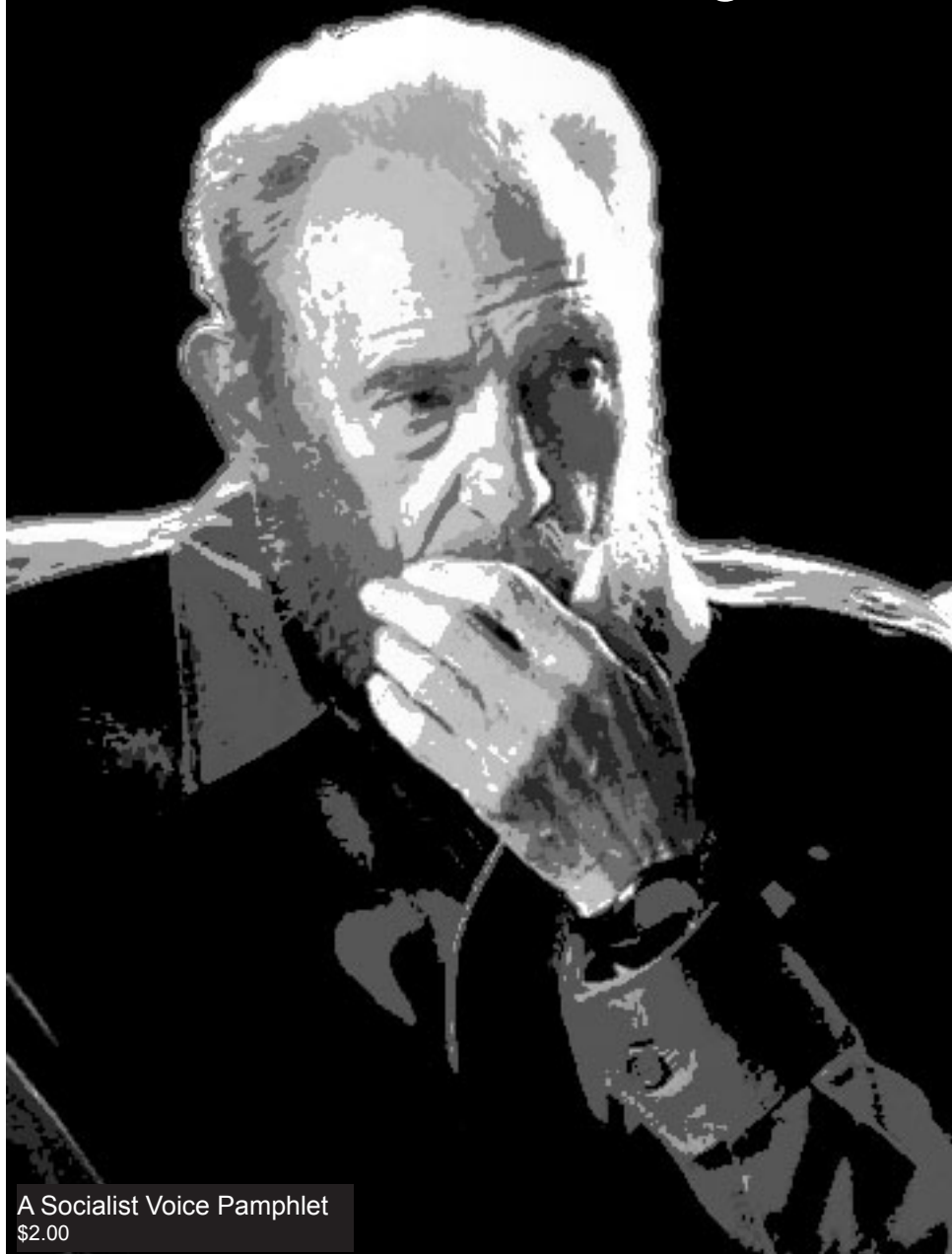


Fidel Castro on Global Warming, Biofuels and World Hunger



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CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
Tomorrow Will Be Too Late	4
More than Three Billion People in the World Condemned to Premature Death from Hunger and Thirst.....	5
The Internationalization of Genocide	8
An Immediate Energy Revolution is Essential	
The Biofuels Debate Heats Up	17
Nobody Wants to Take the Bull by the Horns.....	21
For the Deaf Who Won't Listen.....	23

