

More Than Three Billion People in the World Condemned to Premature Death from Hunger and Thirst

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That is not an exaggerated figure, but rather a cautious one. I have meditated a lot on that in the wake of President Bush's meeting with U.S. automobile manufacturers.

The sinister idea of converting food into fuel was definitively established as an economic line in U.S. foreign policy last Monday, March 26.

A cable from the AP, the U.S. news agency that reaches all corners of the world, states verbatim:

"President Bush touted the benefits of 'flexible fuel' vehicles running on ethanol and biodiesel on Monday, meeting with automakers to boost support for his energy plans.

"Bush said a commitment by the leaders of the domestic auto industry to double their production of flex-fuel vehicles could help motorists shift away from gasoline and reduce the nation's reliance on imported oil.

"'That's a major technological breakthrough for the country,' Bush said after inspecting three alternative vehicles. If the nation wants to reduce gasoline use, he said "the consumer has got to be in a position to make a rational choice."

"The president urged Congress to 'move expeditiously' on legislation the administration recently proposed to require the use of 35 billion gallons of alternative fuels by 2017 and seek higher fuel economy standards for automobiles.

"Bush met with General Motors Corp. chairman and chief executive Rick Wagoner, Ford Motor Co. chief executive Alan Mulally and DaimlerChrysler AG's Chrysler Group chief executive Tom LaSorda.

"They discussed support for flex-fuel vehicles, attempts to develop ethanol from alternative sources like switchgrass and wood chips and the administration's proposal to reduce gas consumption by 20 percent in 10 years.

"The discussions came amid rising gasoline prices. The latest Lundberg Survey found the nationwide average for gasoline has risen 6 cents per gallon in the past two weeks to \$2.61." (AP, March 26 2007) .

I believe that reducing and moreover recycling all motors that run on electricity and fuel is an elemental and urgent need for all humanity. The tragedy does not lie in reducing those energy costs but in the idea of converting food into fuel.

It is known very precisely today that one ton of corn can only produce 413 liters of ethanol on average, according to densities. That is equivalent to 109 gallons.

The average price of corn in U.S. ports has risen to \$167 per ton. Thus, 320 million tons of corn would be required to produce 35 billion gallons of ethanol.

According to FAO figures, the U.S. corn harvest rose to 280.2 million tons in the year 2005.

Although the president is talking of producing fuel derived from grass or wood shavings, anyone can understand that these are phrases totally lacking in realism. Let's be clear: 35 billion gallons translates into 35 followed by nine zeros!

Afterwards will come beautiful examples of what experienced and well-organized U.S. farmers can achieve in terms of human productivity by hectare: corn converted into ethanol; the chaff from that corn converted into animal feed containing 26% protein; cattle dung used as raw material for gas production. Of course, this is after voluminous investments only within the reach of the most powerful enterprises, in which everything has to be moved on the basis of electricity and fuel consumption. Apply that recipe to the countries of the Third World and you will see that people among the hungry masses of the Earth will no longer eat corn. Or something worse: lend funding to poor countries to produce corn ethanol based on corn or any other food and not a single tree will be left to defend humanity from climate change.

Other countries in the rich world are planning to use not only corn but also wheat, sunflower seeds, rapeseed and other foods for fuel production. For the Europeans, for example, it would become a business to import all of the world's soybeans with the aim of reducing the fuel costs for their automobiles and feeding their animals with the chaff from that legume, particularly rich in all types of essential amino acids.

In Cuba, alcohol used to be produced as a byproduct of the sugar industry after having made three extractions of sugar from cane juice. Climate change is already affecting our sugar production. Lengthy periods of drought alternating with record rainfall, that barely make it possible to produce sugar with an adequate yield during the 100 days of our very moderate winter; hence, there is less sugar per ton of cane or less cane per hectare due to prolonged drought in the months of planting and cultivation.

I understand that in Venezuela they would be using alcohol not for export but to improve the environmental quality of their own fuel. For that reason, apart from the excellent Brazilian technology for producing alcohol, in Cuba the use of such a technology for the direct production of alcohol from sugar cane juice is no more than a dream or the whim of those carried away by that idea. In our country, land handed over to the direct production of alcohol could be much useful for food production for the people and for environmental protection.

All the countries of the world, rich and poor, without any exception, could save millions and millions of dollars in investment and fuel simply by changing all the incandescent light bulbs for fluorescent ones, an exercise that Cuba has carried out in all homes throughout the

country. That would provide a breathing space to resist climate change without killing the poor masses through hunger.

As can be observed, I am not using adjectives to qualify the system and the lords of the earth. That task can be excellently undertaken by news experts and honest social, economic and political scientists abounding in the world who are constantly delving into the present and future of our species. A computer and the growing number of Internet networks are sufficient for that.

Today, we are seeing for the first time a really globalized economy and a dominant power in the economic, political and military terrain that in no way resembles that of Imperial Rome.

Some people will be asking themselves why I am talking of hunger and thirst. My response to that: it is not about the other side of the coin, but about several sides of something else, like a die with six sides, or a polyhedron with many more sides.

I refer in this case to an official news agency, founded in 1945 and generally well-informed about economic and social questions in the world: TELAM. It said, and I quote:

“In just 18 years, close to 2 billion people will be living in countries and regions where water will be a distant memory. Two-thirds of the world’s population could be living in places where that scarcity produces social and economic tensions of such a magnitude that it could lead nations to wars for the precious ‘blue gold.’

“Over the last 100 years, the use of water has increased at a rate twice as fast as that of population growth.

“According to statistics from the World Water Council, it is estimated that by 2015, the number of inhabitants affected by this grave situation will rise by 3.5 billion people.

“The United Nations celebrated World Water Day on March 23, and called to begin confronting, that very day, the international scarcity of water, under the coordination of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), with the goal of highlighting the increasing importance of water scarcity on a global scale, and the need for greater integration and cooperation that would make it possible to guarantee sustained and efficient management of water resources.

“Many regions on the planet are suffering from severe water shortages, living with less than 500 cubic meters per person per year. The number of regions suffering from chronic scarcity of this vital element is increasingly growing.

“The principal consequences of water scarcity are an insufficient amount of the precious liquid for producing food, the impossibility of industrial, urban and tourism development and health problems.”

That was the TELEAM cable.

In this case I will refrain from mentioning other important facts, like the melting ice in Greenland and the Antarctic, damage to the ozone layer and the growing volume of mercury in many species of fish for common consumption.

There are other issues that could be addressed, but with these lines I am just trying to

comment on President Bush's meeting with the principal executives of U.S. automakers.

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