

Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans

It has been suggested that Biafra is not interested in relief, or more particularly daylight relief. Just to deal with the first statement, those who suggest Biafra is not interested in relief ignore the fact that Joint Church Aid alone has since its inception 14 or 15 months ago made more than 3,000 flights into Biafra. All this month they have flown about 14 flights a night. They will continue to fly. Ask the relief workers, the pilots, the technicians, the missionaries, all those connected with relief inside or outside who have lines going in, and you will find how interested the authorities are in relief. As a person who is an ordained minister of one church, I would point out that the very fact the churches are able to work together must say something for the co-operation they are getting from the Biafran authorities.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): It has been an incredible operation and could only have been successful with the utmost co-operation of those in control of the Biafran situation. On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to note that there appeared in the *Montreal Star*, a *New York Times* Service article which told us, "Nigeria faces food, supply shortage".

For months now we have seen reports about the starvation in parts of federally-held Nigeria. What action is being taken to assist the people who can be reached by land, presumably? What is the fate of relief organizations working behind the Nigerian lines? We know the fate of Ambassador Lindt; he was shipped out when they ran out the Red Cross. We know—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

Some hon. Members: Go ahead.

Mr. Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to allow the hon. member to continue?

Some hon. Members: Carry on.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): I thank the House, Mr. Speaker, for its indulgence. We know that in fact the Red Cross had a great deal of difficulty in carrying on their operations inside Nigeria and have been threatened with being supplanted by a government organization which has come into force in the last few days. Thousands of Nigerians are now living under difficult circumstances, but there is little action by those who presumably

have the confidence and the good will of the federal military authorities in Lagos. Quite frankly, I am disturbed, when the discussion centres on daylight relief flights, that we are caught in simplistic and naive statements in regard to what is a complex issue.

In this House just a few days ago the Prime Minister spoke of "General Gowon's single condition for daylight flights". Were General Gowon here tonight he might be the first to deny there was a single condition in connection with daylight flights. I notice that today the Prime Minister talked about the two conditions of General Gowon, and I suppose in three weeks' time he will be talking about three conditions. In fact there are many conditions and the problem is to try to get both sides to agree to a set of conditions. I am not going to rehearse the spectacle of trying to get one side, and then the other, to agree to conditions. The closest any group came to effective agreement was the Red Cross in establishing agreement for daylight flights, but that agreement could not be considered generous when you consider that six flights were carrying only 90 tons and operating only three weeks. That is not ideal in this situation. Six flights does not compare with the program of Joint Church Aid which is operating 14 and 16 flights a night this month.

There has been too much innuendo and too much half-informed discussion on what is, of course, a very vital and basic problem. In the context of this debate I should like to ask why our government is clinging so strenuously to one agency in dealing with this problem. I am not here in any way to indict the Red Cross, and surely we sympathize as much if not more than most with the Red Cross in its difficulties in trying to work out an acceptable relief program. But why have we at this time so completely tied ourselves to the Red Cross? I suppose, as usual, the most obvious answer is that this was acceptable to the federal military authority of Nigeria. Why has it been so acceptable to the federal military government of Nigeria? Presumably, it is because no group has had more difficulty in operating its relief over the months than the Red Cross. That is obvious. It is significant that Joint Church Aid, which is still operating, will carry 10 per cent of its load for the International Red Cross. Joint Church Aid is presently sustaining Red Cross hospitals and feeding stations through their transportation facilities. The Red Cross has not paid one penny for this.