

Member has not made a single comment which could be interpreted as relevant to the Bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Cassidy: Mr. Speaker, there are many workers over 40 or 50 years old in this region who will not benefit under Bill C-26 if they lose their jobs. People in Quebec say that we must begin to think about early retirement, which means that people could retire at 60 and even at 55 because, if they do not, there will be fewer jobs available for young people. One of the problems with Bill C-26 is that it concerns a very small group of people between the ages of 60 and 65, and it does not make a real contribution. By providing options to older workers to allow them to retire, we would create jobs for younger workers now affected by unemployment. This is why, Mr. Speaker, I believe that my comments deal strictly with Bill C-26.

Many other Members talked about the weaknesses of the bill as introduced. Because a man and a woman were not able to get along and decided to separate or divorce, if one of them dies, the surviving spouse, if over 60, would not receive any benefits under this bill, but someone in the same situation who stayed with his spouse, would benefit if he or she became widowed at the same age. Personally, Mr. Speaker, I do not find such discrimination justified, but it is inherent in Bill C-26 now under consideration. In addition, Mr. Speaker, I believe that, in view of the promises made by the Progressive Conservative Party during the campaign, a measure such as this one is inadequate as it only represents a small part of the reform of social programs for senior citizens which our society needs.

● (1410)

[*English*]

As I was just saying in French, we on this side of the House believe that while this measure is acceptable and we will support it, it is inadequate because it does not go nearly to the extent necessary even to begin to respond to such problems as the impact of technological change and the desperate plight of older workers in their fifties who have worked faithfully for long hours in many jobs and then find themselves for one reason or another thrown out of work. I am referring to those workers who will be ineligible for any benefit from this measure unless a certain accident or mortality of the spouse makes them eligible.

I should like to give an example of this which is happening right here in the community on Parliament Hill. A number of workers with up to 20 years and 30 years of service in the Government of Canada have been given notice this week. They work for the Canadian Postal Museum in the Wellington Building, which is part of the parliamentary precinct. That postal museum is closing and those workers have been given notice. They have skills which will no longer be valuable on the market. Some of them aged 55, 60 or more will literally find themselves incapable of finding other employment. They face a very grave danger of that.

Old Age Security Act

If one of those employees happens to be over sixty and is a widow or a widower, he or she would at least benefit under the conditions of Bill C-26 commencing in September, 1985. However, that will not be the case for that same employee if he or she happens to be single, divorced or separated. The safety net, if that is what is being proposed, or the support for people aged 60 to 65 proposed in this Bill, has to be more adequate. As well, it has to be part of a more concerted plan to ensure that we have adequate provisions for older citizens rather than doing it on a bits and pieces basis.

[*Translation*]

When we were in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean area, we met workers who had worked hard in the building industry or the aluminum plants, who are now in their fifties and who would like to retire because they know quite well that keeping their jobs would kill them. It is a threat to their health and to their safety. They have an occupation where workers have a short life expectancy and the work has exhausted them.

[*English*]

Unfortunately, this particular Bill does not respond to the very human tragedy of workers whose work has used them up. For example, I am referring to workers in construction or heavy industry in areas like Lac-Saint-Jean, Toronto and Ottawa who are ready to retire at age 55 or 60 but will not be helped in any way by this particular Bill, except in the event that they might happen to qualify because they have lost a loved one, a spouse.

It is time the House of Commons began to take seriously the report of the special committee on pensions of a couple of years ago. It made a number of recommendations which have been ignored. When we have an unemployment rate which has just risen to 11.2 per cent and bids fair to continue rising despite the promises and the bluster of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson), we should start to look at whether we as a society can afford to offer workers the option of taking retirement at the age of 60 rather than 65. If they did retire, they would open up positions which could be taken by younger workers who otherwise would be facing unemployment for a very long time.

I recognize that this is a larger perspective than the one proposed when the project was brought forward by the Government a week or so ago. It seems to me that we have to look at it in that perspective, particularly in view of the very real danger that any commitment to social reform from the new Government will be transitory. It will last for a few months and thereafter the Government will say that the cupboard is bare and that it has done what it can. To the older people of Canada, many of whom are now forced to go on welfare, have exhausted their unemployment insurance benefits or have had to take very substantial drops in pay in order to keep any kind of job, the Government will say that it is sorry but they will have to wait until next time.

Next time, three or four years down the line, is not good enough. Now is the time to have fundamental reform in terms of ensuring adequate incomes for older citizens when they