

The Internationalization of Genocide: Transforming Food into Fuel

The colossal squandering of cereals destined to fuel production

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The Camp David meeting has just come to an end. All of us followed the press conference offered by the presidents of the United States and Brazil attentively, as we did the news surrounding the meeting and the opinions voiced in this connection.



Faced with demands related to customs duties and subsidies which protect and support US ethanol production, Bush did not make the slightest concession to his Brazilian guest at Camp David.

President Lula attributed to this the rise in corn prices, which, according to his own statements, had gone up more than 85 percent.

Before these statements were made, the *Washington Post* had published an article by the Brazilian leader which expounded on the idea of transforming food into fuel.

It is not my intention to hurt Brazil or to meddle in the internal affairs of this great country. It was in effect in Rio de Janeiro, host of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, exactly 15 years ago, where I delivered a 7-minute speech vehemently denouncing the environmental dangers that menaced our species' survival. Bush Sr., then President of the United States, was present at that meeting and applauded my words out of courtesy; all other presidents there applauded, too.

No one at Camp David answered the fundamental question. Where are the more than 500 million tons of corn and other cereals which the United States, Europe and wealthy nations require to produce the gallons of ethanol that big companies in the United States and other countries demand in exchange for their voluminous investments going to be produced and who is going to supply them? Where are the soy, sunflower and rape seeds, whose essential oils these same, wealthy nations are to turn into fuel, going to be produced and who will produce them?

Some countries are food producers which export their surpluses. The balance of exporters and consumers had already become precarious before this and food prices had skyrocketed. In the interests of brevity, I shall limit myself to pointing out the following:

According to recent data, the five chief producers of corn, barley, sorghum, rye, millet and oats which Bush wants to transform into the raw material of ethanol production, supply the world market with 679 million tons of these products. Similarly, the five chief

consumers, some of which also produce these grains, currently require 604 million annual tons of these products. The available surplus is less than 80 million tons of grain.

This colossal squandering of cereals destined to fuel production —and these estimates do not include data on oily seeds—shall serve to save rich countries less than 15 percent of the total annual consumption of their voracious automobiles.

At Camp David, Bush declared his intention of applying this formula around the world. This spells nothing other than the internationalization of genocide.

In his statements, published by the *Washington Post* on the eve of the Camp David meeting, the Brazilian president affirmed that less than one percent of Brazil's arable land was used to grow cane destined to ethanol production. This is nearly three times the land surface Cuba used when it produced nearly 10 million tons of sugar a year, before the crisis that befell the Soviet Union and the advent of climate changes.

Our country has been producing and exporting sugar for a longer time. First, on the basis of the work of slaves, whose numbers swelled to over 300 thousand in the first years of the 19th century and who turned the Spanish colony into the world's number one exporter. Nearly one hundred years later, at the beginning of the 20th century, when Cuba was a pseudo-republic which had been denied full independence by US interventionism; it was immigrants from the West Indies and illiterate Cubans alone who bore the burden of growing and harvesting sugarcane on the island. The scourge of our people was the off-season, inherent to the cyclical nature of the harvest. Sugarcane plantations were the property of US companies or powerful Cuban-born landowners. Cuba, thus, has more experience than anyone as regards the social impact of this crop.

This past Sunday, April 1, the CNN televised the opinions of Brazilian experts who affirm that many lands destined to sugarcane have been purchased by wealthy Americans and Europeans.

As part of my reflections on the subject, published on March 29, I expounded on the impact climate change has had on Cuba and on other basic characteristics of our country's climate which contribute to this.

On our poor and anything but consumerist island, one would be unable to find enough workers to endure the rigors of the harvest and to care for the sugarcane plantations in the ever more intense heat, rains or droughts. When hurricanes lash the island, not even the best machines can harvest the bent-over and twisted canes. For centuries, the practice of burning sugarcane was unknown and no soil was compacted under the weight of complex machines and enormous trucks. Nitrogen, potassium and phosphate fertilizers, today extremely expensive, did not yet even exist, and the dry and wet months succeeded each other regularly. In modern agriculture, no high yields are possible without crop rotation methods.

On Sunday, April 1, the French Press Agency (AFP) published disquieting reports on the subject of climate change, which experts gathered by the United Nations already consider an inevitable phenomenon that will spell serious repercussions for the world in the coming decades.

According to a UN report to be approved next week in Brussels, climate change will

have a significant impact on the American continent, generating more violent storms and heat waves and causing droughts, the extinction of some species and even hunger in Latin America.

The AFP report indicates that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) forewarned that at the end of this century, every hemisphere will endure water-related problems and, if governments take no measures in this connection, rising temperatures could increase the risks of mortality, contamination, natural catastrophes and infectious diseases.

In Latin America, global warming is already melting glaciers in the Andes and threatening the Amazon forest, whose perimeter may slowly be turned into a savannah, the cable goes on to report.

Because a great part of its population lives near the coast, the United States is also vulnerable to extreme natural phenomena, as hurricane Katrina demonstrated in 2005.

According to AFP, this is the second of three IPCC reports which began to be published last February, following an initial scientific forecast which established the certainty of climate change.

This second 1400-page report which analyzes climate change in different sectors and regions, of which AFP has obtained a copy, considers that, even if radical measures to reduce carbon dioxide emissions that pollute the atmosphere are taken, the rise in temperatures around the planet in the coming decades is already unavoidable, concludes the French Press Agency.

