

# Hansard . . .

VOL 89 ISSUE NO 1367  
ORAL ANSWERS 14.1.'86

## Strategic Defence Initiative

**Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's discussions with members of the department of artificial intelligence and other scientists at the University of Edinburgh on research under the strategic defence initiative.

**Mr. Younger:** Ministry of Defence officials met Dr. Thompson from the department of artificial intelligence, Edinburgh University, on 20 December to discuss various aspects of the strategic defence initiative.

**Mr. Dalyell:** The Secretary of State will know from his previous incarnation that the department of artificial intelligence in Edinburgh is one of the most distinguished in the world. How, then, does he answer the point put by Dr. Henry Thompson and his colleagues who say, as do scientists at Imperial college, that the scheme can never come to fruition? In the absence of the spare planet, which the Ministry of Defence presumably does not have, how is the testing to be done? Unless there is a spare planet, there is no way that the scheme can be tested.

**Mr. Younger:** The discussions with Dr. Thompson have been fulfilled as my predecessor undertook that they would be. Dr. Thompson and his colleagues are entitled to their view, but that does not alter the fact that the research will go on in any case; and if this country is involved, there will be considerable spin-off effects, both civilian and military. We should be foolish to turn our backs on it.

**Mr. Ashdown:** Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that I gather that the same scientists have suggested that the computer system to run the SDI would have to be hundreds of times more powerful than the current NORAD early warning system? Is he aware that that system crashes every 30 seconds on average and has never worked for longer than half an hour? Why is the Secretary of State diverting a precious part of our human resources in computer research to this ridiculous red herring?

**Mr. Younger:** The point of the research is to find out whether the scheme is feasible and, if so, how. We should bear in mind that views are strongly held by individuals all over the place and they do not necessarily reflect the views of a university or a department as a whole.