

Recent Books on Genetic Engineering

Tomas MacSheoin

1998

On 28th September last, a group of unknown people approached a field in County Carlow, Ireland, with malicious intent. They proceeded to tear apart an acre of sugar beets' then disappeared back into the night from which they came.

The field was the property of Teagasc, a semi-state agricultural research organization. The catchily-branded Roundup Ready Sugar Beet that was destroyed had grown from seed provided by the U.S. multinational, Monsanto (See p. 2). The sabotage was claimed by the Gaelic Earth Liberation Front.

The sabotage recalls images from the past of other agrarian groups that moved at night to inflict peasant justice with names like the White Boys or the Ribbon Men.

This action was another front in a global struggle over the control of food supply currently being waged. It is seen in the continual destruction of subsistence production, and the application of high-technology to and commodification of basic foodstuffs.

It is also part of a struggle against the introduction of biotechnology, what capital expects to replace current chemical process technology. A November 1995 article in the *Economic and Political Weekly* stated, "According to the projections of several reputed institutions, biotechnology is slated to account for almost 60 to 70 percent of the global economy for the next two to three decades... biotechnology covers a span of economic sectors which is unprecedented. It will play a role in fields as diverse as mining, feedstock chemicals, energy, pharmaceuticals and of course food."

And, surprise, surprise: this biotechnology sector will be almost entirely in the hands of the world's ten to twelve largest multinational corporations.

The Australian pamphlet *Colonizing the Seed: Genetic Engineering and Techno-Industrial Agriculture* concisely puts forward reasons for concern over the introduction of genetically engineered seeds. Author Gyorgy Scrinis argues, "that genetic engineering represents a continuation, indeed an intensification, of the techno-industrial approach to agricultural production, and the social inequalities, concentrations of power/wealth, and ecological problems it has produced."

While this account is good on the process of commodification involved in this development, it lacks details of who is monopolizing the seed business. For the carve-up of the global seeds business that is the background against which genetically engineered seeds are being introduced, Scrinis' work should be supplemented by P.R. Mooney's classic *Seeds of the Earth: A Private or Public Resource?* (Ottawa: Inter Pares) Although much of Mooney's information is now dated, its concentration on corporate maneuverings is bang on target.

On a more anecdotal and less theoretical basis, Robin Mather's *Garden of Unearthly Delights: Bio-engineering and the Future of Food* (Dutton) looks at changes in U.S. food production and consumption and how they have moved from raw reality to a situation where everything is processed. Mather, a striking *Detroit Free Press* food writer (FE note: recently called back to work at the scab gulag), examines dairy, tomato and chicken production, and compares corporate methods of production with alternative, humane methods. Her book, which has a useful index and list

of resources, ends by arguing for a new approach to food. Back to the garden and the kitchen, folks: you know it makes sense.

Note: The Scrinis title is available from Anti-Genetic Engineering Collective, 312 Smith St. Collingwood, 3066, Melbourne, Australia. Tomas MacSheoin's *Poisoning Asia: The Relocation of Toxic Technologies from North to South*, is forthcoming from The Other India Press, (Mapusa 403 507 Goa, India).



Tomas MacSheoin
Recent Books on Genetic Engineering
1998

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/351-summer-1998/recent-books-on-genetic-engineering>
Fifth Estate #351, Summer 1998

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net