



The Trivialisation of the GMO Debate. « Claims Based on Unscientific Nonsense »

Back to the Future with Laverne and Shirley:

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When people don't possess sufficient expertise on matters, they require simplicity. They desire easily manageable packages of knowledge, and these packages become taken for granted stocks of 'common sense' that enable them to cope with or to understand the world around them, no matter how faulty or misrepresented that 'knowledge' may be.

Powerful corporations and the media recognise people's need for simplicity. And here lies the problem. To rally the masses around certain ideas and to make things 'simple' for them, corporations have taken their cue from Edward Bernays, the modern father of advertising, propaganda and public relations. Bernays knew how to manipulate groups of people and get the masses to acquiesce and hooked on the products and messages of capitalism. We are now all subjected to this type of manipulation each and every day by the incessant bombardment of commercials and official pronouncements.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has reported that young people see 3,000 advertisements a day and are exposed to 40,000 different ones per year. It was not without good reason that the late academic Rick Roderick said that modern society would fall apart if it not were based on people's addictions, whether in the form of pharmaceutical drugs or consumer products.

At the same time, Roderick noted the trend towards banality, simplification and trivialisation in society – the type which corporations and their public relations arms excel in. He referred to a rampant phenomenon of important issues and problems being reduced to a fad of some kind through continuous repetition. The same few points become thrown around so often that they constitute sound-bite sloganeering.

Anyone who has followed the debate about GM food will be aware of such corporate-inspired banality:

- 1) Golden rice will save millions of lives
- 2) Greenpeace should be hauled into court for committing crimes against humanity
- 3) Critics of GM are stealing food from the bellies of the poor
- 4) Critics are liable for killing 'billions' – and they are also anti-science, Luddites, ideologues, elitists and so on.

We have heard such things time and again from bought politicians and scientists. These claims are based on unscientific nonsense: for example, read ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) about the issue of Golden Rice, which they have consistently used to beat their opponents with. The latest Golden Rice 'laureate letter' stunt confuses PR with facts (see [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)) and demonstrates how respected but uninformed figures can be easily manipulated to jump aboard the a GMO industry-backed bandwagon.

This manipulation is carried out by individuals with an interest in promoting a GMO techno quick-fix for world hunger and who are blinded by their own ignorance about the social, environmental and economic impacts of this technology and the root causes of poverty, malnutrition, inequality and hunger, which are beyond their narrow field of expertise.

These slogans and PR stunts are designed to bring the debate down to smears and emotional blackmail to sway public opinion in favour of GMOs. They are designed to denigrate critics and side-line debate about realistic alternatives to feeding the world, which challenge the interests of the global GMO agritech sector.

They are also designed to confuse the public and induce apathy. The strategy is that an ill-informed public will eventually just acquiesce and accept the 'inevitable' creeping contamination of the food system.

For the pro-GMO lobby, if the PR surrounding Golden Rice tells us anything, it is that sound-bite repetition and ridicule has become the order of the day.

Rick Roderick liked to refer to an old TV show in the US to highlight how society encourages ridicule, trivialisation and acceptance of the status quo. 'Laverne and Shirley' ran from 1976 to 1983. Roderick stated that the two women worked in Milwaukee in a beer factory. They had two friends who were stupid and ugly (according to Roderick). Basically, their life was mundane and not good. The programme could have been a socialist realist film, but it was a sitcom for a capitalist society.

All the troubles that working class life often involves were dismissed and reduced to banality, just the common rubble of triviality and little one-line jokes that people shrug their shoulders to and accept the plight of people like Laverne and Shirley as a given and say 'well, what can you do?' before moving on to do some shopping.

It's a similar tactic used by the pro-GMO lobby which depicts critics and their concerns in a dismissive manner. Patrick Moore calls critics a bunch of "murdering bastards"; others infer critics of GM are no better than Hitler or some totalitarian political regime. It's a sorry state of affairs that this happens to opponents of GM who have genuine concerns supported by scientific evidence and who also based their arguments on sound political, sociological and historical analyses to make their points.

While mocking opponents and a certain amount of trivialisation occurs on both sides of the debate, the wealthy pro-GMO lobby has adapted such tactics as a well-funded, carefully thought-out public relations strategy for dealing with critics and criticisms of GM.

And what does the industry hope will be the outcome? That people shrug their shoulders and accept GMOs in their food supply as long as they are labelled – albeit with a confusing bar code? Or after decades of industry spin and deliberate confusion tactics and an ongoing debate about GM or the synthetic biological manipulation of food, people say 'I don't know

what to think about it all but it seems OK', become sick and tired of it and eventually shrug their shoulders and say there is not much we can do about it all anyway?

The industry's aim is to take a matter of ultimate importance for humanity and to trivialise the debate, to turn it into banality so the outcome is public apathy and acceptance of and adherence to a status quo they hope to achieve.

What better way to control a population than through inducing apathy and encouraging the trivialisation of causes, ideas or the plight of certain folk? What better way to control dissent by ridicule of the dissenters? It's not unique to the GMO issue. It's a social control tactic that's prevalent throughout society.

Anyone suggesting agroecological solutions, collectivism, equality or just a fairer form of capitalism (like Jeremy Corbyn in the UK) is attacked and painted as an unrealistic dreamer or a dangerous heretic. The message is: this is the way of the world is and nothing can be or should be done about it – there is no alternative. This is conveyed by the media and the political system as a way of preventing people seeking out emancipatory alternatives.

GM technology is in itself neutral. It is neither good nor bad. When placed in the hands of global corporations that have fuelled and profited from the type of neoliberal globalisation we now witness, it becomes a weapon: an exploitative tool to exert monopolistic control over seeds, food, markets and countries. There's nothing trivial about this.

The pro-GMO lobby is attempting to convince us that GM is the only way to feed a growing global population. To challenge capitalism or to challenge pro-GMO propaganda is heresy. That much is clear from the abuse hurled at critics of GM by the self-appointed scientific priesthood and the pro-GMO neoliberal ideologues.

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