

Remarks of Ross C. "Rocky" Anderson

March Against Monsanto

Utah State Capitol

May 21, 2016

A Mexican judge, abiding by the rule of law, including firmly established international law, ruled that genetically modified maize could not be planted in Mexico because of "the risk of imminent harm to the environment". Father Miguel Concha of a human rights organization in Mexico, said the judge's decision "reflected a commitment to respect the Precautionary Principle expressed in various international treaties and statements on human rights." He stressed that the government is responsible for protecting the human rights of Mexicans against the economic interests of big business.

That ruling was appealed by Mexico's Environment and Natural Resources Ministry and Monsanto. In a huge victory for public health and for the environment, the appeal was defeated, maintaining the suspension of all planting of genetically modified maize in Mexico. What an astounding triumph against the rapacious corporations and their puppets in government who care nothing about the basic rights of the people!

The Precautionary Principle has been summarized as "caution in advance" -- the "principle that the introduction of a new product or process whose ultimate effects are disputed or unknown should be resisted." In common terms, the principle is essentially equivalent to the aphorisms "look before you leap," "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," and

"better safe than sorry". The common-sense principle places the burden of proof on those who would take potentially harmful actions to demonstrate first that the actions will not be harmful.

Isn't that what we would expect of *our* government? After all, our nation was formed as a republic -- a representative democracy where government is to serve, and be accountable to, we-the-people.

But instead of a republic, our government is a plutocracy -- a government run for and by the wealthy. And it is an oligarchy -- a government in which all power is vested in a few people or in a dominant class or clique. It is not government of the people, by the people, and for the people, as it was intended to be; rather, it is a pluto-oligarchy -- government of, by, and for the few wealthy elites who have a strangle-hold on Congress, regulatory agencies, and the White House. That's why Congress, the President, regulators, and even the courts have no interest in the application of the Precautionary Principle in the United States. After all, it might get in the way of corporate profits, campaign contributions, gifts to our so-called public servants, and the further consolidation of power by the plutocrats and oligarchs.

So, it's up to us. Let us insist on the application of the Precautionary Principle -- and protect ourselves and the rest of humankind from the ravages of the poisons and genetic mischief foisted upon the public by the likes of Monsanto and its lackeys in Congress and the White House.

The origins of the Food and Drug Administration -- the FDA -- as a federal consumer protection agency go back to the 1906 Pure Food and Drugs Act. That legislation was passed largely in response to the appalling conditions of Chicago's stockyards as described in Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle*. The FDA is supposed to be protecting the people of the United States from unsafe foods and drugs. On its web site, the FDA says it is "responsible for the safety and security of most of our nation's food supply."

Yet, like so much of our federal government, the FDA, along with Congress, is a big auction block, caving in to the corporate short-term interests of the corporate sector that essentially bribes elected officials through enormous campaign contributions. The FDA is run, in large part, by officials who come from the companies that are supposed to be regulated by the FDA -- and who return to those companies after they have corrupted the FDA on behalf of those companies. It is a classic case of the fox guarding the hen house. We are the hens -- and the foxes include those we elect who are financed by the corporate foxes, neither of whom give a damn about us. It is high time that we fight back with everything we can muster!

In a republic, it is the duty of citizens to be engaged. It is our duty, and we have the opportunity, to make certain that government serves *our* interests. It is our duty to shine a bright light on those public officials corrupted by money from those who want to buy public policy inimical to our interests, and to throw them out, replacing them with people who will serve as true servants of the public interest.

Why is the United States the only developed nation in the world that relies upon for-profit insurance companies for the provision of most health care insurance, guaranteeing enormous profits to these parasitic companies while many millions of people still go without decent coverage? Why, among 50 nations, does the U.S. have the worst maternal mortality rate? Why does the U.S. have the next to worst infant mortality rate in the developed world? And why do we pay double the average per capita for health care among other developed nations, while we have such horrendous medical outcomes? We know why. It is because our government, on a disgraceful bi-partisan basis, has been serving the interests of the insurance and pharmaceutical industries instead of the interest of the people.

That is the very definition of a pluto-oligarchy -- and we are here to say we will work together, across the political spectrum, and pledge to overthrow the pluto-oligarchy and reclaim our republic -- a government of, by, and for the people.

Why did the United States, through both Democratic and Republican administrations and majorities in Congress, fail and refuse to join the rest of the developed world and commit, through the Kyoto Accord, to effectively combat human-caused climate chaos, the greatest threat to our world and its inhabitants, particularly our children and grandchildren? We know it's *not* because Congress and our presidents have been concerned about the public interest. It's because of the money flowing to politicians and the major parties from the fossil fuel industry.

That is the very definition of a pluto-oligarchy -- and, once again, we are here to say we will work together, across the political spectrum, and pledge to overthrow the pluto-oligarchy and reclaim our republic -- a government of, by, and for the people.

Commonly known as the Monsanto Protection Act -- a section of an unrelated spending bill intended to prevent a government shut-down -- was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama. Appallingly, that piece of bought-and-paid-for legislation, which was drafted with the help, and at the urging of, Monsanto, bars federal courts from halting the sale or planting of genetically modified organisms or genetically engineered seeds, no matter what health issues may arise in the future -- and provides bioengineering companies immunity if their products cause harm to anyone.

