

Plant Breeders' Rights

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member for Leeds—Grenville, question or a comment.

Mr. Jordan: I do not think, Mr. Speaker, that anyone would deny the need for this kind of protection for those who would choose to invest their time and their talents. Relative to this would be the protection that an artist would need for his or her product and an author would need for his or her product.

I am wondering if the parallel does not stop there. We are dealing with something quite different when it is something which could become a basic life commodity. We are talking about quality, and perhaps quantity, of future developments in food products. I do not think that we can put them in the same category at all. There is some risk that profit orientation might become the point at which we would or would not allow someone to control further developments among strains of grains, foods and fruit which could up the level of quality of life.

I do not think that anyone would deny the need for some protection. If we do not have some protection, who is going to invest? Quite often what happens, if we look at the record, is those who would claim that this is their invention, their investment and their brain power, have had an awful lot of Government support in many instances to get there. When it suddenly is about to break open and become a new strain, they claim it as their own. I would want some assurance that those who would claim such a record of a new development, have not got well along the road with a lot of Government support. The source of Government money being of course only one source, that of the people and they would deserve to have that taken into account.

What is to prevent those who would have this under their private domain from releasing it to the multinational corporations? They could actually tie up future development, trying to home in on what is considered to be their territory when a lot of people have made a big investment. I think the risk is there. I am not suggesting that we could go without any legislation, but I believe that we should have some precautionary clauses built in to protect the economy, to protect the quality of food and the standard of living for all of us.

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, it is important to keep in mind that most of the publicly-funded research and development in this field is done at Agriculture Canada. Agriculture Canada retains the copyright and retains the benefits of that investment for the period of the existence of that plant breeder's right. Clearly, nothing is perfect. We will have to look at all of these questions closely. The Hon. Member raised a couple of questions that are very, very hypothetical. I would not want to spend a lot of time talking about these sorts of hypothetical "what ifs". We would like to get it into committee and get on with discussing it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member for Northumberland on a question or a comment.

Mrs. Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I have a comment. It astounded me that my colleague across the floor would refer to the modern world and our place in that modern world, as if the 17 countries and Canada represented the only countries in the world. The comment that I have to make about Bill C-15 makes reference to the Third World. We can all support the need for plant breeders to have some rights. I consider plant life and germplasm to be a natural resource which belongs to all of the people in our global community. It is not the exclusive right of plant breeders in Canada and the 17 countries which belong to the union.

There is nothing in this Bill to protect the countries of the Third World. I do not mind protecting the rights of plant breeders here but I think it should be balanced with a protection of peoples of the other countries of the world who represent four-fifths of the world's population, and who have the greatest food needs and food problems.

I have been very concerned in my experiences in the Third World in dealing with multinational corporations and their taking over of seed production and marketing world wide. I have seen the very negative effects that have taken place when these seeds were introduced into Third World markets and development situations. I have watched poor farmers in these countries receive gifts of seeds from these multinational corporations, and then find that they were totally unable to produce a crop because they could not afford the complementary chemicals and fertilizers required to produce a crop.