

# The New Luddite War

## We Will Destroy Genetic Engineering!



Two years ago direct action against genetic engineering in Britain was non-existent. Two years later and it has become one of the main struggles in which our movements are involved. Hundreds of new people have got active in everything from mass trashings to night time sabotage. With over seventy experimental Genetically Modified (GM) test sites destroyed, our action is crippling the advance of the technology. This article will cover how the campaign has evolved and some of the reasons why it is so important that genetic engineering is stopped. Many newspapers have covered the ecological and health disasters that could arise if genetic engineering goes badly wrong. Instead this article will chart the ecological, social and health disasters that will arise if genetic engineering goes badly right.

Though Britain has been the (First World) country where actions against genetic engineering have really kicked off, people have been resisting for over a decade all over the world. The first outdoor genetic test site was a crop of genetically engineered strawberries at the University of California in 1987. The night after the plants had been transplanted Earth First!ers climbed fences, evaded security guards and succeeded in pulling up all 2,000 plants.<sup>1</sup> In 1989 Earth First!ers destroyed yet more test sites in the US which in turn inspired actions in Holland where three test sites were dug up. Claiming responsibility for the Dutch attacks, the 'Raging Diggers' stated in their July 1991 communique:

"The destruction of a test field is designed to both start a discussion on the subject of bio-technology, as well as to offer a direct counter to pro-biotechnology propaganda in the form of sabotage!"<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the early and mid nineties a growing alliance of Indian peasant groups organised against GM and the patenting of seeds. The campaign, which involved everything from setting up community seed banks to the mass destruction of an installation belonging to the multinational Cargill, culminated in a 500,000 strong demonstration. Back in Europe, 1996 saw German eco-anarchists squatting fields to stop them being planted as genetic test sites. A third of all sites were prevented from being sown that year and many of those which had been sown were subsequently sabotaged. By the end of the year twelve sites had been dug up, and the remaining experiments were under 24 hour police guard.<sup>3</sup> Crop squats and anti-GM actions in Germany continued throughout the following year. The growing international nature of the resistance showed itself on April 21st '97 when activists simultaneously occupied



Monsanto's head offices in both Britain and America. Two weeks later a GM potato test site was dug up belonging to the Federal Research Institute of Germany. The leader of the research project described it as 'a direct hit'.

"On the 8th of June [1997] just five days after the action in Germany the Super Heroes Against Genetix decided to play cricket on a GM potato test field site just outside Cambridge. Due to the nature of a somewhat muddy and sticky wicket, potatoes replaced the traditional red ball. Fielders had a difficult time of it—most of the batting resulting in the 'balls' being smashed to pieces, or else being lost amongst upturned soil. The entire GM crop was destroyed."<sup>4</sup>

Days after the first British GM test site sabotage, Germany saw another field dug up, this time GM sugar beet. Around two months later more sites were dug up in Britain followed in November '97 by the first of many GM site trashings by the French *Confederation Paysanne* (p. 103). The following year saw a massive escalation of direct action in Britain with numerous office occupations and test site sabotages. In 1998 over thirty test sites were destroyed, including seven rape-seed-oil experiments in different parts of the country on the same night. Last year also saw the first genetic experiment planted in Ireland. Almost immediately the experiment was dug up, never to be replaced. The year

ended with the Indian farmers in Karnataka launching 'Operation Cremate Monsanto' by setting fire to three of the company's crops.

Already this year over thirty three sites have been destroyed in Britain either through covert action at night (p. 101) or mass trashings in daylight (p. 99). During the glorious *Carnival against Capital* in the City of London on June 18th, the British HQ of agribusiness multinational Cargill was closed down and its windows and foyer smashed up (p. 1). The international aspect has grown too, with Indian farmers visiting a squatted genetic test site in Essex and blockading a pro- GM greenwash institute in London (p. 97). On the other side of the Channel, the French peasants are continuing their actions, while across the Atlantic, American activists have destroyed three test sites—one action claimed by the 'Cropatistas'. As I write, three people have been remanded in prison for alleged 'Conspiracy to Cause Criminal Damage' at a GM maize field in Lincolnshire (p. 104). For those unaware of what lies behind genetic engineering this explosion of activity around the globe might seem strange. The next part of the article will aim to give a bit of background to the issues of power behind the struggle.

### Elite Technology— Weaponry for the Class War

Enveloped in darkness, they walked silently through the fields, groups of friends intent on destruction.



May '98 saw activists occupy a trashed genetic test site in Norfolk. Laughs and lettuces replaced corporate agribusiness as a new community took control.



The elite's new technology was their target and night after night they laid their blows at progress. The repression started, but while captured comrades languished in prison, others walked the night time paths. I could be describing today's campaign against genetic engineering but I am not. These bands of merry friends are of the past and despite bravery, imagination and countless escapades they failed. The war waged at the beginning of the last century by the Luddites of Northern England against the elite's new technology—the emerging factory system—was lost, drowned in blood and compromise. The following years saw an armed uprising (the Swing Riots) by the rural poor against new technologies in agriculture, but that too was defeated. The price of such defeats is the ecological destruction, pathologically warped emotions and wage slavery of global industrialism.

A strange tale to tell in an article about the resistance to genetic engineering? No. On the nights I have helped destroy genetic test sites I have thought of people, like those described above, who walked the night time paths before me. Listening to their voices both inspires me and helps me pick out the truth otherwise drowned out by the cacophony of corporate propaganda. With vast budgets the PR departments of the GM companies are trying to convince us that their technology is aimed at feeding the poor and increasing food production.<sup>5</sup> The Luddites of the past remind us of the reality, that the technologies foisted upon the poor by the elite are aimed at accruing profit and power. As one Indian scientist put it;

“Monocultures spread not because they produce more, but because they control more.”<sup>6</sup>

We and the Luddites are fighters in the same war. Two hundred years ago the English elite's main enemy was the peasantry who lived for the most part outside the cash economy and were forever rising up. The elite used the enclosure of land and the mechanisation of crafts and agriculture to crush the rebellious autonomy of the English poor. The class was eradicated by physical force and the elite's technology and forced either to become either wage slaves in the emerging factories or on the farms of the rich.

