

*Canadian National Railways*

the Great Slave Lake railway. It would appear to me that this is a matter of urgency as this crown agency has an obligation to lead the way in proper contract supervision. It is expected that the minister will have a statement to make on the fair and just settlement with the contractors engaged in the construction of the Great Slave Lake railway.

I think it is only right at this time to remind the minister that he should be particularly cautious in his desire to save money when such saving can have the effect of creating hazardous conditions in rail operations. I refer specifically at this time to the elimination of maintenance of way employees and the cutting back of car inspections on through passenger and freight trains. No one needs to remind the minister that the first line of defence in the operation of the railroad is the section man who is required to keep track and roadbed conditions at their best at all times. I do not like hearing of failures because of washouts, broken rails, cave-ins, just to mention a few examples, as it invariably follows that these can all be chalked up to a lack of people to do the job necessary in coping with the high speed trains of today. It can be said that one can expect an act of God in some of these situations, but there have been far too many of these incidents to use that excuse in every failure that has occurred.

My second concern is the decreasing amount of car inspection that is being carried on at terminals by qualified car staff or carmen. I submit that there is far too great a desire on the part of company officers to decrease the work force and pay no attention to the dangers that are being created by such reduction. Trains today are travelling at speeds of 70 to 75 miles per hour in freight service and higher than that in passenger service, and even though the equipment has improved in the past number of years the need for frequent car inspections is an absolute necessity. I, personally, can relate many experiences where wrecks were averted because carmen found defects at intermediate terminals and the necessary repairs were made. I can assure you this is not idle talk, Mr. Chairman. These are true facts and evidence is easily available to substantiate them.

I now wish to say a brief word about the air lines, and I agree with my hon. friend's position with regard to the presidency of Air Canada. I will not repeat what he said. I can only say that the congestion at some of our airports makes one wonder how much needs

[Mr. Skoberg.]

to be done to keep up with the ever-increasing air travel. The staff at these airports are doing an excellent job but too often the work load and the so-called automated system leave people stranded at airports without accommodation. This is happening, and when it does our image in so far as Air Canada is concerned is not improved. When one is in a service industry every effort must be made to serve and please the paying customer. I am sure hon. members agree with that concept.

A further and most important point to be drawn to the minister's attention concerns employees of the C.N.R. who are now on pension. It is well known that a pension which years ago would have seemed adequate to meet a bare standard of living is so inadequate today that these pensioners are living on a bare subsistence. Most hon. members know that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has been waging an unsuccessful fight for people on fixed low pensions and everyone will accept the premise that his attempts are entirely justified.

In the resolution before us it should be recognized and accepted by the government that provisions must be included to expend moneys for the express purpose of alleviating the degrading situation of these pensioners. Surely we cannot continue to ignore one of the greatest problems before us today. People on fixed income or low wages deserve our sincere, immediate attention in raising their incomes to a level that will allow them to appreciate a few of the good things of our modern day living. After all, these are the pioneers of our country and the C.N.R. pensioners are the very people who made it possible for this crown corporation to be the success it is today. These C.N.R. pensioners, and in effect all pensioners, are entitled to due recognition. This party implores the government to take immediate steps now to rectify this deplorable situation.

● (12:40 p.m.)

We will have more to say on the various clauses of the bill when it is introduced. At this time may I say that I agree with the statements some hon. members have made with regard to millions of dollars being spent for purposes of rail improvement and air traffic. At the same time the government across the line is becoming interested in making large investments in the most economic method of transport and is looking increasingly toward a greater use of rail passenger service. I implore the government not to abandon rail passenger traffic but to support