

Committee on Railways and Shipping

However, I find there are other items of business on the order paper which this group would like to get out of the way so they can become law before the end of the month. That does not necessarily mean I am opposed to other hon. members going ahead to discuss matters which they have in mind, because they may consider them just as pertinent as the one we hope to deal with later. It might be that the government would make this other matter retroactive; I am referring to the war veterans allowances.

I do want to indicate once again that this group approves the setting up of a committee to discuss these questions.

Mr. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, having listened to what the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre had to say regarding this unfortunate accident at Brampton, Ontario, and the answer given by the Minister of Trade and Commerce, I personally believe that a public inquiry is necessary in order to clarify what is apparently a serious contradiction in the attitudes and views of my hon. friends. Certainly before the Minister of Trade and Commerce made his explanation I felt that an inquiry by the committee to be set up under this motion would have been sufficient. But the minister in the course of his explanation rather weakened his argument when he stated that the number of hours this pilot had been on duty were in reality and in effect nothing of any particular moment, for the minister himself had often gone to work when tired. Well, when the minister went to work four hours after his arrival in Ottawa he went to his office on Wellington street, and was not in a position where the lives of others were under his control.

The fact that the minister took that position is indicative of an official attitude that certainly deserves clarification in a public inquiry. Indeed, when the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marler) replies I think he should answer why he changed his expressed intention to set up a public inquiry and had instead a qualified private inquiry? What was the reason for the alteration in his general attitude? What events caused him to change his position, which was categorical and clear at the beginning? No one wants to do anything that will cause fear in the hearts of Canadians who travel on the T.C.A., which has an outstanding safety record. On the other hand, no one wants to make a scapegoat of this pilot if the evidence is not such that an independent inquiry would bear out the conclusions arrived at by the private inquiry.

[Mr. Hahn.]

I feel that the minister should give serious consideration to the setting up of an independent commission, if you will, to have this matter investigated in order that no one will have any doubt that justice has been done. As things are now the findings of the private investigatory group have been challenged. There is a feeling among many people in this country that grave unfairness has been done to the pilot. That being so, the minister has a duty to those who serve this country to assure that no injustice shall be permitted to go unchallenged. The findings of an independent commission supporting what has already been found by the investigatory body that was set up would be conclusive, and would remove from the hearts of people any doubt as to whether fairness and equity were achieved in this man's case.

Having said that, there are one or two other matters to which I shall refer. When this committee is set up I should like it to consider the whole question of the payment of pensions to retired employees of the Canadian National Railways. The present basic pension rate of \$25 is paid in a considerable number of cases. The particulars of the numbers who receive this pension were requested by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, and are recorded in *Hansard*. There is a feeling widely held that the present rates are unjustifiably low, and that the time has come for reconsideration of the claims for fairness presented by those who are retired on that basic pension.

Another problem which is of general interest is the matter of unemployment, the retirements and lay-offs on the Canadian National Railways. For several weeks in this house an endeavour has been made to ascertain the true situation. Various union representatives of Canadian National Railways employees across this country are wondering why it is that difficulty is met by those in this house who endeavour to ascertain the picture of lay-offs on the Canadian National Railways. Indeed, it is becoming extremely difficult to secure any information in the house regarding Canadian National Railways employees.

On the 28th of January I placed a question on the order paper asking how many section and maintenance men had been laid off since the 1st of January, 1955, and what further lay-offs, etc., were anticipated. That question should not have required weeks to answer, but the answer was finally brought down on February 21. My question read:

1. How many section and maintenance men of the Canadian National Railways have been laid off by (a) regions; (b) divisions, since the 1st day of January, 1955?