

Labour Conditions

It is not only serious but it is a growing problem, and not only a growing problem but an inevitable one. As sure as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west each and every one of us, if we live long enough, will reach the age of 45 and then we will become eligible for the dubious treatment that people 45 and over are accorded in this country at the present time, and have been in the past.

Men and women who are able to offer another 20 or 25 years of excellent service to their country find themselves in the position where, if they become unemployed, in far too many cases they are unable to get employment. Why is this so? The reason simply is that they have reached the age of 45 or over.

I think we should look first of all at why these people find themselves out of work. I would say that in this changing world certainly the main cause is automation, because we must remember that if they are 45 years old they must have been providing for their livelihood for some 20, 25 or possibly 30 years. Why then should they find themselves unemployed at the age of 45 or over? In my view automation is certainly one of the reasons. Automation, of course, and its effect on these people 45 years of age or over is one problem we have never come to grips with in this country.

But it is not enough to know the reason why so many people of this age are unemployed. I think we should also examine the reasons why they remain unemployed. As I have said, most people of 45 years of age are still able to give many years of service to their country and are well able to carry on whatever duties may be assigned to them. I have talked to many employers across the country who are more than willing to employ people of this age because they have attributes that they did not have when they were 20 or 25 years younger. Why is it not possible for employers who are willing to employ these people to do so? I think we will find that one of the major reasons is that throughout the country today there is a great hodgepodge of pension plans which are mostly under the jurisdiction of private insurance companies and it is not profitable for an insurance company to insure a person of that age. These people do not have enough years left for private insurance companies to set up a plan that will be profitable.

Therefore what we really have is a situation where people have 20 or 25 years left during which they could provide for their own livelihood and that of their children, if they still have to do so, and could be employed with profit to the employer, but they cannot get work because of the hodgepodge of pension plans we now have. As I say, this is one of the major reasons for the present discrimination.

If we cast our eyes ahead to resolution no. 33 on the order paper we will see there one that I hope to have the opportunity to introduce during this session. This resolution provides for a portable pension plan under which the benefits could be carried from job to job. I believe this would solve the problem we are discussing much better than the resolution before us today. However, that is another debate and I hope we will have the opportunity to debate that issue in the house.

It does no good just to wring our hands, feel sorry for these people and say something should be done. It is obvious that industry is unable to cope with the problem. Up to now at least it has certainly been obvious that no government this country has had has been able to cope with the problem, but I do say that there is a need for government to take the lead in this field. I believe that once government takes the lead it will not be too long before industry will start to follow; but industry will not do anything as long as it has the excuse that the government has not done anything about the matter.

One of the disadvantages that I see in the motion now before the house is that even if it were passed by the house and put into effect it would apply to a greater degree in certain areas of the country than in others. Certainly government projects are not evenly distributed throughout the country. However, Mr. Speaker, I wish to provide an opportunity for other hon. members to speak on this very important matter. Therefore I will conclude by saying that I should like to compliment the hon. member for Dollard on introducing this resolution which is good as far as it goes, and having regard to that fact we heartily support it.

Mr. G. H. Aiken (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I agree that the problem of the older worker is one that requires the very careful attention and serious consideration of the government. The subject has been discussed in this house many times. The first time I recall it being discussed was on a motion moved by the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt). Since that time the subject has been discussed on several occasions. I believe that the question of legislation is secondary to that of the education of the public to the ability of the older worker to do a job which is equal to, and in many cases, better than the younger worker. The Minister of Labour (Mr. Starr) has taken a number of steps to improve the public knowledge of what the older worker can do. Some of these studies have been referred to by the hon. member who introduced the motion as well as by other hon. members. I think the Minister of Labour himself is