

*Plant Breeders' Rights*

country. So we have complied with international pressure.

In his opening remarks, the Minister today pointed out that there is a great deal of international pressure on Canada from a few countries who have this international agreement to grant patents to produce new plants or life varieties. Those countries are effectively attempting to blackmail us into developing the same kind of consistent law. Effectively, what American and some European lobbyists are doing is forcing their governments to speak on their behalf, to tell Canada and countries like Canada who do not yet have patent protection for plant forms and other life forms, that if they do not come up with comparable legislation and provide them with the same kind of monopoly protection, they will withhold all information and all material from users in our particular country.

That is the kind of blackmail technique that we refuse to acknowledge when it is applied by hijackers. We refused to acknowledge it in this House, in this session. One of the Ministers refused to acknowledge that form of lobby action on the part of some hunger strikers who said they would not be blackmailed and would not submit to pressure. Yet, we are submitting to international pressure from international business through various governments to bring in the same kind of legislation that I submit has not been thoroughly studied in other countries. The last time this country did a thorough study of where we are going with the issue of patenting and whether or not life forms and plant life should be patented and should be eligible, was in the late 1950s, almost 40 years ago. Thirty some years ago we had a royal commission look into the issue.

The Government realizes that there are still a great many unanswered issues around this whole question of generic development and biotechnology. In the Speech from the Throne, the Government alerted us to the fact that it was thinking of setting up a royal commission to look into some of the questions surrounding the ethical, legal and other problems that surround the question of fertility in humans. Yet the Government appeared not to have extended that consideration even further back to look at the whole question of who has the right to patent a life form. Does it belong to the researcher? Why does it belong to the researcher? Why does a researcher who takes two or three varieties of plants that are found in the Third World, somewhere in South America, and makes some combinations, suddenly become the owner

of the life that emerges from the cross-process or the genetic manipulation that might occur?

Can individuals own life, either as a plant form—is that ethically possible? Is that economically practical? Once we start doing it with plant life, as I have demonstrated with the United States situation, it very rapidly moves on to other forms of life. Our legal system that has developed in the Western World, and I suspect in all of the eastern countries as well, has no way of distinguishing. Once a right is given to a monopoly or a patent over one particular kind of life form, they have no way of distinguishing a difference between the simplest micro-organism and a human gene. It is the role of Parliaments and Governments, through their legislators, to be aware of this and to be fully cognizant of what it is that we are doing. I am not sure at this point that this Government has made any effort to look into those particular issues.

The question could perhaps be handled by a royal commission type of study over several years which could look into the whole question of biotechnology. We could have people who are experts in ethics, law and science do an in-depth study and make recommendations to lawmakers as to what direction they think we should take. It is my opinion that this particular legislation, while it is premature, is sending us down a wrong course in this country. Not only in this country, but I think it is a wrong course for civilization on earth in general.

Canada should be joining with a host of other countries which have expressed some doubts about this course. I point out that while there is a group that belongs to several of the conventions referred to by the Minister, the Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants Convention held in 1961, a lot of the information that was available in 1961 is now completely passé. The items that they dealt with are only very minor beginnings of the kind of technology that is available today.

• (1240)

They have not found a proper way of handling all of the concerns that exist. For instance, there is no proper way of addressing the question of compensation if it is decided to have compensation for those who develop plant types and varieties. Should that compensation not also go to those who have maintained the genetic resources in the Third World? South America, Africa and the Middle East are the birthplaces of most of the plant varieties in the world. How are those countries