

Stop Protecting the Criminality of the Global Pesticides Industry

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The agrichemicals industry wallows like an overblown hog in a cesspool of corruption. With its snout firmly embedded in the trough of corporate profit to the detriment of all else, it is most likely responsible for more death and disease than the combined efforts of the tobacco companies ever were. It indulges in criminality that hides behind corporate [public relations](#), [media misrepresentations](#) and the [subversion](#) of respectable-sounding agencies which masquerade as public institutions.

Dominated by a handful of powerful [parasitical corporations](#) with a global reach, the message from this sector is that its synthetic biocides are necessary to feed billions who would otherwise go hungry. Often accompanying this public relations-inspired tale is the notion that organic agriculture is not productive enough, or is a kitchen-table niche, and that agroecology is impractical.

Of course, as any genuinely informed person would know that, as [numerous high-level reports](#) have suggested, organic farming and agroecology could form the mainstay of agriculture if they were accorded sufficient attention and investment. Unfortunately, big agribusiness players, armed with their chemicals or GMOs seek to marginalise effective solutions which threaten their markets and interests.

Armed with a compulsion to dominate and to regard themselves [as conqueror and owner of nature](#), they require more of the same: allegiance to [neoliberal fundamentalism](#) and an unsustainable model of farming that is so damaging to soil that we could have at most just [60 years of farming left](#) if we don't abandon it.

Since the end of the Second World War, we have had to endure our fields and food being poisoned in the manner [Rachel Carson](#) highlighted decades ago. These companies sell [health-and environment-damaging](#) products, [co-opt scientists](#), [control public institutions](#) and ensure farmers are kept on a [chemical treadmill](#). From CEOs and scientists to public officials and media/PR spin doctors, specific individuals can be identified and at some stage should be hauled into court for what amounts to 'crimes against humanity'.

In his 2014 book, '[Poison Spring: The Secret History of Pollution and the US EPA](#)', E G Vallianatos, who worked for the EPA for 25 years, says:

"It is simply not possible to understand why the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] behaves the way it does without appreciating the enormous power of American's industrial farmers and their allies in the chemical pesticide industries, which currently do about \$40 billion per in year business. For decades, industry lobbyists have preached the gospel of unregulated

capitalism and Americans have bought it. Today, it seems the entire government is at the service of the private interests of America's corporate class."

New UN Report

As [recently reported](#) in The Guardian, a new report delivered to the UN Human Rights Council says pesticides have catastrophic impacts on the environment, human health and society as a whole, including an estimated 200,000 deaths a year from acute poisoning. The report's authors say:

"It is time to create a global process to transition toward safer and healthier food and agricultural production."

Authored by Hilal Elver, special rapporteur on the right to food, and Baskut Tuncak, special rapporteur on toxics, the report states,

"Chronic exposure to pesticides has been linked to cancer, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, hormone disruption, developmental disorders and sterility."

Although the pesticide industry argues that its products are vital for protecting crops and ensuring sufficient food supplies, Elver says "It is a myth."

Elver adds that using more pesticides is nothing to do with getting rid of hunger. She argues that, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), we are able to feed nine billion people today. Production is definitely increasing, but she says that the problem is poverty, inequality and distribution.

Moreover, Elver says many of the pesticides are used on commodity crops, such as palm oil and soy, not the food needed by the world's hungry people. She argues that the corporations are not dealing with world hunger, they are dealing with more agricultural activity on large scales.

The new report says:

"While scientific research confirms the adverse effects of pesticides, proving a definitive link between exposure and human diseases or conditions or harm to the ecosystem presents a considerable challenge. This challenge has been exacerbated by a systematic denial, fuelled by the pesticide and agro-industry, of the magnitude of the damage inflicted by these chemicals, and aggressive, unethical marketing tactics."

Elver says:

"The power of the corporations over governments and over the scientific community is extremely important. If you want to deal with pesticides, you have to deal with the companies."

The report recommends a move towards a global treaty to govern the use of pesticides and a shift to sustainable practice based on natural methods of suppressing pests and crop rotation and organically produced food.

Dr Rosemary Mason's new open letter

The report comes at a timely point. Campaigner Dr Rosemary Mason has just written an '[Open Letter to the Global Pesticide Regulatory Authorities and the UK and US Media](#)'. To make her case, Dr Mason draws on that report as well as new findings and revelations that have emerged thus far in 2017.

Over the past few years, in [her numerous documents](#), Mason has described the devastating effects of agrochemicals and has singled out certain individuals who should be standing in the dock to answer for their roles they have played in poisoning the environment and damaging public health. She has supplied strong evidence to highlight how agrochemicals are killing us and how public institutions and governments collude with the industry to frame legislation and policies

Early in her letter, Mason reminds her intended readership that The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague is extending its remit to include ecocide. The ICC announced in September 2016 that it would prioritise crimes that result in the "destruction of the environment", "exploitation of natural resources" and the "illegal dispossession" of land. Environmental destruction and land-grabs could possibly lead to governments and individuals being prosecuted for crimes against humanity by the international criminal court.

Over the years, Mason has written a great deal on glyphosate (active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup) and has described the massive environmental and health problems associated with its use. Conflicts of interest within public agencies and scientific fraud, which Mason has described many times before, have resulted in glyphosate entering and remaining on the market. A day or two after Mason wrote her letter, The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) announced its decision in favour of re-licensing glyphosate, which may not come as much of a surprise to many given the [conflicts of interest](#) that may have swayed the decision in favour of industry interests.

