

*Supply—Transport*

discussed this question on February 11, 1948, as reported on page 1111 of *Hansard*, as follows:

In reply to the invitation given by the hon. member for Lake Centre to the government to revise upward the basic pension of the Canadian National Railways, all I can say is that, in view of the attitude taken by the government with respect to its own superannuated civil servants, I would not feel disposed to advise the government to interfere in the pension plan of the Canadian National Railways, or to ask the government to tell the officers of the Canadian National Railways that they should revise the basic pension upward.

So the situation has remained throughout the intervening years. The other day the matter came up again and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre and myself spoke with regard to the necessity of something being done. In my opinion there is no excuse that can be satisfactorily given for the failure of the government to have acted in this connection. Three years have gone by and the cost of living continues to mount while the basic pension of the Canadian National Railways remains at \$25 per month.

Today members of the house received a communication from James Downs, secretary of the Canadian National Railways veterans association, which sets forth the situation in clear and unmistakable language. This bears the date April 12, 1951, and says in part:

At a recent meeting of the above association I was instructed to bring to your attention the following conditions affecting the Canadian National Railways pensioned employees.

That the basic pension minimum, twenty-five dollars a month, is totally inadequate to meet the continual rising cost of living, especially amongst the large number of pensioners who, when employed, were receiving wages which only entitles them to the minimum pension of twenty-five dollars.

It goes on to point out that a large number of pensioners did not have the privilege of contributing to the revised pension plan which was put into operation in 1935, and continues:

The employees of the railways and all industries in Canada have had increases in wages and cost of living bonuses granted to them to meet the cost of living conditions during the past few years.

Then the next paragraph reads:

That many of the pensioners are merely existing under deplorable and extenuating circumstances, also cannot secure the old age pension between the ages of 65 to 70 years.

Then they point out that the Canadian Pacific Railway Company and the Ontario Northland Railway have increased the pension rate for retired employees. I bring this matter again to the attention of the minister. There is not a day goes by without letters being received from ex-employees of the Canadian National Railways pointing out the injustice of the situation. While in

the chamber this evening I received a letter from one of these former employees setting out the situation. He points out that he worked for twenty-seven years and eight months straight service but is not of an age to be entitled to the pension. Not being sixty years of age he is not entitled to what is called a gratuitous pension because he had some small savings set aside and had built himself a house during the years he was earning.

I do not want to speak at any length but I feel that the present rate of basic pension cannot be justified in any way. It is inadequate, it is unfair, it is unreasonable. Several thousand ex-employees of Canadian National Railways across this country find themselves today, by reason of the rising cost of living and having only a basic pension of \$25 a month, in a position that is unjustifiable and is no credit to one of the public services of this country. In order to give any other hon. member an opportunity to join in this discussion, I simply conclude by asking the minister what is going to be done about this matter. How much longer will action be delayed? Four years have gone by since I first brought the matter up. There is no indication yet that anything is being done to meet the situation.

These ex-employees are not organized. They have no means whereby they can bring their position before parliament except through the media of members of parliament who are prepared to present the argument. In addition to them, there are also of course those who are being retired from time to time on a basic pension which, in so far as the low income employees of the railway are concerned, places them in a position that borders on destitution inasmuch as over the years in their positions as section men, porters and so on these lesser salaried employees of the railway have been unable to contribute to the pension and thereby provide themselves with at least a semi-adequate pension.

**Mr. Knowles:** There is a good deal I should like to say with respect to this matter even if I have said it before, but I think I will take only a minute to endorse what has been said again by the hon. member for Lake Centre, and to express the hope that in the two or three minutes remaining before eleven o'clock the minister might give us a little more information than he has given thus far on other occasions on which this matter has been raised. It would seem only natural, in view of the number of times the question has been raised, and particularly in view of the number of times the minister has had to get the Canadian National Railways to provide information to answer my questions about