

The End of Science'

It's a laissez faire capitalism all the way and the search for an alternative global capital seems to have become more complex than ever before. The age-old value shattering developments of present era such as the monopolisation of world market and the glaring inequality, social unrest, war, peasant revolts and environmental degradation it is producing, have led to resurgence of religious fundamentalism that negates the very foundation of general science, not to speak of Marxism. Again American President George W Bush who is the principal advocate of religious right, is in the forefront of leading a war against science as he refuses to acknowledge that evolution is a scientific fact! Evolution is just as well-established as the fact that earth goes around the sun. Religious Right throughout the world is trying to create a situation where scientific inquiry is blocked or its findings ruled out of order unless they conform to the goals of the government concerned, to corporate interests and to the ideology of religious fundamentalists. Nearer home the saffronites have demonstrated how religious dogma takes the place of science and rationality. Now social scientists whose findings conflict with corporate interests face retaliation everywhere. No doubt science is passing through difficult times.

The 'end of science' is nowhere so obnoxious as in clinical trials. Also the 'end of science' means the abuse of ethics, particularly in clinical trials as business dominates the scientific spectrum.

Clinical trials have been conducted since the beginning of civilisation. By the nineteenth century, clinical trials had become a fairly common practice to test new medical treatments. The twentieth century saw numerous medical advances which required years of research, testing and clinical trials, and the downside is numerous ethically questionable practices.

Six years ago an experimental drug from the US called M4N was injected into cancer patients in Kerala without being properly tested on animals first. These trials were conducted between November 12, 1999 and April 8, 2000 on 25 oral cancer patients awaiting surgical treatment in Regional Cancer Centre. Most of the patients had not known that they were part of a clinical trial. After all poor Indians can be treated as guineapigs. But the American companies do not spare Europeans either.

On 13 March 2006, 6 healthy young volunteers took part in a clinical trial at Northwick Park Hospital in England. They became violently ill minutes after being injected with a drug developed to fight auto-immune disease. The drug trial was carried out by Paraxel (Massachusetts, USA) on behalf of a German bio-tech firm TeGenero, which was well aware that the previously untested drug might seriously damage the immune system. The drug trial left six volunteers fighting for their lives. What mattered in the calculation of drug multinationals was business, not scientific ethics.

Just as wars cannot be avoided by developing more sophisticated weapons, so disease can never be completely eradicated merely by improvements in pharmacology, immunotherapy, or any other purely medical means. People should and must become more knowledgeable about the role of stress in their lives, their own stress coping techniques. But the idea is in conflict with drug multinationals.

Religious Right throughout the world is blocking scientific rationality and social progress as well. They are successful to some extent because Marxists themselves are a vanishing tribe these days. They may debate endlessly on Marx vs Post-Marx Marxism but that can hardly arrest the rise of religious fundamentalism. As the left moves right in most third world countries, scientific thoughts will continue to face attack from the obscurantists who serve the interests of corporate giants. And Bush is always on their side as he claims and that too in the 21st century. "On the issue of evolution, the verdict is still out on how god created the earth"! □□□