

Adjournment Debate

Following his first public statements criticizing the government and its policies, he was warned of the guidelines concerning the behaviour of an employee toward his employer and given notice that other such statements could lead to disciplinary action. In spite of these warnings, which resulted in two suspensions, he continued and even stepped up his public criticism in all the medias. That is when his employment was terminated, Mr. Speaker, or in other words, when he was fired. Let me remind the House that the Treasury Board is empowered to establish disciplinary standards in the public service and to specify certain penalties, including suspension and firing, which can be applied for a breach of discipline or misbehaviour, and to indicate when, how, by whom and under what authority these penalties can be meted out.

Treasury Board can also authorize the deputy minister of a department or a ministry to exercise its powers and fulfil its duties. It is under this authority, Mr. Speaker, that disciplinary action was taken against this employee. Such action is not taken lightly, and in this case it was based on a well-established principle to the effect that the senior officers and staff of the department should abstain from criticizing publicly the policy, the programs or the services of the government and from making unfavourable comments about them.

You can no doubt determine, Mr. Speaker, that, a fortiori, the employees of the Department of National Revenue hold a very sensitive position and that their behaviour must be especially above reproach.

I mentioned in the very beginning, and I want to emphasize this point, that the employee has a right of appeal, and this is what he is now exercising. This applies to any employee who feels he has been wronged by a management decision, and he is entitled to submit a grievance under the Staff Relations Act. There is an established procedure to this effect which can include four levels of decision of which the final level is that of the deputy minister. If the employee is not satisfied with the decision made at the final level he can, under certain circumstances, ask for a review by a third party, who is an adjudicator appointed under the Staff Relations Act. To accelerate matters, the grievance has been referred to the fourth level.

I hope that justice will be done after both parties have submitted their arguments, and I am convinced that this will be the case.

● (2210)

[English]

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS—ANNOUNCEMENT OF LAY-OFFS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I asked the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) on February 5 about the 1,800 lay-offs announced by the Canadian National Railways, system wide, on February 4. I was, and I am still, particularly concerned about some 216 positions which are to be eliminated at the Transcona shops at the rate of 49 every

four weeks, and some 30 other jobs at Symington Yard. Most of these will be jobs of young people who may already be facing the difficult problems of home ownership and raising families at a time of criminally high interest rates and other economic difficulties.

What are they to do? They cannot wait for the Minister of Transport's scheme of railway revitalization to come into place; if, indeed, it ever will. If it does come into place, it might not create the kinds of jobs for which they are looking.

Indeed, some of these men have lost their jobs as a result of the Minister of Transport's last great scheme, his tragic and stupid reduction of passenger rail service in Canada. Some of these lay-offs, even now, are the delayed result of the VIA cutbacks and not just the result of a downturn in the revenues of the railways caused by the MacEachen recession.

The list of injuries the Liberals have inflicted on railway workers continues to grow. First, the VIA Rail cutbacks resulted in lost jobs and in making a CN pass almost worthless. Second, there were the lay-offs of February 4. A Crown corporation which made a profit last year was allowed to lay people off in a period of high unemployment when there was plenty of work waiting to be done. Third, and even more recently, the CNR made a wage offer to the workers which is clearly part of the over-all Liberal plan to blame workers for inflation, in spite of the fact that the real incomes of workers, after inflation, have decreased every year for the last four or five years.

If the Liberal government had half a brain, it would provide the money that the CNR legitimately needs for capital investment through a national investment strategy, instead of forcing the CN to lay off workers and hold down wages in order to expand. That would be the kind of sound economic and employment policy we in the New Democratic Party could support and, indeed, would implement if we were the government.

Mr. Robert Bockstael (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, let me say emphatically that I share the hon. member's concern about the loss of jobs at Canadian National. I am certain the minister does too, as he has indicated in the House. However, the hon. member must realize that if the CN is expected to continue to serve its customers and Canada as effectively as it does, it must be allowed to operate in an efficient manner.

The facts are clear. Traffic was down substantially in the latter part of 1981 and, in January 1982, traffic was down 15 per cent from the previous year's level. It was regrettably necessary, as a consequence, to reduce manpower correspondingly.

The hon. member should not overdramatize the situation. Normal attrition, early retirements and job transfers will result in significantly fewer people affected than the number of positions abolished. Although the CN does not see a reversal of