

Canadian Action on Nigeria-Biafra

Canairerief because they acted in contravention of their orders, we will have to find some other way of dealing with the problem. I certainly share the views of hon. members of the House that these food supplies should get in there, because they form part of the immediate reserves available. As the hon. member says, there are some 5,000 tons of most valuable foodstuffs and we should make every effort to see that they are moved into the area.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, the minister has indicated—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Before the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) seeks to ask another question, I should draw the attention of the House to the fact that the ministers' time has expired, unless it is the disposition of the House that he continue. Is that agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, the minister has indicated that Canairerief officials have consented to the movement of their foodstocks by any other transfer agency. My question, which has not yet been dealt with in the minister's remarks, has to do with the transportation of these materials. Since the equipment, the crews and the system is there ready to operate, has any discussion taken place regarding another method that might be adopted, using the transportation facilities that are ready for use immediately?

Mr. Sharp: The answer to that question is that we have had some discussions but no decisions have yet been reached. As I said a little earlier, the war ended only this morning and within the last few hours the situation has been transformed out of all recognition. I think it is unreasonable to expect that at this particular moment all these problems should be settled. I assure hon. members that we are as anxious as they to see that this food is made available in these areas. This is one of the reasons we are making transportation available. Perhaps Canadian government planes could be used for this purpose. Perhaps the Red Cross could use the planes, if Canairerief is unacceptable as the agent. I hope it is not, to be quite frank, but this is something that is not entirely within our control.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, I think the House wants to know whether the minister will give
[Mr. Sharp.]

his assurance that he will make immediate representations to the government of Nigeria asking that the stocks of food, planes and personnel of Canairerief be allowed to operate either under Canairerief, the Nigerian Red Cross or the International Red Cross—I do not think it is important which one—and whether these personnel will be allowed to operate immediately to meet the situation which is so pressing and so distressing at this time. We want some assurance from the minister that such representation will be made immediately.

● (9:10 p.m.)

Mr. Sharp: I can assure the hon. member and the House that we are very anxious that those food supplies be moved into the area immediately. I did say earlier that the means is quite important. If we were to insist that Canairerief do it, that might hold up the operation.

An hon. Member: No one is asking that.

Mr. Sharp: I suggest we are trying to find a means to move the food whether it is done by Canairerief or otherwise makes no difference to us. This is one of the problems with which we are engaged and upon which we are trying to get decisions.

Perhaps I should say a further word about my talk with Dr. Johnson. When he was speaking to me on the telephone this morning, and in a later message, he spoke about the particular difficulty being encountered by Canairerief because they were not sure whether in fact their equipment, and so on, was going to be useful. He urged upon the government some assistance to Canairerief to meet the immediate costs. I said to Dr. Johnson that no decision to spend money in that way had been reached, and that we had made a decision to spend money in transporting food to the airstrip at Uli. Of course, he could make representations to us for assistance in this immediate problem.

This is another reason I agree with the hon. member who asked about the urgency of the matter. It is urgent from every point of view. The difficulty is that the equipment and planes standing there are costing Canairerief money while they are inactive. It is essential, from the point of view of Canairerief itself, that there be action as soon as possible.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): What possible objection could there be to the Canadian government guaranteeing