As was to be expected, at the Camp David meeting, Dan Fisk, National Security advisor for the region, declared that “in the discussion on regional issues, [I expect] Cuba to come up (...) if there’s anyone that knows how to create starvation, it’s Fidel Castro. He also knows how not to do ethanol”.

As I find myself obliged to respond to this gentleman, it is my duty to remind him that Cuba’s infant mortality rate is lower than the United States’. All citizens —this is beyond question—enjoy free medical services. Everyone has access to education and no one is denied employment, in spite of nearly half a century of economic blockade and the attempts of US governments to starve and economically asphyxiate the people of Cuba.

China would never devote a single ton of cereals or leguminous plants to the production of ethanol, and it is an economically prosperous nation which is breaking growth records, where all citizens earn the income they need to purchase essential consumer items, despite the fact that 48 percent of its population, which exceeds 1.3 billion, works in agriculture. On the contrary, it has set out to reduce energy consumption considerably by shutting down thousands of factories which consume unacceptable amounts of electricity and hydrocarbons. It imports many of the food products mentioned above from far-off corners of the world, transporting these over thousands of miles.

Scores of countries do not produce hydrocarbons and are unable to produce corn and other grains or oily seeds, for they do not even have enough water to meet their most basic needs.

At a meeting on ethanol production held in Buenos Aires by the Argentine Oil Industry

Chamber and Cereals Exporters Association, Loek Boonekamp, the Dutch head of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s commercial and marketing division, told the press that governments are very much enthused about this process but that they should objectively consider whether ethanol ought to be given such resolute support.

According to Boonekamp, the United States is the only country where ethanol can be profitable and, without subsidies, no other country can make it viable.

According to the report, Boonekamp insists that ethanol is not manna from Heaven and that we should not blindly commit to developing this process.

Today, developed countries are pushing to have fossil fuels mixed with biofuels at around five percent and this is already affecting agricultural prices. If this figure went up to 10 percent, 30 percent of the United States' cultivated surface and 50 percent of Europe's would be required. That is the reason Boonekamp asks himself whether the process is sustainable, as an increase in the demand for crops destined to ethanol production would generate higher and less stable prices.

Protectionist measures are today at 54 cents per gallon and real subsidies reach far higher figures.

Applying the simple arithmetic we learned in high school, we could show how, by simply replacing incandescent bulbs with fluorescent ones, as I explained in my previous reflections, millions and millions of dollars in investment and energy could be saved, without the need to use a single acre of farming land.

In the meantime, we are receiving news from Washington, through the AP, reporting that the mysterious disappearance of millions of bees throughout the United States has edged beekeepers to the brink of a nervous breakdown and is even cause for concern in Congress, which will discuss this Thursday the critical situation facing this insect, essential to the agricultural sector. According to the report, the first disquieting signs of this enigma became evident shortly after Christmas in the state of Florida, when beekeepers discovered that their bees had vanished without a trace. Since then, the syndrome which experts have christened as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) has reduced the country's swarms by 25 percent.

Daniel Weaver, president of the US Beekeepers Association, stated that more than half a million colonies, each with a population of nearly 50 thousand bees, had been lost. He added that the syndrome has struck 30 of the country's 50 states. What is curious about the phenomenon is that, in many cases, the mortal remains of the bees are not found.

According to a study conducted by Cornell University, these industrious insects pollinate crops valued at anywhere from 12 to 14 billion dollars.

Scientists are entertaining all kinds of hypotheses, including the theory that a pesticide may have caused the bees' neurological damage and altered their sense of orientation. Others lay the blame on the drought and even mobile phone waves, but, what's certain is that no one knows exactly what has unleashed this syndrome.

The worst may be yet to come: a new war aimed at securing gas and oil supplies that can take humanity to the brink of total annihilation.

Invoking intelligence sources, Russian newspapers have reported that a war on Iran has been in the works for over three years now, since the day the government of the United States resolved to occupy Iraq completely, unleashing a seemingly endless and despicable civil war.

All the while, the government of the United States devotes hundreds of billions to the development of highly sophisticated technologies, as those which employ micro-electronic systems or new nuclear weapons which can strike their targets an hour following the order to attack.

The United States brazenly turns a deaf ear to world public opinion, which is against all kinds of nuclear weapons.

Razing all of Iran's factories to the ground is a relatively easy task, from the technical point of view, for a powerful country like the United States. The difficult task may come later, if a new war were to be unleashed against another Muslim faith which deserves our utmost respect, as do all other religions of the Near, Middle or Far East, predating or postdating Christianity.

The arrest of English soldiers at Iran's territorial waters recalls the nearly identical act of provocation of the so-called "Brothers to the Rescue" who, ignoring President Clinton's orders advanced over our country's territorial waters. Cuba's absolutely legitimate and defensive action gave the United States a pretext to promulgate the well-known Helms-Burton Act, which encroaches upon the sovereignty of other nations besides Cuba. The powerful media have consigned that episode to oblivion. No few people attribute the price of oil, at nearly 70 dollars a barrel as of Monday, to fears of a possible invasion of Iran.

Where shall poor Third World countries find the basic resources needed to survive?

I am not exaggerating or using overblown language. I am confining myself to the facts.

As can be seen, the polyhedron has many dark faces.

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