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Socialist Voice

Marxist Perspectives for the 21st Century

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Introduction

by **James Haywood**

Much has been written about healthcare and education in revolutionary Cuba — but their fight against capitalism’s destruction of the environment is equally remarkable. Armando Choy, a key figure in the Cuban Revolution, and today head of the massive environmental cleanup operation in Havana Bay, explained why this is:

“This is possible because our system is socialist in character and commitment, and because the revolution’s top leadership acts in the interests of the majority of humanity inhabiting planet earth — not on behalf of narrow individual interests, or even simply Cuba’s national interests.”

Choy is President of the State Working Group for the Cleanup, Preservation and Development of Havana Bay. This operation is just one example of the high priority given to the environment by the Cuban government. Using over 40 local People’s Councils, the operation has evolved from being simply a cleanup procedure. One such example which is incredible when put into context is the river Luyanó. This river was accumulating organic waste from four large slaughterhouses which were contaminating the water. The government simply relocated the slaughterhouses! A simple procedure — yet how inconceivable it would be for this to happen in a capitalist country!

Another example is a Wind Park recently opened in the municipality of the Isle of Youth. The fact that it will provide 10% of the municipality’s electrical needs is one thing, the workmanship is quite another. Work began on it in August of last year and by January one machine was already in operation! And because ferocious storms affect the area, the entire structure is designed to be dismantled within 3 hours!

Cuba has mobilized the entire people to fight Climate Change. The U.N. Climate Change Conference’s call for 140 billion trees to be planted in 10 years was responded to accordingly; 24.3% of Cuban land now is planted with trees. The key to the success of this mission was the Ministry of Agriculture mobilizing the people through mass organizations such as the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) and the Federation of Cuban Women. Mass youth organizations were also mobilized to ensure that every single Cuban household has energy saving light bulbs.

In contrast, the President of the United States preferred to discuss ‘solving’ Climate Change with the top capitalists of the automobile industry. Their solution? Ethanol, a bio-fuel created from corn.

Fidel Castro’s first political statements since his recent illness, published in this pamphlet, attack this disgraceful ‘solution’ to the lack of oil.

He describes how the bourgeoisie would, “...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.” In effect, some semicolonial countries’ agriculture could be coerced into being entirely ethanol based; leaving its populations to starve.

We have a lot to learn from the Cuban Revolution when it comes to Climate Change, but Armando Choy’s comment shows clearly the real and only solution for the working classes of the world.

(James Haywood is a contributing editor of Socialist Voice.)

Tomorrow Will Be Too Late

(Fidel Castro's speech at the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, June 12, 1992)

Mr. President of Brazil Fernando Collor de Melo;

Mr. UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali; Your Excellencies;

An important biological species is in danger of disappearing due to the fast and progressive destruction of its natural living conditions: mankind.

We have now become aware of this problem when it is almost too late to stop it.

It is necessary to point out that consumer societies are fundamentally responsible for the brutal destruction of the environment. They arose from the old colonial powers and from imperialist policies which in turn engendered the backwardness and poverty which today afflicts the vast majority of mankind.

With only 20 percent of the world's population, these societies consume two-thirds of the metals and three-fourths of the energy produced in the world. They have poisoned the seas and rivers, polluted the air, weakened and punctured the ozone layer, saturated the atmosphere with gases which are changing weather conditions with a catastrophic effect we are already beginning to experience.

The forests are disappearing. The deserts are expanding. Every year billions of tons of fertile soil end up in the sea. Numerous species are becoming extinct. Population pressures and poverty trigger frenzied efforts to survive even when it is at the expense of the environment. It is not possible to blame the Third World countries for this. Yesterday, they were colonies; today, they are nations exploited and pillaged by an unjust international economic order.

