

Pyriar with Philip Raitt and Jack Chan, the colleagues at the Advisory Committee of the UNICEF. I appeared in Bern before the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health. The high-level official who met with us refused to accept any resolution on AIDS to take to the World Health Assembly, with the following argument: "There are already too many diseases on the checklist? WHO's representatives in the field are already overwhelmed. They hardly know what to do next. Adding another

**THE AWAKENING OF CONSCIENCE**

... to the list of diseases is not a matter of scientific urgency. It is a matter of political expediency. We must identify the first clinical signs of the disease, investigate more thoroughly and systematically the epidemiological, sociological, and environmental factors that lead to its spread. Finally, it is necessary to ensure that antibiotics and other therapeutic interventions are available in local clinics at the lowest possible price. Realizing this action plan will cost money—money that the NGOs involved do not have.

Those who are fighting AIDS are caught in a vicious circle. On the one hand, there is the absence of data from WHO's reports and checklists, and a lack of public attention is now being paid to the public lack of scientific information on the extent and prevalence of the disease. But on the other hand, so long as WHO and the agencies of health of the UN member states refuse to focus on this disease that affects the young and poor people, there can be no sustained, in-depth research and no international collaboration against AIDS.

Moreover, some are likewise indifferent to the pharmaceutical companies, which exert a powerful influence over WHO, first because the medications used to treat the disease are expensive, and second because such medicines have no money at all to pay for them.

None will only be fully eradicated if the word is it will be done when the cause, underlying and insurmountable, are called back to good.

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**FAMINE AND FATALISM:  
MALTHUS AND NATURAL SELECTION**

**U**ntil the middle of the last century, hunger was a taboo subject, shrouded in silence. The graves of its victims sank into oblivion. Mass death by starvation was thought to be fated, inevitable. Like the plague in the Middle Ages, hunger was considered an invincible scourge that by its very nature lay beyond the power of human will to contain.

More than any other thinker, Thomas Malthus contributed to this fatalistic vision of human history. If the collective European conscience at the dawn of modernity remained deaf and blind to the scandal of millions of human beings dying from hunger, if Europeans even believed they could divine in this daily massacre a judicious form of demographic regulation, this is in large part owing to Malthus—and to his grand idea of "natural selection."

Malthus was born on February 13 or 14, 1766, and grew up at the Rookery, an estate near Westcott in Surrey, in southeastern England. His father lived off his inheritance as a "country gentleman."

On September 3, 1783, in a small townhouse on Rue Jacob in Paris, Ben Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay, as representatives of the American Congress of the Confederation, signed the Treaty of Paris with an envoy from King George III, acknowledging the independence of the United States of America. The loss of this North American colony had, for Great Britain, considerable

repercussions. The landowning aristocracy, which had derived its income from American plantations and colonial trade, lost a great deal of its economic power and was supplanted by the rapidly growing industrial bourgeoisie. Immense factories were built, especially in the textile industry. From the marriage of coal and iron, the British steel industry was created. Millions of farmers and their families flocked to the cities.

Malthus took prizes as an undergraduate at Jesus College, Cambridge, graduating with honors, then completed his master's degree and later became a fellow of the college as well. In 1797, he took orders, and the following year became a country curate in the Anglican church at Okewood, near Albury in Surrey, not far from his childhood home.

However, Malthus discovered in London the appalling spectacle of extreme poverty. Uprooted rural workers who had joined the industrial underclass suffered from hunger. Having lost their bearings socially, many sank into alcoholism. Malthus would never forget the sight of mothers with pallid faces, haggard from undernourishment, of child beggars, and of prostitutes in wretched hovels. He was overcome by an obsession. How could these proletarian masses and their countless children be fed without endangering the food supply of society as a whole?

Even before the publication of his famous work, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, the premises of Malthus's lifework are visible in an early unpublished pamphlet called *The Crisis* (1796), in which he observes that the principal challenge of his era is the problem of population and subsistence, since the needs of a growing population are constantly exceeding the available food supply. Already in this early work, Malthus asserts that it is an inevitable tendency of human beings, as of all living creatures, to increase in their numbers beyond the limits of their available food resources.

In 1798, Malthus published his famous *Essay*. Malthus revised the work through five more editions, enriching it with new material, confronting criticism, and even rewriting entire chapters to reflect his changing views. As late as 1830, four years before his death, when he reprinted a long extract from his article

"Population," which he had contributed to the supplement of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* in 1823, as *A Summary View of the Principle of Population*, Malthus was still revising.

The central thesis of the book revolves around a contradiction that Malthus considers insurmountable:

Through the animal and vegetable kingdoms, nature has scattered the seeds of life abroad with the most profuse and liberal hand. She has been comparatively sparing in the room and the nourishment necessary to rear them. The germs of existence contained in this spot of earth, with ample food, and ample room to expand in, would fill millions of worlds in the course of a few thousand years. Necessity, that imperious all pervading law of nature, restrains them within the prescribed bounds. The race of plants and the race of animals shrink under this great restrictive law. And the race of man cannot, by any efforts of reason, escape from it. Among plants and animals its effects are waste of seed, sickness, and premature death. Among mankind, misery and vice.

For Malthus, a curate, "necessity, that imperious all pervading law of nature," was another name for God.

One of Malthus's most important statements of the "law of population" occurs not in the *Essay* but in his later *Principles of Political Economy* (originally published in 1820):

Under this law of population, which, excessive as it may appear when stated in this way is, I firmly believe, best suited to the *nature* and situation of man, it is quite obvious that some limit to the production of food, or some other of the necessities of life, must exist. Without a total change in the constitution of *human nature*, and the situation of man on earth, the whole of the necessities of life could not be furnished in the same plenty as air, water, the elasticity of steam, and the pressure of the atmosphere. It is not easy to conceive a more disastrous present—one more likely

to plunge the *human* race in irrecoverable misery, than an unlimited facility of producing food in a limited space. A benevolent Creator then, knowing the wants and necessities of his creatures, under the laws to which he had subjected them, could not, in mercy, have furnished the whole of the necessaries of life in the same plenty as air and water. This shows at once the reason why the former are limited in quantity, and the latter poured out in profusion. But if it be granted, as it must be, that a limitation in the power of producing food is obviously necessary to man confined to a limited space, then the value of the actual quantity of land which he has received, depends upon the small quantity of labour necessary to work it, compared with the number of persons which it will support; or, in other words, upon that specific surplus . . . which by the laws of nature terminates in rent.

Malthus's theory has prevailed ever since, and persists today in public opinion. Some continue to believe that population inevitably grows unceasingly, while food and the land that produces it are limited. Hunger reduces the number of people, guaranteeing an equilibrium between fixed needs and available goods. From an evil, God or Providence (meaning Nature) makes a good. For Malthus the reduction of population by hunger is the only possible way out that allows humanity to avoid a terminal economic catastrophe. Hunger thus amounts to a law of necessity.

Malthus's *Essay* includes, accordingly, virulent attacks against the Poor Laws, the tentative efforts of the British government to reduce by a rudimentary program of public assistance the terrible suffering of the urban poor. Malthus asserts, in effect, that if a man cannot live from his work, then that is simply too bad for him and his family. He says that vicars should warn engaged couples that if they marry and procreate, their children will have no help from society. He claims that epidemics are necessary.

With each new edition of the *Essay*, the poor become more and more Malthus's worst enemy. He says that laws designed to help them are harmful; they only allow the poor to have more chil-

dren. Nature punishes man with want; the poor man must accept that the laws of Nature are the laws of God, and that they condemn him to suffer. And if church taxes crush the poor, too bad.

Such a theory must inevitably discriminate on racial grounds, and in the later editions of his book, Malthus indeed makes a survey of the world's peoples. Of the native peoples of North America, for example, he writes: "The tribes of hunters, like beasts of prey, whom they resemble in their mode of subsistence, will consequently be thinly scattered over the surface of the earth. Like beasts of prey, they must either drive away or fly from every rival, and be engaged in perpetual contests with each other."

*An Essay on the Principle of Population* met immediately with immense success among the ruling classes of the British Empire. Its arguments were debated in Parliament. The prime minister recommended reading it. Malthus's theses spread rapidly across Europe: Malthusian ideology admirably served the interests of the ruling classes and their exploitative practices. Malthus's ideas also made it possible to resolve another apparently insurmountable conflict: to reconcile the "nobility" of the bourgeoisie's civilizing mission with the famines and mass graves that it was causing. By adhering to Malthus's vision—accepting that while the suffering caused by hunger and the destruction of so many thousands of people were certainly dreadful, they were obviously necessary to humanity's survival—the bourgeoisie assuaged its own misgivings. The real threat was explosive population growth. Without the elimination of the weakest by hunger, the day would come when no human being on the entire planet would be able to eat, drink, or breathe.

Up until the mid-nineteenth century, Malthusian ideology ravaged the Western conscience, making Europeans for the most part deaf and blind to the suffering of the victims of hunger, especially in the colonies. The starving had become, in the ethnological sense of the term, taboo. Bravo, Malthus! Probably without clearly intending to, he had freed Westerners from their guilty conscience.

Except in cases of serious psychological derangement, no one can bear the sight of another human being dying from hunger. In naturalizing the mass death caused by starvation, by linking it to the idea of necessity, Malthus relieved Westerners of their moral responsibility.

## JOSUÉ DE CASTRO, PHASE ONE

Suddenly, in the aftermath of World War II, the taboo was shattered, the silence broken—and Malthus relegated to the dustbin of history. The horrors of the war, Nazism, the extermination camps, the shared suffering and starvation of wartime: all led to an extraordinary reawakening of the European conscience. The collective conscience rebelled: *Never again!* This revulsion from war was expressed in a movement that sought a profound transformation of society, a movement through which people demanded independence, democracy, and social justice. The consequences were many and beneficial. Among other things, citizens required that governments create social safety nets for their people, but also that states create intergovernmental institutions, norms of international law, and weapons to fight the scourge of famine.

In his book *The Essence of Christianity*, the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach contends that only we human beings, alone among all animals, are capable of being aware of ourselves as members of our own species, and that this form of self-awareness is the very foundation of our moral sense. I would add that the consciousness of our shared human identity lies also at the foundation of the right to food. No one can tolerate the destruction from hunger of his fellow man or woman without endangering his own humanity, his very identity.

In 1946, the fifty-five member states of the UN, which had been founded the year before, meeting in Quebec City, created the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN's very first specialized organization, with its headquarters in Rome. Its task: to develop subsistence agriculture and to oversee the equal distribution of food. On December 10, 1948, the member states of the UN, now numbering fifty-eight, during their general assembly in Paris, adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms, in article 25, the right to food. Faced nonetheless with a series of the catastrophic famines, the UN's member states decided to go further in 1963 with the creation of the World Food Programme (WFP), tasked with providing emergency food aid.

Finally, in order to put more legal power behind the demand for the respect for human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration, on December 16, 1966, the General Assembly adopted—separately, alas—two agreements, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (whose article 11 details the right to food) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In the international context of the Cold War and given the resulting ideological divergences among the member states (capitalism versus communism), the second of these covenants was widely capitalized upon to denounce the violations against human rights in the countries of the Soviet bloc. As for the first covenant, the respect of states that are signatories to it for economic, social, and cultural rights has been overseen since the covenant's adoption by a committee of eighteen experts. Each signatory state must submit, upon ratifying the covenant and every five years thereafter, a report detailing the measures taken in the territory under its jurisdiction to satisfy the right to food.

At the end of the long night of Nazism, there was a dawning awareness of an obvious fact that would take years to spread among the world's peoples and their leaders: that the eradication of hunger is a human responsibility, and that hunger is no one's inevitable fate. The enemy can be beaten. It is enough to implement a certain number of concrete, collective measures to make the right to food real and enforceable.

It followed self-evidently, in the spirit of the instigators of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, that the world's peoples could not leave the realization of the right to food up to the free play of market forces. Normative (that is, prescriptive, rights- and standards-based) interventions in markets would be indispensable, such as agrarian reform everywhere that unequal distribution of arable land prevailed; the public subsidy of staple foods for the benefit of those who cannot provide themselves with regular nourishment of adequate quality and in sufficient quantity; public investment in subsistence farming, at both the national and international levels, to provide fertilizer, irrigation, tools, and seed to ensure the preservation of arable soil and the enhancement of its productivity; equity in access to food for all; and the elimination of monopoly control over the markets in seed and fertilizers and over trade in staple foods by the multinational agri-food industry corporations.

One man contributed more than any other to the awakening of the conscience of the peoples of the West to the problem of hunger: the Brazilian doctor Josué Apolônio de Castro. I hope the reader will indulge me here in a personal recollection, of my meeting in February 2002 with Anna-Maria de Castro, his eldest daughter and intellectual heir.

Despite the deep eaves covering the little terrace of the Garota da Ipanema restaurant in Rio de Janeiro, the southern summer heat was suffocating. Looking down Rua Vinícius de Moraes, I could see the waves of the Atlantic glinting in the afternoon sun. The woman sitting across from me wore a serious expression. "The military believed they were finished with my father," she said. "But see now how he is coming back to us, and he is millions."

