

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS—STATUS OF
FORMER WESTERN UNION EMPLOYEES
AT NORTH SYDNEY

Mr. D. A. CAMERON (Cape Breton North-Victoria): Mr. Speaker, I propose to take up only a very few minutes to discuss a matter to which I should like to draw the attention of the Minister of Railways and Canals (Mr. Howe). This matter concerns a number of men who were in the employ of the Western Union Telegraph Company which was taken over in 1928 by the Canadian National Telegraph Company. Since last November I have been endeavouring to have the claims of these men dealt with by the proper authorities. I first appealed to the Minister of Railways and Canals and I was informed that this matter did not come within his jurisdiction. I then appealed to the chairman of the board of trustees and I was informed that it did not come within his jurisdiction. I then appealed to Mr. Hungerford, the president of the Canadian National Railways, and I received a like response. I then transferred my activities to Mr. Galloway, the president of the Canadian National Telegraph Company, and I was informed by him that the incident was closed.

I should like to direct the attention of the minister to the facts as they appear to me. I respectfully make the submission, first, that the incident is not closed and should not be so regarded, and, second, that the men have what I consider to be a real grievance in connection with the manner in which their claims were disposed of. There was a group of about ten or fifteen men who were in the employ of the Western Union in what was known as the cable office at North Sydney, and in addition to cable work they did what is known in the telegraphic world as land line work. They were brought up and trained to cable work, which demanded a very special degree of efficiency, and they had made for themselves a splendid reputation as good operators at North Sydney. This was the situation in 1928, when the negotiations began between the Canadian National Telegraph Company and the Western Union for the taking over of that utility, and these operations continued until some time in 1929, when the arrangements were completed. I stated a moment ago that the men in the employ of the cable office were highly trained and efficient, and they were commanding as a result salaries a little higher than the ordinary ratings which were in effect in other portions of the Western Union service. A conference was held be-

tween the representatives of the men and the management of the Western Union Telegraph Company in New York, and one of the conditions of the agreement to transfer from the Western Union to the Canadian National Telegraph Company was that the ratings of the men in the Western Union should be continued unimpaired while they remained in the employ of the Canadian National Telegraph Company.

A few days ago we discussed in this house the reorganization of certain departments of government and I was glad to notice that members on both sides of the house were solicitous that employees who had given a good part of their lives to the work of various departments should not suffer financially by reason of the fact that consolidations were about to take place. I applaud that sentiment; I think it is the proper method of dealing with men who have become trained experts in any line of activity, if it can be properly carried out. All that these men are asking for, all that I am asking for on their behalf, is that the same measure of justice and fair play which we bespoke for the men in the employ of the government in these departments should be meted out to men who gave from ten to fifteen years—and one man gave as much as forty years—of service in the Western Union Company.

The agreement entered into with these men was carried on, so far as the Canadian National Company was concerned, by Mr. Robb, the vice president. Mr. Robb gave his undertaking to Mr. Carlton, the manager of the Western Union Company in New York, whose letter is on file in connection with the proceedings under the act respecting conciliation, in which he stated that, acting for the Western Union Company, he would not have agreed to the transfer of that corporation to the Canadian National Telegraph Company if he had not been assured that the men who were in the employ of the Western Union Company and had given faithful service for so many years would not suffer in any degree in consequence of the transfer.

I wish to read from the judgment of His Honour Judge Murray, who was one of the members of the conciliation board. Let us see what he has to say in that connection:

I have not the slightest doubt of the merits of the contentions of the North Sydney men regarding the arrangements made by them with Mr. W. D. Robb, vice-president of the Canadian National in charge of telegraphs, and with the officers of the Western Union previous to their joining the Canadian National Telegraphs. The year 1929 was a prosperous one, and, in my opinion possibly an improvident yet sympathetic bargain was made by Mr. Robb, with the approval of Sir Henry Thorn-