Aside from the cocktail of various other biocides that end up in our bodies and in the environment, Mason has documented at length the destructive consequences of glyphosate in Wales, where she resides, as well as elsewhere, from the US, and the EU to Argentina. It is killing us as well as birds, insects and plants, thus destroying the ecosystem. She has also produced a great deal of evidence to indicate how glyphosate has ruined her nature reserve. Yet, despite her ongoing extensively researched and referenced open letters to key officials and agencies, she notes that corporate profit comes before human health and the environment and it is a case of 'business as usual.'

In her letter, Mason quotes Katherine Paul from the Organic Consumers Association, who in the piece 'Monsanto isn't feeding the world, it is killing our children' says:

"... the already large and convincing body of evidence, accumulated over more than half a century, that agricultural pesticides and other toxic chemicals are poisoning us. Both reports issue scathing indictments of US and global regulatory systems that collude with chemical companies to hide the truth from the public, while they fill their coffers with ill-gotten profits."

Paul is referring to a [new WHO report](#) (and companion report) which argues exposure to pollution kills millions of children.

Events catching up with Monsanto

As far as Monsanto is concerned, events seem to be catching up with the company. According to Mason, Monsanto is trying to conceal evidence of close relationships with the US EPA and glyphosate causing cancer. She describes how Monsanto filed a lawsuit in January 2016 against California's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment in an attempt to block the agency's stated intent to list glyphosate as a possible human carcinogen. Monsanto wrote:

"... Monsanto would be required to provide a warning on the labels to consumers that the chemical is a recognized carcinogen. Monsanto says this is a violation of their First Amendment rights and, according to the complaint, "would cause irreparable damage to Monsanto and the public and negatively affect the reputation of Monsanto for making safe and reliable herbicides would be potentially a loss of sales and force the company to spend large sums of money to re-label their products."

Reputation and corporate profit trump all else.

Mason writes about US Right To Know (US RTK) suing US EPA for documents on glyphosate. She quotes journalist Carey Gillam:

"The litigation against Monsanto has been filed by people from around the United States who allege that exposure to Monsanto's Roundup herbicide caused them or their loved ones to develop non-Hodgkin lymphoma, a type of cancer that originates in the lymphatic system and has been on the rise in recent decades... [The transcript of a recent court hearing](#) reveals that [Judge Vince Chhabria](#), the federal judge who is overseeing a combination of more than 55 lawsuits filed against Monsanto in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, warned Monsanto that many documents it is turning over in discovery will not be kept sealed despite the company's pleas for privacy. He threatened to impose sanctions if Monsanto persists in "overbroad" efforts to keep relevant documents out of public view."

In 2015, Monsanto Vice President Robb T Fraley asked on Twitter [why people doubted science](#). Perhaps he should read Carol Van Strum. Mason refers to Van Strum [who wrote a piece](#) in 2015 about the US EPA's failure to regulate biocides. Van Strum states:

"Within the first decade of the EPA's existence, it became obvious that nearly all the "safety" tests supporting pesticide registrations were faked, with either fraudulent or nonexistent data. The massive lab fraud uncovered at Industrial Bio-Test Laboratories (IBT) revealed that 99 percent of long-term studies (for cancer, birth defects, mutagenicity, reproductive damage etc.) supporting some 483 pesticide registrations were invalid. For 25 years, in what US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) officials called "the most massive scientific fraud ever committed in the United States, and perhaps the world," all major chemical and pharmaceutical companies had paid IBT to produce the test data they needed to register their products. All but forgotten now, the IBT fraud shook the chemical and pharmaceutical industries and regulatory agencies around the world. In 1983, a six-month-long criminal trial resulted in the

convictions of three IBT officials. The trial revealed a vast, lucrative business of deceptive safety testing.”

Van Strum goes on to note that almost all of the products tested by IBT, including 2,4-D, glyphosate, atrazine and many of the 66 products banned on California red-legged frog habitat, are still on the market today. IBT, it turned out, was but the tip of a huge iceberg. Subsequent audits of 82 other testing laboratories found that more than half – 47 labs – had serious “deficiencies,” including some 22 labs that had destroyed all lab reports and raw data, making audits impossible and conclusions unsupported.

Maybe Fraley should also start sifting through Mason’s numerous documents pertaining to scientific fraud and the capturing and subverting of public bodies by Monsanto and others that belong to his sector.

Monsanto and the corporate media in the dock

The verdict of the International Monsanto Tribunal will be announced on 18 April, 2017. Mason states that the goal of the Monsanto Tribunal is to evaluate whether Monsanto’s activities are complying with international law. Through the case of Monsanto, the Tribunal considers an example of a multinational corporation whose behaviour ignores the damages its decisions cause to health, environment and scientific independence. The aim of the Tribunal is to give a legal opinion on the environmental and health damage caused Monsanto. This process will use existing international law but also contribute to the international debate to include the crime of ecocide into international criminal law. It will also give people all over the world a well-documented legal file to be used in lawsuits against Monsanto and similar chemical companies.

Mason’s letter is 42-pages long and covers a good deal of ground that she has previously highlighted. However, by writing an open letter whose intended readership includes the US and UK media, she wants the corporate media to [stop colluding with the agrochemicals sector](#) and to cease from conveying a misleading narrative about illness and disease. That narrative places the onus on individual responsibility for spiraling rates of illness and disease. Mason wants the media to report honestly about the role of the agrochemicals sector and its intimate relationship with governments, official bodies and health agencies.

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