

*Railway Act*

When my colleague the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) was speaking rather personally about his own father and mother and the small amount of pension that his father had and the smaller amount that his mother had until even it was taken away from her, I was wondering whether I would follow suit. Having gone this far, that is what I shall do.

It just so happens that it is precisely because of a raw deal to a certain railway worker many years ago that I have spent most of my life in parliament. That certain railway machinist was my father. At a time when I was quite deeply involved in my work as a minister of the United Church of Canada, I got word that at the age of 58 he had lost his job. This was because of the depression of the 1930's. Not only did he lose his job, but there was no pension of any kind.

● (2102)

I well remember the feeling I had at the time, that maybe it was not enough for me, whatever others might feel, to confine my advocacy of a better life to the pulpit, but that it was time I tried to do something to change the society that was ruining the lives of so many people, particularly the older ones of that decade. I made up my mind that, although there was nothing I could do in so far as my own father's economic position was concerned, down through the years I would try to get a better deal for railway workers when they reached the age of retirement and that I would try to get a better deal for all of our senior citizens. The loss of his job had not only been an economic blow to my father but a physical blow: three years later he was dead.

I am proud of what we have achieved since the year I made that decision. However, it is a black mark on our society that we have still done so little to improve the pensions of our railway workers, both Canadian National and Canadian Pacific.

I welcome the amendment that has been put forward by my next door neighbour in our home city, the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. McKenzie). As my colleague pointed out, it will make it possible for the accounts of the Canadian National pension fund to be brought before this House and the standing committee so we can hammer away at them. I am sure my friend from Winnipeg South Centre will agree that is all that can be accomplished by this amendment. However, it is something. I hope to goodness the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) will not turn it down.

Having been given a chance to look more closely at the Canadian National pension fund and railway pension funds in general, I hope we will make up our minds that things very substantial have got to be done. For one thing, the basic amount of the pension ought to be increased substantially. For another, indexing of railway pensions, at least to the extent of the rise in the cost of living, should be built into the scheme.

It is not good enough for Canadian National once in a while to grant an ad hoc escalation. It is not good enough for Canadian Pacific even less often than Canadian National to

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

grant an ad hoc escalation. That provision ought to be there in the scheme, in the pension plan itself.

My friend the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre was quite right in drawing on the recommendations of Dr. Noel Hall. He was also quite right in drawing on some of the things said by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) when he made his statement on the indexing of public service pensions in this House on Thursday, March 9 of this year.

In addition to what the President of the Treasury Board said on that occasion to which my hon. friend has referred, there was also a very interesting paragraph in which the President of the Treasury Board pointed out that about 30 per cent of the money in the public service superannuation account, including the employees' contributions and the employer's contributions, belongs to those now retired, the other 70 per cent belonging to those still working. The President of the Treasury Board stated that that 30 per cent which belongs to those already retired is actually earning enough interest, and indeed surplus interest beyond what was expected, to cover in full complete escalation.

I contend that if that fact applies to the public service superannuation account, it applies also to the pension accounts of Canadian National Railways and Canadian Pacific Railway. I suggest the moneys in those funds which belong to those already retired is earning more than enough interest to provide escalation fully equal to the rise in the cost of living. This parliament should not stand for nothing being done on this matter.

It is not good enough to say that Canadian National is a separate Crown corporation and that Canadian Pacific is a separate private corporation. They are both creations of the Parliament of Canada. They both exist on the basis of needs that have to be met in this country and on the basis of the work of Canadians. We have the right to say to them that, even apart from the morality and ethics and rightness of it, there is enough money there to make it possible for full escalation of the pensions of all retired railway workers. Some of us insist that this is a battle which must be won. I just hope it does not take as many more decades as some of us have spent fighting pension battles in this House.

The hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre referred to his parents' experience and to the report of Dr. Noel Hall. When I spoke of that in an earlier speech, I drew attention to the fact there was a reference in that report to the miserably small pension then being paid to the father of a former president of the Canadian Pacific Railway. There was a slight escalation by the CPR of those pensions. The late Mr. Emmerson, the father of the former president, received that slight escalation but died a few months later.

I am putting these things in personal terms. I mentioned the late Mr. Emmerson. My colleague mentioned his father and mother. I mentioned my father. This is the kind of society in which we live. It is made up of people who experienced rough times in industry. I see the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) across the way. Sometimes I love her and sometimes I don't.