

*Plant Breeders' Rights*

There is the question of cost at the farm level and research level. Is this an efficient way for producers to get new genetic material? Is this an efficient way for researchers to produce new genetic material?

Finally, I believe this legislation gives us an opportunity to discuss the effects of the patenting of life forms and its effect upon our future and the future of our civilization.

It has been said many times in the last several decades that this is the age of technology and information. We have seen the development of huge computer banks. We know from observation and information that the information within these computer data banks is being more tightly controlled by the owners of the information who are finding new and different ways to control access to that information and data. The purpose of controlling that information and data is to extract money and to control who gets access to the information. This Bill addresses that matter to a certain extent.

We are not simply dealing with information on a computer chip. We are dealing with genetic information in the form of genes and genomes and establishing a blueprint for how this kind of information will be stored and utilized by certain people to make money and maintain a monopoly over the issuance of the information.

Considering the broad implications of this legislation, I think it is rather ironic that it should come forward in Canada in 1989 when we see access to information for people in the East Bloc and China becoming more open.

Finally it is being recognized that those people have a right to information and the freedom of access to information which government should not monopolize. At the same time the Government of Canada and other countries in the West are clearly moving toward restricting the amount of information that is freely available. The information is not only being restricted for the purpose of collecting revenue. It wants to restrict the issuance of the information in order to control it with a full monopoly.

In explaining how that has developed, I cannot help but think there are some frightening parallels between this process and the process the European countries went through during the Dark Ages centuries ago. During the 5th century to the 8th century the churches

began a process of restricting the access to information they held in their libraries. They kept the information they had available to them in the form of books and manuscripts and through educational institutions to themselves during that period and gradually set out restrictive rules as to who would have access to those libraries and that information. The churches decided who was worthy of having that information stored in those ancient records.

Eventually they became so paranoid about allowing the free flow of information that some of those books simply deteriorated, some of the libraries burned, and some were ransacked. Much of the valuable knowledge that could have been used by the common people as well as those in power gradually disappeared. It brought about what our history books now refer to as the Dark Ages.

If we proceed in the direction that some of the owners of the technological firms and computer companies are taking us, I believe we will be setting ourselves up for a similar process. There will be two levels in our society. There will be those who can afford to have information available to them and meet the second test of eligibility for those holding the information. Gradually that information will be restricted in order to maintain power, as was the case with the church and some of the civil authorities which began restricting information to libraries, to the information and educational services that were available many hundreds of years ago.

The Government is attempting to take a small step with this legislation toward setting precedents for the patenting of life forms. This legislation guarantees some rights only to plant life forms, but I point out that once started on that process other countries that are further along in granting of monopoly power to patent holders and granting rights to profit from information, which I believe should be made available to the public very quickly, it will make further inroads into what can and may be patented.

For instance, between 1790 and 1930, as with other countries, U.S. patent laws prohibited the monopolization of biological products and processes, inventions involving national security, and inventions involving food and medicines. They were not permitted to be patented under world patent law and under U.S. patent law.