

Railways

Unfortunately, the time I have available to me is running out. I know that some of my colleagues want to speak. I will be interested to hear the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Thacker) on this subject.

It is important to note that the onus is squarely on the CNR and Canadian Pacific to respond to Earl White, to respond to the concerns of railway pensioners right across this land who believe that they have been robbed.

This is at a time when the cost of living is going up and pensioners are struggling to survive. They are people who have contributed in many cases 40 and 50 years of their lives. I think of people like one of my own constituents, Ray Carrell, who put a lifetime into the railroad. The corporate executives, the fat cats in Canadian National and Canadian Pacific, get great pensions worth of hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, but the ordinary worker, the Earl Whites and Ray Carrells and other railway pensioners, are being hosed. They are the ones being robbed of the funds that rightfully belong to them.

I could go on further about some of the specific figures. Certainly I would be pleased to make these figures available to any Member of the House, indeed anyone in the public who is interested.

In my view Earl White has set out a very comprehensive and concrete statement of the exact situation affecting railway pensioners. He has the funds clearly set out. I believe that the claims Earl White has made are valid and deserve to be repeated.

I am pleased to have an opportunity to do so in the House. I only wish that we had an opportunity to bring him before a parliamentary committee. When New Democrats are in a position to bring forward legislation that would prevent the raiding of pensions, certainly one of the people who deserves the most credit for this change will be my constituent, Mr. Earl White.

Finally, I repeat that the reason this raid on pensioners' funds has been allowed to take place is that past governments, whether they be Liberal or Conservative, have stood by and allowed it to happen. We are not talking about hundreds of millions of dollars, but about billions of dollars. They have not brought forward legislation that would prevent this kind of rip-off of private pension plans and the pension plans of Canadian National and Canadian Pacific.

● (2120)

In conclusion, once again I want to thank all Members of the House for the opportunity to raise what I consider to be a very serious inequity which affects hundreds of thousands of pensioners, employees, spouses, and beneficiaries. I would also, once again, like to thank Earl White for the tremendous work he has done on behalf of the people right across Canada in drawing this matter to the attention of the public. Let us hope

that one of the most important accomplishments of the next Parliament of Canada will be to right this great historic wrong.

Mr. Blaine A. Thacker (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the motion put before this House, dated August 10, 1988, proposing the commendation of "the Canadian National Railways' Employees' Pension Association and in particular National President J. Earl White for their dedication and tireless efforts on behalf of past, present and future railway employees".

On a personal basis, I would also like to thank my colleague, the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson), for placing the motion on the Order Paper. It permitted me the opportunity to be briefed thoroughly on this topic and I must say that I found it to be most interesting. I think Members would like me to share with them information about the pensioners of the railways of Canada.

I would like to give some background on the matter of pensions and on this association, in particular. Canadian National embraces some 44,000 pensioners, with a similar number for CP rail and other railways in Canada combined. These are people who the Government recognizes as having spent their lives making the railways of Canada run, railways which were long the lifelines of commerce, the very arteries and veins which bound the nation together in the first place and which still play an important role in getting our products to market—our grain, coal, forest products, and many manufactured goods such as automobiles, steel products, and pulp and paper.

As you well know, Madam Speaker, it is people who make an enterprise run, who are the backbone of the enterprise. They make it successful, and this is a fundamental truth in the case of our railways—Canadian National, CP Rail, BC Rail, Ontario Northland, and our resource railways like the Quebec Northshore and Labrador, to name just a few. Many of the people who ran some of those railways, indeed, many of those who built some of them, such as the Great Slave Lake Railway, parts of the BC Rail, and other lines, are today represented in the tens of thousands of railway pensioners.

They have worked hard in their careers, men and women alike, as trainmen, carmen, brakemen, porters, stewards on passenger trains, dispatchers, operators, and many, many other careers from maintenance of waymen to engineers. There are many categories which I am sure I did not mention but are no less important and no less worthy of mention.

Since being a Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport I have noticed among railway men and women a pride in serving their railway which we do not often find in other occupations. They are very proud to be railway people. They do not seem to lose that even when they become pensioners. These numerous pensioners today are represented or have grouped themselves into a large number of local, regional, provincial or national associations, or combinations thereof.