

Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans

House asked the Prime Minister of the Canadian government to intervene? We asked him to help save lives. If that is intervention, then it is about time we intervened. When you are in a situation where there are two sides in a conflict, one side of which, Nigeria, has a mass of territory, an approach from the water and most of the air space, while the other side, Biafra, is a little enclave with a blockade by land and a blockade by water so that food cannot be brought in in any other way than by assistance from the world, what protocol should prevent a civilized society such as Canada from offering that assistance?

If the Canadian government informed Lagos that it had decided to give direct assistance to Canairelief, in view of the fact that no other assistance is available to the Biafrans, I do not believe for a moment that General Gowan would dare object to that simple humanitarian act by Canada.

Mr. Diefenbaker: That is what he said in a letter.

Mr. Lewis: It was significant the Prime Minister did not suggest that there was this kind of contact with General Gowan on this point.

The Prime Minister and the government have a diabolical preoccupation with daylight flights. Only daylight flights will satisfy the requirements of this government. First of all, the Prime Minister was simply wrong when he suggested that daylight flights, as agreed to at this time would bring more food to the Biafrans. This is not true. The number of planes would have to be increased by a great many more than are now available to the Red Cross to even approach what is being delivered to Biafra on the night flights by the joint church organizations.

Secondly, the desire of all of us is not limited to daylight flights. I think our government should not only be working for daylight flights but for both daylight and nighttime flights, as well as for the provision of assistance through the Niger River and, in time perhaps, the provision of assistance overland. Even if we obtained agreement to daylight flights, is it sensible to suggest that night flights be ended? Can one possibly deliver enough assistance to the starving millions in Biafra? Is it wrong to continue night flights, even when there are daylight flights? What is this obsession about daylight flights except for insistence on a tight protocol so as to satisfy every desire of Lagos.

I do not know what the Prime Minister is talking about when he speaks about agreements, unless he refers to the copies of agreements which I hold in my hand. One of them was made on August 27, 1969 between the Biafran authorities and the International Red Cross. This agreement laid down certain rules. Let me read the introduction, which is as follows:

With reference to the note dated August 1, 1969 from the International Committee of the Red Cross to General Odumegwu Ojukwu, Head of State of Biafra, the ICRC proposes the following modalities.

I am informed, I am sure accurately, that these modalities were all accepted by General Ojukwu on August 27, 1969. They provide for controllers from neutral states approved by Lagos, controllers from neutral states approved by Biafra, and Red Cross participation in watching these flights and what goes into the planes.

• (5:30 p.m.)

There was no suggestion in that document about any military, political or other demands. I do not know what the Prime Minister is talking about. Maybe he knows. Perhaps there is something in his file that we lesser mortals have not seen, but I do not know what he is talking about. I do know there is a signed agreement between the ICRC and Lagos which was arrived at some time after the agreement with Biafra. As I piece the situation together—and my inquiries suggest that I am piecing them together accurately—the International Red Cross went to Biafra and obtained agreement on the modalities which it proposed. It then went to Lagos to get similar agreement from Nigeria, and Nigeria refused to agree to the ICRC proposals and made its own demands.

Listen to some of the demands.

Cargo and personnel aboard the relief aircraft shall be controlled at the ICRC operational base by

- a representative of the federal military government
- a representative of the ICRC
- a representative of the host government.

That is, the host government of the operational base. There is no room for a representative from Biafra in this arrangement for control; they are to be completely ignored. There is a proviso that the federal military government representative may function alone for certain of the purposes enumerated, to see what cargo goes on a plane and what people board it. The Nigeria representative may act alone as the sole controller in that