

Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I should like to ask most sincerely—though it is unfortunate that the Prime Minister cannot be here—what the government intends to do. How much longer shall we have to wait? I can only adduce from what the Prime Minister said today and in earlier days that, to narrow it down to one phrase, in effect the Prime Minister is saying, “Biafra give up.” We have succumbed to the situation. We believe now that starvation is a legitimate means of war; therefore, let it be used and used quickly in order that the conflict may be ended. To some that is an attractive theory. It is one that was espoused, and I am tempted to believe is still espoused, by the government of the United Kingdom. It is saddening to think that our government is fully supporting a policy of starving-out the Biafran people.

• (8:50 p.m.)

At a meeting in Montreal last night, the Canadian Council of Churches passed a resolution which I presume has come to the attention of the government. The council calls on the government as follows:

1. To extend its efforts to hasten the peaceful settlement of the Nigeria/Biafra conflict.
2. To register again its vigorous protest to all Governments providing any arms or permitting the transfer of arms to either side.
3. To express to Governments of both sides our concern for those undergoing prolonged and massive suffering and to urge these authorities to arrange an immediate cease fire.
4. To call upon the United Nations, the Organization for African Unity, other concerned Governments, and International agencies, to take all necessary steps toward a just and durable settlement.

The next paragraph applies particularly to the resolution before the House, and it reads:

5. To increase its programme of relief to victims on both sides, and to give maximum support to such non-Governmental agencies as are effectively providing relief.

I understand this resolution has been forwarded to the Canadian Catholic Conference which is meeting in Ottawa today and tomorrow. I take it that conference will pass a resolution similar to the one I have just read. Churches of all persuasions in this country and which represent millions of Canadians have asked that this government act. It is imperative for us not to be put off by subterfuge and unconvincing arguments. In the quiet and calm following this debate I ask members of the government to study the proposals that have been made, specifically by

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

representatives of Canairelief who met government representatives today. It is fortuitous that the two key representatives should meet personally with the Prime Minister on the day we are debating this matter. All Canadians look forward to a positive report on action which the government intends to take. Specifically, we are hopeful that the Prime Minister will make a statement within 24 hours.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, I was greatly honoured to have the opportunity this afternoon of seconding the motion moved by the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin). May I also say that I was disappointed to hear some of the remarks the hon. member for Burnaby-Seymour (Mr. Perrault) made to us this evening. They did not add much to our debate. He said one thing in particular that struck me as odd. He was talking about some of the social democratic countries of northern Europe and said that they agreed entirely with the stand taken by the government of Canada. May I remind hon. members that countries belonging to that group, and Sweden in particular, have been giving aid to Joint Church Aid and that therefore their position is similar to the one we have adopted on this matter and to the one envisaged in this resolution.

In essence, the motion before us asks the government to help Canairelief, because that is the only organization bringing aid to Biafra at present. Tonight I appeal to hon. members, and particularly those of the government party, to treat this as a moral and not a political issue. Let us not talk of the complexities of international law, or be technical as the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has been, because in Biafra today 2 million people lie dead of starvation because of the war. They were not dying there until war broke out. Today they are dying because they are cut off from the outside world. I am informed that about every 40 seconds one person dies in Biafra. So while I am standing here talking, people are dying there. While hon. members on both sides of the House are discussing this matter, people are dying in Biafra. While we are engaged in the exercise of political polemics, people are dying there. We must try to relieve the suffering in that country by helping Canairelief do its job. We must also try to end this war.

If Canada acts, perhaps we can make a contribution toward ending the war and settling the dispute, because Canada is trusted