

PATENTS AND THE NAFTA/GATT AGENDA

For International Trade Minister Michael Wilson, the answer is simple : We are harmonizing our intellectual property rights laws with that proposed for the 160 nations participating in the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). That was the reason given when this change was first proposed in January, 1992.

The harmonization agenda sounds like what the opponents of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) warned would happen. Canada would be forced to lower its social standards to compete with the U.S. Already, we have seen the downward harmonization of our U.I. system under Bill C-21, and the failure to implement any adjustment programs to deal with the massive employment dislocation of the FTA. Is this what Michael Wilson means by harmonization?

The irony, of course, is that Bill C-91 has nothing to do with increased competition and trade : the stated objectives of the Uruguay Round of GATT. It's about extending greater monopoly rights to the top drug companies which already control the lion's share of the prescription drug industry worldwide. It's about transferring wealth from consumers to pad their profits, in the name of intellectual property rights.

Wilson's explanation is not only inconsistent, it is also implausible. After all, the GATT agreement is still on hold, pending resolution of issues critical to the future of Canada's