

External Aid

protestations of the Nigerian government, when the question involved is helping the Biafran people in their own country, is not to be taken very seriously.

I again ask the Canadian government to consider stepping up the supply of Hercules aircraft to the Red Cross operation at Fernando Po. If one Hercules can do a good job, cannot two, three or four aircraft do a better job? Surely we are not going to be deterred by an objection which apparently may have been made by Equatorial Guinea to our doing this. Surely in the interests of humanity we could supply two, three or four aircraft and do a much better job than we are doing.

Finally, the government should find a way to provide Hercules aircraft for the Sao Tomé operation. It could, of course, exact any conditions it liked as to inspection to make sure that these flights would not be used to take in arms. Literally thousands of lives would be saved if the government adopted this policy. I know it is not easy for governments to change their minds, and I think I appreciate why the government's initial impulse has been to seek at all costs the maintenance of friendly relations with the federal government of Nigeria. But federalism and even friendliness with federal governments, important though they are, are not sacrosanct. The federal structure of Nigeria has been seriously damaged by this bitter war and what preceded it. No considerations should stifle the cry of humanity for the ending of the war and the feeding of the starving people of this war-torn country.

I urge the government to be bold, to innovate, to speak for humanity. In an open letter to the Prime Minister, signed by many distinguished Canadians, reference was made to a statement of the late secretary general of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, who said:

It is when we play it safe that we create a world of the utmost insecurity.

I say to this government and the Prime Minister, stop playing it safe in Nigeria, because by so doing you are creating a world of the utmost insecurity.

• (5:10 p.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, we are discussing today a matter that is very important for Nigeria and the peoples of Nigeria because of the possible consequences of the action or inaction of the Canadian government with regard to a settlement of the terrible conflict now taking place in what is one of

[Mr. Brewin.]

the most promising countries of the African continent since its decolonization.

We are considering today the report presented by the committee on external affairs and national defence. According to a motion passed by the house last October 7, the committee, and I quote, was to:

Hear evidence on (1) the report of the official observer group on which Canada has a member, of the conduct of federal troops in the prosecution of the war in Nigeria; (2) the reported famine conditions in that country, and to invite Andrew Brewin, M.P. (Greenwood) and David MacDonald, M.P. (Egmont) to report their observation on the conditions of the civilian population of Nigeria.

Being myself a member of that committee, I participated with great interest in its proceedings and I agree that it is not easy to propose a solution, because it is always delicate to interfere in the affairs of another state. We will have to be careful because the action we take must not have consequences worse than those we want to correct.

We know that hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives and that many others will die if that civil war is not ended soon. We know that thousands and thousands of other persons have been and will be wounded if that war does not end.

All wars are cruel, and that one more so perhaps, because of the physical and moral suffering that the civilian population must endure when, for the most part, it does not understand the reason of that war. One might wonder if the people who lived within the present borders of Nigeria were sufficiently prepared for independence in 1960.

The colonizing powers must assume part of the blame because they neglected to create a core of qualified people to govern the country wisely. Since Nigeria gained her independence—and that is the case also of several other African countries—it has been obvious that wisdom was not the main quality of the Nigerian and Biafran leaders entrusted with the administration of the country.

It is difficult, Mr. Speaker, to determine the exact usefulness of the study carried out by this committee, as it deals with two main points, that is the urgency to determine and alleviate the suffering and sickness due to malnutrition, and whether the war constitutes an act of genocide.

I will point out that the Canadian government did not wait for the report of the committee to send well-equipped Hercules aircraft to bring assistance and prevent thousands of innocent people from suffering and