

Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans

Finally, we should put as much pressure as possible on the United Nations in an effort to get that organization to do something. If the United Nations does not act in connection with problems such as this, it will become even less important than it is today. After all, this is an issue of major concern; a couple of million people have died, and the world community ought to be involved. I conclude my remarks by once again asking the government to seriously consider making a grant of some type of Canairelief so that we can play a part in alleviating the suffering in Biafra today. If we fail to do so, how can we really establish a just society or participatory democracy?

Mr. Ian Wahn (St. Paul's): Mr. Speaker, all members of the House, not just the opposition members, want the Nigerian war to end. They also want to get effective aid to the helpless victims of that war—innocent civilians, women and, above all, children. There can be no doubt on that score. The question is, how. What should we be doing?

At times, contemplating this disastrous civil war in Nigeria, so cruel, so destructive, so futile and, basically, so stupid, one wonders whether it is anything more than a fierce power struggle between two militant factions for the control and disposal of the human and natural resources of that great country—a power struggle to control and dispose of its millions of people and its vast resources of oil, minerals and other wealth.

General Gowon and his military group in deadly struggle confront Colonel, now General, Ojukwu and his military group, though only a few short years ago they were sitting round the table together amicably discussing how they would govern all Nigeria. They were then on a first-name basis—it was Jack Emeka, Bob and Harry.

Mr. Peters: Who's Harry?

Mr. Wahn: Is it anything more than the age-old, deadly power game in which ruthless military leaders contend for influence, wealth and power while their people groan and suffer and die? I remember an old Russian saying which expresses this thought very well, "When the nobles battle, the peasants have sore heads." Is this war in Nigeria anything more than one more example of the old power game?

Who is supplying the money to pay for the high powered publicity men and for the costly publicity campaigns which seem to be

[Mr. Nystrom.]

so necessary in our modern society to arouse people to indignation, to activism, to crusades? Who is paying the bills? Where is the money coming from? Is it coming from commercial firms who hope to recoup themselves by obtaining concessions from one side or the other to exploit the rich natural resources of Nigeria? Are members of this House being asked to be dupes and pawns in a power game? I wish I knew for sure. Some opposition members have spoken with great authority. I wish I had their confidence and the knowledge they appear to possess. Do they really know what the answers are? Do they really possess authoritative information which the rest of us do not share?

The debate today has been wide-ranging. Some speeches have gone far beyond the terms of the motion, demanding for example that Canada should sponsor a United Nations' resolution calling for an immediate cease fire. Other speakers have said we should demand that the British, Russian and French governments immediately put an end to arms shipments to the combatants. Mr. Speaker, to respond to suggestions of this type would really be indulging in idle gestures on the part of the Canadian House of Commons. About this time last year the House referred to its Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence the whole question of the Nigerian civil conflict. After extensive hearings, our report was filed on November 6 of that year. In effect, it strongly recommended against any such flamboyant but, in the end, idle gestures. Instead, the standing committee made a number of practical suggestions many of which have been adopted and some of which were referred to in the speech made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) on this subject.

● (9:20 p.m.)

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Would the hon. member indicate what was adopted?

Mr. Wahn: I would be glad to do that. However, I should like to congratulate the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin) for this time avoiding such flamboyant and idle gestures and for raising in his resolution a relatively simple issue, namely, should the Canadian government, as a government, financially assist Canairelief in making night flights to Biafra? That night flights to Biafra is the basic issue is also recognized by the official opposition. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) made that fact clear not