

*Adjournment Debate***PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT
MOTION***[English]*

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 66 deemed to have been moved.

NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL—FUTURE OF ALGONQUIN
RADIO OBSERVATORY. (B) USE OF OBSERVATORY'S EQUIPMENT

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, on November 3 I asked the Minister of State for Science and Technology (Mr. Oberle) to explain why the Director of the Herzberg Institute which operated the telescope at the Algonquin Radio Observatory had notified 25 permanent employees that because of the cut of over \$1 million in its budget the observatory would be closed next year and their jobs would be phased out. I asked the Minister to explain what was happening. He said, as reported at page 1006 of *Hansard*:

There is a reduction in the program which has been announced. However, the decision on the long-term future of the observatory has not been decided.

The Council is looking for alternatives.

That was a strange reply by the Minister because the people who work at the Algonquin Radio Observatory now know that the observatory will close on May 31 this year. The team of 19 persons who operate and maintain the observatory will lose their positions.

My point was that the decision had been made and 25 positions were to be sacrificed from the Herzberg Institute. The decision was that since the Algonquin Observatory was not to be upgraded, then it was to be closed. What are the costs of that decision? A \$40 million to \$50 million facility is being mothballed when it could have been upgraded and made a world-class facility which others would have used. The expertise of the team, which has been lauded by people in the field from one end of this country to the other and by experts in many other countries, has been lost to the nation forever. Canadian astronomers will be forced to go to the United States, in Massachusetts and West Virginia, to use their facilities. In other words, we will become users of another country's facilities rather than suppliers for ourselves and for others.

● (1800)

Canada is now negotiating with Great Britain to buy time on its telescope in Hawaii as we go from being a provider to a buyer of these kinds of facilities. That is just one illustration of what the Government's misconceived and improper approach to scientific research is leading to. When the Conservatives were in opposition, they and we listened to the criticisms of members of the scientific community, the private sector, the universities and Government laboratories who repeatedly pointed out that while other industrialized countries belonging to the OECD and Japan were spending between 2 per cent and 2.5 per cent of their Gross National Product on scientific research and development, Canada was spending just about

half that percentage. We were repeatedly told by those who were knowledgeable that this would lead to a long-term decline in Canada's ability to meet its needs over the next 25 years and to meet competition from other countries which are moving ahead so rapidly in this period when so many scientific discoveries are being made.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) promised that a Conservative Government would move rapidly toward the magical goal of allocating 2.5 per cent of the Gross National Product to scientific research and development. He did not say that this would happen only after we had dealt with the deficit, which is much too great. The Conservatives won the election. They formed the Government with the largest majority any Party has ever had, but what do we see happening? We are now spending less as a percentage of our Gross National Product for scientific research and development than we did when the Liberals were in office. If we look at what the Government is proposing, we see that from now until 1990 the Government is not proposing any increases unless the private sector substantially increases its investment in scientific research, and then the Government will match it.

As a result of this policy, the NRC has been gutted in order to make funds available for deficit reduction and the space program. Cutbacks have been made to the granting councils, to funds for universities as well as to departmental research. Yet the Prime Minister makes speeches about the importance of research and development for Canada, knowing full well that we are no closer to reaching the 2.5 per cent target for research and development as a percentage of our Gross National Product which he promised.

My question to the Government is simply: How can the Prime Minister and the Minister of State for Science and Technology continue to make these statements when such institutions as the Algonquin Radio Observatory and the Bedford Institute of Oceanography in Halifax are now history?

● (1805)

Mr. Gordon Towers (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State for Science and Technology): For some reason, mostly attributed to the Opposition, there is a great deal of misinformation and concern with respect to this particular item. I welcome this opportunity to set the record straight. I trust that all who are concerned over this issue will listen carefully.

The NRC's mandate includes the responsibility to "operate and administer any astronomical observatories established or maintained by the Government of Canada". At present, NRC operates three facilities; radio telescopes in Algonquin and Penticton, and an optical telescope and computation centre in Victoria. NRC also contributes to the Canada-France-Hawaii optical telescope in Mauna Kea, Hawaii, in return for 40 per cent of the operating time. These instruments are available to and heavily used by university researchers from Canada and other countries, although NRC has many fine astronomers in