The solution cannot be to prevent the development of those who need it most. The reality is that anything that nowadays contributes to underdevelopment and poverty constitutes a flagrant violation of ecology. Tens of millions of men, women, and children die every year in the Third World as a result of this, more than in each of the two world wars. Unequal terms of trade, protectionism, and the foreign debt assault the ecology and promote the destruction of the environment.

If we want to save mankind from this self-destruction, we have to better distribute the wealth and technologies available in the world. Less luxury and less waste by a few countries is needed so there is less poverty and less hunger on a large part of the Earth. We do not need any more transferring to the Third World of lifestyles and consumption habits that ruin the environment. Let human life become more rational. Let us implement a just international economic order. Let us use all the science necessary for pollution-free, sustained development. Let us pay the ecological debt, and not the foreign debt. Let hunger disappear, and not mankind.

Now that the alleged threat of communism has disappeared and there are no longer any more excuses for cold wars, arms races, and military spending, what is blocking the immediate use of these resources to promote the development of the Third World and fight the threat of the ecological destruction of the planet?

Let selfishness end. Let hegemonies end. Let insensitivity, irresponsibility, and deceit end. Tomorrow it will be too late to do what we should have done a long time ago. Thank you.

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

(March 29, 2007)

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:

“WASHINGTON, March 26 (AP). 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.”

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 alter-

nating 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 to 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.

The Internationalization of Genocide

(April 3, 2007)

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 Na-

tions 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 oil 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 gallon 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.

An Immediate Energy Revolution is Essential

(May 1, 2007)

I hold nothing against Brazil, even though to more than a few Brazilians continuously bombarded with the most diverse arguments that could well confuse even people who traditionally have been friendly to Cuba, we might sound callous and careless about hurting that country's net income of hard currency. However, for me to keep silent would be to opt between the idea of a world tragedy and a presumed benefit for the people of that great nation.

I do not blame Lula and the Brazilians for the objective laws that have governed the history of our species. Barely 7,000 years have passed since human beings left their tangible mark on what has come to be a civilization immensely rich in culture and technical knowledge. Advances have not been achieved at the same time or in the same geographical latitudes. It can be said that due to the apparent enormity of our planet, quite often the existence of one or another civilization was unknown. For thousands of years human beings never lived in cities with 20 million inhabitants such as Sao Paulo or Mexico City, or in urban communities such as Paris, Madrid, Berlin and others who see trains speeding by on rail and air cushions at speeds of more than 250 miles an hour.

At the time of Christopher Columbus, barely 500 years ago, some of these cities did not exist, or had populations that did not exceed several tens of thousands. Nobody used one single kilowatt to light his/her home. The population of the world at that time was probably no more than 500 million.

We know that in 1830, world population reached the first billion mark; 130 years later it had multiplied by three; and 46 years later the total number of inhabitants on the planet had grown to 6.5 billion, the immense majority of whom were poor, having to share food products with domestic animals and from this time onward, with biofuels.

At that time, humanity did not have all the advances in computers and means of communication that we have today, even though the first atomic bombs had already been detonated over two large human communities in a brutal act of terrorism against a defenseless civilian population, for reasons that were strictly political.

Today, the world has tens of thousands of nuclear bombs that are 50 times as powerful, with carriers that are several times faster than the speed of sound and have absolute precision; our sophisticated species could destroy itself with them. At the end of World War II, fought by the peoples against fascism, a new power emerged that took over the world and imposed the absolutist and cruel order under which we live today.

Before Bush's trip to Brazil, the leader of the empire decided that corn and other foodstuffs would be suitable raw material for the production of biofuels. For his part, Lula stated that Brazil could supply as much biofuel as necessary from sugar cane; he saw in this formula a possibility for the future of the Third World, and the only problem left to solve would be to improve the living conditions of the sugarcane workers. He was well aware – and he said it – that the United States should in turn lift the custom tariffs and the subsidies affecting ethanol exports to that country.

Bush replied that custom tariffs and subsidies to growers were untouchable in a country such as the United States, which is the first world producer of ethanol from corn.