Do you think legislators awakened one morning and said to themselves, "Hey, this piece of legislation would be a great thing for the public!?" No, it is yet another example of corporations buying their way with Congress, regardless of the impacts on the public health. It is all such a betrayal of us -- and of the entire notion of what our republic should be.

Michael Taylor exemplifies the pluto-oligarchy -- and the revolving door between industry, government, and back to industry -- as well as anyone. Who is he? Healthy food consumer advocate Jeffrey Smith described him as "the person who may be responsible for more food-related illness and death than anyone in history" who was "made the US food safety czar" by President Obama's administration in 2012. Taylor had been legal counsel for Monsanto before becoming policy chief at the FDA, then he

became Monsanto's vice president and chief lobbyist, then he was back at FDA as deputy commissioner of food at FDA -- the person *in charge* of FDA's supposed protection of our food. It's like having Bernie Madoff in charge of the Securities Exchange Commission. It's like having Joseph Kony in charge of UNICEF. It's like having George W. Bush in charge of Human Rights Watch.

Years ago, FDA scientists provided their views on what was, as Jeffrey Smith describes it, "the most radical and potentially dangerous change in our food supply" -- the introduction of genetically modified foods. The experts at FDA were very concerned, describing "toxins, new diseases, nutritional deficiencies, and hard-to-detect allergens" that could be caused by GMOs. They called for careful research before any genetically modified organisms could be part of our food supply. However, just like the disregard for climate science and manipulation of scientists' findings during the Bush administration, the science and concerns of scientists would be discounted by the FDA.

So with a corporate-compliant FDA, genetically modified foods were permitted on the market and introduced with no required safety studies. That is completely the opposite of the Precautionary Principle. This, of course, was an enormous boon to Monsanto, which also had previously manufactured and marketed PCBs, DDT, and Agent Orange, even after they were found to be carcinogenic, highly toxic, and enormously destructive to human and animal life and devastating to ecosystems.

Monsanto cares only about one thing: selling products, however dangerous they have been proven to be, to make as much money as possible. Monsanto is a monstrously immoral corporation -- an enemy to the public health and to our earth. Monsanto exemplifies the ultimate refutation of the absurd claim that corporations are people -- because Monsanto certainly has no conscience, no sense of accountability, and is able, like no *person* any of us knows, to persuade Congress to grant it immunity for the potential deaths and destruction caused by the use of its products.

Here's what the Centre for Research on Globalization says about the dangers of GMOs and Monsanto: "Just recently, a study published in the International Journal of Biological Sciences seems to indicate a link between the consumption of Monsanto genetically engineered corn and organ damage in the liver and kidneys. This damage is consistent with the genetically engineered pesticide utilized by the corn, and seems to refute Monsanto's claim that the pesticide will degrade long before it is consumed. Despite evidence that Monsanto's GM corn may cause organ damage in its consumers, they have refused to recall their products."

Monsanto must be stopped. Those in our government who do the bidding of Monsanto must be stopped. Let *us* draw the line and pledge we will never vote for or support in any way anyone who has capitulated to Monsanto in complete disregard for the public health, in complete disregard for our environment, in complete disregard for the interests of consumers and small farmers, and in complete disregard of those in other nations whose health and economic interests are decimated by this monstrous, immoral, democracy-destroying corporate behemoth.

There have been some victories in the people's battle against Monsanto, from which we can find inspiration and which can feed our motivation and sense of empowerment to continue and win this fight.

Vermont passed into law a ban on genetically modified foods, joining some twenty-seven nations that have implemented bans. In Jackson County, Oregon, even in the face of a campaign 95%-sponsored by out-of-state sources, voters, by a two-to-one margin, voted to ban genetically engineered crops. The educated, motivated voters and vigorous GMO opponents in Jackson County showed what can be done with dedicated people power aligned against the likes of Dow, DuPont, Monsanto, Syngenta, and other corporate poisoners, whose money and power proved incapable of defeating the Jackson County movement against GMOs.

The battle is obviously not an easy one, and even grassroots movements can be stopped short by such democracy-denying measures as pre-emption legislation by state legislatures, which deny authority for cities and counties to ban GMOs or even require the labeling of genetically modified foods so consumers can know what they are buying and consuming.

We must stay vigilant and let any who side with Monsanto against the people, on a local, state, or federal level, such as Hillary Clinton, known by some as the Bride of Frankenfoods, know they will pay a heavy political price if they violate their sacred duty to the public by selling out to Monsanto and other greedy merchants in death and destruction who seek

only to make more money while poisoning us, poisoning our environment, and leaving a much more dangerous, unhealthy world for those who follow us.

As we come together, refusing to let other differences between any of us destroy our unity on the fundamental issues of public health and safety, as well as the restoration of our republic, let us act with a dedication to asserting our responsibilities and opportunities as engaged citizens and moral actors in stopping Monsanto in its tracks -- and, finally, ending the corrupting influence of money in politics and our government.

People focused on clear evils, willing to act aggressively and tenaciously, have made great strides toward major social progress in the past. The women's suffrage movement. The civil rights movement. The anti-Vietnam-war movement. The labor movement. The farmworkers movement. All of these were successful because people like us took sustained action, making it clear they would not go away until the evils being addressed were defeated. We can do this, if only we will!