PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS—MOTIONS

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Shall all orders listed under Private Members' Notices of Motions preceding order No. 81 be allowed to stand by unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SUGGESTED ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO STUDY IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville) moved:

That a Special Committee on the Social and Economic Impact of Technological Change be established which would have the mandate to chart a direction and to recommend policies to respond to the revolutionary impact of technological change.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the motion which I put on the Order Paper and which you just read states that we should have a special committee on the social and economic impact of technological change which would have the mandate to chart a direction and to recommend policies to respond to the revolutionary impact of technological change in our society. I hope that we can dispose of this motion today and that it will not be talked out. I hope all three Parties in the House will agree to establish such a committee.

I believe there is a feeling in the country that this should be done. We are in the midst of a very exciting era of transformation to the information society. I have heard spokespeople from the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party say that such a committee should be welcomed and established. The President of the Science Council of Canada, Dr. Stewart Smith, has said many times in the past that there should be such a committee. Other science reports have recommended such a committee to look at the social and economic impact of technological change.

This afternoon I want very briefly to outline a few reasons why I think this should be done. First, I believe it is obvious that we are in a society in transition whether we like it or not. We are undergoing a tremendous revolution from the old industrial age into the information society whether we like it or not. Since this transformation is taking place now, it is important that we in Canada be part of this new society. It is very important that Canadians make sure we introduce this new society in terms of human values, objectives and the moral values that benefit all Canadians.

There are a number of factors which I believe should be studied to explain why we should establish this committee. First, Parliament is the highest court in the land. I believe Parliament should provide more leadership in advanced technology. We must be implicated in the production of advanced technical goods in Canada to a much greater extent than we are today. If one looks at the many reports, one can see that we are lagging behind most other industrial states in the world. In fact, the Science Council said a month ago that we are about five years behind most small European countries in terms of the production of high-tech goods and commodities. We had a deficit of some $8 billion in high-tech in this country last year. That deficit is growing very rapidly every month. In fact, by the year 1990, according to some spokesman in the computer industry, our deficit in computers alone will be approximately $10 million a year. This deficit will exist in a society in which very soon every child in every classroom in this country will have a computer on his or her desk. In a few years 75 per cent or more of the jobs in our society will be connected with the use of a computer. Yet we do not have a computer industry in Canada of which we can be proud. This is an area that the committee could look into.

Second, as I said previously, we must plan the introduction of this new society and technology in accordance with human goals and objectives. This committee could look at a number of areas where this is very important to Canada in terms of production and how it implicates our people. We can first look at the impact of world-wide technological change on cost competitiveness in Canada and abroad of our manufacturing sector. There is much unemployment in Canada. There is a tremendous deficit of approximately $21 billion in manufacturing trade.

Let us look at the economies of Britain, France, Germany, Japan, the Scandinavian countries and the United States. We find that we as Canadians are lagging farther and farther behind most of these countries' manufacturing sectors. We also notice that advanced technology is having a tremendous impact in these areas as well.

• (1520)

A couple of days ago I had a chance to tour a factory that produces frames for cars in southern Ontario. I was told that around five years ago there were approximately 3,000 people working in this factory. Today there are about 1,200 working in the factory and the factory is more productive now than it was five years ago, despite the fact that nearly two-thirds of the jobs have gone because of automation and the introduction of robotics.

We have to take a look at whether or not our manufacturing is going to be competitive in terms of preserving what jobs we can, in terms of exporting what we can and in trying to supply the domestic market in the age of robotics and fully automated factories.

I think this kind of committee could look at the impact of technological change on jobs in every sector of the Canadian economy. What are we doing about retraining? What are we doing about relocation for our working people? How do our efforts compare to those in other countries? I have already mentioned the impact on jobs in the existing or so-called mature industries. I want to say a word now about retraining and relocation.