

Adjournment Debate

Dr. Gerhard Herzberg, one of Canada's new Nobel prize winners, charged in Ottawa in February that government bureaucracy and cost cutting have stifled the creativity of Canada's scientific researchers. He said:

● (2210)

... that pure, not applied, science had suffered most from government cutbacks. Basic research funds increased minimally in the past five years, he said, at a time of high inflation. As a result, actual government spending in pure science declined by about half.

What this means can be seen very quickly if one looks at a letter written by the President of the Medical Research Council, Dr. Malcolm Brown. I shall quote just a few sentences from his letter in which he outlines what the Medical Research Council is doing in order to meet the constraints put on it by the government:

The Visiting Scientist, Research Professorships and Summer Undergraduate Research Scholarships programs have been suspended for 1976-77.

The June 1976 grants competition has been cancelled. General Research Grants have each been reduced by one third for 1976-77.

A 3 per cent cut will be made in the operating component (exclusive of support provided for approved trainees and professional assistants) of all MRC grants for 1976-77 except term grants in their third year and terminal awards, . . .

Let me place on the record a few quotations from some of the letters which have gone to the Prime Minister. Here is one from my province from Professor J. C. Haworth, Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Manitoba Health Sciences Centre. He states:

Reduction of our research programs will have the following results:

1. Since about 70 per cent of our research funding is used to pay salaries, the reduction in the value of research funds will inevitably require the discharge of some technical staff. Quite apart from the personal hardship this will cause, it must be recognized that many of these people are highly trained and skilled in their work and it will take years to train others to the same level of competence when research funds again become more plentiful.

Here is a letter to the Prime Minister from Dr. D. G. Scraba, Associate Professor of the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Alberta. He says:

While I support your government's intention to control its spending, I seriously question its priorities for restraint. Surely the saving of \$7,000,000 from the total federal budget cannot justify the harmful immediate and long-term effects upon medical research in this country.

He concludes by saying:

The net result of these restrictions will be to retard progress now, and to seriously imperil the future of medical research in Canada. Once momentum and enthusiasm has been lost in this field a substantial period of time will be required to regenerate it.

I could go on, but I just want to say that when the government restricts scientific research to the few millions of dollars it has this year, when we have a budget of well over \$30 billion, to say the least it is being pretty stupid about priorities, particularly when one keeps in mind the kind of criticism of government spending the Auditor General made in his last report.

Let me put on the record a few of the comments of the Auditor General. He points out that rental costs for unoccupied space in Ottawa were \$487,000 in 1974-75 and will probably be \$4.5 million in 1975-76. Let me point out that the Department of National Defence is to construct a language centre at its base at St. Jean at a cost of \$88 million.

[Mr. Orlikow.]

Let me point out that we are spending something in the neighbourhood of \$1 billion to construct the Olympic facilities for a three weeks' spectacular. Let me point out that we spent \$10 million on the Pickering Airport which has been abandoned. Finally, in the last six years when the government has been talking about restraints, the number of executive employees has grown from something under 400 to over 1,000, an increase of two and a half times. I am talking about senior civil servants who earn from \$30,000 to \$65,000 per year. It seems obvious to me that when the government talks about restraint and imposes the kind of restraint which it has imposed on the scientific community, it is not only stupid but, to say the least, criminal.

Mr. B. Keith Penner (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the words of the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) who has expressed a sincere and genuine concern about the amount of money which is available at any time for scientific research.

The hon. member is an experienced parliamentarian and has been in this House for a good long while, and he knows full well that the government has been fully committed and remains committed to the maintenance and development of a national capacity to perform research when that research is in the field of natural, medical, or social sciences. Research leads to new knowledge, and hopefully that knowledge will become available for applications which can be useful to the human condition. We all recognize that. Most of our basic research over the years has been directed toward the universities because we know that there is the greatest freedom and stimulation for a very high quality of basic research.

Hon. members know what has been happening in the universities, particularly in the 1960's. During that period of time undergraduate enrollment in universities doubled, and post graduate enrollment increased five-fold. During this period we only need to ask ourselves what was the participation and the role of the federal government? The budget of the research council for grants and scholarships during that same period of time increased annually by the amount of 20 per cent.

Mr. Orlikow: What has happened in the last couple of years?

Mr. Penner: Every member of parliament with an ounce of fiscal commonsense knows that this pattern of expenditures simply could not go on indefinitely. A change in emphasis in government spending was bound to occur, and that is the situation in which we find ourselves at the present time. We realize now, somewhat painfully, that we are in a time of fiscal restraint, and every segment of our economy must bear its share of the burden in this effort to reduce inflation. That includes the scientific community.

Unfortunately, scientific research cannot be an exception. There are budgetary restraints and there is a budgetary discipline, and I believe that the scientists and researchers in Canada can learn to live with that because it certainly does not mean that there will be a dismantling