

Supply

just reflect on some of the history in the House over the last number of years that he may not be familiar with.

I was a little surprised when I saw the motion on the table for today, that it came from the Liberal Party, of all people. Their tradition made me think that probably they had their tongue in their cheek when they presented this as an opposition day motion today. I was also surprised when the member for Ottawa South, who is the critic, took umbrage when the minister made reference to the trivialization of this issue of research and development, science and technology.

I would like to refer to some of the trivial attitudes and approaches that were taken by his government in the last 15 years. There were four people sitting in the front benches of the Liberal Party today in Question Period who were colleagues of the Minister of State for Science and Technology at the time I was first elected to the House. The position of that minister in the government at that time was that we should not spend excessive amounts of money on research and development because we could buy what we needed to buy from other countries like the U.S.A., Germany, Great Britain, and so on. I suggest that type of attitude for a political party is trivializing the whole issue of science and technology.

My second point is that during those years after 1974 we tried desperately to have the then Liberal government establish a standing committee on science and technology. The estimates for spending on science and technology were passed through the standing committee on miscellaneous estimates. With all the other trivial matters that we spend money on, the issue of science and technology was included under that umbrella of miscellaneous estimates.

We tried and tried to get a standing committee and we were turned down regularly. It was not until this present government came in during its first mandate that we got a standing committee on science and technology. It met for the first time four years ago today, and that was under the aegis of the Conservative government.

• (1630)

Finally, the third point is that the Liberals were in power for about 20 years then and they never once made any effort to produce an advisory board such as the one we now have with the present government: the National

Advisory Board on Science and Technology which the Prime Minister chairs. The attitude of the former Liberals is indeed very trivial as it applies to science and technology. I cannot for the life of me see any evidence to suggest they have changed that. Perhaps the opposition critic would like to indicate why there has been a sudden change of heart on the part of the opposition.

Mr. Manley: Madam Speaker, I must say I am disappointed that a debate on such an important issue would raise the kind of response I have just heard from the hon. member for Oxford.

We are here to talk about science and technology being an essential part of our economic development as a nation, especially in the context of a changing global situation. Instead, the hon. member seems to prefer a debate on history. I would like to refer him to the standing committee on history, if there is one, where that debate can be carried on with some usefulness.

At the moment we have before us a very critical situation in Canada that is gaining in its significance virtually daily. When the government came into office in 1984, I was practising law in this city. We had an accounting computer in our office and that was about it. Now, as I stand here, in that law office a few blocks from here there are approximately 100 computers.

The change that has happened since 1984 alone is drastic. We need to be looking at that changing situation and asking what are the policies that we need for the 1990s? Where do we go from here? If we go back to a situation that existed in a previous decade and try to compare apples and oranges, we are not exactly on a continuum in that respect. Many other problems have become more critical, for example, environmental ones.

In 1984 we were beginning to know about the significance of acid rain. At the time the President of the United States thought it was caused by trees, but on this side of the border we were concerned about it. Since that time, in these last few years we have become acutely aware of problems of environmental degradation which are global in nature. This has presented among other things an opportunity for Canada, by making its commitment to research and development a real one, to move forward on the world stage of environmental technologies. That is an opportunity which lies before us. Why do