WILL TRADE UNIONS IN CANADA be the same in 2015 as they are today in 1990? Generally speaking, “I’d say yes,” they will continue to counterbalance the power and influence of industry, they will continue to strive for the economic improvement of their members, and generally they will push for better conditions of life and work. How well unions will succeed will depend on how relevant they become to the significant changes taking place both in industry and in the country.

The social climate in which unions function has a great bearing on their broader social involvement. Unions should not only be regarded as legal entities as they are too often today. They must also be accepted as socially desirable institutions, essential pre-requisites for democracy. Given the necessary climate for growth and development the horizons and responsibilities of the trade union movement of the future will be much wider and broader then those of today. Collective bargaining may well remain the core concern of trade unions, but in addition the total social welfare of the working people of Canada will be added to their agenda. This total social concern will encompass every facet of workers lives.

The labour movement must demonstrate as much concern about the state of the planet as it does about shorter hours or higher wages.

The labour movement must express as much concern about the total health of Canadian citizens as it does about trade union rights and responsibilities.

I believe that the labour movement of the future will not be able to choose one priority against another. Indeed I think the current dichotomy between total social welfare and narrow trade union concerns will disappear.

The labour leader of the future will be a person who has the broadest view of social development and of social concerns. To further such social concerns political involvement will be a critical necessity. While collective bargaining may achieve some gains, most must be gained in the political arena.

I cannot predict whether there will be more or fewer strikes or larger or smaller unions, but I can predict that tomorrow’s labour leader must be concerned with the Gross National Happiness not just the Gross National Product. I can also predict that as long as exploitation exists, the labour movement will be the vehicle of people’s struggle to overcome it.