

*Supply—Transport*

employers" advisedly. Despite the contention that in a sense the Canadian National Railways is a separate entity which handles its own affairs, in the last analysis the entire system is owned by the people of Canada. That means the government, indeed this parliament, must be regarded as the final employer of these people, and I feel we must yet find some way to supplement and increase the amount of that basic pension.

Although I am not a member of the committee on railways and shipping owned, operated and controlled by the government, I have followed the proceedings of that committee with interest and attention. The matter has been raised there, but about all that has come out of the discussion in that committee is the fact that the president of the Canadian National Railways, Mr. Donald Gordon, sees no possibility of the Canadian National itself dealing with this problem. It seems to me that makes it clear that if we are going to get action on this anywhere it will have to be at the level of the government itself; and the only way we can get action from the government, it seems, is for us to exercise our right in parliament to draw this matter to the attention of the government until something is done.

I remind the minister, as I have done on previous occasions, that there is a precedent for this in one of the items we will be called upon to vote a little later. I refer to the item that relates to the railway employees provident fund. That is a case in which a statute stipulates that the pension is to be the sum of \$20 per month. The statute still says that pensions shall be \$20 a month, but for many years now—in fact it must run to something like thirty years—there has been an item in the estimates every year to supplement that \$20 up to a figure of \$30 a month. This supplementary benefit was first provided in the form of an estimate shortly after the close of world war I, when it would seem to be obvious that the people of that day realized that with rising costs it was not fair to ask these people to continue on pensions of only \$20 a month. I do not wish to be interpreted as being satisfied with that figure of \$30 a month. No one would suspect that. I am merely quoting it as a precedent, showing that the government of Canada can step in and by means of a special estimate rectify a wrong of this kind.

I feel it is grossly wrong and unfair to these more than 3,000 retired employees of the Canadian National Railways that there should be no improvement in their basic pension of \$25 a month. I plead with the minister, just as strongly as I can, to take

[Mr. Knowles.]

this whole question under advisement at the ministerial level and indeed at the cabinet level. Let him not say to us again that it should go to a committee or that it should be discussed with the Canadian National Railways. This is a problem that is now on the doorstep of the minister, and of the government itself. I feel it is their responsibility, in the name of parliament, to introduce an item in the estimates or whatever legislation may be necessary, to see to it that those who have only that basic pension of \$25 a month get an increase to some more reasonable figure.

A few years ago, when I first started to present this case, I suggested a minimum figure of \$40 a month. Certainly, that is still a minimum. But with what has happened to living costs and to the problems confronting these people, perhaps an even higher amount than that should now be stipulated as the minimum. At any rate, Mr. Chairman, I raise this question now, and I press it upon the minister as a problem that should be considered by him and by the cabinet for action by the government without further delay. It is a matter of extreme urgency to those who are affected.

Another subject upon which I hope we can get some information as we proceed has to do with the subject of grade crossings. On one or two previous occasions we have had a little difficulty discussing that item in the detailed portion of the estimates, because of the way in which the item is set out. Actually, it is a statutory item, though it does seem to come under the provisions of the administration item with respect to the board of transport commissioners. Perhaps to avoid any procedural difficulty at that point, we might have something on it from the minister at this stage of the estimates. I do not ask that he deal with it immediately following my remarks or even today, but that he include it in whatever organization he is making of what he is going to say before the first item passes. We should like to know how many projects for the elimination of grade crossings have been undertaken during the past twelve months, and how many have been completed. We should like to know what projects for the elimination of grade crossings are now in the process of construction. We should like to know how many applications for the elimination of grade crossings are before the board of transport commissioners today, and what consideration is being given to them.

Now, Mr. Chairman, most of the other items with which I have to deal can be dealt with as we proceed with the estimates in