10-31-1999

Resist Newsletter, Sept-Oct 1999

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Don’t Take Liberties with our Genes

PHIL BEREANO

The Human Genome Project at the National Institutes of Health, according to Bill Clinton, “will one day in the not-too-distant future enable every set of parents that has a little baby to get a map of the genetic structure of their child. So if their child has a predisposition to a certain kind of illness or a certain kind of problem... they will be able to plan that child’s life, that child’s upbringing, to minimize the possibility of the child developing that illness or that predisposition [in order to] enable untold numbers of people to have far more full lives than would have been the case before...”

Bill Clinton’s picture of a wonderful technofuture sounds like a threatening Brave New World to many Americans. The confluence of a number of technical and social trends has greatly enhanced the capacity for genetic surveillance and tracking:

• The science of genetics is a flourishing new industry, nourished in large part by the federally funded Human Genome Project. The goal of this ambitious research endeavor is to identify every gene found in the human body, approximately 100,000 in all. Much of the research focuses on genetic diagnostics: tests designed to identify genes thought to be associated with various medical conditions. More than 50 new genetic tests have been identified in the past five years alone.

• The increasing speed, sophistication, affordability, and interconnectivity of computer systems allows the rapid monitoring and matching of many millions of records.

• The promotion of an ideology of geneticization fosters the belief that genes are determinative of an individual’s behavior, character, and future. In the words of Nobel Laureate Jim Watson, “We used to believe our destiny was in the stars; now we know it is in our genes.” (The critical role of environment, and the complex interplay between a genome and its surroundings, is largely ignored in the media and public discourse about genetics.)

• Capitalist economic relations have created a mad scramble for venture capital, the altering of patent laws, and calls for mass genetic testing by researchers.

Values Underlying Genetic Research

Technologies are not value-neutral; they usually embody the perspectives, purposes, and political objectives of powerful social groups. The dominant ideology in Western society proclaims that science and technology are value-neutral, and the only problems caused by technologies are either “externalities” (unintended side effects) or abuses.

However, because technologies are the result of human interventions into the otherwise natural progression of activities, they are themselves actually imbued with intentions and purposes. Current technologies do not equally benefit all segments of society (and indeed are not intended to do so).

The United States is a society in which the differential access to wealth and power has been exacerbated during recent years. Because technologies are intentional interventions into the environment, those people with more power can determine the kinds of technological developments that are researched and implemented. Thus, technologies themselves are not neutral; they are social and political phenomena. Genetic technologies and computerization exhibit these characteristics, and reflect power differentials in our society.

Genetic Tests, Class and Consent

The growth of the mania for testing in the US is a manifestation of class relations... continued on page ten
From time to time (and it has been a long time) Resist prints some of the letters received from Newsletter readers and supporters. Below are a few notes that have been sent in the past several months.

Dear Resist,

I just got the [April 1999] newsletter and was pleased to see the space devoted to Appalachian activism. I especially enjoyed the interview with Franki Patton Rutherford. She is a true friend and partner with AFSC on welfare and poverty issues here.

As you may recall, the WV Economic Justice Project was featured in an earlier [January 1999] Resist newsletter. I am pleased to report a major victory for the families of people with disabilities. As I mentioned in the Resist article, WV had the harshest welfare policy in the nation towards people with disabilities due to the choice of counting SSI as family income...

Since the Resist article appeared, the WV legislature unanimously passed a bill [signed by the governor on April 8] which ordered DHHR not to count the SSI of any family member as family income when determining eligibility. The bill also orders DHHR to work with the state college and university system to come up with a plan to enable interested welfare recipients to participate in higher education.

This victory came after two years of hard work by a number of organizations and individuals in the state. I would like to thank Resist again for its support for WVEJ and other Appalachian organizations working for social justice.

—Rick Wilson, West Virginia

Dear Resist,

Your [June 1999] issue on Gay Issues and schools reminded me of growing up in a small town in upstate New York where in the 1930s we heard nothing about this... When I was drafted into the Seabees in October 1943 at the age of 18 there was a banner across the back of the office announcing, "If you tell us you are queer, you can leave here and we will tell the Chief of Police in your hometown."

What was a poor belle to do?

You had just signed a form where you stipulated you were not homosexual (I did not know what the word meant and thought it was like syphilis) and you were liable to federal prosecution as soon as sworn in.

Under the present military law, the "Uniform Code of Military Justice" that went into effect in 1950 the mere suspicion a person is gay can make them subject to a "Field Board" and picked out without a trial. Under the old Articles for the Government of the Navy in effect from 1792-1950 there had to be a provable offense. Under the AGN once you retired you were no longer subject to Navy law. Under the UCMJ you are subject to military law for life, if you are a retiree as I am, and can lose your pension for raising a pinkie on a teacup.

—Name Withheld, Revere, MA

Hi folks,

It's great that you are now offering multi-year general support grants. The lack of same is one my chief criticisms of most progressive foundations. They want a group to shape their work to fit proposal guidelines for short-term "projects," when what's often needed is a more secure extended period of financial breathing space to develop and strengthen what's in place. Unfortunately, it is mostly the more conservative foundations which have realized the importance of such a funding strategy.

—Rick Jahnkow, Encinitas, CA

Dear Friends,

Enclosed please find a check in the amount of $25.80 which represents the amount of federal excise tax on my telephone bills for 1998. For the last several years I have participated in modest war tax resistance by refusing to pay the telephone excise tax, a remnant of the Vietnam War. This tax, as I am sure you are aware, was imposed on US. taxpayers as one more means of raising revenue to pay for the Southeast Asian military misadventures. The telephone tax was never revoked even when the Vietnam conflict ended. I feel that withholding the telephone tax is one of the symbolic ways of expressing outrage at the continued misuse of tax money for military purposes. Each month along with payment for telephone service, I send a letter to the phone company explaining my refusal to pay the phone tax.

