

External Aid

of continuing inquiries made at the official level at the United Nations and in a number of foreign capitals, I remain convinced that an attempt to inscribe the Nigerian conflict on the agenda of the General Assembly would not only be bitterly resented by the Nigerian government and the member states of the Organization of African Unity, but would also be totally unsuccessful because of the procedural requirement of support of 63 other members. In view of the O.A.U. resolution, there is not a chance that even a small fraction of that number would agree. And hon. members should not forget that of the 126 United Nations' members, 42 are from the continent of Africa.

There is an alternative to the General Assembly, we are told. A committee. Should we attempt to employ a General Assembly committee for such a discussion, conceding for the moment that we could do so, which is not entirely clear, our efforts would prove not only divisive but totally counter-productive. The soundings to which I have referred and others revealed the following probable consequences of any such attempts: First, hostility and opposition from almost all African states. Canada's long term relations with these countries, which we now find amiable and productive, would be prejudiced for some years to come, both on a bilateral and a multilateral basis. Any doubt in this respect should have been resolved by the O.A.U. vote of 33-4 against intervention. Second, Nigeria would demand that we cease participating in relief assistance to any part of that country. Third, we should be asked to withdraw from the international observer team in Nigeria.

I need only add that in the view of the government, such a policy by Canada would be completely irresponsible and indefensible.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Trudeau: However much it might salve the feelings of concerned Canadians, it would be wrong. For these reasons I am reluctant to strain the very real and very meaningful ties of friendship which Canada enjoys with Nigeria and with other African states. I have accordingly assured General Gowon of our continuing support for his government as the government of all Nigeria. I have at the same time informed him of our desire to see an early conclusion of the hostilities in Nigeria on terms permitting Nigerians to live within a federal structure which provides adequate guarantees of personal and economic security to all persons. General Gowon has for his part assured us of his intention to provide

[Mr. Trudeau.]

such guarantees and has welcomed the understanding and interest of the Canadian people.

What I have said about action through the United Nations applies also to proposals that initiatives be mounted through the Commonwealth. Like the United Nations, the Commonwealth is an association of sovereign states, admittedly bound by special ties of affection but also bound by tradition not to intervene in each other's affairs or to discuss them at Commonwealth meetings. The Commonwealth does offer the unique facility of the good offices function of the secretary-general which I mentioned earlier. Members who are familiar with Mr. Arnold Smith's testimony before the standing committee are aware of the untiring efforts which Mr. Smith has lent to the search for a solution. These efforts have not met with success but they have served to keep open a channel of communications between the disputants.

• (3:30 p.m.)

Recently there have been proposals that Canada attempt to arrange a cease-fire. It is argued that this would not involve making a political or moral judgment on the merits of either side's case, and the advocates see it in terms of "let the fighting cease and peace will prevail". I agree with the theory but the practice is more complicated, as shown by reports of discussions already held by the Nigerian parties about a possible cease-fire. It is clear that this question has been surrounded by political conditions. For example, at one point the rebel proposals for a cease-fire stipulated a withdrawal of federal troops behind the pre-war boundaries, an action which the Nigerians claim would place some five and a half million non-Ibos under Ibo rule without their being able to make a choice. This one example illustrates that in this situation a cease-fire is not a simple proposition to be seen in isolation from the political factors. In present circumstances, any cease-fire inevitably involves a major concession of principle by one side or the other. I am not suggesting that a cease-fire is undesirable or that it is impossible; I am saying that it will be difficult to accomplish.

What I have been attempting to make clear, Mr. Speaker, is the legal, moral and political framework in which the government has viewed this human crisis in a friendly country. It has been clear to me throughout that the concern of the Canadian people in this situation is that their government should act to help relieve human suffering without