The large U.S. transnational producers of this biofuel, which are investing tens of billions of dollars at an accelerated pace, had demanded from the imperial leader the distribution in the U.S. market of no less than 35 billions (35,000,000,000) of gallons of this fuel every year. The combination of protective tariffs and real subsidies would raise that figure to almost one hundred billion dollars every year.

Insatiable in its demand, the empire had launched into the world the slogan of producing biofuels in order to free the United States, the world's supreme energy consumer, from all external dependency on hydrocarbons.

History shows that sugar as a mono-crop was closely associated with the enslavement of Africans, forcibly uprooted from their natural communities and brought to Cuba, Haiti and other Caribbean islands. In Brazil, the exact same thing happened with sugarcane cultivation.

Today, in that country, almost 80% of sugar cane is cut by hand. Sources and studies contributed by Brazilian researchers affirm that one sugarcane cutter, a piece-work laborer, must produce no less than 12 tons in order to meet basic needs. This one worker needs to perform 36,630 flexing move-

ments with his legs, make small trips 800 times carrying 15 kilos of cane in his arms and walk 8,800 meters in his task. He loses an average of 8 liters of water every day. Only by burning cane can that productivity per person be achieved. Cane cut by hand or by machines is usually burned to protect people from nasty bites and especially to increase productivity. Even though the established norm for a working day is from 8 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon, this type of piece-work cane cutting tends to go on for a 12-hour working day. The temperature sometimes rises to 45 degrees centigrade by noon.

I have cut cane myself more than once as a moral duty, as have many other comrade leaders of the country. I remember August of 1969. I chose a place close to the capital. I went there very early every day. It was not burned cane but green cane, an early variety and high in agricultural and industrial yield. I cut for four hours non-stop. Somebody else was sharpening the machete. I consistently produced a minimum of 3.4 tons per day. Then I would shower, calmly have some lunch and take a break in a place nearby. I earned several coupons in the famous harvest of 1970. I had just turned 44 then. The rest of the time, until bedtime, I worked at my revolutionary duties. I stopped that personal effort after wounding my left foot. The sharpened machete had sliced through my protective boot. The national goal was 10 million tons of sugar and approximately 4 million tons of molasses as by-product. We never reached that goal, although we came close.

The USSR had not disappeared; that seemed impossible. The Special Period, which took us to a struggle for survival and to economic inequalities with their inherent elements of corruption, had not yet begun. Imperialism believed that the time had come to finish off the Revolution. It is also fair to acknowledge that during the years of bonanza we wasted resources and our idealism ran high along with the dreams accompanying our heroic process.

The great agricultural yields of the United States were achieved by rotating gramineae (corn, wheat, oats, millet and other similar grains) with legumes (soy, alfalfa, beans, etc.). These contribute nitrogen and organic material to the soil. The corn crop yield in the United States in 2005, according to UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) data, was 9.3 tons per hectare.

In Brazil they only obtain 3 tons of this same grain over a similar area of land. The total production registered by this sister nation that year was 34,600,000 tons, consumed internally as food. It cannot contribute corn to the world market.

Prices for this grain, the staple diet in numerous countries of the region, have almost doubled. What will happen when hundreds of millions of tons of corn are redirected toward the production of biofuel? And I would rather not mention the volumes of wheat, millet, oats, barley, sorghum and other cereals that industrialized countries will use as a source of fuel for its engines.

Add to this that it is very difficult for Brazil to rotate corn and legumes.

Of the Brazilian states traditionally producing corn, eight are responsible for 90% of production: Paraná, Minas Gerais, Sao Paulo, Goiás, Mato Grosso, Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina y Mato Grosso do Sul. On the other hand, 60% of sugarcane, a grain that cannot be rotated with other crops, is cultivated in four states: Sao Paulo, Paraná, Pernambuco and Alagoas.

The engines of tractors, harvesters and the heavy machinery required to mechanize the harvest would use growing amounts of hydrocarbons. The increase of mechanization would not help in the prevention of global warming, something that has been proven by experts who have measured annual temperatures for the last 150 years.

