

Inquiries of the Ministry

the honour to lead. For the sake of the country I hope there will be the same degree of unity among hon. gentlemen opposite. I have received, personally, dozens and dozens of designs. I do not think it would be appropriate or desirable to table one or two of those designs. In due course, and it will not be long now, the design the government has agreed on will be submitted to the House of Commons for decision.

Mr. Diefenbaker: May I point out that the *Winnipeg Tribune* shows two designs and states—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Diefenbaker:—that the blue border flag was the favourite of the Prime Minister. I ask him, will he place on the table of the house these two flags, the designs of which he put before the press conference; or is he going to continue to deny parliament its rights?

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to deny parliament its rights. This is the first time, in Canadian parliamentary history, I believe, that a matter of this kind has not been decided by order in council.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: That is accurate, Mr. Speaker. We are going to refer to this parliament for its decision a design which the government, discharging its own responsibility, has seen fit to put before parliament as a design suitable for submission and, we hope, for decision.

Hon. George C. Nowlan (Digby-Annapolis-Kings): Mr. Speaker, does the statement of the right hon. Prime Minister mean that the government will accept responsibility for the design which it is going to bring before parliament?

Mr. Pearson: Yes, Mr. Speaker; as the government has accepted now for a good many months—indeed, for two years—the policy which will be embodied in that design.

Mr. Nowlan: I was not speaking of the policy; I was speaking of the design. Let us not evade the question any longer. We are now told that the government is going to put a design before parliament. Does the government accept responsibility for it?

Mr. Pearson: I do not intend to evade the question, Mr. Speaker. The government will indeed take responsibility for the design which it submits to the House of Commons.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Prime Minister how he reconciles his statement to the house on Friday, that the matter of the design of the flag would be open to a free vote, with his statement to the press conference in Winnipeg that

the government would resign if the proposal it made to parliament was turned down?

Mr. Monteith: Answer that.

Mr. Douglas: I want to ask the Prime Minister whether he considers a free vote to be one in which the members have an election pointed at their heads like a gun.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, the members have had an election pointed at their heads like a gun in respect of every decision that has been made in this house on policy matters since we took over the government. I have pointed out, and I think I should make it quite clear, that when the government submits to parliament a matter of policy—and this is certainly a matter of policy—the government must stand or fall on the result of the decision of the house. But we have gone out of our way, and I have gone out of my way personally, to let the members of this party know that in a question so personal, so close to their conscience, so deep in their emotions, as a flag, a member of the Liberal party, in voting against the design submitted by the government, would not be read out of the party for so doing.

Mr. Douglas: I take it, Mr. Speaker, we are not to have a free vote.

An hon. Member: That's right.

Mr. Douglas: Could I ask the Prime Minister whether he would agree that it would be common courtesy to parliament, instead of peddling various designs around the country, if these designs were submitted to a parliamentary committee—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Douglas:—where they could be given full examination.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the suggestion that designs have been peddled around the country, and I would remind my hon. friend that when this issue was before parliament some years ago designs were submitted to a committee, some 1,700 were received, and no action of any kind was taken.

Mr. Diefenbaker: An order in council was made.

Hon. Michael Starr (Ontario): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Douglas: I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I had not finished the point I was making.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Ontario was on his feet for at least a minute before the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam.