

Space Agency

In the 1987 edition of the Canadian Association of University of Teachers' Bulletin the Prime Minister wrote:

This Government stands ready to co-operate fully with the provinces and all others involved in post-secondary education and will help create and maintain a system of higher education capable of meeting the challenges facing Canada.

How can the Prime Minister expect Canadians to believe this given that only one year before his statement his Government capped the growth of Established Programs Financing, cutting support to post-secondary education? The recent Budget has once again taken a strip off an already beleaguered system of universities and colleges.

I share the frustration and cynicism that many Canadians have because of the actions of this Government in this crucial area. The Government is going to spend a considerable sum of money on the creation of the Canadian Space Agency, an institution that will derive its success from people, from an exciting convergence of ideas, the kind that led to events such as the launching of the ANIK A1 satellite in 1972, making Canada the first country to operate a domestic communications system based on a satellite in a geostationary orbit.

The frustration we feel is a result of the fact that we are losing the potential to maintain and expand our scientific expertise every time our universities and colleges are compromised by budget cuts and federal-provincial football games where education is the ball being kicked back and forth.

Even when one looks at the basic research in space science, the Government's performance clearly undermines the credibility that it hopes to gain from this Bill. The proportion of federal government space program expenditures devoted to space science has dropped from 14.2 per cent in the 1981-82 to 9.6 per cent in the current time frame. It was precisely this type of basic research in space science that led to the many success stories of which we are so proud.

It is worth noting for the record that the Prime Minister's own National Advisory Board on Science and Technology has made recommendations regarding the funding of university based research. Specifically, this board has called for the doubling of the base budgets of the research granting councils and subsequent indexing of these budgets at a rate of one and a half times the

growth of the Gross National Product of Canada. However, that advice has been ignored by the Government.

It is no great surprise, albeit saddening and maybe even infuriating, when great Canadians such as Dr. John Polanyi are quoted as saying "go to the United States" when asked to give advice to young Canadian scientists.

It is in the context of this pathetic state of Canadian performance and investment in science, engineering and technology that we must consider Bill C-16. It is in the face of our poor R and D performance, our enormous trade deficit in high and medium technology goods and the permitted deterioration of our institutions of advanced education, and in the absence of any discernible strategy on the part of the federal Government to transform Canada's industry to an aggressive export oriented high value added force, that we must look at this Bill.

In the face of those things, Bill C-16 is a weak and pathetic response by the Government. To be blunt, the Government's handling of the creation of the Canadian Space Agency is nothing short of embarrassing and irresponsible.

• (1220)

It was back in 1986 that the Government decided it wanted to create a space agency. It did so with great fanfare in the 1986 Throne Speech. I quote from that Throne Speech:

My Government's commitment to high technology as a motive force in Canada's economic growth will be expressed in legislation to establish a Canadian Space Agency—Working in co-operation with industry, universities and provinces, the new agency will help to ensure that the benefits of Canada's role in space will be shared by all Canadians.

Here we are, nearly three years later, on second reading debate on a Bill to create the agency.

When it takes nearly three years for the Government to fulfil that kind of commitment to high technology as a motive force in Canada's economic growth, Canadians have every reason to doubt the Tory's ability to lead this country successfully through to the 21st century.

Unfortunately, this pathetic attempt at salvaging the Government's reputation and integrity is tarnished by further indecision at the cabinet level. This was demonstrated very well in comments by the Minister for Supply