

Railways and Shipping Committee

I might also advise the house that it is planned to have the sittings of the committee start on Monday, July 14, with the consideration of the Canadian National report as the first business.

Hon. Lionel Chevrier (Laurier): This is the motion, Mr. Speaker, which I understand is annually submitted to the house by the responsible minister, in this case the Minister of Transport (Mr. Hees), to establish a committee in order to discuss the operations of three government-owned and controlled enterprises, namely the Canadian National Railways, the Canadian National Steamships and the Trans-Canada Air Lines. It is the motion which affords an opportunity to members of the house to discuss the affairs of these three government-owned enterprises.

I say to the minister that I am somewhat disappointed in the fact he did not take the opportunity this evening to discuss some of the matters concerning these enterprises that are of importance to the house; some of the things that we have been interested in during this session and the last one. If my memory serves me rightly, we did not have the opportunity of discussing this matter during the last session.

When the minister was a member of the opposition he almost unflinchingly took part in this debate on the motion to establish a special committee on railways, shipping and air lines and there were few occasions when he did not take advantage of the situation to take the then government to task and to criticize it rather severely for certain of its acts of omission or commission. Inside and outside the house he was critical of lay-offs in the Canadian National Railways. But I cannot help thinking that on this extremely important question of lay-offs in the Canadian National Railways, his outlook has changed since he has moved to the other side of the house.

When he was a member of the opposition lay-offs were deplorable; there was no excuse whatever for men being laid off by the Canadian National Railways in the various shops of that government enterprise from one end of the country to the other. The government was responsible. But now, since he has become the minister responsible for the Department of Transport and is the spokesman in this house for the Canadian National Railways he takes an entirely different view of the whole subject. On more than one occasion, in answer to questions in this house, he has given little information; he has said that it is a fact that lay-offs are deplorable, that they are regretted by the government but that they must take place from time to time. I want to draw to the attention of the

[Mr. Hees.]

house the fact that that is an entirely different tune from the one which was played by the minister when he sat on this side of the house.

Even the present Prime Minister was extremely critical of the lay-offs made by the Canadian National Railways. I recall what he said in 1956. His words can be found at page 1864 of *Hansard* of that year. He said this:

The morale of Canadian National Railways employees today in most cases is lower than it has been at any time in my experience because the employees feel they are not receiving the consideration they deserve.

You will appreciate, Mr. Speaker, that the present Prime Minister in those days, just like the present Minister of Transport, regarded lay-offs in an entirely different light from that in which he regards them at the present time. Now it is the Canadian National Railways management that is responsible for lay-offs; members of the government have nothing whatsoever to do with this extremely important question.

This brings me to another subject that is dear to the heart of the present Prime Minister and I want again to quote his words which can be found in the debates of the session of 1956, volume II, at page 1864:

One of the things which would assist would be the removal of the present low level of the basic pension. It should be increased at least to \$40 a month. That would not be very costly. I am speaking from memory but I believe that pensions today cost approximately 2.7 per cent of the total amount taken in by the Canadian National Railways. The increase in question would be infinitesimal having regard to the total amount of business done and would raise beyond words of description the morale of the employees of the railway company.

Of course it was not the first time that the hon. member for Prince Albert had spoken on this subject. As I said earlier, it is one that is dear to his heart. That fact no doubt explains why in the general election of 1957 we had a formal pledge as to C.N.R. pensions by the hon. member for Prince Albert, now the Prime Minister of Canada. He spoke on May 4 at Moncton and Campbellton in New Brunswick—and I draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to the fact that when he spoke in those two cities his words certainly did not fall on deaf ears because there were a large number of employees of the Canadian National Railways who were particularly interested in what the Prime Minister would have to say concerning their problem. I therefore think it is safe to say that what he said fell on very sympathetic ears. I quote his words as reported by the *Globe and Mail* of May 6, 1957. Here they are:

How can the government ask other employers to give their men and women benefits when crown