

Coronavirus Pandemic Will Inevitably Cause Food Crisis

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The coronavirus crisis will not end anytime soon. Day after day, news about the catastrophe becomes increasingly frightening and alarming. The numbers do not indicate any sign of a truce and we cannot see improvements in the world scenario in the near future. The crisis will affect all sectors of society, damaging politics, economy, education and all branches of civilized life. However, what is most noteworthy is the impact that the pandemic will have on the most basic item of human life: food.

There will undoubtedly be a global food production and supply crisis. This fact was already expected by all analysts. But everything indicates that the crisis will be even more profound: there is an imminent risk of “food shortages” on the world market due to Covid-19 disruptions in international trade and supply chains, warned the leaders of two UN agencies and WTO. This scarcity will be generated by the growing wave of restrictions on exports, which, in the context of contemporary global society, will invariably cause a drastic decrease in the world circulation of food.

In an unusual statement, Chinese Qu Dongyu, who heads the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Ethiopian Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of the World Health Organization (WHO), and Brazilian Roberto Azevêdo, director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) published a text warning about the coming crisis and saying that it is important for all nations to maintain their international business, “in particular to avoid food shortages”. In addition, these three international organizations have issued important warnings about the slowdown in the movement of workers in the agricultural industry, which blocks several Western farmers, and with “border delays for containers of goods”, generating “a waste of perishable products”.

The alert issued jointly by the FAO, WHO and the WTO also affirms the need to protect workers in the food sector in order to “minimize the spread of the virus in the sector and maintain the food supply chains”. Finally, concludes:

“By protecting the health and well-being of citizens, countries must ensure that the set of trade measures does not disturb the food supply network (...) In periods like this, international cooperation is essential (...) We must ensure that our response to the covid-19 pandemic does not involuntarily create an unjustified shortage of essential products and exacerbates hunger and malnutrition”.

If, on one hand, the alert is of paramount importance in the current global context, on the other, there does not seem to be any alternative between the pandemic and the scarcity. In order to minimize the effects of the new coronavirus in their territories, States are adhering

to more restrictive and protectionist measures, overlapping the security of their population to the global need for the circulation of people and resources. In other words, the coronavirus is changing the history of globalization, increasing the role of the States and revealing flaws and deep deficiencies in international organizations and in the global system of interdependence.

As an immediate reaction to the resurgence of the State as the main international agent, international organizations are beginning to respond with even more globalist speeches, imploring the maintenance of the free movement of products in the context of the pandemic. Maximo Torero, Chief Economist of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, [told The Guardian](#):

“The worst that can happen is that governments restrict the flow of food (...) All measures against free trade will be counterproductive. Now is not the time for restrictions or putting in place trade barriers. Now is the time to protect the flow of food around the world (...) Trade barriers will create extreme volatility, (...) [They] will make the situation worse. That’s what we observe in food crises.”

In practice, how can we expect governments reacting in any other way than what they are currently doing? How can we expect all nations to keep their trade relations intact while their populations die infected by a devastating disease? Perhaps dreaming of free international trade in the present circumstances is the most utopian globalist wish. In fact, the agents of these international organizations are so ideologically committed to the globalist agenda that they are unable to analyze the case concretely and see the simplest: the whole structure of globalization is flawed and in a context of crisis its effects will be devastating anyway. Perhaps trade will continue and the pandemic will kill even more; perhaps trade is restricted and many die of hunger.

The biggest lesson to be learned from the current crisis is that globalization based on financial capitalism and neoliberalism was a very serious mistake. The foundations of the contemporary world are breaking and the discourses on solutions to the problems presented by the pandemic are beginning to increase everywhere. International organizations harden their globalist discourse and warn on the need to protect international trade, while States are stepping up security measures and downplaying the importance of the circulation of products and capital. Finally, what will be the winning speech? Will we see a return to state leadership or the birth of a new globalization? The only certainty so far is that the post-pandemic world will be very different from the previous one. Perhaps, the best thing to do is thinking about a world with greater food sovereignty and less inequality between nations.

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