

Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans

held on September 16, at which the Canadian representative stated that perhaps the matter should be brought before the United Nations and suggested exploring ways in which this could be done. The answer of the Secretary General was that this would do more harm than good.

No man is working more diligently to bring about a settlement in Biafra than our Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp). On September 18 President Diiori of Niger was in Ottawa and the minister discussed with him the situation in Nigeria and Biafra. While at the United Nations in New York, the Secretary of State for External Affairs discussed the Nigerian Civil war with the United States Secretary of State. He discussed the cessation of arm shipments with the French foreign minister and had meetings with the foreign ministers of Uganda, Ivory Coast, Tunisia and Ghana. This was followed by talks with the foreign ministers of Gabon, Dahomey, the Central African Republic, Italy and the Soviet Union.

● (8:10 p.m.)

In spite of all these meetings we are pilloried in this House by a former prime minister of Canada who lessens the hope of the people of Canada by saying that we are standing on narrow legalism and refusing to bring aid to these people. He said we are hiding behind protocol. As someone who has seen this team in action, I can assure all members of the House that government members are equally concerned about the plight of these young people. We are not standing on protocol.

Yesterday we met with Nigerians and Biafrans at the Canadian Mission in New York. We had a series of meetings. When the final story of the Nigerian civil war is written, Canada will have one of the brightest pages in that book. Let me tell hon. members this, Mr. Speaker: if they study the long story of this tragedy they will find that a number of initiatives were filed by certain nations. I do not want to name them on the floor of this House because the matter would receive too much publicity. This is the reason Canadian efforts are being undertaken more discreetly than would perhaps be the case with other nations, but our efforts are just as effective.

An hon. Member: They are non-existent.

Mr. Perrault: I feel sorry for the hon. member of the Opposition who feels he is such an expert, when really he does not know

very much about the facts of the case. Anyone who has studied this question knows that no one can become an instant expert on it.

Was it callous disregard for the plight of refugees that a meeting was held on September 26 among the Nigerian Commissioner for External Affairs, Mr. Arikp, our Secretary of State for External Affairs and others? Did we fail when we met with the Ivory Coast representative on September 26, discussed the whole situation with M. Usher of that nation and asked for his co-operation in getting relief into this starving nation? Was it disregard for the starving youngsters when we discussed with the Uganda Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sam Odaka, on that same day how we could get aid to the starving Biafrans?

What was the attitude of the Biafrans when they met with the Secretary of State for External Affairs on September 27? The whole object of the meeting was to plead with the Biafrans to at least test a system of daylight flights. If a man's youngsters are starving to death, I do not care where they are living, whether it be Biafra, Canada, the United States or France—it is worth taking some risks in order to help them. There is not one form of aid which might be extended at this point to the starving young people of Biafra which would not involve some risk. In this regard we asked for some assurance; we pleaded with them. These are the facts. Let us not be vague about this situation.

These are the names of the Biafrans who were present when Canada's plea was entered: Mr. Eni Njoki, president of the University of Biafra; Dr. Pius Okogbo, Economic Adviser to Biafra; Dr. Ifegwu Eke, Commissioner of Information for Biafra; Mr. Matthew Mbu, Commissioner of education for Biafra, and Dr. Nwonye Otue, Biafran Special Representative to New York. Hon. members know Mr. Otue very well; they have talked with him on a number of occasions.

Did the Secretary of State for External Affairs fail when he told this group that Canadians were concerned that inadequate supplies were reaching Biafra, and when he told them that unless daylight aid was brought to Biafran youngsters thousands were going to die and that in the opinion of Canadians the only way the situation could be relieved was by bringing in a great many more planes? We offered planes and we offered food. We pleaded with them. In spite of this we are told on the floor of this House