

Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans

Tuesday which I can describe only as an apologia, an apology for his guilt.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lewis: The Prime Minister says quite rightly that all the compassion is not on the benches of the opposition. Whoever suggested it was? No member on this side of the House has any doubt that all members of the government are as concerned, are as decent, and are as willing to help as is any member of this House or any other citizen of Canada. But that is not the question. The question is that the government is in a position to do something and is refusing to do it. That is the question. Protestations of compassion, protestations of concern or self-righteous and self-serving assurances of a guilty heart do not feed a single baby in Biafra. This merely disgusts those who want to see some action taken. I say this because the Prime Minister gave us a series of excuses which I, for one, cannot accept. What we are saying to the Prime Minister and to the government in this resolution today—and it has been put very eloquently and simply—I can put in one sentence. Since June of this year the flights of the International Red Cross have not taken place those flights ceased last June.

● (5.20 p.m.)

Since June of this year the only aid to the starving people of Biafra has come through Joint Church Aid and Canairelief, and it is fatuous, callous and distressing for the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) to sit there and tell us—despite the fact that the only assistance that Biafrans have received since June of this year has been assistance through these church agencies—that he will not help them because he thinks Lagos will not approve. That is precisely what he said. He did not say that Lagos had been asked and has refused. He did not say that anyone from his office had gone to Lagos and said: “we want to help Canairelief. Can we, as a friendly nation, have your agreement to that?” He said that this government in Canada, in a straightjacket of heartless protocol, decided that it cannot undertake this help through Canairelief because of the possibility that Lagos may disapprove.

This is the issue before the House.

Mr. Kaplan: Lagos disapproves of night flights?

Mr. Lewis: So far as I can read, Lagos disapproves of anything that will help the

[Mr. Lewis.]

people of Biafra to survive. I think that General Gowan would probably say: “Oh, I am a compassionate man. If I can be assured that night flights are only for relief, I will not stop them”.

I do not know what Lagos approves or disapproves. There are inconsistencies in the government's position. I ask members on the government side of the House to stop being so shackled by partisan attachment and to look at facts honestly and with open eyes. The Prime Minister of Canada has implied time and time again, although he did not say it today: “when we sent Professor Head to Africa, we could send him to Lagos because we have relations with Lagos. But, if we want to communicate with Colonel Ojukwu, we cannot send him there because that would mean some kind of direct recognition of Biafra”. So we send him to Tanzania to speak to Nyerere in order to communicate with Colonel Ojukwu. But in the next sentence the Prime Minister informs us with pride that the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) has been in touch with Biafran officials in New York. What kind of inconsistent nonsense is that? If it is possible for a minister of the Crown to meet Biafran officials in New York, why is it not possible for a representative of the Prime Minister to meet Colonel Ojukwu in Biafra? Can someone tell me that? The fact of the matter is—and this is what is so distressing in the situation—that the Prime Minister and the government are so completely enclosed in certain assumptions of protocol, and in certain political assumptions about secession from Nigeria, that they are determined not to do anything of which Lagos might disapprove even remotely. This is not good enough.

My friend and colleague, the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin) and the hon. member for Fundy Royal (Mr. Fairweather) introduced the debate on a high tone. The Prime Minister expressed appreciation of that and so do I. Everyone in the House does, but it is regrettable that the Prime Minister was not frank with the House in his speech. It was regrettable that we had to listen to circumlocutions and tortuous explanations which made neither for consistency nor made sense and which represented nothing of the humanitarian approach which this situation requires.

The Prime Minister said that the Organization of African Unity does not want people from outside Africa to intervene. Who asked him to intervene? Who on this side of the