My meeting with Anna-Maria took place shortly after Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva took office as president of Brazil. Lula, a founding member of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, known as the PT, a social-democratic party), was himself born into a very poor family in the interior of the state of Pernambuco,

in the northeast, and lost two brothers to hunger as a child. One of his first decisions as president was to launch a national campaign called Fome Zero (Zero Hunger).

I was reminded of Josué de Castro's brilliant but tragic career. With his scientific work, his prophetic vision, and his militant actions, he profoundly marked his era. He broke the law out of necessity. He showed that hunger is a result of policies sustained by human beings, and that it can therefore be conquered, eliminated by human beings. The massacre is in no way inevitable. Combating hunger is a matter of bringing to light its causes and fighting against them.

De Castro was born on September 5, 1908, in Recife, the capital of Pernambuco, on the Atlantic coast, one of the country's largest cities. In Recife, a green ocean of sugarcane fields comes into view only a few miles from the city. The red earth of the Agreste—a narrow fertile zone that stretches the length of the coast, about sixty kilometers (forty miles) wide, through the states of Paraíba, Pernambuco, Alagoas, Sergipe, and Bahia, and beyond which lies the vast semiarid *sertão*—is a lost cause for such crops as beans, manioc, wheat, or rice. Like a ring of fire, fields of sugarcane encircle villages, market towns, cities. Sugarcane is the people's curse; its extensive cultivation precludes subsistence agriculture. As a result, to this day 85 percent of the food consumed in Pernambuco is imported, and infant mortality in the state is the highest in the region after Haiti. De Castro belonged in the deepest level of his being to that earth and to the people of the northeast. Like many of them, he was himself a *caboclo*, of mixed indigenous Brazilian and European ancestry.

By the time his book *Geografia da fome* (Geography of Hunger) was published in 1946, examining famine in Brazil and in the northeastern states in particular—that is, dealing with his own local and regional experience—de Castro already had a long career behind him. Armed with a degree in physiology from the medical school in Rio de Janeiro, he taught physiology, human geography, and anthropology at the University of Recife while practicing medicine at the same time. Like Salvador Allende, who was a

pediatrician in Valparaíso, de Castro was exposed, in his private medical practice, at the hospital, and during house calls, to every facet of childhood undernutrition and malnutrition.

De Castro led an extensive, systematic series of precisely targeted inquiries, often under governmental authority, into the living conditions of thousands of families—*caboclos*, agricultural day laborers, cane cutters, tenant farmers, and *bóias-frias*—that enabled him to show that it was the system of large-scale plantation agriculture (the *latifúndios*) that was the cause of undernutrition and hunger. He also proved that it was not overpopulation of rural areas or cities that was responsible for the advance of hunger, but the opposite. Extremely poor people had large families out of anxiety about the future. Their children, of whom parents wanted as many as possible, constituted a form of life insurance. If the children survived, they would help their parents to live—and, above all, to grow old without dying of hunger. De Castro liked to quote a *nordestino* proverb: “The table of a poor man is meager, but the bed of poverty is fecund.”

In *Documentário do Nordeste*, published in 1937, Castro writes, “If some of the *mestiços* turn out to be physically weak, afflicted with mental deficiencies and disability, this is not due to some social defect unique to their race, but to their empty stomachs. . . . Their misfortune comes not from their race, but from hunger. It is the absence of enough food that prevents their development and their functioning at full capacity. It is not the machine [i.e., the body] that is of poor quality. . . . Its labor yields little. With each step, it suffers. It breaks down early. . . . Owing to a lack of enough high-quality fuel.”

*Documentário do Nordeste* pursued and amplified arguments de Castro had made in a short, slightly earlier text, *Alimentação e Raça*, which had appeared in 1935. Both books attacked the contention, then dominant among Brazil’s political and intellectual elites, that Afro-Brazilians, the country’s indigenous peoples, and the *caboclos* were all lazy, unintelligent, shiftless—and therefore undernourished—on account of their race. Brazil’s white ruling classes were blinded by their racial prejudices.

The year 1937 witnessed the coup d’état of Gétúlio Vargas and the establishment of his dictatorship and the regime of the Estado Novo (New State). The universalism of de Castro, then a young doctor, collided head-on with the fascist ideology and the proudly proclaimed racism of the ruling classes. In 1945, the defeat of the Axis powers inevitably led to the downfall of Vargas and the Estado Novo. Throughout this period, de Castro was invited by the governments of various countries to study the problems of food and nutrition; he traveled to Argentina (in 1942), the United States (1943), the Dominican Republic (1945), Mexico (1945), and, finally, France (1947).

De Castro’s experience, at once both local and global, as we would say today, from the outset lent his scientific work, which includes some fifty titles, exceptional scope, complexity, and validity. Alain Bué, paying tribute to the man who was his supervisor and friend in France on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of his birth, wrote, “The central argument of de Castro’s entire oeuvre can be summed up in this observation: ‘Whoever has money eats; whoever has none dies of hunger or becomes disabled.’”

*Geografia da fome* is the source of de Castro’s most famous work, *Geopolítica da fome* (1951). In his author’s preface to the revised and expanded 1965 edition of the French translation of *Geopolítica da fome*, de Castro explains that it was his editor at Little, Brown and Company in Boston who suggested that he extend to the entire world the methods that he had developed to support his analysis of Brazil, and which had given birth to *Geografia da fome*. *Geopolítica da fome* constitutes one of the major scientific works of the postwar period. The book met with universal acclaim all over the world. It was recommended by the newly created FAO, was translated into twenty-six languages, went through many reprints and editions, and had a profound impact on the awareness of hunger.

For the new book, De Castro’s earlier title, *Geografia da fome*, which is rooted in the tradition of nineteenth-century descriptive social science, was changed to *Geopolítica da fome*; the author himself shows from the first chapter of the new book that hunger, if it

must be in part related and attributed to geographical conditions, is in fact before anything else a political question. Hunger owes its existence and its persistence not to soil morphology but to human practices. It was in homage to Josué de Castro that I used his title as the subtitle of the original French edition of this book.

In his 1965 French preface, de Castro explains:

But, although degraded by the Nazi dialectic, the word *geopolitics* retains its scientific value and should be rehabilitated with its real meaning. . . .

The real meaning of the word *geopolitics* belongs to a scientific discipline that seeks to establish the correlations existing between geographical factors and phenomena of political character. . . .

Few phenomena have so intensely influenced the political behavior of the [world's] peoples as the phenomenon of food and the tragic necessity of eating. Hence the harsh, living reality of a "geopolitics of hunger."

By treating the ravages of hunger as natural phenomena and invoking, to justify the mass death it causes, the "law of necessity," Malthus believed that he could shelter his conscience and that of the ruling classes from all concern for the hungry. De Castro made his readers aware, on the contrary, that persistent undernutrition and malnutrition profoundly disturb entire societies, both the starving and the well fed. As de Castro often said, "Half of Brazilians do not sleep because they are hungry. The other half do not sleep either, because they are afraid of those who are hungry." Hunger makes it impossible to build a peaceful society. In a state where a large part of the population is haunted by fear of tomorrow, only repression can ensure social peace. The institution of the plantation is the incarnation of violence. Hunger creates a permanent state of latent war.

De Castro frequently uses the term *artificial*. Undernutrition and malnutrition, he says, are "artificial" in the primary sense of the word *artifact*: they are phenomena created entirely by human

activity, by, so to speak, experimental conditions. Colonization, monopolization of the soil, and monoculture are hunger's primary causes. They are responsible at the same time for low productivity and the unequal distribution of the harvest.

In many of his later works, de Castro would reinterpret the results of certain of his initial investigations in Pernambuco, as for example in his very fine *The Black Book of Hunger*. He would remain haunted throughout his life by the starving, toothless women, the children with their bellies swollen by worms, the cane cutters with empty eyes and broken wills of his natal Pernambuco.

Immediately following the end of the Estado Novo, with the reestablishment of a minimum of civil liberties, de Castro threw himself into political action against the *capitanias* (inland plantation estates) and the foreign multinational corporations that controlled the majority of agricultural production in Brazil. The country's agricultural production was at the time in large part intended for export—in this country of widespread hunger—and was enjoying dazzling growth compared to that of a drained and devastated Europe. After 1945, Brazil, where so many were suffering from hunger, became one of the world's biggest exporters of food. Together with Francisco Julião and Miguel Arraes de Alencar, de Castro organized *ligas camponesas*, peasants' or farmers' leagues, which were in effect the first farmers' unions in Brazil, to fight against the sugar barons, demand agrarian reform, and demand for cane cutters and their families the right to a regular supply of quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food.

De Castro, Julião, and Arraes de Alencar were living dangerously. The landowners' gunmen, sometimes even the military police (who in Brazil exercise many functions of a civilian police force in, for example, the United States), attempted to ambush them on the chaotic roads of the São Francisco Valley and the ravines of the Capibaribe River. De Castro evaded numerous assassination attempts and continued with the fight. De Castro was the intellectual and theoretician of the group, Julião the organizer, and Arraes de Alencar the popular leader. The farmers' leagues were lent important support also from two priests of the *nordeste*, Dom

Hélder Câmara, who was in this period an auxiliary bishop in Rio de Janeiro and would later become archbishop of Recife and Olinda, and Father Italo Coelho, a native of Fortaleza, who will forever be remembered as the father of the poor in Copacabana.

In 1954, de Castro was elected the federal deputy for the PT (Workers' Party), Julião a deputy in the state of Pernambuco, and Arrães de Alencar governor of the state—*o goberandor da esperança*, “the governor of hope,” as the people called him. In parallel with his work at the national level, de Castro played a decisive role on the international stage in the founding of the FAO. He was part of the small group of experts charged by the UN General Assembly with the preparatory work in advance of the FAO's founding, then Brazil's delegate to the FAO conference in Geneva in 1947, a member of the FAO's permanent consultative committee in the same year, and finally president of the FAO's executive council. First elected to the position in 1952, de Castro was reelected to this key post for a second consecutive term—an extraordinary exception to the organization's own rules—and served until 1955.

In these years of democratic hope and the quest for peace, de Castro was showered with prizes and honors. In 1954, the World Peace Council, then headquartered in Helsinki, awarded him its International Peace Prize. It was cold that day in Finland. De Castro lost his voice before the ceremony. Arraes de Alencar tells the story this way: Before the microphones and cameras, the theater filled with a colorful crowd of socialist notables and figures in the Finnish government, de Castro was struck by a coughing fit loud enough to shake the rafters of the hall. Finally he managed to utter a few words, just one sentence: “O primeiro direito do homem e de não passar fome” (The first human right is not to suffer from hunger). Then he sat down, exhausted.

De Castro was nominated three times for a Nobel Prize, once in medicine and twice for the Peace Prize. In the middle of the Cold War, he received the Franklin D. Roosevelt Prize of the American Academy of Political Science in Washington and, in Moscow, the World Peace Council's International Peace Prize. In 1957, he was

awarded the Grande Médaille de la Ville de Paris, whose previous recipients include Pasteur and Einstein.

De Castro was perfectly well aware from experience of the often decisive influence exerted by agri-food industry conglomerates on national governments. He knew that no matter how many medals, prizes, and decorations governments showered upon him, they would never take any decisive action against hunger. He therefore pinned all his hope on civil society. In the Brazil of the *ligas camponesas*, he looked to the PT and the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra as engines of change.

De Castro was also active at the international level. Starting in 1950, he traveled the world relentlessly: going to India, China, the countries of South America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe—wherever a government, a university, a union asked him to speak. De Castro also co-founded the World Association for the Struggle Against Hunger (ASCOFAM), whose founding members included practically all the names of those who, after his death, would carry on the fight: Tibor Mende, René Dumont, Abbé Pierre, Father Louis-Joseph Lebret, Father Georges Pire (a future winner of the Nobel Peace Prize), and many others. In 1960, they succeeded in persuading the UN General Assembly to launch the first World Campaign Against Hunger. This campaign worked through schools, churches, parliaments, unions, and the media to inform and mobilize the public, and it met with a considerable response, principally in Europe.

Tibor Mende worked above all on the famines in China and India; his books include *China and Her Shadow*. Some of René Dumont's key early books, written during de Castro's lifetime, were directly inspired by him, including *Socialisms and Development*. As for Abbé Pierre, it was through the Emmaus movement, founded in 1949, that he spread de Castro's ideas. The Dominican priest Louis-Joseph Lebret deserves special mention. Among his colleagues in ASCOFAM, he was probably the closest to de Castro, and also his senior. It was Lebret who had de Castro's books first published in France. He was also the first to offer de Castro an academic position outside Brazil, at IRFED (Institut International



de Recherche et Formation Éducation et Développement, the International Institute for Research and Training in Education and Development) in Paris, founded in 1958. Lebreu's review *Développement et Civilisation* also often opened its pages to de Castro. Lebreu was close to Pope Paul VI; one of the experts who contributed to Vatican II, he inspired the encyclical *Populorum progressio* (On the Development of Peoples), which played an important role in the struggle against hunger. A year before his death in 1965, Lebreu was sent by the pope to Geneva to represent the Vatican at the first United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Lebreu mobilized progressive Catholics to join the struggle led by de Castro.

