

Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans

the part of Canada would not help get peace talks started. Indeed, such an action might have an effect opposite to that intended. Rather, it has been the minister's resolve that Canada should be ready and willing to grasp opportunities to be useful in ameliorating the situation, as in Canada's continuing participation on the observer team, or in helping to bring about peace negotiations. But until peace comes, the humanitarian problem of relieving the suffering of war must be faced. In the absence thus far of any role Canada could play in resolving the complexities of Nigeria's internal struggle, the government has concentrated on helping to mitigate its tragic consequences. Unfortunately, the effort made by the population of Canada cannot be compared favourably to the one of other countries.

Like most other governments, we have made our relief contributions available through the organization which has always served with such distinction and efficiency in relief distribution throughout the world—the Red Cross. Through the Canadian Red Cross Society and the International Committee of the Red Cross, the government has contributed almost \$3 million to relief for victims of the Nigerian conflict and, of this, almost one half in the Biafran area.

I need not dwell here, Mr. Speaker, on the complexities and frustrations which have beset all efforts to get relief supplies through to the suffering. The relief programs which the Red Cross has co-ordinated on both sides of the fighting lines have been persistently pursued in the face of acute physical risks, formidable political complications—

An hon. Member: What has that to do with the motion?

Mr. Goyer: —and monumental administrative difficulties. The most severe problems, naturally, have concerned efforts to deliver desperately needed supplies of food and drugs to suffering civilians in the secessionist enclave, surrounded as it is by Nigerian government forces.

Mr. Broadbent: The speech was written the day before yesterday.

Mr. Goyer: And as the conflict has been prolonged, the tragedy of its impact on those innocent people has assumed ever more desperately urgent proportions in our relief efforts. In his statement to the House on November 25, the Prime Minister outlined the persistent efforts which this government and

[Mr. Goyer.]

other donor governments have made, in co-ordination with and in support of the ICRC, to break the tragic impasse which obstructs the expansion of relief deliveries. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that when we examine this record of relief delivery efforts—efforts massively supported by many governments and organizations which share Canada's concern about the suffering in Nigeria—we cannot escape a conclusion which can only be heart-rendering for all of us who earnestly seek to help relieve that suffering. It is not a conclusion which I derive any satisfaction from stating, but it is the single most relevant fact which we must recognize in the present agonizing dilemma over relief delivery. This is the abundantly tested and sadly demonstrated fact that the Ojukwu regime so far is not disposed to accept more effective relief delivery arrangements unless it thereby achieves political advantage.

● (10:10 p.m.)

If we failed to face up to this distasteful conclusion, we should not only be doing less than justice to all those who have striven to overcome the obstacles to a freer flow of relief; we should also be deluding ourselves as to what are the real prospects for achieving our urgent objective of getting more relief to the suffering. Perhaps, most important, by ignoring the essence of this relief delivery problem we should only further prejudice the chances of yet breaking this impasse over expansion of aid to the hungry and undernourished.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, will the hon. parliamentary secretary permit a question?

Mr. Goyer: Yes, but later, please. This government bears the Ojukwu regime no ill will, but we have much good will and compassion for the people who are suffering in the territory which that regime controls. And when it is clear that Colonel Ojukwu's policies are directly instrumental in denying them the relief we are trying to provide, we must be frank in declaring where our essential concern lies. Tireless efforts have been made over a long period to get a larger flow of relief into the Biafran area. The Prime Minister reminded the House earlier this week that these efforts date from last year. They have been stepped up steadily in recent months and weeks. After the successful airlift operation last spring had to be stopped, the Red