

• (1120)

[English]

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL PROGRAMS

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House the Secretary of State for External Affairs said that while there was some movement on the question of a tribunal, there has been no agreement on rules that would guide such a tribunal. These are rules that would apply to regional development, cultural industries and a number of other very essential ingredients to the Canadian domestic political and social fabric.

Does this mean that there has now been a fundamental change in the American position and they have abandoned any demands that Canada limit its ability to provide regional development programs, and limit its right to determine for itself its cultural programs? Has there been a total abandonment of that position?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I just indicated in French that there has been no change in the fundamental positions Canada has put forward for some time.

Mr. Axworthy: The American position.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): No fundamental change in the position we have put forward for some time. I think that is all that is appropriate for me to discuss at this stage.

However, I want to bring the House up to date with what happened since Question Period yesterday until today. During a meeting to consider the discussions that had been held yesterday in Washington, a telephone call was received from Secretary Baker, who is the Chairman of the U.S. Cabinet Committee directing their side of the discussions. On the basis of that telephone conversation, it became evident to us that we had reason to resume the negotiations. For that reason, the Minister of Finance and the Minister for International Trade, Ambassador Reisman and other of our technical experts are in Washington today.

The House will understand that I cannot go into details of the matters under discussion in Washington today. We have to see if they yield a positive result.

UNITED STATES DEADLINE FOR NEGOTIATIONS

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is based upon that telephone conversation. As the Minister well understands, the deadline for the decision by the United States is Sunday night. We are now entering into negotiations in a two and one-half day period, for one of the most complex, difficult agreements ever arrived at between two countries.

Is it the position of both the Canadian and American Governments that in the two and one-half days they will have fully negotiated that agreement, or will the President of the

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United States announce on Sunday night simply some kind of vague agreement in principle which will, in effect, require Canada to make an agreement to a blank cheque without having had the opportunity to review its contents or whether in fact we agree with it?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I have three observations that I hope will be germane. First, we have no intention of signing, accepting, or being party to a blank cheque. Second, I cannot predict what will happen with these negotiations. They are in a more hopeful phase today than they have been at other times this week.

Third, with regard to the very valid point the Hon. Member makes about the complexity of the negotiations, he should bear in mind that precisely these issues have been under detailed consideration by the expert negotiators on both sides for a long number of months. We are not starting as though there were no past. There has been extensive preparation on the detail of these matters.

We will see if it will be possible, before the American deadline expires, to get the kinds of agreements on principle and on detail that would be necessary to serve Canada's interests. If we do, we will bring forward an agreement. If they do not serve Canada's interests, there will be no agreement.

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[Translation]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

STRIKE BY INSIDE WORKERS—OPPORTUNITY TO APPOINT MEDIATOR

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Labour.

Negotiations at Canada Post have come to a deadlock. Tempers are starting to boil on the picket lines, and Canada Post admits that mail delivery is disorganized.

Moreover, this morning, Canada Post decided to issue a lock-out order aimed at five Canadian Post Offices, including Ottawa, which can hardly result in getting the parties any closer together.

In order to prevent the worst, does the Minister not believe he should immediately appoint a mediator with a very specific mandate, in order to end that dispute?

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, a mediator is to be appointed when the parties are ready to reach an agreement, and if Mr. Parrot is to be believed, the parties are not.