Today, more than 40 percent of the men, women, and children of Recife live in sordid shantytowns lining the Capibaribe. More than a million people live in homes without septic tanks or sewers, without running water or electricity, and in unsafe conditions. In their shacks made from sheet metal, wooden boards, or cardboard, famished rats bite and sometimes kill infants.

The Recife metropolitan area has one of the highest murder rates in Brazil, with 61.2 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. The murder rate for children and adolescents is one of the highest in the world. Abandoned children number in the thousands. They are often the first victims of the death squads.

During my visits to Recife, I have gone out into the streets at night many times to accompany Demetrius Demetrio, the head of the Comunidade dos Pequenos Prophetas (the Community of Little Prophets), founded by Dom Helder Camara to rescue, feed, and provide day-to-day care for several dozen young street children, both boys and girls, from broken families. Some of the children I have seen were not even three years old; they were exposed to every danger, every kind of abuse and violence, every illness, and tormenting hunger. Those I met are surely all dead now, without having reached adulthood.

Deprived of work, the men and adolescents try to earn a few reais by hustling for biscate on the Avenida Conde de Boa Vista,

which runs down to the harbor, lined with restaurants and tourist bars. *Biscate* is a term that covers all the odd jobs that make up the informal economy: sidewalk vending of ice cream, beverages, roasted peanuts, *cachaça* (sugarcane liquor), and *abacaxi* (pineapple); washing and guarding cars; shining shoes; and so on.

On the avenue, the *jangadas*, raftlike boats with triangular lateen sails, traditionally carved from whole logs and used in the open-ocean fishery, return to the docks at nightfall. The fish merchants wait in their vans. Haggard mothers and their starving children in rags wait in the shadows away from the streetlights. As soon as the vans have gone, these wretched people throw themselves eagerly upon the remains: fish heads or bones with a few scraps of flesh on them. The bones crunch in their mouths. I have witnessed this sight many times, heartsick.

Back when de Castro surveyed the shantytowns, about 200,000 people lived along the marshy banks of the Capibaribe. Over time, migrants from rural areas have spread out even over the water, building countless rudimentary homes on stilts. De Castro observed the astonishing way in which they fed themselves. The Capibaribe is a large river that descends from the hills of the coastal mountain range. Its waters are brown and turbulent in winter when, far away in the interior, the heavy rains and thunderstorms of July and August are unleashed. Most of the time, the river is a filthy cesspool where the inhabitants of the shantytowns relieve themselves, a vast stretch of marsh, almost unmoving, where crabs scuttle.

In his novel *Of Men and Crabs*, de Castro describes the "cycle of the crab." People relieve themselves underneath their shacks, in the river cesspool. The crabs, which are scavengers, feed on human waste along with other refuse thrown into the riverbed. Then the river dwellers, their legs stuck in the mud up to their knees, stir the muck to catch the crabs. They eat them, digest them, excrete them. The crabs feed on what the people excrete and throw away. The people catch the crabs and eat them. . . . And so the cycle continues.

## HITLER'S "HUNGER PLAN"

Josué de Castro owed his victory over Malthus in part to Adolf Hitler. Almost half of the 56 million combined civilian and military deaths during World War II were caused by hunger and its immediate consequences. For example, half the population of Byelorussia died of hunger in 1942–43. Undernutrition, tuberculosis, and anemia killed millions of men, women, and children across Europe.

Perhaps one of the most impressive chapters in *Geopolítica da fome* is "Starving Europe," de Castro's account of hunger in Europe before, during, and after World War II. In his section entitled "Europe a Concentration Camp," De Castro writes:

As soon as Germany invaded the various countries of Europe, she applied her policy of "organized hunger." According to Boris Shub, the master plan of the Third Reich was intended "to organize the pattern of privation for the peoples of Europe, apportioning among them in accordance with its military objectives, the short rations which remained after Reich priorities were satisfied."

A few pages later, de Castro summarizes the immediate results of the implementation of the Nazi *Hungerplan*:

Such was Europe, then, stripped by the Nazi grasshoppers, devastated by bombs, paralyzed by panic, undermined by the fifth column as well as by administrative disorganization and corruption; and there starvation felt very much at home. Practically all the populations of Europe began a kind of concentration-camp existence. All Europe was one vast and somber camp.

The Nazi leaders, as is well known, were assisted by rigorous bureaucrats. Parallel to their system of racial discrimination, they created an equally punctilious system of discrimination in nutrition by dividing the populations of occupied countries into four categories:

- The "well fed," comprising population groups that fulfilled auxiliary functions in the Nazi war machine.
- The "underfed," comprising population groups that, on account of German requisitions of food, were limited to daily rations of 1,000 calories maximum per adult.
- The "hungry," a category encompassing population groups that the Nazis had decided to reduce in numbers, by restricting their access to food to a level below the threshold of survival. This category included most of the inhabitants of the Jewish ghettos in Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, and so on, as well as the Roma/Sinti ("Gypsy") villages in Romania and the Balkans.
- The "starving," groups condemned to "extermination through hunger" or the "annihilation of superfluous eaters." In some of the Nazis' concentration camps and extermination camps, a starvation diet was used as a weapon of mass killing.

Hitler invested as much criminal energy in starving the peoples of Europe as he did in affirming German racial superiority. His hunger strategy had a double purpose: to ensure German self-sufficiency in food, and to subjugate the populations of occupied countries to the laws of the Reich.

Hitler was haunted by the food blockade that the British had imposed on Germany during World War I. As soon as he took power in 1933, he created the Reichsnährstand (RNS; Reich Food Corporation), a government body set up to regulate food production and distribution. By decree, all German farmers, food industries, stockbreeders, fisheries, and grain merchants were placed under RNS control. Hitler wanted war. He prepared for it by building up considerable stocks of food. A system of ration cards was imposed upon the people of Germany many years before the invasion of Poland. Between 1933 and 1939, the Third Reich absorbed 40 percent of all food exports from Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, Romania, and Hungary. Before 1933, this figure had never exceeded 15 percent.

One of Hitler's first acts of outright theft took place at the Munich Conference in 1938. On September 29 and 30, Hitler met with Neville Chamberlain (representing the United Kingdom), Edouard Daladier (France), and Benito Mussolini (Italy), and blackmailed them into allowing the Reich to annex the Sudetenland, claiming that a majority ethnic German population there was being mistreated by the Czech government. Abandoned by the Western powers, Czechoslovakia was left to Hitler's mercy. The Führer then forced the Prague government to sell to Germany, according to the terms of a duly signed commercial contract, 750,000 tons of cereals—which were never paid for.

One war was declared, Hitler organized the systematic plunder of food in the occupied countries. The conquered countries were ransacked, their food reserves stolen, their agriculture, livestock, and fisheries placed in the exclusive service of the Reich. The experience accumulated over the course of the previous seven years by the RNS proved invaluable. With thousands of railway cars at its disposal, as well as thousands of agronomists, the RNS systematically bled dry the food production sectors of France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Holland, Lithuania, and so on. Robert Ley was head of the Third Reich's German Labor Front (in effect, the minister of labor). The RNS fell under his jurisdiction. Ley declared in a statement in 1940, "A lower race needs less room, less

clothing, less food' than the German race." The Nazis called the pillage of the occupied countries "war requisitions."

Poland was invaded in September 1939. Hitler immediately annexed the cereal-producing plains of western Poland and put them under the direct administration of the RNS. The region was separated from the Nazi-installed General Government, which controlled the rest of occupied Poland, and incorporated into the Reich as a Reichsgau (administrative subdivision) called the Wartheland (after the Warthe River—or the Warta in Polish—which crosses it; the area was also called the Warthegau). Early in the winter of 1939, the farmers and stockbreeders of the Wartheland were forced to deliver to their new masters, without any compensation, 480,000 tons of wheat, 50,000 tons of barley, 160,000 tons of rye, more than 100,000 tons of oats, and tens of thousands of head of livestock (cattle, hogs, sheep, goats, and chickens).

But the looting was equally effective in the General Government area of Poland. It was the governor-general of the territory himself, Hans Michael Frank (magisterially described by Curzio Malaparte in his book *Kaputt*), who organized the requisitions program. In the course of 1940 alone, Frank extracted from occupied Poland and shipped to the Reich 100,000 tons of wheat, 100 million eggs, 10 million kilograms (more than 22 million pounds) of butter, and 100,000 hogs. Famine set in throughout the Wartheland and the rest of Poland.

Of all the European countries occupied by the Nazis, two took exceptional precautions against hunger early in the war: Norway and the Netherlands. Norway had known a horrifying famine during the Napoleonic Wars, caused by Napoleon's Continental Blockade against the British Isles. By the outbreak of World War II, the country had built the world's third-largest merchant marine. The government in Oslo bought food all over the world. Along the fjords in the far north, the Norwegians stockpiled in warehouses tens of thousands of tons of dried and salted fish, rice, wheat, coffee, tea, and sugar, and thousands of hectoliters of cooking oil. The Dutch did the same. When the Nazis invaded Poland,

the government in the Hague proceeded to make emergency purchases of food all over the world, putting in reserve 33 million chickens and adding 1.8 million hogs to the country's livestock.

When the Nazi armies surged across Dutch and Norwegian territory, the RNS officials who followed in their wake could not believe their eyes: they had based their planned requisitions on out-of-date data. Now, to their delight, they discovered unexpected treasures. They stole everything.

The Nazis invaded Norway in 1940. Three years later, the Norwegian economist Else Margrete Roed made a preliminary assessment of the Norwegian food situation, which de Castro quotes at length:

One day the Germans suddenly appeared, brutally invaded the country and took possession of all [the Norwegians'] reserves. "They descended upon us like locusts and devoured everything in their way. Not only did we have three or four hundred thousand greedy Germans to feed in Norway; the German transports which brought them to us sailed back laden with Norwegian food and other foods." From then on . . . all these products, one after another, gradually disappeared from the market: "First eggs, then meat, wheat flour, coffee, cream, milk, chocolate, tea, canned fish, fruits and vegetables, and finally cheese and fresh fish—all disappeared down the German mouths."

In the Netherlands as in Norway, tens of thousands of people died of hunger or its consequences. Kwashiorkor, anemia, tuberculosis, and noma ravaged the children of both countries.

Practically all the occupied countries endured the same suffering. In many countries, deficiencies in animal protein rose precipitously. The estimated amount of protein required per adult in occupied Europe varied—according to the country, the Nazis' population categories, and the arbitrary whim of the local Gauleiter (leader of a regional branch of the Nazi party)—from 10 to 15 grams (about one-third to one-half ounce) per day. Likewise,

the consumption of fats also plummeted: in Belgium, for example, from 30 grams per adult per day to only 2.5 grams.

In the racial hierarchy established in Berlin, the Slavs occupied one of the bottom rungs of the ladder, just above the Jews, the Roma/Sinti, and blacks. The rationing of food was thus even crueller in Eastern Europe. The daily ration for an adult civilian in the occupied countries in the east fell rapidly below a thousand calories (2,200 calories per day is an average adult's daily requirement). Consisting mainly of rotten potatoes and bread that was often stale and moldy, the civilian ration was soon equal in calories to that of the concentration camp prisoners. Maria Babicka succeeded in smuggling an exposé out of Poland in 1943, which was published in the United States; "the Polish people were reduced, Babicka says, 'to eating dogs, cats, and rats, and to making broth from the skin of dead animals and the bark of trees.'" In the winter of 1942, Babicka notes, the average daily ration of a Polish adult fell below 800 calories. Hunger edemas, tuberculosis, an almost complete inability to work normally, and progressive weakness and lethargy due to anemia tormented the Poles.

The Nazi strategy for weakening or destroying entire peoples or certain groups by hunger comprised several variants. Heinrich Himmler's Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Central Security Department), for example, had conceived a scientific plan for the annihilation by hunger of selected groups of people judged to be "life unworthy of life" (*Lebensunwertes Leben*): the *Hungerplan*. The executioners of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt were determined to hunt the Jews and the Roma/Sinti to death. They used every weapon—the gas chambers, mass executions—and also the weapon of hunger. Thus, everywhere in occupied Europe, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, hermetically sealed Jewish ghettos, surrounded by walls and "protected" by cordons of SS men and enclosing in some cases hundreds of thousands of people, were subjected to a regime of starvation; many of the ghettos' inhabitants died of hunger.

