



WAKE UP! WAKE UP! ITS YER FOREVER IN BLUE GENES

SchNEWS

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"Janet - the good news is that you are pregnant. The bad news is the DNA test reveals that it's going to be a Man Utd supporter who votes Tory."

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GENE GENIE

Scientists have called it the most significant discovery since the invention of the wheel; "A Milestone for Humanity" blurted the backdrop at the White House press conference, whilst others frothed that in biology's 'race to the moon' it was the equivalent of Neil Armstrong's first historic step...

Yup, on Monday scientists announced to media hysteria that they had cracked the entire 'genome sequence' for human beings- and no, we didn't know what it meant either. Basically a 3-billion-character long 'Book of Life', the genome sequence is our entire DNA blueprint; it contains every scrap of genetic information that goes into our make-up. The colour of our eyes, the gingeriness of our hair- it's all in there. We have, as Bill Clinton would have it, "learned the language of God".

In theory, by searching through the chemical sequences, researchers will now be able to pinpoint genes which lead to disease, and alter or eliminate them. Major afflictions- like cancer, for instance- could become history.

The breakthrough has come through the work of two rival research teams- one from the 'philanthropic' public sector- the international Human Genome Project (HGP)- and one from the profit-hungry private, represented by US gene sequencing company Celera. The HGP has published all its findings in daily updates on its website; Celera, on the other hand, has tried to keep its discoveries as secret as possible- whilst taking full advantage of the HGP data.

To anyone blessed with half a cynicism gene, the implications quickly become obvious: in our crazy corporate world whoever holds the rights to all this genetic information stands to make a very fat wad indeed. And Celera is just one of many companies out to make bucks from patenting bits of our bodies. Dr William Haseltine, chairman of Human Genome Sciences: "Any company that wants to be in the business of using genes, proteins or antibodies as drugs has a very high probability of running foul of our patents. From a commercial point of view, they are severely constrained- and far more than they realise."

Already, patent applications are being made by companies on pure guesswork- just in case they might one day yield some lucrative medical breakthrough or other. This patenting of abstract codes- so-called "intellectual property"- is simply a 'logi-

cal' progression in a corporate world desperately scrabbling for new sources of profit. Starting with the 'ownership' of land- something inconceivable in saner societies- capitalism has 'progressed' to the stage where legal disputes have occurred over the 'ownership' of air and clouds. And a recent European directive- pushed by Blair and co.- now enables private companies to own plant and animal species as well as human genes. "The attempt to grab the genome is just one of many symptoms of a far graver disease. We are entering an age of totalitarian capitalism, a political and economic system which, by seizing absolute control of fundamental resources, destitutes everyone it excludes."- George Monbiot

From an ethical point of view, the ability to identify and alter "offensive" genes also raises the ugly spectre of eugenics (see SchNEWS 230)- a fave hobby for Nazis. At the opening of the lottery-funded International Centre for Life - a flash human genetics visitor centre- in Newcastle at the beginning of this month, protesters dressed in Nazi uniforms to highlight the potential consequences of Frankenstein science. "We need to celebrate the rich diversity of human life, however unpalatable it is sometimes. However, this is not ICFL's chosen path. By wanting the elimination of certain genetic conditions through pre-natal screening, the ICFL is reinforcing the social stigmatisation of disabled people and reinforcing its connection with the practice of 'eugenics'."- GeneNo spokesperson

And, of course, one of the most tragic things is the sheer crassness of this corporate race. Curing cancer or Huntingdons' Disease sure ain't top of the list- companies have been recently been scouring the genes of Pakistani villagers- trying to find a cure for bald spots on American men!

What are you- Man or Mouse? Coward or not, the answer might be more confusing than you think. Reckon all these Frankenstein scientists are a bit bananas? Well, you're completely right. A few interesting facts have emerged from all this genetic research: we share half our genes with bananas, for a start. And Celera's next project is to unravel the genome of the mouse- because, genetically-speaking, mice and men are incredibly similar...

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For leaving a puppet show! Riot Police in Eugene, Oregon made 22 arrests after ordering people to disperse who were - eh, dispersing after watching puppet shows and activities commemorating last year's June 18 demos. Police fired bean bag rounds and used pepper spray to disperse the crowd, in a use of force justified by the cops because someone was destroying "a park bench or sign."

* Nearly 1 in 80 children born in the UK is a test-tube baby. Seeing as it was first pioneered only 22 years ago, it just shows how quickly the 'impossible' catches on!

* For info about the International Centre for Life send an SAE to GeneNo! PO Box 1 TA Newcastle, NE99 1TA Tel 07788 520037 www.tapp.cjb.net

* Campaign Against Human Genetic Engineering: email cahge@globalnet.co.uk

* SchNEWS has just learnt that GM giant Monsanto has withdrawn it's Research and Development project in Bangalore, and that large numbers of staff have been sacked from another one of their units in the area. Nothing to do with the fact that Bangalore is the home of the Karnataka State Farmers who have waged a long war of resistance to Monsanto, burning down genetic crops and occupying their offices.