Two hundred years, and many struggles later, the British poor are for the most part wasting their life in crap jobs or depressed and drug-ridden on the dole—their rebelliousness almost totally extinguished, our history forgotten. Meanwhile the—now global—elite continues to wage a war on the class that remains the main threat to its existence—the global peasantry.

## The Triumph of the Code

Enabled by the total colonisation of the seed, control of the global food industry will be further centralised into the hands of transnational corporations. This is the technologies' aim. This fusion of the agribusiness corporation and techno-science now culminates in the triumph of the logic of the code; in particular, the genetic-code of biotechnology, and the bar-code of consumer-industrial capitalism. The genetic-code and the bar-code are the means through which ever more aspects of contemporary life are being colonised, commodified and controlled. In this context, perhaps the fusion of these two codes may even lead to the imprinting of bar codes directly onto the DNA of genetically engineered organisms. Scientists at the Novagene corporation have apparently already 'devoted enormous time and money to write the company logo into a cell, the world's first living trademark.' (Cary Fowler et.al, *The Laws of life*, Development Dialogue, 1/2 1988, p. 55.)

The relative autonomy and link with the land which fuelled the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Viet Cong in Vietnam and the MST in Brasil has to be destroyed. This is where genetic engineering comes in.

The new technologies being pushed by the food industry—a sector which has more companies in the top 1000 than any other—aim to purposefully destroy the social fabric that keeps the land community together and to fully incorporate the peasantry into the global cash economy. The threat is neutralised and becomes fuel for the machine's further expansion.

To understand genetic engineering you have to look at the process it is part of. The last thirty years have seen, in what was called the 'green revolution' (sic), massive industrialisation of agriculture in the Third World. The highly expensive inputs for industrial agriculture; machines, pesticides etc. have forced millions of small farmers off their land. Mechanisation has made redundant many jobs done by agricultural labourers. This process is purposeful, as it was two hundred years ago when the elite dispossessed our ancestors. As one pro-industrialisation advocate put it:

“Economic development. is not compatible with the maintenance of a people's traditional customs. What is needed is a change in the totality of their culture and their psychological attitude, their way of life. What is therefore



required amounts to social disorganisation. Unhappiness and discontentment in the sense of wanting more than is obtainable is to be generated. The suffering and dislocation that is caused is the price that has to be paid for economic development.”<sup>7</sup>

The poor pay the price while the elite reap the profit. Radical social movements usually can't keep up with the rapid rate of social change, failing to effectively organise. As a result the dispossessed turn 'the violence of the green revolution' not on their enemies (who sit back comfortably in air conditioned

offices often thousands of miles away) but on their own class and families. Increases in suicide, the domestic abuse of both women and children, and the re-emergence of serious communal/religious conflict have all been linked by Indian eco-feminists to this social dislocation.<sup>8</sup> In general women bear the brunt of the horror caused, especially the malnourishment and hunger. In her new book, Germaine Greer points out that women are also increasingly burdened with the sole responsibility of child rearing. Lone female headed families are the poorest sector of the worlds population.

“As the extended family has crumbled under the pressure of urbanisation, increasing landlessness and economic change men no longer constrained by their elders to live as husbands and fathers have backed away from women and children. One quarter of all families in the world are headed by a lone female. In the Caribbean, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa it is about a third and rising.”<sup>9</sup>

Going hand in hand with the destruction of human lives, has been devastation of the ecologies those lives were once a part of. In the Third World, as in Britain, industrial agriculture is responsible for more

ecological destruction than any other factor. Corporate PR agencies have been spreading the idea that GM crops will need less chemical spraying and are therefore good for the environment. The truth is that the most common GM plant varieties have been engineered to be 'herbicide tolerant'. This enables a crop to be sprayed with more chemicals than ever before.

In general, genetic-industrial agriculture is characterised by both continuities and discontinuities with the chemical-industrial approach of green revolution agriculture.



*Jaws drop at an agricultural fair when activists trashed a GM display crop.*

It is continuous with it to the extent that they both share a static, one-dimensional, commodified, fragmented, uniform, toxic, and capital and input-intensive approach to agriculture. Genetic-industrial agriculture will continue, and indeed extend, the industrialisation of agricultural production, including the practice of monoculture cropping, the replacement of diverse plant varieties with static laboratory-bred varieties, and the use of toxic inputs.

Genetic engineering will also enable the destructive practices of industrial agriculture to continue where they may otherwise have reached their limits by creating plants that can tolerate greater quantities of chemical inputs or that are adapted to the soils

degraded by industrial agricultural practices. For these reasons, the new genetically engineered seeds and inputs will perpetuate and intensify the environmental problems and concentrations of power and wealth produced by chemical-industrial agriculture. Indeed it is the very same multinational corporations that have developed and continue to sell chemical products and hybrid seeds that are now developing and commercialising the products of genetic engineering.



Despite these continuities, the elite's new technologies differ significantly in the mode in which they take hold of nature and reconstitute it in new forms, since they now engage with organisms at the molecular level. In being able to tamper directly with the genetic structure of organisms, and to transfer genes across species boundaries, genetic engineering creates new kinds of ecological dangers as well as new forms of social control.<sup>10</sup>

## The Colonisation of the Seed

The relative autonomy of the peasantry has always rested on its ability to grow its own food without the major involvement of the market. Every harvest farmers can collect the seeds from their crops and reseed the following year. In many ways, the seed both symbolically and actually holds the key to freedom. Understanding this, the elite's new technologies change the seed from a key to freedom to a key to further slavery.

