

Nigeria; 1,000 Royal Marines were alleged to have been dispatched to Nigeria for an amphibious attack on Port Harcourt, and the Hibernian footballers touring Africa had been said to be British parachute troops. Such reports would be laughable were it not for the fact that they had been responsible for the burning of British property in Port Harcourt by an Ibo crowd.

The Ibo propaganda machine had insisted that R.A.F. aircraft and British bombs had been used in the war, although there had never been the slightest truth in this. There were even some people in high places who believed this propaganda.

Stumbling block to cease-fire

It had been alleged that Federal troops had massacred the inhabitants—some 2,300 people—of two villages. He did not believe such stories were true. A reputable journalist with experience of Africa had found that the entire population of the area had fled and that there were no signs of atrocities. Surely there would have been some signs if atrocities had been committed on such a scale.

It also had been alleged that the 25 vehicles Britain had sent to Lagos for relief purposes had been consigned to the Federal Army when in fact they had been given to the Red Cross.

These reports were tragic as the Ibos themselves were becoming victims of their own propaganda. The belief was being instilled in them that any concession would lead to genocide, and this was a stumbling block in the attempts to achieve a cease-fire.

He was convinced from his talks with General Gowon that he had all along desired a negotiated settlement because he knew the cost of a continued war.

From information available to him on leaving the Commonwealth Office for the debate, there was no evidence of a major push from the north. He had just received a message from the High Commissioner in Lagos that it was clear a military advance had not taken place or started. It seemed that the undertaking General Gowon gave to the Government that he would continue to negotiate as long as possible before a military solution had to be undertaken still held good.

An indelible stain

LADY ASQUITH of YARNBURY (L.) said that the Government had for two years been selling to the Federal Government arms which were being used against starving people. The Federal Government might soon move in for the kill.

It is (she said) the most inhuman deed I can recall in the history of our country. What is Biafra's crime? She has seceded from a federation of incompatible tribal units. Secession is no crime.

Even at the eleventh hour Britain should stop the sale of arms to Nigeria. The Government had branded the British people with a stain that was indelible and made them an accessory to a crime against humanity. (Cheers.)

The BISHOP of LONDON said there was not the slightest doubt that

and this could be done with far greater certainty and regularity at far less cost by the land corridor with five-ton trucks.

He doubted the value to starving people in any part of the war zone of plugging Biafra incessantly, ad nauseam on B.B.C. television, including "24 Hours", with the strong inference it was all due to the wickedness of the Federal Government. This was giving a wholly fallacious impression of the facts.

There was idealism and forbearance and fortitude on both sides of this political squabble. There was humanity among the federal leaders who held the military initiative, and help from every quarter to wretched people who suffered and starved could best be administered by a strictly neutral posture, by a strictly realistic recognition of the legal and military facts, by the maximum possible cooperation between all agencies and individuals, and by backing the man in charge of the operations.

VISCOUNT HEAD (C.) said that from the cloud of propaganda, especially from Biafra, it would be thought impossible for Biafra to live with the north again. But the north and the east had been in close alliance. Now it was the north and the west. A long-term solution was possible. The Ibos were going for something they could not get when the military strength of the federal government was considered.

Error and obstinacy

LORD GOODMAN said Britain had pursued a disastrously mistaken policy, but there was still time to rectify it. The people who had carried out this policy were not criminals with bloodstained hands but well-meaning people whose mistakes arose from error and obstinacy.

For some reason Britain had adopted the view that the Federal Government was legal and the Biafran Government illegal. But the situation, as he saw it, was that there were two ad hoc governments in existence in Nigeria.

While it was not certain that the aspirations of the Biafrans to independence could be achieved, if Britain had negotiated between the parties on the basis that they were both ad hoc governments, some form of loose federation could have been arrived at which would have been acceptable to both of them.

Even today Britain had a mediating role to play and it was one she should immediately undertake.

LORD BROCKWAY (L.) said that while he did not wish to see the balkanization of Africa, the human facts in Nigeria were that tribal loyalties and tribal traditions were not yet ready for a unified Nigeria.

LORD SHEPHERD said he thought it wrong at this stage to consider some new British or Commonwealth move.

If I believed (he said) that the giving up of arms brought peace one hour nearer, I would personally resign from office if my colleagues took a contrary view and continued to supply arms.

