

*Inquiries of the Ministry*

Prime Minister. Following the Prime Minister's statement equating the Nigerian-Biafran war with the Viet Nam war, is it the intention of the government to supply arms to one of the combatants in the Nigerian conflict or, alternatively, to cease the sale of arms to the United States, thus equating the two situations and making more credible our policy in both situations?

**Right Hon. P.-E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Well, Mr. Speaker, I was not necessarily making the equation the hon. member suggests. I was saying that those who refuse to look at history always repeat the same errors. It so happens that yesterday at the United Nations a speaker for Mali was making the same point. He was telling the "imperialist press" and "opportunist philanthropists" of the western countries to stay out of African affairs because, and I quote:

The African leaders will remember this when we deal with separatist or autonomous movements, Flemish or Walloon conflicts, or 'Free Quebec'.

I suppose he was talking about some other conflicts as well.

**Mr. Fairweather:** A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. We are delighted to know about what happened at the United Nations yesterday. Has the Prime Minister's attention been directed to the speeches of the foreign ministers of Tanzania, the Ivory Coast and Zambia urging that some initiative be taken in this regard?

**Mr. Trudeau:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. The statistics are well known; I have stated them many times. Within the organization for African unity 29 states have told the other countries to stay out of Africa and African affairs; only four were in favour of intervention.

**HOUSING****MONTREAL—HEARING OF BRIEFS BY TASK FORCE**

On the orders of the day:

**Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford):** Mr. Speaker, I had wanted to direct my question to the Minister of Transport. Since neither the minister nor the Minister without Portfolio is present may I direct my question to the Prime Minister. Why has the task force on housing stopped receiving briefs in a major Canadian city such as Montreal after only one day of hearings?

[Mr. Fairweather.]

**Right Hon. P.-E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** If the hon. member will give himself the trouble of looking at the roster he will see that the minister is not due in the house today.

**Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order in relation to the remark just made by the Prime Minister, a remark he has made on a number of occasions. I concede the right of the Prime Minister to draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to the fact that a fellow minister is not here. I even concede his right to tell us that he has asked a fellow minister not to be here. But I maintain it is not within the rules of the house for the Prime Minister to keep referring to a certain document which he calls a roster as a reason for a minister's not being present.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** I have a copy of the document in my hand but if I may parrot legal language I suggest it is not a document of which the Chair should take judicial notice. The Chair has to operate on the basis of the rules, customs and established procedures of this house, and for the Prime Minister to cite a roster as though it were a legal or procedural basis for a minister's absence is contrary to the procedures of this house and contrary to our rights as members of parliament.

I should like Your Honour to take note of citation 7(1) in Beauchesne's fourth edition, which reads as follows:

Another collective right of the house is to settle its own procedure. This is such an obvious right—it has never been directly disputed—that it is unnecessary to enlarge upon it except to say that the house is not responsible to any external authority for following the rules it lays down for itself, but may depart from them at its own discretion.

I submit that when the Prime Minister lays down a new practice he is doing so as an external authority, and that when he hands us a document, and calls attention to it day after day, describing it as a roster, as though it were an excuse or a reason for ministers not being present, he is usurping the right of the house to settle its own procedure.

There is no way in which we can force the ministers to be here. There are rules about absenteeism, and the press does not like it when members are absent. The same should apply to ministers, but there is no way in