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Biafra sovereignty demand checks hope of peace

By JOHN YOUNG

Hopes of a settlement, or at least a cease-fire, in the Nigerian civil war were given a setback yesterday by a Biafra broadcast which rejected any kind of association with Nigeria, even an economic one. It added that there could be no further peace negotiations unless Biafra was recognized as a sovereign independent nation.

"Give us Biafra or nothing", Dr. Ifeagwu Eke, the Biafran Commissioner for Information, said in the broadcast, monitored in Lagos. "Any political settlement must take into account the separate existence of Biafra and Nigeria as two independent sovereign states."

The hard line taken by Dr. Eke seems to have surprised even some of the Biafran Government's closest advisers, who have recently been talking in terms of a possible confederal solution. It is also certain to have repercussions among the four African countries, Tanzania, Zambia, Ivory Coast, and Gabon, which have recognized Biafra and have been urging a settlement.

It can, of course, be seen as a deliberate counter to the statement by Chief Anthony Enahoro, the principal federal peace negotiator, who said on Wednesday that, so far as he was concerned, there was no hope of reopening peace talks with the "rebels". Even so, it seems to have taken the federal leaders somewhat aback, and General Gowon is reported to have called a Cabinet meeting.

Clearly both sides are determined to take a forthright stand at a time when the British Government, in the persons of Lord Shepherd, Minister of State, and Mr. Maurice Foley, Under Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, are seeking to get talks restarted. It was noted yesterday that this was not the first time that the Biafrans had reacted in this way to a visit by Lord Shepherd to Lagos.

This attitude, coupled with federal suspicions of British intentions, makes it difficult to attach much credence to reports yesterday that Mr. Foley hopes to visit Biafra in the near future. Even if the Biafrans were to agree to accept an envoy from a country they regard as irrevocably hostile, such a visit would be bitterly resented by the Nigerians and would provoke redoubled cries of "neo-colonial interference".

Mr. Foley left Addis Ababa yesterday for Nairobi and, according to the Foreign Office, is due back in London today or tomorrow. While in Nairobi he was expected to discuss the situation with Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, the British Government's special adviser on African affairs.

In Addis Ababa Mr. Foley delivered a message from Mr. Wilson to Emperor Haile Selassie and also had talks with Mr. Diallo Telli, Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity. He declined to make any statement afterwards but was reported to be very satisfied with the meetings. On the question of relief work for the starving population of Biafra, the Biafran Government said in a statement yesterday that it has given no approval to Miss Susan Garth to collect money in aid of Biafran babies.

Dr. Eke asked the public "not to contribute to Miss Garth's supposed fund to help Biafran children", adding that the Biafran Government is not connected with her activities. He denied news reports of mass evacuation of Biafran children. An advertisement for Miss Garth's fund appeared in The Times yesterday. Miss Garth said last night that she was working with the Gabonese Government, who were arranging for the evacuated children to be accommodated and had received the full consent of the Biafrans. She had also talked to a senior Biafran Government official, Dr. Pius Okigbo, who had approved the scheme.

Hugh Noyes, Parliamentary Correspondent, writes:— The Government are to contribute a further £700,000 towards relief operations in Nigeria. Announcing this in the Commons, Mr. Michael Stewart, the Foreign Secretary, said that this was in response to last month's appeal from the International Committee of the Red Cross (I.C.R.C.) and brought Britain's total contributions to almost £1m. Opening a foreign affairs debate, Mr. Stewart said the Government were prepared to use the R.A.F. for either airlift or air drop operations in Nigeria provided that there were assurances from both sides that this could be done in safety. The Government were trying to get in touch with all persons concerned to see if the necessary degree of consent could be obtained. Both Mr. Stewart and Sir Alec Douglas-Home, who opened the debate for the Conservatives, agreed that there could be no unilateral ban on arms from Britain to the federal Government. Sir Alec said not many people realized that the Russians had taken what they called technical control of all Algerian airfields. They would like nothing better than to penetrate to the north and west of Africa and become the sole supplier of arms to federal Nigeria.

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those... audience were Lord Harew... and Sir Hugh Carleton Greene, Director General of the B.B.C. Long after the curtain rose people waited for unsold tickets.

