Germany

'An Inch' as Good as a Mile on Embryo Research

Under pressure of British moves to allow unfettered embryonic stem-cell research, and even attempts to clone human beings, a shift in the German policy of protection of life in scientific work has occurred. The Bundestag (Germany's national parliament) on Jan. 30 gave its approval to the import of lines of embryonic stem-cells produced abroad (even if under strict conditions). This "little breach in the taboo" with respect to human life, which *EIR* and the LaRouche movement in Germany had warned about extensively, is, in reality, a green light for misusing embryos for research ultimately for a cannibalistic medicine, in which the human being is viewed as a "source of replacement parts" for exploitation.

The bitter irony of the Bundestag vote lay in the fact that the debate had to be led through a fixed staging, with three different proposals, to increase the probability that a foul compromise could be put through. Without further procedural tricks, the vote would still have failed, with a plurality of 43% favoring continuing the ban on imports of embryonic stem-cells. Only with the second vote on the subject was a coalition created between the "extremist" and "moderate" positions. The much-praised "historic debate" was a well-orchestrated "fix." All the subsequent laws for regulating embryonic stem-cell import had been prepared long in advance and will now be on the fast track to be instituted.

None of the German parliamentarians opposing imports realized what trap they had fallen into, since a simple "yes/no" vote was never taken.

The parliamentary vote was barely over, when a heated debate began over the fastest ways of creating "bio-banks," patent regulation, "research competition," and financing of stem-cell projects by the federal German Society for Research (DFG). The German edition of the London *Financial Times* rejoiced: "Regardless of how the politicians vote: Scientists, patients, and the bio-tech Industry will soon push through much softer regulations."

Nothing Human 'Detected'

One thing that will quickly fall by the wayside is the view that embryonic stem-cells can be developed into therapeutic methods for severe medical conditions. This argument was never more than a guise under which the goal of other biotechnology research could be concealed. It is highly doubtful that embryonic stem-cells could ever cure a disease, and if human dignity is to be sacrificed to clarify this question, then the cost for this research is very high indeed.

The arguments supporting this research claim that nothing "human" can be detected in a fertilized egg cell, nor in the "cell clumps," called blastocysts, bred so that embryonic stem-cells can be taken from them. With such a "detection" process justified, it will then be applied to find no "human dignity" in very severely handicapped persons and in coma patients.

Unfortunately, the consequences of the German parliament's decision are all too apparent. More polemics in the Bundestag on the question of embryonic stem-cells would have been in order. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger could have been quoted from his recent interview with Peter Seewald: "We do not know all that this area [of biotechnology] has in store, but we can be convinced of this: God is firmly opposed to a final outrage, a final outrageous self-destruction of mankind. He will oppose the belittling of humans into a livestock of slaves. There are boundaries, which we cannot cross without destroying creation itself or surpassing the first sin and the negative consequences that followed it."

Ignoring the Alternative

One can also look at it another way, if the warning of this leading clergyman sounds too "religious." Research with embryonic stem-cells, and the attempt to raise human "livestock" in some form, will fail because of the reality of biological processes, which are not as reductionalistically simple as today's researchers imagine. Just the recent statement from a reproduction biologist regarding her cloning results with primates—even normal looking cells turned out to be a "scary closet of horrors" upon closer examination—should convince every serious researcher to stay away from human experiments.

Prof. Otto Hornstein, who belonged to the first reproduction medicine committee of the DFG, reminded the current DFG president, Dr. Ernst-Ludwig Winnacker, about the solemn promise of the World Doctors Union in Geneva, in 1948. In an open letter to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on Jan. 30, Hornstein cited the pledge: "I will keep the highest respect for human life from the time of conception onward." It would be more than strange if Dr. Winnacker claimed that important progress in medicine had always been connected with the breaking of taboos. "I don't dare imagine, to what extremes the brownshirted rulers would have been capable, if they had had the biotechnological possibilities of modern molecular genetics at their disposal," wrote Hornstein.

There is a clear alternative, which has often been ignored, and which the British science journal, *Nature*, has recently attempted to debunk. This is research with adult stem-cells—which are taken from the patient who is to be treated. There are strong indications, and some experimental case evidence, that these types of cells can be transformed so as, not only to cure diseases, but also as a basis for fundamental research to uncover basic life processes.