



News Release:
Tuesday, October 23, 2001

HyPEing the Human Genome:

The Dissent Disease

For fun and profit, the Genomics industry is devising a New Genomics Agenda to make well people even better. For power and control, their pharmaceutical industry masters also want to target the 'different' and manage dissent.

A new report by ETC Group (formerly RAFI) argues that the pharmaceutical industry's major interest in "The Book of Life" and parallel advances in neurosciences lies in the development of new drugs and therapies that target "well people" rather than the ill. The study also shows that company strategies focusing on parents could eliminate the "different" in the human species in favour of a monocultural "norm." In addition, industry and government are exploring the potential to use the new genomics to monitor and control dissent.

The new 20-page ETC Communiqué (September/October #72), entitled "**The New Genomics Agenda – A Political Epilogue to the Book of Life: Update on Pharmaceutical Multinationals and the Human Genome**" can be found, in full, on the ETC group website: <http://www.rafi.org> (until our website changes to www.etcgroup.org).

Cloning – a lamb in wolf's clothing? The new genomics agenda has very little interest in human cloning. Ever since "Dolly" the cloned sheep appeared on our television screens almost five years ago, the public's concern about genetic engineering in medicine has been riveted to the moral and technical implications of what the drug companies have always seen as – at best – a tiny niche market. Meanwhile, advances in mapping the human genome have spawned vastly more lucrative markets much more immediate and less controversial than either cloning or stem cell research. The companies have a whole new genomics agenda.

Crotch to cranium genomics: The new genomics agenda runs the gamut from human reproduction to neural manipulations – from crotch to cranium. Of particular concern are the new Human Performance Enhancement (HyPE) drugs and therapies aimed at improving the performance of individuals in all areas of life. Yet the same HyPE technologies meant to enhance human capabilities could be manipulated to provide the reverse effect on perceived enemies or civil dissenters. Where should concerned governments and activists stand in this changed political environment?

Target practice: The new genomics agenda targets the different and the dissenters. Indigenous peoples in remote regions are targets because their cell lines may contain patentable variations that could be used to diagnose or "cure" genetic disorders. Similarly, disease or disability populations are viewed by industry as both "cure" and "customer." The genetic variation of these populations must be studied in order to produce commercial gene therapies and these same genetically "different" groups – or their parents – are also the end-

buyers of the research. The poor are also targets of research. Genomics companies have focused on populations in China, for example, because they are too weak, politically and economically, to resist. As always, it is the women within disadvantaged groups that are the primary focus for study and experimentation.

Never “better” clients: Most disturbing of all, perhaps, is the pharmaceutical industry’s new emphasis on “well” as opposed to “sick” people. Healthy people are simply better customers. They remain employed, they don’t die easily or elicit much sympathy over the high cost of their medications, and best of all, they never really get “better.” HyPE medications play to “well” people and to their employers. A poor work environment – causing stress or physical strain – can be medicated away with the costs borne by the employee and not the employer. The Communiqué gives a series of examples of company research underway on HyPEs and on its military applications. HyPEs can be used to enable friendly troops or to disable the enemy. Many of the new developments in genomics and neurosciences come under the category of “non-lethal weapons” that could be used to pacify protesters and maintain crowd control at times of urban unrest.

UN action needed: To date, the World Health Organization (WHO) has sidestepped these issues. WHO’s Assembly has taken the tried and trite path of condemning reproductive cloning but it has failed to survey the whole horizon of new genomics technologies. In addition, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has failed to resolve the unfinished business arising from the Rio Earth Summit almost ten years ago to address the political placement of human genetic diversity. Though UNESCO adopted a weak Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights in 1997, the document does not address serious issues such as intellectual property and is the wrong place for such an important document. The document should be transferred to the UN Human Rights Commission and developed into a legally binding convention. Following debate at Rio+10 in South Africa in September 2002, the UN should hold a Special Session of the General Assembly on Genomics and Genetic Resources (human and other) in order to address unresolved issues and assign institutional responsibilities.

The Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC Group), formerly RAFI, is releasing a series of new reports in 2001. This paper is the second in the series that also includes the following issues of *The ETC Communiqué* available on our web site from September to December:

- *Globalization, Inc. Concentration in Corporate Power: The Unmentioned Agenda*
- *“New Enclosures: Alternative Mechanisms to Enhance Corporate Monopoly and BioSerfdom in the 21st Century”*
- *“Nanotechnology – Spiraling down from Genomes to Atoms”*

The Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration, formerly RAFI, is an international civil society organization headquartered in Canada. The ETC Group (pronounced Etcetera Group) is dedicated to the advancement of cultural and ecological diversity and human rights. Our new web site, www.etcgroup.org is under construction. All RAFI and ETC Group’s publications are available at: www.rafi.org