

MORE THAN THREE BILLION PEOPLE IN THE WORLD ARE BEING CONDEMNED TO A PREMATURE DEATH FROM HUNGER AND THIRST

It is not an exaggeration; this is rather a conservative figure. I have meditated for quite a long time on that after the meeting held by President Bush with the US automakers.

The sinister idea of turning foodstuffs into fuel was definitely established as the economic strategy of the US foreign policy on Monday, March 26th last.

A wire service issued by the AP, a US information agency with world-wide coverage, literally reads:

WASHINGTON (AP), March 26 - 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 think that reducing and recycling all fuel and electricity operated engines is an urgent and elemental necessity of all humanity. The dilemma is not in the reduction of energy costs, but in the idea of turning foodstuffs into fuel.

Today we know with accurate precision that one ton of corn can only render as an average 413 liters of ethanol (109 gallons), a figure that may vary according to the latter's density.

The average price of corn in US ports has reached 167 dollars per ton. The production of 35 billion gallons of ethanol requires 320 million tons of corn.

According to FAO, US corn production in 2005 reached 280.2 million tons.

Even if the President is speaking about producing fuel out of switchgrass or wood chips, any person could understand that these phrases are far from realistic. Listen well: 35 billion gallons, 35 followed by nine zeros!

Beautiful examples of the productivity of men per hectare achieved by the experienced and well organized US farmers will come next: corn will be turned into ethanol; corn wastes will be turned into animal fodder, with a 26 percent of proteins; cattle manure will be used as raw material for the production of gas. Of course, all of this will happen after a great number of investments, which could only be afforded by the most powerful companies whose operations are based on the consumption of electricity and fuel. Let this formula be applied to the Third World countries, and the world will see how many hungry people on this planet will cease to consume corn. What is worse, let the poor countries receive some financing to produce ethanol from corn or any other foodstuff and very soon not a single tree will be left standing to protect humanity from climate change.

Other rich countries have planned to use not only corn but also wheat, sunflower seeds, rapeseed and other foodstuffs to produce fuel. For Europeans, for example, it would be a good business to import the entire soybean production of the world to reduce the cost of fuel for their automobiles and feed their animals with the wastes of that legume, which has a high content of all kinds of essential amino acids.

In Cuba, alcohol was produced as a sugar cane by-product, after three extractions of sugarcane juice. Climate change is already affecting our sugar production. Severe droughts alternate with record rainfall values, which hardly allow our country to produce any sugar during a period of 100 days with adequate yields during our very mild winter. So, in Cuba, we are either producing less sugar per every ton of sugarcane, or the number of tons of cane per hectare has been reduced due to the long lasting droughts in the plantation and harvest seasons.

I understand that Venezuela would not export alcohol; it will use it to improve the environmental safety of its own fuel. Therefore, despite the excellent technology designed by Brazil to produce alcohol, its use in Cuba to produce alcohol from sugarcane juice is nothing but a dream, the ravings of those who entertain such ideas. In our country, the land which would otherwise be devoted solely to the production of alcohol could be better used to produce foodstuffs for the people and protect the environment.

All countries of the world without exception, whether rich or poor, could save trillions of dollars in investments and fuel if they only replace all incandescent bulbs with fluorescent bulbs, which is what Cuba has done in all the residential areas of the country. This would be a palliative that will enable us to cope with climate change without killing the poor people in this planet with hunger.

As can be seen, I am not using adjectives to describe either the system or those who have become the owners of this world. That task will be brilliantly accomplished by the information experts, the many honest socio-economic and political scientists in this world who continuously delve into the present and the future of our species. A computer and the increasing number of Internet networks will just be enough to do that.

For the first time a truly globalized economy exists and a dominant power in the economic, political, and military spheres that is in no way similar to the ancient Rome ruled by emperors.

Some people may wonder why I am speaking about hunger and thirst. And I will answer: this is not about the other side of a coin, but of the many different sides of quite another object, maybe a six-sided dice or a polyhedron which has many more sides.

This time I will quote an official news agency, founded in 1945, which is in general very familiar with the economic and social problems of the world: TELAM. It literally said:

"Within hardly 18 years, nearly 2 billion people will inhabit countries and regions where water might seem a far away memory. Two thirds of the world population could live in places where the lack of water could bring about social and economic tensions that could lead peoples to go to war over the precious "blue gold".

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In the course of the last 100 years, water consumption has grown at a pace which is more than twice the population growth rate.

“According to the World Water Council (WWC), the number of persons affected by this serious situation will increase to 3.5 billion by the year 2015.

On March 23, the United Nations Organization observed the World Water Day, urging all member countries to cope with the international water shortage as of that day, under the auspices of FAO, with the aim of emphasizing the increasing importance of water shortage in the world and the need for greater integration and cooperation to ensure a sustainable and efficient management of water resources.

“Many regions in this planet suffer from severe water shortage, where the annual rate of cubic meters per person is less than 500. Every time there are more and more regions suffering from a chronic shortage of this vital resource.

“An insufficient amount of the precious fluid necessary to produce foodstuffs, the impaired development of industry, urban areas and tourism, and the emergence of health problems are some of the consequences that derive from water shortage.”

So much for the TELAM wire service.

I have not mentioned other important facts, such as the ice that is melting down in Greenland and the Antarctic, the damages caused to the ozone layer and the ever higher titers of mercury found in many fish species which are part of the regular people's diet.

Other topics could be addressed, but in these few lines I simply intend to make some comments about the meeting held by President Bush with the chief executives of US automakers.

Fidel Castro Ruz

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