

# Anti-science mob in action: food irradiation pioneer Welt indicted

by Marjorie Mazel Hecht

The technology of food irradiation could nearly double the world's food supply, simply by preventing the spoilage of existing crops by insects, rodents, and mold. Needed protein—meat, fish, and poultry—could be sealed in plastic bags, irradiation-sterilized, and shipped without refrigeration to areas of famine where there is no infrastructure to protect perishables like meat. Yet, instead of promoting this life-saving technology, the U.S. Justice Department is prosecuting—and even jailing—its promoters. This witchhunt against nuclear technology and those who would benefit from it is carried out under the banner of the anti-science mob and their New Dark Ages policies—protecting the people from big, bad science.

Dr. Martin Welt is a victim of these anti-science crusaders. A nuclear physicist who pioneered the technology of food irradiation and has worked to commercialize it for the past 25 years, Welt is now under federal indictment in the state of New Jersey for “crimes” allegedly committed while he was president of Radiation Technology, Inc. A trial date is set for June 27.

The case against Welt is purely political. Usually when there are minor and even major infractions of Nuclear Regulatory Commission safety regulations, there are reprimands or fines. The weekly news releases of the NRC, in fact, are full of instances of such fines.

In Welt's case, the state's “environmental crime coordinator,” Jacqueline Wolff, announced that she wanted Welt jailed. Wolff, a federal prosecutor, was appointed as environmental crime czar in March, just after she handed down the indictment against Welt. As quoted in the *Newark Star Ledger*, Wolff said, “Environmental crime shouldn't be treated as anything less than any other type of crime. . . . I think they'll [industrial corporations] be more concerned about being incarcerated than about paying fines,” she said. “It's easy for a corporation to pick up the fine. It's not so easy for them to pick up a jail term.”

Welt, 55, was trained as a nuclear reactor specialist and started off working for the Atomic Energy Commission in the 1950s. He is the first to assert that special care has to be taken and regulations followed when nuclear power is con-

cerned. One of his first jobs, in fact, was to commission a nuclear reactor and set up the safety regulations governing its use.

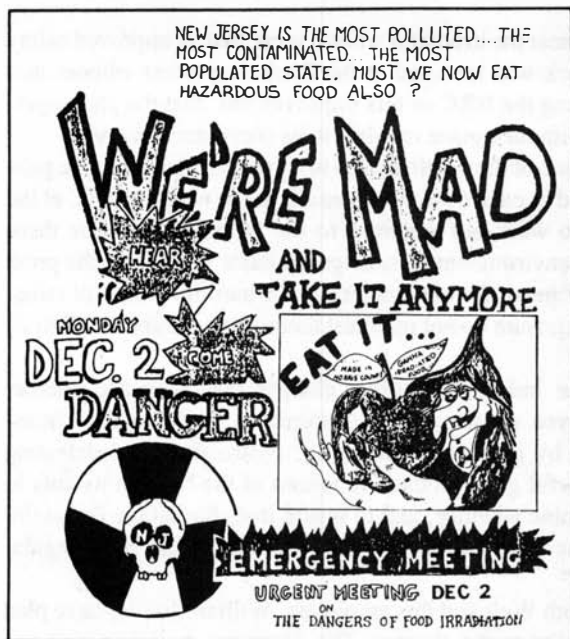
Welt got into the area of food irradiation in the 1960s, because he saw the potential of the then-young technology and he wanted to see it developed and commercialized as quickly as possible. In large part, that any commercialization has taken place is due to his efforts, promoting the technology and pushing the federal agencies involved to approve the use of it for spices, herbs, enzymes, vegetable seasoning, and pork.

It was Welt's radiation-sterilized meals that the astronauts ate up in space, and Radiation Technology had also filed petitions to allow radiation-sterilization to be commercialized. Welt had also established plants that irradiated chicken and fish for export, since those products had not yet been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for U.S. consumption. When he left Radiation Technology under Nuclear Regulatory Commission pressure, Welt formed another company, Alpha Omega Technology, Inc., and designed an irradiator specifically geared to be operated in a developing nation. His new company also provides consulting services to hospitals and laboratories to monitor radiation use.

