

● (1210)

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Madam Speaker, the Minister made the point that because it was not explicitly set out in the rule, it may well be that the Government would choose not to allow a debate on this matter to occur in the very near future. Also the Minister indicated yesterday that he would discuss the matter with the House Leader, and again indicated today that he would discuss the question of whether or not there ought to be some time allocated for discussion of this very important matter, one which touches upon the lives of people in this country and in other countries now and in the future.

Notwithstanding the fine legal point which he made with regard to the appropriateness of the rule, there was a desire on the part of the Committee established to review the rules of Parliament that matters of substance, heretofore not dealt with in the House of Commons or in committee by virtue of any automatic referral, could be dealt with and would be dealt with. This matter falls four square into the category. It is a matter of considerable importance to the vast majority of Canadians, notwithstanding on which side of the argument they come down.

Again I ask the Minister, as I did yesterday, whether he is going to rely on some very fine legal point to thwart the right of Members of Parliament to discuss matters of vital importance to the future of the country, or is he going to rise in his place and say that the deployment and use of the Cruise missile, which will be effected by the complicity of Canada in providing a testing site for it, is to be given time in the House and in committee. I suggest that it needs time both in the House of Commons and in committee for a reasonable debate, the time limits of which we would easily agree upon.

Does the Minister not think, in the over-all scheme of things with which we deal in the House of Commons on a day-to-day basis, that the question of the use of the mechanisms to be tested in Canada is a justifiable reason for debate in the House of Commons? If he does, surely it is not too much to ask him to sit down and work out the mechanics of having that take place.

Hon. John M. Reid (Kenora-Rainy River): Madam Speaker, I just want to point out to the House Standing Order 46(4) which reads:

Reports, returns or other papers laid before the House in accordance with an Act of Parliament shall thereupon be deemed to have been permanently referred to the committee—

One of those papers which would be permanently referred to the parliamentary committee is an annual report. Surely any procedural expert would tell us that an agreement of the kind which comes under an annual report would automatically be referred to that committee. Therefore, it seems that the point of order raised by the Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) is not really a point of order at all, because that committee, as soon as it is set up and the referral of the annual report is made, will have all the authority it needs to conduct a

Point of Order—Hon. Walter Baker

discussion into the papers laid before the House by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen).

Mr. Doug Lewis (Simcoe North): In joining the debate on this point of order, Madam Speaker, I would ask you to consider very seriously the essence of what we are discussing. We have a document which is vital to Canada tabled by the Minister. Despite the comments of the Hon. Member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) that it may some day become part of a report which some day is referred to Parliament, the fact is that it was tabled yesterday. I request that you reserve your decision, Madam Speaker, in order to consider very carefully the vital nature of what we are trying to do, which is to provide scrutiny of these documents immediately by standing committees.

Mr. D. M. Collenette (York East): Madam Speaker, as a Member of the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure, I beg to differ with the Hon. Member for Simcoe North (Mr. Lewis). I think the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen) has outlined the problem. I am certainly in agreement with his interpretation of the Standing Order.

I would not want to put words into the mouth of the Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker), but my recollection was that he was one of the people at the Committee most concerned that minor—or major—administrative matters, not necessarily dealing with policy but all administrative matters, would be before the House on a regular basis. I would certainly defer to him on this particular point, but I thought it was he and some other Members of the Committee who actually stipulated or made the point before the Committee that the words “in accordance with an Act of Parliament” be included, specifically so we would not be dealing on a routine basis with administrative matters, no matter how important they may be.

I am not addressing myself to the substance of this matter; I hope we can divorce it from the procedural question.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, dealing with what I think is an important question, I have cited two Statutes; there may be others. Before there is a ruling with respect to the matter, perhaps we ought to reserve in terms of the argument to see whether or not it is in fact “in accordance with an Act of Parliament”. The words are quite clear.

I accept what the Hon. Member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) said with respect to the annual report, but nonetheless the words of the Standing Order are quite clear. They set out the intent, really, of what we meant if we were to view it. I agree that it is not the intention of the rules that every minor administrative matter, as the Hon. Member for York East (Mr. Collenette) said, should go to the standing committees. I have to allow that this is not a minor, routine administrative matter. Nonetheless, two Statutes were cited. I do not know whether the Chair has had a chance to read the Statutes yet or whether the Clerk of the House has had a chance to read them in order to advise the Chair. It might be wise if there were a