

Inquiries of the Ministry

20 tons of food, which now appropriately are being sent, might have been made available much sooner had a message been sent to the general.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby-Seymour.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, may I restate the question by way of a further supplementary. I have been trying to find out whether there is any correspondence, and the Prime Minister has not answered that yet. I want to know the answer and I ask this directly. Did he ever send a message to the head of that government?

Mr. Trudeau: The right hon. member may be surprised at the answer, Mr. Speaker, but it is yes; I did send a message.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Diefenbaker: When?

Mr. Trudeau: I generally took the position, Mr. Speaker, that General Gowon who is trying not only to govern his country but fight a civil war as well should not be put under an imposition by me as a result of too many messages. I believe our high commissioner and his officials in Lagos can communicate with fruitful results with the government there. I did not take the position, either, that my intervention would be of such import that it would shake the world or alter the results of the civil war. But at one point I did send a message directly to the general.

Mr. Diefenbaker: When was that? Will the Prime Minister say approximately when he sent that personal message? Will he table that message, because I have found that one can get immediate replies from that government.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I thought the right hon. gentleman was rising to congratulate me for having done what he suggested should be done. As to the exact date and content of the message, I shall acquaint the house with these facts at some appropriate occasion, possibly during the debate on the report of the committee of parliament on this matter.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. May I congratulate the Prime Minister and the government even at this late stage for having finally taken the 20 tons of food into Biafran territory. I wish to ask whether the Prime Minister has received a communication from the

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

World Council of Churches of Geneva, in which they forward a request that Canadian Hercules aircraft be made available for flights from Sao Tomé?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I know of no such request. I will inquire, but I think I can tell the hon. member in advance that it has been the position of the Lagos government that they will authorize the use of Canadian military aircraft and personnel by the Red Cross, but they are not prepared to authorize that use by the churches. I realize that this somewhat contradicts the information the hon. member believed was obtained at New York. We have now received specific word from the government of Lagos that they have authorized flights by the Red Cross, and that they do not feel it necessary to authorize flights by the churches. As the hon. member no doubt knows, the churches are making flights without the authorization of Lagos.

Mr. Brewin: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of privilege I might say that the information was not something I thought I heard. I heard Foreign Minister Arikpo clearly make the statement that flights by the churches in addition to those made by the Red Cross would be permissible if under the supervision of the International Red Cross. I wish to know whether the government has been in touch with the International Red Cross to see whether they will arrange to supervise the flight of Hercules planes taking food supplies from Sao Tomé, in order that the maximum amount of supplies might be flown into Biafra.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the question of the maximum number of flights is determined by the possibilities of taking off and landing. My understanding is that the Red Cross has asked for one Hercules, and for not more than one.

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Are the Prime Minister's officials or the Prime Minister making contact with officials of the Red Cross in Equatorial Guinea to determine whether it might not be more effective to use additional Hercules aircraft? Having seen part of the operation I understand that additional Hercules aircraft would be tremendously useful at this time in the relief operation.

Mr. Trudeau: I have been discussing this with the Minister of National Defence. Our understanding is contrary to that of the hon.