Letters to the Editor

To the Editor

Bureaucratic Sensitivity to Food Dyes

The consistent complaints from parents and teachers about food dye and additive sensitivity in the past six or seven years have placed two very different demands upon the Food and Drug Administration. It became necessary to appease the parents with an investigation while allowing the agribusiness-food processing industrial complex to make maximum profits with a minimum of concern about effective government interference. In 1980 a research project at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Canada, provided solid proof that a combination of food dyes would interfere with learning in hyperkinetic but not in truant delinquent children.

The responses to this important study were quite different at Tufts Medical School and at the F.D.A.. Professor Sidney Gellis of the pediatric department at Tufts concluded: "Well, there you have it: the Feingold Diet is in with a bang. It does not matter how you view these studies; it seems quite clear that artificial food dyes will have to go". The response of the F.D.A. was to claim that it was impossible to clearly establish the diagnosis of hyperactivity so that conclusions should not be drawn. They concluded that the use of azo-aniline coal tar derivative dyes should be continued.

We must explore the topic of the nonprofit scientific information and research organizations which receive money from both the federal government and the industries which the government is supposed to regulate. The oldest of these is the National Academy of Sciences which was established about a century ago as a non-profit organization "dedicated to the furtherance of science and its use for the general welfare". In 1916 the National Research Council was formed by the N.A.S. to bring industry into liaison with government agencies intended to regulate industry. With it industry gained entry to advisory committees which are used for regulations in the public interest.

In 1941 the NAS-NRC founded a committee which eventually became the Food and Nutrition Board. This group is regulated by twenty-four members chosen from three groups. These are university professors who receive grants from industry, research organizations hired by industry, and the food industry itself. In 1950 the Food Protection Committee of the Food and Nutrition Board was organized at the request of, and with the financial support of the food and chemical industries. In 1940 the Nutrition Foundation

arose during discussions of Charles Dunn of the Associated Grocery Manufacturers of America and Clarence Frances, President of General Foods Corporation. It was chartered in 1941 with support from fifteen food and food related industries. These included American Can, American Sugar Refining, Campbell Soup, Coca Cola, General Mills, National Biscuit, Pillsbury Flour and Safeway. Such agribusiness giants as Proctor and Gamble and Dow Chemical are among the many corporations which have later become member companies. The governing body is composed of company Member Trustees and of Public Trustees from academia, other foundations related to the food interests, and specially selected "non-industrial organizations". This organization was founded to aid and promote research and scientific information that the food industry can use in regard to safety, production and promotion of food products, and to communicate with such government regulatory bodies as the F.D.A. It proceeded to pass out prizes and research grants to investigators whose work brought new products and profits to the company members. The membership of this foundation overlaps that of the Food and Drug Law Institute which was founded in 1949 by the food, cosmetic, drug, canning, liquor and allied industries.

In 1966 they included Anchor Hocking Glass, Anheuser-Busch, Atlas Chemical, Bacardi, Coca Cola, Continental Can, General Mills, General Foods, Kellogg, Kraft, Lipton, Morton Salt, National Biscuit, Nestle, Pepsi Cola, Pillsbury, Proctor and Gamble, Quaker Oats, Ralston Purina, Schenley Liquor, Seagram, Seven-Up, C & H Sugar, Standard Brands, United Fruit and many others. This powerful and well funded organization provides major advice to the government in drafting and interpreting all legislation dealing with consumer protection in the areas of food, drugs and cosmetics.

