

Delay in Use of Aircraft for Biafra

that is to alleviate the suffering and starvation in Biafra and Nigeria.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make two points to Your Honour which, to me at least, suggest there is clearly urgency of debate in addition to the urgency of the matter with which the motion deals. May I remind Your Honour that on a number of occasions several of us in this house asked the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs whether they would not consider sending the Hercules aircraft to Sao Tomé pending the various consents which they are trying to obtain with respect to the use of the Hercules via Lagos and Fernando Po. In every case the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs insisted that the arrangement through the International Red Cross had to stand and that they were not prepared to send the Hercules to Sao Tomé for use by the church relief organizations. We have therefore had the spectacle of planes, which for the last number of days could have been delivering urgently required supplies to Biafra, standing idle in Lagos, in Cerife and on Ascension island doing nothing.

I would also remind you, Mr. Speaker, that the other day when the Secretary of State for External Affairs was asked by a member of this house why the Hercules were not being used, he informed this house that there was an additional reason, namely that the airstrips in occupied Biafra did not appear to be good enough to receive the Hercules. If my memory serves me correctly, and I think I am accurate, he added that they had to consider whether to pull the Hercules back and replace them with other, smaller planes.

Mr. Speaker, the main reason I rise today in support of urgency of debate of this matter is the fact that this operation can be undertaken either today or over the week end. According to the answer which the Secretary of State for External Affairs gave, and according to reports, it is quite possible that the government, in line with its determination that the Hercules only be used through Fernando Po and Lagos by the International Red Cross and by no one else, will decide that these planes will be brought back home and we will have to start the whole thing over again by sending planes back to do this urgent and humanitarian job of providing relief.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the obvious likelihood contained in the answer by the minister that the planes will be returned

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

home makes this matter of immediate urgency for debate in this house so the government may have its mind changed as a result of discussions in this house, and so these planes which are waiting helplessly and uselessly now may be used as they ought to have been used from the first day, through Sao Tomé for the delivery of supplies to starving thousands in Biafra. *

Mr. Speaker, if I may put this as strongly as I can, I ask you to permit the members of the opposition to tell the government today that so far as we are concerned we will not stand for the return of these planes to Canada. They can be used. There are church organizations in Sao Tomé that have already flown supplies into Biafra, and they are eager to have these planes. It is nothing but the most arid, irrelevant and hard headed obstinacy which prevents these planes from being used for this humanitarian purpose and that lets them stand idle and useless instead. We have to express this view today, not tomorrow or on any other day, because Monday may be too late.

Before I sit down may I say, Mr. Speaker, that it would have been desirable if the Secretary of State for External Affairs had been here. He is not here today, and on Sunday he leaves for a very necessary mission to Latin America which, if my memory serves me right, will keep him away for a month, from October 27 to November 27. So the absence of the Secretary of State for External Affairs today cannot possibly be a reason why this should not be debated today. If this parliament is at all meaningful in the life of the people of Canada and in the life of peoples throughout the world, and if our job as parliamentarians has any purpose at all, then the discussion of this urgent matter of providing necessary relief for starving thousands seems to me to transcend any other subject which may come before the house today. The likelihood of these planes being returned home makes it all the more urgent that we debate the matter now, and not even an hour from now.

• (11:40 a.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words in support of the motion of the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin).

I do not intend to talk at length of the urgency of the matter, for I think that point has been quite well made by the member for