

Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans

Mr. Broadbent: I will conclude soon, Mr. Speaker. Having listened to the debate which proceeded from the original argument by the hon. member for Greenwood, one would have to conclude that the government is convicted of the charge that is levelled at it in the resolution, and that if the government wants to extricate itself from the guilt of the lack of action that has characterized it in the past, it should begin to do something. Most specifically, it could begin by providing governmental aid for the night flights being conducted by Joint Church Aid and Canairelief. I would look forward, Mr. Speaker, to hearing what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for External Affairs has to say on this question.

• (10:00 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Pierre Goyer (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, while civil war has been raging for over two years in Nigeria, the people of Canada have become aware of the situation and are increasingly concerned with the nature and the importance of this tragedy. They are concerned with the sufferings which this conflict has brought to the civilian population. It is of course this aspect of the situation which has preoccupied the Canadian government first and foremost. We have wondered what was the best way to bring relief to people in distress while the war goes on. And we have always kept in touch with those who try, by different means, to promote a peaceful settlement. We have kept ourselves ready to do our best to help, should an opportunity arise.

I should perhaps say more on this subject, Mr. Speaker, before examining the problem of relief supplies as such, even if the opposition is very much divided over the scope of this motion, since some members dealt with the political aspect of the conflict, while the member for York South (Mr. Lewis)—who is not the least important member in this house—took care to mention that the motion presented by the opposition was strictly humanitarian.

[*English*]

There are compelling limitations on what outside governments can do about furthering the settlement of this civil war. We can urge, as we have persistently, the critical importance of finding a peaceful solution, and the crying urgency of achieving this in order to

shorten the agony of the conflict. We can, as the government has also done, make clear our readiness to help in any way the parties might agree upon in the elaboration and implementation of arrangements for peace. What Canada emphatically cannot do is prescribe for the parties to the conflict the concessions each might make to bring about a settlement. Nor, sadly, is there any formula whereby we could introduce from without the essential conciliatory spirit which alone could make peace talks meaningful and a peace settlement lasting. This essential ingredient can be provided only by the parties themselves.

It should also be borne in mind that in so far as mediatory assistance from outside may be of help, there has been no lack of well-placed and well-intentioned conciliators. From the early stages of the conflict, African countries have made clear their fully understandable concern that it should be recognized as essentially an African problem and that a solution should be sought in that context. This view was endorsed by the Secretary General of the United Nations in a letter to the SSEA, tabled in the House on September 30, 1968, and was again expressed when he had discussions with the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) about Nigeria early this month. The Organization for African Unity in September reaffirmed its position in this respect. The Organization for African Unity, which is duly recognized as a regional organization of the United Nations, has been actively seeking to bring the two sides together for peace negotiations, and those endeavours are continuing.

It is unfortunate that the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) is unable to be here today to give us his views on the motion before the House. So many of his activities, especially in the past few months, have centered around the conflict in Nigeria. Elsewhere I will mention his discussions with Mr. Stewart and Mr. Gromyko about arms shipments to the area. He has also had many opportunities in Ottawa and in New York to have talks about Nigeria with the foreign ministers of other countries, including a number from the African continent. Hon. members will also recall the visits to Ottawa of two distinguished African leaders, President Diiori of Niger and President Nyerere of Tanzania. These meetings confirmed the view of the government that Canada should continue to concentrate on the humanitarian problems and that a dramatic peace initiative on