## Anti-nuclear takeover

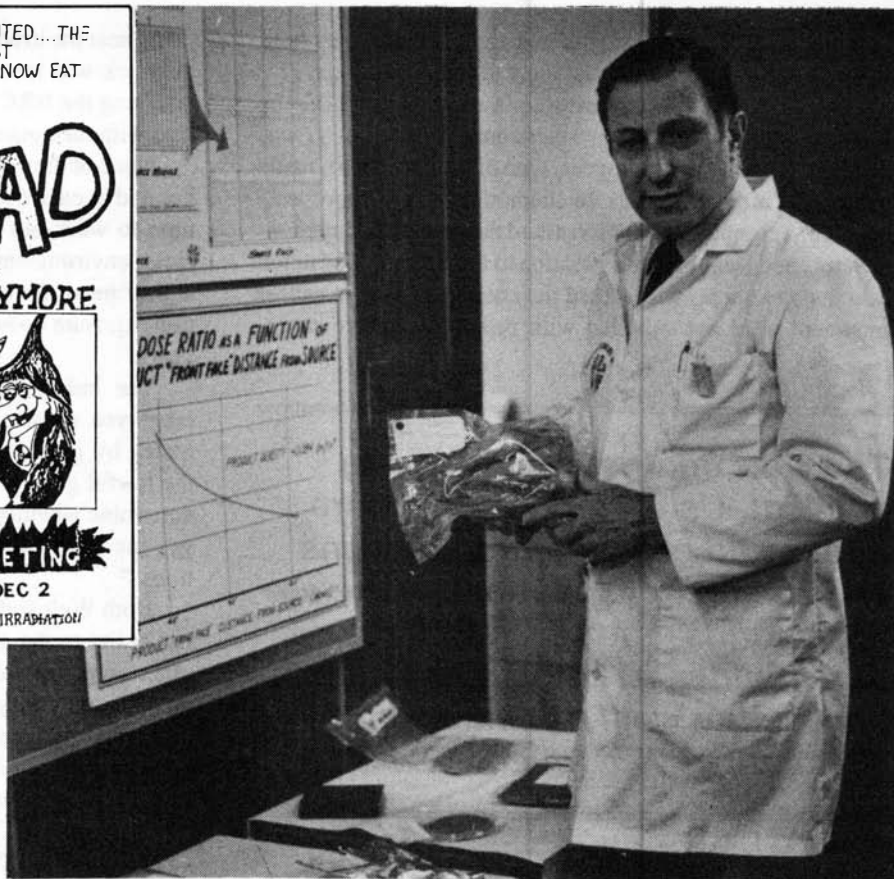
The only way to understand this case is to see it in the context of the anti-nuclear takeover of the media and U.S. policy over the past two decades. In the paranoid world of the anti-nuclear activist, the nuclear industry is just a plot to make money, and anyone who is pro-nuclear must be so because they are on the take. To these anti-nukes, nuclear power is inherently bad and dangerous, and poor little human beings cannot possibly tame this monster. To this anti-nuke, “they,” are out to get “us,” and “they” must be stopped. The same follows for any other big industry that uses modern technology.

In the state of New Jersey, such a mentality is now institutionalized in the office of Jacqueline Wolff. It would be interesting to document how much Wolff has relied on the propaganda provided by local anti-nuclear environmentalist



A New Jersey environmentalists' leaflet, distributed in 1987, was used to stir up hysteria and stop Welt from opening more plants in New Jersey.

Dr. Martin Welt in his laboratory in New Jersey in 1984, demonstrating the technology which could double the world's food supply.



Smart Lewis

groups. Equally interesting would be how often she checks with reputable scientists to determine what constitutes an actual environmental danger to the public.

But the case against Welt did not begin with Wolff. Because Welt aggressively pursued the commercialization of food irradiation and spoke out on behalf of nuclear power, publicly debating the leading anti-nukes, and because he would not cater to the environmentalists and baby their fears about the nuclear monster, he has been a prime target of the anti-science mob in New Jersey. In fact, part of Welt's decision to export the technology to the developing sector, where it could vastly increase the food supply simply by stopping the spoilage now due to insects and mold, was that the local environmentalists would attack every move he made in the state with lawsuits and leaflets to stir up as much hysteria as possible (see illustration of a New Jersey leaflet issued in 1987) to try to stop Welt from opening more plants in New Jersey.

### Food and water

One such anti-nuke is Wally Burnstein, an osteopath, who founded an activist group called Food and Water. In a recent telephone interview, Burnstein bragged about the environmentalists' activities against Welt, claiming responsibility for the indictments. "We made the situation so hot," he

said, "that the NRC would have been embarrassed not to go after Welt and prosecute him."

To Burnstein, scientific facts don't matter. Burnstein is a bully. He told me that he had never talked to a reporter or public official or anyone not connected to the nuclear industry whom he did not convince that food irradiation was dangerous and should be stopped. When I said that I guessed I would be the first, he decided that he didn't want to talk to me anymore! So much for reasonable discussion.

