

Nurses' Retirement Age

if these plans were required to provide for retirement at age 60 rather than 65.

Earlier retirement would obviously entail a significant drop in income and, if pension entitlements were small, social assistance would be needed. A drop in income also entails a change in status which must be assimilated by the retiring worker. Desirable or not, our society is strongly work-oriented. Individual prestige and high evaluation by others often result from a person's job. In older age brackets, this identification of work with social value is particularly strong. Early retirement, especially when involuntary, can drastically harm a retiree's self-image, pride and self-esteem.

Successful retirement depends to a considerable extent upon the amount of preparation for it, including the development of outside interests and hobbies which can replace the work focus. It is a fallacy to expect that "just relaxing" will satisfy people who have been active all their lives. Hobbies and artificially cultivated interests cannot simply be minor items but must have the potential of becoming full-time absorptions. Yet preretirement training is at present still a very underdeveloped field. The requirements of a new and younger-aged population would simply add to existing deficiencies and gaps in these services.

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There is also the important question of social interaction. Work provides a daily set of human contacts and it offers friendship and shared interests. Retirement removes this meeting place and can bring great loneliness, especially for people who are alone as are some widows, widowers and people without close relatives. Both physical and social mobility are likely to be more limited as the period of retirement lengthens.

It is evident that all these factors can have an impact upon a person's physical and mental health. Loss of income, loss of status, loss of friends and loss of the sense of accomplishment are all determinants affecting the health of older segments of the population. Removing what has been the focus of life for 40 years and replacing it with a void can be extremely harmful. Moreover, dropping into retirement status, highly trained professional people like registered nurses who are younger, more vigorous, energetic and endowed with a highly developed social conscience may just accentuate the sense of alienation and uselessness which can become a malaise in our society. The stress and self-questioning which unfilled time can carry could well outdo the pressures of a busy and fulfilling job as causative factors in physical and mental illness.

An analysis of the personal factors involved in early retirement does not exhaust the administrative problems which arise. There is difficulty, for example, in determining whether or not a person is in the labour market. Would a person be permitted to work at all, or even part-time, without loss of old age security and Canada Pension Plan benefits? If so, what number of hours would be considered appropriate? What controls should be developed to ensure that people meet the criterion of not being in the labour market? And how should those controls be administered?

The probable effect upon the employment market of implementing the hon. member's proposal needs to be

[Mr. Baker (Gander-Twillingate).]

weighed if possible. One justification for earlier retirement is that it would free jobs for younger, unemployed workers. In reality, fighting unemployment never involves a one-to-one relationship whereby one person leaves forever and is immediately replaced by a younger individual. Many people who retire do not wish to stay retired; they try to re-enter the labour force—openly or secretly—if not full-time, then part-time. In this way, retirement of healthy workers actually increases competition for jobs rather than reduces it.

In addition, managers might not replace every retiring employee. They may choose, instead, to consolidate positions and reduce production costs or automate some tasks. It may come as a surprise to think of a female registered nurse being replaced by a computer, but this is far from fantasy. Many routine laboratory tests are being done by automated procedures. Invoicing and patient records are now computer input. Drugs can be mixed and dispensed in computerized doses, and we are living in an age when computer diagnosis is fast becoming a reality.

I personally believe we have to keep our physical and personal assets in the labour force as long as it is feasible to do so. It takes many years of education and experience to build sound knowledge and good professional practice. It would be discriminatory as well as extremely costly and impractical to set the wheels of government in motion to provide for retirement five years earlier of female registered nurses, to the exclusion of their male colleagues and other women and men who make up the millions of Canadians in the living, working, human labour force. We owe them all fair treatment and the opportunity to work if they see fit, and are fit, without being faced with the necessity to retire.

I find myself unable to support this motion for early retirement of female registered nurses, for the wide variety of reasons I have just given. I would hope that other, more realistic measures can be planned to enhance the status of women, particularly during 1975 which the United Nations has designated as International Women's Year.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers) for bringing before the House once again the question of pensions at age 60. I agree with the hon. member for Trinity (Miss Nicholson) that my friend on this side of the House would be well advised not to limit his interest in pensions at 60 to female registered nurses. I do not think it would be very hard to persuade him to enlarge his interest in this matter. As I say, I agree with criticisms made by the hon. member for Trinity but I think it is a good idea that in every way possible the question of pensions at 60, on a voluntary basis, be discussed in the House as often as possible.

Mr. Gillies: Conflict of interest.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies) suggests that in my case there is a conflict of interest. Mr. Speaker, in two days I shall be 66½, so when I support pensions at the age of 60 there is no conflict of interest. I appreciate the concern of the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate (Mr.