Brazil does produce an excellent food that is especially rich in protein: soy, 50,115,000 tons. It consumes almost 23 million tons and exports 27,300,000 tons. Could it be that a large part of this soy will be converted to biofuel?

As it is, the producers of beef cattle are beginning to complain that grazing land is being transformed into sugarcane fields.

The former agriculture minister of Brazil, Roberto Rodrigues, an important advocate of the current government position – and presently a co-president of the Inter-American Ethanol Commission created in 2006 following an agreement with the state of Florida and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to promote the use of biofuel on the American continent – announced that the program to mechanize the sugarcane harvest will not create more jobs but, on the contrary, would produce a surplus of non-qualified manpower.

We know that the poorest workers from various states are the ones who gravitate toward cane cutting out of necessity. Sometimes, they have to spend many months away from their families. That is what happened in Cuba until the triumph of the Revolution, when the cutting and lifting of sugarcane was done by hand, and mechanized cultivation or transportation hardly existed. With the demise of the brutal system forced on our society the cane-cutters, massively taught to read and write, abandoned their peregrinations within a few years and it became necessary to replace them with hundreds of thousands of voluntary workers.

Added to this is the latest report by the United Nations on climate change, which affirms what would happen in South America with water from the glaciers and the Amazon water basin as the temperature of the atmosphere continue to rise.

Nothing is preventing U.S. and European capital from funding the production of biofuels. They could even send the funds as gifts to Brazil and Latin America. The United States, Europe and the other industrialized nations would save more than \$140 billion every year without having to worry about the consequences for the climate and the hunger which would affect the countries of the Third World in the first place. They would always be left with enough money for biofuels and to acquire the little food available on the world market at any price.

It is imperative to have an immediate energy revolution that consists not

only of replacing all the incandescent light bulbs, but also of massively recycling all domestic, commercial, industrial, transport and social electric appliances that require two and three times more energy with their earlier technologies.

It hurts to think that 10 billion tons of fossil fuel is consumed every year. This means that each year we waste what it took nature one million years to create. National industries are faced with enormous challenges, including the reduction of unemployment. In that way, we could gain a little time.

Another risk of a different nature facing the world is an economic recession in the United States. In the past few days, the dollar has broken records in losing value. On the other hand, every country has most of its reserves in convertible currencies precisely in this paper currency and in U.S. bonds.

Tomorrow, May Day, is a good day to bring these reflections to the workers and to all the poor of the world. At the same time we should protest against something incredible and humiliating that has just occurred: the release of a terrorist monster, precisely on the 46th Anniversary of the Revolutionary Victory of the Bay of Pigs.

Prison for the assassin! Freedom for the Five Heroes!

The Biofuels Debate Heats Up

(May 9, 2007)

Atilio Borón, a prestigious leftist intellectual who until recently headed the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), wrote an article for the 6th Hemispheric Meeting of Struggle against the FTAs and for the Integration of Peoples which just wrapped up in Havana; he was kind enough to send it to me along with a letter.

The gist of what he wrote I have summarized using exact quotes of paragraphs and phrases in his article; it reads as follows:

Pre-capitalist societies already knew about oil which surfaced in shallow deposits and they used for non-commercial purposes, such as waterproofing the wooden hulls of ships or in textile products, or for torches. Its original name was 'petroleum' or stone-oil.

By the end of the 19th century – after the discovery of large oilfields in Pennsylvania, United States, and the technological developments propelled by the massive use of the internal combustion engine-- oil became the energy paradigm of the 20th century.

Energy is conceived of as just merchandise. Like Marx warned us, this is not due to the perversity or callousness of some individual capitalist or another, but rather the consequence of the logic of the accumulation process, which is prone to the ceaseless "mercantilism" that touches on all compo-

nents of social life, both material and symbolic. The mercantilist process did not stop with the human being, but simultaneously extended to nature. The land and its products, the rivers and the mountains, the jungles and the forests became the target of its irrepressible pillage. Foodstuffs, of course, could not escape this hellish dynamic. Capitalism turns everything that crosses its path into merchandise.

