

Patent Act

I happen to be one of those who believes that research and development, testing, distribution and the sale of drugs should remain in the public domain. That is where it should be. That is where it can be done the best and the most economically for the benefit of those who desperately need drugs. I think that the whole area of research and development should be in the hands of medical schools, university research facilities and the Department of National Health and Welfare because, as I said earlier, private companies, and especially those from outside our borders, have no business in the business of drugs for our old and our sick.

There is no problem about investment in Canada because this kind of investment out of both the public and private purse is the most civilized and humane kind of investment we can make. It is not because we want to make fast bucks, but rather how well and how civilized our society functions. The test of any society is how well it treats its old, its poor, its sick and its young. In this area, Sir, I profoundly believe that Canadians would support public and private investment in research, development, testing, distribution and sale of drugs on, at worst, actual cost recovery. There should be no profit made from those who are sick.

The Minister has repeatedly said in the House that this Bill will only apply to new developments in drugs. He implies that if we did not have this Bill we could prevent the development of a drug for some form of cancer or some other disease that mankind is trying so hard to find a cure, or we could prevent the development of a drug to ease a terrible disease.

Can you imagine what would have happened had this legislation been in place in France when Dr. Pierre Curie and Madam Curie were doing their research? What would have happened had there been a 10-year locked-in patent, a 10-year monopoly, when Drs. Banting and Best discovered insulin which relieved millions of people all over the globe? Nobody was making large profits and fast bucks out of that one. What if there had been this kind of legislation when Dr. Jonas Salk came up with his vaccine for polio, which was a plague on mankind around the globe? We did not have that kind of legislation in place in Canada. Thank God for that. There was nobody making big profits and fast bucks off the Salk polio vaccine.

Many efforts are being made to provide drugs for any kind of cancer, multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's disease and a host of things to which we are still trying to find solutions or to alleviate many other terrible afflictions, but let me tell the Minister that nobody needs or should have a 10 year guarantee recovery cost when we have no way of knowing how much the costs actually are.

I suppose if I force myself I could live with the Eastman report recommending a four year patent protection, and generic drug manufacturers paying a 14 per cent royalty, although I would like to see a limit on that. How long do you pay and pay and pay? All costs get passed on to the consumers of drugs. Drug developments should be and remain in the public domain.

We had a world leader in research and development, the testing and distribution of drugs in Connaught Laboratories which was part of the Canada Investment Development Corporation. It was a winner, not necessarily a winner in dollars in profits, but it was a winner for people. It was the finest example of public endeavour for the public good. Only the Tories would attempt to sell a winner, and I guess they have. To whom? I do not know. It was something that the people of Canada had put their wealth into, it was a world leader, and the Tories said, get rid of it. However, under the aegis of National Health and Welfare, the Connaught Laboratories, our universities and medical schools, we can still have the best research and development, testing, distribution and sale at the lowest possible price because this is in the public domain.

● (1500)

I have had occasion over the last several years to require medical treatment, so I have some personal experience. People in the medical profession, including some hon. colleagues of mine in this House, have been good friends and have been good advisers to me on more than one occasion. I wish the drug industry had as good a conscience, as good an attitude, as they have had about how drugs are dispensed, used, and priced.

The other thing I find totally unacceptable is that people from outside our borders make demands upon us concerning how we govern ourselves. In this instance, the demands concern our methods of research and development, testing, distribution and sale of drugs. This is another of many examples of blatant interference with our sovereignty and independence. No self-respecting country of any kind would hold still for that. I, as one Member of Parliament and a proud Canadian, am not going to hold still for that. I am sick and tired of our crawling on our hands and knees to Washington and asking how high when they holler at us to jump.

Mr. Gormley: Do you really believe that, Les?

Mr. Benjamin: I certainly do. This is not the first time we have had blatant interference with our independence and sovereignty from the U.S. It certainly will not be the last so long as we have a Tory Government more concerned about getting a pat on the head and approval from the U.S.

This legislation is obscene. It is brought forward in the name of so-called free and open market competition. I say that drugs for the sick, the old, the poor should not be subject to competition in the free and open market. It is because of that kind of obscenity that I move, seconded by the Hon. Member for Churchill (Mr. Murphy):

That this House do now adjourn.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: No.