

Point of Order—Mr. Lewis

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER**POWERS OF COMMITTEE UNDER STANDING ORDER—
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

Mr. Speaker: I indicated to Hon. Members who wished to make procedural arguments about another matter that they would be free to make them now. The Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans).

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I would be prepared to yield to the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) since he spoke first on the prior occasion, and then I will follow him if Your Honour so wishes.

Mr. Speaker: On the procedural question, the Hon. Member for Trinity (Miss Nicholson).

Miss Aideen Nicholson (Trinity): Mr. Speaker, I thought it might be helpful if I were to offer for your consideration some precedents on this point. The practice of requesting a Government response to certain recommendations contained in Public Accounts Committee reports has been used for a number of years. I have before me some examples.

The eighth report of the Public Accounts Committee concerning CIDA was tabled on October 22, 1985. Of the eight recommendations, the Government was asked to respond to only three. On February 13, 1986, the Government's response to those recommendations was tabled. On March 26, 1986, CIDA responded to the remainder of the recommendations.

The twentieth report of the Public Accounts Committee dealing with the Canada Post Corporation was tabled on May 30, 1983, in the first session of the thirty-second Parliament. Pursuant to the then Standing Order 69(13), two ministerial responses were received to recommendation 7(a) on September 19 and 27 of 1983.

The last precedent concerns the eighteenth report on the Canadian Dairy Commission which was tabled on March 29, 1983, during the first session of the thirty-second Parliament. A Government response was requested to recommendation 6(a) and one was received on July 11, 1983.

I would like to take a moment to explain why this practice has been followed. It is because reports dealing with departments or agencies sometime refer to broad and related policy objectives and the individual department or agency may not be able to respond to a recommendation because it needs an overall government statement. For example, in the case of the eighth report of the Public Accounts Committee concerning CIDA, the committee was concerned with problems of planning and monitoring procurement which involved economic and regional concerns. Clearly this was an area that needed a Government response since it concerned many departments.

● (1110)

Second, in the case of overlapping or divided jurisdiction, a department or agency cannot provide a response, and this is somewhat the same issue, if the response is directly involved through legislative or ministerial direction. Again, in the case of the eighth report of CIDA, the committee was concerned about divided responsibilities for the Food Aid Program. CIDA is involved with three departments and therefore the committee requested that the Government clarify the roles of the various departments and agencies.

In the case before us, most of the recommendations were addressed to the Public Service Commission which is responsible to Parliament, but there were recommendations concerning the division of responsibilities between the Public Service Commission and the Treasury Board which seemed to the members of the committee to call for a Government response.

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, very briefly, I think the Hon. Member for Trinity (Miss Nicholson) has covered most of the salient points. Suffice it to say, therefore, that I agree with the precedents she has brought forward as being relevant in this particular case.

I would like to make the point that in this particular report, it is primarily referenced to the commission itself, and that in this one instance under No. 15(b), it requests from the Government a certain response. It would be possible, I would say, for the Commission to prepare a comprehensive report without dealing with the question of the Government response. That report could therefore be submitted to the House of Commons.

However, more importantly, in the interest of common sense, I think we all understand that it would be possible for a committee to file a number of separate reports if it were determined that it could not ask for specific responses to specific items within one report. It would be possible for a committee, for example, to have held more than one day of hearings and to report on its deliberations as they affect the Commission and then on its deliberations as they affect the Government. That would stand as two separate reports which of course would have to be responded to in any event. To put a committee into a position of having to go through that rather false procedure rather than to simply allow it to highlight that part of the single report which refers directly to a Government responsibility would, in my opinion, be counter-productive and would not make much sense in the way in which committees operate.

I would respectfully urge, Sir, that you find that it is appropriate in the circumstances and is not in any way denied as a right under Standing Orders for a committee from time to time, on matters that refer directly to Government operations, to draw the attention of the Government to its specific request for a government response to a part of a report which in fact would normally be responded to by the Commission itself.