

Plant Breeders' Rights

Canadians and not agri-business. It is my hope that that will be the ultimate result of this Bill. The objective is the same, to provide a better lifestyle, a better world for all of us. This Bill is not a Bill for Canadians, it is a Bill for agri-business.

Mr. Murray Cardiff (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise to speak to Bill C-15 at this late time and at the last event and speech that we will be giving in the House of Commons as we wrap up for the summer session.

We will have the opportunity of going home and seeing the wonderful plants that are growing which have been the fruits and work of many of our plant breeders.

We have heard many arguments against Bill C-15 over the course of second reading debate. Some have suggested that plant breeders' rights will destroy world gene resources or adversely affect less developed countries, or lead to the patenting of human life. Bill C-15 does not do these things, and during the course of debate, my hon. colleagues in the Opposition have at times forgotten what plant breeders' rights are all about.

• (0040)

Bill C-15 is about joining with 18 of our most significant trading partners in signing the international convention for the protection of plant varieties. Bill C-15 is about ensuring a place in the world for Canadian varieties so that Canadian efforts can be rewarded abroad. Bill C-15 is about allowing farmers and horticulturalists to import exciting new foreign varieties which are unobtainable until we have our own plant breeders' rights legislation.

Bill C-15 is about offering private breeders incentive to undertake this important work despite its risks and its expense. Bill C-15 is about ensuring that Canadian farmers have access to the best possible varieties, whether they be foreign, private or public. In short, Bill C-15 is about benefiting Canadian agriculture which in turn benefits all of us. When agriculture is prosperous, Canada is prosperous and everyone does well.

Let me begin with the suggestion that this is patent legislation. In fact, it is quite obvious that this is not patent legislation, nor will it lead to any. If it were, we

would be debating an amendment to the Patent Act. Instead, we are discussing plant breeders' rights legislation.

Because the Government recognizes that this is a sensitive and complicated issue, we have chosen to deal with it separately. In such a manner, we believe we can best protect the interests of breeders, farmers and the country as a whole.

Equally, this Bill in no way authorizes anyone to patent human life forms. It merely allows plant breeders an opportunity to be rewarded for their hard work, and 18 years has been designated as the period of protection for a variety under Bill C-15.

There are a number of reasons for the choice of 18 years. Generally, out of one million initial crosses, plant breeders find only four potential varieties. These will take 10 to 15 years to develop at a cost of \$3 million to \$5 million. Out of this work will arise varieties which often last only a few years before they are superseded by other new plants.

It is essential that the really outstanding varieties help to pay the costs of plant breeding programs. There are varieties which have lasted well beyond the 18-year period. For example, Thatcher spring wheat was registered in 1935, Selkirk wheat in 1953, a red clover called Alataswede in 1923 and Climax, a timothy variety in 1947. Those of us in the agricultural industry know the value of Climax, one of the best timothys that has ever been developed in this great country. I think that says something for the early plant breeding programs and for the dedication of plant breeders many years ago who did not have the technology and tools to work with we have today in developing varieties.

After the 18 years, these successful varieties would, of course, become public, but if breeders are not given time to recoup their investment, seed prices would necessarily go up. Currently, in other countries with PBR, royalty rates are approximately 6 per cent to 8 per cent, but the length of protection is essential to maintaining this low level.

The Hon. Member from Regina said that he accepted the principle of royalties. A Member of the NDP said that, though he did not say how the royalties should be paid.