I am reminded of my visit to the former concentration camp of

Buchenwald, in Thuringia, before Germany's reunification. The prisoners' barracks, the quarantine hospital, the execution chamber (execution was by pistol shot to the neck of a prisoner seated and handcuffed to a chair), the SS quarters, the two crematorium ovens, the muster ground where selected prisoners were hanged daily, the brick villa built for the commandant and his family, the chimneys, the kitchens, the mass graves—all are situated on an idyllic hillside that you ascend on foot, through a forest of beech trees, after leaving the small city of Weimar, below in the valley, where, until his death in 1832, the poet Goethe once lived and worked. Immediately upon entering the camp, after passing through the gray iron gates, now rusted, you find yourself in a vast enclosure, as big as a soccer field, surrounded by barbed-wire fences ten feet high. My guide, a young East German, explained to us in a neutral voice, "This is where the authorities"—he says "the authorities" and not "the Nazis"—"starved prisoners to death. . . . The camp was first used in 1940 with the arrival of Polish officers."

Several hundred Polish officers were imprisoned at Buchenwald. They had to take turns sleeping, because the camp could barely contain them all standing upright. The prisoners spent their days and nights on their feet, jammed together. They were deprived of any food and given only a little brackish water that fell drop by drop from two iron pipes. They had no protection from the elements: no shelter, no blankets. They were brought to Buchenwald in November, with only their uniform greatcoats to protect them. The snow fell on their heads. It took them two or three weeks to die. Then a new batch of Polish officers arrived. The SS had set up machine-gun posts all around the barbed wire. Escape was impossible.

Historian Timothy Snyder has taken advantage of the opening of the archives of the former Eastern Bloc countries since the Soviet Union's disintegration in 1991. He describes the suffering endured by Soviet prisoners of war condemned by the Nazis to "extermination through hunger." The Nazi butchers were ferocious

accountants. Every camp, whether it relied on forced labor, extermination by gas, or forced starvation, had to maintain its *Lagerbuch* (accounts book). In many of these *Lagerbücher*, the SS relate with relish and in vivid detail recurring cases of cannibalism. They see in the cannibalism to which young Soviet prisoners of war resorted as they were dying of hunger the ultimate and definitive proof of the Slavs' barbaric nature. The archives also reveal that in one of the camps that practiced extermination through hunger, many thousands of Ukrainian, Russian, Lithuanian, and Polish prisoners of war signed a petition, which they presented to the SS commandant. They demanded to be shot.

The blindness of the Allied High Command throughout the war to the Nazis' strategy of control and destruction through hunger of selected groups within the occupied countries astounds me. At Buchenwald, I was struck by the single railway line, its tracks covered in grass and wildflowers, which in almost bucolic fashion winds its way through the charming, gently rolling Thuringian countryside. Not one American, English, or French bomber ever tried to destroy it. The trains full of deportees continued to arrive day by day at the foot of the hill, as if it were the most normal thing in the world. Some of my friends have visited Auschwitz, and they returned with the same feeling of revulsion and incomprehension: again, a single railway line bringing its daily quota of prisoners to this factory of death remained perfectly intact until early 1945.

In the autumn of 1944, the Allied forces liberated the southern part of the Netherlands. They then pressed their advantage eastward to penetrate German territory, leaving the entire northern part of Holland, and in particular the cities of Rotterdam, the Hague, and Amsterdam, under the iron rule of the Gestapo. Members of the Resistance were arrested by the thousands. Hunger ravaged entire families. The national railway system was paralyzed. Winter came. Hardly any food could be brought into the cities from the countryside.

Journalist Max Nord, in his introduction to the 1947 book of

photographs *Amsterdam tijdens de Hongerwinter* (Amsterdam in the Hunger Winter), wrote: "The western part of Holland lived in bitter despair, in the greatest penury, without food or fuel." So many people died that, since "timber for coffins was scarce, there were long rows of deceased to be seen in the churches." He adds, bleakly, "the Allied forces marched toward Germany, paying us no heed."

Throughout World War II, Stalin, like Hitler, distinguished himself by committing massacres through starvation. Adam Hochschild points by way of example to one freezing night in February 1940 when the NKVD (the Soviet secret police) arrested 139,794 Poles, the parents and wives and children of Polish prisoners of war, who were then deported in cattle cars to Siberia. The NKVD was able to detain entire families because the occupying Soviet troops in eastern Poland had allowed captive Polish officers and men to correspond with their families; in this way, the secret police were able to learn the soldiers' families' home addresses. Since the camps of the Gulag were already overpopulated, the police had to decide to "liberate" thousands of families, who were abandoned along the way, without food, without blankets, without water. As Hochschild recounts, all along the railway lines in the Soviet Far East, as far as the Pacific, groups of these people were "scattered" and left to die of hunger.

## 11

## A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS: THE UNITED NATIONS

**I**n Europe, the ordeal of hunger did not end with the surrender of the Third Reich on May 8, 1945. European agriculture was ravaged, its economies in ruins, its infrastructure destroyed. In many countries, people continued to suffer from hunger, malnutrition, and illnesses caused by the lack of food and aggravated by the immune system collapse of entire populations.

Josué de Castro observes in this regard:

One of the toughest postwar problems was to provide food for a Europe that had been torn and broken by six years of fighting. Several factors had led to a marked decline in food production, and now stood in the way of recovery. Particularly responsible for the decrease of food production in Europe were a decline in productivity of the soil, due to lack of manure and fertilizers; a reduction in cultivated area; a relative scarcity of agricultural labor; and a shortage of farm tools and machinery. Acting together, in most cases, these factors had reduced agricultural production 40 per cent below the prewar level. This decrease had still graver effects on Europe's food balance because the population of the continent, in spite of heavy loss of life, had increased by some 20 per cent during the war.

“The case of France,” writes de Castro, “is typical”:

In this country, the war, the occupation and the liberation led to extremely unfavorable conditions for food supply. France continued to go hungry for a long time after the liberation, and was shamefully preyed upon too by the corruption of the black market. The agricultural recovery of France encountered serious obstacles, outstanding among them being the extremely poor condition of her farm lands and the absolute lack of mechanized agricultural machinery.

One of the most difficult problems to resolve affecting food production was the lack of fertilizers. In France, the amount of mineral fertilizers available had reached 4 million tons in 1939; by 1945, this figure had fallen to a quarter million tons.

Another problem was the agricultural labor force. More than 100,000 French farmers had abandoned their fields between 1939 and 1945, either because their farms had been devastated or because the occupying Nazis had ruined them financially. Moreover, during the war, 400,000 French farmers had been taken prisoner, and 50,000 killed. Recovery was slow and painful. As De Castro writes:

As a result of the tremendous drop in production, and the absolute lack of financial resources to buy foods outside the country, France was forced to go through long years of nutritional poverty after the war. It was only with the aid of the Marshall plan that the country succeeded in emerging from this economic asphyxia, and that the people were able little by little, to return to a more tolerable diet.

The suffering, deprivation, undernutrition, and hunger endured by Europeans throughout the dark years of Nazi occupation made them receptive to de Castro's ideas. Rejecting the Malthusian ideology of the law of necessity, they committed themselves

wholeheartedly to the campaign against hunger and to building international organizations responsible for leading the fight.

The personal destiny of Josué de Castro and his battle against hunger are intimately linked to the growth of the United Nations.

Today, the UN is a bureaucratic dinosaur directed by the passive and colorless Ban Ki-moon of South Korea, incapable of responding to the needs, expectations, or hopes of the world's peoples. The UN arouses hardly any popular enthusiasm. This was not, however, the case when the UN was created in the aftermath of the war. The name of the United Nations emerged for the first time in 1941, when the very words *united nations* aroused strong emotions. And the idea was explicitly linked to the fight against hunger.

On August 14, 1941, the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, and the American president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, met at Roosevelt's instigation on the American cruiser USS *Augusta* off the coast of Newfoundland. Their meeting, known since as the Newfoundland Conference, yielded a document called the Atlantic Charter, whose principles Roosevelt had anticipated several months before. In his State of the Union address delivered on January 6, 1941, referred to ever since as the Four Freedoms speech, Roosevelt had proposed four fundamental freedoms that people “everywhere in the world” ought to enjoy, and which he said he was dedicated to achieving: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. The idea of the Four Freedoms had already been at the heart of the New Deal, the program of reform that had carried Roosevelt into the White House in 1932.

The four freedoms lie at the foundation of the Atlantic Charter, whose fourth and sixth articles read in full:

4. They [the United States and Great Britain] will endeavor, with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all States, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and

to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity.

6. After the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, they hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want.

In 1941, hunger was still tormenting entire populations in the countries occupied by the Nazis and consumed by the war. Once military victory had been won, it was clear to Churchill and Roosevelt that the UN must as one of its first priorities mobilize all its resources and all its energies in support of the eradication of hunger.

Sir John Boyd-Orr (who was at the time consultant director to the British Imperial Bureau of Animal Nutrition) wrote the following year:

When the fighting forces of the Axis Powers have been completely defeated, the United Nations will be in control of the whole world. It will be a shattered world. In some countries the political, economic, and social structures will be almost completely destroyed. Even in countries least affected by the war, they will be badly damaged. It is obvious that the world will need to be rebuilt. . . .

The opportunity is there, but the immensity of the opportunity is equaled by the immensity of the task. The task cannot be accomplished unless the free nations which have united in the face of the common danger of Nazi world domination remain united to co-operate in building "the new and better world."

A few months before his death, Roosevelt reaffirmed the principles announced on board the USS *Augusta*:

We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. "Necessitous men are not free men." People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made.

In our day these economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all regardless of station, race, or creed.

The global campaign against hunger, inspired in large part by the scientific work and the tireless activism of Josué de Castro and his comrades, was buoyed up by the energy and hope that Roosevelt so magnificently expressed.

Two inherent limits to this great project must be mentioned here. The first concerns the world's political organization in this period. The member states of the UN—whose composition was very much at issue in the early 1940s, before the UN's founding in 1945—were dominated by the United States, Western Europe, and the Commonwealth: that is, by Western and mainly white countries. At the end of World War II, two-thirds of the planet's people still lived under the yoke of colonialism. Only fifty nations participated in the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco, where the United Nations Charter was drawn up and signed on June 26, 1945. In order to be admitted to the founding conference, a country's government had to have declared war against the Axis before May 8, 1945. When the UN convened the General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948, to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there were fifty-eight member states, as I have said above.

The second limit to the UN's effectiveness is rooted in a contradiction within the organization that dates back to its founding: its legitimacy lies in the free adherence of the world's nations to the UN Charter, as is set out in the charter's preamble. But the UN itself is an organization of *states* (comprising representatives



of their *governments*), not of *nations*. Every component of the UN is governed by a different array of its member states. Its executive is the Security Council, which today numbers fifteen states. The General Assembly, which constitutes the UN's parliament, today comprises 193 states. The UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) oversees the UN's specialized organizations, such as the FAO, WHO, the WMO, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and so on; ECOSOC comprises ambassadors, that is, representatives of its own fifty-four member governments. The UN Human Rights Council, which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Universal Charter by the UN's member states, comprises representatives of forty-seven states. As we all know, moral convictions, enthusiasm, and the spirit of justice and solidarity do not inhere in the idea of the *state*. The state's *raison d'être* is *raison d'état*. These intrinsic limits to the UN's effectiveness persist today.

Nonetheless, the aftermath of the war did indeed witness a great awakening of conscience and consciousness in the West, which broke the taboo on speaking of hunger. The peoples who had endured famine would no longer accept the doxa of fatalism and inevitability. Hunger, they well knew, was a weapon that the occupying powers had used to break and destroy them. They knew it from experience. They would now resolutely commit themselves to the fight against this scourge, behind de Castro and his comrades.

## 12

## JOSUÉ DE CASTRO, PHASE TWO: A VERY HEAVY COFFIN

In Brazil in 1961, João Goulart, the candidate representing the Workers' Party (PT), was elected president of the republic. He immediately initiated a series of reforms, including, as a first priority, agrarian reform. He appointed Josué de Castro as Brazil's ambassador to the UN agencies in Geneva. It was there that I knew de Castro. At first glance, he was the very picture of a bourgeois gentlemen from Pernambuco, down to the discreet elegance of his clothes. Behind the fine lenses of his glasses his eyes shone with an ironic smile. His voice was soft. He was warm but discreet, very friendly, obviously a deeply moral man. De Castro had proven to be effective and conscientious as the head of the Brazilian mission, but little inclined to diplomatic socializing. His two daughters, Anna-Maria and Sonia, and his son, also named Josué, attended a public school in Geneva.

De Castro's appointment to the mission in Geneva unquestionably saved his life. After President João Goulart was overthrown in a coup d'état masterminded by the Pentagon on the night of March 31–April 1, 1964, and Field Marshal Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco took power as president on April 15, Brazilian democracy was destroyed and a period of military dictatorship inaugurated that would last twenty-one years. Indeed, at the top of the first list of enemies of the state issued by the coup leaders were

the names of leading figures of the PT, including João Goulart, Leonel Brizola, Francisco Julião, Miguel Arrães de Alencar, and Josué de Castro. At dawn on April 10, paratroopers took over the governmental palace in Recife. Arrães de Alencar was already at work. He was abducted and disappeared, but soon a great wave of international solidarity compelled his captors to release him; like de Castro, he had become, throughout Latin America, a symbol of the fight against hunger.

