

Delay in Use of Aircraft for Biafra

these people and save a large number of lives.

Consequently, Mr. Speaker, I believe the time has come to act and to know clearly what the intentions of the government are in this regard.

[English]

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the great importance of this motion I wonder whether the Prime Minister would ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs to come into the house, in spite of the fact it is his day off, so he could give us his views on this important problem.

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (President of the Privy Council): I should like to address myself, Mr. Speaker, not to the merits of the issue as other hon. members have, but to the only question which should be considered at this time, that is the procedural question of whether there are other opportunities available for this matter to be discussed. I should like to remind you, sir, that according to citation 100(3) of Beauchesne's fourth edition, the following distinction is made:

"Urgency" within this rule does not apply to the matter itself, but it means "urgency of debate", when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the house do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.

On October 7, by means of a motion I moved, the estimates of the Department of External Affairs were referred by this house to the standing committee on external affairs and national defence. As Your Honour knows, since then that committee has been engaged in a very active consideration of the events in Nigeria. It is not open to me at this stage in the proceedings to go into what the committee has been discussing, but I believe it is quite clear there is every opportunity for hon. members, if they are interested in this particular aspect of the situation, to have it discussed within the framework of that particular committee. This committee is still meeting; therefore there will be every opportunity in the committee for the question to be discussed.

Perhaps the only other citation which is of interest in this procedural discussion is citation 288 of Beauchesne's fourth edition, which reads as follows:

Committees are regarded as portions of the house and are governed for the most part in their proceedings by the same rules which prevail in the house.

Greenwood and those who spoke after him. However, I should also like to insist on the debate taking place today, Mr. Speaker, because although the government has not misled us deliberately, it has not clearly stated its intentions concerning the humanitarian help it has been asked to give to Biafra, and it seems to be stubbornly refusing to help that country. The government seems to have agreed to lend its Hercules aircraft to help the Nigerians rather than the Biafrans, although, according to the information we have received in the committee on external affairs and national defence, the need exists rather on the Biafran side.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, one knows that other organizations such as Caritas and the World Council of Churches can go to Biafra. It may be that the Hercules are too heavy to use the landing strips in Nigeria, but if the other organizations can go where the disorder is most serious, I think that the government should consider using the Sao Tome base to send relief where it is most needed. We are told that the two Hercules are ready to take off, but no one does very much except drink beer.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I think that we should study the matter today in order to find out exactly what the government intends to do. It is unfortunate, as stated by the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis), that the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) is not here today, but I think that his colleague the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Cadieux) could be here within a short time to tell us the government's plans.

Mr. Speaker, we learned this morning that there is a possibility that the Hercules might be brought back to Canada instead of being sent to Biafra; I feel that perhaps we should consider replacing the Hercules by lighter planes which could land on the runways in that area.

What we want to know today is whether the Canadian people are not directly involved in the urgency of this matter. I feel that the Canadian people are entitled to know what is being done with their money and what humanitarian steps are being considered. Of course, we are not asking the government to go and wage war in that area, but we are asking it to help those who are hungry, who are sick. In fact, we are told that thousands of people are dying each day from starvation and disease. If the government used the planes which are in readiness, we could help