

When the Minister of State for Science and Technology (Mr. Oberle) was asked about this in the House he said that he would appoint a task force to look into the matter, and have it bring back a report, particularly since the cuts that had been made troubled a number of people because they may have interfered with the health of basic research in the country. The Minister appointed the task force, and after the task force reported back to the House, we found that the Government had hogtied the task force on the National Research Council cuts, and that the task force was to report only on the health aspects of the cuts at NRC. The task force could not talk about it in wide terms. Indeed, that is said in the report. On page 2 of the report the task force stated:

You first asked us to consider whether or not the decisions made by the National Research Council and recommended to the Government in our opinion endangered either the health or the safety of the Canadian public.

It is our view—

They then state their decision. On page 8 the task force states the following:

We have not attempted to interfere with with actual management decisions made. This would be inappropriate in our view.

Well, that is what all the questions were about, the actual cuts in science and technology.

The task force further stated:

—we have not been asked to comment on the broader governmental policy decisions which resulted in these reductions and we consider that such comment would be equally inappropriate.

In other words, the task force was not asked to do it, therefore, it cannot be put in the report. After the report came out with those narrow guidelines to go on, the task force practically gave the Minister a clean bill of health on his decisions. As a matter of fact, the task force was not asked to do the specific things that we wanted to see it do when we questioned the Minister in the House. The science community is rightly angry because it has not had its day in court on this decision. Members who represent many high-tech and science-oriented installations in this country are perturbed.

● (1230)

It was sloughed off to a minor scale task force which did not meet the crunch of the bad decisions of the Government respecting science and technology and the future of the country. It was no wonder that the press indicated that the Minister of State for Science and Technology was dead wrong to claim that his task force report on the National Research Council vindicated the cabinet ordered budget cuts at the NRC. The article went on to indicate that it did no such thing, that the task force passed over the most important issues raised by the Government's assault on the NRC and that the narrowness of the group's mandate was the excuse cited by the three-member board. They admit that the Government did not allow them to go into the issues raised on the floor of the House of Commons, because it knew very well what would be the answers.

Borrowing Authority

I should like to refer to a large telescope in Algonquin Park which weighs over 900 tonnes. It was programmed to be upgraded and polished, to become one of the three most famous installations of its kind in the world. As a result of a combined project by France and Germany, there is one in Spain, and there is a second one on a mountain in Japan. The Government, which pretends to be interested in science and technology and space, killed the very project in Canada that gave the most information about space itself. Not only did it give Canadians information on space, but people from many countries came here to conduct experiments and use it. In fact, Americans came up here because it was a better facility than those available in the United States. It is the old adage—if something is working well, kill it. That is what is happening with the Government.

Let me refer to what this means to Canada. It is the loss of the largest fully steerable telescope for astronomy in North America. Its value in terms of scientific research in Canada, in North America, and in Europe is incalculable.

Let us take the Post Office, for example—

Mr. Bradley: Please.

Mr. Hopkins: I hear a Tory Member saying "please". Is it any wonder? It does not matter what answer government Members give on the question of post office closures in rural Canada. The fact of life is that no one out there is listening to them because no one believes them any more. They talk about small community Canada, and the Minister says that any changes will only result through "natural opportunities". Is that not a wonderful term? The natural opportunities include things such as resignation. I am sure the resignation of an individual does not have much to do with whether or not there is a need for a postal service in a community. Also they include retirement. What relationship is there between someone's retirement and the need for postal service in a community? Also there is the promotion of a postmaster. Will everyone feel so glorious about the promotion of the local postmaster that they will say, "Now that he has been promoted, we do not need any postal service in this community"? Also there is the loss of the post office site. If the post office closes up or if it is sold, what does a real estate sale in a community have to do with the requirements for local postal service? That is the kind of logic which has caused trouble for the Government.

The Conservative Government says that rural post office closures and other changes in rural mail service will be concentrated in communities where these natural opportunities happen. We in the Liberal Party feel that postal service belongs to communities and that retirements or the sale of buildings have nothing to do with the continuing postal service needs of people.

It has been said that the national deficit should not be attacked on the basis of income tax alone, and that is quite