

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, January 12, 1970

The House met at 2 p.m.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRESENCE OF TELEVISION CAMERAS IN
FOYER—PROVISION OF OTHER SPACE

Mr. Speaker: As hon. members are aware, television cameras have been located for some time in the foyer adjacent to the House of Commons. Propriety of this procedure has been considered by the Chair in consultation with House Leaders and with the executive of the Press Gallery. It was agreed by all concerned, in the course of these lengthy discussions covering several months, that the decision should be left with the Chair. The decision has been made that on an experimental basis, the foyer should no longer be used for this purpose. To give effect to the decision Room 110-S, located at the foot of the stairs leading to the foyer, has been made available to the Press Gallery for the purpose indicated, in addition to Room 154-D which was already available to members of the Press Gallery for radio and television interviews. Technical objections having been made to the use of this particular space, Room 238-S has also been allocated to the Press Gallery on a temporary basis for interviews following Orders of the Day.

This decision has had the effect of bringing into focus a long-standing problem, that of television and radio coverage of the House and its committee proceedings. In view of the wide interest shown in the situation, I have taken the liberty of consulting with the House Leaders and suggesting to them, as they are representative of the members of all parties in the House, that the whole issue should be considered forthwith by the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization. I propose to have a further meeting with the House Leaders in the hope that a suitable reference will be made as soon as possible.

I think I should insist that in so far as I am particularly concerned, as the custodian of the dignity of the House of Commons and its proceedings, I feel as strongly as ever today that the foyer should not be used as it has in the past for the purpose of radio and televi-

sion interviews. It is my hope that the House Leaders and the Committee on Procedure and Organization, in consultation with representatives of the Press Gallery, can find a solution which will be acceptable to all concerned.

• (2:10 p.m.)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

NIGERIA-BIAFRA—PLANS FOR RELIEF SUPPLIES AND ADDITIONAL OBSERVERS FOLLOWING CEASE-FIRE

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, hon. members will no doubt wish to know what steps the government is taking with regard to the rapidly changing situation in Nigeria. The latest information we have is that the Commander in Chief of the Biafran forces has ordered his troops to stop fighting and has asked General Gowon for an immediate cease-fire. The government welcomes General Gowon's statement of reassurance to the supporters of the Biafran cause. Bringing hostilities to an end in a territory like that of Eastern Nigeria inevitably results in confusion. The government hopes that General Gowon will spare no effort in maintaining the discipline of his forces and protecting the lives of all the peoples of Nigeria.

We have, at the moment, two senior officers of the Canadian Armed Forces in the area of operations as part of the International Military Observer Team. The government is offering to provide more observer personnel.

The need for relief is bound to increase very rapidly. The government considers it of first importance that outside relief activity should be co-ordinated on an international basis in co-operation with the government of Nigeria, preferably under the aegis of the Red Cross. With this in mind, we are in touch with the Nigerian government and other governments concerned with relief activities. There are considerable stocks of food and other supplies in Nigeria and neighbouring countries, including ports like Cotonou and Sao Tomé. The immediate problem is to move these supplies rapidly and effectively into the areas where they are most urgently required.