Arrães de Alencar was forced into ten years of exile, first in France, then in Algeria. I saw him, not for the first time, in 1987. With the end of the dictatorship in 1985, he had been reelected governor of Pernambuco. He had immediately picked up work where he had left off twenty years before. In a husky voice, barely audible, he told me, "I have found all the old problems—multiplied by ten."

As for Julião, he went underground on the morning of the coup. Denounced, he was arrested in Petrolina, on the border of the states of Pernambuco and Bahia. Despite appalling torture, he survived and was freed. He died in exile in Mexico. (Goulart and Brizola successfully evaded arrest, escaping to Uruguay.)

From 1964 to 1985, Brazil's military dictatorship—barbaric, cynical, and efficient—ravaged the country, as a succession of generals and marshals, each bloodier and stupider than the ones before, governed a marvelous and stubbornly resistant people. In Rio de Janeiro, air force secret-service torturers held sway downtown, in hangers at Santos-Dumont Airport. Others, affiliated with the marines, tormented kidnapped students, professors, and union leaders in the basement of the marines' general-staff headquarters, a vast white building eight stories high located a few hundred meters from the Praça Quince, the square at the heart of historic downtown Rio, and Cândido Mendes University. Every night, army commandos, disguised as civilians and armed with lists of suspects, roamed throughout the city, from the middle-class neighborhoods of Flamengo and Botafogo, to the chic Copacabana, to the endlessly sprawling, wretched suburbs of the Zona Norte, where working-class

neighborhoods stretch out into a sea of shacks on stilts in the favelas.

But all across Brazil, from the Amazon delta to the Uruguayan border, there was active resistance to the dictatorship. Although the farmers' leagues, agricultural and industrial unions, political parties, and leftist movements were all annihilated by the secret services and the dictatorship's commandos, a few armed groups survived to wage a clandestine war against the generals in the countryside, such as the VAR-Palmares, of which the current president of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, was a member.

Fourteen countries offered to welcome de Castro. He chose France. In Paris de Castro was one of the founders of the Centre Universitaire Expérimental in Vincennes (today the Université de Paris VIII in Saint-Denis), where he taught starting in the beginning of the academic year in 1969.

Although he was living in exile, de Castro did not disappear from the international stage. Despite the opposition of the generals in power in Brasilia, the UN continued to offer him a platform to speak out. In 1972, de Castro delivered an address at the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (also known as the Stockholm Conference). His arguments in favor of family subsistence agriculture, as the only form of agriculture exclusively in the service of human needs, provided a powerful source of inspiration to the final resolution and action plan of this, the UN's first ever conference on the environment.

De Castro died of a heart attack in his Paris apartment on the morning of September 24, 1973, at the age of sixty-five. His funeral service took place in the Église de La Madeleine. His children having negotiated—with difficulty—their father's return to Brazilian soil, the airplane carrying his body landed in Guararapes Airport in Recife, where an immense crowd awaited its arrival. But no one was able to reach the coffin. The surrounding area was ringed with thousands of riot police, paratroopers, and soldiers. Such was the influence of the deceased, and his place in Brazilians' hearts: the dictators feared his coffin like the plague. De Castro today lies interred in the São João Batista Cemetery in Rio de Janeiro.

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André Breton once wrote:

Everything leads to the belief that there exists a certain point in the mind beyond which life and death, the real and the imaginary, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low cease to be perceived as contradictory.

The life of Josué de Castro confirms this hypothesis. Born Catholic, he was not a practicing Christian. But he remained a believer—a believer beyond dogmas.

De Castro and Gilberto Freyre shared a stormy relationship, but one marked by mutual respect. Freyre, the scion of a wealthy family in Recife who lived in a house called the Casa Amarela, was the author of the famous book *The Masters and the Slaves*, and a conservative who supported the military dictatorship—at least until Institutional Act #5 (AI-5), promulgated at Christmas in 1968, abolished the last vestiges of democratic freedom.

Freyre was the protector of the best-known Umbanda house in Recife, the Terreiro de Seu Antônio, in the neighborhood known as Coque. (Umbanda is a syncretistic Afro-Brazilian religion, similar to Candomblé, which blends together various African and indigenous Brazilian traditions with Catholicism and Kardecism, the beliefs of the nineteenth-century French systematizer of Spiritism, Allan Kardec.) A passionate sociologist, de Castro entirely shared the point of view of Roger Bastide, who believed that the task of the sociologist is to “explore all the ways that humans have of being human.” In de Castro’s day, all the Afro-Brazilian religions, which had persisted since slavery, including Umbanda and Candomblé, were regarded with great contempt, imbued with racism, by the white ruling classes. De Castro was fiercely interested in the cosmogonies and other beliefs of such popular cults. Encouraged by Freyre, he faithfully attended ceremonies at the Umbanda house that Freyre supported.

I encountered the Terreiro de Seu Antônio in the early 1970s thanks to Roger Bastide. The tropical night was thick with all the

odors of the earth. The faraway sound of drums rolled like muffled thunder across the sky. We had to walk for a long time down alleyways without streetlights, full of restless shadows, through the vast Coque quarter. The guard recognized Bastide. He called Seu Antônio. Bastide persuaded him, at great length, to allow me to enter. Before the altar young black men and women, all dressed in white, spun interminably, obsessively, round and round, until they fell into a trance and the house resounded, over the heads of the silent witnesses, with the voice of Xango.

The universe of Umbanda is full of mysteries, strange chance events, logical coincidences. Should one see signs in what follows?

On January 17 and 18, 2009, the Université de Paris VIII celebrated its fortieth anniversary. Paris VIII is surely, after the Sorbonne, the best-known French university abroad, and the one with the most prestigious reputation in the countries of the South. In the words of its president, Pascal Binscak, it is “a world university.” Born out of the student revolt of May 1968 and incarnating the student movement’s spirit of openness and radical critique, Paris VIII has conferred since its founding more than two thousand PhDs, about half of them to men and women from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Garcia Alvaro Linera, the current vice president of Bolivia; Marco Aurélio Garcia, a special foreign policy adviser to the Brazilian president; Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the former president of Brazil; and Cardoso’s wife, Ruth Cardoso, all either taught or studied at Paris VIII.

The school decided to celebrate its anniversary with an international colloquium dedicated to Josué de Castro on the hundredth anniversary of his birth. I was invited to speak at the event and received that day—at the instigation of Alain Bué and his colleague Françoise Plet—an honorary doctorate.

And then this. It was Olivier Bétourné, at the time a young editor at Éditions du Seuil, who ensured the republication in France of de Castro’s *La géographie de la faim* in the early 1980s. And it was also precisely Bétourné, today the president of Éditions du Seuil, who had the idea for this book you are now reading—to reignite the struggle.



## THE CRUSADERS OF NEOLIBERALISM

For the United States and its hired guns—the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank—the right to food is an aberration. For them, the only human rights are civil and political rights.

Standing behind the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank, the U.S. government and its traditional allies, to be sure, are the gigantic global private corporations. The growing control of these corporations over vast sectors of food production and trade clearly has considerable repercussions for the exercise of the right to food.

Today, the top two hundred corporations in the agri-food industry control about a quarter of the world's food production resources. Almost all of these companies realize astronomical profits and have at their disposal financial resources much greater than those of the governments of the countries in which they do business. They exercise monopoly control over every aspect of the entire food supply chain from production to distribution, including the sale, processing, and marketing of food products, the effect of which is to restrict the choices of both farmers and consumers.

Since the publication of Dan Morgan's classic book *Merchants of Grain*, the American media has used Morgan's term "merchants of grain" to designate the principal global agri-food corporations. Yet Morgan's term is inadequate: the giants of agri-food control not only

the setting of prices and the trade in foods but also all the sectors essential to the food industry, especially the production of seed, fertilizers, and pesticides, as well as storage, transportation, and so on.

Just ten corporations, including Aventis, Monsanto, Pioneer, and Syngenta, control one-third of the market in seed, with estimated annual sales in 2010 of \$23 billion, and 80 percent of the market in pesticides, with estimated annual sales of \$28 billion in the same year. Ten other corporations, with Cargill prominent among them, control 57 percent of the sales of the world's top thirty retailers and represent 37 percent of the revenues earned by the top one hundred manufacturers of foodstuffs and beverages. Six companies control 77 percent of the market in fertilizers: Bayer, Syngenta, BASF, Cargill, DuPont, and Monsanto.

In certain sectors of agricultural-products processing and marketing, more than 80 percent of the trade in a single product lies in the hands of a few oligopolies. As Denis Horman has shown, "six companies control some 85 percent of world trade in cereals; eight divide up about 60 percent of world sales in coffee; three control more than 80 percent of sales in cocoa; and three share 80 percent of the trade in bananas." The same lords of the food-industry oligarchies dominate the bulk of transportation, insurance, and distribution of foodstuffs. On the commodities exchanges trading in agricultural products, their traders fix the prices of the most important staple foods. As Doan Bui notes, "From seeds to fertilizers, from storage to processing to final distribution . . . they lay down the law for our planet's millions of farmers, whether they are farmers in Beauce or smallholders in Punjab. These businesses control the world's food."

In his pioneering book published fifty years ago, *Modern Commodity Futures Trading*, Gerald Gold used the terms *cartel* or *monopoly* to designate such companies, depending upon the sector of economic activity he examined. Today, the UN uses the term *oligopoly* to better characterize markets in which a very small number (*oligo-* in Greek) of producers or sellers confront a very large number of buyers. As João Pedro Stedilé writes of the agri-business giants, "Their purpose is not to produce food, but to produce merchandise and make money."

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Let us examine more closely the paradigmatic example of Cargill. Cargill is active in sixty-six countries, with 1,100 branches and 131,000 employees. In 2007, the company had \$88 billion in sales and net profits of \$2.4 billion, a 55 percent increase in net profit over the previous year. In 2008, a year of global food crisis, Cargill achieved sales of \$120 billion and a profit of \$3.6 billion.

Cargill is one of the companies most closely watched by NGOs, especially American organizations. Consider, for example, the report issued by Food and Water Watch entitled *Cargill: A Threat to Food and Farming*. As the report explains, Cargill, especially through its subsidiary Mosaic, was until recently, among other things, the world's largest producer of mineral fertilizers. Because of its quasi-monopoly, Cargill was able to make prices rise considerably in 2009; the prices of nitroglycerine-based fertilizers rose 34 percent and the prices of phosphate- and potash-based fertilizers doubled.

In 2007, the year for which the most recent figures are available, Cargill was the second-biggest meat packer, the second-biggest feedlot owner, the second-biggest pork packer, the third-biggest turkey producer, and the second-biggest producer of animal feed in the world. Regarding its treatment of meat products, Food and Water Watch writes:

Cargill has been a major advocate for technological fixes to food safety challenges that could also be addressed through more stringent sanitation and other preventative measures. Only days before the November 2007 recall of hamburger patties, a Cargill representative testified before Congress and claimed its use of carbon monoxide in meat packaging helped inhibit the growth of *E. coli*. There is no evidence that carbon monoxide hinders or inhibits the bacteria that cause foodborne illness, and the FDA did not approve it for that use. The company had treated much of the beef involved in the recalls with carbon monoxide, which is primarily used in meat packaging to keep meat looking fresh and red long after it may have spoiled. . . .

Food & Water Watch views the use of carbon monoxide in food packaging as consumer deception. It makes it impossible for customers to use visual cues alone to determine if meat is fresh.

Cargill also uses the highly controversial technology of food irradiation to kill bacteria. As Food and Water Watch writes, irradiation

creates chemical byproducts in the food, some of which are known carcinogens and some of which are unique to irradiated food and have been linked to tumor promotion and genetic damage. In scientific studies irradiated food has been shown to cause premature death, stillbirths, mutations, immune system failure, and stunted growth in animals.

Because of its harbor facilities and silos around the world, Cargill is able to stockpile enormous quantities of corn, wheat, soybeans, and rice—and to wait for prices to rise. Conversely, because of its fleet of ships and cargo aircraft, Cargill can liquidate its merchandise in record time. As Food and Water Watch writes:

By 2008, millions of people around the globe faced starvation that spawned rioting and instability due to skyrocketing food prices, and Cargill was making billions of dollars in profit. . . .

For agricultural communities in the developing world, high prices for imported food like the corn and wheat that Cargill sells coincided with low prices for the tropical crops like cotton and cocoa that Cargill buys from these communities. . . . Even during the recent commodity price surge, tropical cash crop prices grew modestly while food staple prices doubled or tripled. Between January 2006 and June 2008, the world price for coffee, tea, cotton and bananas grew by a third or less, while rice prices tripled, corn and soybean prices grew by more than 150 percent and wheat prices doubled. This price-spread benefits Cargill, but puts food beyond the reach of many rural communities in the developing

world. The United Nations estimated that an additional 130 million people worldwide became malnourished because of the high price of food during the 2008 food crisis.

