

Labour

many shortcomings to it that we would beg the Government to make improvements in it.

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): Mr. Speaker, finally we are getting legislation to help older workers who lose their jobs, but unfortunately this legislation is far from adequate. I will explain that in greater detail in a few minutes.

I said "finally we are getting legislation to help older workers" because it was more than three years ago that the Government announced this program. The Minister of Finance, in making his budget address in February 1986, announced that he was abolishing the Labour Adjustment Benefits Program. He was to replace it with a wonderful new program called "Program for Older Worker Adjustment".

Months went by in 1986, and we did not see this wonderful new program. Opposition members started to rise and ask questions on where the program was. We received no adequate answers. There was delay upon delay. Then 1986 passed, 1987 passed and 1988 passed, but once the election was under way, on October 6, 1988 finally the Government announced the program again with a few more details. However there was still no legislation of course; we were in the middle of the election campaign.

If the Government did not have this older worker adjustment program ready on that occasion, it should have kept the old Labour Adjustment Benefits Program in place until the new program was ready. No, it did not do that. It abolished the old program immediately with the Budget of February 1986. It has been some three and a half years and we still do not have the legislation, but at least we have started to debate it. We have gone all this time since February, 1986 with no program whatsoever.

Any reasonable Government would have kept the old program in place, a program which did help older workers when they were laid off permanently. It was not as complete as it should have been. It was not as perfect as it should have been, but at least it was a program that helped older workers who were laid off from work on a permanent basis. The Government abolished that program and promised a new one. As a matter of fact, it gave the impression in the Budget that the new program was going to come on in a matter of weeks, and here we are in 1989 finally debating this new program.

This situation has been allowed to carry on where, the situation where for more than three years we have gone without any program for older worker assistance, despite several reports to the Government pointing out how serious the situation was.

I refer first to a report prepared by the Canadian Employment and Immigration Advisory Council. This council was set up by the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Its report entitled "Older Workers, an Imminent Crisis in the Labour Market" was published in August 1985. In part it read:

There are now more than 300,000 workers between the ages of 45 and 64 officially and unofficially unemployed in Canada. The unemployment rate for this age group increased significantly after 1981, and then took a major jump early in 1985 at a time when unemployment among other age groups decreased or remained stable. Furthermore older workers stay unemployed longer than their younger counterparts.

This report of the advisory council to the Minister of Employment and Immigration contained 10 recommendations on what should be done for older workers in this country, but the Government did not act on any of them.

We also had a report published by Statistics Canada in November 1987 entitled "Older Workers in the Canadian Labour Market". As a result of a special statistics study, this report pointed out: "Results from the 1986 Census show a rapidly aging Canadian population. This trend has its roots in rising life expectancy, low birth rates and the maturing of the post-war baby boom generation. In 1976 Canadians 55 years or more comprised about 17 per cent of the total population. By 1986, 10 years later, the proportion had risen to about 20 per cent, and by the turn of the century this age group could account for nearly one in four Canadians". That would be 25 per cent.

• (1630)

The report went on to point out that, in 1986, four years after the recession, unemployment among older workers was worse than it had been during the depths of the recession in 1982. The unemployment rate for those older workers had risen from 6.9 per cent in 1982 to 7.3 per cent in 1986.

A moment ago I referred to the report published by the Advisory Council. It published a follow-up report on June 22, 1988, one year ago. In publishing this follow-up report on older workers it stated: "It is evident that the unemployment situation of older workers has not improved since 1985 when the Advisory Council report on