One of the most important weapons being developed for use against the rural poor is 'terminator technology'. Terminator technology allows seed companies to sterilise new varieties, meaning that farmers will not be able to obtain healthy seeds for the following year at harvest. Instead, every year they will have to buy seeds off the corporations. This is once again an extension of the green revolution which created hybridised seeds that were by nature sterile. However, in the past, hybridisation has not been possible with many crops. Terminator technology will allow companies to sterilise any of their seeds. Research at the moment is aimed at crops such



*Indian farmers in Karnataka burn GM crop in 'Operation Cremate Monsanto'.*

as rice, wheat, sorghum and soya beans, the basis of a large section of the world's daily survival. To paraphrase Brecht; "First control their fodder, then you're in control of their philosophy".

"Through patents and genetic engineering, new colonies are being carved out. The land, the forests, the rivers, the oceans, and the atmosphere have all been colonised, eroded, and polluted. Capital now has to look for new colonies to invade and exploit for its further accumulation. These new colonies are, in my view, the interior spaces of the bodies of women, plants and animals. Resistance to [biotechnology] is a resistance to the ultimate colonisation of life itself—of the future of evolution as well as the future of non-Western traditions of relating to and knowing nature. It is a struggle to protect



*The structures go up and the sun goes down over a GM crop squat in Essex. (May 1999)*



*The mobilisation of communities all around the country has succeeded in engendering wide scale mistrust of GM. The next stage must be massive assaults on the corporations and scientists behind the approaching nightmare. Give those kids a mask and a monkeywrench.*

the freedom of diverse species to evolve. It is a struggle to protect the freedom of diverse cultures to evolve.”<sup>11</sup>

Like most dominant technologies in this society, genetic engineering is an ecologically destructive, socially devastating weapon used by the elite in its continuing war of expansion against the wild and the worlds poor. In this context it is handy to remember that Monsanto was the producer of Agent Orange, the chemical defoliant used by America in its war with the peasantry of Vietnam. It is no accident that Chiapas, home to the Mexican Zapatistas, is the first place where GM trees are being commercially grown.<sup>12</sup>

## Disarming the Elite

What strategies can we use? Many reformist campaigners have mistakenly pinned their hopes on two tactics; (a) lobbying government and (b) consumer boycotts. Neither of these tactics can stop or seriously slow down genetic engineering. Lobbying the state will never have an impact because Western governments are in fact corporate fronts and genetic engineering is too important to them. Third World elites who see genetic engineering as a further grasping back of the small amounts of power they have over their turf, almost unanimously oppose patents

on life and GM technology. They are irrelevant, none have the power to stand up to the global elite pushing genetic engineering. This was graphically shown at the 1999 International Bio-Safety Protocol Negotiations:

“As ever the motives were money and power, with the N. Americans wanting to continue in their global control, the Europeans trying to re-assert their right to the global foray at par with N. Americans; and the Southerners trying to be spared from continuing to be the prey”<sup>13</sup>

The above quote is the view of Dr Tewolde Egziabher, the general manager of Ethiopia’s Environmental Protection Authority and chairperson of the African group of delegates at the negotiations. His conclusion was that global elite’s aim in running the conference was probably that “it merely wished to fool its own public”.

On the surface, consumer boycotts look more hopeful; at least they hit the companies in the pocket. Due to mad cow disease and other similar crises the European public are very suspicious of anything the companies and government say about food. Most people also feel that GM is inherently ‘wrong’, that is ‘tampering with nature’. Despite massive PR propaganda by both the state and the corporations this view only solidifies. A report leaked to Greenpeace, written for Monsanto reveals:

“An ongoing collapse of public support for biotechnology and GM foods. At each point in this project, we keep thinking that we have reached the low point and that public thinking will stabilise, but we apparently have not reached that point”.<sup>14</sup>

Some retailers interviewed believed there was a ‘fifty-fifty’ chance of ‘losing to the pressure groups’. Against the odds, thanks mainly to small local demonstrations, trolley blockades, determined leafleting and pure public cynicism many retailers are backing out of GM foods. Indeed, the elite is getting very worried at this situation. The deputy head



*After campaigners destroyed the first GM trees in Britain, one scientist adopts the dewy-eyed 'how could they cut down the trees' expression. Hey, I thought us eco-warriors had trademarked that look.*

of the American Treasury said in a statement to the Senate this spring that the campaign against genetic engineering in Europe "is the greatest block to global economic liberalisation presently in existence". People deserve to give themselves a pat on the back for this. However, as the main market for GM crops will be in the Third World consumer boycotts in the first world cannot stop the advancement of genetic engineering.

Two hundred years ago the English elite was forced to construct its new technological weaponry—the factory system—in hostile territory. Night after night the Luddites of northern England laid waste to the technology they knew was aimed directly at the destruction of their communities. Two hundred years later, the elite designs its new technological weapons thousands of miles from the people who

will eventually feel the effects. Unable to reach and destroy the experiments themselves the peasantry are forced to rely on us to be the long arms of the third world. We must make the territory *hostile again*.

The challenge has been taken up and people all over Europe are walking in the footsteps of the Luddites. The test site sabotage is crippling the development of the technology, giving valuable breathing space to Third World movements and really beginning to intimidate companies. This year after many of its test sites were destroyed, Britain's leading plant breeding company, CPB Twyford, announced that it was pulling out of the development of GM crops. In a press statement they said;

"...it was felt that the risks of continuing work with GMOs were not worth taking while the threat of indiscriminate vandalism exists."

Other research organisations have also given up on genetics due to the possibility of their crops being uprooted. This includes the Royal Agricultural College, who were told by their insurers that premiums would rise massively if GM crops were planted. Nearly half of all test sites in Britain have been destroyed this year and the number will continue to rise.

