

Railways

If I may mention some, there are the CN Pensioners' Association and their many councils and locals, the Canadian Pacific Pensioners' Association, the National Council of CN Pensioners' Associations Incorporated, the Saskatchewan CPR Pensioners' Social and Service Association. I suspect my colleague, the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin), was probably a founding member of the Saskatchewan Pensioners' Association. I would like to mention the Biggar Railway Employees and Pensioners Association and the Ottawa Retired Railway Pension Association. There is even a CNR Lady Pensioners' Association. There are retired members of many unions—the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen of the United States and Canada, to mention but a few.

An important contingent, of course, are members of the Canadian Railways Employees' Pension Association, whose membership totals some 19,000 and which I understand is split about equally between pensioners and active employees. The Canadian Railways Employees' Pension Association has been in existence since December, 1971 and consists of 19 branches of which four are particularly active.

Many of these associations from time to time put forward their views on pension and pensioners' issues. The Canadian Railway Employees' Pension Association has certainly been among the most active in this regard, as has its president, Mr. J. Earl White. Without detracting one moment from the efforts of Mr. White, I think we must also acknowledge that many of the other unions have made similar types of presentations.

However, the Canadian Railways Employees' Pension Association has not been the only pensioner association which has made itself clearly heard. It is important to mention the National Council of Canadian National Pensioners' Associations Inc. This organization, called the National Council, was incorporated in 1974. It represents four regional and thirty-two local councils, some of which date back to the 1940s. At present, through its associations the National Council represents about 15,000 CN pensioners. It is the policy of the National Council to work together with CN for the benefit of its members. Since February, 1984 the National Council President has been one of the three pensioners' representatives of the CN Pension Board.

Many of these groups have made numerous recommendations on improvements to their pension plans in the past and, over time, these have no doubt contributed to achieving some improvements in the benefits which railways and other pensioners enjoy today.

Not to be ignored in contributing toward improvements in the railway pension plans are the negotiated settlements among active employees with their employers, as well as various government initiatives such as the Pension Benefits Standards Act amendments introduced earlier this year. The former have enabled certain enrichment of plans as part of the collective bargaining process, and the latter government initiative will go a long way to increasing pension benefits.

Railway pension plans, and I can speak particularly for CN's pension plan, have long been among the best in the country. I should take this opportunity to mention to Members of this House the fact that CN's 1959 pension plan is above average. Indeed, by most standards it has been among the top ten plans in Canada and provides benefits that only 25 per cent of members of pension plans in Canada enjoy. CN has also done much in recent years and months to improve various aspects of its plan.

It is through the untiring efforts of employees and pensioners in all walks of life, as represented either directly with their employers or through their unions and associations, that benefits to them and Canadian pensioners as a whole continue to improve over the years. To all these groups and individuals, I would extend recognition and encourage them to work closely with their present or former employers to achieve their goals.

I wish to take this opportunity to express my highest esteem to the railway pensioners throughout Canada and my thanks to them for their significant part in building this great and wonderful nation.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Birds Hill): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) for giving the House the opportunity to debate something which we do not often get a chance to debate. I recalled in the House just yesterday that one of the promises made by the Conservatives when they came to power in 1984, was that they would finally do something about the long-standing complaints that various CN pensioners and CN pensioners' associations have had about the inadequacies of the CN plan. I noted yesterday in the House that four years will soon have gone by and nothing had happened. We had the subcommittee make some recommendations. For a variety of reasons, good reasons, I might say, not all CN pensioners, particularly Mr. White, whom we honour tonight by debating this motion of commendation, were happy with the report. Even the recommendations of that report would have been an improvement, yet the Government has chosen to let four years go by without acting. The subcommittee reported a long time ago and absolutely nothing is happening.

• (2130)

There are a lot of CN pensioners out there, people who were pensioners in 1984, who will remember this, and people who have become pensioners since 1984. That, I might say, is a very large group because of the process that the CN has gone through since 1984. Incredible numbers of people have been retired. Many retired early, with or without a handshake. Many, fortunately, retired with a handshake.

It used to be that I knew an entire generation of people who worked for the railway. I now know an entire generation of retired railway workers. Most of them are not 65 yet. Most of them retired early as a result of what has been going on at CN. I might say that many of them are thankful to have been retired when they see what is going on in the railway and the way that the CNR is now being run. Many of them are grateful not just to be retired but grateful not to be having to put up with the way in which the railway is now being run.