* Genetic Engineering Network have been informed that three genetic test sites in Cambridgeshire, forming part of National Seed List tests have been destroyed.

(NO) FARMING TODAY

Last week 17 anti-GMO activists invaded an animal feed production facility in Hampshire. The site was shut down for a couple of hours as forklift trucks were squatted, the gates blockaded and the offices occupied. The site was owned by BOCM Pauls, who are the largest manufacturer of animal feed in the UK and a major user of GM crops. they state that they are using GM crops to keep down costs and offer the customers value for money, but what is the real cost of the technology they are putting into the food chain? The answer is that no-one knows but it doesn't stop the governments and the companies that use this technology. What ever happened to taking precautions? Genetic Engineering Network, c/o PO Box 9656, London N4 4JY. 020-8374-9516.

* Carnival Against GM crops. New Craig Farm, Davot Saturday 15th July at 2pm. The genetic oilseed rape on this farm is the only authorised large scale planting in Scotland. Tel 01224 451140 email grampianearthfirst@hotmail.com

ON THE GAME

SchNEWS this week decided that it is time to back-off and cease our attacks on corporations. The reason? Well, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) this week agreed a new code of conduct for multinational corporations. The new code sets higher standards on labour and the environment and contains stronger implementation mechanisms. Perhaps the only slight problem is that the code is not legally binding.

There have been OECD guidelines for multinationals since 1976 – and it's plain for all to see just how effective they've been. Even that well known bastion of anti-capitalism rhetoric The Financial Times noted "The code (has) ... been largely ignored by governments and companies since they were adopted more than 20 years ago."

So, obviously what we need now is a New Improved Version – which corporations will now no doubt adhere to rigidly.

* Where can you find Shell, BP Amoco, Siemens, Ernst & Young, Texaco and many more all together in one go?! At the World Corporate Games of course! Aberdeen has been given the dubious honour of hosting this multinational festival of fun which will take place on 13th July. Apparently Aberdeen has been chosen as organisers expected there to be little opposition. However, as no corporate get-together goes unopposed these days, local groups are planning to mount resistance. Aberdeen Against The Games is a newly formed alliance of concerned people, "These companies cannot be allowed to think that they can get away with parading around any City in the UK" said a spokesperson. If you want to get involved in protests email zakawale42@hotmail.com

* Cor blimley – the World Trade Organisation has backed a French ban on imports of white asbestos from Canada. A panel of WTO scientists agreed the material is carcinogenic.

* A Massachusetts law which penalised companies for carrying out business with the Burmese military junta has been ruled illegal. The US Supreme Court ignored the state of Massachusetts argument that it had a right to apply a "moral standard" to its spending decisions and said it should be up to Federal Government and not individual states on whether or not they could trade with dodgy regimes.

* If the last SchNEWS front page story didn't depress you enough then we suggest you get hold of the latest Corporate Watch whose main theme is climate change. For a copy of the highly recommended issue 11 send £3.50 to 16B Cherwell St., Oxford, OX4 1BG. They have also launched a new web site to help people find out their nearest gmo test site as well as research-briefings on everything from genetic animal feeds to the companies behind GMOs. The address of the site is www.gm-info.org.uk. Any similarity between the governments pro-genetic website www.gm-info.gov.uk is of course purely co-incidental.

* Port Harcourt in Nigeria has ordered Shell to pay a local community \$40 million in compensation for a 1970 oil spill in the area. Shell are gonna appeal against the decision.

