

out full, complete and adequate information, you cannot make proper decisions. That is true, not only for governments having information, but also for citizens of the country having information.

There is no greater need today than the need for adequate, essential information to be available to decision-makers, whether they be people or government. In the type of society in which we are living today we have to make very important decisions, decisions which affect not just a few people, not just a little community, not just a little country, but which affect large masses of people, not just for a week or a year but for generations to come.

Because of rapid technological and social changes, we have within our hands the power to destroy the environment and to affect the genetic pool of the human race, of plants and of all living things for generations to come. These are very important decisions which we as a race now have the power to make.

As the critic for science and technology for my party, I find that it is important that we have in this country not only legislation but, more importantly, practice and custom, as the previous speaker pointed out. We can have legislation in the books, but lawyers and bureaucrats will always be able to find a crack or exemption to prevent the release of any information which they do not want to be released. In the end, it is the practice, the custom and the appreciation of the importance of the process of free information that will determine how effective and how real this legislation is.

In the field of science, as I have indicated, the free flow of information is totally essential. Information is needed to spread understanding and knowledge. In a period of very rapid technological changes, we are making decisions, the ramifications of which we are not certain of a year, a decade or a generation later. It is essential that we have free information so that when it becomes known, observable and shown that these new technologies are having a negative and harmful effect on the environment or on the human being, the public is made aware of it, because if the public does not know about it, then the natural social progress of public pressure to change technology and to set boundaries to these technologies, will not occur. We depend upon the public eventually to make decisions as to what technologies are developed and how they are developed. The public cannot make those decisions unless there is a free flow of information available.

Information is not a privilege but a right. It is an essential right in a democracy. It is essential if a democracy is to work and be healthy. It is essential if we are to live and see new science and new technologies developed and if they are to be developed in a human and responsible way.

So I ask: does Bill C-43 guarantee that this will occur? I am afraid I cannot answer that, in spite of the enthusiastic "yes" which I hear from the benches opposite. There are areas in the bill which suggest that important information will not necessarily become public. I refer, for example, to clause 20 of the bill which reads:

Access to Information

Subject to subsections (2) and (3), the head of a government institution shall refuse to disclose any record requested under this act that contains

(a) trade secrets of a third party;

We have chemical companies which will not reveal publicly what the contents of their products are, and yet their products are being used over a wide area and will affect the environment for years to come. I feel that the public should know exactly what is being put into the environment and what is being put into the food chain.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. de Jong: I suggest that knowledge which will have an effect upon such a wide area of space as our environment for many years to come, something which will have such an effect upon the health of so many people as will these new products being introduced into our food chain and into our diets, should not be considered private property.

Surely all this should be public knowledge so that no mistakes are made. Surely mistakes can happen, and I think we all agree that mistakes will happen, when knowledge is possessed only in a little corner here or in a little patent office there. If the government has the knowledge, then surely it has the responsibility to make certain that that knowledge is made public.

Earlier this month I brought a case to the attention of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) concerning a certain fungicide called captan. The Canadian government has been reviewing tests and studies concerning the carcinogenic qualities of this fungicide. We could not get this information in Canada. This information was shared with the U.S. government, and we had to use freedom of information legislation in the United States to get Canadian documents which had been sent to the U.S. government. What do these documents reveal? They reveal that this particular fungicide is not very safe, yet it remains on the shelves. The documents reveal that the company which manufactures this product, namely Chevron Corporation, a big chemical company, asked the testing corporation to change five pages of its data because it showed that this particular product was having a mutational effect on test animals.

Chevron Corporation did not want to see these test results, so it deliberately asked the company to change the results. This information was contained in the secret government documents.

I believe that such information should be made public so that the public knows how responsible these corporations are. I am afraid that there are too many loopholes in the bill in front of us for this law to have had much effect when it came to my attempting to get information about the fungicide captan. Recently my colleague and I have drawn attention to certain aerial spraying of a chemical called Agent Orange in New Brunswick. I wonder if clause 15, governing our relations with other countries, would not have prevented making that information public in this country. Yet, it was important that that information became public information. We know from the experience in the United States with veterans returning from