As the Luddites of today, we know that given the continuation of this society, halting—forever—the development of new technological weaponry might not be possible. Even if we don't succeed in stopping genetic engineering we have already slowed down the introduction of this technology. What this means in real terms is that we've succeeded in delaying the further degradation of the lives of millions of people. We have delayed for months, maybe years the ecological destruction, hunger, despair and domestic abuse that social dislocation brings. If that is all we succeed in then we have achieved much.

## **Growing the Global Land Community**

As well as the 'thumb in the dam' aspect of anti-GM, campaigns, the resistance is serving other purposes. Groups all over the world are linking up, training and learning from each other. France, America, Britain, Holland, Germany, Ireland and India- people are together taking action. The hope for a free and ecological future lies in these embryonic movements which understand their enemies are the machine and its masters, and their comrades the land and its lovers. In helping to catalyse the growth of these revolutionary ecological groups around the world the elite may have designed a weapon which will rebound on themselves.




Under the cover of the mass, masks and midnight we, the new Luddites, will continue to fight back in the land struggle that has never ended.

'Together we, the peasants and you, the poor of Europe will fight the multinationals with our sweat, and together we will succeed in defeating them!' - from a speech in London by an Indian peasant of the Bharta Kissan Union- Punjab, May 1999

## References

1. *Earth First! Journal*, June/July 1987
2. *Attacks on biotechnology in the Netherlands*, Do or Die No.1
3. *Anti-Genetics Actions: Crop Circle Chaos and Vegetable Vandalism*, Do or Die No. 6, p. 57.
4. *Genetix Update* June 1997, No. 1.
5. The increased food production of green revolution agriculture is yet another development fallacy. Study after study has shown that labor intensive small scale agriculture is far more efficient in producing food than capital intensive large scale agriculture. Nonindustrial farming techniques produce a large supply of food, consisting of many crops. Industrial-monoculture on the other hand produces a larger supply of one particular crop but a smaller amount of food in general. This uniform production of crops lends itself to mass society and the non-local—and therefore formal —economy. Production from the perspective of capitalist economics is relevant only if it is commodified. In the starving of the millions we see the conflict between commodity production for the market and food production for the stomach.
6. *Monocultures of the Mind: Biodiversity, Biotechnology and the Third World*, by Vandana Shiva, Third World Network, 1993, p.7.
7. *The Social Anthropology of Economic Underdevelopment*, by Sadie, J.L., *The Economic Journal*, No.70, 1960, p. 302.
8. *The Violence of the Green Revolution* by Vandana Shiva, (Zed Books, 1991)
9. *The Whole Woman* by Germaine Greer, (Transworld, Doubleday, 1999), p.320
10. *Colonising the Seed* by Gyorgy Scrinis (FOE Australia)
11. *Bio-Piracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* by Vandana Shiva, (Green Books, 1998) p11
12. See the June 1999 report *Eucalyptus, Neoliberalism and NAFTA in Southeastern Mexico*, as yet not published on paper but available on the web <http://www.acerca.org/eucalyptus>

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## Further Reading

*Colonising the Seed: Genetic Engineering and Techno-Industrial Agriculture* by Gyorgy Scrinis. Available from AK Press see page 332 for contact details. If you read one thing on genetics, read this pamphlet. *Biopolitics: A Feminist and Ecological reader on Biotechnology*, ed.Vandana Shiva and Ingunn Moser, (Zed Books 1995) £14.95, 294 pages, ISBN 1-85649-336-9 Overly academic but nevertheless illuminating collection of essays on everything from genetics and the Third World to the flawed reductionism of western science! *Farmageddon: Confronting Industrial Agriculture*, Do or Die No. 7, p40 An over view of the history of land struggle and the horrors of industrial agriculture. *The Luddites War on Industry: A story of machine smashing and spies*, Do or Die No. 6, p. 65 Learn about some of our inspirational political ancestors. *BioPiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* by Vandana Shiva, (Green Books 1998), 143 pages, £7.95 Without a doubt the best book written on genetics and power, even more powerful as it comes from a Third World author. *Genetic Engineering, Food and Our Environment* by Luke Anderson, (Green Books, 1999), 160 pages, £3.95 A newly published intro guide to the subject, though coming from a rather reformist perspective is definitely worth reading. Contains good scary facts.



## The Inter-Continental Caravan



"[Industrial agriculture has]... driven millions of peasants off their land... to the slums of the cities... The introduction of genetic engineering in food production will increase... the control of agri-business of the food system..., causing massive ecological hazards... and the impoverishment of farmers all over the world... Genetic engineering and patents on life represent one of the most serious threats ever faced by humankind..."

- From the ICC manifesto, by the Union of Peasants of the State of Karnataka (KRRS), India.

In May 1999 a coachload of Indians and Nepalese, mostly from peasants unions in Gujarrat and Punjab arrived in Britain. They were part of the Inter-Continental Caravan (ICC), in which nearly 300 campaigners from the South travelled through Europe, holding talks, demonstrations and direct action.

The initiators were the Union of the Peasants of the State of Karnataka (KRRS) whose previous actions include the brick by brick destruction of an installation belonging to the multinational agri-business firm Cargill; the destruction of the first Kentucky Fried Chicken in India; and burning genetic test sites and a demonstration against the World Trade Organisation involving 300,000 people. Their aim with this project was to bring attention in Europe to the struggles in the South and link up with western groups 'fighting the same battles'. The organisation of the ICC was absolute fucking chaos, and the project itself questionable (see page 28) but as one of the

cooks I found the experience of meeting the farmers really inspiring. We chatted with them between meals, learnt about each others' movements and swapped stories and addresses. The farmers were keen to do some actions and the main vent of their anger while they were in Britain was genetic engineering. For us here in the west, the motivation behind our fight against genetic engineering can be a bit abstract. For the Indian farmers it's about their own survival.

