

*Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans*

definitely and more assuredly his disregard for this institution which he is endeavouring to remake in the image of the Congressional government of the United States.

What can be done? Toward the end of last year the Biafran authorities completed preliminary surveys for a relief airstrip. In an undertaking with Canairelief and Joint Church Aid, the Biafrans cleared and levelled a strip to be used exclusively for relief purposes. If the Canadian government wishes to send any relief, and certainly the speech of the Prime Minister today indicates no such desire, it could complete this strip easily and quickly by laying down a metal military emergency grid. This could be done in a matter of hours by a military team. Biafran authorities have stated that such action would be deeply appreciated.

Dr. Otué, the senior Biafran representative in New York, is in Ottawa today and has given his personal assurances. Hercules aircraft could thus be flying in food by the hundreds of tons within a matter of days. The food is stockpiled at Sao Tome in thousands of tons. In addition, there are several thousands of tons of Red Cross supplies which have been lying around deteriorating since last June.

Sir, I am shocked by the attitude of the Prime Minister today. He represents all of the people of Canada. He does not want to engage in any dialogue, but would rather have us listen to his monologue. Isn't it about time this Government decided that it should act?

Since June 5, the Red Cross, jointly with Canairelief, has carried into Biafra over 30,000 tons of food, so that in contrast with the negotiations that are going on between the Red Cross and the authorities in Nigeria the population has been assisted to this extent. Canairelief, the Canadian company or group, has just completed its 500th flight. It uses, at the present time, 4 superconstellation planes, and could fly another four flights if additional funds were available. I say to the Government, furnish these funds.

Canadian people are responding well but there are limits. Do you mean to tell me that the Canadian Council of Churches or the other organizations which have joined together for action should be spurned in the way they have been by the expression of the views of this Government today? Why will the Government not contribute to Canairelief?

The Prime Minister today produced a legalistic formula. The request was made in

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

August and there has been no reply made or there was not up to the day before yesterday. There has been neither a yes nor a no in reply. The Government has hidden behind protocol and pretended international legal principles in order to deny hundreds of thousands of starving people at a time when Canada has the largest surplus of wheat—1,400 million bushels—in its history. The Government says this cannot be done. Let us simply look at the facts. For a long time the Government said it was unable to get any information from the Nigerian leaders or those associated with them. That was in September and October of 1968.

• (5:10 p.m.)

I decided, as a private member of parliament, to send a message to General Yakubu Gowon, State House, Lagos, Nigeria, imploring him to expedite the clearance of Canadian aircraft to permit relief supplies of food and medicine to be delivered to those parts of Nigeria affected by the civil war. The message continued:

Along with tens of thousands of Canadians I heard you in August in an interview on CBC undertake to assure delivery of relief supplies to the afflicted whatever their political affiliations. The words you used were "I have told you the supplies will get through, I will see to it that it is done". Will you in the name of humanity now do that which you undertook and as a humanitarian assure that innocent children and others in need will secure the available supplies which Canada desires with all its heart to provide.

Within a matter of four days I received a complete answer thereto from Major General Gowon in which he pointed out that he could not understand my message. He said that there is nothing being done on his part or on the part of those associated with him to interfere in any way with food going into Biafra. He said further:

I have at no time failed to honour my pledge to do everything possible to ensure that no one in this country suffered unnecessarily as a result of this war. Unfortunately there are areas to which the authority of my government cannot yet be extended and these are the areas from which the stories of harrowing distress issue but even then my government has made repeated offers of practicable means of getting relief supplies to them. Unfortunately the secessionist leaders have consistently turned down these offers and their supporters in Canada are taking the public for a ride by concealing these facts while parading statistics of the magnitude of distress.

There need be no cause for you to be concerned that relief is not reaching those in need who can be reached. My government is ensuring that more and more of such persons are continuing to be reached.