

Canadian National Railways

There is another subject to which I should like to make reference, while we are dealing with this resolution. I have already said that I think the Minister of Transport and the Minister without Portfolio, the hon. member for Winnipeg South, should be here. But at this point I wish the Minister of Finance were here too. I do not place any blame on the parliamentary secretary for piloting this resolution; it is one of the things he was asked to do, and it is one of the duties for which parliamentary secretaries are paid. But the reason I wish the Minister of Finance were here is because he wears several hats. As Minister of Finance he is responsible for policy related to the question of the pensions paid to retired civil servants. Hon. members know the many altercations and exchanges I have had with him over this matter.

The resolution before us is also in the name of the Minister of Finance and it relates, among other things, to the C.N.R. The same problem arises there, namely that there are thousands of retired employees of the C.N.R., a company to which we are constantly voting or lending money, who are on pensions which are utterly inadequate to meet today's living costs, utterly inadequate in the light of today's living standards. Hon. members need not be surprised if I find my way back to this subject under various headings time and time again, because I think it is just about the most important question we face in the whole pension field. Unless we do something to make sure that people who go on pensions will have their standard of living protected throughout the years they are living on those pensions, our whole pensions system will fall into jeopardy.

Answering some questions of mine in this area on October 7, as reported on pages 846 and 847 of *Hansard*, the Minister of Transport indicated that there are still 388 retired employees of the C.N.R. whose pensions are less than \$25 a month; still 2,241 on pensions of \$25 a month, and another 3,002 whose pensions range from \$25 to \$50 a month.

This makes a grand total of 5,651 retired employees of the Canadian National whose pensions are less than \$50 a month. Yet despite the fact that these pensions are so low, nothing has been done in the years since these men went on pension to effect any adjustment in the amount paid to them. We have accepted the principle of pension escalation, in part, in the adjustment which is made under the old age security legislation and under the Canada Pension Plan. Several

provinces have accepted it and other jurisdictions as well have done so. Quite a few private companies have done so—in most cases, it is true, when these matters are subject to collective bargaining, but not in all cases. Quite a few companies have accepted the principle that escalation has to be built into pensions so that the pensions might have some value in the years after those who draw them have retired. In the old days, when people retired at 65 or 70 and did not live very long afterwards, this problem was not so acute. Today, people are living longer and retiring earlier; costs and prices are rising more rapidly and thousands of people are left helpless as they watch the standard of living they enjoyed on retirement going down and down.

I submit that this is one of the most serious problems facing us in the pension field. We must start dealing with it somewhere, and that is why I wish the Minister of Finance were here today. There are two places where he can make a start. One is with respect to retired civil servants and the other is with respect to retired employees of the C.N.R.

The Chairman: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. gentleman, who is an acknowledged expert on the rules, but standing order 59(2) does say that speeches in committee of the whole house must be directly related to the subject under consideration. Possibly I missed the hon. member's point of connection during his remarks about this resolution, which is essentially a financing resolution, and if I have, I apologize. In case I have not, I would appreciate it if the hon. member would return to the substance of the resolution.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Well, Mr. Chairman, I had just about finished making my plea on this occasion. But I would not want to be out of order. It is bad enough trying to get a response, without finding oneself out of order, and I do not believe I am. May I point out that the resolution relates to the financing of the C.N.R., and that in this connection you have permitted discussion about running trains all over Newfoundland—or not doing so—the question of bus services, and so on. It seems to me the debate has ranged very far from the question of direct capital expenditure. This is a resolution by which we are making money available to the Canadian National Railways and if, at such a time, we can call upon the company to run trains in Newfoundland, or to redress other grievances, surely I have the right to appeal