

Old Age Security

This kind of an amendment could add another 800,000 people to the lists of those dependent on the government for their income, and deprive the community of the valuable energy and skills which these men and women can offer. This is becoming increasingly important with the changing age structure of our population.

At present 8 per cent of all Canadians are over 65. But by 1985 at least 13 per cent of our citizens will be over 65. This, combined with the trend to smaller families, means that we may well be facing a severe labour shortage in the coming years. Therefore the contribution that our senior citizens can make to the work force will be even more significant. As it is, these demographic changes mean that we will almost certainly have a smaller proportion of people in the labour force who will have to support a larger retired population. To accept this motion for the provision of retirement pensions at age 60 would make this situation even worse.

Secondly, let us consider the cost of providing pensions and guaranteed income supplements to those who retire between 60 and 65. It would be approximately \$1.2 billion. This measure by itself would double the current federal contribution to Canadian public assistance. This money must come from somewhere. In fact it will come from the taxes paid by other Canadians and at the expense of other needs in society. In this as in every other instance of government spending we are talking about priorities.

● (1620)

Should our priority be to provide additional funds to a limited group of people in the population, many of whom already hold well paying jobs, before we tackle the more urgent problems of poverty in this country? If we are really concerned about fighting poverty in Canada we will aim our resources at those who are the worst off, not to broad groups across the board, but in a selective fashion to the poor, the disabled, and the needy.

The government is presently conducting a comprehensive review of its social security programs with a view to improving the distribution of income across the country. The reform which will follow should benefit Canada's senior citizens as well as others, but according to their need as individuals rather than as a group, regardless of need.

Finally, this resolution makes the assumption that the majority of people between the ages of 60 and 65 want to retire. This is by no means always the case. A number of cases have come to my attention of people who are being compulsorily retired at age 35, and who object to being pensioned off in this way with good working years ahead of them. To make Canada Pension Plan benefits available to people at age 60 would only encourage private industry to retire people earlier.

In the past businesses have tended to accept the age at which old age security or Canada pension payments begin as the normal age for compulsory retirement under their private plans. When the eligible age for social security payments dropped from 70 to 65 many private firms dropped their own age for compulsory retirement. To lower this age again to 60 would penalize many Canadians who are not happy to retire at that age, and who have productive years ahead of them.

Already more and more people here and in the United States are questioning the value of early retirement and the widespread policy of compulsory retirement. A Conference Board study reports, for instance, that in those companies which already offer early retirement plans, only 10 per cent of eligible employees actually take advantage of this option. There is a strong argument which suggests it may be preferable to reintroduce a system of optional retirement in view of the extended lifespan and productive capacity of many people over 65.

Too many of us in the past decade have been persuaded by advertisements and a media campaign which glorified the "Pepsi generation", those under 25, to the point where we assume that the world belongs exclusively to the young—where we assume that a man's or woman's productive years are finished at age 60 or even earlier. This is not so. For instance, were we to introduce compulsory retirement at age 65 in this House we would lose the valuable contributions of such colleagues, among others, as the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), as well as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). Truly this would be a shame.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Maine: I am particularly concerned at the number of industrial firms who seem reluctant these days to hire older employees, who put so much emphasis on the bright young men around that they forget how much more experienced and older employees can offer. This is a subtle, but socially debilitating, form of discrimination. In my view we need less talk about lowering the age for pensions and more support for hiring and recognizing the contribution of older and experienced employees.

This government has deliberately been emphasizing that great potential to be found among Canada's senior citizens—a productive potential which is now being developed through such programs as New Horizons. There are good reasons why New Horizons has been one of the most successful and widely acclaimed programs ever launched by the federal government. This kind of project, which employs and funds the activity of senior citizens, must be considered a more productive utilization of funds than a simple extension of the pension.

Another good example of Canada's senior citizens working not only for their own country but also abroad, is the Canadian Executive Service Overseas. This is an agency funded by the federal government which, at the request of the developing nations, sends out over 200 retired Canadians a year—between the ages of 65 and 70 for the most part—who use their expertise and experience to help solve particular problems or challenges facing the developing nations. In this way older Canadians have helped in over 40 countries of the world. In the past year under this program, Canadian senior citizens have given voluntarily of their time in a wide variety of projects. Some have worked, for instance, to increase barley production in Sri Lanka, to improve car leasing in Thailand, and to modernize the hotels of Nigeria. These people are proving that not only Canadian young people, but also our senior citizens, can make a contribution to development around the world.

With the same goal, the government introduced amendments to the Canada Pension Plan last year which were