

Old Age Security Act

such housing does exist. However, the provincial Government, in the name of restraint, has decided that it will not build any more senior citizens' housing units in the Province of British Columbia because it is not a priority and the Government simply cannot afford to do so. I think it is a very cutting comment to say that the Government cannot afford to provide decent housing for the senior citizens of the Province of British Columbia. That tells us a great deal about where the priorities of the Government of British Columbia lie. We must look at ways and means of providing better housing for our senior citizens in the country.

As well, we should use this debate as an opportunity to flag an issue that should be dealt with now, and that is the matter of providing more opportunities for early retirement. On Friday we learned that the unemployment figures had leaped significantly higher than they had leaped for a considerable length of time. The number of unemployed in Canada appears to be growing. We heard from the Minister of State for Youth (Mrs. Champagne) and from many of the spokespersons in that Party that the young people are the ones who are being particularly hard hit during this time of recession or virtual depression-like conditions.

Those people who have the means and the will to retire at an age other than 60 could take an early retirement option and that would provide opportunities in the workplaces of the country for young people to access the job market.

● (1210)

This week a major report in one of the metropolitan newspapers indicated that many seniors have been fortunate enough to put money aside and are financially prepared for their retirement years. Those seniors are prepared to retire at an age other than 65 or, perhaps, 60. They will be able to live the rest of their lives with enjoyment and satisfaction. That early retirement will enable those seniors to do a variety of things which they have looked forward to during their working lives. Rather than paying UI or, indirectly, welfare benefits from the federal coffers, we could provide a pension for people who are considering retirement at an age earlier than the traditional age, and that would provide much-needed jobs for the young people in our society.

In conclusion, I would like to say that we will be supporting the principle of the Bill at second reading. However, we look forward to committee stage in order to consider extending the group that is involved, which has been arbitrarily defined. We will also make an effort to have this legislation become effective prior to September of this year.

Mr. George Baker (Gander-Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that no other Member is interested in speaking on this legislation at this particular moment. Of course, I am sure that there are Members who wish to speak and, during the ten minutes which are allotted to me, I am sure other Members will come into the House to express their opinions.

I have listened to the debate and, when I was not able to be in the House, I read the debate in *Hansard*. I think we must

realize one thing. When we pass legislation such as this we must be careful when we say that the legislation will benefit x number of people. In any social security legislation which is passed by the Parliament of Canada, we must be very careful when we say that it will benefit, for example, 85,000 people, as has been stated in this Chamber.

There are certain people who will qualify under this legislation. They will receive a cheque, but they will not be allowed to keep one penny. They will not benefit from the legislation. That is a very unusual statement for a Member of Parliament to make. I am referring to the thousands of people who are in institutions, or who are in government-subsidized nursing homes, senior citizens' homes or homes of special care. I bring this up today to make an appeal to the Government of Canada and to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp). There are certain standards in Canada which are not being maintained. It requires a strong arm on the part of the federal Government in dealing with provincial authorities and regulations. I am referring to the whole question of the social security safety net.

I would like to illustrate a situation. Suppose a person was about to retire, without money, and that person was going into a senior citizens' home, a nursing home or a home for special care, and had a choice in which province they would retire. Where would that person retire? It is an important question. Under this legislation, with a person between the ages of 60 and 65 who is in an institution which is being subsidized under the Canada Assistance Plan and through the provincial departments of social services, it would depend on which province that person decides to live in that determines the amount of money which will be made available to them. I find that absolutely incredible.

If we looked at the comforts allowance that a senior citizen or a person between the ages of 60 and 65 is allowed to keep out of the cheque, we would find that one province in western Canada will only allow that person to keep \$34. However, if that person was not receiving the cheque, they would still receive \$34 from the provincial department of social services. Of course, that \$34 is cost-shared under the Canada Assistance Plan and comes from the federal Government Department which is introducing the legislation. In another province that person would be allowed to keep \$115. In Ontario, if the person is between the ages of 60 and 65, they would receive \$77. However, if that person is older than 65 years of age, they receive \$105.

Who determines on a national scale how much money a senior citizen requires to buy birthday or Christmas presents for their grandchildren, to buy pipe tobacco if the person smokes, or to buy a bottle of brandy once a month? Who determines how much money senior citizens are allowed to keep from their comforts allowances? As a policy, it is a decision of the provincial Government. No one in this Chamber can say that a measly \$34 a month is adequate for a senior citizen who is living in a senior citizens' home.

We must also realize, under the financing arrangements with provincial Governments, that the deficit on the operation