

Adjournment Debate

FISHERIES

information more difficult and reducing financial help to seniors will not improve their quality of life.

The government must ensure that the information on services and programs for seniors is easily accessible.

A quick reminder: the previous government had targeted the Canada Pension Plan, but the Prime Minister of the time, Brian Mulroney, had to revise his position. The Ottawa lady who became an instant celebrity in 1985 with her famous "Good bye Charlie Brown", when the first Mulroney budget was tabled, is proof that seniors are not going to be fooled and that they will not be scapegoats as regards the national debt, while the government is wasting public money.

Take family trusts for example. What is the government waiting for to tax these trusts which only benefit rich families? Why target the poor who have worked hard all their lives? The government must promote and facilitate independence among seniors by providing them the support they deserve through income security and services geared to their specific needs.

Seniors have contributed throughout their lives to a universal plan.

• (1845)

Obviously, they expect all Canadians reaching the required age to receive those benefits, whatever their income may be.

Right now, 72 per cent of all retired women and 50 per cent of retired men are receiving OAS benefits or some income supplement. Only 5 per cent of older Canadians have an income over \$50,000. Life expectancy is increasing. These additional years must be fulfilling and enjoyable for our elderly.

To efficiently maintain the quality of life for our elderly, we must provide them with the tools they need to get all the appropriate information. Finally, I would like to reiterate a request I made during a speech in the House of Commons, on February 3, 1994, and which boils down to this: "Why is there no secretary of state or department responsible for issues relating to seniors, like the one we had under the previous government, since this issue is so vitally important?"

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): The period provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired. Pursuant to Standing Order 96(1), this item is dropped from the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 is deemed to have been moved.

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, on May 3, 1994, I put the following question to the Minister of Human Resources Development, which was preceded by the following comment: "Yesterday, this minister clearly indicated to this House that the Atlantic fishery workers unions had been consulted about the individual contracts that workers must sign, thus committing themselves to undergo training or do community work in order to receive their benefits. We checked and the unions were never consulted on this".

My question to the minister was: "How can the minister reconcile the statement he made yesterday in the House with the confirmation that was given to me afterwards by the head of the fishery workers union, who said he had never been consulted on the issue of the individual contracts?" I later met the president of the fishery workers union who again confirmed that he had never been consulted about this matter.

My question was: How can the minister reconcile his answer with my information? I expected an answer that would at least address the question, but that is like trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. What I got was a model of political rhetoric, not from the Minister of Human Resources Development but from the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

I therefore want to take this opportunity to draw the attention of the House to the lack of openness of the government and the ministers. Some explanations are in order about the issue of obliging workers who participate in the pilot project to sign a contract in exchange for the benefits promised by the minister, something people find disturbing.

If this pilot project leads to further projects, people certainly had the right to know whether there was any consultation. The answer was no. This government will have to learn to be more open, because otherwise, how can it proceed with its reform of social programs?

• (1850)

I have a very good reason for raising this issue again this evening. There are communities all over Canada where workers, like the fisheries workers, have lost all hope, except that their numbers are not as high as in the fisheries industry.

So how can we help those workers? Can we help them only by making this help compulsory, when in many cases they are older than average? There is a very large number—24,000—between the ages of 25 and 49, but many, in fact more than 6,000, are at least 50 years old. Now workers who are between the ages of 35 and 49 need to know what they will get in the end, because we cannot pay them a pittance for a few years and oblige them to take training that is a dead end. We have to ensure that the community has the resources to create jobs, to help them create businesses and to attract businesses, so there is some hope for the future. Compulsory training, clean-up programs and com-