In May the Nuffield Institute, a greenwash think tank, released a report arguing that genetic engineering was needed to help the third world poor. In what was a beautiful coincidence, the day they released the report coincided with the arrival of the ICC. The following day the third world gave its reply. After marching from a public meeting half a mile away, the farmers and a hundred supporters stormed the office, and blockaded the street outside. They demanded a meeting with the head of the institute, which the



totally shocked, shaken and confused staff agreed to. They were told by the Indians that

“We will not let your corporations justify genetic engineering with the lie that it will alleviate the suffering, dispossession and poverty that these same corporations are responsible for—and hope to increase—with the introduction of GM crops to our country”

Whilst inside the greenwashers were being given a bit of an earful outside Punjabi farmers taught British activists Indian anti-GM chants. The meeting ended with the farmers asking for payment for the advice they had given the institute.

“After all, you pay a fortune for an english researcher’s opinion on how to *run our lives* and we have come all the way from India to tell you how *we will live our lives.*”

This was as far as I am aware the first time that anyone has demanded payment from an institution for the service of blockading, occupying and closing down its office!

Meanwhile up north, activist friends were attempting to set up a crop squat to host a visit by the Indians. Moving in late at night, they set up on a genetic test site near Nottingham which had been trashed weeks before. The tripods and shelters went up, everything was going like clockwork, that was until the cops turned up. Under squatting law the occupation of the site was actually legal but the police would have none of it. They moved in the next morning and evicted the site. A disaster! The northerners, by now weary from scant sleep, set about preparing to take another site. Driving nearly two hundred miles south they took over a trashed genetic test site in Essex. Once again the tripod and benders went up and everyone awaited the cops. Thankfully Essex police were less vigilant than their northern counterparts.

The news of the successful occupation got to us in London and after a bit of deliberation (‘*Can we shout slogans?*’ one farmer asked. ‘*Yes*’, ‘*Oh then we come!*’) half the Indians and us from the cooking crew climbed on board the bus and set off. Driving through London the Indians spotted some allotments—which being farmers fascinated them. We

explained that after the peasantry had been dispossessed these small sites were all the land available to the poor. They were truly horrified. Essex really confused them. As we walked for two miles—flags in one hand cooking pots in the other—through vast agri-business fields, one Indian asked where the people lived? To them a deserted countryside peppered for the most part with the houses of middle class farmers and commuters was a horrific vision. Seeing our country for a moment through their eyes really revealed how dispossessed we really are.

After weaving our way through various fields we arrived at the crop squat. In what was a truly bizarre moment the Indians walked onto the site brandishing their placards and chanting in Punjabi greeted by some British activists playing mandolins, fiddles and assorted folk paraphernalia. We cooked up a big soup and everyone sat down to eat. Activists from both countries discussed strategies over dinner. A Punjabi sung a beautiful song from the resistance against English imperialism accompanied by one of our own mandolin players. After the applause finished one Gujarati exclaimed ‘*Now we fight the greatest empire ever—together*’. Very



soon it was time for the farmers to go, the Sikhs had an appointment at the Temple. Banners and flags were swapped with the Indians promising that they’d put our banner at the front of their next demo in the Punjab. The sun set on our two flags flying together on the site monopole. Cheesy as it all sounds the Indian farmers visit really gave me a feeling of global unity. The Indians too seemed to feel this. One said:

“We have not even dreamt that people of this part of the world, the peasants and the poor people of Europe would join us in our struggle against the multinationals. With this we are not only happy, we are strengthened, empowered and we assure you we’ll double our fight.”

After four days in Britain we waved the caravan goodbye as it drove off to France—where the Indian farmers linked-up with the union of french peasants. and destroyed a GM-rice test site



## Agr'Evence!



On the 18th of July 1999, 700 activists ripped, rolled and raged their way through twenty five acres of contaminated farmland in Watlington, Oxfordshire—destroying a field of GM oilseed rape 24 times bigger than a football pitch in another installment of The Big Match between the bio-tech bullies and their government lap dogs, (the corporate culprit being AgrEvo in this case) and... well, just about everyone else!

The Stop the Crop National Rally and GM test site 'visit' began innocently enough despite the bevy of police cameras filming people donning suits (it pays to get your disguise on in advance!). In a field opposite the offending site, a seriously hot summer sun blazed down on hundreds of disparate people drawn from all over the country who spent the first hour or so fortifying themselves on cheap organic food, info stalls, speeches by George Monbiot, Alan Simpson MP and cookery writer Lynda Brown—and of course music from Seize the Day. In a little while, all these people—from the most liberal to the most hardcore—would perform an act of united spontaneity. No conspiring, no retiring liberals—just the recognition by everyone there that there was only one thing to do—and it wasn't holding hands.

When the talking was over, the crowd transformed itself into an unforgettable army in white. Within minutes of arriving at the edge of the field, middle-Englanders and anarchists alike (indistinguishable from each other in their 'paper armour') ploughed into the crop—a 700-strong demolition crew.

In the sweltering heat, flag poles, scarecrows, space hoppers and placards became tools to trash the trifflids—breaking stalks, flattening huge swathes of genetically modified crop, ripping plants whole out of the sundried soil. When we first stormed the field, there was barely a cop in evidence—apart from police cameramen vainly snapping pictures of hundreds of identical white suits and masks. Later on, snatch squads bumbled in and bumbled out (usually without a snatch) proving mainly that coppers' boots are better than most at smashing crops!

By four o'clock about half of us remained on the field and we slowly made our way out, keeping those not in suits towards the middle of the group so they wouldn't get picked off. It is imperative to wear a white suit on this kind of action unless you want to be a sitting duck. I saw two unmasked people snatched who weren't even on the field!