Cargill is also one of the most powerful cotton merchants in the world. Its principal sources of cotton are in East Asia, and particularly Uzbekistan. Cargill United Kingdom maintains a purchasing office in Tashkent that buys about \$50 million to \$60 million worth of cotton per year. In its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, the State Department in Washington has for several years condemned the use of compulsory child labor in Uzbekistan's cotton fields. By some estimates, as many as a quarter million children are forced by the government to work for paltry wages in the annual cotton harvest; children who fail to meet their daily quotas are often severely beaten.

Cargill and the other oligopolies play, at certain moments, a key role in the explosion of food prices. When the market is rising, cargoes of food commodities may change hands multiple times even while they are being shipped. Analyzing the speculative bubble in grain prices of 1974, Morgan writes that

speculative fever gripped the grain trade as prices began to climb. Cargoes were changing hands twenty of thirty times before they actually were ready for delivery. Cargill might sell to Tradax, which might sell to a German merchant, who would sell to an Italian speculator, who could hand it off to another Italian, who would pass it on to Continental.

Today, Cargill, through a financial services and commodity-trading subsidiary, is active in the world's principal agricultural commodities exchanges. As Food and Water Watch writes:

Cargill also participated in the commodity speculation that helped propel the [2008] food crisis, both through its dominant market position in the cereal market and the activities of its commodity futures trading subsidiary. Cargill operates a financial services and commodity-trading

subsidiary that trades financial instruments (like interest rate and currency swaps) and energy futures as well as farm commodities. This allows Cargill to manage its own purchases and sales of farm products but also to act as a financial services firm for other investors to speculate on commodity prices. In 2008, excess speculation on the commodity markets helped to drive up food prices and significantly contributed to the food crisis.

One of the greatest sources of power exercised over markets by such conglomerates, which are like octopuses of world trade with tentacles extending in all directions, is vertical integration. Jim Prokopanko, acting as a spokesman for the conglomerate, describes what he calls total control of the food production chain, using as an example the “chicken supply chain.” Cargill produces phosphate-based fertilizer in Tampa, Florida. With this fertilizer, Cargill grows soy in fields in the United States and Argentina. In Cargill factories, the soybeans are transformed into flour. In ships that belong to Cargill, this soy flour is then sent to Thailand, where it is used to fatten chickens on large farms that also belong to Cargill. The chickens are then killed and gutted, in an almost entirely automated process, in factories that belong to Cargill. Cargill packs the chickens. The Cargill fleet then carries them to Japan, the Americas, and Europe. Cargill trucks distribute the chickens to supermarkets, many of which belong to the MacMillan and/or Cargill families, which control 85 percent of the multinational conglomerate’s stock.

On the international market, the oligopolies use all their power to set food prices to their advantage—that is to say, as high as possible. But when it comes to conquering a local market by eliminating local competitors, the merchants of grain willingly practice outright dumping. One example: the total ruin of local poultry production in Cameroon. Massive imports of cheap foreign poultry products threw tens of thousands of poultry-farming and egg-producing families into deep poverty.

As soon as the local producers had been destroyed, the lords of agribusiness raised their prices.

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Private multinational corporations in the food industry often exert a decisive influence on the policies of international organizations, as they do on the policies of virtually all the Western governments. And these corporations act as determined adversaries to the right to food.

They argue as follows: Hunger does in fact constitute a scandalous tragedy. It is due to the insufficient productivity of global agriculture, since the amount of goods available does not meet existing needs. To fight against hunger, we must therefore increase productivity, an objective that can be attained only if two conditions are met: first, the most intensive possible industrialization of food production processes, mobilizing the greatest possible capital investment and the most advanced technology (such as transgenic seed, high-performance pesticides, and so on), and, as a corollary, the elimination of the myriad family and subsistence farms deemed “unproductive”; and second, the most complete possible liberalization of the world market in agricultural goods. Only a totally free market is capable of extracting the maximum from the economic forces of production. That is the credo. Any normative intervention in the free play of the market, whether it be undertaken by states or by intergovernmental organizations, can only inhibit the development of the forces of production.

The policies of the United States and of the intergovernmental organizations that uphold those policies constitute a threat pure and simple to the right to food. I must, however, admit that these policies proceed from neither blindness nor cynicism. In the United States, officials are perfectly well informed about the ravages of hunger in the South. Like all other civilized countries, the United States claims to fight hunger. But, according to the U.S. government, only the free market will be able to overcome this scourge. Once global agricultural productivity reaches its maximum potential through liberalization and privatization, universal access to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food will follow automatically. Like a shower of gold, the market, liberated at long last, will pour out its blessings on humanity.

But the market can also malfunction, the Americans admit.



Catastrophes can always happen—a war, a climatic disturbance. In such a case, international emergency food aid will rescue the afflicted.

Today it is the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank that determine the economic relations that the dominant countries maintain with the peoples of the South. But in matters of agricultural policy, these organizations faithfully obey the diktat of private multinational corporations. This is why the FAO and the WFP, which were originally founded to combat extreme poverty and hunger, no longer play, in comparison to the corporations, anything but a vestigial role.

In order to gauge the abyss that separates the enemies and the supporters of the right to food, consider the positions taken by various countries regarding the UN's Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the obligations that follow from it. The United States has always refused to ratify the covenant. The WTO and the IMF have fought and continue to fight it. The states that are signatories to the covenant undertake three distinct obligations. First, they must "respect" the right to food of the inhabitants of their own territories, which means they must not do anything that would interfere with this right.

Take the example of India. The country's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture to this day: 70 percent of the population lives in rural areas. According to the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report 2010*, India is home, both as a proportion of the total population and in absolute numbers, to more malnourished children than any other country in the world—more than all the countries of sub-Saharan Africa combined. One-third of the children born in India are underweight, which means that their mothers themselves are seriously undernourished. Each year, millions of infants suffer irreparable cognitive impairment as a result of undernutrition, and millions of children under age two die of hunger. As Sharad Pawar, the Indian minister of agriculture, himself admits, some 150,000 poor farmers committed suicide between 1997 and 2005 to escape the stranglehold of debt. In

2010, more than 11,000 deeply indebted small farmers committed suicide—usually by swallowing pesticides—in the northern states of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh alone.

In August 2005, in my capacity as UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, I undertook a mission to Shivpur, in Madhya Pradesh, together with my small team of researchers. Shivpur is the name of both a city and its surrounding district, which includes about a thousand villages, each home to between three hundred and two thousand families. In the Shivpur district, the soil is rich and fertile, the forests splendid. But poverty there is extreme and the degree of inequality particularly shocking. Tucked into the valley of the Ganges, Shivpur was, until Indian independence, the summer residence of the maharajas of Gwalior. Of the former splendor of the Shinde royal dynasty there remain today a sumptuous palace in red brick, a polo field, and above all a wildlife park encompassing some 900 square kilometers (about 350 square miles), where peacocks and deer run free. There you can also see a colony of crocodiles living in an artificial lake and caged tigers.

However, the district today remains dominated by a caste of exceptionally voracious great landowners. The district controller, introduced to me as Mrs. Gheeta, age thirty-four, is originally from Kerala; she wears a yellow sari with a narrow red border. I sense immediately that this woman has nothing to do with the bureaucrats we met the day before in Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh. She is surrounded by department heads, all men with impressive mustaches. Hanging on the wall behind her desk I notice a copy of the famous photograph of Mahatma Gandhi at prayer taken two days before his assassination on January 28, 1948, with, below, these words:

His legacy is courage,  
His lesson truth,  
His weapon love.

The district controller responds to our questions with extreme discretion, as though she does not trust her mustachioed subordinates. As always, our schedule is tight. We are soon to take some time off.

But first, over the next three days, we will visit the villages and the countryside of the district. We are already expected in Gwalior. And we are already in bed when, late that evening, the hotel receptionist awakens me. A visitor is waiting for me downstairs. It is the district controller of Shivpur. I wake up my colleagues Christophe Golay and Sally-Anne Way. Mrs. Gheeta regales us with a veritable history of her district, ending only at daybreak.

The federal government in New Delhi had demanded that she enforce the new law on agrarian reform and distribute to agricultural day laborers the unused arable land left uncultivated by the great landowners. But as soon as a dalit—one of the so-called untouchables, the poorest of the poor, a member of the most despised castes in India—tries to take possession of his little plot (1 hectare, or about 2.5 acres, per family), he is soon chased off by the great landowners' thugs. The dalit farmers have even been murdered; their killers do not hesitate to eliminate entire families, burn down their huts, and poison their wells. Unsurprisingly, the inquiries opened by the district controller vanish into bureaucratic quicksand. Many of the great landowners maintain useful relationships with the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh in Bhopal, or with the federal ministers in New Delhi. The district controller was close to tears.

In the Indian context, the fight for the legal implementation of the human right to food is of the utmost importance. India inscribed in its constitution the right to life. In its rulings, the Supreme Court of India has asserted that the right to life includes the right to food. Over the course of the last ten years, many rulings have confirmed this interpretation of the law.

Following five years of drought, famine struck the semi-arid state of Rajasthan in 2001. The Food Corporation of India (FCI), a state-owned enterprise that is active throughout entire country, was put in charge of distributing emergency food aid. To this end, the FCI had stockpiled tens of thousands of sacks of wheat in Rajasthani warehouses. But in Rajasthan, as is well known, the representatives of the FCI are especially corrupt. Thus, in order to allow local merchants to sell their wheat at the highest possible price, in 2001 the directors of the FCI refused to distribute their

stockpiled grain. The Supreme Court then intervened, ordering the immediate release of the state-owned supplies and the distribution of wheat to starving families. The court's reasoning in support of its verdict is compelling:

The anxiety of the Court is to see that the poor and the destitute and the weaker sections of the society do not suffer from hunger and starvation. The prevention of the same is one of the prime responsibilities of the Government—whether Central or the State. How this is to be ensured would be a matter of policy which is best left to the Government. All that the Court has to be satisfied and which it may have to ensure is that the food grains which are overflowing in the storage receptacles, especially of FCI godowns [warehouses], and which are in abundance, should not be wasted by dumping into the sea or [being] eaten by the rats. Mere schemes without any implementation are of no use. What is important is that the food must reach the hungry.

Orissa is one of the most corrupt states in India. In the 1970s, the Orissa state government expropriated thousands of hectares of arable land in order to increase the hydroelectric capacity of the Mahanadi River by constructing a series of dams and retention basins. The police accordingly drove thousands of farming families off their land without any compensation whatsoever. The Right to Food Campaign, an Indian NGO, with the support of exceptional lawyers and the leaders of the farmers' unions, filed a complaint with the Supreme Court in New Delhi. The judges ruled against the state of Orissa, requiring that it grant the farmers whose land had been seized "adequate compensation." The court defined what it meant by "adequate compensation" thus: since the rupee had undergone severe inflation in the interim, compensation could not be monetary. The state of Orissa would have to compensate the farmers by providing them with arable land equivalent to their expropriated land in surface area, fertility, soil composition, and access to markets.

As in this case, the Supreme Court of India generally issues

extremely detailed verdicts, specifying the exact measures that a state must take to redress such violations of the right to food of which their citizens have been victims. In order to monitor the enforcement of such measures, the court relies on commissioners, specialized officials who are neither judges nor court clerks, but who are bound by oath to uphold the court's rulings. Sometimes these commissioners must work for years to oversee the implementation of programs of reparations and compensation incumbent upon a given Indian state.

It is important to remember that one-third of all the seriously and permanently undernourished people in the world live in India. Farmers whose land is expropriated—for the most part illiterate and the poorest of the poor—obviously have neither enough money nor sufficient familiarity with the justice system to organize themselves to appear before the courts as plaintiffs or to pursue complicated cases against powerful multinational corporations that may last for years, even if they are assisted by state-appointed lawyers. For this reason, the Supreme Court of India allows class action lawsuits. Farmers who are plaintiffs in such suits join together with, for example, civil society organizations, religious communities, and unions that are not themselves plaintiffs in the case. These organizations bring the money, experience, and political muscle needed to embark upon such court battles.

Another legal weapon, unique to the Indian judicial system, allows such organizations to act in this way: public interest litigation. Under this concept, in Indian law, "Any person . . . has the right to appear before a competent court when he maintains that a fundamental right recognized by the constitution has been violated or is threatened with violation. The court may then remedy the situation."

In India, since the right to food is recognized constitutionally, anyone—even people not themselves directly injured—may file a complaint alleging a violation of this right. The legitimacy of such complaints is recognized as inhering in their being in the public interest. In short, every Indian citizen has an interest in ensuring that all human rights, including the right to food, are always and everywhere respected by every level of government. Being based on this concept of the public interest, such complaints are of

enormous practical importance. In such states as Bihar, Orissa, or Madhya Pradesh, members of the upper castes have a monopoly on power, controlling practically all administrative and judicial functions. Many are corrupt to the marrow. Toward the dalits and the indigenous forest-dwelling peoples, the upper castes express limitless contempt. Government ministers, police officers, and local judges terrorize farmers whose land has been confiscated.

