

*Committee on Railways and Shipping*

This was the answer given by the Minister of Transport:

This is another question which cannot be answered completely without the assignment of a special staff. Here again, the information would have to be assembled at the 42 divisions of the company, and would then have to be consolidated. This would take many weeks, and by the time the figures had been compiled they would no longer be currently accurate.

I say to the minister that if that answer is correct it does not indicate that the records kept by the Canadian National Railways are similar to records kept by other corporations. They could not be kept in the same manner. My next question was:

2. Is it anticipated that there will be further lay-offs and, if so, what are expected numbers by (a) regions; (b) divisions?

The answer to that question was as follows:

Seasonal employment, with resultant lay-offs at the termination of seasonal programs, has a very marked impact on figures relating to the strength of working forces.

That portion of the answer is simply legislative evasion. My third question was:

3. What is the total number of employees of Canadian National Railways in (a) office staffs; (b) all other positions, laid off either permanently or temporarily, since the 1st day of December, 1954?

The minister answered:

These comments apply particularly to parts 1 and 3, and similar difficulties exist as to part 2 of the question.

My fourth question was:

4. How many employees of Canadian National Railways have had their working hours reduced, since the 1st day of January, 1955?

The minister replied:

With regard to part 4, I would answer that no employees have had their working hours reduced since 1st January, 1955, except perhaps that in certain cases of illness an employee may be working part-time pending complete recovery.

I am not going to argue with the answer given by the minister. The same type of answers were given the same day to questions asked by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. I submit that those answers given by the minister either do not give the picture as the railway company knows it to be, or indeed reveal a cavalier attitude on the part of the high officials of the Canadian National Railways toward the right of parliament to information.

I go on to point out that on February 28 I moved:

For a copy of all correspondence exchanged between the minister or Department of Transport and the Canadian National Railways relative to a question placed on the order paper in the name of the mover of this matter on the 28th January last, the purpose of which was to ascertain the number of section and maintenance men, office staffs, etc., who have been laid off by the Canadian National Railways during the periods particularly set forth in the said question.

That motion was challenged by the minister, and it was dropped. A little later a further question was put on the order paper in order to ascertain the number in the employment of the Canadian National Railways as at the end of February this year. That is my recollection of the question. I am not certain of the date as I have not the question before me. In that case the answer again was that the information was not then available.

Those answers throughout do not meet the fair requests of Canadian National Railways employees across Canada who are asking for information on this matter, and for the assurance that their jobs are not to be placed unnecessarily in jeopardy. They are not in the position of being suppliants. They have the right to know the position in which they will find themselves in the days ahead, as far as the railway company can predict. They certainly have the right to information as to the number of employees who have been laid off since December last.

Among the employees in general—that is, sectionmen, maintenance men and the like—I find the desire to know what the situation is. They want information, but they do not seem to be able to get it. There is only one method by which they can secure it, and that is through their parliamentary representatives. At least that was what they thought until questions were asked by certain of those representatives in parliament.

I ask the minister, when he replies, to give the Canadian people and the railway employees the picture as to how many had been laid off from last fall until the end of February. The railway employees believe the number runs into thousands. Indeed, as a result of their own computations several of them have concluded that the number of employees laid off within the last year approaches 10,000. They may be in error, but the only way they can find out is to have the minister give that information, and give to those who hold positions today some reassurance as to the future.

After all, you cannot maintain morale unless there is full and complete disclosure. Today morale among Canadian National Railways employees is undermined as a result of the failure of the minister to give some information as to the picture and the course to be followed. I ask him, when he concludes this debate, to furnish the information to the extent that it is possible to do so.

As to the last question I asked, with regard to the number who were in employment as at the end of February, as I recollect the answer it was to the effect that the computation was made on the 15th of each month.