

unforgiving when one tries to second-guess her, as most farmers know too well.

The new seed which is developed in centres like the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, or the International Centre for Maize and Wheat Improvement in Mexico, does not always cope with disease or draught or a lack of pesticides or irrigation water or chemical fertilizer when the money of the peasant or the country runs out for these expensive imports. Often, unfortunately, by the time that happens the traditional diverse seed handed down through the generations is gone, replaced by new varieties. It has either been eaten or spoiled or sold to pay bills. This is often very difficult for the peasant farmer whose very survival depends upon a reliable crop each year.

However, there is another more intangible result of such trends on a global scale. The genetic diversity is diminishing rapidly in the face of the spread of western-style monoculture in plantation agriculture for export crops, and also in the spread of man-created or man-engineered seeds. Meanwhile, pests such as smut or insects are actually encouraged by this same uniformity, leaving crops much more vulnerable to disease.

In Canada we have a network of research stations and scientists to keep abreast of disease. Yes, it could be expanded, but when one compares our research capacity in agriculture with that in most Third World countries one can see the desperate situation in which so many of these countries find themselves. They want to acquire more expertise in plant breeding and agronomy to upgrade their agriculture, and they want to control it themselves. They are confronted with a muddle of new and old agriculture, insufficient seed storage, inadequate cleaning and production systems, and an almost total lack of expertise either to set up or to run such a system. Even if they did have some plant breeding skills, they have no stored and identified genetic material with which to work.

All this is by way of introduction to my question of December 16 to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) in which I asked if Canada was prepared to be a signatory to an undertaking to assure the free exchange of plant genetic material set up by the recent FAO conference. This would act as a guarantee, subject to certain conditions for each signatory, such as those who wish an exemption of patented material for countries with plant patents, that plant genetic resources would be exchanged freely. Third World countries feel that they should have access to material, much of which was collected in the Third World but is stored in rich countries or in gene banks with the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources. The IBPGR is controlled by the rich countries. If rich countries turn churlish, refuse to have anything to do with this FAO undertaking and ignore the international plant gene fund and the commission set up under the council and the FAO network of gene repositories, there will be increasing difficulty in collecting funds for necessary expeditions and increasing polarization over the gene issue between rich and poor countries. The Minister said:

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We do not intend to sign this agreement because some of the main players who have the genetic resources are on the sidelines now. They are not going to be participating in this program. That is why we are not going to sign it.

Have you, Sir, ever heard a better articulation of a dog-in-the-manger attitude or an "I'm all right, Jack" attitude? "We have the resources so the Third World can go to blazes" is what we are telling them. What kind of attitude is this on the part of the president of the World Food Council, which the Minister is? Why has Canada with its reputation for openness and generosity taken such a stubborn position on a moderate and open-ended agreement such as this?

● (1815)

The answer can be found, I believe, in the issue of plant patents or *Plant Breeders Rights*. The rich countries, and in particular the U.S., are unwilling to see any relinquishing of control over seeds. In the words of Shell Oil, the largest seed merchant in the world, "seeds form the very basis on which every other technology is based". The modern seed is designed with pesticides and fertilizers and mass production in mind. It is the basis for the expansion of agri-business and the market for the products of companies such as Shell in the Third World. Why would any company or country now doing a lucrative annual business in seed in a Third World country want to see that country learn to produce these seeds themselves?

It is beneath us in Canada to get dragged into this conflict. Moreover, it is reckless and dangerous. As farmers need access to the research results of government breeders to stay ahead of disease and remain competitive in world markets, so too these breeders need access to the Third World to collect new material. As this material is disappearing, it is doubly important that Canada collect more material and also be a part of a world effort to collect, describe and place in accessible high quality storage as much genetic material as possible, as soon as possible. This should be and must be done through international co-operation.

While the U.S.S.R. cannot sign the undertaking because it is not a member of FAO this can be overcome if all countries who are members of FAO would sit down in a spirit of co-operation and compromise and hammer out something workable. One can be sure the Third World will be addressing this issue. Then why not Canada?

The Minister condemns the FAO initiative because not everyone can be or chooses to be involved, yet the Minister knows full well that the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources is in exactly the same situation. The board may have the support of rich, western countries which are storing a lot of material and can access it, but they do not have the membership of the Third World countries where the material has been and will continue to be found. I have nothing against the board; on the contrary the evidence shows it has done much good work. But the board is not a substitute for the broader efforts of FAO. It may and will complement the FAO work but it will not replace it, nor can it, given its current structure.