

Inquiries of the Ministry

government has raised the issue of the continuing occupation of that country?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I believe I indicated that the details of the discussion are of a confidential nature.

[*Later:*]

Mr. Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister said in his reply today, as he did on Friday, that the discussion with the Russian ambassador was privileged. My point of order is this: A mere statement by the right hon. gentleman does not make it so; it simply indicates his refusal to tell Canadians what took place, or to explain the purpose of these talks.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a matter of debate; it is certainly not a point of order. If the hon. member would indicate the standing order or precedent to which he is referring I shall rule on the point raised. However, it seems to me he is arguing the validity of the Prime Minister's position in refusing to reply to his question. The hon. member knows that a minister is not obliged to reply to a question, even though the member asking it may think it should be answered, or answered in a certain way.

Mr. Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): To continue this point of order, Mr. Speaker. I fully agree I have not referred to the Standing Order—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): Will you hear me out?

Mr. Speaker: I have ruled on the point raised by the hon. member and it seems to me there is little purpose in going into the matter further. The hon. member is not satisfied with the reply made to him by the Prime Minister. I do not see how that can constitute either a point of order or a question of privilege.

MAINLAND CHINA—EFFECT ON RECOGNITION OF BORDER CLASHES WITH U.S.S.R.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): On a point of order, dealing with the rights of parliament, Mr. Speaker. The other day I asked the Prime Minister again in this house whether there had been any suggestion of postponing recognition of communist China because of the aggression being practised between communist China and the U.S.S.R. The answer received from the Prime Minister and from the Secretary of State for External Affairs was that this could not be revealed.

[Mr. Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys).]

Later that day it was stated in the press that according to information received the subject had been discussed between the Prime Minister and the Soviet ambassador. It is not proper that answers which were not given here in this chamber should be given outside the house by officials in order to offset any possible criticism of the failure to answer here.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): On the point of order, Mr. Speaker. The subject matter which was discussed between the Soviet ambassador and myself was China. When I was asked the question, the External Affairs Department had not yet received permission from the Soviet ambassador to release the subject matter of the discussion. The ambassador did agree later to