Volume 12 No. 14
April 4, 1984

King and Queen of Spain make first official visit to Canada

Canapress

Honouring a six-year-old invitation from the Canadian government, King Juan Carlos of Spain and his wife, Queen Sophia, made their country's first official state visit to Canada, March 12 to 18. The royal couple arrived in Ottawa March 12 where they met with Governor General Edward Schreyer and political leaders including Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and the leaders of the two opposition parties. They then travelled to Montreal, Toronto, Victoria and Vancouver, meeting with provincial leaders and members of the Spanish community. In Ottawa, Governor General Schreyer (second from left) *hosted a state dinner for the royal couple, shown with Prime Minister Trudeau* (right).

Canada to host ILO conference

Labour Minister André Ouellet has announced that Canada will host the twelfth regional conference of American states members of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The conference will be held in Ottawa in 1985 and will focus on rural development including the problems of indigenous populations, as well as labour relations.

These regional conferences, which are held very four or five years, attract representatives from the 25 American member states of the ILO, as well as observers from member states outside the region and international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Canada last hosted an ILO regional conference in 1966.

The purpose of the conference is to review aspects of ILO activities in the four ILO regions of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas. The American region includes the United States, Canada and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Science centre aids Third World

Biotechnology applications in developing countries will be promoted by a Microbiological Resource Centre being established by two Ontario universities.

The centre, set up by the universities of Guelph and Waterloo, is sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It is one of 12 such establishments in the world, and the only one in Canada.

The centre will draw on Guelph's expertise in agriculture and Waterloo's experience with computers, biological science, and engineering to conduct research on fermentation and biomass conversion.

Biomass, a term which describes anything that is alive or that was once a living material, can be converted by fermentation and other methods to food, fuel and chemicals. Acceptance of biomass technology has been hampered by its high cost and the lengthy conversion processes, which can take as much as several weeks.

Biomass materials include a large number of waste byproducts of agriculture, forestry and the paper-making and food-processing industries; but much of the centre's research will deal with cellulose, according to Murray Moo-Young, director of Waterloo's Institute for Biotechnology Research.

The two universities are also developing a computer-based conferencing system to allow the UNESCO centres to exchange information. A prototype system, based on an electronic conferencing software package developed at the University of Waterloo, is being tested in conjunction with the International Development Research Centre, headquartered in Ottawa, and the United Nations University in Tokyo.

In addition, the centre will provide training in biomass conversion technology to scientists from Third World countries. UNESCO is co-sponsoring a biomass symposium this summer at the University of Waterloo.

Test laboratory for rare diseases

Canada's first laboratory for testing rare contagious diseases is being built by the Ontario government.

The laboratory, which should be ready by spring 1985, will mean that blood and tissue samples from Canadian residents or visitors suspected of suffering from exotic, possibly fatal diseases will no longer have to be sent to the United States for analysis.

There are only two laboratories in North America able to safely study dangerous viruses. They are the Centres for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, and a US military centre at nearby Fort Detrick. The Ontario laboratory, to be located in Toronto, will cost $2.8 million to build.

Dr. Bernadette McLaughlin, head of the health ministry's laboratory services branch, said the new centre means testing can be done more quickly and less expensively than if samples were sent to Georgia.

The laboratory will test for rare diseases such as Lassa fever, an often fatal influenza-like virus originating in Africa, encephalitis and Q-fever, a rare influenza that strikes half a dozen Ontarians annually.

All tests will be done in air tight, stainless steel cabinets, and all material will be sterilized before removal from the cabinets and from the laboratory.