

Mr. COOPER: I should like to mention in connection with this change it was decided we would give each district engineer an accounting clerk, and we chose the division assistant accountant to stay with the district engineer; but in every case except one they asked that they be permitted to remove to Winnipeg. The reason for that is a perfectly sound one. The opportunity for this staff in the Winnipeg office will be measurably better than it is in the district and divisional offices. At the present time the advancement which is open to these small staffs is very limited. They cannot go very far. By moving into the central accounting office at Winnipeg, they have the opportunity of going as far as, say, the regional auditor's position, which is quite a responsible position.

Mr. SANDERSON: What about the province of Ontario—London, for instance?

Mr. COOPER: After we have dealt with the western region, we intend to move to the central region. Centralization having been agreed to in principle, and having some regard to the practicability of making these changes, we have to do it in stages. We thought it would be advantageous to deal first with the western region, then with the central region, and then move to the Atlantic region, the thought being that complete centralization would be effected before the end of this year. I might say that, as far as I know, the Canadian National Railway is the only railway on the North American continent which has not centralized its accounting either on a regional or on a headquarters basis.

Mr. HANSON: Is the C.P.R. centralized?

Mr. COOPER: The C.P.R. is more or less centralized in two places: in Western Canada and in Montreal. They have what they call district accounting, which is a stage in between division accounting and regional accounting. Most of the large railways are at least on a regional basis and quite a number of them are on a centralized basis centred at headquarters.

Mr. POULIOT: Is that done in view of possible regulation of the railways in the near future?

Mr. COOPER: Not in any way, Mr. Pouliot, no. It is done essentially in the interests of efficiency. It is also due to the fact that under present conditions we are finding it very difficult to get the clerical staff we need to perform the work that has to be done. The work of the railway has increased tremendously, and members of our staff are enlisting. We are confronted with restrictions in the engagement of staff to replace them, and I think it is inevitable that steps of this sort should be made effective if the railway work is to be continued. We have to do more work, and we have to do it with less staff; and that is what centralization of accounting is intended to do. Incidentally, we expect to save some money.

Mr. NICHOLSON: At how many centres is this work now being carried on in the central region?

Mr. COOPER: We have Fort William, Port Arthur, Dauphin, Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Calgary, Prince Rupert, Vancouver and Winnipeg. In future all this accounting work will be done in Winnipeg. We feel too that this is a good time to do it. Any one who might be displaced at this time has all sorts of opportunities to go and find work. If we waited until things were slack, then you would be confronted with a personnel problem. We have thought of this plan, as a matter of fact, for several years. We have hesitated to do it because of the damage that would be done to the people whose positions would be abolished. This seems to us to be a very desirable time to introduce a centralization plan of this sort. The relatively few people who might be displaced, as I see it, will not have the slightest difficulty in leaving the railway service and finding other employment. But in every case the people displaced will have relatively very short service. I should like to repeat that those who are transferred to the centres will have considerably better prospects. The position of chief accounting officer of the Canadian National Railways will be