

*Railway Operations Act*

bers of parliament have shown the slightest interest in the fact that maintenance of way crews have been largely removed. They have shown little interest in the fact that seldom a day passes when there is not an accident on one of our railroads, that seldom a day goes by when there is not a derailment somewhere or other simply because the railways are being poorly operated and because insufficient maintenance of way personnel are employed.

In most cases the companies have got rid of five out of six of the section gangs, the people who used to walk the rails to determine whether it was safe to run trains over them. Now they run an inspection trolley over the lines twice a year and this process decides whether or not the rails are safe. Nobody cares a damn. Nobody cares about the accident rate. Nobody seems to care about the railways at all. The government spends a lot of money in Rockcliffe establishing a STOL airport so that people can fly between Ottawa and Montreal, despite the fact that a train could travel from Ottawa to Montreal much faster than passengers could make that journey by aircraft, counting time taken for travel at both ends.

But nobody cares. Nobody is interested in the railway. Nobody seems interested in the fact that the railways are not carrying passengers any more, that we are not using the railways to the best advantage. Nevertheless, when there is a strike, everyone gets alarmed and the CPR calls in its friends, the government, to do something about it. The companies are not interested in negotiating. Indeed, the workers have not been interested in negotiating on occasions. I think it can be said in connection with some of these contracts that the union has been willing to drag its feet hoping the government would make a decision.

Most members of parliament have not looked at the financial statements of the two major railways. Today they are making money hand over fist, just as the banks are. They are making a fortune. The government has not even asked us for the money needed to pay the interest on the CN debt for the last two years. Maybe the company is making enough money to afford to pay the interest without the benefit of legislation.

There is another problem which parliament has not faced, and it has to do with pensions. Other agencies in Canada have been told that in order to be acceptable for income tax purposes, a registered pension plan must be vested. This has not been done in the case of the Canadian National. We have said to the CN, "Just put in an IOU." The company borrows the money paid in by contributors and invests it to do all sorts of things which are not necessarily in the interests of the workers.

I have heard a number of people say they have helped to negotiate contracts. Everybody knows all about the way in which unions or companies should be run, when it comes time to settle a strike. That is not important. But what the Minister of Transport said today was important; and if he thought it was important, why should we not act along the lines he suggested? He said we should allow the unions and the companies to negotiate, that they should use the strength they have. The financial position of the railroads is not bad at the present time.

So far in this debate we have listened only to those who say we must get the railroad workers back to work. Nobody has mentioned an alternative. In my riding there

[Mr. Peters.]

are railroaders employed by the Canadian National, the Canadian Pacific and the Ontario Northland Railway. These people are interested in running the railways, but they are also interested in achieving some dignity while they are working for these companies.

Let me give hon. members some figures. In 1950 the Ontario Northland Railway employed 2,500 workers. Today it has less than 1,600 employees. Its pension plan is fully vested. The government of Ontario has made a commitment to put in nearly \$1 million a year in addition to other contributions to the plan. But check the figures contained in the financial report of Ontario Northland and you will find that the average wage of all the employees, including the supernumerary people in Ontario, all the hangers-on in the Ontario Railways Commission, is only \$8,500 a year; and some of the supernumerary people are getting between \$35,000 and \$40,000.

There are many in my area who make less than \$4,000 on the railway. No one can say this is a reasonable amount of money to earn. I agree there comes a time when the public interest becomes so important that one has to override principles. I am sure there are few women who, if they were offered enough money, would not put principles behind them and take the money.

**Some hon. Members:** Shame!

**An hon. Member:** Explain.

**Mr. Peters:** Mr. Chairman, I might have overstated the position.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Peters:** The argument I was trying to put forward is that there is a point at which all would agree that a settlement should be arrived at. The suggestion I make is that we have not yet arrived at that point; we have not allowed negotiations to continue up to that point. If we decide to satisfy all the people in this country who believe that the railways are important and that the railways should run, we must do better than the workers would have been able to do for themselves, because we are asking them to do something on behalf of the public which they themselves did not want to do.

● (2050)

I have talked with many railroaders and I know they want to go back to work with enough wages so that they will again be in a position to hold up their heads in their communities. There was a time when railroaders were the top blue-collared workers in Canada, but that is no longer so. Many of them earn less money than a garage worker, a plumber or an electrician. In fact I am sure that in many cities these men earn less money than a garbage collector.

We represent the people of Canada and the people have an interest in this strike. I suggest that before we pass this piece of legislation each member should consider increasing the amount that is proposed. When the non-operating unions began negotiations many months ago they put forth a number of proposals they felt were fair and just.

These people have suffered as much as anybody else from the high cost of living, and I suggest that whatever