracite. Some of it has been waiting on sidings for weeks. It is covered with snow. The men who own it have been holding it for the zero weather they know would soon afflict New York. While they kept up the talk of the steady consumption of the daily supply, they were holding out a percentage for the harvest which the first good hard cold snap would assure them.

HOLD FOR PROFITS WHILE PEOPLE FREEZE.

So New York shivers. Mothers and their babies lie down at night and when the neighbors come the next day they are frozen corpses. Even the rich shiver, for as the price soars higher and higher, from \$7.50 to \$8, to \$9, to \$10, to \$11, to \$12, the greedy holders hang on in the hope that it will go higher; yet, perhaps it will, unless the indignation of the millions of sufferers in this city goes higher too and frightens the conspirators into loosening their frozen grip.

Newark and Rutherford and Paterson and Morristown and the other Jersey towns can get coal, for the people in those places can see with their own eyes the lines of laden coal cars standing at the sidings. It wouldn't do to tell them there is no coal, that the demand is greater than the supply, that the operators are only selling to those who will charge a "decent" price, for these people know better.

So the railroads satisfy their clamor for coal, and the New Yorker, who cannot get his information first hand, but must depend more or less on the skillful press agents and statisticians of the operators, get squeezed, or frozen if he refuses to be squeezed.

Take, for instance, the action of Stickney, Conyngham & Co., of No. 1 Broadway, who handle the output of the Pennsylvania Railroad. They have just notified all the retailers who they have been supplying that hereafter they could have no more coal. The reason given for this sudden move was that the coal was needed more in Philadelphia, Boston and other points.

Some of the firms affected are J. F. R. Ernst, of No. 218 East Forty-fourth street; Ernst Bros., who have yards in East Twenty-ninth and East One Hundred and Ninth streets, and O. J. Stephens, of One Hundred and Thirty-eighth street and the Harlem ship canal. These men have been forced to buy coal of speculators. Go ask these men about the conspiracy.

A member of the firm of Stickney, Conyngham & Co. admitted that the notice had been sent out.

"Why?" he was asked.

"Because we aren't getting the coal," he said. "It is going elsewhere." He refused to give any further explanation.

There is no way of telling whether this coal really is going to Boston and Philadelphia or whether it is being sold to speculators right here in New York for fancy prices, but the public will be able to draw its own inferences from the action taken and the attitude of the firm when asked for an explanation of their conduct.

THE SPECULATOR'S HARVEST.

To cover their tracks as far as possible the third party has been brought into the iniquitous deal. This is the speculator. New York knows him well from other lines of trade. The retailers whose yards are empty, the salaried who have a few tons to sell at exorbitant prices either by the half or quarter ton or by the bag or pail to the very poor, tell you that they can't get coal of the operators. They have to get it of the speculator and pay whatever prices may be demanded. Some of the speculators demand as high as \$9 and \$10 a ton. Yet coal is selling for \$5.50 at the mines. Who sells to the speculator?

The railroads know who these men are. They have big offices. Some of them are friends and others relatives of the men who mine the coal. They get coal at the price which the wholesaler who isn't a speculator gets it. Then, with the connivance of the railroad and the operators, they hold it until they have a profit of 100 per cent.

While the operators are feeding into the city, to supply the daily demand, part of their output, they are storing up either through speculators or directly on their own account part of their output for the harvest which is now going on. The North and the East Rivers are full of barges of coal held by speculators. Go down to the river front and you can see them lined to the deck with coal and moored alongside the piers. Only yesterday Ernst & Co., on East Forty-fourth street, managed by paying \$9.50 a ton to get two tons of coal from a full barge at the foot of East Forty-fourth street. The other tons were held for higher prices.

The number of full barges loaded with the speculators' coal is so great that if the railroads want to rush a larger supply from the receiving points in New Jersey to this city they will be hampered, as the supply of barges is limited.

FAMINE AMID PLENTY.

New Jersey is full of coal; the rivers on each side of the city are full of coal, but the bins of the rich and the bags of the poor are empty. Thousands of poor clamor at the East Side yards for enough to keep death

away. Thousands of well-to-do and rich are running around from coal yard to coal yard begging for fuel, and exerting as much influence to get it as they would were they seeking political office. While the consumer dances, the speculator and the operator look on and keep raising prices.

