

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I apologize for having a second time in my speech provoked a point of order which, obviously, is not a point of order.

Mr. Rodriguez: Obviously the hon. member opposite is not spending enough time in the House.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My referring to the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Dionne) was a preamble to my saying that the person from whom we really want to hear in this debate is the minister. Of course he may tell us that he spoke on second reading and appeared before the committee.

When we adopted the provision for report stage debate we provided for the mover of the motion to speak for 40 minutes, and the minister to reply for 40 minutes. Everybody else may speak only 20 minutes. We recognized that when a serious proposal is made by way of report stage amendment, the minister should be given a special opportunity to reply. He has said very little, yesterday and today, in this report stage debate, and he had nothing at all to say on the taking away of unemployment insurance protection from those aged 65 years and over, when we discussed the subject yesterday. I hope he will enter the debate today, or enter it at an early stage. No doubt he has arguments to advance in support of the validity of this measure; otherwise he would not bring it before us.

Having heard the arguments made by members of all parties in this House, to the effect that this provision should not stand, I invite the minister to enter the debate. And when I speak of all parties I remind him that the members of the Progressive Conservative party want to rescind the cancellation of benefits at age 65; we want to do it, too. My friends in the Social Credit party take the same position, and at least one Liberal member, the hon. member for Davenport, took this position openly yesterday. I understand that when the vote comes, several Liberals may vote with us. So, in all corners of the House members think this measure unfair, and I hope the Minister of Manpower and Immigration will say something to us about it.

Sir, as I said yesterday, we have come a long way in the decades I have been here in improving the lot of our older people, particularly in terms of pensions, medical care and housing. But that is no reason for taking away from them their right to be part of the work force, if that is their choice.

● (2050)

In removing the right to participate from workers over the age of 65 we are taking away a right which applies in the case of workers in a younger age bracket and I hope, therefore, that when the vote comes on these two motions, despite the fact that we are pretty well along the way, the House will this time decide that Canadians between the ages of 65 and 70 should remain eligible for participation in the unemployment insurance program. Surely that is their right.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has stated fairly well what all members of

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the House think about the abolition of unemployment insurance benefits for individuals aged 65 or over and even 60 or over.

Mr. Speaker, workers are now paying their unemployment insurance contributions and I think they are entitled, as long as they have opportunities for employment, to those benefits if for one reason or another, they become unemployed. Pensions are denied to workers of 60. We have been advocating that in the House for some fifteen years, however, the government maintains it is unable to pay those pensions to individuals over 60. For purely financial reasons, it is suggested that at 65 people are unable to work. We have considerable evidence that some individuals of 65 or over even of 70 and up to 75 can still perform paying work which is considered as adequate. I have in mind the case of an 85-year-old Rouyn-Noranda man who was sawyer 40 or 50 years ago. Last year, a north western company needed such a man; they went and hired him at 85 years of age to continue to saw in this Rouyn-Noranda sawmill.

Mr. Speaker, I am not saying that any person of 85 can do the same thing. This citizen was not contributing at that time to unemployment insurance, because he was over the required age. However, nothing prevents a great number of persons, 65 to 70 years of age, to accomplish a sensible and essential task in many cases. While there are young people who cannot or will not assume working responsibilities, there are people 65, 66 or 67 years old who are employed.

Mr. Speaker, if these working people who are 65 and paying unemployment insurance premiums became unemployed while remaining able and willing to work, there is no reason why they should not be paid unemployment insurance benefits.

I feel that my colleague the hon. member for Kamouraska (Mr. Dionne) who is well informed about work and unemployment insurance has clearly expressed the position of the Social Credit Party on this unique legislation which the government has introduced in Parliament. And I sincerely believe that hon. members from both sides of the House want that citizens 65 years of age and over in their ridings be allowed to work if they want to. On the other hand if they decided not to stop working or to leave the labour market and receive some annuities or pensions, then it would be all right to discontinue payment of these benefits. Yet, if this citizen chooses to go on working rather than draw old age pension, the government should be respectful towards those Canadian citizens who are the agents of the normal development of our country with their own work. Instead of penalizing them when they reach the age of 65, let us grant them the right to decide by themselves about their work and their life and not by a unilateral act of the federal government.

[English]

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): I should like to say a few words in connection with this amendment, Mr. Speaker. In effect what it is saying to the Unemployment Insurance Commission is that workers should retire at the age of 65—that they are not needed in the work force any more. I think this is a wrong attitude to take. Many workers over the age of 65 have important responsibilities. But the attitude of the Commission is: this is a bad-risk group so