

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, July 10, 1969

The house met at 2 p.m.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have the honour to inform the house that a message has been received from the Senate requesting this house to unite with the Senate in the appointment of a special joint committee to consider the government's proposals for tax reform and also to select members of this house to act on the special joint committee.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

EXTERNAL AID

BIAFRA—OUTLINE OF STEPS TAKEN BY CANADA TO EFFECT DAYLIGHT RELIEF FLIGHTS—NEUTRAL INSPECTION

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that members of the house would like to know the steps Canada is taking as a result of recent developments in Nigeria.

I have instructed our High Commissioner in Lagos to tell the federal military government that Canada is prepared to supply the neutral inspectors both sides are ready to accept as a precondition for the resumption of relief flights into the secessionist territory. We are prepared to supply these inspectors for service either inside or outside Nigeria. We have urged the Nigerian government to give careful consideration to the acceptance of outside inspection sites.

We are told that if these flights are not resumed there will be countless deaths from starvation. Urgent action is required and Canada is ready to act urgently. Contingency planning is now under way so that we can move immediately if agreement is reached.

All interested parties are now looking to daylight flights as the best way of getting the food to those who need it. Canada has advocated this course for many months. There appears now to be agreement that a way must be found to get these flights going.

Relief flights in this civil war situation should be readily recognizable as relief flights and it should be clear that the aircraft are carrying only relief goods. If these things are done, both sides should be able to agree on the necessary details.

There is no problem identifying relief flights in the daylight hours. Our proposal to the Nigerian government further suggests that this could be reinforced by filing flight plans of agreed daylight flights with the interested authorities before take-off.

We are encouraged by the fact that the principle of inspection by neutral as well as Nigerian inspectors has been accepted by the authorities on both sides. We and others are continuing efforts to see whether agreement can be reached in this matter.

● (2:10 p.m.)

I must point out however that the success of our efforts, and those of others, to get the relief goods moving again regularly and in large quantity into the secessionist area still depends on the parties to the conflict. Unless they co-operate, a great human tragedy may take place. This we will do all we can to avoid.

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal): Mr. Speaker, I think one must resist the temptation to say to the government, "We told you so." This issue has been before parliament since last September and perhaps the words of this folk song are apt. They go something like this:

If I could have the world the way I want it,
I would set these children free.

Some think that some of us here are becoming emotional about this issue. I do not apologize one whit for our emotions. Although the countdown tonight begins for what promises to be the most spectacular achievement so far of science and technology, the landing of man on the moon, it seems that man has not yet found a way to feed his brother's children. Actually, through the medium of joint Churchaid, Canairelief and the International Committee of the Red Cross, man has found a way, but his efforts have been frustrated by narrow concepts of national interest and thwarted by policies of non-intervention