

Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans

assistance to Canairelief or to Joint Church Aid? It has been pointed out that this organization flies in every night, as it is doing tonight. We will come to the reason for that in a minute.

We go on to the third reason given by the government for not involving itself. This has been brought out outside the House quite recently and certainly in previous debates by the Prime Minister. I am referring to the matter of sovereignty. It has been suggested that to take medical or food supplies in any way, by any means which do not meet with the approval of the Nigerian authorities, would constitute an infringement of their sovereignty and perhaps implicitly the recognition of the sovereignty of Biafra. This argument has been conclusively shattered by eminent jurists in this country and abroad. I will not repeat the point that was made on this score by the hon. member for Greenwood this afternoon.

There has been no answer from the government side of the House on the third reason that has been suggested. There is no question now, in terms of international law, that to send in food or medical supplies to another country, whether or not they agree, would constitute an act of war or aggression. On this question, incidentally—and this may be a trivial point but a logical one at least—if the government is so concerned about the question of sovereignty, why are they so busy negotiating with the representatives of mainland China? After all, officially they recognize the sovereignty of the Formosa government, but they are certainly being inconsistent in their refusal to meet openly and frankly with Biafran officials when at the same time they do not hesitate to meet the officials of mainland China.

The fourth point that has been made is that the Biafrans are secessionists and rebels, that they have broken away from a federal state, and for certain Canadians federal states are sacrosanct institutions and we must not contribute in any way to their disintegration. It is now beyond questioning by anyone with the most elementary knowledge of the history of Nigeria and Biafra—and I do not claim to be an expert although I have some knowledge of it—that the reason for the break-away of the Biafrans was that they were subjected to very considerable human pressures, to understate the case somewhat. On balance, any civilized person would reach the conclusion that they were very sensible in making their decision. However—and I stress this point as

[Mr. Broadbent.]

well—the right of the Biafrans to secede from the federal state is not being debated here; that is not the issue. We are not being asked to recognize the separate state of Biafra or to decide whether secession in any form is legitimate and, therefore, whether we as a government should support that kind of activity.

I have gone through the four arguments that have been raised by the government at various times and I have suggested that the hon. member for Greenwood presented them at the outset of the debate today. He argued in a rather conclusive fashion that none of the reasons that the government has put forward is tenable when we consider what we are debating today, which is whether the government has provided the kind of aid that it could provide to stop starvation in that unfortunate country. I suggested, further, that not one government member has tried to deal in a direct fashion with the arguments put forward by the hon. member for Greenwood. Therefore, at this point in the debate I can only conclude, being as objective as I can, that this side of the argument has won and that the case has been established.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I understand it is ten o'clock.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if I may either make a request or give the House word about an agreement. About an hour ago the House leaders conferred and we agreed on the number of people who would speak before we adjourn tonight. The understanding was we would hear from the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) and then hear from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Goyer), who would be the final speaker. I think hon. members will find there would be general agreement that the House continue to sit through these two speeches and that the late show questions which were scheduled for tonight be postponed to another night.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, we would be quite agreeable if the House wishes to make that order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is this agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is so ordered.