The coal roads admit that the evil of speculation is partly responsible for the present situation, but they blame it all on the independent operators. They say that ever since mining was resumed coal has been coming into New Jersey from the independent mines at the average rate of 1,000 tons a day. This has all been bought at the mines by speculators. Practically none of it has been sold. Therefore there is a total, they say, of 40,000 tons on hand, and it is this coal which is now being sent out at exorbitant prices.

IMPROVEMENT PROMISED.

They further say that there is a better outlook for New York's supply in the future, because the very cold snap which has brought on this crisis has closed navigation on the great lakes. Since last Friday no coal has been going by the water route for the lake ports. In the last week of navigation there was a total of more than 70,000 tons sent to the Northwest. This, or the greater part of it, will now come to New York, as by rail hard coal cannot compete with soft in this soft coal district owing to the high rates by rail.

According to figures given out by the railroads, there has come into New York ever since Thanksgiving a daily average of 51,000 tons of coal, divided among the roads as follows:

D. L. and W.	11,000	Reading	5,000
Erie and D. and H.	10,500	O. and W.	3,800
Jersey Central	10,000	Pennsylvania	3,000
Lehigh	8,000		

One-third of this has gone to New England points. This is the normal supply of other years. Retail prices of coal this year and last, as given out by a retailer, are as follows:

	Last year.	This year.
Stove, nut, egg and furnace	\$6.00	\$7.50-\$11.00
Pea	3.75	6.50
No. 1 buckwheat	3.25	5.50
No. 2 buckwheat	3.75	5.00
Soft coal	3.75	6.50-7.50

NOT STOVE COAL, SAYS ERIE OFFICIAL.

An official of the Erie road, when asked about the large number of coal-laden cars piled up in New Jersey, admitted that they were there, but said:

"If you scrape the snow off them you will find, I think, that most of them are filled with pea coal for which there has been no demand in New York until the last two days. The railroads are hampered in their work of getting the coal across to New York by the lack of barges. The roads do not control the barges. They own some, but the greater part are owned by coal dealers in New York or by captains who rent them to the highest bidder. There will be a larger supply from now on, as the canal barges can be used, owing to the fact that the canal is closed."

The coal agent for the D. L. & W. road also admitted that there were many coal cars in New Jersey.

"They are held by speculators who have bought from the independent operators," he said. "We are doing our best to force them to unload at once. We charge them \$1 a day demurrage for each car after it has been 48 hours at its destination. That is the only control over them we have. But even were we to land 25 per cent. more coal in New York than we are daily doing the New York men could not handle it, as they have not the facilities, although they have pressed into service all sorts of carts. The slippery streets have also interfered with the deliveries and made the lack of coal seem greater than it really has been."

TRICKY PURCHASERS, TOO.

A big retailer told an Evening World reporter to-day that many persons had plenty of coal in their cellars and pretended that they haven't. He said one man came into his place with tears in his eyes and told of a wife dying because there was no coal in the house.

"I sent him," said the dealer, "one ton at once. When the driver got to the house he found the fellow had fifteen tons already in his cellar. The driver brought the coal back. That chap was just stocking up for fear prices are going higher all winter and there are a lot like him."

SAYS THERE IS A CONSPIRACY.

Michael J. Burns, of Burns Bros., one of the largest retail firms in the city, admitted to-day that there was a conspiracy, but he said it was not among the coal combine, but among the jobbers, who bought the coal at the flat rate of \$5 and then held it for the rise.

"I do not know of a single instance," he said, "where a member of the so-called coal combine has sold above the regular flat rate of \$5 a ton at tide water. The conspiracy is among the middlemen, who market the product of the independents. They buy the coal at the mines, ship it here and pay the freight. Then they leave it in the cars, paying a dollar a day demurrage for a forty-ton car until the price gets up high enough to give them a tremendous profit."

"Only last week a liquor dealer at Mayfield, Pa., offered to supply me with fifteen carloads of coal per week from an independent mine. I could not find out who he was or where the coal was coming from, and I refused to accept the offer."

"Coal from these individual companies is being brought here and sold for \$10 a ton. Any quantity of it is to be had. I got two cargoes yesterday at \$9. I should say that the estimate of 1,000 tons a day coming in here for the speculators every day is small. In fact, I know it is. "Another reason why the New York public has to pay high prices is that the barge owners, who were idle all summer, have raised their rate per ton from 17 to 75 cents. I can't say that I blame them, for this is their only chance to get even for the summer's losses, which almost bankrupted some of them."

