

A) The Study

The present study was undertaken in response to problems of which Canadians have made us aware in our capacity as Members of Parliament. In letters and in personal visits during recent years, older Canadians have shared with Members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Rights some deeply disturbing stories about the experience of aging in Canada. Among these stories have been some heartbreaking accounts by Canadians in their fifties and sixties, who remain unable to find work after sometimes lengthy periods of unemployment, or unable to re-enter the workforce after periods of child-rearing. Many of these people now suffer immediate privation, and related problems of family breakdown and eroding physical and mental health, while most Canadians enjoy new levels of affluence after five years of economic growth.

First-hand accounts of the experience of individuals, supported by a substantial body of social science research, convinced the Committee that age discrimination plays a central role in the predicament of unemployed older workers. Problems of age discrimination fall within the general mandate of the Committee. It was therefore concluded that the Committee could legitimately undertake an investigation of age discrimination and older worker employment problems. The inquiry leading to the present report was launched in the spring of 1987.

During initial phases of the study, it became increasingly apparent that experiences of age discrimination encountered by many unemployed older workers are part of a much larger problem. While retaining age discrimination in employment as an area of focal interest, the Committee therefore invited witnesses to provide evidence, more broadly, on ways in which the experience of older Canadians reveals inadequacies in our adherence to accepted standards of human rights.

Between 20 May 1987 and 3 May 1988 the Committee held 10 hearings, in Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal as well as Ottawa. The Committee would like to express its thanks to witnesses for their invaluable help and, in particular, would like to commend contributing non-governmental organizations for their obvious dedication and expertise, achieved despite often scarce resources of time and staff. The Committee would also like to thank officials of the Canadian Human Rights Commission for their informative contributions during information visits to the Commission held in lieu of formal hearings. We look forward to ongoing