Resist seems to be a most appropriate recipient for funds from war tax resistance. It is a pleasure for me to be able to make this donation to you. I hope that I can encourage some of my friends to do the same. Keep up the good work.

—Steve Schnapp, Cambridge, MA
When we sow seed, we pray, “May this seed be exhaustless.” Monsanto and the USDA on the other hand are stating, “Let this seed be terminated, that our profits and monopoly be exhaustless.”
Genetic engineering will rob Third World women of their creativity, innovation and decision-making power in agriculture.

Women and Biodiversity

Instead of falsely labelling the patriarchal projects of intellectual property rights on seed and genetic engineering in agriculture which are destroying biodiversity and the small farmers of the Third World as “partnership” with Third World women, it would be more fruitful to redirect agricultural policy towards women-centered systems which promote biodiversity-based, small-farm agriculture.

A common myth used by Monsanto and the Biotechnology industry is that without genetic engineering, the world cannot be fed. However, while biotechnology is projected as increasing food production four times, small ecological farms have productivity hundreds of time higher than large industrial farms based on conventional farms.

Women farmers in the Third World are predominantly small farmers. They provide the basis of food security, and they provide food security in partnership with other species. The partnership between women and biodiversity has kept the world fed through history, at present, and will feed the world in the future. It is this partnership that needs to be preserved and promoted to ensure food security.

In this women-centered agriculture, knowledge is shared, species and plants are kin, not “property,” and sustainability is based on renewal of the earth’s fertility and renewal and regeneration of biodiversity. In our paradigms, there is no place for monocultures of genetically engineered crops and IPR monopolies on seeds.

Monocultures and monopolies symbolize a masculinization of agriculture. The war mentality underlying military-industrial agriculture is evident from the names given to herbicides which destroy the economic basis of the survival of the poorest women in the rural areas of the Third World. Monsanto’s herbicides are called “Round up,” “Machete,” “Lasso.” American Home Products, which has merged with Monsanto calls its herbicides “Pentagon,” “Prowl,” “Scepter,” “Squadron,” “Cadre,” “Lightning,” “Assert,” “Avenge.” This is the language of war, not sustainability.

The violence intrinsic to methods and metaphors used by the global agribusiness and biotechnology corporations is a violence against nature’s biodiversity and women’s expertise and productivity. The violence intrinsic to destruction of diversity through monocultures and the destruction of the freedom to save and exchange seeds through IPR monopolies is inconsistent with women’s diverse non-violent ways of knowing nature and providing food security. This diversity of knowledge systems and production systems is the way forward for ensuring that Third World women continue to play a central role as knowers, producers and providers of food.

Genetic engineering and IPRs will rob Third World women of their creativity, innovation and decision-making power in agriculture. In place of women deciding what is grown in fields and served in kitchens, agriculture based on globalization, genetic engineering and corporate monopolies on seeds will establish a food system and worldview in which men controlling global corporations control what is grown in our fields and what we eat. Corporate men investing financial capital in theft and biopiracy will present themselves as creators and owners of life.

We do not want a partnership in this violent usurpation of the creativity of creation and Third-World women by global biotechnology corporations who call themselves the “Life Sciences Industry” even as they push millions of species and millions of small farmers to extinction.

References


Vandana Shiva directs the Secretariat of Diverse Women for Diversity at the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, A-60, Hauz Khas, New Delhi - 110 016, India; vshiva@iasdl01.vsnl.net.in; www.indiaserver.com/betas/vshiva.

Page 4 RESIST Newsletter September/October 1999
Derailing the Biotech Express

US & Global Activists at the Crossroads

RONNIE CUMMINS & BEN LILLISTON

A specter haunts the boardrooms of Monsanto and the other Gene Giants. Mass public resistance against genetically engineered (GE) foods and crops in Western Europe and India, spearheaded by an incredible grassroots campaign in Britain, appears on the verge of spreading into North America and across the globe. If mass anti-biotech campaigns catch fire in North America and Japan—and solidarity and cooperation continues to increase between activists in the North and South—the Brave New World of agricultural biotech may be short-lived. Even more unnerving to certain sectors of the economic elite, trade wars and collateral damage could seriously undermine GATT and the World Trade Organization as Monsanto and other biotech hardliners (including the US government and trade officials) turn to ever more extreme measures to force the citizenry to “shut up and eat their Frankenfoods,” and compel farmers to plant their “Terminator” and “Traitor” seeds.

This article will review a few major developments on the GE front and focus specifically on US government and industry plans to co-opt and divide the growing international anti-biotech movement and stifle debate in the US.

The Great Butterfly Battle

In the most dramatic story of the year highlighting the environmental hazards of GE crops, Nature magazine published a letter from Cornell University scientists in its May 20, 1999 issue indicating that pollen from Bt corn crops (crops inserted with the pesticide Bacillus thuringiensis) is poisonous to Monarch butterflies. Headline stories of the threat to what the press dubbed “the Bambi of the insect world” brought home the fact—especially to Americans—that millions of acres of GE crops are already under cultivation in the US, with untold damage already being done to the environment and living creatures.

As long as the Europeans know that genetic engineering has been accepted here in the US, then we'll have no problem.

Although Monsanto and the biotech industry immediately tried to undercut the Monarch story, claiming that the studies were carried out in a laboratory rather than in the fields, another recent study by scientists from Iowa State University conducted in and around fields planted with Bt corn, showed similar results.

