

Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans

appeal to me if I were found behind the lines and in some way involved in the Biafran fight for survival.

What did Secretary Rogers say in his statement of November 12 in terms of the kind of guarantees that he was going to offer the Biafrans in order that they be fully protected and that their security not be violated? His first point was as follows:

We sought and received the solemn assurances of the federal government of Nigeria that it would ensure that no hostile military action would be taken against the ICRC relief aircraft.

How utterly ridiculous it is for any person to believe that the first guarantee that would be meaningful to a combatant in a conflict is a pledge of good faith by his fight-to-the-death enemy. I find it absolutely incredible that any diplomat or government representative should make that kind of statement with a straight face. Surely it is sheer lunacy to believe that anyone could offer that kind of guarantee and expect it to be accepted as an assurance.

Further, it is a well-known fact that it has become increasingly difficult to know who speaks for the federal military government in Nigeria and who gave this solemn assurance. Was it General Gowan? Was it Chief Awolowa or Chief Enaharo? Was it one of the military commanders in the field about whom we have heard so much? One speaker at a conference that I attended many months ago was very quick to point out, on the information of the U.S. State Department, that General Gowan cannot really effectively control his army. As he said, each of the divisional commanders does his own recruiting, determines his own military strategy and has connections with one or the other power supplying arms. As a case in point, the House may recall that after June 5 when the Red Cross plane was shot down by the Nigerian military authorities and General Gowan was asked to comment, he said he was sorry; it was not his decision but rather a decision taken somewhere out in the field. How could anyone with any intelligence whatsoever accept the guarantees of a government which does not know who is in control, and expect the guarantees to be meaningful?

● (8:40 p.m.)

An hon. Member: What have they to lose?

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): They have their lives to lose. Further, there has been a good deal of misunderstanding as to what was vital

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

in this situation. Many people thought that what was in question were the planes themselves because, of course, many of the planes have suffered harassment. But what has been vital to Biafran security is the guarantee of the security of their airstrip which has served as a lifetime, with everything that means—relief, arms and everything else—for well over a year and a half. The Biafrans are looking for the guaranteeing of their airstrip, not the good faith of the Lagos regime.

We have been told that relief has been used as a cover for arms. Mr. Speaker, I find it incredible that anyone who is reasonably well informed on the facts as they relate to Nigeria-Biafra could continue to say that or imply it—and we have had some question as to whether it was really said. But in spite of the fact that people believe the church operation is used as an arms cover, let us look at the facts. On June 5, before six o'clock, a Red Cross plane was not down. For some days, stretching into two or three weeks, no relief planes operated—certainly not the church relief—out of Sao Tomé; nor was there any Red Cross relief. What was moving during those two or three weeks was arms shipments. To know this is a fact, one has only to speak to the people who were on the ground and saw the arms shipments moving in quite independently of relief, which had stopped altogether during that period of time.

Some people are prone to forget that the shipment of relief items is a recent phenomenon with respect to the war. It began some time around August, 1968, while the war began over a year before that. It is certain a war cannot be fought without arms. It is quite obvious that in the months prior to the air shipment of relief, arms were going in by every means possible, and that means by air as well.

Perhaps a more important question to be raised is why the arms shipments have been as effective, to some extent, as relief. To the best of my knowledge no planes carrying arms have been shot down by the Nigerian air force, which is reasonably sophisticated with its Russian and Czechoslovakian aircraft. There has been little or no harassment of these arms shipments. Also, more than 50 per cent of the arms have in fact been captured as the battlelines move back and forth and the Biafrans, skilled as they are, have been producing as much as they can of their own arms during the course of this conflict. Those who quite neatly slough off the relationship between relief and arms have not looked at the facts as they present themselves.