

Minister's Statement on Biafran Relief

regard to daylight flights. What are these conditions? Certainly for a long time the actions and activities of the government of Canada with regard to Biafra were dilatory and the government refused to talk to anyone associated with Biafra. Professor Head, the personal representative of the Prime Minister, has never done so to my knowledge, certainly not when he was over there. When Professor Ferguson was appointed by President Nixon he had discussions and tried to make the necessary arrangements with the Biafrans. Granted, Mr. Speaker, we want to see arrangements regarding daylight flights. The Prime Minister puts all the blame on Colonel Ojukwu, the head of the Biafran government.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Stanfield: I doubt that it is quite as simple as that. I ask the Prime Minister why the government of Canada is not prepared to do what it can to help solve the problem. Why has the government refused to assist Canairelief which has been and continues to transport substantial relief to the starving people of Biafra? Why, Mr. Speaker? Two requests made to the government by Canairelief have been refused. I understand that the most recent request is still unanswered. Why?

The Prime Minister has accused Colonel Ojukwu of indifference toward daylight flights and the kind of relief that could be brought by daylight flights. I must charge the Prime Minister with stubbornness regarding aid that could be used to bring relief through night flights.

For over 16 months the people of this country, the opposition parties and many private organizations outside this country have been trying to move the government to action. I shall not go over the whole history as the Prime Minister did in his statement; there is no need. We tried to get the government of Canada to protest the shipments of arms from the United Kingdom and other countries but the government refused. According to a recent announcement, shipments of arms from Britain are to increase. We tried to get the government to support the early efforts of the Nixon administration in the United States but the government refused. We went on trying to get them to contribute to the efforts of Canairelief. Again the government refused. Canairelief has received support from the United States government in the amount of some \$750,000, without which it could not have carried on its lifesaving operations. Now it appears that the government of the United

[Mr. Stanfield.]

States is likely to withdraw its support of Canairelief because the Canadian government will not support its own citizens who are sending food and medicine to the war victims.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Stanfield: The people of Canada are aroused as never before by what I call the callous stubbornness of the Prime Minister—I am not going to accuse him of indifference—in the face of one of the great human tragedies of our time. Shortly after the Nixon administration took office and began to take some initiative in this area we pleaded with the government of Canada to support those measures but the government refused until November 12 when a statement was made by the United States Secretary of State, Mr. Rogers, which appeared to suggest that the United States government was backing away from the problem. Then the government of Canada courageously rushed to Washington's side.

I understand that about 1,500,000 people have starved since early in 1968 and that perhaps 2,000 a day are dying of starvation at this moment. Let us do what we can. Let the Prime Minister and his colleagues act to assist Canairelief in taking supplies to that country by night; let them provide this assistance rather than come to the House with a long statement designed to whitewash the whole picture and excuse the government of Canada from discharging its humane responsibility.

The Prime Minister has passed a harsh judgment on Colonel Ojukwu; the people of Canada will pass a harsh judgment on the Prime Minister for his failure to act in an area in which Canada can be of assistance, night flights, and I plead with the right hon. gentleman to move as rapidly as he can to make this important and helpful assistance available.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I have never listened to any statement made in this House by the present Prime Minister or by any other prime minister which caused me greater unhappiness or deeper regret than the statement we have just heard.

There is one thing in the statement which I am prepared to welcome: it is clear the right hon. gentleman is now aware of the great concern felt by the Canadian people about the immense human tragedy which has already cost between one million and two million