These are the major advisory groups which the F.D.A. calls upon in order to decide how the executive branch of the government will regulate laws passed by congress. For instance, Charles Dunn was a founder of the Nutrition Foundation and was also a founder and prime mover of the Food and Drug Law Institute. The F.D.L.I. can actually function as an industrial lobby, and yet many private citizens have assumed it was a branch of the F.D.A. simply because its name sounds like a government bureau. The F.D.A. got help from a committee of the National Academy of Science to decide how to regulate the Food Additives Amendment in 1958. With the help of the F.D.L.I. they decided that some food additives ought to be "generally regarded as safe" (GRAS), so approval was given for the use of a wide variety of additives for which safety tests were non-existent. However, in actual administration of the law, a manufacturer is entitled to reach his own conclusions that a substance is in fact GRAS. He is not required to go to the F.D.A. to have the material added to the list. If he has some doubt about his chemical he can go to the F.D.A. and ask for a determination. This looseness of management was described by Senator George McGovern as "the never-never land of non-regulation". It is likely that the F.D.A. relied on opinions from the industry funded Food and Drug Law Institute when it decided to wait for consumer groups to sue offending food processors for using potentially toxic ingredients instead of just educating the public that they should be cautious about buying certain products, and thereby putting consumer pressure on the food manufacturer to improve his product.

These public-spirited and non-profit foundations, institutes and committees share a large number of officers and members. This amounts to interlocking directorates in which a relatively small number of individuals are to be found making major decisions in several of the organizations which help to control the national food supply. This is readily seen in the careers of professors Frederick Stare of Harvard, William Darby of Vanderbilt and Glen King of Columbia. At various times they have served as an officer or as president of the Nutrition Foundation, the Food and Nutrition Board, and the Food Protection Committee. Dr. King set up an Institute of Nutritional Sciences at Columbia University which receives significant grants from the food processing industry through the Nutrition Foundation, of which he has been president. The most articulate and well known spokesman for the food processing industry is Professor Stare of Harvard who

has also received grants from the Nutrition Foundation and from separate member trustees. He has said in his syndicated newspaper column that "there is no convincing evidence that in the average American diet decreasing the intake of sweets will lessen tooth decay... the empty calories of sugar and fat have always been important ...". As you would expect his Harvard department receives donations from the Sugar Research Foundations and the Cereal Institute. In his 1964 book, "Eating for Good Health", Frederick Stare says that the nutritive qualities of canned, evaporated milk are every bit as good as those of fresh pasteurized milk. It was also in 1964 that Dr. Stare was elected as a board member of Continental Can Company.

Professor Darby was chairman of the National Academy of Science Committee to evaluate food additives. They studied classic simple toxic reactions to rats which were exposed to one toxic food additive at a time. They would then set the permissible dosage in human food at 100 times more dilute. However they committed a serious logical error in these determinations, because they assume that each chemical is toxic for a different reason. If they were toxic for different reasons you could use several of them together with safety because you would not get enough of any one of them to be harmed. However if they are toxic because they injure the same biologic principles, the use of several at non-toxic doses will damage both experimental animals and man. Not only has Benjamen Ershoff found this to occur, a more recent report by Goldering and Associates at Yale found that rat pups fed food dyes were hyperactive and had impaired avoidance performance in behavioral studies. These findings clearly provide experimental support for the clinical discovery that salicylates and food additives can cause hyperactivity in some but not all hyperkinetic children.

We must not expect that the agribusiness food processor conglomerates will have a greater sense of morality and honesty than the American Tobacco Company. We must maintain awareness of the ancient rule of the marketplace: "Caveat Emptor: Buyer Beware". The decision making apparatus by the F.D.A. has been penetrated by the industry it is supposed to regulate. This is the reason that the consumer public is nearly helpless in trying to influence the way our food supply is protected. **Robert E. Buckley, M.D. City Center Building #411 Hayward, California**

Suggested Reading

Consumer Beware: Your Food and What's Been Done To It. Beatrice Trum Hunter, Simon & Schuster, N.Y. 1971. The Great Nutrition Robbery. Beatrice Trum Hunter, Chas. Scribner and Sons, N. Y. 1978. Food for Nought: The Decline in Nutrition. Ross Hume Hall, Random House, N.Y. 1974. Food Dyes and Hyperactive Children. Robert E. Buckley, M.D., J. of Intern. Acad, of Nutrition Consultants 2, 4, 33, Jan.-Feb., 1981.