

*Delay in Use of Aircraft for Biafra*

The general background of this matter is well known to the house, and I will only mention the outstanding matters which have to be considered when considering the urgency of debate. There is reliable evidence that upwards of 6,000 are dying daily in Biafra, mostly children, and that the provision of supplies to relieve this starvation is an urgent matter. Surely that requires no argument.

More than two weeks ago the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) and I visited São Tomé and Biafra. We inquired as to what should be done by way of relief. We discovered that the nightly airlift from Sao Tomé to the airstrip of Uli within the Biafra-occupied region was the most efficient operating means of getting in supplies. This is being operated by Caritas International and the Protestant churches as a non-political activity using aircraft loaned, among others, by the Swedish and West German governments, and chartered by the church organizations.

When we asked the man in charge, who happens to be a Canadian, what was the greatest need to increase the supplies he replied "Hercules planes are urgently needed, as their capacity is in the neighbourhood of 20 tons per trip." This can be compared to roughly 10 tons per trip in respect of the planes now being used. He also indicated the Hercules have adequate cargo doors to enable loading and unloading more quickly. He said "I would give my eye teeth for even one Hercules".

Upon our return we reported this to the Secretary of State for External Affairs in New York on October 8. About this time the minister announced that the government of Nigeria had agreed to the flying in of supplies to Biafran-held territory by a Canadian aircraft in conjunction with the International Red Cross, and stated that the Canadian government had indicated its willingness to make this Hercules plane available.

At a meeting on the same day in New York, October 8, at the United Nations offices of the Nigerian government—the meeting was arranged by the Department of External Affairs—Dr. Arikpo, the distinguished foreign commissioner of Nigeria, stated in the presence of representatives of the Department of External Affairs, the minister's parliamentary secretary, several other members of parliament on the delegation to the United Nations, the hon. member for Egmont and myself, that the Nigerian government was willing to permit the Canadian government to loan aircraft

[Mr. Brewin.]

to the Red Cross for the operation of the emergency airlift into Biafra.

At that time, knowing the urgent need of the churches' operation from Sao Tomé for Hercules, and the efficiency of this operation, I specifically asked Dr. Arikpo whether this consent extended to Hercules aircraft made available for the churches' operation from Sao Tomé. Dr. Arikpo replied with perfect clarity that it did, subject to one proviso only, that the Red Cross would provide someone to inspect the cargoes of the airlift, and would provide insignia for the aircraft so used.

We all know that since that time the Canadian government has sent two Hercules to Africa—perhaps it is three, but I understand two have been flown to Africa—one of which I understand is in Lagos, which it was proposed should be used to transport supplies into the Nigerian-occupied sections of Biafra. Another aircraft is at Tenerife island to be available to go to Fernando Po, and another is in Brazil. I believe this aircraft is still in Brazil, ready to fly over as required.

These plans have proved to be abortive. It has been suggested that the landing strips in the areas of Biafra occupied by Nigerian forces are not suitable for landing in Nigeria, or the Nigerian military authorities are unwilling to give their final consent. The difficulty in respect of the airlift from Fernando Po seems to lie in making contact with the government of Equatorial Guinea. But there is one avenue left, and that is the one from Sao Tomé. That avenue has proved in the past the most successful and promising outlet of all, and in this respect a very strange situation has arisen. On Tuesday last I asked the Secretary of State for External Affairs a question, and he said in reply:

—I have not been able to confirm that such statement—

That is the statement by the foreign minister of Nigeria that he would agree to the flights from Sao Tomé if supervised by the Red Cross.

—is true, but I am still making inquiries.

I asked him again on Wednesday and on that day the Secretary of State for External Affairs repeated that he was trying to find out whether this was so, but that unfortunately the commissioner for foreign affairs for Nigeria was in hospital.

I find it very difficult to understand why the minister needs to delay in finding out