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SchNEWS in brief

Should Yorkshire Water be sold back to its customers? Sounds OK, but it depends on what is sold back, and who picks up the debts. The infrastructure and debts of £1.4 billion will be sold to some dodgy corporate structure (a Registered Community Asset Mutual!), Yorkshire Water will then provide the nice profitable services to the infrastructure. In other words they're flogging off the unprofitable bits and keeping the most profitable bits for themselves. There is a public meeting (but you can't speak at it) about these proposals at 10am, Thursday 6th July, Metropole Hotel, King Street, Leeds. WaterWatch keep an eye on the water industry, call them on 01709-558561, www.waterwatch.org.uk. ** July is **Tom Paine** month in Lewes (in case you didn't know he wrote Rights of Man in defence of the French Revolution). Fri 7th, Lewes Rousers: Lewes' radical history in all its glory!. Wed 12th, Tom Paine's Lewes. Fri 14th, Bringing home the revolution! Politics poetry and protest. All events starting at 7pm Lewes Castle. www.tompainelewes.org.uk. ** On July 19th **Defend Council Housing** are Lobbying Parliament (4pm House of Commons Lobby) to try and persuade New Labour to stop councils flogging off all their council housing. It's followed by a meeting at 6pm, Westminster Hall, House of Commons. Contact Defend Council Housing c/o 179 Haggerston Rd, London E Tel.020-72759994. www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk. ** Campaigners are invited to a mini-conference on the Government's white paper on **Transport** on Sat 28 July, 11am at Birmingham Voluntary Service Council, 138 Digbeth Street, £5 to cover costs. Tel 020-7737-6641. ** Interested in building your own home? Then check out the newly revamped website www.selfbuildcoop.co.uk for advice and links to other groups. ** **The Fifth Sun Archive** is an audio visual library of environmental and social protest within the UK with downloadable movie and still files www.5sun.freeuk.com ** **The Counter Information Agency (CIA)** is a new squatted info centre in Amsterdam. Free tea, coffee and internet access. Help is urgently needed as eviction is imminent telephone +31-20-6860097 for information and directions. ** **London Underground** is a monthly meeting of groups taking action for environmental and social justice in and around London. The next one is on Friday July 7th, 7.30pm, at The Gallery Cafe, 74 Tavistock Road, London W11 Nearest tube Ladbroke Grove. Details: (020) 7281 4621 ** **Anarchist Parkfest 2000**, July 8, Clissold Park, 2pm. Bring along music, food and drink to share and unwanted books for exchange. www.tak.to/LAF ** **Aspe valley action camp** 22-31 July training in non-violent direct action at the site of proposed E7 motorway through the Pyrenees. They are also looking for people who can teach techniques of direct action. 0030672634905 maloka@chez.com ** **Schwoops-** The World Petroleum Congress in Calgary was disrupted by 2,500 protesters, NOT 25,000. This was the first ever protest against Congress, and hopefully not the last as they are meeting again in Brazil next year. Watch this space (hopefully we'll get it right next time) ** **The Leicester Street Party** is happening on August 19th. Meet at 12 noon at Peace Walk, Victoria Park.

***For a regularly updated list of party and protest throughout the summer – and beyond, check out our web site.**

McGOWANS MARCH

On 2nd July 1999 Errol McGowan was found hanging from the door handle of his friends house in Telford with an electric flex around his neck; Errol had suffered prolonged racist abuse. His nephew, Jason, tried to find out who was behind his uncle's death. Six months later Jason was found dead, hanging from park railings in the early hours of new years eve. Despite the highly suspicious circumstances West Mercia Police decided not to open murder investigations and treated the deaths as suicide. Eight months after Errol's death and following a media campaign West Mercia Police have finally apologised to the McGowans and will now treat the deaths as murders. The McGowan family are calling for justice for Errol and Jason and are organising a rally and march, 11.30am, Sat 1 July, Telford Town Park. Contact PO Box 430, Teedale, Telford, TF4 3WZ.

Positive SchNEWS

Plants For a Future (PFAF)... has a future. After three years of fighting the local council PFAF have finally received planning permission for the building of a major plant research and visitors' centre. The research Centre will carry out research into potentially useful plants and investigate alternatives to mono-culture growing techniques, such as woodland gardens, permaculture and the use of perennial plants. Work has already started on preparing the demonstration garden, and building up the range of plants for sale in their shop and catalogue. It is hoped the land will eventually become the site of an 'eco-village' with sustainably designed housing. Financial assistance is desperately needed to pay off loans.

The Field, Penpol, Lostwithiel, Cornwall, PL220NG www.scs.leeds.ac.uk/pfaf/

McVICTORY

In December 1998 local residents in Hinchley Wood, Surrey moved caravans on to the car park of their well-loved local pub which had been closed and the land leased to McDonald's. The residents aim was to occupy the site and stop it from being turned into a new store. After 18 months and a 24hr-a-day continuous occupation and campaigning, McDonald's threw in the towel and handed back the lease on the pub to the original owners. Residents Against McDonald's (RAM) long campaign gained local support through public meetings, posting their newsletter door-to-door and distributing campaign posters and stickers. McDonalds have been increasingly targeting pubs as sites for new stores, as the planning laws (already in favour of the developers) doesn't recognise transformations of local pubs into fast food stores as a 'change of use'. RAM have been trying to change the planning laws and the Government have announced a review. www.mcspotlight.org/

...and finally...

Worthing Council have spent £26,000 in a blitz against the appalling affliction of chewing gum on pavements. The cheeky Worthing newsletter *The Pork-Bolter* has identified another **foul, stinking menace** that must be tackled at once, another **sordid stain** on the reputation of Worthing that, if ignored, will end in ruin and tragedy: just **when** will the Council finally do something about all the dust on top of bus shelters? (Nicked from *The Pork-Bolter* - to receive a copy of the newsletter send an SAE to PO Box 4144, Worthing, BN14 7NZ, or visit www.worthing.eco-action.org/porkbolter)

Disclaimer..SchNEWS warns all readers not to fiddle with the Book of Life or you'll get a banana down yer genes. Honest.