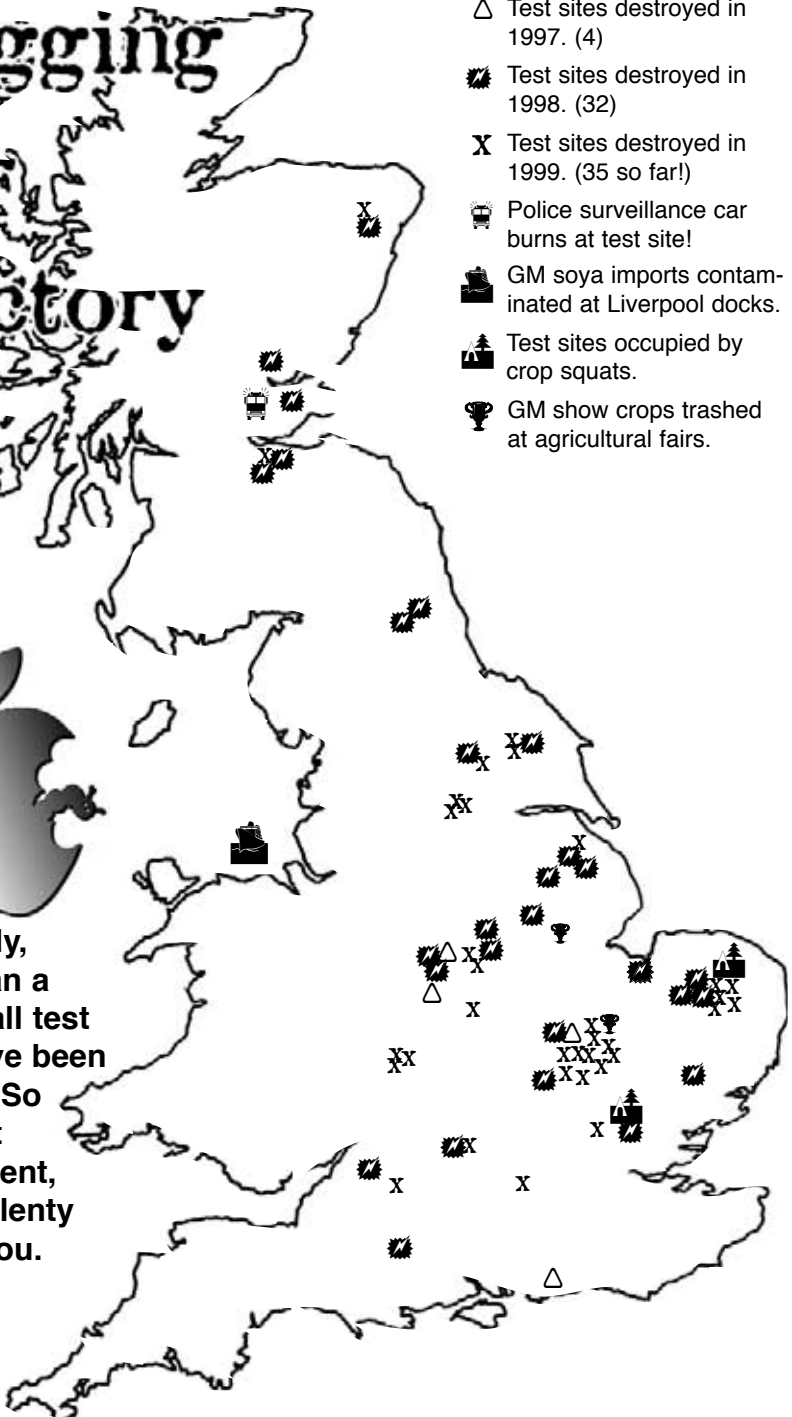
As this last group made its way up the road to the 'reception' field, the police closed in for their usual last-minute muscle-flexing session, joined by horses and riot cops fresh from twatting people at the Hillgrove Farm cat demo. They made six arrests in total; 4 charged with criminal damage, 1 with obstruction and damage to a police vehicle and the last with violent disorder. There were enough people there to have de-arrested everyone, but it didn't happen.

At 6 o'clock, everyone climbed back into their coaches. That night the sun went down on another farm scale test site, the 3rd of seven to bite the dust...

# Digging for Victory



As of July, more than a third of all test sites have been trashed. So don't get despondent, there's plenty left for you.



- △ Test sites destroyed in 1997. (4)
- ★ Test sites destroyed in 1998. (32)
- X Test sites destroyed in 1999. (35 so far!)
- 🚓 Police surveillance car burns at test site!
- 🌱 GM soya imports contaminated at Liverpool docks.
- 🌲 Test sites occupied by crop squats.
- 🏆 GM show crops trashed at agricultural fairs.



## 'My First... Genetic Crop Trashing'

Actions on genetics test sites were increasing and our group thought it was high time we took part. I'd taken part in riskier actions before and ones involving more damage, but walking to the meet up point I still felt a pang of misapprehension. I met up with my friends and after waiting for someone who was (as usual) horrendously late, we set off.

Bundled as we were, five in the back of a pretty small car, I worried about whether we'd get stopped for simply being overloaded. Then I worried about not having a mask (which I quickly improvised by ripping off my long johns below the knee). I worried when a cop car behind us started flashing its lights motioning for the car, behind us, to pull over. Thankfully after about quarter of an hour on the road the little voice in my head saying *'this is madness'* became less audible. If you've never been involved in risky direct action then you may have a view of those of us who do it as 'brave and courageous'. The reality is everyone gets scared—you just learn to ignore the nagging voice in your head. Experience pushes up the threshold so that you find it easier and easier to silence that voice in riskier and riskier situations. In truth it's only our fear that holds us back.

After about half an hour in the car, yabbering with my mates, the feelings of misapprehension turned into ones of anticipation. The adrenalin started to rise.

Halfway to the target site we met up with another van full. We didn't know everyone but we trusted those we did to bring only sensible accomplices. We still had a few hours of driving ahead of us so those of us in the back went to sleep. Awoken from our dreams with the news that we were fifteen minutes away from the target we gobbled some chocolate and psyched ourselves up.

