

It'll be yes for Senator No.

The Economist(London, England), Saturday, February 11, 1978; pg. 42; Issue 7015.(659 words)

Category:News

digging of coal. Until the cold spell began at the end of January with freezing storms in the midwest, the miners' strike, although the longest in the union's history, was not causing much concern. Coal stocks seemed sufficient to last a good four months; and at least half the coal, in any case, was coming without hindrance from non-unionised western mines. Now, in the midwest and the east, the picture is considerably bleaker. Several large electric generating companies in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois and New York, all states struggling under deep snow, have warned consumers that they may run out of coal this month. Many power plants in these states, fired—as are half the power plants in the country—by coal, have stocks for only 30 days.

The sudden deterioration in the weather, however, even in Washington where the union and the major companies are negotiating, has done little to spur the talks forward. Agreement on a new contract has been reached between union and management negotiators, but the union bargaining council has refused to make a decision until it has seen the full text. Even if the council and local districts were prepared to ratify the plan, there cannot be a settlement in less than the 10 days it will take to consult them all.

Ratification is by no means certain. Although the agreement provides rises of \$2.35 an hour in wages and 37% in all benefits, over the three years of the contract, it also requires miners on unofficial strike to pay to their health and pension funds the amount of money the funds have lost through lower production during the strike. This is, in effect, a penalty for striking. It does not touch the reasons why strikes occur so frequently in coal mines in the first place: not simply because of history or bloody-mindedness on both sides, but partly because companies consistently infringe the smaller clauses of the contracts they make with the unions over conditions and pay.

The miners' health and pension funds, once the pride of a once-progressive union, are already in deep trouble. Because they are financed by employer contributions linked to production, every stoppage depletes them; and there was a strike for several weeks last autumn, which ended not long before the present one began. Last week more than 80,000 miners who retired before January, 1976, did not receive their pension cheques because there was no more money. The new agreement proposes that the national system of health and welfare payments should disappear altogether, to be replaced by separate systems inside each company. That is cold comfort for miners who have already learnt to expect little sympathy from their employers.

North Carolina

It'll be yes for Senator No

Raleigh, North Carolina

His critics call him "Senator No". Rarely does Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina vote in favour of anything. Ranked as the fourth most conservative member of the senate, he proudly points to his votes against cutting money for defence, against the ban on imports of Rhodesian chrome, against splitting up the oil companies, against giving civil servants the right to engage in politics, against protecting coastal marshes, against cutting car pollution, against easier picketing by unions, against supersonic aircraft landings. For? The B-1 bomber. It is with this record that Mr Helms faces an election campaign this autumn—one that he seems almost certain to win.

A former television executive and commentator, Mr Helms had never held any public office before becoming senator in the Nixon landslide of 1972. He was the first Republican senator from North Carolina this century. In the six years that have followed, the bespectacled Mr Helms has established himself as one of the country's best known conservatives, lashing out at communists, bloated federal budgets, welfare chisellers, federally financed abortions and the busing of school children.

Recently he has been one of the most visible opponents of ratifying the Panama

Canal treaties, appearing regularly on television programmes to rail against "giving away" the canal and spearheading the drive by a group of conservative Republicans to defeat the treaties in the senate.

Although registered Democrats outnumber Republicans in North Carolina by a 3-1 margin, Democratic officials concede privately that Mr Helms will be difficult to beat. A former Democrat, he did especially well in 1972 among conservative Democrats in the eastern part of the state who had watched his nightly television editorials for more than a decade. Mr Helms regularly tells his listeners that he "doesn't care which party straightens this country out, just as long as one does". His emphasis on returning to "Christian principles" is popular in a heavily Baptist state that boasts of such residents as evangelist Billy Graham and Mrs Ruth Carter Stapleton, the preaching sister of President Carter.

Money will be no problem for the crusading Mr Helms. He has already raised more than \$2m for his re-election effort, thanks in large measure to the skills of Mr Richard Viguerie, the direct-mail wizard of conservative candidates and causes. In 1972 Mr Helms spent \$654,000 and won with 56% of the vote against an attractive moderate Democrat.

Mr Helms has seized the "Senator No" tag pinned on him by an opposition newspaper and is attempting to turn the label to his advantage. "I am Senator No," he told an audience at a recent gathering, "and I am glad to be here tonight. Isn't it the political yes-men who



They shall not pass

