

*Private Members' Business*

It has been shown that tropical rain forests in their natural state are more valuable to this world than their destruction for the timber products which we purchase in the developed world.

One of the environmental non-government organizations in Canada which has been very sensitive to global environmental issues is Probe International. It was just a few weeks ago that I received from them one of their Probe Alert announcements that talked about Cameroon rain forests which are currently under siege. What is happening in the Cameroon at the present moment is that the World Bank and the African Development Bank are busy preparing forestry loans for the African Republic of Cameroon. The loans will open the flood gates, as the Alert bulletin says, "to commercial exploitation of the country's remaining primary rain forests." These ancient forests are among the richest in the world in terms of diversity of plant and animal species and are the home of pygmy peoples, hunters and gatherers, whose survival and cultural identity are intertwined with their environment.

Cameroon, like much of Africa, has lost vast areas of savannah woodland to export crops such as coffee and cocoa. Another reason why rain forests have been so enormously destroyed world-wide is to cut down the timber, first for sale overseas, and also to produce export crops to bring income to poor countries.

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Logging in Cameroon, which got under way on a commercial scale about 15 years ago, has already devoured nearly half the country's tropical forests, notably in the coastal and central regions.

Today, no primary rain forest remains in the central region. If the World Bank and the African Development Bank get their way, Cameroon's rain forests will disappear like its neighbours'.

The Cameroon government, with enormous international debt problems, is desperate for foreign exchange earnings. It is looking to its untapped southern rain forests for solutions. The label is used: "sustainable management"; but it has been shown that when logging is done on a commercial scale, the methods are not sustainable.

Logging leads to mass deforestation. It does not sustain the rain forest's ecosystem as the experts promised. Furthermore, logging roads inevitably open up the

rain forest to colonization, agricultural settlement and cultivation which the land cannot support.

The very construction of roads to haul out logs from these areas creates enormous destruction to the ecosystems in the area.

Canada is a signee and a contributor to the UN International Tropical Timber Organization. This organization was set up in order to try to preserve tropical rain forests. But to date, few measures have been taken that have been effective. The organization is generally considered by environmental groups to be toothless. Canada has played, and continues to play a role in the destruction of tropical rain forests through our importation of tropical hardwoods.

Canada must look at all of its policies internationally to see how we can improve our record. A Brazilian by the name of Jose Lutzenberger, a leading environmentalist and the winner of the 1988 Right Livelihood Award, speaking in Toronto of November of 1987 said: "Rain forest destruction has been called the biggest biological holocaust in the history of life. The resulting loss of biodiversity will affect the entire ecological system on which humanity depends, leading to consequences depressingly similar to those expected from a nuclear winter."

We have many benefits that derive from tropical rain forests which are not well appreciated. Tropical rain forests provide important environmental services such as the prevention of soil erosion and the protecting of watersheds.

Rain forest plants provide valuable medicinal extracts in the fight against leukaemia, cancer and other diseases, not to mention the traditional yield of spices, canon, dyes, pesticides, fibres, nuts, fruit, vegetable oil, waxes, gums and rubber worth billions of dollars.

We have yet to really research and explore all of the benefits that rain forests provide to us as Canadians, and to everybody as citizens of the world. However, we are beginning to understand somewhat, but not completely, the destructive impact of cutting down tropical rain forests.

The clearing and burning of huge areas of Amazonian rain forest has contributed to the greenhouse effect and possibly to the thinning of ozone layers. Rain forest destruction once again threatens the livelihood and possibly the very survival of 200 million people world wide. In Brazil alone, the native population living in the Amazonian rain forest has fallen from 1 million in 1900