EU authorities reacted to the Monarch story by announcing that previous approvals for Bt crops in Europe will now have to be reviewed and possibly reversed. The Bt-Monarch controversy comes on the heels of other recent studies showing that Bt-spliced crops kill beneficial insects such as lacewings and ladybugs, kill beneficial soil microorganisms, damage soil fertility, and may be harming insect-eating birds.

In the face of mounting consumer pressure and heavy media coverage of the Bt-Monarch controversy, Japanese government officials announced in mid-June that they were suspending approval of Bt crops for agricultural production, pending the establishment of criteria for safety evaluation. Japan’s Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) will also apparently decide by the end of the year whether mandatory labeling will be required for most GE foods.

In recent international meetings of the Codex Alimentarius, Japanese officials have refused to support the US position of “no labeling” for GE foods. Japan imports 77% of its soybeans from the USA, as well as 87% of its corn. One of the biggest nightmares of the biotech industry is that Japa­

European Union wins Moratorium

On June 24, the European Union environmental ministers moved to implement the legal equivalent of a three-year moratorium on any new approvals of GE foods or crops. The moratorium will remain in effect until more stringent EU safety regulations are put in place in 2002.

Not since April of 1998 has a GE food been approved in Europe. “We’ve had a de facto moratorium, and now it’s been cast in stone,” EU Commission spokesman Peter Jorgenson told a reporter from Dow Jones. While the powerful European biotech trade association, EuropaBio, criticized the moratorium as “deplorable,” Greenpeace spokes-woman Louise Gale categorized the ministerial decision as “a clear step in the right direction,” a recognition of EU citizens’ “massive rejection of GMOs (genetically modified organisms) in food and agriculture.”

US Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky complained that the GE approval process in the EU had “completely” broken down and warned that the White House was considering the possibility of economic retaliation by filing a formal complaint with the World Trade Organization. The EU decision comes in the wake of a massive grassroots movement across the continent which has provoked major supermarket chains, fast-food restaurants, food producers, and animal feed companies in Europe to proclaim a ban on GE foods and food ingredients.

Stuart Eizenstat, nominee for the second-highest job at the US Treasury Department, testifying before the US Senate on June 29, 1999, provided insight into the administration’s perspective on GE crops: “Almost 100% of our agricultural exports...continued on page eleven
The Purpose of Genetic Engineering
To Feed the Hungry or Control Agriculture?

DON FITZ

Monsanto claims that genetic engineering is necessary to feed the world’s growing population. But a growing coalition of environmentalists, farmers, and scientists is exposing this claim as a cover for grabbing control of world agriculture.

Monsanto spokespeople aggressively argue that, since the population will double by 2030, we need to grow more food. Moreover, since more land is not available, increased yield from GE crops is essential. There are many reasons to be skeptical of the claim that agribusiness executives are rushing to GE out of concern for hunger.

Hunger for Control

It is easy to think that if people go hungry, then there must be a shortage of food. This is not the case. There is already enough food for everyone on the planet. People starve because food is produced for profit and does not reach people in desperate need but with little money. Ethiopia exported livestock feed to Europe at the same time its people were dying of famine in 1984. On the reverse side, Monsanto devoted enormous resources to developing recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH), which it promised would increase milk production 10-15%. When rBGH was approved in 1994, the US had a surplus of milk.

Despite Monsanto’s rant that GE is necessary to boost agricultural yield, many studies show a decline in productivity from GE crops. Summarizing data after Roundup Ready soy had been used in eight states, Dr. Charles Benbrook says the evidence is “overwhelming and indisputable” that GE soy has a 4 to 6% lower yield.

In addition to reducing crop production, the use of GE varieties is likely to shift production away from staple food crops. Reporting from his studies of Brazilian agriculture, George Monbiot notes that 56% of farmers, with only 3% of the land, produce almost all of that country’s staple crops such as corn and beans. Big landowners tend to produce cash crops for export such as pineapples, flowers, tea, and cereals for animal food. The added costs of GE will increase the impoverishment of small farmers, and thereby encourage concentration of land in the hands of those least interested in growing food for human consumption.

In short, GE seeds have nothing to do with solving world hunger and have everything to do with restructuring world agriculture.

Creating Global Dependence

The plan of several multinationals seems to be to change the underdeveloped world to an “American model,” where a few megacorporations decide what is grown and how it is grown. These corporations stand to make immense profits.

The neoliberal revolution in agriculture aims for farms in Latin America, Africa and Asia to become either huge rural land-factories or medium-large vassals of agrochemical companies. The land-factories are prefigured in Tyson’s chicken farms in Arkansas and vertically-integrated (from semen to cellophane) hog production which eliminated half of Missouri’s family hog farms between 1994 and 1997.

Using Monsanto’s GE seeds requires farmers to pledge to use Monsanto’s chemicals and surrender their right to save seed. Farmers buying Monsanto’s seed must grant the corporate overlord the right to venture onto their land to take samples for genetic testing.

The revolution of GE in agriculture promises to repeat on a grander scale the consequences of the chemical revolution: increased expenses, loss of small farms, and unknown damage to farmers, consumers and ecosystems. GE may increase crop yields a little in some plants, but farmers choose GE varieties mainly because they allow greater pesticide usage. Two-thirds of GE crops have been altered for herbicide tolerance (not increased yield).

Opposition Cropping Up

Slogans such as “No Patents on Life!” “Ban GE Food!” and “Terminate the Terminator!” are capturing the hearts of millions. Farmers have burned Monsanto test fields in India, and, in Bangladesh, forced it to withdraw micro-credit schemes designed to addict them to the new technology.

