

Tabling of Documents

opinion is shared by others and is the general consensus of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. The idea that any minister should table press releases, or statements that are self-serving or exculpatory through the medium of this rule, should absolutely not be considered. If this were allowed our procedure would degenerate to the level of that followed in other countries, particularly that followed in the United States—and I will not deal with the situation there—where documentation may be placed on the record without being the subject of a speech. Certainly it was never the intention of this house or the procedure committee that this should be done.

The question for Your Honour to consider involves an interpretation of the rules. Under these conditions it is my submission that standing order 40 provides for the tabling of a document which is required by statute. When we come to the new standing order the words "return, report or other paper" must be considered in the same light; that is a document of an official character which, while not being required to be tabled by statute, is a subject for which a good case can be made for tabling in the house.

But if we let the rule go beyond this, where do we stop? Any document or any speech could be included: the Postmaster General could table in this house the speeches he has made.

An hon. Member: Oh, no!

Mr. Baldwin: Papers of any kind at all could be included within the provisions of this rule. If we adopted the interpretation which would be called for in order to uphold the legality of what was done yesterday, the words "other paper" could be given the widest possible meaning. I am sure this would not be a desirable practice in the house, and I therefore ask Your Honour to consider this question and come to some decision on it.

It may well be that, because the question has been raised for the first time, Your Honour might like to reserve your position on it. I say this because if Your Honour does come to a decision that the words "other paper" could include the right of a cabinet minister or parliamentary secretary to table any document, any paper at all, self-serving or argumentation, without in any sense its being an official document published under the authority of a government department, this house might well want to review the position it took on the rule and revise it.

[Mr. Baldwin.]

If on the other hand Your Honour comes to the decision, as I hope you will and as the facts and precedents justify, that the words "other paper" must have a restrictive interpretation placed upon them, I think the government will have to review its position. I suggest it might well have to consider giving to hon. members of the opposition parties and Your Honour, well in advance of the time they intend to table the document, the document itself so that a decision may be arrived at as to whether it does or does not in fact conform to the rule.

I therefore ask Your Honour to give this matter most careful consideration, because I think what happened yesterday could degenerate into an iniquitous practice which would be most restrictive of the rights and privileges of members of this house.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am sure we all agree that, for the most part, our new rules are working very well. I think we will grow in our appreciation of them as time goes on. Even so, if any apparent infraction has taken place in connection with one of the new rules, I agree with the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) that it should be looked at by Your Honour without delay.

Like the hon. member for Peace River, I realize that this is a point you may want to look at and on which you may wish to reserve your judgment. But I would like to support the contention of my hon. friend that the change in the rules that we made did not contemplate the kind of document which the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) asked permission to table yesterday. I accept the correction of the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), who has just said that the Secretary of State did not seek permission, because under the new standing order, if the document fits the wording of the order he does not have to ask permission. That is the whole point.

As Your Honour must be aware, the new rules have put many more responsibilities on you than existed heretofore. We were quite deliberate in the recommendation that there be what is now known as standing order 41 (2), which reads as follows:

A minister of the Crown, or a parliamentary secretary acting on behalf of a minister, may, in his place in the house, state that he proposes to lay upon the table of the house, any report or other paper dealing with a matter coming within