

Canada Labour Code

More of these institutions will be put in place. The Canada Pension Plan will be a most important social institution and I have no doubt that it will be actuarially sound because I believe that we all recognize, as partners in the industrial workplace, that this incredible wealth can be created with little human energy in the new information society. It will be shared equitably and a portion of that wealth will be put into a fund that will afford people who have made their contribution to the workplace at an earlier age a comfortable life with dignity and financial security. Again, unions will have a very influential role to play in persuading Governments, the third partner in this bargaining process, to bring about greater social benefits such as dental plans.

I do not speak of these benefits being affordable only for people who have the protection of a powerful union. I believe that if it is fair and right for a steelworker or a public servant to have a dental plan, it should be fair for everyone else, including those who are unable to belong to a union to enjoy those benefits.

The role of equitably distributing the wealth that will be generated in this new industrial workplace must be shared by the other two partners in the bargaining process. I have said that it is particularly important to recognize this fact because the unions in our country only represent one-third of our work force. Two-thirds of the people working in this country have no opportunity to join a union and the unions have not really been very interested in organizing them.

The recession has shown that workers' expectations of what their unions would deliver them have been betrayed and disappointed. In the crucial period during 1982 and 1983, the unions have not produced jobs or job security for those who are working. To the contrary, we have evidence throughout the country that, because of the irresponsible exercise of union power, some plants are shut down and people are out of work. Some have been deprived of work and have a more modest income than they were used to during the roaring 1970s as a result of the irresponsible exercise of union power.

Like the Depression in the 1930s, the recession will force us to adjust our attitudes, expectations and relationship in the workplace. For that reason, the long-term effects of this recession will be positive to some extent. While there is no excuse for the misery that was caused, there certainly will be long-term, positive effects, particularly if we all, Government, labour and business, draw important lessons from these crises.

The unions and their spokesmen in the socialist Party will have to adjust their attitudes as well. The best way they can do that would be to look around the world and see what other models are available for them to learn from and begin, in partnership with the other legitimate partners, the debate, and to build a new and more responsible and equitable union model in our country.

As I have said, there is even a more compelling reason. It is that Canadians are expecting certain fundamental institutional changes resulting from the patriation of our Constitution and the entrenchment of a Charter of Rights and certain principles of democracy in which we all believe. I am exaggerating somewhat because I doubt that our friends in the socialist Party believe in all of these principles. One such principle I

wish to comment on is the freedom of association. That freedom permits the average citizen and indeed every individual which makes up the cornerstone of a free society to join any political party, church, religion or union of their choice and become an extra-parliamentary critic of Government. It is probably the most important, essential and precious element of democracy that we know.

That cardinal principle of democracy, freedom of choice, must be exercised both ways. No one should be compelled or coerced to join a political party, religious group, extra-parliamentary protest group or indeed a union, particularly if our laws are structured in such a way as to permit unions and their leaders to play a very active role in politics. By letting our labour law compelling a person to belong to a union remain in force, people are being deprived of some of their political freedoms.

I draw from the experience of other industrial countries with whom we compete in the markets of the world. I talk about socialist countries like Sweden, France and even Germany until recently. However, I should qualify that statement by calling these countries social democracies because unfortunately the New Democratic Party does not espouse principles of social democracy but principles of socialism. There is a very profound difference. In no other country in the world except the United Kingdom, where there is an equally irresponsible Labour Party from time to time, is this principle of freedom of association interpreted in any way other than I have just described—free to belong but free also to abstain. Free to be provided with the choice either to belong or to opt out is an important freedom.

• (1540)

This is Canada in a painful way working its way into the twenty-first century. I espouse a European-type model which would provide every Canadian worker with an opportunity to belong to a union. That would be a very important element in our labour law. Any union that wants to be certified would have to make itself available to every person who wishes to join, but no person should be compelled to join for no other reason than the right to work. No longer should we permit the sacrifice of this important and cardinal principle of democracy, the freedom of association. I hope that our Government, industrial leaders and union leaders will get together and this question will be tested in our Supreme Court. This, then, will be the last time that I have to stand up in Parliament to speak for the freedom of the individual in terms of his relationship with his union.

Mr. Gilbert Parent (Welland): I thank you for recognizing me today, Mr. Speaker. Listening to the Hon. Member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle), I note his comments this time are basically the same arguments he put forward before. The Hon. Member from Prince George-Peace River is bringing before Parliament for the fourth time in a decade what, in my opinion, is an ill-considered and ill-advised