Colin Gonsalves, founding executive director of the Human Rights Law Network, one of the principal directors of the Indian Right to Food Campaign, and an advocate who appears before the Indian supreme court, has recounted the extreme difficulty advocates face, under such conditions, in persuading the heads of families who have been illegally deprived of their huts, their wells, and their plots of land to file a complaint and appear before a local judge. The farmers tremble in fear of the Brahmins. Nonetheless, public interest litigation does make it possible to take an Indian state to court if it confiscates farmers' lands without their consent. It is in the state of Madhya Pradesh that the Supreme Court is most active.

In India, some eleven thousand farming families were evicted from their land in 2000 by local governments to make way for hydroelectric dams or the development of mines. In Hazaribagh, in Jharkhand state, thousands of families have had their land expropriated by the state and turned over to coal mining. The construction of the gigantic Sardar Sarovar dam on the Narmada River in Gujarat has deprived thousands of families of their means of subsistence. Their complaints for redress and compensation in kind are currently before the courts.

Recalling the countryside of Madhya Pradesh reminds me of unforgettable images of skeletal children with enormous eyes, "astounded to suffer so much," as Edmond Kaiser (the founder, in 1960, of *Terre des Hommes*) used to say, with bitter irony. For the people of Madhya Pradesh (one of the most impoverished states of India), so hospitable, so warm, the daily quest for a handful of rice, an onion, a piece of bread requires all their energy.

The second obligation imposed on signatory states by the UN's

Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is this: the state itself must not only “respect” the right to food of its inhabitants but must also “protect” this right against violations inflicted by third parties. If a third party infringes upon the right to food, the state must intervene to protect its inhabitants and to reestablish the violated right.

Consider the example of South Africa. There, the right to food, inscribed in the constitution, enjoys extended protection. In South Africa there is a national Human Rights Commission, comprising equally representatives of the government and civil society organizations (unions, churches, women’s movements, and so on). This commission may seek redress from the Constitutional Court in Pretoria and from the South African regional high courts for any law enacted by Parliament, any governmental regulation, any decision taken by a government official, or any action undertaken by a private enterprise that violates the right to food of any group of citizens. South African jurisprudence is in this regard exemplary.

The right to drinking water is also encompassed within the right to food. A few years ago, when the city of Johannesburg engaged a multinational corporation to provide its drinking water, the company massively raised the rates for water, to exploitative levels. Many inhabitants of the city’s poor neighborhoods, unable to pay such exorbitant rates, had their supply of running water cut off. Since the company also required prepayment for water usage in excess of 25 liters (6.6 gallons), many families of modest means were reduced to fetching their water from drains, gutters, ditches, polluted streams, and ponds. Supported by the Human Rights Commission, five inhabitants of the township of Phiri, in Soweto, took their case to the high court.

And they won. The city of Johannesburg was required to reestablish its former system of providing water at low prices as a public service.

Article 11 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stipulates a third obligation of every signatory state: when famine strikes, if the government concerned is not capable of com-

bating the disaster with the means at its disposal, it must appeal for international aid. If it does not do so, or does so only after a deliberate delay, the country violates its inhabitants’ right to food.

In 2006, a terrible famine, caused by both locusts and drought, struck south and central Niger. Many grain merchants flatly refused to put their stockpiled grain on the market. They waited for the shortages to worsen and for prices to rise. In July 2005, I thus found myself on a mission to Niger, and in the office of the country’s president, Mamadou Tandja. He denied the evidence. Apparently he was in collusion with the speculating merchants.

It took CNN, Doctors Without Borders, and the NGO Action Against Hunger arousing worldwide public outrage, and a personal three-day visit from Kofi Annan to Niger’s Maradi and Zinder regions, to force Niger’s government to finally make a formal appeal for aid to the World Food Programme. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of men, women, and children were already dead by the time the first truckloads of international aid—sacks of rice and flour and containers of water—arrived in Niamey.

Tandja, apparently, was at no point concerned, since the survivors of the famine had no means to accuse him in court.

For the WTO, the U.S. government (as well as the Australian, British, and Canadian governments, among others), the IMF, and the World Bank, all these normative interventions provided for in the despised covenant are anathema. In the eyes of the supporters of the “consensus of Washington,” they constitute an intolerable attack on the free market.

Those who are called in the South the *corbeaux noirs du FMI* (the “black ravens of the IMF”; or in English, the “IMF vultures”) consider the arguments advanced by supporters of the right to food to be pure ideology, doctrinaire blindness, or, worse, communist dogma.

There is a cartoon by the French cartoonist Plantu that shows an African child dressed in rags standing behind a hugely fat white man wearing glasses and a tie and seated before a sumptuous meal. The child says, “I’m hungry.” The fat white man turns to him and replies, “Stop talking politics!”

## THE HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

The three horsemen of the apocalypse of organized hunger are the WTO, the IMF, and, to a lesser extent, the World Bank.

The World Bank was directed until recently by Robert Zoellnick, George W. Bush's former chief trade negotiator; the IMF is currently directed by Christine Lagarde and the WTO by Pascal Lamy. These three have in common exceptional expertise, intellectual brilliance, and an impenetrable faith in neoliberalism. One curious detail: Lamy is a member of the Parti Socialist Français. All three directors are top-flight technocrats and ruthless, remorseless realists. Together, all three exercised exceptional power over the economies of the most fragile countries on the planet, and Lagarde and Lamy continue to do so. Contrary to the recommendations of the UN Charter, which assigned this task to the Economic and Social Council, it is the directors of these three agencies who determine the policies of the UN.

The IMF and the World Bank were founded in 1944 in the tiny resort town of Bretton Woods, New Hampshire. Both are integral parts of the UN system. The WTO, on the other hand, is a totally autonomous organization, independent of the UN, although it comprises representatives of 157 countries (as of August 24, 2012) and functions by negotiated consensus. The WTO was founded in 1995 as the successor to the General Agreement on

Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which had been established by the industrial nations in the aftermath of World War II to harmonize and gradually lower customs tariffs.

René Dumont's successor as a leading theorist of world agriculture, Marcel Mazoyer, is professor emeritus of comparative agriculture and agricultural development at the Institut National Agronomique de Paris-Grignon (the French National Agricultural Institute, popularly known as Agro-Paris-Tech). In 2009, before an audience of UN-accredited ambassadors in Geneva, he subjected the WTO's policies to a merciless critique: "The liberalization of agricultural exchanges, by reinforcing competition among extremely unequal forms of agriculture, as well as price instability, can only aggravate the food crisis, the economic crisis, and the financial crisis."

What is the goal that the WTO pursues when it fights in favor of the total liberalization of trade, patents, capital, and financial services? Rubens Ricupero, the former secretary general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) from 1995 to 2004 and former finance minister of Brazil, gives a straightforward answer to that question: "The unilateral disarmament of the countries of the South."

The IMF and the WTO have always been the most determined enemies of economic, social, and cultural rights, and particularly of the right to food. The 2,000 IMF bureaucrats and the 750 more at the WTO regard with horror any normative intervention in the free play of the market, as I have said. The organizations' policies have not fundamentally changed since their founding, even if Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the IMF's director from 2007 until his resignation in 2011, did allow a larger role for emerging nations in the IMF's governance, and even if he did make an effort to develop a more favorable lending policy for poor countries—which are regardless sooner or later always reduced to bankruptcy.

A simple image enables us to grasp the justice of Mazoyer's and Ricupero's views. Imagine that Mike Tyson, former world heavyweight boxing champion, were to confront in the ring an undernourished, unemployed Bengali worker. What would the ayatollahs of neoliberal dogma say? That a fair fight is ensured,

because both fighters have to wear the same kind of boxing gloves, fight the same number of rounds in the same space, and abide by the same rules. So, may the best man win! The impartial judge is the market. The absurdity of neoliberal dogma stares you right in the face.

During my two terms as UN Special Rapporteur on Right to Food, I got to know four successive American ambassadors to the UN's agencies in Geneva. All four, without exception, fought vigorously against my reports and all my recommendations. Twice they demanded (unsuccessfully) that Kofi Annan fire me, and, of course, they voted against the renewal of my appointment.

Two of these ambassadors—and one in particular, a nabob of the pharmaceutical industry from Arizona, a special envoy of George W. Bush's—expressed their personal hatred toward me. Another contented himself with strictly applying State Department directives: the refusal to recognize the existence of economic, social, and cultural rights and to recognize only civil and political rights.

With one of the four I did develop a friendly relationship. George Moose was President Bill Clinton's ambassador, a cultivated African American man with a subtle mind, who was accompanied by his wife, Judith, an obviously left-leaning intellectual, warm and funny, who also worked in the State Department. Before his appointment to Geneva, George Moose had held the post of assistant secretary of state for African affairs. It was he who, in 1996, had chosen Laurent Kabila—then an obscure guerilla fighter and gold trafficker hiding out in the mountains of Maniema—as leader of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL), now the Democratic Republic of Congo. With his passion for history, Moose knew that Kabila was the only surviving leader of the pro-Lumumba rebellion against Mobutu Sese Seko in 1964 who had never sworn allegiance to Mobutu and who retained intact his credibility with the youth of Congo. Events would bear out the wisdom of Moose's choice.

But our shared passion for Africa was not enough. Throughout his tenure in Geneva, Moose, like the other ambassadors, fought against every one of my recommendations and initiatives, every one of my reports on the right to food. I was never able to pierce the armor of his genuine convictions in this regard.

For more than two decades, privatization and the liberalization of trade, financial services, capital flow, and patents have proceeded at a stupefying pace. As a result, the poor countries of the South have found themselves largely stripped of the prerogatives of sovereignty. Borders have disappeared, and the public sector—even hospitals and schools—has been privatized. And all over the world, the number of victims of undernutrition and hunger grows.

One study by Oxfam that has become famous showed that in every country where the IMF has instituted a program of “structural adjustment” in the decade from 1990 to 2000, millions more human beings have been thrown into the abyss of hunger. The reason is simple: the IMF is, precisely, in charge of the management of the external debt of 122 countries of the so-called Third World, which, as of December 31, 2010, totaled \$2.1 trillion. In order to make the interest and capital payments on its debts held by creditor banks or the IMF itself, a debtor country needs foreign currency. The big creditor banks obviously refuse to be repaid in Haitian gourdes, Bolivian bolivianos, or Mongolian tugriks. How can a poor country in South Asia, South America, or sub-Saharan Africa acquire the necessary foreign currency? By exporting manufactured goods or raw materials that will be paid for in foreign currency. Of the fifty-three countries in Africa, thirty-seven have almost entirely agricultural economies.

The IMF periodically grants overindebted countries a temporary moratorium on their debt repayments or a refinancing of their debt—on the condition that the overindebted country submit to a program of so-called structural adjustment. All these plans require the reduction of expenditures on health and education in the budgets of the country involved, and the elimination of subsidies for staple foods and aid to families in need. Public

services are the first victims of structural adjustment: thousands of public service employees, including nurses and teachers, have thus lost their jobs in countries all over the world.

In Niger, as I have said, the IMF demanded the privatization of the National Veterinary Office. Ever since, Niger's stockbreeders have had to pay exorbitant prices set by multinational corporations for the vaccines, vitamin supplements, and antiparasitic medications they need for their livestock. The consequence? Tens of thousands of families have lost their herds. Today these people waste away in the shantytowns of the big coastal cities of West Africa: Cotonou, Dakar, Lomé, Abidjan.

Wherever the IMF holds sway, the fields of manioc, rice, or millet shrink. Subsistence agriculture dies. The IMF requires the expansion of the crops of colonial agriculture, whose products—cotton, peanuts, coffee, tea, cocoa—can be exported and sold on the world market to bring in foreign exchange, which will in turn go to service the national debt.

The second task of the IMF is to open up markets in the countries of the South to private global food corporations. This is why, in the southern hemisphere, free trade wears the hideous mask of famine and death. Consider the following examples.

Haiti is today the poorest country in Latin America and the third-poorest country in the world. In Haiti, rice is the staple food. In the early 1980s, Haiti was self-sufficient in rice. Working terraced fields and the wet lowlands, Haitian farmers were protected from foreign dumping by an invisible wall: a tariff of 30 percent on imported rice. But over the course of the 1980s, Haiti was subjected to two programs of structural adjustment. Under orders from the IMF, the protective tariff was reduced from 30 to 3 percent. American rice, which is heavily subsidized by the U.S. government, flooded into Haitian towns and villages, destroying the country's rice production and, as a consequence, the way of life of tens of thousands of rice farmers. Between 1985 and 2004, Haitian imports of foreign rice, mainly American and heavily government-subsidized, increased from 15,000 tons to 350,000

tons annually. At the same time, local rice production collapsed, declining from 124,000 tons to 73,000 tons.

