

Delay in Use of Aircraft for Biafra

must have a clear statement from the government that these aircraft will not be brought back with their mission unfulfilled.

Canadians are concerned, as is evident from the many young people who were in the minister's office the other day and who are on parliament hill this very week end. Their concern reflects the concern of all Canadians. We must act at once and I think we ought to debate the matter, not next week or the week after, but at once, this very day.

Mr. Barney Danson (York North): Mr. Speaker, I shall be brief. The anguish and deep concern hon. members on this side of the house feel is no less than the anguish and deep concern felt by hon. members on the other side. Yet I do not think a debate here will answer the matter. The action the government proposes to take, an action I support, will ultimately solve the problem. It is not to be solved by having hon. members score debating points or discussing this matter further.

● (12 noon)

[Translation]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I would not want to unduly prolong this debate. I would just like to quote briefly two authors who insisted upon the sovereignty of this parliament and the importance for every member to express his views on a question as significant as the one which is facing us now, the matter of Biafra.

It is essential that the majority should be neither brutal nor tyrannical, that it should not abuse its power to go ahead without taking into account the respectable minorities which it meets on the way.

This is somewhat the problem opposing Biafra and Nigeria.

The law ought not to be the expression of an unreasoning will: "It is first and foremost—suggests Mr. Esmein, well-known author—a rule of justice and public interest.

That is why I fail to understand the stand taken by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald), who hides behind legislation in order to curtail the sovereignty of this parliament when we know full well that the government makes decisions with regard to Biafra and Nigeria without any consideration for the proceedings of the committee, indeed it had taken some before the said committee had met.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is of vital importance, of national and even international urgency that this sovereign parliament be informed of this matter. Since the government agrees to account to this parliament, the matter must therefore be placed before parliament.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: Again, I thank hon. members for their contributions to the debate. This is obviously a very difficult decision to reach because it involves a matter of great importance and concern, I know, to all hon. members.

The hon. member for Greenwood has made a very strong case in support of his motion, and he was ably supported by other hon. members who have taken part in the procedural debate. The hon. member for Egmont has referred the Chair to a citation which is quite to the point, that is citation 100(3) of Beauchesne. I wonder, however, if the Chair can ignore the fact that as a matter of special importance and immediate urgency the whole of the Nigeria and Biafra situation has been referred by this house to a special committee. As hon. members have indicated, this committee is sitting now, and I assume it has the power to consider the special aspect of the problem which was raised by the hon. member for Greenwood in the course of his contribution.

Normally I would not think it sufficient to refuse such a debate for the simple reason that a forum existed in a committee of the house, but the situation is essentially different in this case because the house by its own special order agreed that this question of Nigeria and Biafra should be considered by a special committee.

In the exercise of its supremacy, the house has decided that this is what should be done, and I find it extremely difficult to disregard a special instruction to the committee that the situation referred to by the hon. member for Greenwood is, generally speaking, to be considered by that committee.

One of the prime purposes of a debate obtained or agreed to under the terms of standing order 26 is to permit hon. members to seek reports or to advocate specific action on the part of the government. This, it seems to me, has been done effectively by hon. members. It is obvious that the debate has ranged far beyond the usual procedural limitations on such a discussion, when contributions should be limited specifically to the question of urgency of debate rather than to the urgency