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## GOVERNMENT AND THE CHALLENGE OF AUTOMATION

*The following is part of an address by the Minister of Labour, Mr. John R. Nicholson, to the Labour-Management Conference in Guelph, October 22:*

...I am sure that you have all grappled with attempts to define that troublesome word "automation" and the other related terms, "mechanization", "computerization" and "cybernation". I don't propose to add my own definitions to the list. In fact, formal definitions of what is or is not automation have very little relevance from the point of view of government, — and here I would state my first basic principle. The Government is concerned not so much with automation itself but with the effect of automation, its impact on the individual and the communities affected. In my view, the implementation of change in our society is ably handled by the free-enterprise system. But innovation, whatever its definition, does involve government the moment it affects substantial numbers of individual Canadians through loss or change in their employment and the moment it adversely affects whole communities or substantial segments thereof.

Although the introduction of computers into our industrial economy is only one facet of automation, this particular change is often taken as the bell-wether for the entire technological revolution. The first commercial computer came into use in the United States in 1954. Canada had its first commercial computer in 1956, just ten years ago. I am told — and in this highly-competitive field there is no way of getting 100 percent accurate figures — that by the end of 1966 there will be between 1,100 and 1,200 major computers in Canada and that some 75 per cent of these will be in industrial and commercial use.

### CHANGING PATTERNS OF WORK

Passing from the increasing use of computers to the Canadian work force generally, we see equally dramatic changes. The number of agricultural workers has steadily declined during the past 15 years while production workers, including labourers, have only slightly increased. On the other hand, the number of white-collar workers has jumped ahead, especially in the past five years. This changing pattern of white- and blue-collar workers is one of the most important manifestations of automation.

...It is the role of the Government...(and here I wish to make my second fundamental point) to be prepared to cope with the problems of automation over the *foreseeable* future. We must take at least the more reliable prophets seriously far enough in advance to be able to formulate sound plans....

### POSITIVE ASPECTS

The third fundamental proposition that I would put to you is that it is the duty of government not only to avoid hindering the process of automation but actively to encourage it. The principle follows directly on the heels of the two previous ones. If automation poses as serious a challenge as some people believe, then it will be far better to ride with it and to control it than to attempt to oppose it vainly. Canada is too vast a nation, with too small a population, to support our desired standard of living unless we continue to increase our competitive exports. This is becoming increasingly difficult as newer industrialized nations are entering international markets with lower-priced goods and as our established competitors switch to automated techniques. To remain competitive in world