

## REFLECTIONS ON THE POISONING OF FOOD AND MAN

The U. S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the California Department of Agriculture (CDA), and many supposedly scientific researchers for private industry and the Division of Agriculture of the University of California and other institutions of higher learning, are allowing increasing amounts of toxic poisons, chemical pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, and preservatives to be added to America's food supply. Like a group of witches proudly watching their poisonous potions bubbling and cooking, these bureaucrats and scientists keep assuring the American public that the new, improved poisons are just what man and nature need to eliminate "pests." What they don't seem to worry about is that the pesticides they have invented and "approved" are posing a real danger not just to "pests" but to all life, including man, and to the very environment itself.

In his recent decision banning the use of the chemical cyclomates in diet soft drinks, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Robert Finch (who supervises FDA programs) stated, "It is imperative to follow a prudent course in all matters concerning public health." Yet Finch, FDA, and USDA officials, and the state CDA have maintained a deafening silence on the problem of pesticides added to foods. They have broken that silence only to assure the public that "there is no danger."

The dangers from DDT, the most commonly used pesticide, have become a world-wide scandal. The National Cancer Institute has now released studies which prove conclusively that DDT causes cancer in mice and rats. A recent study of autopsy reports in the state of Maryland indicated a link between DDT levels in the human body and death from cancer, leukemia, and tumors. Whole species of fish, birds, and other life are threatened with extinction because DDT levels in their bodies have upset their chemical balance and interfered with their ability to reproduce.

The public uproar over DDT may force Finch and the FDA to ban DDT altogether. But such a ban, left largely unenforced, might be used as a political smoke-screen to try to make the public feel that the problem has been "solved." Such a ban should call for confiscation of airplanes and other fruit and vegetables with residues of DDT. A recent study of grapes for sale in San Francisco supermarkets showed dangerous levels of DDT residues on all bunches of grapes studied.

A ban on DDT, while definitely a step in the right direction, would only scratch the surface of the problem. There are already dozens of pesticides, such as aldrin and dieldrin, which are far stronger and more persistent than DDT. There are petitions pending for permission to use literally hundreds of new pesticides. The public has almost no access to information on the dangers and benefits and effects of these new poisons. In most cases, there has been little research on the long-range side effects of these poisons on anything except the "pests" they are designed to eliminate.

Like any witches making poisons, the scientists and

bureaucrats have devised elaborate rules and procedures to preserve the secrecy of the recipes and formulas. "Trade secrets", the FDA and Departments of Agriculture claim, in refusing to divulge any information about the poisons they allow on our foods. Since the government does not have the staff to evaluate the testing of dangerous poisons, they depend almost entirely on the tests and conclusions submitted by the manufacturers. The manufacturers have spent millions of dollars developing these chemicals, and want to get them on the market as soon as possible to start making profits. The manufacturers, usually large oil and chemical companies with plenty of economic and political muscle to back up their "discoveries," usually have their way. On the basis of these tests, the USDA approves the use of the pesticides on food crops.

The FDA then sets human tolerances and suggests "safe" levels of residues. But the FDA admits that they don't have the staff to study residues. "The American public's principal consumer protection is provided by the Food and Drug Administration, and we are currently not equipped to cope with the challenge," said a special report submitted to Finch by a seven-man panel of top scientists from the FDA. The report went on to state, "The consumer literally is surrounded by an arsenal of products which can kill or maim him."

The decision to allow or ban poisons on foods is often a political decision, rather than a decision based on health considerations. A recent directive from California Agriculture Director Jerry Fielder banned DDT on 36 food crops, but specifically allowed its continued use on cotton and ... grapes! "What a colossal fraud!" commented UFWOC attorney Jerry Cohen when hearing of the exemption of grapes from the ban. "For political reasons they allow DDT-soaked grapes to remain on the market, because of the political implications of the strike."

The first step in protecting the public's interest in this problem is to give the public access to the information on pesticides. The public has a right to know what pesticides are being used on what food crops, in what amounts and strengths, in what time of the year. The public has a right to know the extent of industry testing of a new poison before it is approved for use, both for its effects on "pests" and side effects on other life, on the environment, on man himself. Only then can the public develop programs to protect itself, setting amounts of poisonous residues allowable on foods, regulating or banning the poisons, writing safety codes to protect workers involved in applying the poisons or working in proximity to them.

As long as the present policy of secrecy is maintained, the government agencies will remain servants of the oil, chemical and agribusiness industries, profits will take precedence over public safety, and America's food supply will be subject to increasing contamination and poisoning. It's time to end this horror story and take control of the poisons away from the witches.