

Government Orders

Although the practice of protection of intellectual property may seem to be a complicated affair the reasons behind it are really very simple when we strip away the legalese and the jargon. It is a straightforward affair. It stimulates invention and new technology. It recognizes people for developing a better mousetrap, except in this case we are not talking about mouse traps but about new medicines and new cures for treatments of ailments and diseases that afflict Canadians and people throughout the world.

Without patents on those inventions there really would be little motivation for people to develop those inventions. Why should someone invest years of effort and large sums of money when others can copy the work of the inventor with no obligation? In this situation, people will stop inventing and people will stop investing.

By adopting this legislation, we will be providing the pharmaceutical sector in Canada with the same conditions of patent protection as are available to all other sectors of our Canadian economy. As it is now, pharmaceutical inventions are not treated the way that inventions in other sectors of the economy are treated. For example, the patent for a new plastic compound receives full market exclusivity for the patent holder for 20 years.

Why not the same for the developer or the creator of a new medicine? We should all agree that it is only fair that all sectors of the economy should be treated the same way when it comes to recognition for a discovery.

That is the major reason we are going forward with Bill C-91. I urge this House to adopt the bill. It is good for Canada, it is good for Canadians.

Mr. Steve Butland (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, one could accuse the government of being high on drugs but that would not be parliamentary. I suspect that it is high on the drug companies.

Just who are these people? A veritable who's who, no doubt: Bristol-Myers, Squibb, Hewlett-Packard, Johnson & Johnson, Monsanto, and Procter & Gamble. There is absolutely no doubt they are the poor people on the block. There is an old saying: "A spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down". Well, this is a poison pill for Canadians across this country. A report in the 1960s said that drug prices in Canada were among the highest

in the world. They corrected the problem. Now we are in a situation where the drug companies have reduced the price of drugs by 20 per cent and sometimes 30 per cent. They are saying: "That is not good. We have to jack those prices up and make them more expensive".

• (1730)

The member from Winnipeg talked about GATT. That is important. That is the legal slant on this particular bill and what the government has put forward as its argument. It has been proven to be fallacious. The average Canadian no doubt has a difficult time understanding what GATT is and some of us in these seats have difficulty understanding it also. However, what they do understand is that the price of drugs will continue to spiral as a result of C-91.

An hon. member: They are going straight up. They are not even spiralling.

Mr. Butland: They are not spiralling, they are going straight up. Constituents by the dozens in my riding were calling me just about a year ago, asking me: "What happened to this particular drug? The Ontario government says it is not going to pay for it anymore under OHIP". Upon further research it was indicated that the drug companies had increased the price twelvefold. After investigating, we asked: "What is the difference". The toothless Prices Review Board said: "Well, they are under investigation right now". The details of that investigation given to me revealed that they had repackaged the drug. "It is a new improved drug with better results, therefore, we have to increase the price of the drug 12 times."

I cite from some of the actual statutes of the Prices Review Board. The first consists of new strengths of an existing dosage form or comparable dosage form of an existing drug product, a line extension. The second includes drug products that constitute a substantial improvement over other drugs because of significant improvements in the therapeutic effects or important savings to the Canadian health care system. It is impossible to document, therefore, the Prices Review Board says: "There is not really anything we can do. We will have to allow the prices to increase tenfold, twelvefold and there is not a darned thing we can do about it".