

Canadian National Railways

recommendation and the fact that the House had approved of it. I asked him if he was taking the matter up with the Canadian National Railways, and the reply of the Minister of Transport was in these words:

Mr. Speaker, I will undertake to do that formally, but the slight tremor noted in Montreal on Tuesday seems to be pretty clear evidence that the CNR already knows of the action taken by this House.

Some days later, on Friday, October 23, as recorded in *Hansard* at page 514, I asked the minister again about this, but on that occasion he tried to slough me off with the suggestion that this was a matter to be taken up in the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications. We of this party will not stand for that kind of treatment. I think there are members of all parties, in fact I am sure there are members of the Liberal party, who will not stand for this sort of ploy.

An hon. Member: Who are they?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): They will speak for themselves, I am sure of that. The government will find that there are Liberal members who feel as strongly about this as we do.

We have had officials from the CNR appear before the committee. We have gone through that routine, but since that point the committee has spoken and Parliament and this House of Commons have said, as we have said, we want action. For the Minister of Transport to act merely as a messenger boy to carry these recommendations from Parliament to the CNR and then simply say to us: Well, I have taken it up with the CNR but it does not want to act on this, is not good enough. To be told to let this bill pass second reading and go to the committee, there to be discussed with the CNR officials, is not satisfactory. They will come and tell us they cannot afford this. By the way, in our report we showed them how they could.

I am sure the officials of the CNR will come and tell us about some changes in the pension plan they are making of their own volition. They may tell us that their employees' associations have decided they want this matter to be the subject of collective bargaining and that we must not now discuss it. I do not accept that argument. The very fact that this is the kind of situation we would get into should indicate to the CNR that if it had any sense in this matter, it would act now. As a matter of fact in our report we have given the CNR a much happier solution to this problem than could be achieved by conflict, years of struggle, confrontation and collective bargaining. We in this House of Commons have the right to have this matter dealt with in this way.

On the two or three occasions we have raised this on the floor we have had a brush-off. We have been told we can deal with it in the committee. No, Mr. Speaker, that is not good enough and I am satisfied that it will not be good enough for members in any part of this House. What we need is a commitment now before this bill passes. We may be told that the officials of the CNR are not in this House and they cannot give a commitment. We do not want and we will not accept a government

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

commitment that this will be discussed in the committee. The government can give us a commitment that it will tell the CNR it is expected to comply with the will of Parliament, and this is what we want.

I have gone along for many years with the suggestion that we must not interfere with the independence of the CNR. But I have said already that when the independence of the CNR becomes doing the will of the CPR, which does not want these things but wants the CNR to hold back, then if the CNR is not going to be independent it should at least do the will of Parliament. I contend that we have the right in Parliament to get a clear statement that the government will not just write letters to the CNR, not just provide a messenger service, but a commitment that the CNR will be told to accept the fact that Parliament has said to this company and that Parliament expects it to deal with this matter as it has recommended.

I remind the government that it is a party to this recommendation because it was passed unanimously by this House. The whole question of how the government will find the money is a problem which is, of course, beyond a private member's purview, except that we dealt with this in the report.

The point I want to make, and the point that makes this completely relevant to the debate, is that we are being asked right now to support a bill which provides money for the CNR. This bill provides money in several ways. It authorizes the CNR to make loans, guarantee those loans, guarantee other things, but if debts are not paid the idea is that Parliament will pick up the tab and pay them out of the general revenues of this country. If we are being asked to provide money in that way for the Canadian National Railways we have the absolute and moral right to say from the floor of this House of Commons that we want that company to do the right thing by its pensioners. What is the right thing is now quite clear. It must be nothing less than was done for the retired civil servants.

I am speaking not just for myself or my colleagues. I am speaking for every member of this House including every member of the Cabinet, because the motion for concurrence passed on October 7, 1970, was unanimous. That is the will of the House of Commons. The policy of the Canadian National Railways not to act on this issue is a case of affronting the will of Parliament itself. I think there will be an abundance of support on the part of members of all sides of this House for this position.

Therefore, to focus our attention on this phase of the matter I should like to move, seconded by the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Skoberg):

That Bill C-186 be not read a second time, but that it be resolved that in the opinion of this House no consideration should be given to the making of any further financial guarantees or grants to the Canadian National Railways until the government has assured parliament that it will call on the Canadian National Railways to implement forthwith the improvements in pension arrangements recommended in the Report of the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, tabled in this