

Canadian Action on Nigeria-Biafra

for by modest people, inspired by the strangest collection of religious leaders ever gathered together to share a task. If we seek heroes, here they are. We should remember them as we pick up the pieces and wrest a formula for stopping this madness in which men engage.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Dumont (Frontenac): Mr. Speaker, we have heard today the statement of the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) concerning the Nigerian tragedy.

On reading that statement, we realize that the government is disposed even to airdrop supplies, now that it knows the Nigerians have crushed the Biafrans. And yet two years ago, the government was told that it was time to help the Biafrans who were dying by hundreds of thousands through lack of food. If it had been decided then to airdrop supplies, our country would have helped to counter-balance the sale of arms by England and Russia to the Nigerians.

It must be said that the Canadian government behaved somewhat like Pontius Pilate saying it was not responsible for the Biafran victims. For my part, I prefer to have been one of those who demanded the adoption of emergency measures rather than an irresponsible member who would not have asked a majority government to take the necessary action.

If we recall briefly the history of this civil war, we discover that already in 1966 the "Southerners", also called Ibos, were being massacred.

At that time, they were already amputating the hands of Biafran civil servants to prevent them from writing. Trains of refugees from the South were being stopped by Northern Nigerian troops, and men, women and children tortured and butchered.

To show the Ibos what to expect if they came back to the northern part of the territory, some of them were deported after having had their noses, lips, ears and hands cut off. Despite such a massacre, one and a half million refugees were successful in reaching the Eastern province and on May 27, 1968, the Nigerian authorities attempted to divide this Biafran region into three parts. They wanted furthermore to deprive it of a very vital seaport, that of Harcourt, to protect British-owned oil wells. I feel that this was already unacceptable to the Biafrans. It is why they fought stubbornly until death rather than surrender.

[Mr. Fairweather.]

History repeats itself. We have at the present time a government which, to my way of thinking, was not firm enough when firmness was called for, a government without backbone which would rather see a people assassinated than express its disapproval to a country that we know well, a country to which we did immeasurable services in money and in human lives during the last two wars.

The Canadian war effort has saved England from disaster. Therefore it seems to me that this country should have listened attentively to our representations, had they been strong enough, and stopped selling arms to Nigeria to protect certain economic interests controlled by the British government: oil wells, peanuts or cocoa. To sacrifice human lives in order to secure control over the economy of a country is what we call a criminal act which will not go unpunished. I know that some will feel guilty for having watched the genocide of a people without saying a word.

What kind of arms did England sell to Nigeria? Firstly, the 120,000 Nigerian soldiers got ultramodern material, especially many British "Saladin" tanks, 18 bombers and many other British planes, six coast-guard vessels and all the military equipment that a modern army needs. All this has been furnished in order to ensure the protection of the interests of the British Shell company which discovered oil in 1955.

And in the meantime, our government said in the House that we cannot interfere in the domestic problems of a country. In my opinion, all this was nothing but deceit and even, sometimes, hypocrisy—just like the ostrich which would rather bury its head in the sand.

I would like to draw the attention of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) to the prose of a young 18 year old student who made an appeal to Canadians, and I quote:

L'APPEL AUX CANADIENS

Amitié, Fraternité.

De quoi êtes-vous les symboles?

De cet univers plein de cruauté,
Étes-vous bien l'auréole?

Des hommes meurent par milliers

Là-bas, dans ce pays du Biafra,

Personne ne bouge, et, tel des piliers,

Chacun se dit: «Ce n'est pas le Canada»...

Le Gouvernement se meurt d'insolence

Tandis que d'autres expirent de souffrance

Notre premier ministre fait la bise

Les autres subissent la crise.

D'innocentes victimes s'éteignent tous les jours

Et ce doit être un peu de chaque Canadien qui
part aussi