

## ADDRESS

— by —

Hon. Lionel M. Robinson,

*Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries Trinidad and Tobago*

Ladies and Gentlemen :

I believe that it is generally accepted now that the development of agriculture is crucial to the economic success of the developing countries, and that as Professor Myrdal the renowned Swedish economist has said "it is a dangerous illusion to believe that there can be any significant economic development in these countries without radically raising the productivity of agricultural labour". The inference being that failure in agriculture will only result in total and complete failure with all that that signifies for the governments and peoples of all our countries.

The plight of the developing countries has been described and explained in depth — as we say these days, and I have no intention to outline the major factors responsible for this crisis as this has been so ably and so thoroughly done already. What I want to stress here, is that I believe that in large measure the solution for a significant proportion of our problems in the West Indies and in the developing countries around the world rests with people trained in your disciplines and possessing your skills.

We have been told and I accept the statement, that there is enough scientific and technical knowledge available for revolutionizing backward agricultural practices and modernizing the agricultural sectors of the developing countries. We have also been told and this may come as a bit of a surprise that despite the balance of payments and liquidity crises of the developed countries that the capital is available to meet the requirements for the modernization of the developing world's agriculture. I am not for a moment suggesting that all the capital should come from our friends in the advanced industrialized economies, but only that they have enough to fill the gap which will exist after domestic resources and savings have been tapped in the developing countries.

The figure given for the necessary annual investment for agriculture in Africa, Latin America, and Asia excluding mainland China is approximately \$8.6 billion U.S. per annum of which \$2 billion U.S. is said to be the foreign exchange component. The problem which exists, however, is associated with a rather new expression or piece of developmental jargon and this is "absorptive capacity". In the words of a World Bank expert "the gap which exists is largely a latent one; this latent need can become an effective demand for capital only as farmers increase their capacity to use and benefit from investments." — and this my friends brings me back to you people.

Ministries of Agriculture in the developing world have the important and vital task of mobilizing and allocating their countries resources so as to realise or to use the economists jargon maximise the returns from agriculture. The direction for the country's effort in agriculture must come from them, but such a complex task especially in the developing world requires — and this is part of the job of

mobilization — the concern and the attention of the country's best minds especially in the scientific field.

Scientific research and technological advancement and progress in the industrialized countries which has come from continuous effort and concentration on their particular problem has in turn created serious problems for us in the developing world and has brought us face to face with the problem of the displacement of our traditional exports by synthetic substitutes and further difficulties which have arisen from the so called "chemicalization" of industry. This is the dilemma which we face, science and technology can make us and break us, all apparently at the same time.

It would be folly and indeed impossible to try to contain or constrict the frontiers of knowledge; this has been tried previously only to fail utterly. What we have to attempt to do is to apply science and technology to the solution of our particular problems just as the developed countries have successfully applied them to theirs. But even this may not be enough, for as Professor Myrdal has said — "it is not enough to adapt and adopt modern technology in the developing countries, but to have a substantial part of an increased research activity directed to the concrete production problems in these countries where conditions are so variegated and different".

What he is in fact saying is that merely to attempt to adopt or utilise the most modern technology or scientific methods without finding out whether they are the most suitable or appropriate in the given circumstances may solve one problem and create two. What is required and what I believe is necessary if you pardon my presumptiveness is that our scientists and technicians should first of all try to fully understand the environment in which they have to work and as my economists friends tell me the factor endowments of their respective countries, that is how much labour to combine with capital given the fact that labour is the abundant resource in every case.

A look at your programme of discussions has convinced me, however, that the emphasis at both the Symposium and the Agricultural Conference is on what I would term severely practical issues and problems which confront the West Indian farmer. I am quite impressed also by the people you have listed to present these topics. The Symposium and Conference will I am sure result in the presentation of many concepts and ideas which will be of great assistance to us all especially as food crop farming on a commercial basis as opposed to a subsistence level is becoming widespread in the Caribbean Region. We ourselves here in Trinidad and Tobago have in our Crown Lands Programme fixed targets for the establishment by 1970 of over 900 foodcrop and vegetable farms, so that our interest in the proceedings here is more than assured.

I have already taken up too much of your valuable time, so I will leave you to your deliberation which I have good reason to believe will be both rewarding and path breaking. My country is indeed proud to be host to such a distinguished gathering.

*Thank you.*