

Committee on Railways and Shipping

unemployment insurance, this period should count in his pension qualification period. This has frequently been the contention of the hon. member for Perth. It is something which represents a real demand on the part of the railway employees of this country.

In summarizing I simply say this. The time has come and it is long overdue when the basic pension of Canadian National Railways employees should be increased. Secondly, I join with my friend the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre in suggesting to the minister that the Canadian Pacific Railway, a private corporation, having seen fit to make changes such as have been referred to by him in detail, there is no justification for the railway of the people of Canada doing less than its competitor is doing. I also suggest that if the Canadian National Railways is to secure its fair and proper share of the competitive dollar in this country it should certainly do a lot more than it is doing to elevate the standard of its trans-Canada train. It is a fine train but it can be improved a great deal more in order to meet the competition provided by the Canadian Pacific Railway and its trans-Canada train. Too frequently individuals having no preference one for the other take the Canadian Pacific Railway train in cases where the Canadian National Railways train would ordinarily be taken.

Now we pass on to another matter which has to do with the transportation of goods and merchandise. Mention has already been made of the box car situation.

The Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe) blandly brushes this aside, saying, there are lots of cars; everything is fine. Within the last week, on February 28, the Saskatchewan wheat pool, a non-political organization, came to this conclusion, as reported in a recent press dispatch:

Persistent shortages of box cars for movement of grain from the prairies have made deep cuts into the current income of many western farmers.

It then goes on to deal with the situation as it exists. I would point out that the manner in which box car distribution has been made on the prairies would seem to indicate that those in authority on the Canadian National Railways have little regard to the needs of the western provinces. It may be that box car traffic hauling other than wheat is more remunerative, but there can be no justification for the cavalier disregard that has been shown to the requirements of the western provinces and the farmers who inhabit those provinces.

The records show that in a period of five months from the first of August until the

first of February on the prairies there were some 32,000 less cars hauling wheat than in the previous year. There has been a near collapse of freight transportation for wheat on the prairies and in large measure this is responsible for the financial condition which exists today. It cannot be offered as an excuse that there was no place to which to haul the grain, because there was vacant storage available running well up to 100 million bushels.

These are one or two matters that I wanted to bring to the attention of the minister. I recapitulate. In so far as railway pensions are concerned, what possible reason can be given to deny the almost universal desire on the part of railway employees to have a reconsideration of the rules governing the payment of their pensions and for the removal of injustices, inequities and anomalies which have crept into the administration of these regulations, as they creep into the administration of all regulations when tested in the light of experience?

If that were given there would be a changed attitude. If the minister would travel incognito across the country on the trains of the Canadian National Railways and ask the employees what they think of the administration as they see it today he would receive a reaction of depressed morale which would be a revelation to him. What I am trying to place before the house at this time is that that state of mind on the part of the railway employees is not conducive to expansion or to securing the largest possible share of the competitive freight dollar.

Mr. Elmore Philpott (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, I want to take just a minute or two with what seems to me to be an extremely important point having to do with a certain percentage of Canadian National employees whose pensions are totally inadequate to meet the cost of living today. I am not going to go into the numbers of these pensioners because they have been set forth already in the discussion earlier today and there are members on all sides of the house who have brought this matter to the attention of the proper authorities before now. I certainly have done so, not only to the former minister but to the management of the Canadian National Railways.

I submit that there is a special reason why the Canadian National Railways should not fall behind the Canadian Pacific Railway Company in the treatment of any of its employees. I think we all believe in robust competition. One reason why there has been such admirable success on the part of the Canadian National, one reason why the Canadian National has become, not only the pride