

Inquiries of the Ministry

Minister quoted from this paragraph—there is the following reference:

The ministers also discussed arrangements to supply United Kingdom requirements for uranium fuel after this five-year period and agreed that further discussions on this matter should proceed between the agencies concerned.

Well, of course, as one who was there I knew there would be further discussions between the agencies concerned. Those discussions did not result in a contract at the end of March as has been stated. They went on through May. I believe that they came to a conclusion, as far as negotiations were concerned, some time toward the end of May, a few days before the general election. The Prime Minister says now, no contract came out of those discussions. Then the hon. gentleman wonders—and some of his friends have been wondering—why we did not know all about those negotiations in the early part of June, after the general election? The election was on June 10.

After June 27, the Prime Minister was responsible for these negotiations. He criticizes us and the government of that day for not knowing all about this. We have been criticized also for not knowing that there was a contract at that time, though the Prime Minister now admits, for the first time, there was no such contract.

Mr. Diefenbaker: No formal contract.

Mr. Pearson: I ask the Prime Minister—and this is one of the questions I hope he will answer—if he will tell the house whether there was a commitment entered into with the United Kingdom authorities with regard to the supplying of 25 million pounds of uranium from Canada from 1963 to 1966. Does the United Kingdom admit there was a commitment entered into in 1957 for the supplying of this uranium and if there was a commitment why was that commitment not carried out during the time when we were closing uranium mines in this country?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: The Prime Minister has said there were negotiations, but no contract. Let me read from *Hansard* on that point—

Mr. Speaker: Would the hon. member consider this suggestion? He has asked a supplementary question. Would he consider having it answered at this time?

Mr. Pearson: No, Mr. Speaker. I have a lot of other questions to ask arising out of what the Prime Minister has said.

Mr. Speaker: I am not happy about the prospects of a general debate on this matter by question and answer across the house.

I believe the house is about to go into committee of supply and it seems to me it would be much better if hon. members would debate this matter at a time when debate is permissible because there is no rule, other than my discretion, which would permit such a discussion as this to continue. It is not too comfortable a position for the Chair to be in to be regulating a debate at a time when no debate should be taking place.

The Leader of the Opposition has the floor to make a statement which explains the Prime Minister's answer in so far as it involves him and reflected on his part in this matter. If the hon. gentleman would conclude that statement I think we might reserve any further debate on this subject until it would be proper for such a debate to take place.

Mr. Pearson: I shall try to deal with those points with which I was directly concerned. Perhaps the most important of them is the Prime Minister's criticism that we did not know all about the subject when we were in office, and he mentioned me by name. The Prime Minister now says there was no contract. But the Minister of Trade and Commerce, only a few days ago, as reported at page 2672 of *Hansard* had this to say in reply to a question asked by the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond:

The Canadian government through its crown corporation, the Eldorado company, has a firm contract with the British atomic energy authority. I have received from the British authorities no indication that they do not intend to honour this contract.

The Minister of Trade and Commerce left us in no doubt about what he thought of the position when he made a statement in Calgary as late as Friday last on being confronted with this report that a 24 million pound uranium deal with the British had come to light. Here is what the minister is reported as telling the *Toronto Star* from Calgary:

Hon. George Hees, Minister of Trade and Commerce, told the *Star* the contract would be of great assistance to the industry.

The report continued:

He said there had been no reason to reveal the contract earlier.

Now I quote from the report:

"The government doesn't go around shouting what it is going to do in the future".

That, Mr. Speaker, is a laughable observation. The Minister of Trade and Commerce went on to say that there was nothing hidden about it. "Nobody ever asked me about it," he declared.

So the Minister of Trade and Commerce said there was a firm contract. The Prime