

or might not be drastically affected. We would like to know more and we are given no answers at all.

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, there has been on our order paper since November 27 an inquiry in the name of Senator Everett, that he will call the attention of the Senate to the free trade negotiations with the United States. It may be well to get on with that debate.

Senator Gigantès: Honourable senators, I know that I am a neophyte, but, unless I am mistaken, there is nothing about the fact that there is an inquiry on the books to prevent any senator from asking questions of the government on the same issue.

Senator MacEachen: Dead on.!

CAPE BRETON DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

NEGOTIATION OF COALMINERS' CONTRACT

Hon. Robert Muir: Honourable senators, I direct my question to the Leader of the Government in the Senate. I do not want to talk about pigs or pokes or snakes or anything of that nature. Last Thursday I asked the government leader a question with regard to possible negotiations between the coalminers of Cape Breton Island and representatives of the the Cape Breton Development Corporation. Up to that time we had heard nothing other than reports of the apparently defiant attitude of the president of the Cape Breton Development Corporation. The Leader of the Government said that he would check into the matter and get back to me as soon as possible.

After the Question Period, honourable senators, I received from him a message indicating that negotiations had begun while we were discussing the subject in this chamber. Is he in a position to provide a progress report as to what may be happening? Is there any indication of an agreement between the management of the Cape Breton Development Corporation and the union, in light of the cooperative attitude expressed by the president of district 26 and the executive of the United Mine Workers Union?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, I was told just before coming to the chamber today that a tentative agreement has been reached in the negotiations between the United Mine Workers and Devco, but I have no details on the matter.

[Translation]

CANADA-UNITED STATES RELATIONS

FREE TRADE NEGOTIATIONS—REDUCTION OF REGIONAL DISPARITIES

Hon. Pierre De Bané: Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Leader of the Government in the Senate. What I am interested in personally is the reduction of regional disparities.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced that in the event of a free trade agreement with the United States, one of the

[Senator Gigantès.]

benefits of such an agreement would be the reduction of regional disparities in Canada.

My question for the Leader of the Government is about this reduction of disparities. Would it be due to a general improvement in the Canadian economy or to the Canadian government's continued flexibility in modulating measures to fit the needs of disadvantaged areas? And in the event of an agreement with the United States, would the Canadian government not be as free to develop special programs for this country's disadvantaged areas?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, the federal government's ability to provide assistance to disadvantaged areas in this country is not negotiable.

As for a free trade agreement between Canada and the United States, I can only quote the report of the Royal Commission on Economic Union which felt that all regions in Canada would benefit under such an agreement, and especially our disadvantaged regions.

Senator De Bané: I am most grateful to the Leader of the Government for stating in no uncertain terms that the Canadian government's latitude for helping our disadvantaged areas is non-negotiable. I had the impression that all departments, to the extent that it is not incompatible with their mandate, have an obligation to reduce disparities in Canada, and I hope they will continue to do so.

I would also like to know whether the Leader of the Government in the Senate has any studies on the impact of the Common Market's Treaty of Rome on Europe's various disadvantaged areas.

Some economists claim that on the whole, the Common Market has helped Western Europe enormously, but that the impact was felt particularly in the prosperous regions of each country. I would appreciate it if the Leader of the Government in the Senate would let me know whether he has any studies on the impact of the Treaty of Rome on Europe's disadvantaged areas.

Senator Murray: I certainly will, honourable senators. However, since it is St. Patrick's Day, I would like to take this opportunity to say that I have the impression the Republic of Ireland has benefitted enormously from its membership in the European Economic Community.

Hon. Philippe Deane Gigantès: Did the Leader of the Government by any chance read a recent article in *The Times* which said that the Irish economy was in such bad shape that not only had the government been defeated but the percentage of Irish emigrants had increased tremendously?

While he is looking into what is happening in various European countries that have prosperous areas, perhaps he could also look at what has happened in what is called the "Northern Tier", in other words, the group of American states just south of our borders which are in full decline, despite free access to markets in the United States. They are in full decline because new factories and new investment are going further south where it is warmer, where there are fewer social restric-