

Inquiries of the Ministry

war in Viet Nam and helping one side, when a few years ago the United States thought it would only send a few observers there. I do not think hon. members would want this country to become involved in the same kind of civil war and face the same kind of conflict.

Mr. Stanfield: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Is the Prime Minister suggesting that it involves participation in the war for the government of Canada to bring this matter before the United Nations, or to bring pressure upon Great Britain and other countries to cease shipping arms into Nigeria?

Mr. Trudeau: No, Mr. Speaker, I am not suggesting that. The Leader of the Opposition's question was a broader one, and was asking us to reconsider our whole policy. Our whole policy is based on this presumption, that civil wars have happened before, and that when other foreign countries intervene in civil wars to seek a solution in their own way they generally find they are drawn into the civil war in a way they do not desire.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, there is no more reason to think Canada has any justification for telling the Nigerian government how to settle its civil war than the United States might have for telling some other government how to settle theirs. I am sure the house knows the logic behind some of the positions that have been taken by, among others, distinguished members of the New Democratic party, which now seem to lead them to think that we should be shipping arms to Biafra. This is the kind of logic, Mr. Speaker, that you get into when you try to settle other people's internal affairs.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a supplementary question to the right hon. Prime Minister.

According to news reports which he must have heard as we did, airplanes carrying food supplies to Biafra also had thousands of beer bottles on board. Is the Prime Minister in a position to tell us whether this beer is intended for the Biafrans, the Red Cross representatives, or simply for the Canadian staff which is taking it to Biafra?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I have discussed this matter with the Minister of National Defence and as he is more qualified than I am in to deal with this kind of problem, I yield him the floor.

[*Mr. Trudeau.*]

Hon. Léo Cadieux (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I hope everyone is not being too unfair towards the personnel of the Canadian air force.

One of the three planes which is now in Recife carried 400 half cases of beer, that is, 3,600 bottles, to the 71 members of the personnel which is to operate out of Santa Isabella, where there is no drinking water. That, Mr. Speaker, comes to an average of two bottles of beer per man per month, not counting week-ends.

It has also been said in some circles, Mr. Speaker—I insist on this because it should be corrected and I heard it myself on television—that we were guilty of criminal negligence by transporting beer instead of food. I must point out that we have never asked that Canadian planes carry food from Canada into Biafra, but merely that they be ready to carry relief supplies for the victims of disaster from Fernando Po or inside Nigeria itself. I think it is very important, at this time, not to be unfair towards the personnel which is now over there.

[*English*]

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I put my question in the form of an appeal to the Prime Minister in connection with the shipment of food and medicines to the tens of thousands who stand in imminent danger of an early death. Since the government either by intention or through inertia will not act to bring this matter before the United Nations, will the Prime Minister set aside a day—say the day after tomorrow—and have a resolution brought before this house so the Canadian people can express to the government and to the world the need for action? Set aside these legal technicalities and niceties which can only result, if they are followed, in the extermination of a people.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Diefenbaker: However great its humanitarian objectives may be, is there not a desire on the part of the government to do something? This house will give you the power to act. Will you place the matter before us?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I think the question phrased by way of an appeal by the right hon. gentleman really is an indication that opposition members on his side of the house do not know how to solve this problem.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Give us a chance.