Newsletter 22 : 8 - HOW MANY ANTI-NANO ANGELS CAN DANCE ON THE HEAD OF A PIN?

This year has seen a rash of actions against nanotech. In many cases there is a clear crossover between anti-GM activists and those now turning towards nanotech. The infamous PR company Burton Marsteller[1] has noted that 'The organized opponents of nanotechnology include the same critics of progress and technology who were vociferous in the resistance to genetic engineering'.[2]

T.H.R.O.N.G. -- The Heavenly Righteous Opposed to Nanotech Greed -- attended the 'Nanotechnology - Delivering Business Advantage' conference in Buckinghamshire, December 2004. A meeting was interrupted by a banner ('Nanotech: it's not big and it's not clever) and the 'can of worms' award was handed to one of the nano-promotors. The Angels were later contacted by the Institute for Nanotechnology, one of the conference's organisers, and invited to the January 20th meeting of the Institute's Advisory Group, via a posting on UK Indymedia. This development seems to indicate that groups like the Institute -- or at least some people within it -- are eager to talk to the people who are beginning to protest. Dialogue with large NGOs such as Greenpeace is usually the preferred tactic for institutions, and the fact that they would consider inviting such an informal protest group as the Angels indicates that industry is terrified of nanotech becoming the 'new GM'. A recent article in The Economist (January 1st) flagged up the significance of anti-nano activities and research by actors like the ETC group -- and yours truly, Corporate Watch -- since, while 'on the fringe' we can often be very influential in shaping views on nanotech in the wider society. The left-wing think-tank Demos has gone one step further and produced a report, See Through Science, that calls on industry, government and scientists to involve concerned groups in shaping research into problematic subjects such as nanotech at a much earlier stage than commercialisation. The problem with this argument is that for a development to be seen as 'concerning', usually takes protest activity, and this usually happens well after industry and government have set their targets. In the case of nanotechnology, aspects have already been commercialised, so it is unlikely that nanotech will be an example of citizen/scientist co-operation.

And in the end the Angels declined the Institute's offer:

'the angels have decided that we have little to gain by entering into dialogue with an organisation that can only ever represent the interests of industry and not the concerns of the public (and quite frankly we smell a
Actions Against Nanotech During 2004

- January 30th, Berkely, USA, 30 people protested the building of an $84 million Molecular Foundry which will be dedicated to the study of nanotech, funded by the US government and operated by the University of California.
  www.dailycal.org/article.php?id=13950

- October 6th, Chicago, USA, members of T.H.O.N.G. (topless humans organised for natural genetics) disrupted the NanoBusiness 2004 conference by stripping down to their skimpy undies to reveal slogans painted on their bodies, like 'plenty of room at this bottom'. The conference, organised by the US Nano Business Alliance and US nano trade journal Small Times, was sponsored by military contractor Lockheed Martin and featured presentations from Motorola, BP and Dupont in order to support the emerging private nano sector.
  www.chicagothong.org/nanocommerce.php?photo=061

- 12th November, Leeds, UK, the Nanotech/Convergent Technologies conference was disrupted by stink bombs, a microphone was seized and a statement against nanotech read out over the tannoy, and delegates were leafleted.

- 13th December, Grenoble, France, activists occupied cranes on the site where nano company Minatec are building the largest centre for nanotech in Europe. Grenoble is already the home of GM, nuclear, chemical and microcomputing industries, and Minatec is a new operations based on state-funded companies and Grenoble university.

Monsanto men and GM PR firm set to cash in on Nanotech

If 'nano is the new GM' then UK companies involved with nanotech are frantic to avoid repeating the disaster that saw GM technology virtually wiped out in Britain. However, many of the public relations companies they are employing are the ones formerly involved in...the GM industry. Ex-Monsanto executives are already getting on board -- presumably due to their impressive knowledge of 'what not to do'. This includes people such as nanotech manager Harry Swan, who now works for carbon nanotubes maker Thomas Swan & Co, and PR exec Bernard Marantelli, who ran a pro-GM campaign on behalf of the Agricultural Biotechnological Council (ABC). This council was itself set up by Monsanto, Bayer, Syngenta, Dupont and Dow in 2002. Marantelli's PR firm, Lexington Communications, specialised in pro-GM press releases and spin, calculated to demonstrate GM benefits to nature and the third world. The independent research group SpinWatch recently reported that "Marantelli has convinced about 30 companies to come to a meeting on the 1st December to explore setting up a Nanotechnology - equivalent of ABC. Expect a new corporate front group being run out of the offices of Lexington."

Lobbywatch profiles

Lexington: www.lobbywatch.org/profile1.asp?PrId=138


References

[1] Corporate Watch B-M company profile

[2] Burton-Marsteller AG briefing, 'Nanotechnology in Need of Successful Communication'


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