One of us had recced the site out beforehand so despite the rather vague grid refernces on the government register we knew exactly where to go. Our car drove past the field first to check it out. All seemed quiet. We parked up a nearby lane and our ragged looking army piled out. We stretched our legs and went to sit behind a hedge—waiting a while for our eyes to grow accustomed to the darkness. Someone started nattering and was answered by the first of many shushes. After about ten minutes, we started trudging through the fields. Walking along the side of the hedgerow, we ducked down so that any cars passing on the (now deserted) country road would not see us. Antipation, anticipation...

A few fields and a lot of shushes later, we arrived at the target—a test site of genetically engineered wheat. Silently we got to work trashing the crop. We

all had different techniques—some edged forward kneeling on the ground and breaking armfuls of wheat—methodical but slow. Others simply trampled the crop, while some munched a path through the experiment with gardening shears. A house was in sight, but we were all dressed head to toe in black and it being late, we hoped the inhabitants were wrapped up in bed.

As we had given ourselves half an hour to 'carry out our mission', we checked our watches regularly. After what seemed like twenty minutes I looked at my watch only to find we had only been there for eight. It had rained all day so the wheat was wet and soon we were all soaking. We didn't care—the adrenaline was rushing. Our faces were sombre and we were concentrating on the job at hand. Suddenly the halogen security lights on the house came on—





shining with surprising force directly onto us. After a moment of panic we realised they'd probably just been set off by a fox or something and we got back to our work. Soon afterwards the lights blinked off. After quarter of an hour boredom was setting in—then someone realised that the crop would be destroyed quicker if we all lay down in a line and rolled over it. As we all rolled around bumping into each other the sober faces tuned to maniacal grins. Apart from swimming I challenge anyone to find a quicker way to get soaked than rolling around wet fields in the rain. It was truly great.

Time was running out and so we sped up our rolling. This induced lots of dizziness, maybe not the best thing to happen on an action you may need to run away from at any time. It was at this point that a car drove past. It's headlights reached out towards us but thankfully we remained in the pitch dark. What a surreal sight would have greeted the driver if his headlights hadn't been so dirty. As we came to the end of our 'mission time' every minute seemed to go quicker. By now it was pouring and we were all pretty weary but a third of the crop was still intact. Breaking our own (sensible) rule we stayed ten minutes extra. The tension had really built by now and mixed with a bit of action hysteria every sound of a distant car brought worried expressions.

We finished off the crop and happy but tired from our manic work we trudged back to our vehicles. Walking bent over, once again a sudden rash of cars drove past—oblivious to our little tribe five feet away on the other side of the hedge—we hoped. Just as we got to the car someone realised they'd left a pair of shears—with their fingerprints on—in the middle of the field. (Always wear gloves!). After a moment of worry we realised another one of us had picked it up—phew!

Driving off, our different vehicles in different directions, we remained tense until we were around ten miles away. Then the smiles and giggling started. Chaos erupted in the back as we took off our top layer of clothes—bought the previous day from a charity shop. We changed shoes chucking the cheap trainers we had bought for the occasion in a bin liner with the clothes and tools. We drove into a town and dumped it all in a skip. We stopped at a phonebox and rang up the van's mobile to see if they were all right—they were. With no evidence of our crimes on us and entering a different county we all felt pretty pleased with ourselves. We got out the chocolate biscuits

and put on some loud music. Too buzzing to sleep we chattered about future plans and took the piss out of each other for being too jumpy. In the early hours of the morning I was dropped off at home. A contented sleep followed.

The sabotage was both successful and fun. It was one of the first actions our affinity group had done and therefore unsurprisingly we made a few mistakes. Mistakes we've learnt from. Having done a few more site trashings, we've refined better techniques. The biggest mistake we made was leaving our vehicles in a nearby layby. Their number plates if spotted would have led the cops right to our doorsteps. In subsequent actions we've been dropped off by the drivers, meeting them again at a pre-arranged pickup point and time. For this reason we have not overstayed our 'mission time' again even if it has meant not entirely finishing the crop.

Trashing genetic test sites has really helped our group. New activists are now experienced and willing to go on, and organise, more actions. Activists who have been around for a while have also been re-empowered.

From the looks of things more and more sites are being destroyed so there must be a lot of you feeling the same thing as us. Despite the mistakes we made the memory of 'My First...Genetic Test Trashing' will always make me smile.

Good luck to you all, especially those of you with night time harvests!

**For info on trashing crops see 'A Gardener's Guide' on page 318**





## The Peasants are Revolting... in France

On June the 22nd 1999 in a combined operation in four towns, police arrested several militants of the *Confederation Paysanne* (CP). Earlier in June they'd taken part in a joint action with the visiting Indian peasants of the ICC (see page 97), destroying genetic rice experiments at a research facility in Montpellier. Funded by the multinational AGR-EVO the experiments were aiming to create varieties resistant to its glufosinate-based weed killer. The new varieties are to be grown both in the Third World and in the French Carmargue. Their sabotage, for which they still await a court date, was only the most recent confrontation in an impressive wave of anti-GM direct action carried out in France by the CP.

The CP is 20,000 strong and its farm labourer and peasant members are renowned for radicalism and the militancy of their actions. In the last two years they have destroyed twenty genetic crop sites as well as attacking laboratories and holding demonstrations all over France. Below we reprint two statements, one from a CP member in court and another from the popular assembly of the Jussieu unemployed centre occupation. The occupation was part of an effective campaign of action which succeeded in halting the introduction of the French JSA/New Deal. Hundreds from the unemployed movement blockaded the court where the CP members were on trial, impressively weaving the two struggles together. All three defendants were given suspended sentences and ordered to pay 500,000 francs compensation to Novartis. The defendants have refused to pay and Novartis has backed down fearing bad publicity.