ALDERMANIC ACTION COMMENDED.

The Board of Aldermen's prompt action in the coal crisis elicited more commendation in the City Hall than anything the Fathers have done for years. Republicans and Democrats alike voiced the same sentiment, that the proposition was humane and timely.

"The only unfortunate feature about it is that requests of this sort, according to our law," said Assistant Corporation Counsel Clarke, "must be held up three days before the Mayor can sign. This means that it will be next Monday before the Board of Estimate and Apportionment can act upon it."

"The Mayor himself is Chairman of the Board, and I have no doubt that he will sign just as soon as the law permits in order that the Board may take action speedily."

"By the constitution, if any one member of the Apportionment Board votes against a proposition it is lost. But I have little fear of that contingency in the coal fund request. It appears to be entirely popular."

WRETCHEDNESS AMONG THE POOR IN EAST SIDE TENEMENTS.

Stories of misery resulting from the severe cold continue to unfold their pathetic details in the bureaus of the charitable organizations of New York. The rise in the temperature to-day has brought some slight relief, but the poor, who have suffered so piteously, are still flocking to the coal

yards striving to buy the pail of coal that will keep a little fire burning in their freezing homes.

Such is the suffering in the east side alone that even the professional workers among the poor, inured as they are to scenes of wretchedness, shudder at the awful misery on all sides.

The pitiful cry for coal is heard on all sides and many schemes have been proposed by which to furnish heat for the shivering unfortunates.

An incident of unusual pathos occurred on Oliver street this morning when a coal wagon which had just been emptied jostled over the street. In its wake were seven or eight children, shivering and poorly clad, their little hands blue with the cold, catching the coal dust as it fell from the wagon. As fast as their tiny hands were filled with the precious powder they disappeared into their tenement-house homes and were back again in a trice, reaching for the particles of fuel which they hoped to convert into a little warmth.

THINK OF THIS, YOU WELL-WARMED.

"My mother is sick in bed," said the oldest girl in the pathetic little group, "and all day yesterday we nearly froze. We had a little bit of coal, but it's all gone now and we can't buy any more. I get a little help by searching the ash barrels, and sometimes I find enough to make a little fire."

"When I can go around the stores sometimes I can get some kindling wood, but mother is too sick for me to leave her long, and I have to mind the baby."

As the girl spoke she regarded the handful of coal dust in her possession as if it were the greatest treasure in the world.

The poor who search the ash barrels for fuel, and who in their inability to obtain coal are on the verge of desperation, conjure up every conceivable means of keeping warm, but the severity of the weather has thwarted their feeble efforts.

The slum workers of the Salvation Army tell many sad stories of distress which they have come across and to-day they say that sickness is developing in the unheated homes. Pneumonia and lung trouble follow in the wake of the bitter cold and the demands for medical aid are increasing. **WOULD RATHER DIE TOGETHER.**

"Many of our most pathetic cases come from people who cannot obtain help from the city," said Staff-Captain Johnson this morning. "I found a case of pitiable suffering on Cherry street last night, where a crippled woman, her invalid husband and three children were shivering in a miserable little room, in absolute need of food and clothes. The wife stated that she had received coal from the city once, but that as hers was an institutional case, no further relief could be given."

"My husband has consumption and could get in a hospital, but he does not want to leave me and the children. We would rather die together. If we only had a little coal, everything would be all right."

At the coal yards this morning the scenes of yesterday were duplicated. A long line of applicants stood at the yards of Alfred Barber's Sons, No. 367 Water street, anxiously awaiting their turn to fill the pail or bag which each one carried.

Women with baby carriages, children with wagons, little tots with sacks which they could scarcely carry, were in the struggling mass, piteously demanding fuel.

Sometimes the applicants strove among themselves, shoving and pushing each other with the desperation of hungry animals, in the endeavor to get their pails filled before the supply gave out.

At Alfred Barber's Sons it was stated that it was scarcely possible that the demand could be met.

At Fishman's coal yard, No. 105 Broome street, a riot occurred last night, a crowd of freezing and starving seekers for coal engaging in a contest for the right to the last few buckets full. This morning Fishman was unable to supply the demand.

