World Food Conference: Amid Politicking, Some Progress

Rome. The United Nations World Food Conference ended in Rome on 16 November amid declarations of guarded optimism. A fortnight of international politicking has not guaranteed the world security from famine but it may have helped to improve the odds.

Such meetings, of course, often end on a cheerful note. Two weeks' hard work and accumulated exhaustion are enough to blind most delegates to the faults of their handiwork and make small advances stand out like victory beacons. But the Rome conference did achieve agreement on future food aid levels, an Agricultural Development Fund, an international food monitoring system, and a World Food Council, and not all these achievements are going to prove illusory.

The conference did leave many problems unsolved. Most damagingly, it failed to come up with the food aid which the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations believes will be urgently needed to stave off famine in developing countries before next spring. Further meetings, the next on 29 November, will be needed before the major grain exporters and importers can arrive at a scheme of allocation to help the neediest.

Even before Henry Kissinger's stopover in Rome to get the conference going, it was likely that the United States would find itself at the center of most of the arguments. No other country or group of countries has it in its power to do so much to help out with the world's provisions. In the event, the U.S. delegation did little to dispel the notion that the United States intends in the future to use its dominance in food production as a diplomatic weapon of some weight.

There was general agreement in Rome that the world faces a period of increased food deficit among the developing countries, caused by a faltering Green Revolution, a succession of bad harvests, and continuing population growth. And Kissinger's broad outline of what needs to be done also commanded wide agreement—increased production in both the developed and developing world, better food distribution and financing, better food quality, and a system for ensuring against food emergencies.

The conference thus managed to agree about ends, which already took it a step further than the unsuccessful Population Conference in August. Predictably enough, there was less unanimity on means.

One argument centered over the institutional arrangements needed to solve the food problem. The conference secretariat favored the idea of a wholly new international agency, but this idea found remarkably little support and it had essentially disappeared by the end of the first week. The developed nations at Rome were reluctant to see the formation of a new U.N. bureaucracy, which would probably have been no more effective than the FAO. And most developing countries were surprisingly lukewarm about the idea, too, so it died a quiet and unlamented death.

What finally emerged was an organization on a much more modest scale and nearer to the liking of the United States and other developed nations. This is the so-called World Food Council, to be based in Rome and closely linked with FAO. The council will be a kind of senior ministerial committee, with 25 to 30 members and its own small secretariat, and its function will be to act as an "umbrella" organization responsible for coordinating world food policies and making sure that the recommendations of the Rome conference are followed. The formation of this council represented an almost complete victory for the developed countries: it is small, high-level, and nonbureaucratic, and it is based in Rome well away from the political maneuverings of the General Assembly. Thus there seem to be good hopes that it can manage to avoid conflict with FAO, which will continue to have an essential role of its own.

Much less success was achieved in devising new financial arrangements for funding agricultural development in the developing world. Here American policy was far less clear, and many delegates remained confused about it right to the end of the conference.

The central purpose of the U.S. delegation seemed to be to extract a promise from the oil-producing countries to use some of their oil revenues to finance agricultural improvement in the Third World. These countries, said Kissinger, have "a special responsibility . . . many of them have income far in excess of that needed to balance their international payments or to finance their economic development."

The pressure was therefore on the members of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) right from the beginning of the conference. Put your money on the table, the U.S. position seemed to suggest, and we will respond by doing something about immediate problems of world starvation by releasing more food aid. When, however, the OPEC countries did respond by establishing an Agricultural Development Fund, the American reply was less than ecstatic and was not accompanied by a promise of additional food aid in the immediate future.

By the time the conference ended, there were even signs that the United States was discontinuing the importance of the OPEC fund and pushing for Kissinger's original proposal, that new agricultural financing should be the responsibility of a Coordinating Group for Food Production and Investment organized by the World Bank, the FAO, and the U.N. Development Program. Only two developed nations, the Netherlands and Australia, had signed up for the Arab Fund, and one, West Germany, had actually declared itself against the fund. It begins to appear that what the United States really wanted was not just OPEC money, but OPEC money in a financial institution of U.S. devising—which was asking rather too much.

The result could be the worst of all worlds, a split in agricultural development funds between two organizations, one supported by the rich countries and the other by the newly rich. It is not difficult to see why it should suit the American purpose to operate through a respectable, American-dominated institution like the World Bank rather than through a new fund of uncertain size, structure, and political inclination, but splitting the money two ways is unlikely to suit anybody's purposes.

The consistency of the U.S. position in Rome was hampered by a running feud which developed between the Administration's representatives on the

delegation and the congressional advisers. Fresh from the midterm elections, Democratic Senators Hubert H. Humphrey, George McGovern, and Dick Clark arrived in Rome and began pressing the delegation to increase the commitment of U.S. food aid by 1 million tons, for immediate use in famine areas. In this they were finally unsuccessful, but not before making plenty of sound political capital and provoking Earl Butz, head of the delegation, to a spirited defense of the Administration's position.

