

By Isaac Wolfe

At the time of this writing, a trial is underway in the U.S. District Court in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania challenging the teaching of “intelligent design” in high school biology. “Intelligent design” is an alternative explanation of the origin of life based on biblical creationism. The case stems from a 2004 decision by the Dover, Pennsylvania School to mandate the teaching of “intelligent design.” Eleven parents sued the school board arguing that “intelligent design is religion gussied up as science.” (Washington Post, October 15, 2005). Voters have since ousted the school board and elected a new slate of candidates who have promised to reverse the decision to teach “intelligent design”, but the battle is hardly over.

The events in Dover are only one part of a nationwide attack on the teaching of evolution. In 2005, organized movements in 19 states forced school boards to consider teaching “intelligent design” in place of or alongside the teaching of Darwinian evolution. For example, the Kansas state school board voted to revise the high school biology curriculum to include the teaching of “intelligent design.”

Rev. Terry Fox, pastor of the largest Southern Baptist church in the Midwest, is one of the most visible leaders of the anti-evolution movement. “The fight to teach God’s role in creation is becoming the essential front in America’s cultural war,” Fox told the Washington Post in March. “The issue is on the agenda at every meeting of pastors, and if evolution’s boosters can be forced to back down, the Christian right’s agenda will advance.”

It is easy to dismiss the people pushing these proposals as small bands of religious fanatics. However, this is not an accurate description. The anti-evolution groups are part of a highly organized and well-financed movement. According to a report in the Washington Post earlier this year, the nonprofit Discovery Institute (DI) spends more than \$1 million a year for research, polls and media pieces supporting intelligent design. The DI receives funding from wealthy conservatives such as Howard Ahmanson, Jr. whose goal is “the total integration of biblical law into our lives” and the MacLellan Foundation which promotes “the infallibility of the Scripture.”

While many of the foot soldiers in the anti-evolution movement believe that they are fighting in a religious/moral war, the real objectives of the leadership of this movement (such as the DI) are to ideologically disarm the working class and to help organize the counter-revolutionary forces. These objectives and the strategic plan to achieve them were outlined in documents prepared by the DI, including the 1999 “Wedge Document” and the follow-up “Wedge Document”: “So What?” The DI has met and exceeded most of its 5-year objectives. What is the DI’s plan of attack?

“The Discovery Institute Center for Science and Culture is not attacking science or the scientific method. It is challenging the philosophy of scientific materialism and the false scientific theories that support it, such as Darwinism, Marxism and Freudian psychology.”

Why scientific materialism? In this case, the term “materialism “ refers to the understanding that, as Lenin wrote in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, “an objective reality exists apart from our consciousness. From this it follows that the society in which we live is determined by defined and understandable relationships between how goods are produced and distributed and who owns the means to produce and distribute these goods. In this context, scientific materialism is a method by which we can not only understand the world, but also change it.

The DI wants to replace philosophical materialism with its opposite, idealism. In this context, idealism means that nature only exists in the mind, that one cannot really understand the world we live in, and that there are basic laws of nature that cannot be uncovered by science. Thus, not only can we not understand the world, we cannot change it.

In addition to outlining the goal of the DI, the “Wedge Document” clearly describes the organization’s objectives and tactics: “The DI seeks nothing less than the overthrow of materialism and its cultural legacies... In order to defeat materialism, we must cut it off at its source. That source is scientific materialism. This is precisely our strategy. If we view the predominant materialistic science as a giant tree, our strategy is intended to function as a ‘wedge’ that, while relatively small, can split the trunk when applied as its weakest points. The ‘thin edge of the wedge’ is Darwinism.”

Why is Darwinian evolution the “wedge issue”? The forces leading the anti-evolutionism battle realize how important the understanding of evolutionary theory is to the movement for economic justice and peace. Darwinian evolution teaches that systems undergo internal changes, that these changes are expressed when the external environment changes and that this process leads to new relationships and systems. This concept is dangerous to the capitalists. In order to ideologically disarm the working class, idealism must replace materialism, status quo must replace change, fantasy must dominate science, and God-based creationism must be substituted for evolution. Rev. Terry Fox stated in the Washington Post earlier this year, “Creationism’s going to be our big battle.”

It is important to realize that the ideological attack reflected in the anti-evolution movement is not new or unexpected. In 1934, R. Palme Dutt wrote of a fascist led

“revolt against science” in his work *Fascism and Social Revolution*.

“The revolt against science, which bourgeois society today encourages in the ideological sphere, at the same time as it utilizes science in practice, is not only the expression of a dying and doomed social class; it is an essential part of the campaign of reaction ... through which alone capitalism today can try to maintain its hold a little longer.”

The current “revolt against science” is not limited to evolutionary biology. It is also seen in the other biological sciences such as neurobiology, as well as in the environmental, medical and social sciences. However, at the same time, science is being lauded as the source of new mini-pods, plasma screen TVs, and other new commodities. This apparent contradiction is rooted in the fact that we are living in an economic environment that utilizes quantitative scientific advances that result in faster and cheaper production as well as improvements in proven commodities, but cannot incorporate qualitative scientific advances.

Scientific research is comprised of two separate, but interrelated, aspects, basic research and applied research. Basic research addresses the issues of “why” biological and natural events occur, while applied research addresses the issues of “how” to alter biological and natural realities. Both basic

research and applied research are necessary for the healthy growth of scientific research, but their relative importance varies in relationship to the maturity of a particular field of research and to their relationship to the means of production.

The anti-evolution movement has focused its attacks on basic scientific research rather than applied research. It has not targeted applied research because it provides new products like smaller CD players and cell phones; it is accessible and understandable; and it is the source of immediate profits for the capitalists. Applied research makes use of existing scientific advances and theories and, as such, is not a challenge to existing ways of looking at the world.

Instead, the anti-evolution movement has made basic research their primary target, in particular basic research in the biological sciences. This area of scientific research is in the realm of qualitative scientific advances. It is an abstract and intellectually challenging area that deals with life, death, health, social interactions, how the world changes and so on. It is based on willingness to question, and raises the possibility that the world as we understand it is ever-changing and ever-changeable. The results of basic research often cannot be directly converted into new products or processes, and are not easily understood by the general population. Basic research is also predominately conducted at publicly-funded educational and research institutes, and, as such, is one of the targets of the movement to destroy public education.

The dichotomy between basic research and applied research allows the DI to state in its “Wedge Document” that it “is not attacking science or the scientific method,” rather it is “challenging the philosophy of scientific materialism and the false scientific theories that support it.” But this is not the case. It is important that we listen and understand exactly what the anti-evolution movement is saying and the threat that it poses to the fight for a new world.

The attack on Darwinian evolution is a direct result of dying capitalism and the rapid degeneration of the standard of living of the American people. In a rapidly changing, frightening and dangerous world, people are looking for a

way out of this mess. There are two paths. One leads to social revolution, change and freedom, the other to fascist repression. The anti-evolution movement supports the second path and attacks the first by accusing science in general and Darwinian evolutionary theory in particular, of being amoral, anti-religious and anti-God. They would have our children be taught that the world came about due to God's "intelligent design" and that the plant closings, low wages, decreasing health care and increasing poverty are "God's will" as well, which must be endured.

The movement against the teaching of Darwinian evolution is part of the ideological attack on the working class and is a component of the growing fascist movement in our country. As such we must understand it, expose it and defeat it.