The production is staged by Mr. Michael White, the impresario, Mr. Kenneth Tynan, literary manager of the National Theatre and Mr. Norman Granz, an American jazz promoter.

Mr. Tynan wept at the end of the performance. He said: "This is marvellous. It is astounding. It is the end of two years' work and it proves for me the essential sanity of audiences in England. This could not have happened anywhere else in the world."

Twenty months ago, the National Theatre refused to allow Sir Laurence Olivier to produce the play there because it "grossly maligned" Sir Winston Churchill.

Mr. Colicos said in his dressing room afterwards that he thought the play's welcome answered those critics who said it attacked Sir Winston's memory. "I feel that this, on the other hand, increases his stature as a tragic hero."

A glass of champagne was on the table. Telegrams from friends surrounded the mirror. Before him was a large photograph of Sir Winston. Mr. Colicos said: "I felt no qualms going on stage tonight. I felt very confident."

"After 10 minutes on stage, I was sure. There was no hostility. No feeling of tension from the audience. We gripped them, we absorbed them, and one realized this practically immediately on the stage."

At the theatre it was said that the play would run "indefinitely".

Students stage sit-in at the Commons

BY OUR POLITICAL STAFF

Police reinforcements were called to the House of Commons last night to eject about 40 students of the University of Essex who staged a sit-in to protest against the supply of arms to Nigeria.

They made their demonstration in Committee Room 14 just before a meeting of the 1922 Committee was due to be held there to hear the speech by Mr. Heath, Conservative M.P.s had to wait until the room was cleared.

Most of the students left of their own accord after the police had been called in. Three students had to be carried out, offering no resistance, and three or four were led out by the arm.

The students had had a meeting with Mr. Stan Newens, Labour M.P. for Epping. He reported the situation to the Speaker after the students had rejected his three appeals to them to leave.

Mr. Newens said that at the end of the meeting one student got up and read a prepared statement. This was to the effect that they wanted to apologize for any inconvenience to Mr. Newens personally, but they were determined

that they should sit in the room until they were removed or until there was a free vote in the House of Commons on the question whether or not British arms should continue to be supplied to Nigeria.

Mr. Newens said that a number of the students came to apologize to him for putting him in a difficult predicament, and many of them responded to his appeal to leave.

"The students were completely peaceable, and could not be called irresponsible; nor did they behave in a rowdy way," he said.

"I would pay tribute to the police who removed the students with the minimum possible use of force. They treated them very gently."

A tempt in Bonn to ban NPD

Bonn, Dec. 12.—Herr Ernst Benda, the west German Minister of the Interior, will recommend a ban on the extreme right-wing National Democratic Party (N.P.D.) at next week's Cabinet meeting, Government sources said tonight.

Food and arms for Biafra

An extra £700,000 from Britain to help the Red Cross in Biafra, which Mr Stewart promised yesterday, will be money well spent. But, as Mr Stewart made clear, relief flights can have little impact on the starvation which threatens to come in a few weeks when the present harvest is eaten up. What happens then? Neither Mr Stewart, for the Government, nor Sir Alec Douglas-Home, for the Opposition, had new thoughts to offer. As has become usual in such debates, the Government had dispatched a Minister to Lagos, apparently so that peacefeelers could be seen to be in progress. But, as backbench critics on both sides pointed out, we cannot arm one side and pose as peacemakers at the same time.

The critics concentrated on the supply of arms. But what matters more is the policy behind the arms. In spite of all the evidence that the "quick kill" policy has failed, Britain remains committed to help maintaining the Nigerian federation in its present form by force. This means we are supporting the war, not opposing it. And, judging by Chief Enahoro's latest statement, the federal position remains as intransigent as the Biafran. Britain can only acquire influence when we public support a different solution—not an independent Biafra and not a return to the old federation, but something in between. The Government continues to base its case on inadequate arguments. When Sir Alec asked for information about supply routes for relief shipments, he was assured that the federal side approved of both daylight flights and a land corridor: it was Colonel Ojukwu who refused. This is misleading. Dr Dunwoody, who gave the only first-hand account from Biafra, reported that the obstacles to such routes were not mysterious stubbornness on the part of Colonel Ojukwu, but "military and strategic." In other words, while the war goes on the only substantial food supplies Biafrans are likely to get will be those they can conquer with their arms.