

Canadian Action on Nigeria-Biafra

the cost of maintaining those planes for 48 hours or 72 hours until a decision is reached?

Mr. Sharp: We have not yet had an opportunity to discuss this question. I thought the House would be interested in hearing the position of Canairielief at the moment. This representation is now under consideration.

In conclusion, I agree with hon. members that this is a time for action rather than talk. It is also a time, of course, for effective action and not simply for propaganda. We have to be, and I think have been throughout this whole bloody and despicable war, careful to avoid participation in propaganda exercises.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Sharp: Our purpose is to help. That is the only purpose we have. Our motives are as pure as those of any government.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Sharp: They are related entirely to humanitarian considerations. Certainly we do not want to engage in propaganda and we do not want to lay blame on one side or the other. Our only purpose is to help. I think if we act in co-operation with the Nigerian government we will achieve the most effective results.

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, I am sure everyone in this House, the people of Canada and the people of the world who have had their attention so vividly drawn to the tragedy of Nigeria during the last year or two rejoice today in the news that actual military activities have stopped. While this poses a tremendous challenge in so far as the immediate need in the next weeks and the longer range need so far as rehabilitation is concerned, we can rejoice that we can now look toward something positive.

I have spent most of today meeting with a church-oriented group in the city of Toronto in an effort to work out an emergency program for the most urgent need at the moment. I refer to the need for doctors, nurses and social workers who can take over or assist with the tremendous problem of distributing food and relief supplies that are presently stockpiled either on the Nigerian side or in some of the countries adjacent to Nigeria.

I believe I am right in saying there were between 500 and 1,000 workers in the area which we know as Biafra. Many of those workers have been evacuated in recent days.

I believe it is also correct to say that many of them will not readily be able to go back and pick up what they have left. In other words, there is a need for replacements as well as an additional task force of people to handle the food and medical needs that are so urgently necessary for the survival of millions of people.

I do not think that most of my colleagues in the House are familiar with the fact that I spent a number of days in the early part of December, just a month ago, in Africa in relation to the situation in Nigeria. I was particularly concerned about speaking to the representatives of the member nations of the Organization of African unity who make up the special committee which had been set up by the OAU to deal with the Biafran situation. Emperor Haile Selassie is the chairman of that committee. At that time there was a major offensive to bring Nigeria and Biafra together to negotiate a final end to hostilities in order to prevent the heavy military action which took place during the last week.

To the credit of the Biafran administration at that time, which I believe was clearly able to see the writing on the wall, a delegation came from Biafra and arrangements were set up for negotiation away from the public eye where not only could they negotiate but also sign an agreement which would allow a settlement to be made by negotiation. Unfortunately, some of the interference that has come from European countries during the whole course of this tragic experience in Nigeria took place again, and the Nigerians were probably advised that it was in their own interest to continue the military activity which at that time they were prepared to begin.

There are several observations I should like to pass on which came out of the discussions I had with the various African leaders who are members of the OAU and are directly concerned with the Biafran situation. I do not intend to go back and try to review the situation which led up to the Secessionist action of General Ojukwu. However, perhaps I should go back briefly to the massacres in 1966 and the obvious hostile attitude of many of the Nigerian people and elements of the government at that time which led to the massacres of thousands of Ibo people.

One would also have to go over the history of the two coups. The first was the elimination of the original government of free Nigeria, which as we are told was basically instigated by Ibo officers in the army and which