

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 6, 1967

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

[Translation]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

TABLING OF CULTURAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN CANADA AND BELGIUM

Mr. Gérard Pelletier (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I ask leave of the house to table, on behalf of the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the French and English texts of the cultural agreement between the government of Canada and the government of the kingdom of Belgium.

[English]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

MIDDLE EAST—REQUEST FOR REPORT ON CEASE FIRE NEGOTIATIONS

On the orders of the day:

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Israeli army having established for Israel the right to live, if today's press reports are correct, I would now ask the Prime Minister whether he is in a position to make a statement to the house as to what progress, if any, is being made to bring about a cease fire. I realize that the United Nations security council will not meet until this afternoon, but I wonder if the Prime Minister is in a position to give some information to the people of Canada. I have found out that they are most anxious to know what is going on. While secrecy is important, at the same time as far as possible they should be able to secure information in this house rather than indirectly through the press.

Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the security council has been meeting, but more importantly the members of the security council have been discussing among themselves a resolution calling for an immediate cease fire. Those discussions have not resulted in an agreement among all the members of the security council on the terms of such a cease fire resolution. I believe the discussions are continuing at this moment with a view to a meeting of the security council later this afternoon.

We can hope there will be agreement among all the members, including the U.S.S.R., the United Kingdom, France and the United States of America on the terms of such a resolution. We can hope for that, but it is premature to say that it has been achieved. It is being considered at the moment, and as soon as there is any more definite information I would of course be very glad to give it to the house. But while these discussions are going on, and our own ambassador is participating in them, it is difficult for me to say more.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I realize the limitations and I have a suggestion to make for consideration by the government; namely, that a secret session of the house should take place so that members may be given some idea as to what is the general situation, provided that a cease fire is not determined on in the meantime by the United Nations security council. In any event, regardless of whether it is or is not, I suggest that the estimates of the Department of External Affairs should be presented, if possible tomorrow, so that discussion may take place on this matter that exercises the hearts of free men everywhere.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, it would be possible and perhaps desirable to arrange for a discussion in connection with the estimates of the Department of External Affairs. I believe they would have to be brought back from the standing committee for that purpose; however, that could be easily done. It might be desirable to do that on Thursday, which is a longer day, but it could be done tomorrow if the situation required it.

So far as a secret session is concerned, this naturally would be held only in conditions of emergency. I am not suggesting that it might not be desirable to have a secret session, but at the moment I do not think it would be as useful as a public discussion. I shall keep in touch with my right hon. friend and the leaders of the other parties before we introduce the external affairs estimates tomorrow or Thursday, and if the situation requires some unusual procedure of the kind suggested perhaps we could agree on that.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a supplementary question to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. I ask