

Oral Questions

examine it? Surely those are questions to which we should have answers before the ink is placed on the agreement.

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I can see no reason, if the standing committee so chooses, that it should not examine the provisions of the agreement every year—not every five years, but every year.

REQUEST THAT AGREEMENT BE TABLED

Mr. Derek Blackburn (Brant): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Minister of National Defence. He has just announced this afternoon that he will be attending a meeting of the defence committee today at 3.30. Is that correct?

Mr. Nielsen: No.

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): Therefore, my question is: when he does go before the committee, or if he does not go before the committee, will he at least table in the House the exact wording of the agreement before it is signed? I put that to him, not only as the Minister of National Defence, but as a professional lawyer. Would he advise a client to sign a contract without first reading the wording?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, with respect to my appearance before the committee, information has been conveyed to the chairman with a firm committed date for my appearance. I am trying to arrange my schedule to appear sometime next week. If that is at all possible, I will do that. I would be delighted to do that.

With respect to making the agreement public before it is signed, as I indicated yesterday, the agreement is to be signed in Quebec city on March 18. It will then be made public and tabled in the House of Commons.

AGREEMENT PROVISIONS

Mr. Derek Blackburn (Brant): Mr. Speaker, obviously, to a democratic parliamentary body that is totally unacceptable.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): This Government was supposed to have a new wave of openness. Could the Minister of National Defence go part way? What specific wording in the proposed agreement precludes Canada from participating in a star wars defence system as an inadvertent consequence of signing? Could he at least give us the words which would provide that protection?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, it may be unacceptable to the hon. gentleman, but the form of government which we operate under in this country permits—

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Secret.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, the right hon. gentleman has been away for ten years, so maybe he doesn't know.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Sign first and tell us later. I love it.

Mr. Nielsen: All of the elements of the agreement were in my announcement yesterday.

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): No way.

Mr. Nielsen: The reason they do not believe that is so is because they refuse to accept what is stated here. I can understand the Hon. Member wanting to look at every "t" which is crossed and every "i" which is dotted, but I certainly cannot understand those in the Official Opposition, including the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry and the former Minister of External Affairs, putting that kind of question. They were the ones who negotiated that very agreement for nine years. They cannot stand here now and tell us they do not know anything about it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

* * *

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRESENCE IN GALLERY OF HON. JOHN KERIN, AUSTRALIAN MINISTER FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRY

Mr. Speaker: May I interrupt the proceedings to advise Members of the presence in our gallery today of the Australian Minister for Primary Industry, the Hon. John Kerin, MP, who is leading a delegation from Australia.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

PRESENCE IN GALLERY OF HIS EXCELLENCY YITZHAK SHAMIR, VICE PREMIER AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF ISRAEL

Mr. Speaker: May I also advise Members of the presence in our gallery today of the Vice Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, Mr. Yitzhak Shamir.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

* * *

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

SINAI—REQUEST FOR PEACEKEEPING CONTINGENT

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg-Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I would say by way of preamble to Members opposite that the reason we are so curious to know is that, if we were there signing that agreement, it would have been in the national interests of Canada. But, with the flip-flops they have had, we are not so sure.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!