

*Committee on Railways and Shipping*

I have in my hand the answers to six questions which were put concerning employment on the Canadian National Railways. On reading them I notice that in each case the reply states that "the Canadian National Railways advise as follows", and then the information follows. I assure hon. members that the source of the information is not my imagination, but is the records of the Canadian National Railways. I believe the information given is truthful and accurate; otherwise, as the responsible minister, I should not give it to the house.

I should like to say also that no answer has been given while I have been minister that I have not examined personally. I want to say, therefore, that I accept full responsibility for the language used in all the answers which have been given. I have reread them since the debate this afternoon, and while I might perhaps be a somewhat prejudiced observer, I do not believe any fair-minded person would say that the answers given were arrogant, or that they suggested the minister lived in an ivory tower and wished to withhold information, except under the circumstances to which I have already referred.

On this same subject of questions I should like to say that a number of questions have been put concerning lay-offs by the Canadian National Railways. I am quite sure hon. members will appreciate the difficulties that arise from the use of this term "lay-off". As I understand it, if the railway discharges an employee and immediately engages another in his place, there is in fact a lay-off and there is also the engagement of a new individual. Consequently when members ask for information concerning lay-offs, it seems to imply a consideration of all the cases where the services of an employee have been dispensed with or where he has voluntarily retired.

We have not, in the Department of Transport, endeavoured to avoid giving information concerning employment with the Canadian National Railways. The difficulty has arisen when questions have been asked that would have involved special research on the part of the railway staff. If any member had made a case for having special information concerning a particular date, I think we would have endeavoured to obtain that information. We have received information as to the total number of employees on the railway at the middle of each month. Whenever questions have been put and the records of the railway company would permit us to give an answer in that way, we have made no effort whatever to conceal the facts concerning employment figures.

Not very long ago the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre asked about employment during the month of February. I must say I was sorry I was not able at that time to furnish the information, for the simple reason that the information was not then available. In fact it was only this afternoon that I was able to obtain information with regard to the level of employment in the middle of February. I would have liked to give that information to the hon. member for Prince Albert who, I am sorry, is not in his seat at the moment. Had he been here I would have told him that at February 15 employment in the Canadian National Railways was 102,262, which shows very little difference from the figures for January, 1955.

I do not want unduly to prolong the discussion, but I think hon. members would be interested to know that there are very marked fluctuations in the level of employment in the Canadian National Railways. If I might merely put a few examples on record, I believe they would serve to demonstrate the difficulty of arriving at any very positive conclusions from the number of persons employed at any mid-month point.

For example, in March of 1952 the employment level was 118,561, whereas in the following month it was 113,375. One would have thought that meant a tremendous number of lay-offs. Yet only a few months later in the same year the total was back to 120,095 employees which, up to that time, was probably an all-time high in employment on the railroad.

I notice that as between the highest and lowest month of that year there was a difference of some 6,700 employees, while in 1953 there was a difference of some 11,000 and in 1954 of some 6,000. So the figures from month to month can be very misleading. And it is a fact that, though August seems to be the month of peak employment—a fact which I am sure hon. members will understand—the month of minimum employment seems to vary and is not always the same every year.

At all events I would say that we do not wish to conceal any information concerning employment with the Canadian National Railways, and if questions are asked concerning employment at mid-month dates it is usually not too difficult to provide the information hon. members desire to have.

Then the hon. member for Greenwood referred to the board of directors of the Canadian National Railways. I think I shall merely say to him tonight that there is on the order paper legislation to consolidate into one statute the various enactments relating to the Canadian National Railways, and he will