

*Adjournment Debate*

The government has an obligation and a responsibility to ensure that individual Canadians and businesses are informed as to how the GST will operate.

The importance of public understanding is a key lesson from other countries where similar tax systems have been introduced. Where business people and consumers have been well informed, implementation has gone smoothly.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

## LAY-OFFS

**Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—Saint-Michel):** Madam Speaker, on January 26, 1990 I asked the Minister of Labour what steps he had and would be taking to convince the Canadian General Electric Corporation not to close their light bulb manufacturing plant in east Montreal on July 13, 1990 as planned as that closing would mean the loss of some 200 jobs, involving mostly women with more than 20 years' seniority who would have next to no chance of retraining for the labour market.

All I got from the minister was that he would make sure provisions in the Canada Labour Code would be adhered to, that those responsible for the plant closing would take steps to apply under the POWA Program for older workers. Madam Speaker, that answer was of course not good enough and I said so to the minister, insisting that he contact General Electric to urge them not to put their employees on UI benefits or on retirement, but to keep their plant in operation.

I was not the only one to do so because at a round table of elective representatives in Villeray to the three levels of government, namely Mr. Berthelet, Mr. Biello, Mr. Goyer and Mrs. Martine Blanc of the Montreal City Council, Mrs. Violette Trépanier and Mr. Christos Sirros, two MLA's whose constituencies comprise that plant in Montreal and who are also members of the Bourassa Cabinet in Quebec, as well as my colleague from Saint-Denis and myself, we talked with labour representatives from General Electric who told us about their problems. After that round table in Villeray and a number of consultations, all attendants at that meeting decided to support the employees in their attempt to

save the plant. The Montreal councillors and the Quebec MLAs contacted their respective bodies.

I raised the matter here in the House of Commons and urged the Minister of Labour to intervene personally because he is responsible for the Montreal region.

Here we are, two months later on March 20, so I hope the response I get tonight from the parliamentary secretary is a lot more encouraging than what I heard last January. Hopefully the parliamentary secretary will tell me that the minister did get in touch with the company president and made representations to General Electric management to convince them to keep their Montreal plant operating. And I hope he did let General Electric management know that as spokesman for the Canadian government he is not going to stand still while jobs which are important to Montreal disappear because the company has chosen to relocate the plant in the United States.

In light of the fact that General Electric has reported profits of hundreds of millions of dollars for the last financial year, I would suggest this is quite a reasonable request. Nor are we talking about a run-down plant manufacturing nearly useless products, these are halogen or special lamps of the type used by Quebec Hydro and the city of Montreal, state-of-the-art products for which world-wide demand is very strong indeed. This is why we think it is utterly ridiculous that General Electric should decide to rationalize its operations in the United States and in eastern Europe rather than keep this plant running in Montreal.

• (1825)

This is a plant with no labour conflict. If General Electric could say that there had been strikes every year or two, that the labour climate was bad, we could understand that they want to go somewhere else. But I cannot remember the last time there was a strike or conflict at that plant. Labour relations have been very good there for a long time and therefore we cannot accept General Electric closing it down with no consideration for its employees who, I repeat, are mostly women with about 20 years of good service to this company. Overnight, they will find themselves with no alternative unless the economic situation in eastern Montreal changes substantially. I need not remind the parliamentary secretary that in the past fifteen months or so, there have been many layoffs affecting some 6,000 workers in the Montreal area.