

Old Age Security Act

minister reminded us earlier that it meets the needs of a pensioner whose spouse is under 65. We are totally in favour of this corrective action taken by the minister.

But I feel advisable to try to make the minister realize the importance of granting to all the security that is being given today to a certain category of people, which, to my point of view, would be equally justifiable for other persons of 60 who, under the present circumstances, as I said, are also in dire straits. Today, one need not be 50 to experience a lot of problems when looking for a job. People of 57 or 58 greatly hope that such security will be provided at 60.

● (1640)

For technical reasons, it is unthinkable to actually blame the companies that are somewhat reluctant to hire people of that age. As concerns technological changes, we are perfectly aware that, especially in industry, machines have greatly increased their performance and productivity, while man, from a physical point of view, of course, after 40 years of work, has slowed down. I remember the minister telling me yesterday that according to a survey, few people might be interested in retiring at age 60.

In my opinion, if quite a large number of people would take a well-earned rest, this would make some room in the labour force and, in view of the present situation, with the high rate of unemployment. I wonder if that would not be desirable. The minister believes that the effect of early retirement would be of small importance at this level. It is possible that some categories of people, such as the public servants and those who have an easier job, may not be interested in retiring at 60. I wonder if we could not make this legislation optional or at least give those who want to take a well-deserved rest at 60 the possibility of doing so without necessarily forcing those who still find their work easy and who are physically able to do it, to keep on working; but many people have told me what they think about this and have said that they hope to receive their old age security pension at 60 considering that they have worked hard for so many years.

I wanted to make these points during the debate on this bill in order to get the minister and the government to reflect seriously on the possibility of extending this legislation, which, in my opinion, would be well received by thousands of Canadians and would be quite justified. I also have in mind the additional costs. Today, the big question is inflation and we must keep this in mind whenever considerable expenses are involved. A while ago, I referred to the possibility of making such a legislation optional. For those who would like it, I think this would not represent the right amount that could be obtained by a universal and compulsory pension at age sixty. On the other hand, since discussions are being held with the provinces and since, for the past years, we have been talking about this guaranteed annual income without knowing the precise date it could become effective, I wonder if we could not seriously consider the possibility of offering the people who are sixty years of age this protection that we are giving them today through Bill C-62.

If we were to receive the assurance that as of January 1, 1976, we could grant this guaranteed annual income to all

[Mr. La Salle.]

the people who are waiting for it, then maybe we would be very patient. I also know that if we insist without proving how serious the matter is, we will be accused of favouring additional expenses in an already difficult inflationary context.

I also feel that if one considers the billions of dollars involved in the budget, I am justified in requesting that the government give consideration to reducing certain expenses, in different departments, so as to fulfil the needs of our old age pensioners. We must not let these old age pensioners believe that we are putting the load of inflation on their backs, and we must at all costs avoid giving them evidence to that effect. I believe it would be possible to consider a reduction in government expenses or a better management of such expenses so as to make it possible to grant our old age pensioners the necessary monies without being automatically accused of favouring additional expenses in the present circumstances. We are thinking of the importance of this legislation, we are giving thought to improving the social climate of our country, and we believe that if we enable people sixty years of age to take a well deserved holiday, we are improving the social climate. We also feel that if these people have occasion to take holidays, we would possibly be giving job openings to some very discouraged young people who are waiting for their place in the labour force.

This being said, Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to delay passage of this bill. We believe it is a valid and necessary piece of legislation. I believe the time is well chosen to request that the government consider the arguments in favour of an old age security pension at age sixty, and I am more than willing to take into account the financial possibilities available to a government.

I think we have every reason to do it, given the favourable implications this could have for the class of people which needs it. We must also, I think, consider financial facilities, when we study the budget which will be introduced shortly. If this were to lead the government to cut its expenditures in some areas where the prime concern should be efficiency and the principle which urge us to aim at this end, which is the improvement of the social context and climate, I think this is worth considering. I dare also believe that the minister will take these arguments into account, which others will voice after me, but will always keep in mind the well-being of a class of people who are entitled to a very well deserved vacation, they have been looking forward to.

I shall finish here, Mr. Speaker. I shall of course be very glad to support such a move. I repeat that it is a step in the right direction. We hope that this legislation will be extended as soon as possible to all those who are 60. We also hope that the negotiations with the provinces will take a successful turn for the federal government and that this will bring satisfaction to those who are waiting for this old age security, this minimum income. Let us hope that this will be done as early as possible, for the benefit of those who have been waiting for it very long.

[English]

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated at each stage in the consideration of Bill C-62, we are supporting it and we will give it our vote at all times. However, that does not deny us the