

Supply—Transport

these days when private industry is prepared to pay a basic pension of \$60 or \$65 a month, with some contribution on the part of the employees, I believe the government as an employer should show the way in assuring a reasonable degree of security for its own employees.

Then I want to bring to the attention of the minister a complaint in connection with the administration of the pension fund. Altogether too much red tape is insisted upon in connection with proof of age and continuity of service. Numbers of Canadian National employees object most strenuously to the fact that, their continuity of service having been interrupted by being placed on the spare or slow board, they are denied the pension for the entire period of their service. While they were unemployed they could not seek employment elsewhere; but, having a break in their service, are denied a pension proportionate to the period of time they have been with the company. I believe something should be done in this regard. Then, there is no reason why proof of age should be insisted upon to the extent of a birth certificate or its equivalent. Surely the census information given by the parents of these employees seeking pension should be accepted as the best evidence of age in the absence of official documentation. Persons now approaching the age of sixty-five may have been born in an area where birth registration certificates were not as generally available as they are now.

The third suggestion I make is in connection with those who are out of work by reason of illness and are denied unemployment insurance. These employees contribute regularly to the unemployment insurance fund; it is compulsory. The only time they are able to collect any return under that insurance is when suitable work is not available. As far as railway and other similar employees are concerned, I believe provision should be made to ensure them protection under the Unemployment Insurance Act in the event that they become unemployed by reason of illness.

I am not going into further detail in connection with the pension system, except to say this. I think the time has come when we should enact legislation similar to the United States Retirement Act. It protects men in service on the railways, no matter where performed. Some Canadian National employees began their service on other lines and yet their service on those other lines cannot be counted in the computation of their pension.

I wish to ask the minister what was the result of the negotiations last fall between the unions and the Canadian National Railways in connection with the demand for a five-day

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

week and a seven-cent per hour increase in wages. I have been asked that question by a number of employees. What are the possibilities of acceptance of those terms, or at least a compromise?

Finally, sir, there is one other matter affecting the province of Saskatchewan, and northern Saskatchewan in particular. I know that the minister and nearly every other member of the house from Saskatchewan has received letters from Mrs. Gibbs, who lives in northwestern Saskatchewan, and who for some time has been conducting a one-woman campaign for the completion of the gap between Heinsburg and Frenchman's Butte in northwestern Saskatchewan. Persistently, in season and out of season, Mrs. Gibbs, representing the view of the people of northwestern Saskatchewan, has demanded the completion of this gap. The settlers who went in there twenty-five or thirty years ago find themselves in a forty-mile gap between the ends of a railway which begins nowhere and ends nowhere. To make it a useful, worth-while and paying railway branch line, I submit it should be completed. The gap between Bonnyville and St. Walburg should also be completed.

Anyone who goes into that area cannot but be impressed by the disadvantage suffered by the people who are served by railway lines in which a gap remains to be completed. Those settlers went in there believing that those lines would be completed. I ask the minister, when he replies, to give those people some hope that this work will soon be undertaken.

Again I ask the minister to bring to the attention of Canadian National Railways the fact that they have several thousand employees whose basic pension, after many years of service, is out of line, having regard to any other pension system in effect today; that it is unjust as to its amount, and that it denies to employees the security they rightfully should have, having regard to years of service rendered at comparatively low rates of pay.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, I shall take only two or three minutes, for the obvious reason that my views about this matter are on record a great many times. But I want to support the representations put so well by the member for Lake Centre. I feel it should be indicated that there is wide support for the request that is being made for the reconsideration of the position of Canadian National employees, so far as pensions are concerned.

I want to thank the minister for his readiness to secure information and put it on *Hansard* every time I have asked a question