

Canadian National Railways

because understanding will exist only when appointments are made to ensure that the two great nations that make up our country will co-operate in the administration of public business, the various departments and crown corporations.

That is why I protest, not against any specific appointment, because I trust the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Finance, I recognize the competence of those accountants and their honesty when auditing the books of the C.N.R.

The only thing I deplore is precisely—

[Text]

Mr. Benson: Mr. Chairman, will the hon. member permit a question? I was wondering whether the hon. member is aware that there are a number of French Canadians in the firm of auditors that is being appointed for the C.N.R. audit. In fact, I would think there are as many French Canadians in this firm as there are in any major accounting firm in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Teillet: Mr. Chairman, may I make a comment?

I should not like to leave unchallenged—

The Chairman: Is the hon. member rising on a point of order? The hon. member for Lapointe still has the floor.

Mr. Gregoire: Mr. Chairman, there may be several French Canadian accountants in that firm. I was asking for information about that a while ago and I am only too happy to get some. Besides, I pointed out that those appointed as public accountants are qualified, and the protest I raise tonight is not against that firm of accountants. I do want to say that, but it is rather against the fact that we do not appoint a reasonable proportion of French Canadian people within the federal civil service and the crown corporations.

It is on that point that I raise my objection.

[Text]

The Chairman: The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, I should like to repeat a suggestion that I think I first made 15 or 20 years ago. It was rejected then and was rejected several times after I first made it. It seems to me that tonight it is more appropriate than ever. My suggestion can be put in the form of a question. Why not have the Auditor General of Canada do the work of auditing the accounts of Canadian National Railways?

Mr. Teillet: Is this still the point of order?

Mr. Knowles: No. Is there a point of order? I was making a speech. Just because I am on my feet does not mean there is a point of order.

Mr. Pickersgill: It is a reasonable assumption.

Mr. Teillet: Mr. Chairman, I am sorry to interrupt the hon. gentleman, but I thought the Chair a moment ago pointed out to me that we were discussing a point of order and asked whether my remarks were on it, and they were not. I thought I had the floor then.

The Chairman: No, I am afraid not. I recognized the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, I do not blame my hon. friend and neighbour from St. Boniface for being confused. When I made the suggestion some years ago that the Auditor General might do this job, there was never at that time any comment such as we have heard this evening, involving the use of the word "patronage". We proposed that the job should be done by him because we thought the Auditor General of Canada could do the job for us. After all, he is responsible to this parliament. But because the banter back and forth this evening over the changing of the firm of auditors has raised questions about patronage, it seems to me a good way to remove any such allegation would be by having this job done, not by a firm that might be friendly to this party or the other, but by the Auditor General appointed by the parliament of Canada. It seems to me also it would meet the point raised by the hon. member for Lapointe, because I understand that in the office of the Auditor General there are about 180 employees and I am sure a reasonable proportion of them are English speaking and a reasonable proportion are French speaking. I believe that not only does this suggestion made good sense and good economics, but it would do away with this query about patronage. It would also meet the contention of the hon. member for Lapointe, if the government would consider having this audit carried out by the Auditor General of Canada.

Mr. Benson: Mr. Chairman, perhaps I may make some brief remarks in this connection. I have some sympathy with the hon. member's suggestion with regard to having the Auditor General audit the accounts of the C.N.R. However, there are several corporations—and I think the minutes of the proceedings of the public account's committee of last week would indicate the number of audits—which are carried out by other than the Auditor General. I think there is a reasonably good reason for this, in that the Auditor General has