

External Aid

Biafra. Is our government ready to help and are we willing to match dollar for dollar? It seems to me that these are questions which should not be considered today or even yesterday, but a month ago or two months ago.

It seems to me that our contacts with Biafra have been ludicrous. We know there is a problem with regard to diplomatic recognition, and we know there is a problem with whatever national sovereignty and integrity still exists in federal Nigeria. Surely we could have set up the machinery for an accurate contact with the Biafran authorities through Zambia and Tanzania. What arrangements have been made to work through these contacts? None that I know of. Instead we choose one relief agency which, as is well known, has had considerable difficulty not just beginning in September but in July or before with its relief operation. Yet the Prime Minister told us this afternoon that his confidence in the Red Cross has not been shaken. Does he seriously expect us to believe that kind of statement? If we are serious about it, let us establish some contact so we can have a good back and forth communication with the authorities in Biafra. Let us use the Tanzanians or Zambians or whatever diplomatic contact will work, but let us not waste time trying to confuse the issue or faltering in feeble efforts such as we have attempted to date.

● (6:20 p.m.)

I hope the Prime Minister and the members of his government will simply not rest on their activities to date. I was frankly disappointed that the Prime Minister in his long speech spent almost no time dealing with the committee report itself. We and other opposition groups submitted minority reports. There were useful recommendations in them with regard to conciliation, the relief operation, the transportation of food and supplies, and the observer team. Yet since these reports were published two or three weeks ago there has been no comment, not even today, on what is to be the response of the government to the new series of suggestions.

Mr. Sharp: I will make that comment later.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): We look forward to a comment of that kind, because it is shocking that we should have set aside a whole day to debate this serious matter and should have to wait for some kind of wrap-up, presumably, or dessert before we are told the government's views with regard to the suggestions made. We look for action.

The tragedy of this war so far as Canadians are concerned is that they want to participate, not in solving the political problems of the Biafrans and Nigerians, for that is not our intent, but in looking for self-determination for all the people in Nigeria-Biafra. But that will only happen if these people are alive to participate in it.

Mr. John Roberts (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, there seems to be no basic disagreement on the part of the opposition with the purposes of the government's policy in relation to Nigeria and Biafra. What they have complained about is the fact that they believe this policy does not go far enough. They are disappointed it is not promoting further the humanitarian efforts which they wish to see succeed. In this regard, of course, they share the concern of many Canadians that the suffering end in Biafra. That feeling is brought about by many of the best aspects of Canadian life, our concern for others, our disinterested desire for good and the strength of our moral concern.

But the test of a foreign policy is not simply the high-mindedness of its purposes. We live in a real and hard world where idealism must be tempered by realism. The major test of any foreign policy is its practicability, its usefulness for the objectives that all members of this house share, for it is not simply members of the opposition who are concerned about the suffering, the pain and the death in Biafra.

The criticisms which have been brought against the government's policy are basically of two kinds. There are those who say the government should be more vigorous in pursuing these humanitarian objectives but should not become involved in the politics of the dispute. They say the government should pursue these humanitarian objectives regardless of the various interests or expressions of opinion by the Nigerian authorities. There are others who, recognizing that the humanitarian and political aspects are impossible to disentangle, suggest that Canada must seek for and put forward some kind of political stalemate which would result in the end of the war. They believe that in this way the humanitarian aspects might succeed.

Let me talk briefly about both these aspects in turn. I refer first to the proposal that Canada could and should be more vigorous in pursuing these humanitarian objectives and that we should not be delayed or derailed from so doing by the point of view of the Nigerian authorities. It would be a lovely