From 1997 through 1999 Europe saw an explosion in awareness of the health dangers of “Frankenfood” and threats to ecosystems posed by GE. Fields of test GE crops have been pulled up, farmers have demonstrated with environmentalists, and consumers have not been hoodwinked by Monsanto’s pro-GE advertising campaign.

Suffering from extensive agribusiness influence on the media, Americans are less aware of the issues. But a large majority tell pollsters they want GE food to be labeled. In 1998, the “First Grassroots Gathering on Biodevastation” was hosted by the Gateway Green Alliance in St. Louis with financial support from Resist. The Gathering became a focal point for bringing together voices of criticism and two more Biodevastation Gatherings have occurred.

The reorganization of world agriculture is neither a done deal nor destined to fail. Agribusiness has huge financial resources, close ties to government, and the backing of several international trade agreements. At the same time, awareness of dangers posed by GE expands daily. The outcome will depend on whether alliances can deepen and expand widely enough to halt the impending agricultural revolution.

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The Purpose of Genetic Engineering

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Sources: Much of the information in this article is from essays in the collections "Genetic Engineering: The Unheard Dangers and The Political Economy of Genetic Engineering," published as Synthesis/Regeneration 18 and 19 (Winter & Spring, 1999), available for $3.95 each from WD Press, PO Box 24115, St. Louis MO 63130. Information is also from the following: M. Lappe & B. Bailey (1998) Against the Grain: Biotechnology and the Corporate Takeover of Your Food (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press). V. Shiva (1997) Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge (Boston: South End Press).

Don Fitz is a member of the Green Party of St. Louis/Gateway Green Alliance, and The Greens/Green Party USA. He is editor of Synthesis/Regeneration: A Magazine of Green Social Thought. Gateway Green Alliance received a grant from Resist in 1998.

Food Labels & the Right to Vote
A Local Petition Initiative Sparks Debate Over Both

TAMMY SHEA

Should you have the right to know what you are eating? This question is fast turning into a different one: "Do you have the right to ask?" Residents of the greater St. Louis-area (world headquarters of Monsanto) are hearing Monsanto supporters answer both questions with an unambiguous "No!"

In December 1998 Gateway Green Alliance (GGA) members and local residents asked the Webster Groves City Council to pass an ordinance requesting the State of Missouri and the US Congress to pass a mandatory labeling law for all genetically modified food and crops. The recommendation would be neither binding nor enforceable, but it would make a statement about the desire of area consumers to know what is in their food.

Council members claimed that municipal governments do not traditionally take matters of federal policy. That argument holds little water since the City of Webster Groves is among a number of municipalities that have addressed issues of national relevance. For instance, many cities passed resolutions opposing the war in the Persian Gulf in the early 1990's. Webster Groves itself passed a 1996 resolution regarding federal policy on nuclear waste transportation that made explicit demands from federal and state authorities to demonstrate and justify transporting nuclear waste through highly populated metropolitan areas that included the city of Webster Groves. The resolution set a precedent for commenting on and imploring change of a federal policy by a municipal government.

Taking it to the Streets

After the Council refused to pass the ordinance, GGA and other activists tried a different tactic. The Webster Groves City Charter states that a petition with 10% of the number of votes cast in the most recent municipal election are sufficient to require the Council to approve an ordinance or submit it to a city-wide vote. Upon receiving the required petitions, the Webster City Clerk forwarded them to the County of St. Louis, which certified more than enough signatures as valid.

The City Council again declined to pass the ordinance. In the meantime, an opposition group made up of Monsanto employees began to lobby the Council against the ordinance.

Monsanto supporters claimed that the ordinance was a waste of time and money for the city. They argued that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) didn't require labels on GE foods and, we should "just trust the government."

Arguments opposing the ordinance ranged from "This will be bad for commerce in the city," to "I don't want the government telling what I can't eat." Labeling opponents attempted to blame the pure food activists for the costs of an election, despite the fact that passage of the ordinance would not cost the city a dime.

Green representatives spoke to the need for consumers to be able to identify foods that had been genetically altered and pointed to examples of products with similar labels, such as organic foods. They also provided a critical analysis of the dangers to human health and the environment from GE products, backed by scientific sources. Environmental activists reminded the Council of Monsanto's legacy of environmental destruction and concluded by reading passages from the Webster Groves City Charter which describe the importance of self-governance.

Although the Charter requires the Council to then place the issue before a vote of the people, the Council refused to do this as well. Greens interpret that action as a direct violation of the City Charter and a clear obstruction of democratic process. Apparently, the city officials are willing to risk a legal battle defending the violation of their charter rather than pass it or allow their citizens to vote on the issue.

Residents and the GGA are in process of taking the issue to court. As of this writing, the case has been assigned to a judge and Greens are waiting for a hearing date. With each level of debate over labelling and consumers' rights—both in the Council and in the court—activists increase the public awareness of GE products and potential dangers.

The outcome of this case promises to be interesting. If the citizens of Webster Groves are allowed a vote, the issue will receive further discussion and people will have a chance to decide on a request for labels. If the City of Webster Groves and Monsanto win, it will further illustrate a fundamental problem with GE food and crops—that GE agriculture is being ushered in without consideration to what people really want and that its success requires silencing critics, violating law, and subverting democratic process.

Tammy Shea is a member of the Gateway Green Alliance. GGA received a grant from Resist in 1998. For information, contact GGA, PO Box 8094, St. Louis, MO 63156.
Disability Activists Warn of Eugenics

LAURA HERSHEY

Disability-rights activists, myself included, have become increasingly alarmed about the economic and political issues arising from the rapidly advancing field of genetic research. The Human Genome Project, a multi-year, multimillion-dollar government-funded endeavor, promises eventually to “map” all of the 60,000 to 90,000 human genes and chromosomes. Scientists now expect to be finished sequencing genetic information by the year 2003, or even sooner.

