

*Railways*

As you might know, Madam Speaker, I come from Transcona. Transcona is and was a railway town. It is becoming less so as it has become part and parcel of the greater City of Winnipeg. But it still remains the case that a good many people in Transcona either do or have worked for the railway. A great many CN pensioners live in Transcona or in Elmwood, East Kildonan, or in other nearby areas which are all part of my riding. Without wanting to get into a bidding war with other Members, I would say that I probably have more CN pensioners in my riding than anyone else I could imagine. The main Transcona shops are there. We have had them there ever since 1912.

I also have a personal interest in it, if you like, Madam Speaker. I heard the Hon. Member for Lethbridge—Foothills (Mr. Thacker) mention the Biggar Pensioners Association. My association with the railway goes back to when my grandfather Blaikie started with the railway in Biggar in 1912 as a carman, or what was then known as a car knocker. I can remember in the mid-fifties before my grandfather retired in 1958 being in Biggar and going with him down the track as the trains came in. His job was to hit the wheels with a hammer and listen for cracks, among other things.

My father also joined the railway in Biggar. First, he shovelled coal and then later he went to Transcona to take his apprenticeship as a machinist. He retired in 1986 with 44 years of service in the railway as the Assistant General Superintendent of Equipment for the Prairie Region, Motive Power.

I just took a quick count. I think I have at least a half dozen uncles who are CN pensioners, and two grand-uncles, brothers of my grandfather who are now gone who were also CN pensioners. I have a cousin working in the Transcona Car Shop to this day. For me, the welfare of CN pensioners is not an abstract matter. It is something that I know many people whom I personally know will have to deal with if that plans becomes inadequate. That is why I am on my feet tonight. It is to advocate that something finally be done to change the nature of the plan so that CN pensioners are not forever dependent on the goodwill or the fiat of the CNR for increases in their pensions.

There are a number of things that need to be done. We need to have indexation built into that plan.

People who are retiring now, those who have just retired, and those who are in really tough situations now are those who retired quite a while ago—but regardless of the situation—all need to be alleviated of the uncertainty of wondering whether or not they will receive an appropriate increase when the economic situation demands it. We say, and we have said for a long time, that there needs to be some kind of indexation structured right into the plan so that this kind of economic uncertainty might be removed, so that people might continue to get a pension which has the purchasing value that it had when they retired from the railway. It seems to me that that is only justice. It is only elementary justice that people should not find themselves in a situation several years from now, or for

that matter, if they are fortunate to live long, many years after their retirement, in which their pension is worthless. I do not know how anyone can argue against that.

Yet, obviously, nothing has been done. Part of the problem, of course, has been the unwillingness on the part of the Government to challenge the relationship between the company and the pension plan, to challenge this whole question of unfunded liability whereby on the basis of that unfunded liability the CNR feels that it has the right, when the pension plan generates money, to seize that money and to funnel it into the coffers of the CNR instead of either allowing it to accumulate interest or using it in a way that would give it back to the pensioners themselves.

What needs to be done is for the plan to be changed finally in such a way that the company actually contributes instead of sitting and saying: "We will look after the unfunded liability. We will look after it if anything happens". This is a very kind of tenuous way to operate. What if something were to happen to the CN? The very Member who spoke in this debate, the Hon. Member for Lethbridge—Foothills (Mr. Thacker), has said in the House before that the CN should be sold. What if the CNR were sold and in its new private incarnation it ran into economic problems and no longer had the political goodwill of the Government behind it? What would happen to all those pensioners who were depending on this company to provide the unfunded liability in those moments when the pension plan could not meet the commitments of the pension plan? This is a very real concern. There are a good many people out there who have literally bet their retirements on the validity and the solidity of this particular pension plan. The CNR has got away for far too long with this whole unfunded liability business.

I say to the Government and to future Governments—if the NDP were to form a government this is one of the first things that I as a member of that government would be working for—that they must make sure that this kind of change is brought about. I actually had a hope that, knowing as I did some of the members of the Conservative Party who have concerned themselves with this, they might have addressed themselves to it over that four-year period.

But time has come and gone. The problem remains the same. Earl White is four years older now. He is 79 but he has not given up. I am sure that he will not. He and many other CN pensioners, and various pension associations, are going to have to continue the battle to get some justice, to get that plan changed so that people who are retired now and find their pensions to be inadequate, people who are retiring now and have to face the economic uncertainty should inflation come back with any significance, or should any other economic situation be created in which their pensions will no longer have the same purchasing power, will not have to be dependent on what the CNR decides from year to year. As the situation exists now the CNR, could conceivably decide year after year after year not to do anything, not to provide an increase.