Foodstuffs are transformed into fuels to make viable the irrationality of a civilization that, to sustain the wealth and privilege of a few, is brutally assaulting the environment and the ecologic conditions which made it possible for life to appear on Earth.

Transforming food into fuels is a monstrosity.

Capitalism is preparing to perpetrate a massive euthanasia on the poor, and particularly on the poor of the South, since it is there that the greatest reserves of the earth's biomass required to produce biofuels are found. Regardless of numerous official statements assuring that this is not a choice between food and fuel, reality shows that this, and no other, is exactly the alternative: either the land is used to produce food or to produce biofuels.

The main lessons taught us by FAO data on the subject of agricultural land and the consumption of fertilizers are the following:

- Agricultural land per capita in developed capitalism almost doubles that existing in the underdeveloped periphery: 3.26 acres per person in the North as opposed to 1.6 in the South; this is explained by the simple fact that close to 80 percent of the world population live in the underdeveloped periphery.
- Brazil has slightly more agricultural land per capita than the developed countries. It becomes clear that this nation will have to assign huge tracts of its enormous land surface to meet the demands of the new energy paradigm.
- China and India have 1.05 and 0.43 acres per person respectively.
- The small nations of the Antilles, with their traditional one-crop agriculture, that is sugarcane, demonstrate eloquently its erosive effects exemplified by the extraordinary rate of consumption of fertilizers per acre needed to support this production. If in the peripheral countries the average figure is 109 kilograms of fertilizer per hectare (as opposed to 84 in developed countries), in Barbados the figure is 187.5, in Dominica 600, en Guadeloupe 1,016, in St. Lucia 1,325 and in Martinique 1,609

The use of fertilizers is tantamount to intensive oil consumption, and so the much touted advantage of agrifuels to reduce the consumption of hydrocarbons seems more an illusion than a reality. The total agricultural land of the European Union is barely sufficient to cover 30 percent of their current needs for fuel but not their future needs that will probably be greater. In the United States, the satisfaction of their current demand for fossil fuels would require the use of 121 percent of all their agricultural land for agrifuels.

Consequently, the supply of agrifuels will have to come from the South,

from capitalism's poor and neocolonial periphery. Mathematics does not lie: neither the United States nor the European Union have available land to support an increase in food production and an expansion of the production of agrifuels at the same time.

Deforestation of the planet would increase the land surface suitable for agriculture (but only for a while). Therefore this would be only for a few decades, at the most. These lands would then suffer desertification and the situation would be worse than ever, aggravating even further the dilemma pitting the production of food against that of ethanol or biodiesel.

The struggle against hunger –and there are some 2 billion people who suffer from hunger in the world– will be seriously impaired by the expansion of land taken over by agrifuel crops. Countries where hunger is a universal scourge will bear witness to the rapid transformation of agriculture that would feed the insatiable demand for fuels needed by a civilization based on their irrational use. The only result possible is an increase in the cost of food and thus, the worsening of the social situation in the South countries.

Moreover, the world population grows 76 million people every year who will obviously demand food that will be steadily more expensive and farther out of their reach.

In *The Globalist Perspective*, Lester Brown predicted less than a year ago that automobiles would absorb the largest part of the increase in world grain production in 2006. Of the 20 million tons added to those existing in 2005, 14 million were used in the production of fuels, and only 6 million tons were used to satisfy the needs of the hungry. This author affirms that the world appetite for automobile fuel is insatiable. Brown concluded by saying that a scenario is being prepared where a head-on confrontation will take place between the 800 million prosperous car owners and the food consumers.

