

*Technological Change*

Members of the House, particularly through the task force but in other ways as well, and for that reason I see no real need to adopt the Hon. Member's suggestion.

I would also say to the Hon. Member that if this were only an academic exercise and something that could take a number of months or years to accomplish, I would support his resolution for the creation of a special committee on the subject. The fact is that at this point in time it is my view that we have not yet taken full advantage of the economic opportunities and job opportunities which high technology has to offer the country. I commend Cabinet for having focused on the issue and having made, so expeditiously, a decision which allows that policy to be formulated and to become public, as it did on May 3. I would invite the Hon. Member for Yorkton-Melville not to pursue a course of action, however much it resembles motherhood on its surface, that would have the effect of delaying the implementation of a very good policy.

I would be remiss if at this time I did not note the occasion of the occupancy of the chair by my good friend, the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor), who performs in this capacity extremely well, as he does in all others. I hope he stays there a long time.

It is true, Mr. Speaker, that we have had to deal with the issue of radical changes in employment patterns in the past and we have coped with it. We expect that we will have to deal with this issue in the future and we will cope with it. We will cope with it again just as long as we face the issue directly and continue to devise intelligent policies to deal with it.

I say that we have dealt with that problem in the past, Mr. Speaker, and I will give you an example of it that involves the field of agriculture. In only 15 years between 1946 and 1961, the number of people employed in agriculture dropped from just over one million to just over 600,000, a drop of almost half a million jobs. Over the same 15-year period, the percentage of employed Canadians who worked in agriculture dipped from 25 per cent to just over 11 per cent. In 1981 that percentage stood at only 4.4 per cent.

This was indeed a wrenching change in employment patterns and one we would have viewed with alarm if we had been able to forecast the disappearance of farm jobs without any clear idea of the opportunities that would emerge as the economy grew and changed. It has always been far easier to identify the jobs at risk than it has been to identify the jobs likely to be created by change. But hundreds of years of experiencing the emergence of new technologies have shown that there is always a parallel and unforeseen set of new opportunities that will emerge to create wealth and jobs.

Before we become too disheartened, Mr. Speaker, it is worth remembering that in the 1970s total employment grew by almost three million. It grew from eight million employed in 1971 to 10.9 million a decade later. Moreover, massive adjustments in the labour force are taking place all the time. The Task Force on Labour-Market Development in the 1980s found that every year one million new jobs are created and three-quarters of a million jobs disappear in the same period.

• (1600)

I should like to return for a moment to my agricultural example. It is clear that we managed transition because we had a strong economy, one that was creating wealth and favouring the growth of capital investment. In turn, that called for a work force adapted to new circumstances. In the 1950s and 1960s the economy was able to provide that growth, and in order to maintain our ability to adapt to new technologies and to changing world patterns, we need a strong economy again.

Regaining that economic strength is the objective toward which the efforts of the Government are targeted. It seems clear that the future will be a highly competitive one. If Canada is to prosper, the Canadian economy must be competitive in terms of cost, quality, technological sophistication and marketing.

The reality is before us; it is inescapable. If we try to hide from the reality of the new product and production technologies, we will slip into an economic backwater. If we refuse to hide our heads in the sand and if we meet the challenge head on with intelligence, I foresee continued growth and social wealth, the wealth of our society as a whole and the emergence of new ways of work and wealth sharing.

Perhaps we should look at this not as a problem but as an opportunity. I am told that in the Chinese language there is one set of symbols for two words. They use a set of symbols to designate on paper the word we know as "problem", but they use the same set of symbols, without rearrangement, to connote "opportunity". I submit that those who see the coming high technology as a problem would do well also to look at it from the perspective of it being an opportunity—indeed, a set of opportunities—for Canadians.

Human beings have always been at their best when facing challenge. Our adaptability has always been our strength. The technology policy that the Government has proposed and the specific initiatives it has announced are actions which will facilitate the transition of our economy and our society to a new world, the shape of which we can only begin to guess. I for one face that new world with some optimism. I repeat the essential point, that job losses are always easy to see and forecast while the new opportunities cannot be nearly as readily predicted. These opportunities will emerge just as long as we continue to put in place the programs and policies that will ensure we are able to seize the advantage in a timely way. No one will argue that the period we face is not one of profound structural change. That change will eliminate jobs; no one would argue with that. My point is that it will also create new jobs.

The choice is an important one, Mr. Speaker, but a fairly simple one—to hide our heads in the sand, to try to freeze everything in time, to fight high technology as some kind of evil monster or, conversely and more positively and certainly more productively and sensibly, to see high technology as a set of opportunities we must latch on to, a new door which opens to create new kinds of job opportunities to replace those which have disappeared because of passing technology. That is the