

Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans

that we lack human compassion. I think this is one of the most unfair types of accusation to make.

Great compassion has been a characteristic of Canada ever since confederation. This has been true throughout our history; it has not mattered whether the Tories, the Liberals or anybody else was in power. So why is there this trading in accusations and the suggestion that we lack sympathy and are not concerned about this tragic situation? Frankly, I am proud of Canada's external affairs effort. The MPs in the opposition who were down in New York were proud of the professionals in the Department of External Affairs. They are doing a very good job there. Some of them know of the plight of Biafra.

Only yesterday I had the opportunity of meeting Mr. Moses Ihonde, Nigerian Consul General in New York. It was a good meeting, a meeting which again reflected the desire of Nigerians and Biafrans to see this war ended, and also to see an end to the suffering which has been afflicted on families everywhere in Nigeria. Only yesterday I had a meeting with Dr. Otue, Biafra's representative in New York. I understand he is in Ottawa today. He has some knowledge of Canada and is a very personable gentleman. It was a good meeting. I asked him this question directly, "Are Canadians doing enough to help your people?" I told him I would write down his answer and read it to the House of Commons. He said that the Canadian people are doing a great deal; they are doing magnificently, and Biafrans appreciate the help we are extending to them. He said several organizations have extended humanitarian aid at considerable risk, and they appreciate it.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It was not the government he was talking about.

Mr. Perrault: I told him there has been criticism by some parties about Canadian contributions to alleviate this tragic situation. I asked him what Canada should do to help. What was his answer? He thought for a while and then he said, "I hope you will do what you can do to de-escalate the shipment of arms to both sides. It is a power war now, with too much big power involvement. Let us try to end arms shipments. This may facilitate a peace settlement." That was his answer. There were no shrill exclamations from Biafrans that it is terrible that there is in Canada a government which lacks humanity, because it is not giving to Canairelief or trying to bring relief through the Red Cross. As a

[Mr. Perrault.]

member of this House, I frankly hope that those people who contribute to the military build-up in Nigeria and Biafra will stop the shipment of arms.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired. Is there unanimous consent that the hon. member continue?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Perrault: I appreciate the indulgence of the House, Mr. Speaker. Let me point out again that this is precisely what Canada has done in conversations with France and with Great Britain; we have proposed that arms shipments to Nigeria and Biafra be ended. Even if all official arms shipments were to be halted tomorrow, we know that the problem would not end there. We have discussed the problem and have expressed the view that arms shipments should be halted, but we are under no illusion that a large and thriving free arms market does not exist. We know that arms would still find their way to the combatants. As a result, there is a need for Canada and other nations to continue their efforts to bring about a peace settlement and to find a more immediate and effective way to bring in aid.

I want to report to the House that in the past 24 hours I have talked with the Organization of African Unity Ambassador to the United States, Mr. Thiam. He said Canada's position in this whole affair had been very commendable. He said there is no reason for relief to be denied the starving youngsters of Biafra. With Canada, they back the efforts of the Red Cross to get supplies in during daylight hours. He said this could be done and there is no reason why it should not be done.

Biafrans will read the debate in this House and will know of the program which is supported by the Organization of African Unity. There is no reason why this program cannot be carried out; rather than having destructive criticism and accusations made in the House. We think in this way we could perhaps get aid to these people at the beginning of next week.

Mr. Speaker, I must leave out much of what I had hoped to say, but let me say this: those who went to New York as observers will almost without exception gladly acknowledge the respect with which Canada is held by other nations of the world. Perhaps no other nation has established such an effective record of quiet, continuing effort to mediate