The application of genetic knowledge to the repair of damaged genes, for the purpose of treating certain illnesses, may offer welcome benefits to some people with disabilities. But genetic research is likely to be put to other, more insidious, uses such as denying health insurance, even jobs, to people whose genes predispose them to medical problems. Another threat is the implementation of eugenic policies to “weed out” certain types of people from the population. Thus, along with the much-heralded scientific advances offered by genetic research, disability activists nervously witness a resurgence of eugenic thinking.

Genetic Screening Against Disability

Using ultrasound and abortion to select a child’s sex is regarded as unacceptable to most people. Using genetic testing to eradicate characteristics such as homosexuality is still a new concept, but is likely to cause a great deal of controversy. Yet the media and the public seem to accept, almost without question, the idea of screening for genetic anomalies that cause disabilities and then using that information to eliminate certain conditions, by eliminating their carriers before birth.

Scientists and journalists may consider genetic screening against disability a wise public health strategy. But the progressive disability community sees the dangers inherent in targeting genetic research toward efforts to do away with disability. Ruth Ricker, who has congenital dwarfism, and who formerly served as president of Little People of America, wrote, “The basic presumption that disability is a condition to be cured or prevented devalues people living with disabilities.”

Many people assume that people with disabilities would want to spare future generations from the difficulties we had to endure. But this assumption relies on another assumption, that our disabilities are inherently problematic. The disability-rights movement disputes that idea. Rather than blaming our physical or mental disabilities themselves, we see our problems as rooted in social, physical, economic and political barriers. Attempting systematically to wipe out disabilities is the wrong solution. Instead, society should commit itself to removal of these barriers, and to full equality for people with disabilities.

Still, why would disabled adults object to genetic practices which do not directly affect us? At first glance, genetic screening seems to target only potential people with disabilities — either fetuses diagnosed with genetic anomalies, or those not yet conceived, but at risk of such anomalies. But in fact, the mindset that advocates the widespread, even routine use of screening also promotes efforts to “prevent disability” — not by reducing occupational hazards and violence, nor by improving health care or environmental conditions; but by deterring the births of children who may have disabilities.

Genetic counseling, prenatal testing, and selective abortions arise from — and reinforce — the erroneous and dangerous belief that people with disabilities are a problem. As our society struggles with the allocation of health care resources, we overlook the vast amounts of money which are consumed by corporate bureaucracies and private profits. People with disabilities are scapegoated for needing and using expensive medical services and ongoing supports.

As a feminist, I have always been pro-choice on matters of reproductive freedom. That’s another reason that the new eugenics movement disturbs me: It’s not about granting women greater autonomy; it’s about pressuring women to carry out public policies which are driven by scarcity economics, utilitarianism, and deep-seated social prejudice against people with disabilities. It’s also about stigmatizing women who do bear children who have disabilities.

As an example, witness the recent remarks of Dr. Bob Edwards, world-renowned embryologist and creator of Britain’s first test-tube baby. Speaking at an international fertility conference, Edwards said the increasing availability of prenatal screening for genetic disease gave parents a moral responsibility not to give birth to disabled children. Edwards celebrated a new age in which every child would be genetically acceptable. “Soon,” he pronounced, “it will be a sin of parents to have a child that carries the heavy burden of genetic disease. We are entering a world where we have to consider the quality of our children.” At the same conference, physicians were discussing the development of a new, comprehensive national screening program for Down’s syndrome. The program, expected to begin next year, will essentially mandate testing for all pregnant women.

Not Model Citizens

Since virtually the beginning of the disability-rights movement, activists have criticized “the medical model.” This model viewed people with disabilities — our bodies, our social identity, our private stories — as pathology. The medical model viewed people with disabilities as afflicted, ill, aberrant, burdened patients to be cured, or at least rehabilitated.

We refuted the mastery of the physician, and challenged the built-world around us to change, to adapt to our nonstandard...
continued from page eight

specifications. The disability-rights movement insists on accessibility and accommodations, not as benevolent gestures toward the “less fortunate” but as the civil rights of a large political minority.

Increasingly, another ideology is evolving from the medical model. The field of public health has gained prominence in recent years, spawning new, perhaps equally coercive beliefs about disability.

Under the public health model, one person’s health or illness becomes a societal responsibility. Health equals good citizenship, whereas illness is expensive, disruptive, and (with genetic intervention) can be preventable.

For all its oppressiveness, the old medical model did claim as its primary concern the well-being of the patient herself. Its definitions and prescriptions could be profoundly misguided, but they were made in the name of serving the disabled person’s needs. In contrast, the public health model aims to serve the dominant (nondisabled) majority, by cutting costs associated with disability. As disability-rights advocate, author, and psychologist Carol Gill points out, the idea of “promoting wellness” sounds benign — but in practice, it can mean that “disenfranchised people suffer.”

A Place at the Research Table

This isn’t just a matter of good science being used for bad purposes. Disability activists question the research itself; we deserve and demand an opportunity to give input into the directions taken by the Human Genome Project and other research endeavors. This means questioning the presumption of total scientific objectivity.

Writes Ricker: “In the present context, each time a scientist decides to do research on a particular gene or trait in order to figure out how to alter that gene or trait to result in an ‘improved’ human being, that scientist is making a eugenic decision. Deciding which genes to investigate, alter, delete or insert is a process inherently imbued with value judgements about what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ for humankind.”

Laura Hershey is an activist, writer, organizer, and trainer in Denver, CO. She writes an on-line disability-rights column called “Crip Commentary,” at <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/LauraHershey>.

