

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND EMPLOYMENT

DRAFT OPINION

for the Committee on
Energy, Research and Technology

on
matters relating to biotechnology

Draftsman: Mr B HÄRLIN

14 May 1986

PE 105.015

D R A F T O P I N I O N
(pursuant to Rule 101 of the Rules of Procedure)
of the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment

Draftsman: Mr B. HÄRLIN

At its meeting of 31 January 1986, the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment appointed Mr HÄRLIN draftsman.

The Committee considered the draft opinion at its meetings of
and . It adopted the opinion on by votes to
with abstentions.

The following took part in the vote:

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

1. The Social Affairs Committee can only applaud the comprehensive approach adopted by the rapporteur, Mrs VIEHOFF, in soliciting opinions on the subject of biotechnology in Europe from each of the standing committees, since this technology is certain to have a profound impact on every area of human activity.
2. When coupled with computer technology, the techniques of recombinant DNA and related genetic engineering techniques constitute a qualitatively different mode of production, which will unlock a new industrial cycle and could affect up to 70 % of the Gross National Product within the next twenty years, having social consequences of a magnitude comparable to those resulting from the Agricultural and the Industrial Revolutions.
3. The commercialisation of biotechnology is likely to exacerbate existing injustices in distribution patterns both within any given society and between the developed and the developing countries. It will increase still further the tendency towards the concentration of capital, as can already be seen in the case of the pharmaceutical and chemical industries and seed production, and will result in an even greater rationalisation and alienation of work; the number of jobs in both the primary and secondary sectors will be reduced and employment and income in the developing countries will be particularly affected.
4. It should be noted that the focus of the present opinion is confined to those areas specified in Mrs VIEHOFF's original outline for the hearing on biotechnology¹ which explicitly excluded human applications of genetic engineering and reproduction technology. These aspects are being dealt with in a separate report by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Citizens' Rights.

¹ PE 98.227

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the foregoing,

The Committee on Social Affairs and Employment:

1. Calls on the Commission to draw up forthwith a plan for warning Third World countries of the possibility of genetically-engineered organisms being deliberately released on their territories, and for helping them develop the expertise and regulatory mechanisms needed to protect their health and environment;
2. Calls on the Council to issue a Directive instructing all E.C. Member States to enact legislation prohibiting field tests in the Third World, involving the deliberate release of genetically-engineered organisms, for which prior approval has not been given by the state(s) concerned, and imposing severe penalties, including fines and withdrawal of marketing and business licences in the case of contravention;
3. Recommends, therefore, the negotiation of global agreements in this connection, and in the meantime calls for a total ban on the release of genetically-engineered organisms in the Third World;
4. Is resolutely opposed to industrial investment in university genetic engineering research, and recommends therefore that the European Community make every effort to promote the principle of the separation of the business and academic sectors and to prevent, and reverse, the 'take-over' of universities industry; recommends also that the Commission draw up a corresponding plan of action;
5. Insists that scientists having "conflicts of interest" (e.g. due to financial, advisory, or other links with the bio-technology industry) be disqualified from serving as experts on governmental committees or other official bodies responsible for the supervision and/or control of the industry;
6. Urges that all candidates for advisory and other posts in the bio-technological field, both within the Community institutions and in the Member States, be required to provide full details both of their financial situation and of their business interests which would be accessible to the public;

7. Insists that biotechnologists working for government agencies or committees should be prohibited from accepting employment, research funds, or advisory posts in the biotechnology industry for a period of at least three years following the termination of their contracts;
8. In view of the alarming implications of the potential military application of biotechnology, recommends that no Member State should allow genetic research projects to be financed from its defence budget, and that details of all R & D contracts previously funded in this way should be a matter for public record;
9. In view of the deep public concern which the Biotechnical Revolution is generating in many parts of the European Community, and of the manifest desire for public participation in the development of genetic engineering policy, calls on the Commission to put forward proposals for promoting wide-ranging information and public debate on the subject in every Member State, instead of financing programmes designed exclusively to promote public acceptance of biotechnology (e.g. BioT 2000);
10. Recommends that citizens representing every walk of life - and not, as has hitherto been the case, only Ministers - be actively involved in the ongoing discussion on the O.E.C.D. guidelines on the safety aspects of the industrial, agricultural and environmental application of genetic engineering; urges, in this connection, that the groups most directly affected (women, farmers, workers, handicapped persons, educators, etc.) be given a say in regard to the work of the various committees and agencies within the Commission having supervisory and other responsibilities in the field of biotechnology¹;
11. Recommends, by the same token, that Member States be encouraged, by means of a Council recommendation, to launch similar programmes of public participation and that Public Biotechnology Commissions be set up at the local, national and Community levels to maximise public input and control of genetic engineering;
12. Believes that, on the one hand, public funds should be made available to interest groups wishing to make their views heard through the media and information projects, but, on the other hand, that such funds should not be made available for promotional campaigns which are geared primarily to the interests of the biotechnology industry itself; calls furthermore for the immediate appointment to the Advisory Editorial Board of the AEGIS project BioT 2000 of members of the general public representing the affected sectors of society;

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13. Given the legitimate concern about the long-term cultural impact of the Bio-technical Revolution, especially on humanity's conception of and relationship with Nature, calls for greater public investment in research geared to developing methods of ecological forecasting to assess more accurately, both in the short and in the long term, the risks and potential consequences of genetic engineering;
14. Believes that workers, farmers, consumers and the public as a whole have a right to know the precise nature of the potential hazardous organisms and substances to which they may be exposed, and that this right takes precedence over the rights of patent holders in regard to the protection of 'intellectual property'; and urges that this fundamental principle be recognised, promoted and enforced as Community policy through the appropriate mechanisms;
15. Insists that patents be withheld from private firms for genetically-engineered organisms and substances developed through publicly funded research;
16. As regards the occupational health and safety aspects of applications of genetic engineering techniques in industry and agriculture, recommends that all workers employed in genetic engineering operations of any kind, whether public or private, be informed by outside personnel of the hazards presented by their particular working environment;
17. Recommends furthermore that genetic screening of workers for employment purposes be prohibited through a Council Directive, and calls on public health institutions to set up long-term health monitoring programmes for all bio-technology workers;
18. Insists moreover - notably in view of the risk that genetic screening may, in the long term, become an alternative to conventional identification cards, thus constituting an additional and unacceptable assault on personal privacy - that all information about the genetic make-up of individuals be regarded as strictly confidential;
19. Urges that, in view both of the risks of abuse and of the potentially serious consequences for public health and health services, genetic screening be prohibited throughout the Community as an application requirement for health insurance;

20. Calls on the Commission to draw up guidelines relating to insurance liability for biotechnology enterprises;
21. Deeply disturbed by the growing tendency to blindly accept biotechnology, and notably genetic engineering, as the 'magic' solution to many, if not most, of our social and economic problems - not least in view of the general concern about atomic energy provoked by the Tschernobyl nuclear power station disaster - and frustrated by the fact that society has, a posteriori, to evaluate and cope with developments imposed on it by science and industry, urges the Commission to follow the example of the United States Congress by establishing a 'Clearing-House on the Future' in order to counteract this trend and notably to determine what kind of technology we really need and, through public investment and other incentives, steer science and industry in the right direction;
22. Finally, convinced of the crucial and timely significance of the process of exploration, reflection and discussion generated by the report of the Committee on Energy, Research and Technology on matters relating to biotechnology, recommends that an "Intergroup of Gene Technology" be established in the European Parliament as soon as possible to promote this fundamental debate beyond party and committee lines;
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23. Invites the Committee on Energy, Research and Technology to take account of the above points when drawing up its draft report.