“On Jan 8, '98, 200 members of the *Confederation Paysanne*, reacting against the government decision to authorise the use of bio-engineered corn in France, broke into the Novartis Seed Company warehouse in southwest France where this corn was stored, 'ripped open the sacks and drenched the corn with a firehose' (Le Monde, Jan 19)

The unemployed movement cannot fail to see a close connection between this exemplary act and its own actions. The market relations that are tending to exclude the majority of people from all power over their own lives are the same relations that are causing a constantly increasing degradation of the most basic conditions of survival by the blatant ravaging of nature and the widespread poisoning of the population. Capitalism has become so suicidal that each new step in the direction of 'Progress' is another step toward catastrophe. The scale and range of disasters



*French peasants destroy Monsanto GM crop*

and the threat of their worsening make it a life-and-death matter to call in to question the very nature of a society dominated by commodity relations. Merely to survive, we are ALL forced to undertake a radical transformation of this society.”

“Three members of the *Farmers Confederation* have been indicted for their role in this action. We intent to support them with all the means at our disposal' -Jussieu Assembly Statement (Jan 21)

“The techniques of domination are developing so rapidly... that anyone who doesn't happen to be in the ruling circles is confronted with the question: Is it still possible to make the truth heard when so many political and economic powers are in league to cover it up? How, amid a population that has been turned into deaf-mute spectators, can we thwart the schemes that the merchants and their lackeys feel free to hatch in broad daylight, knowing that, whether they are right or wrong, no one is in a position to contradict them? Under such conditions, how can we deal with emergencies? Faced with Novartis's bio-engineered corn, my comrades and I felt it was urgent to act before it was too late. In joining us at this first ever public trial of a bio-engineering plant, the joyous and resolute crowd outside [1,800 strong], whose shouts can be heard even here in the courtroom this afternoon, clearly aims at the same time to put on trial a social order that doesn't shrink from announcing that it considers it acceptable to risk poisoning humanity and the entire planet in the name of progress...”

-Rene Riesel Statement to the Agen Court (Feb 3)

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## Loonies Let Loose in Linconshire

Picture this... it was the hottest day of 1999, and somewhere in Lincolnshire a convoy of 15 vehicles drew to a halt opposite a seven acre field of maize. A hundred white-suited people with masks and gloves piled out of vans. For an hour and a quarter they systematically decimated the rows of ripening genetically-modified crops--completely unimpeded by the police!

Despite the recent spate of crop-trashings (including the destruction of 3 of the 7 farm scale trials) and the fact that the *Smash Genetic Engineering* Action had been flagged up in the mainstream media the week before, the AgrEvo farm scale site at Spittle in the Street, Lincolnshire was completely undefended.

The first people to attempt to intervene were the farmer and his daughter, who strolled over and took holiday snaps of the anonymous, masked invaders, whilst claiming that the site was not in fact GM (a lie that was later repeated in the press). As people continued to destroy the crop they retreated to the nearby roadside and had animated conversations with a bemused and lonely copper.

After over an hour of pulling, stamping and snapping, around half the crop was destroyed and the absence of police was becoming rather marked. It seemed like a good time to leave... As people gathered to leave the area, an air horn was sounded to make sure no one was left stranded in the head high maize. Affinity groups checked all were present and correct and everyone moved off—unfortunately lacking an appropriate sense of urgency...

Sometime later, in a wheat field nearby, a motley six van loads of police (unceremoniously dragged back on duty from the far corners of Lincolnshire) apprehended a crowd of white-clad individuals trying to cross a road. Fifty or so identically clad individuals were seen running through the woods, while around thirty people linked arms and attempted to resist arrest. Affinity groups were lost in the melee and police moved in and picked people off. Remarkably, as police held people down, a number broke free, rolled through ditches of stinging nettles and followed a bizarre trail of abandoned clothing through the woods.

Lincolnshire constabulary were ludicrously unprepared for the 30 arrestees who were taken to stations across the county. White suits, masks and gloves mysteriously disappeared *en-route* and as if this was not enough, showers and toothbrushes provided by the police quickly washed away any possibility of forensic evidence.

Meanwhile back on the other side of the woods... a succession of daring escapes were underway. Vans

massing to collect the escapees were blocked into a field by irate farmers, and rather than just sit and wait for the cops, some spectacular getaway driving ensued. All that was needed was a backing track to complement the sight of various coloured vans speeding through adjoining wheatfields and across ditches to the relative safety of the open road.

Not all were so lucky, however, and a number of vehicles ended up overheated and abandoned in the fields with occupants either arrested or legging it on foot out of the area. Tales have continued to abound of people hiding in potato fields 'til moonrise then skulking away, and hitching home!

By Saturday evening the police had upwards of 40 people (and a number of vehicles) taken under arrest from a variety of locations. Interviewing all those arrested should not have taken long given that everyone said “no comment”, but it was not until the Sunday evening that the news came in that people were being charged with conspiracy to commit criminal damage and held until court on Monday.

The action and arrests were clearly being treated as political. ‘Conspiracy’ is used as a catch-all charge. In this case it allowed the cops to link people arrested at different times and places to an offence for which they appear to have insufficient evidence.

Forty-six arrests, and the legal wrangles that inevitably follow are certainly not to be taken lightly. However, to say that the action was a failure on the basis of the large number of arrests plays into the hands of the State in the same way as believing their lies that the site was not GM. (The site was lab tested and found to be genetically modified, and the farm is listed as hosting test sites.)

It should be remembered that in the middle of a Saturday afternoon, 100 people converged on and destroyed a strategic farm-scale trial. The action was openly publicised and yet managed to catch the police completely unprepared and unawares. This fact was immensely empowering during the action, and gives fantastic scope for the future organisation of our actions. Certainly mistakes were made and lessons should be learnt, but there were many positive aspects too. Perhaps a *Smash More Genetic Engineering* Action could address some of these...!