

ECO-IMPERIALISM: Green Power - Black Death

Excerpts from Chapters

(Note: All endnotes and citations in original text have been deleted; asterisks denote missing text.)

4. Playing Games with Starving People

* * * * *

Nearly 2.5 million people were on the verge of starvation in Zambia alone, where President Levy Mwanawasa bowed to NGO pressure and EU import policies, and refused to accept food aid from the United States.

The US had shipped 26,000 tons of corn to Zambia, where many people were down to one small meal per day, only to have the grain sit in storage. Parroting the EU/Greenpeace line, Mwanawasa decreed it was unsafe for consumption, because some of the corn (maize) had been genetically modified, to make it resistant to insect pests, reduce the need for pesticides, and increase crop yields without having to put more land under cultivation.

“We would rather starve than get something toxic,” Mwanawasa cavalierly remarked. Anonymous European Commission officials went so far as to accuse the US of using Africans as guinea pigs, to prove biotech foods are safe to eat. Rumors circulated among the locals that women would become sterile and people would get AIDS, if they ate the corn.

The fact that Americans have been consuming this corn for years did not change Mwanawasa’s position. (Over 34 percent of all US corn and 78 percent of its soybeans are genetically modified, as are many other crops.) Nor was he swayed by repeated scientific studies concluding that biotech foods are safe to eat – or by the demands of his own starving people, who on several occasions attempted to break into the warehouses.

* * * * *

As for President Mwanawasa and his ruling elites, they are not going hungry, either. Nor are Mr. Mugabe and his cronies in Zimbabwe, who live lavishly on imported European food and luxury goods. They will, however, profit mightily from any agricultural and other trade with EU nations that threaten their countries with sanctions, if the Africans dare to import, export or grow biotech crops. The elites’ real fear, in other words, is not “tainted” food – but concern that Euro food fanatics will decree that African crops have been tainted by American GM pollen. Meanwhile, the desperate masses continue to starve.

* * * * *

Biotech experts Gregory Conko and Dr. Henry Miller, MD are blunt in their denunciation of the EU, UN and radical green actions. This “self-serving involvement in excessive, unscientific biotechnology regulation,” they argue, “will slow agricultural research and development, promote environmental damage, and bring famine to millions in developing countries.” The UN-sponsored “biosafety protocol,” regulating the international movement of gene-spliced organisms, is based on a “bogus precautionary principle,” which falsely assumes there are risk-free alternatives, and imposes an impossible standard on innovation: guilty until proven innocent beyond a shadow of a doubt.

No longer must regulators demonstrate that a new technology is likely to cause harm. Instead, the innovator must now prove the technology will *not* cause any harm. Worse, “regulatory bodies are free to arbitrarily require any amount and kind of testing they wish.... [T]he biosafety protocol establishes an ill-defined global regulatory process that permits overly

risk-averse, incompetent, and corrupt regulators to hide behind the precautionary principle in delaying or deferring approvals,” they charge, as in the case of a years-long moratorium on EU approvals of gene-spliced plants.

The principle imposes the ideologies and unfounded phobias of affluent First World activists, to justify severe restrictions on the use of chemicals, pesticides, fossil fuels and biotechnology by Third World people who can least afford them. Opposition to biotechnology is “a northern luxury,” says Kenyan agronomist Dr. Florence Wambugu. “I appreciate ethical concerns, but anything that doesn’t help feed our children is unethical.”

Greenpeace co-founder and ecologist Dr. Patrick Moore echoes her sentiments. Now an outspoken critic of the group he once led, he underscores the “huge and realistically potential benefits” that GM crops could bring “for the environment and human health and nutrition.” He calls the war on biotechnology and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) “perhaps the most classic case of misguided environmentalism” in memory.

* * * * *

“If today’s rich nations decide to stop or turn back the clock, they will still be rich,” notes Wellesley College political scientist Robert Paarlberg. “But if we stop the clock for developing countries, they will still be poor and hungry.” And thousands, perhaps millions, of their children will die.

* * * * *

Africa missed out on the first “Green Revolution.” Pioneered by Iowa farmer and agricultural researcher Dr. Norman Borlaug, this revolution brought new corn varieties to Mexico, new wheat strains to India and new rice to China, saving the lives of perhaps a billion people. Africans can hardly afford to miss out on the biotech green revolution.

As Dr. Borlaug has put it, “There are 6.6 billion people on the planet today. With organic farming we could only feed 4 billion of them. Which 2 billion would volunteer to die?” Or which 2 billion would Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Fund and the Earth Liberation Front “volunteer” to die?

* * * * *

Economist Indur Goklany has calculated that, if the world tried to feed just today’s six billion people using the primarily organic technologies and yields of 1961 (pre-Green Revolution), it would have to cultivate 82 percent of its total land area, instead of the current 38 percent. That would require plowing the Amazon rainforest, irrigating the Sahara Desert and draining Angola’s Okavango river basin. The only thing organic farming sustains, says Tuskegee University plant genetics professor and AgBioWorld Foundation president CS Prakash, is “poverty and malnutrition.”

None of this is to suggest that biotechnology is a magic bullet that will transform Third World agriculture. It isn’t. However, it is a vital weapon in the war against malnutrition, starvation and disease. In conjunction with modern equipment, fertilizers and pesticides, improved transportation infrastructures, integrated crop protection programs, better training in handling chemicals and running farms as businesses, and stronger organizations that give farmers a greater voice in policy decisions – biotechnology and GM crops could play a crucial role in developing countries.

In short, even if the absurd worst-case anti-biotech (or anti-pesticide) scenarios propagated by activists are accepted as valid – and even if a case can somehow be made that these technologies should not be used in the United States or Europe – developing nations should still be permitted to use them. In fact, they should be encouraged to do so. The lives of their people, and their wildlife, hang in the balance.

* * * * *