

Inquiries of the Ministry

Minister thinks there was not. The president of Eldorado thought there was a firm contract—

Mr. Diefenbaker: What I said was that a letter of intent was given and accepted but that a formal contract was not entered into and negotiations thereon are still continuing.

Mr. Pearson: Here is what the president of Eldorado said on that score. The Prime Minister was good enough to quote selected passages from this document. Let me quote this. The president, talking about these three contracts, said that these are firm contracts. He repeated that in emphatic terms. Later, on March 3, he said that these are firm contracts and the British can be trusted to live up to their contracts. He went on to say that there are, however, always ways open for re-negotiation.

Now the Prime Minister says it is not a question of re-negotiating a firm contract, a commitment on which the United Kingdom government had entered—oh, no, it is not that—we are now in the process of negotiating a new contract. That is not what the Minister of Trade and Commerce said.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): That is not what the Prime Minister said.

Mr. Pearson: That is not what the president of Eldorado said, and if anyone wishes to read the evidence given by the president they will find out he was talking about the 24-million pound firm contract into which the United Kingdom government entered and which was obscured and kept hidden by the government at the time when the uranium industry in this country could have used a contract of that kind.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): That is perfectly untrue.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I believe that the hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Pearson) is now referring to evidence given before a committee of the house which has not yet reported. It seems to me that any debate that arises out of that should be deferred until that committee reports. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has had an opportunity to deal with his own knowledge and statements on this matter. If he is not through, I will allow him to finish, but I would ask him to limit himself to that aspect of it rather than refer to aspects that are obviously out of order.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned the president and the committee report because the Prime Minister himself had done so initially to show that his statement was correct. The Prime Minister referred to the president of Eldorado and I now refer to the president of Eldorado, as the president of an agency—
[Mr. Pearson.]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pearson: It was stated in no uncertain terms that there was a firm commitment, and that the firm contract for 24 million pounds was in the process of being re-negotiated with the United Kingdom government. That is a very different story from the one the Prime Minister has told us this afternoon. It will be very interesting to find out exactly what the facts are in this matter. Perhaps there will be an opportunity in debating the estimates to discuss this at greater length and in greater detail. Perhaps on this occasion I will be able to restrain myself to asking the Prime Minister some questions supplementary to that which has been addressed him by the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Argue), to which I am not sure he received a reply.

Mr. Hazen Argue (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to get into any general debate. I am not in the happy or unhappy position, whichever it may be, of having a record in the government, as has the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Pearson), which can be brought forward in this debate. I think that the Canadian people are interested in—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member is in the happy position of having the right to ask a supplementary question. If he will do so, he will be in order, otherwise he will not.

Mr. Argue: In view of the latitude that has been allowed this afternoon I think I might be allowed to conclude one sentence.

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry but I am not prepared to accept that position. As the hon. member knows, his question regarding this subject was answered originally, and he is now entitled to ask a supplementary question. I suggest he should proceed in that manner.

Mr. Argue: I can proceed in that manner, but I am put in a very awkward position when two hon. members have made speeches based on my question and I am allowed only to ask a supplementary question. However, I would be interested if the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) could tell the house whether or not there is any firm commitment by the United Kingdom in this regard and, if so, for what quantity of uranium. I would also like to know the basis upon which the contracts will be allocated because of the very great interest of many communities in this question. I wonder whether the Prime Minister is prepared to answer the question I have just asked: whether or not the United Kingdom has given a firm commitment, and if so, for what quantity of uranium?

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I endeavoured to make that very clear. There was a firm commitment, but before we are in a