The devastating impact of increased food prices, which will inexorably happen as the land is used either for food or for fuel, was demonstrated in the work of C. Ford Runge and Benjamin Senauer, two distinguished professors from the University of Minnesota, in an article published in the English language edition of the *Foreign Affairs* magazine whose title says it all: "How Biofuels Could Starve the Poor". The authors claim that in the United States the growth of the agrifuel industry has given rise to increases not only in the price of corn, oleaginous seeds and other grains, but also in the prices of apparently unrelated crops and products. The use of land to grow corn which will feed the fauces of ethanol is reducing the area for other crops. The food processors using crops such as peas and young corn have been forced to pay higher prices in order to ensure their supplies. This is a cost that will eventually be passed on to the consumer. The increase in food prices is also hitting the livestock and poultry industries. The higher costs have produced an abrupt decrease in income, especially in the poultry and pork sectors. If income continues to decrease, so will production, and the prices of chicken, turkey, pork, milk and eggs will increase. They warn that

the most devastating effects of increasing food prices will be felt especially in Third World countries.

Studies made by the Belgian Office of Scientific Affairs shows that biodiesel causes more health and environmental hazards because it creates a more pulverized pollution and releases more pollutants that destroy the ozone layer.

With regards to the argument claiming that the agrifuels are harmless, Victor Bronstein, a professor at the University of Buenos Aires, has demonstrated that:

- It is not true that biofuels are a renewable and constant energy source, given that the crucial factor in plant growth is not sunlight but the availability of water and suitable soil conditions. If this were not the case, we would be able to grow corn or sugarcane in the Sahara Desert. The effects of large-scale production of biofuels will be devastating.
- It is not true that they do not pollute. Even if ethanol produces less carbon emissions, the process to obtain it pollutes the surface and the water with nitrates, herbicides, pesticides and waste, and the air is polluted with aldehydes and alcohols that are carcinogens. The presumption of a “green and clean” fuel is a fallacy. The proposal of agrifuels is unviable, and it is ethically and politically unacceptable. But it is not enough just to reject it. It is necessary to implement a new energy revolution, but one that is at the service of the people and not at the service of the monopolies and imperialism. This is, perhaps, the most important challenge of our time, concludes Atilio Borón.

As you can see, this summary took up some space. We need space and time; practically a book. It has been said that the masterpiece which made author Gabriel García Márquez famous, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, required him to write fifty pages for each page that was printed. How much time would my poor pen need to refute those who for a material interest, ignorance, indifference or even for all three at the same time defend the evil idea and to spread the solid and honest arguments of those who struggle for the life of the species?

Some very important opinions and points of view were discussed at the Hemispheric Meeting in Havana. We should talk about those that brought us real-life images of cutting sugarcane by hand in a documentary film that seemed a reflection of Dante’s *Inferno*. A growing number of opinions are carried by the media every day and everywhere in the world, from institutions like the United Nations right up to national scientific associations. I simply perceive that the debate is heating up. The fact that the subject is being discussed is already an important step forward.

Nobody Wants to Take the Bull by the Horns

(May 22, 2007)

On March 28, less than two months ago, when Bush proclaimed his diabolical idea of producing fuel from food, after a meeting with the most important U.S. automobile manufacturers, I wrote my first reflection.

The head of the empire was bragging that the United States was now the first world producer of ethanol, using corn as raw material. Hundreds of factories were being built or enlarged in the United States just for that purpose.

During those days, the industrialized and rich nations were already toying with the same idea of using all kinds of cereals and oil seeds, including sunflower and soy which are excellent sources of proteins and oils. That's why I chose to title that reflection: "More than 3 billion people in the world are being condemned to a premature death from hunger and thirst."

The dangers for the environment and for the human species were a topic that I had been meditating on for years. What I never imagined was the imminence of the danger. We as yet were not aware of the new scientific information about the celerity of climatic changes and their immediate consequences.

On April 3, after Bush's visit to Brazil, I wrote my reflections about "The internationalization of genocide."

At the same time, I warned that the deadly and sophisticated weapons that were being produced in the United States and in other countries could annihilate the life of the human species in a matter of days.

To give humanity a respite and an opportunity to science and to the dubious good sense of the decision-makers, it is not necessary to take food away from two-thirds of the inhabitants of the planet.

We have supplied information about the savings that could be made simply by replacing incandescent light bulbs with fluorescent ones, using approximate calculations. They are numbers followed by 11 and 12 zeros. The first corresponds to hundreds of billions of dollars saved in fuel each year, and the second to trillions of dollars in necessary investments to produce that electricity by merely changing light bulbs, meaning less than 10 percent of the total expenses and a considerable saving of time.