The three Democratic senators, said Butz, had put the American nation "in a stance of being reluctant to go along with food aid" which was not true at all. The Administration was reluctant to offer more than it already had because of budget restraints, the likely impact on grain prices at home, and the simple availability of grain.

All this was good knockabout stuff for home consumption, but had little to do with the conference, which had not even been called to discuss the immediate problems. These have been handed over to a group of major exporters and importers of grain who were involved in a series of meetings with Addeke Boerma of FAO at Rome. Little really hard information emerged from these meetings, but the general impression was that the "gap" between supplies and expected demand for

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Inventor's Suit Could Break New Ground

A David and Goliath type struggle, now under way in California in the form of a lawsuit between one of the nation's corporate giants and an immigrant inventor, could set a precedent in strengthening the rights of inventors to privileges and royalties resulting from their patents.

The suit has been brought by MCA Discovision, Inc., a division of the giant entertainment business, MCA, Inc., against a former employee, Manfred H. Jarsen, who came to the United States from East Germany, was educated as a chemist, and subsequently went to work for the company. Lawyers for Jarsen say that their defense of him, if successful, could prove an important test of the so-called preinvention assignment agreement which Jarsen signed with MCA Discovision when he was hired. By extension, the suit could test similar arrangements in many other companies, since nearly all inventors sign such agreements when they are employed.

The details of the suit are sealed by a Los Angeles Superior Court judge from public disclosure, but it is known that the dispute revolves around several pending patent applications in Jarsen's name which relate to a device known as a video disk system. This is a machine which enables home TV sets to play full-length movies using inserted disks.

Video disk systems are believed by many in the industry to be the next major breakthrough in the trade, and one which will boost the business in the 1970's the way color TV did in the 1960's.

A heated corporate race is now being run between MCA, Inc., Zenith, RCA Corp., and others to see who will be first with a system for the mass market. But last fall, MCA appeared to be well in the lead because it signed a long-term agreement with the giant Dutch conglomerate, N. V. Philips, to build and market video disk systems. At that time, it announced that it could market its laser-based system as early as 1976 for as little as $500. The company also plans to market a line of individual disks priced from $2 to $10, which will be based on the extensive film library of MCA's movie subsidiaries such as Universal City Studios, Inc.

Hence, Jarsen's patents could be part of a major industry development. And the outcome of the suit could determine who, in the long run, makes a great deal of money. If Jarsen is successful, according to his lawyers, he will retain the privilege of negotiating a licensing agreement with MCA or any other company and in return be entitled to a share of the royalties. MCA is contending, however, that the patent rights fall under the terms of his preinvention assignment agreement with the company.

Alan C. Nixon, a former president of the American Chemical Society who has been involved in the cause of industrially employed scientists, says that most preinvention assignment agreements give everything resulting from a patent to the company and, in return, the inventor gets $1 in cash. Only rarely, he says, is the inventor offered pay increases or stock options. "The mechanism to achieve a better break for inventors would be a different type of assignment agreement," Nixon says. If Jarsen is successful in retaining his rights, other inventors might, so to speak, follow suit.—D.S.

GAO Calls Security Lax at Nuclear Plants

Existing security systems at nuclear power plants are insufficient to prevent a "takeover for sabotage" by as few as two or three armed attackers, the General Accounting Office has told the Atomic Energy Commission. The GAO, an investigative unit of Congress, said that storage areas for spent nuclear fuel seemed particularly vulnerable as a potential target for saboteurs. The spent fuel, made highly radioactive by waste fission products, is usually stored in pools of water inside concrete buildings but outside the huge containment dome that covers a nuclear plant's reactor.

"A takeover, particularly of a nuclear power plant near a large metropolitan area," the GAO said, "could threaten public health and safety if radioactive materials were released to the environment as a result of sabotage."

The agency acknowledges that experts disagree on the vulnerability of nuclear plants to sabotage, and it notes that the AEC intends to complete studies defining this vulnerability by next June, at which time some 60 nuclear power plants will be licensed to operate in the United States. Meanwhile, the GAO is strongly urging the AEC to improve plant security.

The GAO's report consists of a five-page letter to AEC chairman Dixy Lee Ray dated 16 October, but not made public until 20 November. The AEC said it was studying these questions.

GAO officials said they based their conclusions on visits to nine nuclear plants at five locations (which were

emergency food aid could be met.

Looking further ahead, good agreement was reached on forward planning of food aid for the next 3 years. All the major producers, including the United States, the European Economic Community, Australia, and Canada, accepted a target of 10 million tons of food aid for each of the next 3 years, thereby providing the worst hit among the developing countries with at least a safety net. Only Britain's voice was raised against the idea of planning food aid in advance. One of the U.K. delegation suggested that it might reduce the incentive for poor countries to become self-sufficient, but this was not an argument which found any support.

