

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Starr: A supplementary question to the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker. In view of what he has said, and in view of the howling from the Liberal benches today to questions on this matter, is it the intention of the government to pick a design and then ram it down the throat of parliament and the people of this country?

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Prime Minister whether it is not true that the committee to which he referred, which was chaired by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, did make a recommendation and that the government of that day, which was a Liberal government, did not act upon it?

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, it took that committee a very long time indeed to come to any decision in regard to a design because of the number of designs submitted. If we set up a committee for this particular purpose I am afraid that action would be postponed indefinitely, and we desire to take our responsibility in this matter as a government, which we indicated in two election campaigns we would be happy to be able to do.

Mr. H. A. Olson (Medicine Hat): A supplementary question to the Prime Minister. I wonder whether the Prime Minister could indicate to parliament some of the dates he has in mind. That is to say, would he like to comment on whether he could accomplish all the steps which are needed to be able to submit a design to parliament before July 1?

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, I think it would be very difficult to do this on the orders of the day, but we could have a supply motion next Monday, and if hon. gentlemen opposite are critical of the procedure of the government in this matter they could move a vote of no confidence on this question and that would give the house an opportunity to debate it fully.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Would there be a free vote on that too?

Mr. Pearson: I hope my right hon. friend, who feels so deeply in this matter, will take advantage of the opportunity of a supply motion next week.

Mr. Diefenbaker: In view of the fact that the Prime Minister has decided to bring in a red herring, may I ask him this. Will this motion on Monday next, this amendment, be a free vote?

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, I cannot, of course, tell my hon. friend the form of the motion that he should produce; but if he

[Mr. Speaker.]

produces a motion condemning the action of the government in this matter he can draw his own conclusions.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lessard (Lake St. John): Mr. Speaker, may I put a question to the Prime Minister?

Does the Prime Minister not think it would be a good thing for the government to invite Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, during her visit to Canada, to come and raise on the mast of the parliament buildings the flag which the Canadian people will give itself this coming summer, in order to dampen the extremist ideas of both groups?

[Text]

Mr. Pearson: Well, Mr. Speaker, the present plans for the royal visit to Canada include a visit to Charlottetown and Quebec. I do not think it would be desirable to change those plans at this time; nor do I think it would be possible to do so even for the purpose to which my hon. friend refers.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has brought up this question in answer to a question, may I ask him this. Is it not a fact that under our parliamentary system of government, whatever the Prime Minister recommends to the crown or to the representative of the crown in Canada must be accepted?

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, I am not a constitutional expert like my hon. friend—

Mr. Diefenbaker: I appreciate that.

Mr. Pearson: —but I think his statement is strictly accurate. I do agree, and I am sure he will too, that there are certain royal prerogatives which even as a matter of courtesy should be taken into consideration in these matters.

Mr. Diefenbaker: But does the Prime Minister realize that this is not one of the royal prerogatives which still remains unused, even though usable?

Mr. Pearson: I agree with my right hon. friend that this is not one of the active royal prerogatives; I was talking of taking royal prerogatives into consideration as a matter of courtesy in these matters.

Mr. Barry Mather (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Prime Minister. I should like to ask him whether, in line with the current public interest in the flag question, the government would consider, before bringing in a design to parliament, first of all giving the people of Canada a free vote on this question through a plebiscite at the next federal election,