With complete clarity, we have expressed that CO2 emissions, besides other pollutant gases, have been leading us quickly towards a rapid and inexorable climatic change.

It was not easy to deal with these topics because of their dramatic and almost fatal content.

The fourth reflection was titled: "It is imperative to immediately have an energy revolution." Proof of the waste of energy in the United States and of the inequality of its distribution in the world is that in the year 2005, there were less than 15 automobiles for each thousand people in China; there were

514 in Europe and 940 in the United States.

The last of these countries, one of the richest territories in hydrocarbons, today suffers from a large deficit of oil and gas. According to Bush, these fuels must be extracted from foods, which are needed for the more and more hungry bellies of the poor of this Earth.

On May Day 2006, I ended my speech to the people with the following words:

“If the efforts being made by Cuba today were imitated by all the other countries in the world, the following would happen:

“1st. The proved and potential hydrocarbon reserves would last twice as long.

“2nd. The pollution unleashed on the environment by these hydrocarbons would be halved.

“3rd. The world economy would have a break, since the enormous volume of transportation means and electrical appliances should be recycled.

“4th. A fifteen-year moratorium on the construction of new nuclear power plants could be declared.”

Changing light bulbs was the first thing we did in Cuba, and we have cooperated with various Caribbean nations to do the same. In Venezuela, the government has replaced 53 million incandescent light bulbs with fluorescent in more than 95% of the homes receiving electrical power. All the other measures to save energy are being resolutely carried out.

Everything I am saying has been proven.

Why is it that we just hear rumors without the leadership of industrialized countries openly committing to an energy revolution, which implies changes in concepts and hopes about growth and consumerism that have contaminated quite a few poor nations?

Could it be that there is some other way of confronting the extremely serious dangers threatening us all?

Nobody wants to take the bull by the horns.

For The Deaf Who Won't Listen

(May 23, 2007)

A summary of the FAO declaration from its headquarters in Rome, on May 16, 2007.

World cereal production is on track to reach a record level in 2007. In spite of this, supplies will be barely adequate to meet increased demand, boosted by the development of the biofuels industry.

International prices for most cereals have risen significantly in 2006-07

and the current forecast shows that prices will stay high in 2007-08, according to the relevant report «Crop Perspectives and Food Situation». It is forecast that the cereal import bill of the low-income food deficit countries will increase by about 25 percent in the current season.

The rapid growth of the demand for maize-based ethanol is expected to increase by 9 percent the use of that grain in 2007-08.

Expectations for the world wheat harvest are down slightly since the April forecast.

In North Africa, a sharp decline is expected in 2007 cereal production, reflecting dry conditions in Morocco that are anticipated to halve the country's wheat production this year.

In Southern Africa, a reduced cereal harvest is expected for the second consecutive year. In Zimbabwe, a huge rise in the price of maize, a basic staple for millions, is anticipated as a result of the drought.

In Malawi, an ample exportable surplus will be available following a bumper harvest.

Emergency assistance is required for large numbers of vulnerable farmers in Bolivia affected by serious crop and livestock losses following drought and floods during the 2007 main cropping season.

The flare up of conflict in southern Somalia has displaced hundreds of thousands of people and is likely to reduce the area planted.

A first provisional FAO forecast for world production of rice in 2007 points to a slightly improved harvest with some 422 millions of tons, thus matching the 2005 record.

Except for China and India -the main producers- the cereal harvest totals in the rest of the countries will drop slightly.

FAO recognizes the consequences of producing food-based fuels. That is something.

But it is also remarkable to see the news that the United States Congress decided to replace 23 thousand incandescent light bulbs with fluorescent throughout its offices. It is said that American families, on their own volition, have decided to replace 37 million incandescent light bulbs with fluorescent. In just a few months, the 37 million replaced light bulbs will save the equivalent cost of gasoline for 260,000 automobiles. Calculate the savings when billions of incandescent light bulbs are replaced.

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