This was a matter of conscience. He believed that the policy of the Government, though distasteful, was the only one that could be pursued.

The motion was agreed to.

The House rose at 4.53 p.m.

providing in the past, and that there has been no change or stepping up in any way of the arms which we have been making available.

But things could change, either if the struggle took on the character of a genuine civil war, or if there were a threat of wanton and brutal slaughter.

Control over commanders

The conflict was still a question of secession rather than civil war. He did not believe that a breakaway by the Ibo areas could be reconciled with the continuance of Nigeria in the sense of a unitary and powerful state capable of providing security, peace and prosperity for its inhabitants.

It would be a tragedy if a break-away led to a break-up of Nigeria.

What was worrying was the intentions of the commanders of the Nigerian forces in Iboland. A statement recently attributed to Colonel Adekunle amounted to a threat of massacre on a major scale. This was quite different from the responsible attitude taken in Lagos, and there were people who suspected that the voice of the colonel was the true voice. Many feared that the commanders were not adequately under the control of their government.

The tasks before us are clear (he said). We must continue to do all we can to get the relief supplies moving and bring all pressure we can to bear on both sides to remove any obstruction. We must try and help to find a solution which can bind a united Nigeria with security and confidence for the Ibo people.

With Britain's experience of settlements of constitutional problems, this country should be able to make a valuable contribution to the solution of the problems in Nigeria. They must be solved if Nigeria was to survive and become a happy country.

Confusing and obscure

MR. GEORGE THOMSON, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs (Dundee, East, Lab.), said the House would have been happy to hear the formula of Emperor Haile Selassie for relief operations had been accepted in principle by the Nigerian and Biafran delegates. A great deal of credit was due to the persistence of the Emperor.

It must be hoped that both sides, aware, as Mr. Maudling had said, of the way the conscience of the world was aroused by the starvation in Nigeria, would now move with urgency to make the Emperor's formula an instrument of relief.

The military situation was both confusing and obscure. It was now more accurate to speak of the Ibo areas than of Biafra.

Although Colonel Ojukwu still talked of Biafra he was in control of not much more than half of Iboland now. Federal forces were in a strong position. They had cut off the Ibos entirely from the sea. Whether the federal government would carry out a full scale invasion of Iboland would depend on the peace negotiations at Addis Ababa, and this was a measure of the importance of them.

Neutrality not an option

He asked the House to recognize that when the civil war began neutrality was not a possible option for any British Government at that time.

This was not a possible attitude (he said) when a Commonwealth country with whom we had long and close ties was faced with internal revolt.

What on earth would other Commonwealth countries have thought if we had reacted by an immediate cessation of supplies? What effect would it have had on the rest of Africa, struggling to create modern nation states in the face of tribal fears and rivalry?

Our policy since the war began has been to continue authorizing the export of carefully controlled quantities of arms. I gladly confirm that there has been no change in that policy.

Britain had not supplied military aircraft or bombs, and Nigeria was obtaining the bulk of its arms supplies from elsewhere. The question therefore was whether unilateral British action in cutting off supplies of defence equipment would make a peace agreement more likely.

We would, I think, lose our capacity to influence the Federal Government (he said) and I believe the record shows that General Gowon and his colleagues have all along been prepared to listen to our advice and meet us when they felt they could. I think we have certainly exercised influence, and we would certainly lose it if we followed the course of unilateral suspension.

Effects of stopping arms

MR. ALLAUN (Salford, East, Lab.)—Did not General Gowon say on television last night that the big push has started? How in the light of that can the Secretary of State say that his policy has influenced the Federal Government? (Labour cheers.)

MR. THOMSON.—I hope Mr. Allaun will listen to my argument as a whole, and judge it at the end. Apart from the undoubted reduction, and indeed abolition, of influence with the federal government that would follow unilateral suspension, I believe that suspending arms would make the Ibos less willing to come to a settlement rather than more willing. Far from persuading the Ibos to negotiate meaningfully our action would be bound to encourage them to fight on.

The Russians had already secured a political foothold in Nigeria by supplying military aircraft and bombs which Britain had firmly refused to supply. If Britain cut off its supplies Russia would be only too willing to fill the gap and gain the influence which this country would lose.