At the Co-operative Coal Company's, No. 50 Delancey street, a crowd of shivering, desperate people demanded coal this morning. Policemen were forced to quiet the throng. It was stated that there was just about enough to go around.

A tiny little girl with a coal bag on her arm stood crying on the edge of the group this morning.

"I've been here all morning," she sobbed, "and mamma is so sick at home. She most froze to death yesterday and mamma and the babies are all sick to-day. I'm so cold and hungry and I just must get some coal."

HAD CRAWLED "HOME" TO DIE.

In a basement in Oliver street a widow was found by the Salvation Army yesterday almost dead from cold. She had tried to buy coal, had failed, and had crawled back to her miserable abode to die.

The people who go to the coal yards with their sacks and pails each represent a story of suffering in the homes from which they come.

"My father is sick and can't work," said a consumptive looking girl this morning, "and it's all we can do to get money for a little coal. Then, when we do get the money, we can't get the coal. I've been here over two hours, and I don't know what will happen if I don't get coal."

The girl was clad in a calico gown and the tears rolled down her cheeks as she spoke.

"Sometimes we think we'll go hungry and be warm," she said, with a sob, "and then we think again, we'll try being warm and hungry, but I don't know which I'd rather do. If it wasn't for father being sick I'd get along."

The various organized charities are powerless to cope with the widespread distress. In the general scarcity of fuel those who are able to pay for fuel are almost as badly off as those who are not. Those not quite destitute at the beginning of the winter are rapidly becoming so.

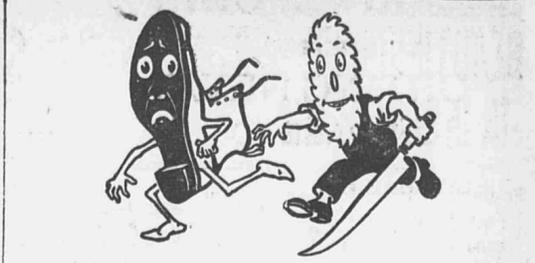
On every side are seen the inroads of the pawn shop. Some people have pledged even their beds during the past few days for money to buy coal.

SALVATION ARMY APPEALS TO MORGAN.

J. Pierpont Morgan has been appealed to by Commander Booth-Tucker, of the Salvation Army, to use his influence to have the Army supplied daily with from 25 to 100 tons of coal in order that they may distribute it among the poor. He was asked this favor to-day by the Commander, and promised through his secretary to do everything in his power toward that end.

"His secretary told me," said Commander Booth-Tucker, "that Mr. Morgan is taking a personal interest in my request. Of course, if he cannot do it, no man can. I am sure that he will make a strong effort in our behalf, for he has a splendid heart."

Many rich persons in New York are helping the Army in its efforts to relieve the poor. Among them is Miss Helen Gould, who to-day sent her check for \$1,000 to the Army headquarters. She asked that her donation be kept secret, but it became known. The money is being used to buy coal for distribution in the Army wagons. Although great courtesy has been shown the Salvationists at the various yards, they have had great difficulty in finding coal



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Children's Ribbed Cashmere Hose, double knee, sizes 6 to 9, 25c pair; value 35c. Ladies', Children's & Youths' Fleece Vests, Pants and Drawers, White and Natural, will be sold for 25c garment; value 39c.

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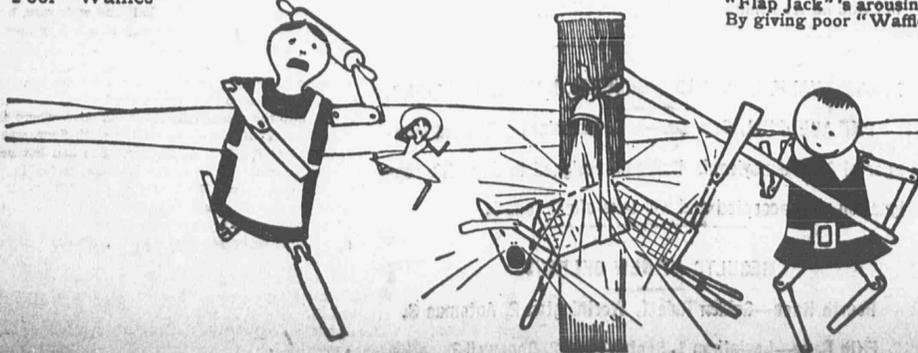
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