

Canadian Yearly Meeting Minutes on Biotechnology

2000:

45. **Ecumenical Committee - Biotechnology:** Mona Callin, Clerk, introduced Anne Mitchell who is representing Canadian Yearly Meeting on the Federal Government's Canadian Biotechnology Advisory Committee and on the Canadian Council of Churches' Biotechnology Reference Group. Anne Mitchell spoke of her serious and urgent concern regarding the current legal actions being followed or potentially to be followed by the parties concerned (Harvard University, the Canadian Federal Court of Appeal, and the Government of Canada) regarding the patentability of genetically altered non-human mammals for use in carcinogenicity studies. She and other concerned Friends deplore the lack of democratic process, and the lack of opportunity for full education of and debate by the Canadian public on the broad subject of biotechnology and its far-reaching implications.

The following Minute from Ecumenical Committee was read:

Ecumenical Committee is concerned that biotechnology is moving ahead rapidly without due caution. We recognize that biotechnology is a complex and controversial issue in Canadian society and there are varied perspectives on it. From consultation, we are aware that biotechnology is seen as a growth industry by the Government of Canada; however, the ethical and social considerations surrounding it are largely ignored. The technology is in the hands of corporations and government while the Canadian public is excluded from informed decision making on this matter.

We ask Canadian Yearly Meeting to communicate with the Government of Canada regarding the absolute need to actively involve the Canadian public in the decision-making process on biotechnology even if this means a slowing down of the development of such technology in Canada.

We approve sending the following letter as amended to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and an appropriate circulation list:

Jean Chrétien, Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Building
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G4

Dear Jean Chrétien:

We, the members of Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), in session at Sedbergh, Québec, are writing to you on a matter of great urgency.

On June 21, 1985, Harvard filed a patent application in Canada for an invention entitled "Transgenic Animals". The patent examiner refused to allow patents on transgenic mice. Harvard appealed this decision to the Federal Court Trial Division (FTD). The FTD upheld the decision. Harvard then appealed this decision to the Federal Court of Appeal. On August 3, 2000, the Federal Court of Appeal upheld this appeal from the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

It is our understanding that the Federal Government has 60 days to appeal this decision or the decision is final.

We believe that decisions of this magnitude which may have fundamental ethical, social, environmental and health implications for future generations should be made by Parliament, informed by a full public debate. Unfortunately, these and other aspects of biotechnology are moving ahead rapidly without due caution and without adequate consideration.

We therefore implore the Federal Government to appeal the August 3 decision of the Federal Court of Appeal and to ensure that Parliament and the Canadian public are engaged in meaningful and informed debate on this matter.

As a member of Canada's faith community we feel compelled to communicate with you on this matter and look forward to being informed of the actions our Government will take prior to the October 2, 2000, appeal deadline.

Mona Callin thanked all Friends present for approving the Minute upon which Friends, especially Young Friends, have laboured. We are urged by Young Friends, whose concern for this issue brought them in large numbers to our meeting, to vigorously pursue the whole

issue of biotechnology after the rise of Yearly Meeting. They offer to address this concern at their business meeting this week. The Ecology Working Group will confer with Young Friends on ways to help.

63. Young Friends Yearly Meeting report - Biotechnology: Young Friends representatives Sam Stevenson (Vernon Monthly Meeting), and Kelly Ackerman (Prairie Monthly Meeting) reported that Young Friends have agreed to form a committee on the biotechnology issue, and will maintain liaison with the Ecology Working Group to help carry this concern forward into action.

2001:

38. Canadian Young Friends Yearly Meeting: Peter Stevenson, Vernon Monthly meeting, presented the following minute on behalf of Young Friends:

Last year at Yearly Meeting, Young Friends stated their concerns about biotechnology. The study of biotechnology is developing rapidly without public input and without debate in Parliament. We have become aware of two current actions being taken. The first is a Private Member's Bill - Bill 27- on mandatory labeling which is currently before Parliament. The second is the Treaty to Share the Genetic Commons which is being drafted to be presented to the Rio +10 Conference in South Africa in the fall of 2002. While we are still studying these documents, given the short time of Yearly Meeting, we wanted to bring this concern to the attention of Yearly Meeting.

We would encourage Monthly Meetings and individual Friends to obtain a copy of Bill 27 in order to follow up on this information. We would also recommend that Canadian Yearly Meeting consider signing onto the Treaty.

We agree that Canadian Yearly Meeting will consider the recommendation to sign the Treaty to Share the Genetic Commons. Young Friends invite interested Friends to meet with them to season this concern. They will return with their recommendations later in these sessions. We name the following Friends to meet with Young Friends: Anne Mitchell, Kitty Dunn, Carol

Dixon (subject to consent), and Sylvia Mangalam. Other interested Friends are welcome to join them.

39. **Ecumenical Committee:** Mona Callin, Clerk, introduced Anne Mitchell, the Canadian Yearly Meeting representative to Canadian Council of Churches and its Biotechnology Working Group.

Anne Mitchell presented a summary of work done on the Harvard Onco-mouse patenting case since Canadian Yearly Meeting 2000. We are grateful to hear of the very active follow-up on this issue that generated such concern at our previous Yearly Meeting.

We received a minute from the St. Lawrence Valley Regional Gathering, Spring 2001:

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has historically affirmed that of God or the Divine in everyone and in all of Creation. Many of us unite with Albert Schweitzer who said that all of life is sacred.

In the light of this testimony we oppose the patenting of life forms. We ask that this be referred to the Canadian Council of Churches for their consideration.

The Canadian Council of Churches is seeking intervenor status before the Supreme Court of Canada on the commodification of life issues related to this case.

We approve the inclusion of Canadian Yearly Meeting in the application to seek intervenor status.

We approve that the consultation with Canadian Yearly Meeting regarding the case be conducted through the Biotechnology Working Group, keeping in close communication with Ecumenical Committee.

We ask Finance Committee and Canadian Friends Service Committee to work together to propose the best method for Friends to individually contribute financially to support this action. Friends should be notified about the method and the timing when contributions are required.