

Delay in Use of Aircraft for Biafra

It is clear, therefore, that since the estimates are still being considered by that committee, this is the area of parliamentary proceedings in which the matter should be discussed. By a specific motion this house has chosen the committee as the place to deal with this particular question. If I may borrow some of the terminology used by the hon. member for Greenwood, it seems to me it would be making a mockery of the proceedings of the committee, and indeed of the standing orders of this house, to suggest that a matter which has been so actively pursued during the last several weeks before that committee should be taken away from the committee and dealt with in this chamber. The subject matter before the committee provides the fullest opportunity to go into all aspects of the question. I think we can take notice of the fact that this has taken place.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that there is not the urgency of debate necessary to adjourn the ordinary business of the house. If there be urgency in the subject matter which is referred to in the motion of the hon. member, then he and others who have supported him should be active in seeking a discussion of that matter within the standing committee on external affairs and national defence.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): It is often said, Mr. Speaker, that parliament is in disrepute. Parliamentary institutions everywhere in the free world are under attack. Here we are, under circumstances that touch the hearts and minds of humans everywhere, with occurrences taking place that we have it within our power to do something about, regardless of the attitude of those people who live in countries adjoining Nigeria, and we stultify ourselves by the rules. It was never intended that a government should hide behind the rules when a matter as emergent as this is taking place. There are no arguments that can be advanced. The government is adamant in inaction and refuses to give the members of this house an opportunity to speak. This is the clear import of the words of the hon. gentleman who just preceded me.

Surely there are members in this house supporting the government who are prepared to take a stand on an occasion like this when a principle is at stake. This nation's prestige is at stake. Canadians everywhere ask "Why don't you do something? Can't you get this government to act?" Parliament has been stultified and hamstrung. The hon. gentleman

[Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale).]

says "Why don't you go to a committee?" Parliament is supreme, and a committee is simply an adjunct. Surely, regardless of the rules, the government will at least take a stand instead of pussyfooting around, procrastinating, promising action for three weeks and doing nothing.

● (11:50 a.m.)

Mr. Ian Wahn (St. Paul's): Mr. Speaker, the question before us is the urgency of debate. About three weeks ago this general subject matter was referred to the committee on external affairs, of which I am chairman. Since then the committee has met almost daily, meeting two or three times a day sometimes, and has heard a great many authoritative witnesses among whom were some suggested by the hon. member for Greenwood and his colleagues. We are still awaiting a brief which the hon. member for Greenwood says is essential for the preparation of our report. The report is being prepared now and will be considered by the steering committee on Monday. If at that time we have the cooperation of the hon. member for Greenwood and others on both sides of the house, we hope to have the report available for debate early next week.

As a result, I find it difficult to understand why this motion has been put. In any event I do not think it should be proceeded with, since there is no urgency of debate.

The right hon. member for Prince Albert spoke sincerely of the importance of parliamentary institutions. Important to our parliamentary institutions are committees and the development and maturing of our committee system. Entertaining this type of motion would do a great deal to undermine the development of our parliamentary committee system. I do not understand the purpose of the motion, when one considers that the external affairs committee, on which there are 30 members of all parties, has sat for three weeks considering the matter which the hon. member now wishes to have debated by this house.

Mr. Brewin: Will the hon. member permit a question? Does the hon. member not think that it is important today, tomorrow and Sunday, to move emergency supplies?

Mr. Wahn: Naturally I consider that important. Supplies should be moved at the earliest moment, but I do not think the procedure suggested by the hon. member for Greenwood will advance us very far toward that goal.