

Old Age Security Act

In addition to this, inevitably a debate on amendments to the Old Age Security Act puts on the table expressions of will, recommendations, observations and suggestions which are made by Canadians at large. Many people in their late fifties would like to retire early. That message is particularly strong when it comes from those who engage in hard physical labour. They are asking why the Government does not reduce the retirement age to bring Canada in line with other jurisdictions where it is possible for a man to retire at the age of 60 and a woman at the age of 55. That message is also received from people who have had physical working lives and must retire because they cannot perform physical work any longer. Those people are the construction workers, miners, longshoremen, woodworkers and others who have had to use their muscles and backs all their lives. At a certain point those people feel that physically they cannot continue. They would like a social security system which would allow them to retire earlier than others. They want to be able to make the choice and retire when they are ready, rather than being required to wait for a uniform age which applies to everyone across the board.

● (1450)

Whether one is a blue collar worker or a white collar worker, whether or not one is engaged in heavy physical work—and physical conditions vary from person to person—the natural question which comes to mind is, should we not design a system in a fine democracy like ours which permits choices, which permits a variety of preferences according to the individual? People have different spans of life, of course, and there are different types of activities in the workplace, so these questions do come to mind. Should we not try to design a system which offers the opportunity to choose when we want to retire and when we want to go on a fixed income formula? This is a very crucial question for people whose incomes are modest and who have not had an opportunity during their lifetime to invest for their retirement.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that is the record of the Liberal Party which has spoken for this kind of principle on behalf of the people who want to see it promoted. This is also, by and large, the basic principle which has guided us in this country with respect to social security and social progress. This is why Governments have introduced a host of other measures to protect everyone in society from difficult times, whether they are expected or not.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that as we make progress with our social security legislation we have to begin to look for ways to provide certain options for Canadians. We have to take into account the type of work people have been engaged in during their lifetimes and find ways which will permit an early retirement. In this respect, I would like to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, the fact that some workers in certain industries in Canada can, if they qualify, retire at the age of 55 years. It applies to workers who have worked for, I believe, 30 years in four industries—clothing, textiles, tanning and shoes. That measure was actually introduced not so much as a social security measure but as an industrial protection measure

in case those industries were to be hit by competition and technological change.

Since a reference was made to the most excellent report prepared by the Hon. Member for Calgary West (Mr. Hawkes) on technological change, it is only appropriate to refer to the fact that we do have in Canada today a certain number of Canadians who can retire at the age of 55 years.

The question which then comes to mind is how we can build on that foundation and provide this type of opportunity to a larger number of people, if they wish to exercise that option. Obviously, it is an option which some people may not want to exercise because we all know that there are Canadians who enjoy working beyond the age of 65 years. However, there will be some who will want to exercise it.

The question then which comes to mind, of course, is how do we finance earlier retirement in a manner which is realistic and possible? Will it be done through taxation? Will it be done through redeployment of funds which are presently available to Governments? Will it be done through other means? This is something, of course, to which we have to put our minds, and I believe we will do that because I do not believe there is one Hon. Member in his House who would reject the notion of the desirability of permitting early retirement.

The question of early retirement has been raised both by the elderly and by the youth in times of high unemployment because of the deeply held belief that, by permitting early retirement, the system would then be able to create openings for youth to enter into employment. Therefore, when we debate the question of old age security, we are debating at the same time, to some degree at least, the question of providing employment. The two factors are obviously interrelated.

Of course, the big challenge which faces the Government these days will be that of finding the ways and means of financing a form of early retirement. As Bill C-26 applies to those who are between the ages of 60 and 65 years and who are in need, I would certainly urge the Minister of National Health and Welfare, who is well known for his compassion and his keen understanding of social policies in this country, to consider very seriously the inclusion of those persons who are not covered under this Bill. I am sure that the Minister would be given full support by his own caucus and by both Opposition Parties, and I am sure it would be welcomed by those 80,000 or more Canadians who were referred to with great passion by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart), during this particular debate. These are Canadians who need and require the attention of society as a whole through their Government. These are the people this Bill should also include and cover in its total scope.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hudon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Hon. Member who just mentioned the great passion shown by the Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart) in defending this issue. In fact, he said on November 30, 1982: