

Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans

how to get it to those who need it. We can use the same flexibility in dealing with relief for Biafra that the Canadian Wheat Board, for instance, is using now in its dealings with the Peoples Republic of China, a government which we do not recognize. Nobody is doing a song and dance about that.

I am informed that a group of church leaders from Winnipeg has written to the Prime Minister asking him to appoint a mission to visit both sides in Nigeria and Biafra. The suggestion of these gentlemen is that Mr. Lester Pearson, who has a world-wide reputation, would be an obvious choice to head such a group. I received a bit of flak for making such a dangerous suggestion during the last debate. Surely, it is an initiative which might be recommended. The only qualification I would have is that the world is asking so much of Mr. Pearson at this stage. Jim Hoagland in last evening's edition of the *Montreal Star*, in an article entitled "Brinkmanship in Nigerian war", spoke of the mutual distrust. This is something which I think a really authentic or legitimate mission, if that is the expression, sent by the government of Canada could help alleviate. Mr. Hoagland said:

The deadlock on talks at a time when they should be moving ahead seems to illustrate two important factors in the war that is Africa's agony:

Neither side feels it can believe the other. The confusion over Biafra's November statements was matched by the incongruous incident of September, in which Nigeria's leader, Maj. Gen. Yakubu Gowon, said Nigeria would accept talks without pre-conditions, only to have his information minister, Anthony Enahoro, say two days later that Nigeria would not accept such talks.

If I might interpolate here, I think this too has been one of the problems in this country; that is, that Gowon, although a major-general and head of a military government is in effect a "captive" of more hawkish people within his cabinet. The article continues:

Many analysts interpreted this as confirmation of a long rumoured split within the Nigerian leadership, with Gowon being in the dove camp that wants talks and Enahoro speaking for the hawks.

The distrustful Biafrans will not accept even this possibility. Ojukwu's top advisers say the incident was carefully orchestrated to give the impression of Gowon wanting peace while doing nothing to obtain it.

Neither side feels weak enough to bargain. The week following Ojukwu's press conference saw major air attacks by the Biafrans, which are likely to bolster the Biafran hopes that they can hold out until the Nigerians are willing to negotiate.

The Nigerians retaliated, according to reliable reports, by resuming bombing of civilian areas in Biafra, and are capable of greatly intensifying such bombing if goaded into it.

[Mr. Fairweather.]

Lagos also does not feel that it should gamble on losing at the peace table what it has won on the battlefield. The Nigerians are confident that, at the least, they can contain the Biafrans in the small enclave, and wait for them to crack.

A visitor to both sides recently can see some of the frightening logic in each position. But the fruits of this logic are likely to become even more bitter for each side, unless meaningful talks are started—now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his time expired a few moments ago. Does the House give unanimous consent so that the hon. member may continue?

Some hon. Members: Continue.

Mr. Fairweather: Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the minute or two the House has graciously given me. I keep saying this each time I receive consent to continue although it shoots down my argument for shorter speeches. However, I think we were very interested to read just yesterday about the initiative taken by Biafra to ask Switzerland and several other neutral countries of Europe to mediate a cease-fire. I think this is a significant development, but it does not change the need for humanitarian aid forthwith.

• (4:00 p.m.)

In the last few minutes I want to remind the House that it was on October 12, 1968 that Dr. Herman Middlekoop of the World Council of Churches sent a telegram to Secretary General U Thant requesting humanitarian aid for Biafra. I find it a matter of very real and terrible frustration that 13 months later the body that was supposed to be the salve of human suffering has been so bound up by outmoded concepts of sovereignty that it has not been able to respond. Even now, as I said, the Red Cross in its meetings has not been able to devise a formula supported by most men that would result in bringing relief supplies to the innocent victims of the internal war. But two and a half years of war and hundreds of thousands of lives cannot be dismissed any longer as being some internal matter. I really do not know what an internal matter is anyway, unless it is the gobbledegook of internal relationships.

If the United Nations will stand by and watch this tragedy unfold, then the only thing that national governments can do is to respond in the ways that are open to them. What is needed is a cease-fire as a prelude to a settlement. What is needed is an end to the supply of arms. What is needed is immediate