

*The Address—Mr. Ouellet*

and often poorly understood by the general public. The media often quote comments by people who wonder why the power of the unions should not be further restricted. According to opinion polls, the public reacts negatively to work stoppages, especially when a strike is on or a strike has just ended. Generally speaking, the unions are too powerful, in the eyes of the public. Is it therefore unusual to find that the unions are concerned about the situation and feel that their basic right to exist is threatened?

I believe that in a modern, developed society like ours, the existence of unions should be considered as a matter of course and as a permanent and deeply rooted part of our society. The role of the unions, their importance for workers and the benefits they have provided are there for all to see, and their existence should never again be challenged. Who can deny that workers deserve a fair share of the benefits of economic recovery? I do not think anyone can. Unfortunately, there are still people who challenge the concept put forward in the Speech from the Throne presented by the Liberal Government, that workers, and consequently, their unions should have an equal voice in the resolution of issues like technological change and improvement of work safety.

● (1130)

We as Liberals, on this side of the House, are not on the fence on this issue. We profoundly believe that workers should have a say in the matter. Unfortunately, there are still too many people who challenge this view, and I have no hesitation in saying that people who oppose this concept have a conservative philosophy that is both reactionary and reprehensible. As was pointed out in the Speech from the Throne, North American, European and Japanese experience shows that productivity is a co-operative endeavour, not a punitive process of seeking more work for less reward.

To improve productivity, we need a combination of progressive management, ingenious technology and high employee morale.

Well, Mr. Speaker, morale will certainly not be high if they are not consulted about changes in industry and realize that they will have nothing to win and everything to lose as a result of these changes. Consequently, it is absolutely vital, especially in a rapidly changing environment, that workers and their unions should be fully informed and consulted, so that they too can share in our economic recovery. To do so, we must strengthen, not weaken, our unions and they should be given funds to help them prepare and disseminate information among their members. We must help union leaders and members to acquire a good understanding of the repercussions that technological change will have on them and on society. I am convinced that new technology will help upgrade the quality of many boring and dangerous tasks. Only when unionized employees understand the advantages of the switch to new technology and appropriate mechanisms are established to

ease their introduction, only then will they realize that they can benefit, only then will they welcome a new technology that will help provide a safer job environment and more stable employment.

That is why, in the Throne Speech, the Government of Canada is proposing the creation of a fund for my Department, Labour Canada, to support research into the effects of technological change and to conduct joint information exchanges between management and workers. This proposal shows that our Government realizes that technological change must be managed in a responsible manner. Of course, we must use technological innovations to make Canada more competitive on international markets, to maintain and increase the number of jobs and safeguard our standard of living, but we must not forget that such changes can have a negative impact on the working conditions of many Canadians.

Although we are aware that technological changes can affect a number of aspects such as occupational safety and health, we still do not know enough about the impact they will have on the organization of work and on labour-management relations.

The Government is therefore proposing the creation of a fund that will be available to union organizations and other groups that may be directly affected by technological change and have no other source of financing, to obtain this kind of information.

The Government therefore intends to award grants for studies on the social impact of certain technological changes. As its next step, and just as important for a better understanding of technological change, the Government is proposing to set up a program of information sessions, to enable labour to benefit from the knowledge thus acquired regarding the nature, scope and probable impact of technological change.

The impact of technology is currently a source of major concern, partly because of lacking information, partly because of incomplete information on the issue. More often than not, when information is available it is not readily accessible to everyone. That explains the wide-ranging discrepancies in the quality of information which may be accessible to the working population.

With a view to disseminating information on technological changes, the Liberal Government will sponsor a series of one-day information seminars. Each Canadian province will probably host one such seminar to look into the significance and impact of technology and related issues which are of some interest to the community. Organized in co-operation with the labour movement, those meetings will be generally patterned after last year's technology and competition seminars arranged and sponsored by the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce and the Department of Regional Economic Expansion.