

Plant Breeders' Rights

Earlier in this debate, the Hon. Member for Swift Current—Maple Creek—Assiniboia (Mr. Wilson) said that there were several reasons for this particular legislation. He said that one was to enhance our exports and another was to practice better husbandry. However, he offered no compelling argument other than that Conservative Members think that is true.

We are producing lots of grain for export and we could produce a lot more. We could invest more in plant breeding, and I think we should. It does not matter whether it is private or public investment. The point is that those resources should stay in the public domain so that seed is available to everyone as it has always been. Farmers can afford high quality seed. It is a national and international resource and should be treated as a public resource.

Then the Hon. Member said that some of the provisions in the Bill, including the 18 years of the patent's lifespan and the exchange of information, were because of an international convention that we needed to become a part of. The international convention is made up of those countries which, as the Hon. Member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton) so eloquently outlined, took their cues from large multinational corporations and did their bidding. Sure enough, a farming system evolved which followed that kind of philosophy.

The Hon. Member mentioned 18 countries. What about the other 160 countries in this world? Only 12 per cent of the countries of this world belong to that convention. If we join that convention, we will have to play by the rules of those 12. If we become the lucky 13th, we will not be able to do anything with the other 159 countries where much valuable work is going on. If Hon. Members think we will be better off with the 12 than with the 159, they should check out which countries those are and what kind of agriculture they support.

The Hon. Member also said that this Bill was not related to free trade. He said that no matter what happens, if there is a tornado or some other natural catastrophe, Members of the Opposition will jump up and down and say it is about the Free Trade Agreement.

Mr. Althouse: This isn't a natural catastrophe, this is a man-made one.

Mr. Funk: As the Hon. Member has pointed out, this is a man-made disaster, not a natural one. It is linked to the Free Trade Agreement, if not precisely to the language of the free trade legislation, though there is some evidence that that might well be true. This Bill represents a philosophy that is very much a part of free trade.

I fully accept the Hon. Member's criticism of people wrapping everything up in free trade, but that is because free trade is symbolic of the Government's whole philosophy, which is that large foreign corporations are more important than family farms, that the jobs of people in Ohio are more important than the jobs of people who work at the Inglis plant in Toronto. Those are the kinds of judgment calls Members opposite are prepared to make. Government Members will have to excuse us if, whenever we see that philosophy in action, we start talking about free trade. I think that is something Members opposite will have to get used to because Canadians everywhere see it in those same terms.

We have been told that we have to adopt this line of thinking to become competitive in the modern world. We have been told that the agricultural industry can only survive in the modern world if we adopt that kind of thinking. Government Members go so far as to say that Members who might oppose this Bill might be reactionary and might not want change or progress. That is relatively hard to take coming from a political tradition that has brought many of the institutions that have contributed immeasurably to the agricultural wealth of Canada, ideas like the Canadian Wheat Board which a Conservative Government brought in. The Hon. Member said that it was an old-fashioned idea which symbolized the NDP, and I think in some ways it does. We do not think that the Wheat Board is old fashioned, we think it is doing very well. If Canadian farmers are to beat American farmers, they will do it through the Canadian Wheat Board, not through Cargill, because Cargill has a conflict of interest. We are better off with our own Wheat Board, and I think most farmers believe that as well.

The difference between us is whether we see the farm community as being composed of owner-operators and large enough numbers of them to support small communities, or whether the rural community is seen as a series of large agri-business corporations. We think that the modern approach to the Saskatchewan economy has to be that the small farmers have access to the technology,