

Plant Breeders' Rights

recompensed under this kind of system? It hardly seems fair when material is taken from South America, manipulated in North America, and taken back to South America where they can have the use of it but they will have to pay a very steep price for getting their own genetic material back. They could very rightly say that they have been keeping and manipulating that genetic material for hundreds of years and ask why we did not pay them for it when we took it in the first place. That question has not been addressed.

For some reason, our business leaders and Government people think that genetic material should be free and available to everyone until they get hold of it, then they think a price should be charged for it.

The Minister said we should not worry because there will be gene banks around the world and that Canada is responsible for part of the overall gene bank. I think the gene bank idea is an excellent one. We in Canada are responsible for most of the varieties of barley. However, I note with some alarm that some of the oldest gene banks are now being privatized. How can we guarantee full access if some private corporation has bought a gene bank, presumably with the idea of making a profit? I see no other reason for a private corporation to buy, for example, the gene bank in Cambridge which has developed over many centuries.

All of the explorers, including Charles Darwin, brought botanists or scientists with them to bring back new plant varieties and life forms, and they were deposited in places like the gene bank in Cambridge. Mrs. Thatcher, in her wisdom, decided that it should be privatized and a private corporation bought it for something over \$160 million Canadian. No one can convince me that any corporation would be so generous and altruistic that it would invest \$160 million Canadian of shareholders' funds in an enterprise that will not have some return. We can only conclude that those genetic resources will have a cost attached to them sometime in the future.

The road we are embarking upon with this legislation is fraught with many dangers. There are many questions that have not been answered. The Government seems to be proceeding in this direction because other countries

are doing it, so it must be okay. I submit that some sectors of society restricted access to libraries prior to the Dark Ages, something that led to very negative consequences for our ancestors. There were several hundreds of years of the Dark Ages in which information was restricted and technical knowledge declined as a result. I would hate to see Canada embark on that kind of a process at a time when the rest of the world is recognizing almost unanimously that there has to be openness, *glasnost*, access to information, whether from Government officials or the scientific and technical community.

Our society cannot strive and grow when access to information is limited. The Government should take a very careful second look at proposing this kind of legislation, which I submit is completely counter to that move toward openness. The legislation proposes to provide monopoly control which would limit access to information and genetic materials, and I think that is the wrong direction for our society to take. It is opposite to the direction taken by most of the countries in the world with the exception of a few very highly developed countries which have been attempting to privatize and capitalize on the information that is locked away in the genetic material that no man created. Man may be able to manipulate that genetic material, but he did not create it and he should not receive recompense for something that he only had a minor assisting role in manipulating.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I would like to bring to the attention of Hon. Members the fact that the first three speakers were allowed 40 minutes with no questions or comments under Standing Order 74. We are now entering the eight-hour period in which the speeches are 20 minutes long with 10 minutes of questions and comments.

Mr. Ross Stevenson (Durham): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to take part in the debate on Bill C-15 respecting plant breeders' rights. When we examine the situation surrounding the development of new varieties of seeds in Canada, we have to ask if our farmers and farm families are getting the best resources that are available to them to compete with other growers around the world. It seems to me that every Member of the House would want food producers to have access to the