

biotechnology should grow out of existing scientific paradigms, and often do not recognise biodiversity as a fundamental prerequisite to sustainable food and energy production.

Robert Walgate, the author, outlines the aims of the book (the 'dossier') as:

- * to clarify the basic science behind biotechnology
- * to tackle controversies over the possible risks and benefits of biotechnology for the poor
- * to report stories, actual cases of applications, research programmes and policies.

The first aim is achieved in excellent fashion. The second is covered satisfactorily, but the third, though a number of stories are reported, is inadequate. The *Development Dialogue* issue "The Laws of Life" achieves this third aim far more comprehensively by giving precise data on what has taken place in research during the last 15 years, and what the trends are in the corporate world where most of the research is being carried out.

What comes out of the three publications mentioned in this review is that biotechnology has potentially far reaching effects for us all. It is, therefore, important that we lay people have some understanding of the implications. *Miracle or Menace* is a good introduction to this, but does not answer the question posed.

Reviewed by John Wilson, Permaculture Association of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe.

References

- Fowler Cary, Lachkovics Eva, Mooney Pat and Shand Hope (1988) "The Laws of Life. Another Development and the New Biotechnologies" in *Development Dialogue*, 1988:1-2, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala.
- New Internationalist* (1991) "Test Tube Coup. Biotech's Global Takeover", March, No 217, Oxford.

Rural Communities under Stress. Peasant Farmers and the State in Africa, Jonathan Barker, Cambridge University Press, African Society Today Series, Cambridge, 1989 (228pp, £8.95 pbk, £25 hbk, ISBN 0 521 31358 9).

The stresses on peasant communities do not all come from the State, and this book offers a fairly comprehensive survey of them.

Peasant farming is described as touching on self-provisioning, full commercial farming and scale of labour, and thus is a complex entity which is not easy to define precisely. The influences and stresses on it are equally complex: ecological, economic and political. These, with less emphasis on the first, are outlined along with the various solutions currently on offer, all of which are found to have their disadvantages. Some will take heart from the conclusion that a worker-peasant alliance could be a viable political-economic strategy in the hands of a longsighted government in control of its economy.

The wealth of material in this book makes it more dense than could be expected from the declared intention of the series, to provide 'scholarly, but lively and up-to-date' books. Scholarly and up-to-date it is, and for anyone seeking deeper understanding of the situation and problems of the majority of Africa's agriculturalists, and of policy-makers in this regard, it will reward the careful reading which it demands.

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