

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Trudeau: A few days ago they asked this house to set up a parliamentary committee to look into all aspects of this situation. The parliamentary committee is meeting. It has heard all kinds of arguments from all sides. I do not think there is any reason to suppose that we should go beyond or beside what the parliamentary committee is doing, before hearing its report. I think it is a great mistake to leave with the Canadian people the feeling that there is an easy solution to any of this, or that we should in any sense intervene in a civil war in Africa. If we were to do that we should be faced with the consequence similar to that faced by other white nations which are intervening in Viet Nam. Those white nations are being accused of telling the yellow races what to do. We should be in the same position in Africa if we went in there and told them how to settle their civil war.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Diefenbaker: The Prime Minister's answer certainly did not deserve the applause of an almost overwhelming number of Liberal members in this house.

Mr. Gibson: Mr. Speaker, the right hon. gentleman seems to be making a little speech instead of asking a question.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I like audience participation, particularly from those who do not usually take part on these occasions.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question to the Prime Minister. If he will permit me to say so, may I suggest that we are asking for an answer to a question and not to a straw man the Prime Minister has set up. I say that because no member of this parliament has suggested that Canada should intervene directly or indirectly to find a solution to the problem in Nigeria.

Has the Prime Minister on that basis, not on any basis he has set up or which anyone may have suggested to him, reconsidered placing the matter before the appropriate agency of the United Nations for a discussion of the possibility of a cease fire, something which both sides in Nigeria might welcome and which all members of the O.A.U. might welcome? This is the question we are placing before the Prime Minister.

Mr. Trudeau: It is hardly a straw man, Mr. Speaker, because some persons very well

known to the hon. member are not asking for a cease fire but for an increase in fire—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lewis: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I suggest to you that no member of this house, not even the Prime Minister, has a right to refer to evidence given before a committee of this parliament—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Lewis: Hold your horses before you bray.

An hon. Member: Cheaper and cheaper.

Mr. Speaker: Would the hon. member kindly state his point of order.

Mr. Lewis: I suggest that no member of this house, not even the Prime Minister, has a right to refer to evidence given to a parliamentary committee and to distort that evidence when replying in the house. No witness appearing before that committee, certainly not the one who is well known to me, as the Prime Minister said, suggested an increase in fire. What was suggested was that if arms are to continue to be delivered to one side the only way to produce a stalemate and an end to the war might be through the provision of arms to the other side.

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): In view of the Prime Minister's earlier statement about difficulties in connection with Hercules aircraft in providing relief supplies direct to Biafra, may I ask whether special efforts are now being made by the government or the Red Cross to have these aircraft deliver supplies to that area of Biafra now under Nigerian control, particularly in the south where there have been many reports of serious starvation?

Mr. Trudeau: Yes, Mr. Speaker, some efforts are being made in that direction. We were asking whether the Red Cross had been able to arrange for permission to proceed to Port Harcourt, but we understand this has not yet been granted; clearance has not been obtained there. However, we are given to understand there is some possibility that flights to Calabar in the same area will begin tomorrow.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Has the government considered giving notice to the Red Cross that a deadline will be imposed, and that if the deadline is not met other action will be taken?