

## **genetiX snowball: Resisting Corporate Rule Statement by Rowan Tilly**

*"If the world is to be healed through human efforts,  
I'm convinced it will be by ordinary people; people  
whose love for this life is even greater than their fear.  
People who can open to the web of life that called us  
into being, and who can rest in the vitality of that  
larger body."*

Joanna Macy

During the year since the genetiX snowball campaign began, the weight of evidence for the failures and dangers of GM crops has grown ever heavier. Yet genetic pollution continues to threaten the environment and public health. Biotechnology companies continue to threaten the security of the global food supply. Furthermore, this year has seen no significant progress towards a full moratorium, nor has the public will been manifested in government regulation or corporate practice.

The public response to GM crops seem to be pointing to a complete ban. Even so, I believe it is necessary to explore all sides of the arguments including a thorough independent assessment of GM crops, assessing whether they are needed, wanted and safe. This must take place during a five year moratorium (see section 2.2 of the *Handbook for Action* enclosed) without any releases of GM crops in the environment.

A participant of genetiX snowball has been to India to establish direct communication with Indian farmers. The resulting information has confirmed to me their vulnerability in the face of corporate domination of agriculture in their country via seed monopolies and GM crops. Claims by biotechnology companies that GM crops will feed the world and aid the poor are unfounded. Many such GM crops in countries of the South are not even food crops or else they are fodder crops for livestock or improvements to ingredients of processed food to feed the wealthy.

I have been involved for over a year in the genetiX snowball campaign to decontaminate GM test sites in Britain. I have actively invited people to join the campaign, given trainings and helped with preparations for actions. During this time I have so far pulled up only one GM plant belonging to Monsanto.

Throughout my involvement I have been open about my work and could easily have been charged at any time by the Crown Prosecution Service but they have chosen not to get involved. The charges of the two women who decontaminated a GM trial site in Totnes last year were dropped. This decision came from on high shortly after the defence documents had been submitted. Perhaps the events of 29 July 1996 were in the minds of those who made that decision: four women were acquitted in a trial by jury of causing criminal damage to a hawk jet on public interest grounds. It comes as no surprise that whilst the state is now avoiding jury trials for those who act in the public interest, the privatisation of the legal system has accelerated.

Two biotechnology companies, AgrEvo and Monsanto, who are responsible for GM crop release sites, have also shied away from prosecuting via the state's criminal legal system and instead have used restraining injunctions in a draconian manner. If I am to continue to follow my convictions by pulling up GM crops on the sites of other companies I could easily end up with a whole string of injunctions. I would need to be very rich to be able to counter them all through a privatised legal system which puts the onus on me to prove my innocence.

If we were charged under criminal law we would have the opportunity to put a good legal defence of public interest before a jury. We would be innocent until proven guilty. Anyone who breaks an injunction will not be able to put a defence before a jury and therefore will not have a fair trial. The corporations who use injunctions are able to avoid the embarrassment of committing us to prison. They can hand this over to the legal system who will treat our actions as a straightforward case of contempt of court. The real issues behind the decontamination of GM crops is lost and the illegal actions of the biotechnology companies will not be brought to light in this process. This is an outrageous abuse of the legal system that will inevitably result in a miscarriage of justice with no recourse.

In previous months small groups of people have attempted to take action as part of the genetiX snowball campaign on two separate organised days of action. In both cases their openness has been rewarded with the threat of committal under injunctions held over genetiX snowball.

The circumstances in which we framed the genetiX snowball campaign have now changed substantially as a result of the injunctions. Most people are understandably unwilling to face the threat of injunctions and therefore it seems unlikely that large numbers of people will take action.

Those who have everything to gain by keeping the status quo are unlikely to give it up without being challenged. If we really want to achieve deeply rooted social changes for the better we will need to move through our fears and take personal risks; it is this very process that will help us to grow in strength towards those changes. It is up to each person to define what risks they can take for themselves according to their circumstances. For some people handing out a leaflet knowing that they may be publicly ostracised could be a risk; others may be able to risk being sent to prison; employees of AgrEvo may risk losing their job if they speak out against their company's bad practices.

It is up to those people who feel able to take the risk of resisting the injunction to continue to decontaminate the GM crop trial sites. I am afraid of the penalties of resistance but feel a moral imperative to take action simply because my circumstances allow this: I regard myself as relatively privileged (for example, by being white, educated, having a secure home) and the penalties will not be as great as in countries which have repressive regimes. Therefore I will continue with the work of decontaminating GM trial sites regardless of whether they are covered by injunctions.

On .....I intend to decontaminate as much of one of AgrEvo's GM release sites as possible in full knowledge that this may be considered to be a breach of their injunction on which I am named. This is an act of nonviolent civil responsibility: it is necessary, urgent and intends to serve the public interest; as such I believe it is also legitimate.

As with previous actions I will be following the ground rules laid down by genetiX snowball (as detailed in the attached pledge) in the belief that these practices will help to pave the way to increased democracy. I would like companies to be open, accountable, safety conscious, nonviolent and to

accept liability for any mistakes. I feel it is essential to adopt these practices myself when taking nonviolent direct action, and to do so *at least* to a fuller extent than the company's current practices.

I do not have the answers to the problems of resource deficiencies, nor am I an expert on the issues surrounding GM crops. But the principles on which genetiX snowball is based are essential ingredients for solutions to be found. I trust that all of us together, participating in democracy, sharing power and responsibility, have the creativity to find those solutions for the common good. I believe this common good can only be manifested with the participation of all and by our willingness to take personal risks.

My efforts to decontaminate the site are likely to be limited by my own physical capabilities or by being stopped before my work is finished. Even if I do complete the decontamination of a site there is still plenty more decontamination work to be done. I hope others will continue with this work, acting safely, nonviolently, openly, accountably and accepting the consequences of their actions.

*Please refer to the genetiX snowball "**Handbook for Action**" enclosed. Please note also the enclosed **pledge** which has been adapted according to the latest circumstances and which I have signed.*

Rowan Tilly

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