There was also a strong feeling that every effort should be made to bring about some kind of international embargo. The Government had looked into that closely and anxiously over recent months. They had concluded that the only way to get an effective international arms embargo was for the contestants to cooperate in it as part of a cease-fire. Private arms dealers would certainly find ways of circumventing any arms embargo.

It also had its own aircraft to supply from Lagos to Enugu and Calabar. Two DC 4s had been operating an airlift of 36 tons a day, and two more were being added next month.

Medical teams

There have been reports of relief air traffic being suspended for military reasons during the last day or two (he said) I am afraid that these reports are true. The Biafrans have once again acquired a certain aerial bombing capacity. They were the first to introduce aerial bombing into this civil war, and that has been a factor in the hold-up in the last day or two.

Five hundred tons of supplies a month were now being sent by rail and road to Enugu. This recital was sufficient to show that there was now a real momentum gathering in relief to federal-held territories.

On the British part in these operations he said two civil medical teams had left London for Nigeria, organized by the Save the Children Fund, which would be contributing something to their cost although the major part would be borne by the Government.

Twenty-five vehicles which were being purchased on behalf of Oxfam should be reaching Lagos in the next few days. Whatever differences there might be about what the British Government policy should be, there would be universal agreement about the need for us to make a maximum contribution to the international relief effort in Nigeria, and this they are seeking to do.

MR. SANDYS (Streatham, C.) asked whether the idea of an international force to provide security after hostilities had ended was still being considered.

MR. THOMSON said that it was under active consideration. The British Government had expressed willingness to take part in a Commonwealth force if that was desired, and the Organization of African Unity was also considering the matter.

Associated with this point was the need to get Red Cross observers into the fighting line to ensure that the relief operation could get in close, and to have an international team there to deal with any allegations of atrocities. This matter was being discussed with the Federal Government.

Fears still remaining

MR. HUGH FRASER (Stafford and Stones, C.) said that the fears of all sides of the House had been in no way swept aside by Mr. Thomson's speech. For him to talk of the Addis Abbaba talks as though it was a developing situation was wrong.

This is a situation approaching crisis point (he said). I hope that unless the Commonwealth Secretary is able to reassure members further, the House will, if possible, make a protest against the further provision of arms to the Nigerian Government.

I feel profoundly sorry for that noble and distinguished man, Lord Hunt. His impact, and that of the Government, on supplies sent to the people of Biafra has been nil. Fewer supplies are being sent today by

king, C.) said it was the duty of the Government to assure the House that failing more satisfactory assurances from General Gowon about supplies and the intentions of the Federal Government towards the Ibo people this country would have no more to do with the supply of arms to Nigeria.

The situation had deteriorated and there was clear evidence of callousness in relieving starvation. It might make no difference to the ability of the Federal forces to wage war to the end, but if the relationships between Federal Nigeria and Britain were as close as he believed them to be a gesture of the sort he suggested would have an effect on the priority they gave to saving civilian life.

Commissioner criticized

MR. JAMES DAVIDSON (West Aberdeenshire, L.) said Britain's aim and purpose in Nigeria had never been openly and unequivocally declared. Time and again the House had been given the excuse that by continuing to supply the Federal Government with arms this country was somehow retaining influence, but this had never been explained. He for one could not accept it.

Had the Government considered replacing the present British Commissioner in Nigeria? One is informed from unimpeachable sources (he said) that his standing, to put it tactfully, is not high, and I suggest that a highly respected British Commissioner of great political ability and integrity will be needed in the coming months.

He asked whether it were true that the British Government would have to pay massive cancellation charges if arms orders from British firms for the Federal Government were not delivered, and whether Airwork Services Ltd., which might be termed a British Government cover organization, had negotiated a large contract to reequip the Nigerian air force with jet Provosts.

MR. HENIG (Lancaster, Lab.) said that the British Government should have taken up a tougher attitude on sending relief. Britain should send aid on a direct basis.

SIR JOHN EDEN (Bournemouth, West, C.) said the Government had said that if the federal forces advanced beyond a certain point they would be greatly concerned. That point had now been reached; and the supply of arms should stop.

Preventing economic collapse

MR. MACKINTOSH (Berwick and East Lothian, Lab.) said the British Government should tell the Federal Government that they would continue to supply arms if the Nigerians made a better job of distributing food. Offer aid to get the oil wells operating again to earn foreign exchange to avoid an economic collapse of Nigeria.