The developed countries go their way very easily on the question of reserve stocks. Everybody accepted that they had now fallen to a dangerously low level and should be built up again as quickly as possible. A potential source of conflict was exactly what form the stocks should take, but the United States and Canada quickly made it clear that they were only prepared to discuss nationally held stocks with some element of international coordination. The idea of a large internationally held stockpile sent shivers through the major grain producers, particularly Canada, who remember how easily a large stockpile can depress

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not disclosed) between February and May of this year. At several plants, investigators found unlighted security fences, unlocked outside doors, unarmed watchmen, and a lack of intrusion alarms.

These specific weaknesses are being corrected, the GAO said. But they appeared to reflect a more general laxity in security traceable to vagueness in security policies laid down by the AEC. Within the past year the AEC has taken steps to require more sophisticated security systems at all nuclear facilities. But the new regulations currently have failed to make clear who is responsible for defending nuclear plants.

For example, the GAO noted, AEC regulations require utilities to handle a variety of threats up to and including those posed by "a small group of discordant individuals." The regulations also say that any "deliberate assault by trained paramilitary groups" will be the government's responsibility. But the GAO found that utilities have not been told how to distinguish between "discordant individuals" and trained terrorists.

For its own part, the AEC has made no specific arrangements with the Defense Department or the Federal Bureau of Investigation to respond to paramilitary attacks on nuclear plants. Nor has the commission required utilities to make similar arrangements with local police.

The worldwide rise of political terrorism has aroused concern over nuclear plant security, and so has an imminent shortage of nuclear fuel reprocessing capacity in the United States (*Science*, 30 August). Problems in building new reprocessing plants mean that utilities will have to store more spent fuel, and longer, than anticipated. "This situation," the GAO said in its letter to the AEC, "increases the potential consequences of successful sabotage of the used-fuel storage facilities at [nuclear] plants."—R.G.

RANN Remiss in Reporting out Results

The National Science Foundation's program of Research Applied to National Needs (RANN), which has been widely publicized as a generator of scientific solutions to urgent national problems, is grinding out reports which "gather dust on the back shelf of an NSF bureaucrat," according to Senator William Proxmire (D–Wis.).

"NSF has done distressingly little to make certain that the findings [of RANN research] are widely disseminated," Proxmire commented in releasing a letter he wrote to NSF director H. Guyford Stever on 1 November. "Even if the results of these unevaluated projects could be of great value, very few potential users would know about them."

Proxmire cited NSF's failure to circulate RANN research results as one of a series of "glaring deficiencies" in NSF's internal management which he blasted in his letter to Stever. Another deficiency came to light, he said, when his staff checked to see whether other federal agencies were aware of proposed or ongoing RANN projects or had been allowed a chance to check whether the proposed work overlapped with research under way in other agencies. NSF has advertised the RANN research projects as being very carefully selected so that NSF can make unique contributions. But Proxmire's staff contends that the panels charged with coordinating RANN's work with that of other agencies are virtually defunct. Panel members from other agencies said that one panel had not met in a year and a half; others said they had not heard of work that RANN was doing in the fields of expertise of their agencies; a transportation official said he had heard of a transportation study RANN was carrying out, but had had no chance to make an input into the original proposal before it was funded.

A third management defect, according to Proxmire, and one not limited to RANN, is the failure of NSF's auditors over the last 5 years to make "program evaluations" instead of more limited audits of dollars-and-cents transactions. Proxmire noted that the General Accounting Office asked NSF auditors to do this in 1969, and again in 1973; but only one such program audit has been made. He asked Stever for a review of what NSF plans to do about these problems by the first of the year.

Proxmire made his letter to Stever public the same week he sent it to the NSF; in return NSF has released its reply to him. Stever said that NSF had been busy with the "unusual demands" of coordinating federal solar and geothermal energy research, and this had caused the declining use of RANN-agency coordinating panels. He also replied that NSF makes program evaluations through other offices and committees outside of the financial audit group. Stever promised a longer reply by January, but this will probably not thwart the senator's criticisms. Proxmire has already said that he will cross-examine NSF witnesses closely on these matters when his committee—on HUD, Space, Science, and Veterans—of the Senate Appropriations Committee holds hearings next spring.—D.S.

farm prices. In the event, there was little argument about the principle, and Butz's principle of "national stocks, internationally coordinated" went through with barely a challenge.

So strongly opposed were the grain producers to a stockpile that they even turned down the idea of a small emergency stockpile of 500,000 tons, stored near potential disaster areas to provide rapid relief. Canada said that such a stock would only add to costs for storage and turnover, and would not speed relief work. And the United States said that there was no reason to believe that the earmarking or prepositioning of stocks would help. So, although the conference did ask governments to earmark stocks for emergency use wherever possible, it is unlikely that this recommendation will have very much effect.

