

exceedingly harsh. Many of them are aware that at this stage of their lives, it is unlikely they will ever recover financially.”¹⁴

In view of the near unanimity among witnesses about the seriousness of the problem of unemployment among older workers, the Committee heard, with particular interest, testimony from officials of Employment and Immigration Canada late in the hearings. Evidence provided by the department, based on comparisons between 1977 and 1986 data, confirmed the conclusion based on more immediate comparisons that while older workers tend to experience somewhat lower overall rates of unemployment than workers of other ages, certain older worker groups, particularly the age 55-59 group, have experienced significant increases. Attention was drawn, with respect to older workers and long-term unemployment, to what was described as a significant polarization among older workers. While the majority did not seem to be negatively affected by the recession, a minority — estimated at between 25,000 and 35,000 older workers — has proven to be highly vulnerable to long-term unemployment, that is, of a year or more. Departmental officials indicated that efforts are currently underway to more precisely identify characteristics of this group, with a view to exploring the possibility of targeted programs.

C) Unemployment and Age — Two Approaches

A major question facing the Committee, when looking at the labour market problems of the older worker, was to determine to what extent their origin lies in discrimination, on the part of employers or others, on the grounds of advancing age. Evidence presented by witnesses points to two seemingly different answers to this question.

1. The Age Discrimination Emphasis

Numerous witnesses, typically those directly representing the aging and elderly, or including members of these groups, advised the Committee that discrimination based on advancing age is a recurring element in the experience of older workers. The Committee was told that age discrimination is encountered by older workers in the workplace, where it often takes the form of limitations of promotional opportunities and promotion-related training, as well as of skills maintenance or upgrading opportunities which may be necessary even to retain employment in our era of technological change. The Committee was also told that, while seniority provisions in contracts provide lay-off protection to many older workers, they often face