Burnstein, like the other activists campaigning against food irradiation, repeats the same allegations over and over, and the same pathetically unscientific references against food irradiation by "quacks." One of these so-called experts on food irradiation, whom I met at congressional hearings on food irradiation legislation, is a Ph.D.—in "holistic medicine" with a mail-order degree from an unaccredited California college where the number of degrees you accumulate is limited only by the amount of money you spend to purchase them.

These environmentalists and their experts repeat a litany against modern science: "They" are doing something to our food that "poisons" it. "They" would have to experiment for 50 more years to make sure it is safe. Of course, 50 years from now, no matter what scientific proof the scientific community produced, Burnstein and his fellow travelers would

be wailing for 50 more years of research, because they hold valid no scientific basis for making a decision, just fear.

Interestingly enough, Burnstein's medical practice, the Roxbury Medical Group, in Succasunna, New Jersey, was recently struck by its employees. One of the complaints made by the staff is that materials for chemotherapy are improperly handled, a complaint the union asked the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration to investigate. The union said that the nurses who mixed the chemicals used in cancer treatment were not supplied with proper protective equip-

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ment. Other complaints concerned the x-ray procedure. So much for Burnstein's real concern about safety.

But Burnstein and company's bullying tactics have taken their toll. In January, the New Jersey legislature passed a bill that would have banned the distribution and sale of irradiated food in the state. Fortunately New Jersey Gov. Thomas Kean, refused to sign the bill, and instead took the advice of the state health commissioner, who said that there was "insufficient evidence to warrant an absolute ban of irradiated food in the state."

Burnstein's response to the veto typifies his worldview. He told the *Star Ledger*, "The Department of Health's action in regard to this issue has been scandalous. Through their inaction and totalitarian science, they have placed the people of this state in jeopardy."

### **The indictment**

The case against Welt bears resemblance to other political cases inspired by the Department of Justice Criminal Division and waged as vendettas against public figures: both the charges and the press coverage are maximized as much as possible. In addition, some of the evidence—a computer tape of Welt's office memos and correspondence—was seized by investigators and then "disappeared."

The indictment against Welt centers on charges that he allowed the irradiator at the Rockaway plant to be operated without the safety interlock in place, which keeps staff from

going near the irradiator when it is on, that an improved safety interlock was installed at the Rockaway plant without first notifying the NRC of this improvement, that the plant operated without a maze monitor in its computer console.

None of these infractions involves any danger to the public, and in each case, Welt was in touch with the NRC at the time to work out solutions to the problems. Despite these facts, environmental crime coordinator Wolff told the press at the time of the indictment that the harmful effects of radiation exposure do not manifest themselves for about "10 to 20 years."

The indictment further charges that Welt and another employee subsequently conspired to "defraud the United States by impeding, impairing, obstructing, and defeating the lawful governmental functions of the NRC in its duty to determine whether, and to insure that, Radiation Technology, Inc. was complying with its license and NRC regulations."

Both Welt and this employee, William Jouris, have pled not guilty to the charges. The company, however, and one other employee pled guilty to the charges. To answer the question why they pled guilty would shed light on how the NRC investigators, the greenies, and the Justice Department have worked behind the scenes to remove Welt from his role as a leader in commercializing this technology.

Why the NRC would join such a witchhunt is a complicated question. There are obviously technically competent people at the NRC, but there is also a "head-hunter" section, the Office of Investigation. This is headed by someone whom a former NRC commissioner termed "the loosest of 20 to 30 loose cannon" at the NRC. Reportedly, this office shops around among various U.S. Attorneys throughout the country to find one whose "personal agenda" agrees with the witchhunt target. Perhaps this is how Wolff entered the Welt case.

### **At stake: the future of nuclear power**

As Welt goes to trial, there can be no dispute that the future of nuclear power, and with it the quality of life in this country, is on the line. In neighboring New York State, the anti-nuclear governor has forced the abandonment and bulldozing of a fully completed nuclear plant, creating what is admitted to be an immediate energy crisis with brownouts and possibly blackouts, unless people cut back severely on energy use during the hot summer days.

The future of food irradiation is also on the line. The anti-nuclear groups are salivating at the prospect of "getting" a leading pro-nuclear monster, and have geared their propaganda accordingly. And while prosecutor Wolff pursues her policy of jailing environmentalist criminals who offend her definition of the public good, how many people in the world will die of starvation, whose lives could have been saved by the commercialization of a technology that could double the world's food supply?