Britain should use what influence it had to press Federal Nigeria to moderate its Kampala terms. There was no reason why the central eastern state should not be called Biafra, and there should be a more far reaching amnesty.

The federal government had offered reasonable terms and Colonel Ojukwu had rejected them.

An example of the completely misleading claims made by Markpress was a press release that said that "Airwork Services Limited, a semi-official British Government agency, was engaged in an expansion of the Nigerian airforce". Airwork Services Limited was a completely independent commercial organization.

A man in the public gallery shouted, That is not true. I wrote that report.

He was led from the gallery by attendants.

MR. WHITLOCK.—It is not a semi-official British Government agency.

(The man, who was still being led away, cried out "Liar").

MR. WHITLOCK said that Airwork Services had no plans to recruit pilots to serve Nigeria. Their activities were confined to maintenance of trainer and communication aircraft.

In the past the Government had had repeatedly to deny stories that R.A.F. aircraft or pilots had been made available to Nigeria. Now they had this latest story about the British Government being behind an alleged expansion of the Nigerian air force. He wished not only to deny this allegation, but to point once more to the completely misleading nature of the type of hand-outs the Ibo leaders were using in an effort to influence outside opinion.

He could go on at great length giving examples of Ibo propaganda which were not only untrue but grossly defamatory about British policy and intentions. One instance of Biafran claims which painted an illegitimately lurid picture of events was their recent allegation that federal troops massacred 2,300 inhabitants of two villages.

Demands for a vote

MR. THORPE (North Devon, L.)—Does the Minister not think it time to move on to a matter he has not denied: that the Government have continued to supply arms?

[There was an outburst of clapping and cheering in Strangers' Gallery, and Labour and Opposition shouts of "Reply to the debate."]

MR. WHITLOCK, continuing, said that particularly tragic was the way the Ibos seemed to become the victims of their own propaganda: the belief instilled in them that any concession would lead to planned genocide by the federal authorities was a stumbling block in achieving a cease-fire. The Government did not accept that the Federal Government had any such intentions against the Ibos.

[Here another man in the public gallery shouted: "How do you find out their intentions?" and was escorted from the House.]

MR. ALLAUN.—In view of the need to take a vote I move that the question now be put as I am assured that nothing recorded in the chamber yesterday prohibits a decision before 4 o'clock if it is the will of the House. (Cheers.)

THE SPEAKER.—That is right. There is nothing in yesterday's motion which prevents a decision of the House being recorded by vote, provided this debate ends before

Mr. Whitlock spoke another minute or two against noisy interruptions and shouts of "Sit down" until, at 4 p.m., the Speaker adjourned the House without question put.

Hostile demonstrations

As the Speaker left the Chair angry members continued their hostile demonstration, shouting their protests and crying: "Shame, shame" from both sides of the House at the Ministers on the front bench, and gathered in gesticulating groups.

People in the public galleries, many of them black, joined in the demonstration, shouting persistently as attendants tried to hasten their departure. The angry scene lasted for three or four minutes before members and public had finally left the Chamber empty.

The House will meet again on October 14.

Civil rights demand

By Our Political Staff

More than 60 Labour backbenchers yesterday signed the Commons motion tabled by Mr. Gerard Fitt, Republican Labour M.P. for Belfast, West, deploring police action against a civil rights procession at Dungannon, co. Tyrone, on Saturday.

The motion demands that citizens in Northern Ireland should be allowed the same rights of peaceful demonstration as those enjoyed by people in other parts of the United Kingdom.

The M.P.s recall words used by Mr. Wilson on July 11 on the subject of civil rights in Northern Ireland: "The Prime Minister of Northern Ireland and his colleagues know that we cannot continue indefinitely with the present situation. Something must be done."

The motion also asks the Government to use powers under section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, to achieve equality in civil rights for the citizens of Northern Ireland.

MP seeks report on missing boy

Mr. John Ellis, Labour M.P. for Bristol, North-West, has taken up the case of a schoolboy missing in Czechoslovakia. Mr. Ellis has cancelled his engagements and is waiting in London for a report from the Foreign Office on the whereabouts of Martin Dixon, aged 12, of Shirehampton, Bristol.

The boy was in a party from St. Mary Redcliffe and Temple School. The other children returned home on Sunday while Mr. Robert Jones, a teacher with the party, stayed in Prague to look for the boy.