

The Government was shocked when that offer of assurances was turned down out-of-hand by Colonel Ojukwu. It was even more shocked when Canadian officials were informed by Biafran representatives that military assurances were not enough; that military disadvantage was not the main reason for Biafran rejection of daylight flights; that desire for political advantage was the reason.

I have been asked to spell out the Biafran demands in these respects. I have been reluctant to do so because this would be a breach of the normal rules which regulate discussions of that sort. I shall only add that Canada was asked for an assurance of a political character, and of a nature so extreme that no government could accede to it and still make any claim to non-intervention and non-support of the political aims of one side or the other. Those persons who have repeated so often their contention that Canada as an impartial country could play a mediator role would, I am sure, be the first to object to Canada placing itself in such a position.

CANAIRELIEF

The resolution before the House urges the Government to support Canairelief. The Government recognizes the courage of the pilots and crews of the joint church-aid aircraft, and regrets that they are forced to risk their lives every night in order to carry out the task they have assumed. From my place, in this House I have urged Canadians to support the efforts of Canairelief through generous financial contributions....

It is also a matter of record that Canairelief qualifies under United States laws as a carrier of United States foreign aid, for freight payments.... Those freight payments will continue so long as Canairelief carries cargoes of preponderantly U.S. origin. In the result, Canairelief, a private Canadian charitable organization, is employed as a cargo airline, engaged in the carriage of U.S. goods to Biafra, and is receiving payment for that task. I say this not critically but as an explanation of the position in which Canairelief finds itself. I say it also as a refutation of the totally baseless charge...that... "the United States is likely to withdraw its support of Canairelief because the Canadian Government will not support its own citizens". There is absolutely no foundation in fact for that allegation....

The Canadian Government has not granted any support hitherto to Canairelief, for two reasons. The first is that our contributions were made to the

International Red Cross, which at that time was the only agency flying relief to both sides in the conflict. Supporting the Red Cross was consistent with our aim of impartiality in the war. The Red Cross amassed a proud record: 2,030 flights, carrying over 23,000 tons of relief supplies.

Our second reason stems from the argument I made a few moments ago: that in our view all Government efforts should now be focused on daylight flights.

It will be remembered that Canairelief commenced its operations as complementary to the Government-assisted Red Cross flights. It was correctly recognized that there were limits to the Government's freedom of action - limits expressed not just by the Nigerian Government but by more than 30 African governments in the OAU - and that there was a role to be played by a private Canadian organization. The Canadian Government welcomed that initiative.

I have said many times that, if Canadians, private organizations, and, I hope, Members of the Opposition and on this side of the House, want to help Canairelief, it is an act of which we shall certainly approve. I have said that many times.

I think that what the Government, as a Government, cannot do, private citizens can do and have done. For the Government's part, while assisting the Red Cross we were, at the same time, pressing for daylight flights. Now that the Red Cross is no longer flying, it is all the more imperative that some massive relief operation get under way.

The Government readily admits, and has said so before, that it faces a question which demands continual and urgent examination - whether to take steps, such as assisting Canairelief, which are likely to be objected to by the Nigerian Government, or to take steps, such as dropping food by air in daylight, which are again likely to be objected to by the Biafrans. I recognize that this could be interpreted as a decision involving a value judgment about which side in the war is at fault. I hope we shall not be forced into such a judgment but instead reach only a decision as to which is the most effective way of alleviating the suffering.

I suggest that this attitude on the part of the Government and these persistent endeavors cannot in any circumstances be described as indifference, as partisanship or as stubbornness. We are doing what we think is right and what the overwhelming majority of African leaders tell us is right....

The Canadian Weekly Bulletin extends to all its readers
best wishes for the holiday season
and the new year