Partial List of Resources on Genetics for Activists

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<th>Resource</th>
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<td><strong>Campaign for Food Safety</strong>&lt;br&gt;(formerly Pure Food Campaign)&lt;br&gt;860 Highway 61, Little Marais, MN 55614&lt;br&gt;<a href="mailto:alliance@mnr.net">alliance@mnr.net</a>; <a href="http://www.purefood.org">www.purefood.org</a>&lt;br&gt;A public interest organization acting as a global clearinghouse for information on sustainability.</td>
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<td><strong>The Campaign to Label Genetically Engineered Foods</strong>&lt;br&gt;PO Box 55699&lt;br&gt;Seattle, WA 56699&lt;br&gt;www.thecampaign.org</td>
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<td><strong>The Center for Food Safety</strong>&lt;br&gt;www.ict.org&lt;br&gt;A division of the International Center for Technology Assessment which oversees the Organic Watch and the Organic Food Action Network.</td>
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<td><strong>Council for Responsible Genetics</strong>&lt;br&gt;5 Upland Road, Cambridge, MA 02140&lt;br&gt;<a href="mailto:crg@essential.org">crg@essential.org</a>; <a href="http://www.gene-watch.org">www.gene-watch.org</a>&lt;br&gt;A non-profit organization of scientists, public health advocates, and others promoting a public interest agenda for biotechnology.</td>
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<td><strong>FARM Aid</strong>&lt;br&gt;P.O. Box 228, Champaign, IL 61824&lt;br&gt;1-800-FARM-AID&lt;br&gt;The organization seeks to preserve traditional farm culture and safe family farm grown food.</td>
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<td><strong>Greenpeace International</strong>&lt;br&gt;www.greenpeace.org/~geneng/&lt;br&gt;Documents protests against genetic manipulation and offers an overview of the activism issues surrounding genetics.</td>
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<td><strong>Indigenous Peoples Coalition Against Biopiracy (IPCDB)</strong>&lt;br&gt;P.O. Box 72, Nixon, NV 89424&lt;br&gt;<a href="mailto:IPCB@niec.net">IPCB@niec.net</a>; <a href="http://www.niec.net">www.niec.net</a>&lt;br&gt;A coalition of indigenous organizations throughout the Americas which resists the exploitation of indigenous peoples’ biological resources.</td>
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<td><strong>Institute for Agriculture &amp; Trade Policy</strong>&lt;br&gt;A leading public organization concentrating on matters of agriculture and trade. 2105 First Avenue South</td>
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<td><strong>Minneapolis, MN 55404</strong>&lt;br&gt;www.iatp.org</td>
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<td><strong>Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<a href="mailto:panna@panna.org">panna@panna.org</a>; <a href="http://www.panna.org">www.panna.org</a>&lt;br&gt;One of five PAN Regional Centers campaigning to replace pesticides with ecologically sound alternatives and to increase citizen access to information on pesticide hazards.</td>
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<td><strong>Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI)</strong>&lt;br&gt;P.O. Box 640, Pittsboro, NC 27312&lt;br&gt;<a href="mailto:rafi@rafi.org">rafi@rafi.org</a>; <a href="http://www.rafi.org">www.rafi.org</a>&lt;br&gt;An international NGO dedicated to sustainable improvement of agricultural biodiversity and to the socially responsible development of technologies.</td>
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<td><strong>Secretariat of Diverse Women for Diversity</strong>&lt;br&gt;Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology&lt;br&gt;A-60, Hauz-Khas, New Delhi 110016, India&lt;br&gt;<a href="mailto:vshiva@giads1101.vsnl.net.in">vshiva@giads1101.vsnl.net.in</a>; <a href="http://www.indiaserver.com/betas/vshiva">www.indiaserver.com/betas/vshiva</a></td>
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<td><strong>Third World Network</strong>&lt;br&gt;www.twinside.org.sg/souths/twn/bio/htm&lt;br&gt;Compilation of articles and books about biotechnology problems facing Southern hemisphere countries.</td>
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<td><strong>Union of Concerned Scientists</strong>&lt;br&gt;www.ucsusa.org/agriculture/&lt;br&gt;A coalition of citizens and scientists offering analysis, policy development and advocacy about genetically modified organisms and biotechnology.</td>
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<td><strong>Washington Biotechnology Action Council (Washington Biotechnology Action Council (WashBAC))</strong>&lt;br&gt;<a href="mailto:radin@u.washington.edu">radin@u.washington.edu</a>;&lt;br&gt;weber.u.washington.edu/~radin/&lt;br&gt;WashBAC offers expertise in technical and insurance matters to many biotechnology movements, such as the fight against genetic discrimination.</td>
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<td><strong>Women’s Environmental Network</strong>&lt;br&gt;Test Tube Harvest Campaign&lt;br&gt;87 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BE, UK&lt;br&gt;e-mail: TestTube@~gn.apc.org</td>
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An overemphasis on the role of genes in human health neglects environmental and social factors.

- The US Department of Defense insists on taking DNA samples from all its personnel, ostensibly for identification of those killed in action and body parts from military accidents—despite the fact that the samples are to be kept for 50 years (long after people have left active duty). The program includes civilian employees, and the agency refuses to issue regulations barring all third party use.
- The FBI has been promoting the genetic screening of criminals to establish state DNA identification data banks to be used in criminal investigations; recent Federal legislation penalizes states fiscally if they don't participate. Yet the data includes samples from those whose crimes have low recidivism rates or don't leave tissue samples; in some states people merely accused are forced into the program.

