

Old Age Security Act

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Speaker, I have two things to say in response to the question. There is a very good chance that persons who reach the age of 60 or 65, having been single all their lives by choice, have been contributing working members of our society since the age of 20. Over the past 40 years they will have built up experience in different areas of the workforce. There is a very good likelihood that those persons will continue to work and will be ineligible in any event.

The Hon. Member is perhaps getting at the case of a person who is unemployed and therefore, unfortunately, on welfare. That is the economic strategy that this Government was elected to correct. That is why I said in my comments that I thought the actions of the previous Government were very discriminatory toward older people in that they cannot find or hold jobs today. Some of the most difficult cases that come to my office are those of older ladies or gentlemen who cannot find work. We have excellent programs for youth but very little for the elderly. We must continue with the actions put forth in the economic statement, with investment Canada and other actions which will be forthcoming in the Budget to address the very serious problems of unemployment. That is how we will meet the needs of those people.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Order, please. It being one o'clock, I do now leave the chair until 2 p.m. this day.

At 1 p.m., the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): When the House rose at one o'clock, we were having questions and comments on the speech by the Hon. Member for Kitchener (Mr. Reimer).

Mr. Malépart: I would like to comment on the Hon. Member's speech. Unfortunately, he had to leave the House. I would have liked to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): The Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart).

Mr. Malépart: —comment on the Hon. Member's speech before the House rose at one o'clock.

I noticed that according to the Hon. Member, widows or widowers were more in need of assistance than someone who is separated, because in the Hon. Member's mind, a widow had raised children while a woman who was separated had not.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the first excuse given by Progressive Conservative Members to justify their position on this Bill, but I do not think there is any distinction in terms of financial

need that can be made between a widow and a single person who has worked all her life to serve the community.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Questions and comments. Debate. The Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy).

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): As the Hon. Member for Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands said, Mr. Speaker, the New Democratic Party supports Bill C-26 as it relates to the extension of old age security benefits to widowers and widows aged 60 to 65. The problem is not our support for this measure, it is the fact that, in my opinion and in the opinion of my Party, this Bill falls far short of the needs of the elderly and in terms of the necessary reform, it does not address the issues of retirement pensions and the treatment of older people in our society.

This week, or a couple of weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, I spent two days in the Province of Quebec. I went to Quebec City and the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean area.

I met with various groups and individuals who are directly affected by the current economic crisis, made still more urgent today with the release of unemployment figures which show an upward trend throughout the country.

Mr. Speaker, practically all the individuals and groups that appeared before us during our two-day trip spoke about the impact of technological changes which are beginning to be felt by a great many Quebec workers in a province where youth unemployment is over 20 per cent. In the Chicoutimi-Lac-Saint-Jean area, no less than 50 per cent of young people aged 15 to 19 are looking for work.

We are wondering now whether the policies of this Government, which is so intent on convincing businessmen that growth and confidence will help spur investments and eventually create jobs, will really have any kind of impact on the residents of regions such as Lac-Saint-Jean or Quebec City where more than 40,000 people are now without work. Unmistakably, the answer we got from groups and people we met in Quebec City was no, they have lost hope. They are fully aware of the current unemployment crisis, they are seeking fresh solutions, and they are familiar with the consequences of technological change.

Here are some examples, Mr. Speaker. First, the Alcan aluminum production line in the city of Arvida, where Alcan is now busy replacing old machinery by new technological equipment, with the result that productivity will be four or five times higher.

[English]

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I recognize that the Hon. Member is new to this Chamber and I am not sure of the rules in the Ontario Chamber, but there is an important rule of relevance in this Chamber. We are dealing with a Bill concerning spousal allowance and so far the