Research played a fairly insignificant part in the conference deliberations, despite the emphasis on it by both Kissinger and Butz. "We have not adjourned research, we have not adjourned innovation," declared Butz, but there were times when it did seem as if the conference had adjourned discussion of them.

It did, however, pass a lengthy resolution on the subject of food and agricultural research, which expressed concern at the inadequate amount of basic and applied research suited to the needs of developing countries; called for greater efforts, particularly in the exchange of technology, development of cooperative programs, study of weather and climate, improvement of fisheries and marine culture, and better extension and training; and (as such resolutions customarily do) called for increasing research spending in developing countries severalfold by 1985.

Another resolution, proposed by France, Malaysia, Senegal, and the United Kingdom calls for better soil protection and conservation techniques to be used in areas where erosion, salinity, and alkalinity are problems, and suggests the establishment of a World Soil Charter, to be used as a basis for making the most rational use of the world's land resources.

On fertilizers, the conference expressed anxiety at the international supply position and urged developed countries to cut back on nonessential uses—gardens, parks, and golf courses—in the interest of making more available for food production. The resolution also makes mention of the need to improve the use of organic fertilizers, still largely neglected despite the estimate given in a preconference report that animal and human wastes in developing countries represent seven times the needed fertilizer inputs.

And, in a resolution which broke new ground, the conference called for a global information and early-warning system to be set up to provide information in advance of famines. The system would be run by FAO on the basis of information supplied by member governments and kept confidential. In the past, governments have resisted schemes of this sort because information on stock levels can have damaging commercial consequences, pushing up prices when stocks are already low. But this time most governments appear willing to let FAO have a go; even the Soviet Union, which has never joined FAO, expressed cautious support of the scheme.

On trade matters, the conference made little progress. The Group of 77, representing the Third World, made militant noises about remodeling the world's trade system to favor the poor, but on this occasion the rich were hardly disposed to discuss it. This was not the forum, most developed countries argued, for lengthy discussions of trade issues which were due to be discussed at GATT and UNCTAD meetings.* But a resolution did emerge which gave the developing countries some comfort: the developed countries agreed to reduce the barriers to world trade, to look for ways of extending tariff preferences to food products, and to try to solve world commodity problems.

In a year which has seen an unusual amount of international discussion, starting with the General Assembly session on the New Economic Order in the spring and going on to Bucharest and Rome, the results of the Food Conference were a good deal solider than many pessimists expected. The mood of angry conflict between rich and poor showed a few signs of abating. It may not have transformed the prospects of the hungry peasant in Bangladesh or the Sahel—few conferences ever do that—but it has left grounds for hope.—NIGEL HAWKES

Mr. Hawkes is the science correspondent of the London Observer.

* General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

APPOINTMENTS

Kenneth C. W. Kammeyer, professor of sociology, University of Kansas, to chairman, sociology department, University of Maryland. . . . **Ruth F. Weiner**, chairman, physical sciences department, Florida International University, to dean, Huxley College of Environmental Studies, Western Washington State College. . . . **Joachim Bruhn**, dean for special projects, Richmond College, City University of New York, to dean, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, University of Michigan, Dearborn. . . . **Barbara Uehling**, academic dean, Roger Williams College, to dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Illinois State University. . . . **Beaumont Davison**, vice president for higher education, Ohio University, to dean, School of Engineering, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. . . . **James L. Gant**, director of teacher education systems, Florida State Board of Regents, to dean, College of Education, Florida State University. . . . **Dale W. Lick**, vice president for academic affairs, Russell Sage College, to dean, School of Sciences, Old Dominion University. . . . **I. Robert Ehrlich**, manager, transportation research group, Stevens Institute of Technology, to dean for research at the institute. . . . **Maurice Glicksman**, professor of engineering, Brown University, to dean, Graduate School at the university. . . . **Joseph E. Rowe**, chairman, electrical and computer engineering department, University of Michigan, to dean of engineering, Case Western Reserve University. . . . **Edward L. Dejnozka**, chairman of curriculum and instruction, Northern Arizona University, to dean, College of Education, University of Nebraska, Omaha. . . . **William B. Knowles, Jr.**, professor of psychology, California State University, Northridge, to dean, School of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the university. . . . **Julius S. Greenstein**, professor of biology, State University of New York College, Fredonia, to dean, School of Mathematics and Natural Science at the college. . . . **James W. Strobel**, chairman, ornamental horticulture department, University of Florida, to chairman, horticultural science department, North Carolina State University. . . . **Lazar J. Greenfield**, professor of surgery, University of Oklahoma, to chairman, surgery department, Medical College of Virginia.

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