The American Civil Liberties Union advocates that "the decision to undergo genetic screening is purely personal," it should not be "subject to control or compulsion by third parties" or the government. And "where a person has intention-ally undergone genetic screening procedures there must be no disclosure of findings to third parties without the express and informed consent of the subject given after the results of the screening are made known to the subject . . . ."

Yet patients' records "are commodities for sale," in the words of the New York Times; and a panel of the US National Research Council warned this March that the computerized medical records of millions of citizens are open to misuse and abuse.

Authoritarian-minded public officials are trying to extend testing without consent. Louisiana has a statute requiring all arrestees to be tested (a provision the New York City police chief believes is worth enacting up North—his boss, Mayor Guiliani thinks everybody should be DNA-tested at birth.)

The scope of the informed consent should define future allowable uses of the samples, denying all future unconsented research uses. If the argument is made that this may compromise the ability to do research, we should remember that upholding civil liberties values often leads to inefficiencies; we could catch more crooks if we did away with the Fourth Amendment prohibition on warrantless searches.

Insurance and Genetic Discrimination
Genetic discrimination is the other major civil liberty threatened by genetics research. Scientists working with the Council for Responsible Genetics have documented hundreds of cases where healthy people have been denied insurance or employment based on genetic "predictions."

Of course, relatively few genetic diseases are deterministic; most tests (which have inherent limits themselves) cannot tell us if a genetic mutation will become manifest; if it does do so, when in life this will occur; and if it happens, how severe the condition will be. In addition, many genetic conditions can be controlled or treated by interventions and environmental changes; that is why governments mandate testing newborns for PKU.

Recent Federal legislation, the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill, limits genetic discrimination regarding certain medical insurance policies, but does not apply to others, nor to life, disability, or automobile insurance, nor to employment—all areas of documented discrimination. Slowly, state by state, the CRG, ACLU, and patients' rights groups are trying to get legislation passed to reduce or eliminate genetic discrimination; about 40 states have enacted some type of protections.

President Clinton announced his support of a Federal bill which would prohibit health insurance providers from using any types of genetic information for making decisions about whether to cover a person or what premium to charge. This legislation would address some of the discrimination problems which have been occurring.

Beyond the risk of discrimination, however, society's fascination with genetic determinism has other social and political consequences. An overemphasis on the role of genes in human health neglects environmental and social factors. For example, strong evidence points to links between environmental contamination and cancer. Current research priorities, however, are skewed toward identifying genetic predispositions to cancer. If cancer is cast primarily as a genetic disease, then legislators may discard efforts to clean up environmental carcinogens in favor of a search for "cancer genes."

In effect, we encourage a "blame the victim" mindset, where we condemn people with "faulty" genes. Social conditions such as poverty or environmental pollution, which correlate directly with poor health and higher mortality rates, become less important. And economic and social resources end up being diverted into finding biomedical "solutions" while societal measures get short-changed.

Although new technologies claim to offer us more "freedom," they really can threaten our civic values. This is certainly true of the new biology. As Jefferson warned, "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance"—it isn't genetically hard-wired to happen automatically.

Phil Bereano is a member of the Board of Directors of the Council on Responsible Genetics and a long time Resist supporter.
in the next five years will be genetically modified or combined with bulk commodities that are genetically modified ... The EU's fear of bioengineered foods ... is the single greatest trade threat that we face."

Rounding Up the Losses

One of Monsanto's lead GE products is Roundup-ready soybeans (RRS), designed to be resistant to the potent pesticide Roundup. With promises of higher yields, Roundup soybeans have already taken up to 40-50% of the domestic market.

The July 10 magazine *New Scientist* (UK) contains an article on recently released USDA data on GE crops that essentially reaffirms Dr. Charles Benbrook and others' analysis that herbicide-resistant and Bt crops are neither producing higher yields nor reducing pesticide use. According to Kurt Kleiner of the *New Scientist*: "Most American farmers who have turned to genetically engineered crops seem to be getting yields no better than farmers who grow traditional varieties. They also appear to be using similar quantities of pesticides."

Not only is the promise of higher yield apparently false, but according to Dr. Marc Lappe from the Center for Ethics and Toxins, RRS soybeans are not as nutritious as the naturally occurring variety. Dr. Lappe published with two other scientists July 1 a peer-reviewed study in the *Journal of Medicinal Food* pointing out that Monsanto's RRS soybeans contain 12-14% lower levels of beneficial, naturally occurring phytoestrogens (thought to provide natural protection against breast cancer, heart disease, and osteoporosis) than conventional soybeans.

Monsanto has vehemently denied Lappe's claims. Monsanto previously intervened with a publisher to try to prevent Lappe and Britt Bailey's anti-biotech book, *Against the Grain*, from being published.

Some Buyers Say No

According to an article in the July 2 *Farmers Weekly* (UK), after major US corn buyers Archer Daniels Midland and A.E. Staley announced they would no longer purchase GE corn which was unapproved for sale in the EU, up to 20% of US corn farmers in some areas returned their unapproved GE corn seeds to seed distributors.

In the May 6 issue of *Post*, an insurance magazine, a manager for insurance giant Cigna International, Maunce Pullen, recommended that insurance companies think twice before issuing insurance policies to genetic engineering companies: "Our experience with asbestos, PCBs, and other 'miracle' products in the past should have warned us of the potential dangers of diving into issues before we have an adequate awareness of the exposures."

According to the British and Brazilian press, more and more major supermarket chains, food producers, and animal feed companies in Europe are starting to turn to Brazil, rather than the US (where GE and non-GE soybeans continue to be co-mingled), for their soybean imports. This is alarming to US farmers and the White House, since US ag exports are already in crisis, with a 14% decline overall in exports since last year. Meanwhile prices paid to farmers for US soybeans have dropped to a 27-year low, with overall US soybean exports declining by 38%.

