

Railways

Every MP from all Parties received letters galore every year from railway pensioners. Every year we raised it in the committee when we dealt with the CNR's annual report. Every third or fourth year there would be what was called an extra payment of the CNR pension fund. Invariably the CPR did the same thing in direct proportion. The CNR has always been the guinea pig.

Finally, I even got mad at the railway unions. I asked them what they were doing, and why they were not representing their members at the collective bargaining table and fighting. The pension plan is worth a strike, not necessarily a wage increase, but a pension plan for the employees and their brothers and sisters already on pension is worth a strike. Under the law, the railway unions, no matter what they tried, legally they could not represent those on pension because, under our present law, they are not considered part of a collective bargaining unit. Who is to speak for the railway brotherhoods and the railway pensioners? I compliment Members from all Parties who have raised this so often for so many years in the House, but the only ones outside the House who could and did speak for railway pensioners were people such as J. E. White and railway pensioners with whom we met from Moncton, New Brunswick, to Victoria on numerous occasions.

We obtained an order from the House of Commons after 1984, and a subcommittee was struck, half the Standing Committee on Transport. We held hearings in five locations. I wanted us to go to 25 or at least 15. We got to five locations outside Ottawa. Pensioners came for miles from all over, at their own expense, to tell us what they were going through.

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There were men and women in their late seventies and early eighties who, when they retired, had a great, big pension. When they retired back in the 1950s and early 1960s, they had a pension of something over \$200 a month. That was a fabulous pension then, but 10, 15, or 20 years later they could not live on it. Every once in a while their pensions would be increased by \$2, \$3, \$4, \$5 a month, out of what are called excess earnings.

What did I know and what did any other Member in this House know about the difference between a defined benefit plan and a money purchase plan, actuarial assumptions, and excess earnings? We very rarely heard about them. It turns out that there were excess earnings, all right, but they were on paper. It is like the "unfunded liability". The money is not there.

It is not that the CPR and the CNR has done anything illegal under our law. They have abided by the law meticulously. It is immoral and unconscionable that these two magnificent corporations, successive Governments since the 1930s, and Members of Parliament from all political Parties since the 1930s have allowed that to continue. There is no excuse. We all deserve to be blamed and condemned.

We tried in the subcommittee. We had some excellent staff—legal counsel, an actuary, a researcher from the parliamentary library, and an actuary from the Department of National Health and Welfare. They got the figures for us. They showed us what it would cost for full indexing, and it costs a bundle, a lot of money.

It was perfectly obvious that there was no way. It was obvious to all members of the subcommittee and to the whole standing committee that if we were to recommend full indexing of railway pensions, it would (a) not get accepted by this Parliament and (b) not be implemented by the Government. It is not just this Government, but previous ones as well.

We tried to get what we could, and we got a few small things in that subcommittee report which was unanimously adopted by this House.

Here we go again. Some time in the next several months there will be a new Parliament. I hope to be here, if my voters will let me, if I am lucky and honoured enough to be their representative again.

I want to thank my colleague from Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) for this motion and his other motion on the Order Paper. I know that J. E. White is strong enough, angry enough, and ornery enough. He will be here, too, again appearing before a parliamentary committee.

I want to say that my Party and I are committed to the fact that this Parliament, whenever we get the chance, will bring in legislation covering all pension plans under federal jurisdiction that call for two things: First, no longer will any corporation be able to raid a pension plan for any funds or part of funds in that plan. We will recall one of the big multinational food chains headquartered in Toronto which tried to lift tens of millions of dollars out of a pension fund. We say that Parliament must pass legislation that prevents that and makes it unequivocal that every nickel in a pension fund belongs to nobody else but current employees and pensioners and that nobody else can touch it. Second, we stand for full indexing of all pensions under federal jurisdiction.

We got partial success in the minority Parliament of 1972 to 1974. We got indexing of old age pensions and family allowances, which we have since been lost under this Government. War veterans' pensions were indexed, old age pensions were indexed as were the pensions of the RCMP and the Armed Forces. Oh, many a Minister of Finance since would have loved to get out from under that, but it is still in place.

We would have full indexing even if it had to be phased in over two or three years. That is another aspect of pensions under federal jurisdiction that must be brought in and brought in as quickly as possible. Once done by a national Parliament, every other province will have to follow suit or accept their political peril if they do not.