

Inquiries of the Ministry

emergency facing the community of Elliot Lake. My question is this. Will the government, as a matter of urgency, examine with the government of Ontario measures that can be taken to alleviate the distressing unemployment situation at Elliot Lake, where more than 3,000 miners will soon be laid off, and do everything that is possible to remove the danger of this important and model community becoming a ghost town?

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prime Minister): The form in which the hon. gentleman's question is couched cannot but be a very direct appeal to members of the government. We realize that Right Hon. Mr. Howe said in 1955 and 1956 that by 1962 those companies which produce uranium would have to be on their own. That is in general what he said.

Mr. Pearson: That is not what he said.

Mr. McIlraith: That is not a correct summary of what he said. I looked it up when you quoted it the other day.

Mr. Diefenbaker: If hon. members will allow me to give an answer to this question I should be obliged to them.

Mr. McIlraith: Don't abuse the rules.

Mr. Diefenbaker: What I am pointing out is this. The action taken in making provision for an extension to spread out the contracts was designed to prevent a complete breakdown in 1962. What has happened, however, has resulted in lay-offs about to take place, and according to the press they will be continuing. I can assure the hon. gentleman and the people of that area that the government is giving the fullest consideration to the matter and that the dislocations that have taken place so unfortunately—by reason of the lack of demand for uranium everywhere in the world and the tremendous stockpile in the United States—will be a matter of continuing and first consideration.

Mr. Pearson: I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I know I am not permitted to comment on the Prime Minister's observations at this time—I will do that later—but may I ask the Prime Minister whether he—and if he cannot do so, and I could understand why he could not—or the Minister of Trade and Commerce will visit Elliot Lake in order to get first-hand information about the dangers that threaten that community, as well as information about the possibilities of new development there?

Mr. Diefenbaker: I have visited Elliot Lake, Mr. Speaker. If, after the minister returns from Washington and discussions have taken place between him and other

members of the government, it is considered that a visit such as that to which reference has been made would be beneficial, I would certainly be the first to desire to make such a visit. I followed that course in western Canada and I will follow it again when I believe that, as a result of any such meeting or visit, circumstances can be improved to the benefit of the people of that area or of the country as a whole. That would be the course I would follow.

Mr. Hazen Argue (Assiniboia): I should like to ask a supplementary question. Perhaps the Prime Minister will answer it, since he has been answering the questions already, or the Minister of Labour. Can the Prime Minister say whether action will be taken at an early date to rescind regulations 172 and 173 under the Unemployment Insurance Act so that the \$400 severance pay to each employee involved in these lay-offs may be paid to the employee and not considered as income, thereby depriving the employee of unemployment insurance? I ask that supplementary question on the basis of this being action that can be taken.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I think a similar question was asked recently of the Minister of Labour. This is a matter that comes particularly within his jurisdiction, and I think it is appropriate that he give such answer as is required.

Hon. Michael Starr (Minister of Labour): In answer to the hon. member for Assiniboia I can only say that these regulations have been referred to the unemployment insurance advisory committee. Unfortunately the wife of the chairman passed away and he has been held up in that respect. A meeting is called for March 4.

Mr. Argue: I have a further supplementary question. Would the minister care to give consideration to having these regulations rescinded immediately, without waiting for this proposed meeting, since the regulations were placed in effect in the first instance without asking for the advice of the unemployment insurance advisory committee?

Mr. Starr: My opinion is that the unemployment insurance advisory committee should have an opportunity of examining these regulations.

Hon. Paul Martin (Essex East): I should like to ask a supplementary question. In view of the fact that the minister says the meeting of the advisory committee will not take place until March 4, can the minister not take steps now—in spite of the unavoidable absence of the chairman—to see