

External Aid

In its eighth recommendation the committee urged the government to intensify its efforts to persuade the parties to accept mediation. The caution attached by the committee to this point is sound: that we should not operate in such a way as to jeopardize the effectiveness of our relief efforts. There are, as we have said, limitations on the government's action on this essentially political question; but I can assure the house that within these limits we shall work strenuously for a peaceful settlement of this dispute.

An hon. Member: Words, words.

Mr. Sharp: On the proposal that Canada should contribute to an eventual peacekeeping force in Nigeria, I think it is premature to offer comment before a settlement or ceasefire has been achieved or before the terms of any peacekeeping operation are known. I may add this, however: As is well known, Canada has always taken a positive look at peacekeeping proposals, and I can assure the house that any proposals in respect of the Nigerian situation will be given prompt and careful consideration by the government.

An amendment has been proposed to the committee's report, Mr. Speaker, which would oblige the government to take this question to the United Nations, to the General Assembly or to the Third Committee. As the Prime Minister explained this afternoon, and as has been made clear before, following intensive study of the matter we have come to the conclusion that this is neither a practical nor a useful initiative. Any proposal to have the matter discussed at the United Nations would not gain more than minimal support. For that reason alone an initiative would not be effective and would have no helpful influence on the situation. Moreover, if we were to press on regardless of the lack of support, Canada's position in the world body would be affected and the possibility of our taking useful steps on this or other matters would be seriously reduced.

In opening this debate this afternoon the Prime Minister spoke these words, with which I concur entirely:

—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—

He also said:

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

[Mr. Sharp.]

entirely clear, our efforts would prove not only divisive but totally counter-productive.

I am asking, in the face of these statements, do hon. members think we should persist when the consequences of our actions would be those put forward today by the Prime Minister?

An hon. Member: You must prove that.

Mr. Sharp: The Prime Minister said that we would incur the hostility and opposition of African states, and that would jeopardize our policy of dealing with the situation effectively. We would probably be told that we were not welcome in providing relief assistance in Nigeria, and our observer would probably be told to go home. Is that what hon. members opposite want? Presumably it is, if they persist in making these statements.

An hon. Member: Nonsense.

● (9:30 p.m.)

Mr. Sharp: And now may I comment on the suggestion that we should intervene to press Britain, the U.S.S.R. and others to cease their sales of arms to the participants in this war? I am sure this house would be gratified if all the countries currently supplying arms to the two sides would cease to do so, and if I thought that action by Canada would accomplish this, I would not hesitate to propose it. This is, however, a matter of policy for each government to establish for itself. It is well known that the French government has denied it provides arms to the rebels. Moreover I ask the members of the house this question: Would the situation be improved if external pressure caused the British government to cease all its arms supplies to Nigeria, leaving the field open to the U.S.S.R. to become its principal source?

I should like to refer again to the hope, widely felt by the Canadian people, that this civil war can be brought to an end. I said earlier that the achievement of a peaceful negotiated settlement does not depend on the provision of facilities or the making of proposals by outsiders. Canada stands ready to be of assistance if that would be helpful; and I hope that the responsible course we have followed enhances the possibility of our playing a useful role. Whether any progress can be made toward peace depends, however, on the parties to the dispute. In particular, in my view, it depends on the Nigerian government providing sufficiently convincing guarantees to the Ibos of their security after the conclusion of hostilities, and on the willingness of the rebels to envisage a negotiated