

*Old Age Security Act*

accurate terms exactly what the cost would be to extend this level of benefit to other than simply the spouses of those who have been in receipt of the old age pension. I do want to suggest to the Minister that, whatever the cost, I do not think it is impossible for us to find a way to fund it. I do not think for one moment it is impossible for us to reallocate funding from other less worthy causes. I do not think it is impossible for us to look into ways of making this available.

It strikes me that an allowance based on need—which this allowance is I think we all agree—that has as its primary criterion that one has to have been married is unfair. It is unfair, Mr. Speaker. If an allowance is based on need, it ought to be paid to those who are in need on the same basis. If you are in need, you are in need and whether you were or were not married does not alter the fact that you are in need. If your circumstances are the same in terms of your financial capacities, then quite clearly you should be treated in the same way by your Government.

I think the distance that the Minister has gone is fine, but I seriously urge the Minister to go the other short distance and attempt to find a way to accommodate the question to which my colleague who formerly represented Winnipeg North Centre, my colleague from Beaches, and probably my colleague who now represents the riding of Winnipeg North Centre would want him to give some consideration.

I know the Minister himself is aware of the speeches made in the House of Commons by his colleague, the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald), as recently as May 10, 1984. She made speeches on other days going back to June and February, 1984. There were statements made by another colleague on those occasions with regard to the problems of people in Canada who, because of the economic conditions that now exist, and which did not exist in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, are unable to find employment. They have not yet attained what we consider to be the normal retirement age and, as a result of that, they are unable to continue to hold on to what they accumulated throughout their lifetime as a result of hard work.

I do not doubt, when the Minister goes back to Provencher, that he meets in his constituency office every weekend or at the church on Sunday mornings with citizens who are in their middle fifties, maybe in their late fifties, who have worked hard all of their lives and who have been employed perhaps in many instances by the only major employer in the area. Perhaps that major employer has ceased to operate for any number of reasons, and if he has not ceased to operate, at least is operating at a dramatically reduced level. I am confident that there are people who have brought to the Minister's attention the terrible situation in which they have found themselves.

On the weekend in Hamilton—I am sure it is the same in every constituency, I do not doubt that for a moment and no doubt my colleague, the Hon. Member for Hamilton West (Mr. Peterson), meets the same kind of people I do—I had an opportunity to discuss with a family its particular difficulty. Here was a man and his wife who over the many years raised a

family, had worked at one of the plants in Hamilton and worked there for the better part of 30 years, not quite, but almost. He had an excellent work record but suddenly discovered that the plant in terms of its management was redundant. This plant no longer manufactured a product that was saleable in the consumer market-place. It was not his fault. Every day he went in and he made the product he was asked to make. He made it to the best of his ability, and the company sold it. Gradually, with the passage of time and the introduction of new technology, it became unnecessary for that product to be made. This man, it could be said as an aside—and I am not sure if one can make an aside to something one says oneself—was the victim of two things, neither of them of his own making. He was a victim of a changing market condition and of a rapidly changing economic climate. He may well have been the victim of bad decision-making on the part of the management of the company, which ought to have been able, with proper planning, to alter the manufacturing process, seek out additional markets and manufacture new products. Unfortunately, that did not happen.

● (1610)

Here he is at age 56. He has been to many employers. I have personally sent him to a number of people who I thought might give him a job, but he cannot find one in the Hamilton area. He travelled to Toronto, Kitchener and down to St. Catharines, but there were no jobs. He came to the conclusion somewhat reluctantly that his age is working against him. Although we all know that we cannot discriminate because of age, there are hints that that sort of thing happens. It is not unreasonable to think that at age 56 maybe he is being overlooked just because of his age. He offered to take anything. He cannot find anything. He ran out of unemployment insurance benefits and therefore has no income of his own. His wife works but only part time because she cannot find a job. They have to pay what is left on the mortgage which they assumed 20 years ago. It is not a great deal, but nevertheless it is there. They cannot make their payments. What do we do for a man like this? What do we say to someone like this? He is representative of a host of people.

The Minister brought forward this particular amendment to the Old Age Security Act. Again I say to him in all fairness and honesty that I applaud the initiative. However, it does not really address today's problems. It addresses a part of today's problems, a very small part, but it obviously does not address the much larger, if not more important, problem confronting many workers in the 55 to 60 age group. We have reached the point where we in the House of Commons as Members of Parliament have an obligation to look seriously at the plight of those people about whom I am talking today in a representative sense. We have an obligation to find the ways necessary for them to re-enter the workforce. The Government would love it to happen, but it is realistic and recognizes that with tens if not hundreds of thousands of people in the age bracket of 20 to 30 also looking for work, the chance of our being able to entice employers to hire those in their later fifties and early sixties is somewhat difficult. Also, we would be put in the