

THE CARP AND THE RABBIT

Professor Alan Malcolm

The UK has had to deal with very few members of the legislature violently opposed to GM technology in agriculture. (**Everyone** is in favour of it in medicine!)

Although Peter Melchett is Lord Melchett, he hasn't flaunted his peerage since he was a junior minister more than two decades ago. When charged with criminal damage, he was found not guilty. By comparison the Commons' most vociferous spokesperson for the Luddite party, Michael Meacher, seems benign.

As one might expect, things are different across the Channel. On June 7th, one of the new French MEPs was a convicted criminal, found guilty on numerous occasions of being a significant nuisance.

José Bové is now licensed to wreak havoc in Brussels, or as *Le Figaro* put it, "C'est comme le carp et le lapin".

Our hero is a charming and highly intelligent sheep farmer and cheese maker from what is known as La France Profonde – a tiny village called Montredon on the Causse de Larzac in southern Aveyron. The British will recognise it as being only 30km from Norman Foster's mighty Millau Viaduct across the Tarn, helping to link Paris to Barcelona.

His first naughtiness was a decade ago when he confiscated all the items in a supermarket which he believed contained GM material, wrapped them in clingfilm to prevent the genes escaping, and blocked a checkout. The manager and the gendarmerie were not sympathetic. Suspended sentence.

His next little foray was a retaliation against the US's imposition of a 100% import duty on Roquefort cheese! Most of the milk produced by Bové and his neighbours goes to make Roquefort. In fact the US was retaliating against the EU's ban on imports of (GM) hormone treated beef – a legal wrangle which is still not resolved. A comparatively inoffensive gesture was the imposition of a 100% tax on

vociferously about American imperialism. The irony of their driving Ford tractors was overlooked by their audience. The gendarmes stood politely by, preventing the local traffic from interfering with the protest.

The magistrates were not amused and sentenced him to three months in prison. He hated this.

He also managed to fit in visits to Palestine/Israel where he

Maurice Chevalier accent. The unexpected bonus from this was the resurfacing of four miles of road leading to the village – such upgrades to the local highways usually require a significant injection of funds from the EU.

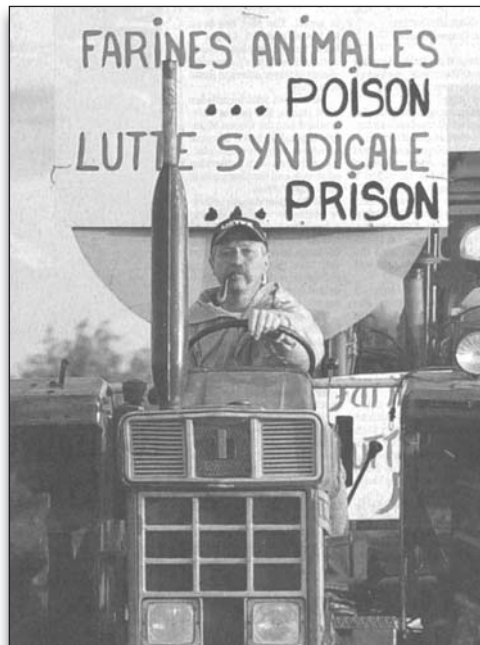
Needless to say, Bové and friends have also dug up (à la Melchett) GM maize crops in south western France. He was very upset that Chirac would not exercise a Presidential pardon in his favour, and a further spell in prison resulted.

His retaliation was to run for President against Sarkozy, finishing a very honourable sixth.

But now at last, the electoral system has given him a political voice which will be heard. He was number one (Tête de Liste) on the Green Party list for South West France. In his home village of Nant, he received 89 votes, a soupçon behind the representative of the UMP (Sarkozy's party), and more than double the number of any other candidate. The turnout was 50%!

He appeared on television later that evening, along with his new partner as MEP, Daniel Cohn Bendit, whom older readers will remember as the leader of student rebellion in 1968. Our very own President of the National Union of Students at that time, Jack Straw, seems to have matured very nicely.

Only problem now remaining is that nobody has yet worked out who will succeed Bové as barbecue chef at the Montredon market on Wednesday evenings. Cometh the hour, cometh the man as we Anglo Saxons say.



Coca Cola at the Montredon farmers' market. This was without noticeable effect on anything since the locals all drink the local pastis.

Much more serious was his advance on the site where a branch of MacDonald's was being developed in Millau. In fact all he (and accomplices) did was to make a nuisance of themselves and rearrange some of the building materials. The "damage" was negligible. His followers then paraded through the streets of Millau, banging dustbin lids and complaining

defied the Israeli army by walking in front of a tank (à la Tiananmen Square, but with a better outcome). DVDs of this foray can be purchased at the Farmers' Market in Montredon.

Next he was off to disrupt the G8 summit in Seattle. By now the world was waking up to the presence of this new Ghandi, and CNN decided to send a film crew to Montredon to interview him. Having spent several years of his childhood in California with his microbiology professor father, he speaks perfect English, albeit embellished with a