In addition the US has lost $400 million in corn exports to Europe over the past two years because of the EU public's rejection of GE corn.

Organizing in the USA

Over three dozen NGOs and consumer groups in the US—including for the first time several national environmental groups—have begun holding anti-biotech meetings, participating in conference calls, and organizing press events and protests. According to a report by Bill Lambrecht in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on May 30, a number of major non-profit foundations in the US are on the verge of pouring significant financial resources into public interest organizations in order to facilitate an American GE public awareness campaign.

Proponents of GE realize they're going to have to make at least some minor concessions on the biotech labeling front in order to head off a trade war with the EU, prevent the GE controversy from heating up in Japan and other major US export markets, and prevent the emergence of a serious debate and organized opposition movement in the US. The biotech industry understands quite well consumer polls over the past ten years that show that 80-90% of Americans support mandatory labeling, and that 60% or so, if foods were clearly labeled, would attempt to avoid buying GE products. They also understand that there isn't more of a controversy yet in the US because consumers erroneously believe that GE foods (except for rBGH-derived dairy products) are not available. A 1999 study by the International Food Information Council, a government and industry-funded group, found that 47% of Americans believe that there aren't any genetically engineered foods on the market yet.

The biotech lobby apparently believes that a more moderate set of proposed national organic standards—one that specifically excludes GE, irradiation, and toxic sludge—will placate US organic consumers. Beyond this, if the overall biotech debate in the US starts to get out of hand, they are willing to entertain the notion of partial, voluntary industry labeling. The White House and the Gene Giants believe that segregation and labeling of GE exports will placate Europeans and Asians, and that over time everyone will calm down.

In the meantime they intend to use the GATT, the World Bank, the IMF, and other corporate and biotech-friendly institutions to rewrite global trade agreements and investment policies so that nation states no longer have the ability to respond to citizen demands for rigid controls over genetic engineering technologies. As an ultimate fall-back plan, our sources tell us, the White House would conceivably consider a general and deliberately vague label on food products that says something like "This product may contain bioengineered or irradiated ingredients...".

Of course this is not enough. Campaigners in the US and around the world must prepare ourselves for a protracted struggle. The battle has just begun.

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This article is excerpted from Campaign for Food Safety News (#20, July 14, 1999). For more information, contact: Campaign for Food Safety (formerly Pure Food Campaign), 860 Highway 61, Little Marais, Minnesota 55614.
Resist awards grants six times a year to groups throughout the United States engaged in activism for social and economic justice. In this issue of the Newsletter we list a few grant recipients from our August allocation cycle. For more information, contact the groups at the addresses below.

CAUSA
3248 Market Street
Salem, OR 97301; mano@open.org

CAUSA is a statewide, grassroots coalition of more than sixty Latino, African-American, Asian-American, Native American, labor, religious, student, health, gay/lesbian, human service and education organizations. CAUSA's mission is to defend immigrants' rights and well-being and to counter the burgeoning anti-immigrant agenda in Oregon. The coalition, founded in the fall of 1995 as CAUSA '96, focused on defeating anti-immigrant ballot measures modeled on California's Proposition 187. These measures sought to deny benefits, driving privileges, and public education to undocumented persons, and to deputize public officials, police and educators as immigration agents. As a result of CAUSA's organizing efforts, the initiatives failed to qualify for the November, 1996 ballot. Over the last several years, CAUSA has conducted more than 50 forums in Oregon to raise immigrants' awareness of their rights, to discuss welfare and immigration reform, and to organize against Immigration and Naturalization Service raids.

Resist's grant of $2,000, from the Leslie D'Cora Holmes Memorial Fund, will provide general support for CAUSA's statewide coalition as they continue to defend immigrant rights and build immigrant leadership.

9 to 5 Colorado
655 Broadway, #300
Denver, CO 80203; Wrkingwom@aol.com
www.9to5naww.qpg.com

9 to 5 Colorado, a chapter of 9 to 5, the National Association of Working Women, was founded in 1996 to involve women in efforts to address economic and social issues by which they are directly impacted. They combine activism, education, advocacy, leadership development and support to promote fair pay, an end to discrimination and access to training, leadership and job opportunities for all women. Over the last several years, 9 to 5 Colorado has conducted a corporate responsibility campaign, organized around welfare reform issues, fought to defend affirmative action. The "Not in My Workplace" project educates members, allies, co-workers and friends about the connections between different forms of oppression such as sexism, racism and homophobia.

Resist's grant of $2,000, from the Freda Friedman Salzman Memorial Fund, will support 9 to 5 Colorado's proposal for a workplace anti-discrimination outreach and education project designed to help low-wage women understand their rights and empower them to take action.

Alaska Women’s Environmental Network
750 West Second Avenue, #200
Anchorage, AK 99501; levensaler@nwf.org

Alaska Women’s Environmental Network (AWEN) was founded in the Fall of 1994 after several local women attended a national “Women in Conservation Leadership” conference. The group formed to create an on-going network to help Alaskan women environmentalists be more effective activists. AWEN has since developed programs in nine communities throughout Alaska, maintained an e-mail listserv that provides timely information on environmental issues, and assisted in the formation of Alaskan Youth for Environmental Action. Among environmental organizations, AWEN has one of the highest rates of participation of people from rural Alaska. AWEN participants work on issues that include protecting open space in urban areas, fighting for wilderness protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the Copper River Delta, and fighting to keep the ecosystems of local forests alive and healthy.

A $1,250 grant from Resist will provide general support for AWEN as it seeks to create networking opportunities and training programs to promote women's leadership in Alaskan conservation efforts.