Since 2000, the Haitian government has had to spend more than 80 percent of its meager revenues to pay for imported food. And the destruction of rice farming has caused a massive exodus from the countryside. The overcrowding of Port-au-Prince and the country's other big cities has led to the disintegration of public services. In short, Haitian society has been totally turned upside down, weakened, made more vulnerable than ever before by the effects of the IMF's neoliberal policies. And Haiti has been reduced to a beggar state, subject to foreign laws. Coups d'état and social crises have followed inevitably, one after another, throughout the last twenty years.

Normally, the 9 million people of Haiti consume 320,000 tons of rice per year. When world prices for rice tripled in 2008, the Haitian government was unable to import enough food. In Cité Soleil, between the hill that dominates Port-au-Prince and the Caribbean—one of the largest shantytowns in Latin America—hunger began to prowl the streets.

Since the 1990s, Zambia has endured a whole series of structural adjustment programs. The social and nutritional consequences for the population have been, obviously, catastrophic.

Zambia is a magnificent country, where the Zambezi River flows gently and the farmers' sloping fields grow lush and green thanks to the mild climate. The staple food of Zambia's people is corn. At the beginning of the 1980s, the price of Zambian corn was 70 percent subsidized by the state for consumers; producers were also subsidized. Sales of corn on the domestic market and exports to Europe (in years of surplus) were regulated by the state's marketing board. Together, subsidies to consumers and producers absorbed slightly more than 20 percent of the federal budget. Everyone had enough to eat.

The IMF imposed first the reduction and then the abolition of the subsidies. It also forced the state to eliminate subsidies for the purchase of fertilizer, seed, and pesticides. Schools and hospitals,

which had previously been free, began to charge fees. With what consequences? In the countryside and in poor urban neighborhoods, families were reduced to eating no more than one meal per day. Subsistence agriculture began to decline and then collapse as farmers were deprived of fertilizer and improved seed. In order to survive, they sold their draft animals, which led to further declines in productivity. Many were forced to leave their land and sell their labor as agricultural day laborers on the big cotton plantations owned by foreign corporations. Between 1990 and 1997, the consumption of corn fell by 25 percent. The result: the rate of child mortality exploded. By 2010, 86 percent of the Zambian population lived below the national poverty line. In the same year, 72.6 percent of the population lived on less than \$1 a day; 45 percent of Zambians were seriously and permanently malnourished. Forty-two percent of children under five years old were 24 percent below the normal weight for their age as defined by UNICEF.

The American mentality dominates in the glass-clad building at 700 19th Street NW in Washington, D.C., the headquarters of the IMF. The Fund's annual reports reveal a delightful candor. A report for 1998, for example, admits of one program of structural adjustment that while in the long term the program will improve access to resources and increase the population's income, in the short term it is reducing the consumption of food.

At the level of the Zambian state itself, the program of structural adjustment has had disastrous consequences. The tariffs protecting national industries were abolished, and most of the public sector was privatized. The revision of the Employment Act and the Land Act badly damaged the social safety net, union rights, and the right to a guaranteed minimum salary. There followed mass evictions of people from their homes, mass unemployment, and a drastic rise in the price of staple foods.

The IMF bureaucrats do have a sense of humor. In the conclusion to their report, they applaud the fact that disparity of living conditions between Zambia's urban and rural populations was considerably reduced between 1991 and 1997. Why? Because the

level of urban poverty increased so dramatically that it equaled the level of poverty in the countryside.

Aside from Ethiopia and Liberia, Ghana was the first country in Africa to have achieved its independence. After repeated general strikes, mass uprisings, and ferocious repression by the British colonial regime, the Republic of Ghana, the successor to the mythic kingdom of the Kaya Maga or Kanne Mahan (a name that, in the language of the Soninke people, the founders of the ancient kingdom of Ghana, means "king of gold"), was born in 1957. Its flag depicts a black star on a white ground. Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, the prophet of pan-African unification, was one of the founders, together with Gamal Abdel Nasser, Modibo Keita, and Ahmed Ben Bella, of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa in 1960.

Ghanaians of all the country's fifty-two ethnic groups are fiercely proud people, viscerally devoted to their national sovereignty. Nonetheless, they too had to bow before the IMF and the multinational food corporations. Ghana has suffered a fate similar in every detail to Zambia's.

In 1970, some 800,000 local farmers supplied all the rice consumed in Ghana. In 1980, the IMF struck for the first time: the protective tariff on rice was reduced to 20 percent, then lowered further still. The IMF then demanded that the state eliminate all subsidies to farmers for the purchase of pesticides, mineral fertilizers, and seed. Today, Ghana imports more than 70 percent of the rice consumed in the country. Ghana's Marketing Board, the national office that supported the commercialization of agricultural products, was abolished. Private companies have since taken over agricultural exports.

Ghana is a lively democracy whose parliamentary representatives are animated by a strong sense of national pride. In order to revive national rice production, the parliament in Accra decided in 2003 to introduce a 35 percent tariff on imported rice. The IMF reacted forcefully and required the government to revoke the law.

In 2010, Ghana spent more than \$400 million on food imports.



In the same year, Africa as a whole spent \$24 billion to finance its importation of food. As I write, in 2011, speculation on agricultural commodities exchanges has caused a worldwide explosion of the prices of staple foods. In all likelihood, Africa will not be able this year to import enough food.

Everywhere and always, the violence of the free market and the arbitrariness of its operations, free from all normative constraint, from any kind of social control, kills—through poverty and through hunger.

## 15

### WHEN FREE TRADE KILLS

In December 2005, during a WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong that aimed to relaunch the negotiation process begun in Doha in 2001, and which has been stalled ever since, the WTO attacked free food aid. The WTO declared that it was unacceptable that the WFP and other organizations distribute—in refugee camps, villages ravaged by locusts, hospitals where undernourished children lie dying—rice, precooked cereal-and-pulse blends, high-energy biscuits, or milk for free, taking advantage of the surplus agricultural products provided to the WFP by donor nations. According to the WTO, this practice corrupts the market. Any commercial transfer of a good must have a price. The WTO therefore demanded that in-kind aid provided to the WFP by donor nations be henceforward taxed at its fair value. In short, the WFP must no longer accept in-kind donations originating as surplus agricultural production in donor nations, and must no longer distribute anything except food purchased on the open market.

Thanks in particular to Daly Belgasmi, former director of the Geneva office of the WFP (and currently WFP regional director for the Middle East, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe), and to Jean-Jacques Graisse, the WFP's senior deputy executive director and chief of operations, the WFP reacted forcefully in a memorandum:

A woman widowed by AIDS in Zambia with six small children is not concerned to know whether the food aid she receives comes from an in-kind donation to the WFP or from a monetary contribution by the same donor. All that she wants is for her children to live and not to have to beg for food. . . . WHO tells us that, on our Earth, undernutrition and hunger constitute the most important risks to human health. Every year, hunger kills more human beings than AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and all other epidemic diseases combined. . . . The WTO is a club of the rich. . . .

The debate that the WTO is initiating is not a debate about hunger, but a debate about commercial advantages. . . . Is it tolerable to reduce food aid for starving mothers and children who play no role in the world market in the name of economic liberalism?

The memorandum concluded: "We want world trade to be endowed with a conscience."

In Hong Kong, the countries of the southern hemisphere stood up to the powerful interests that dominate the WTO. The proposition to tax food aid was rejected. Pascal Lamy, the WTO director general, and his associates were soundly defeated.

The WTO soon suffered another defeat, this time at the hands of India. The jurisprudence of the Supreme Court of India is beyond the reach of the WTO. India, to be sure, is a member of the WTO, but the organization's statutes impose obligations only upon the executive power of its member states, not on their judiciaries. India is a large and vibrant democracy; its system of government relies upon the separation of powers.

However, India's Public Distribution System (PDS) exercises executive power. What does this mean? In 1943, a terrible famine left more than 3 million dead in Bengal. The English colonial government had emptied the granaries, requisitioning the harvests and sending the confiscated food to the British forces fighting the Japanese in Burma and on the other Asian fronts. After the Bengal famine, Mahatma Gandhi made the fight against hun-

ger an absolute priority of his struggle. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, continued the fight. Today, if even one person dies of hunger in any of the country's six thousand districts, the district controller is immediately dismissed.

This reminds me of a night in August 2005 in Bhubaneswar, the magnificent capital city of the state of Orissa, on the coast of the Gulf of Bengal. Each of my missions included as a top priority meetings with representatives of social movements, religious communities, unions, and women's movements. In Bhubaneswar, Pravesh Sharma, on behalf of the Indian branch of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, which has its headquarters in Rome, was in charge of organizing these meetings. More than 40 percent of Indian farmers are landless peasants, tenant farmers, and migrant workers who travel from harvest to harvest. IFAD works above all with tenant farmers, who live in abysmal poverty. Sharma introduced us to two women in faded brown saris, sad-faced but determined; each had lost a child to hunger. My colleagues and I listened at length, taking notes and asking questions. The meeting took place out in the suburbs, far from our hotel and from the local UN offices.

Three days later, in the departure lounge at the Bhubaneswar airport, a police officer approached me. A delegation, dispatched by the chief minister of Orissa, was waiting for me in a meeting room. The group was led by P. K. Mohapatra, the senior regional manager of the Food Corporation of India in Bhubaneswar. For three hours, the five men and three women of the delegation tried to persuade me, with the help of medical certificates and other documents, that the two children I had heard about three days before had died not from hunger but from an infection. Evidently there was a great deal at stake for some of these officials—their jobs were on the line.

The FCI administers the Public Distribution System, maintaining immense warehouses in each Indian state, buying wheat in Punjab and stockpiling it in every corner of the country. Across the land, the FCI oversees more than half a million storehouses. Local assemblies in villages and urban neighborhoods draw up

lists of recipients of food aid. Every family that receives aid gets a card confirming their eligibility. There are three categories of recipients of PDS food aid: those Above the Poverty Line (APL); those Below the Poverty Line (BPL); and those who qualify for the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) scheme, which seeks to assist the poorest of the poor. For each of these three categories, there are specific set prices for each kind of food available. A family of six has the right to 35 kilograms of wheat and 30 kilograms of rice per month. In 2005, for a BPL family, the prices were as follows: 5 rupees for a kilogram of onions, 7 rupees for a kilogram of potatoes, and 10 rupees for a kilogram of cereal (rice, wheat, corn). (In 2005, the rupee traded at between 2.2 and 2.3 cents to the U.S. dollar.) It is important to understand that the minimum wage in India for urban workers in 2005 was 58 rupees per day.

It is true that 20 percent of PDS stocks of food are regularly sold illegally on the open market. Some ministers and officials make fortunes by misappropriating stockpiled food supplies in this way. Corruption is endemic. Nonetheless, hundreds of millions of extremely poor people benefit from the PDS. Since the "farmers' prices" in the FCI food ration shops are a small fraction of market prices (varying somewhat, as noted above, according to the category of the recipients), large-scale famine has been eradicated in India.

Moreover, the PDS system improves children's lives. There are in fact more than 900,000 specialized facilities for child nutrition in India, the Integrated Child Development Centers (ICDs). According to UNICEF, more than 40 million of the 160 million children in India under age five are seriously and permanently undernourished. For some of them, the ICDs provide therapeutic feeding, vaccines, and sanitary care. The ICDs are supplied by the FCI. In the fight against the scourge of hunger, the PDS thus plays a crucial role. If the WTO undertook to eliminate the PDS, it is because the system's very existence and its manner of functioning are in effect contrary to the statutes of the WTO.

Hardeep Singh Puri, the current permanent representative of India to the United Nations, who is a Sikh and a man of inexhaustible energy, has fought very hard against the WTO's attempt

to abolish the PDS. In New Delhi he has relied on two allies as determined as he is: his brother, Manjeev Singh Puri, who was from 2005 to 2009 the joint secretary (United Nations—Economic and Social) in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, and who is now India's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations; and Sharad Pawar, the minister of agriculture. Together, these three men have saved the PDS and outwitted the WTO.

## 16

## SAVONAROLA ON LAKE GENEVA

Pascal Lamy, the director general of the WTO, is the Savonarola of free trade. The man's willpower and analytical intelligence are impressive. His current position and his previous career give him influence and prestige enjoyed by few other directors of international organizations today: as I have noted, the WTO currently has 157 member states, and its headquarters on Rue de Lausanne in Geneva employs 750 officials.

Lamy is an austere man, even ascetic; he runs marathons. According to Lamy himself, he travels nearly 450,000 kilometers (300,000 miles) each year by plane, apparently immune to the havoc wrecked on the human body by jet lag—not to mention the interminable nighttime meetings that are customary at the WTO.

Lamy is not given to soul-searching. To one interviewer, he declared, "I am neither an optimist nor a pessimist. I'm an activist." Lamy is a man of power; power relations alone interest him. When the same interviewer remarked, "Like the IMF, you are publicly accused by some of driving the poorest citizens of the poor countries deeper into poverty," the director of the WTO replied, "An agreement always reflects the power relations in force at the moment when it is signed."

A former European commissioner for trade, Lamy has shaped

the WTO since its earliest days. One of his books, *L'Europe en première ligne*, gives an account of his indefatigable war against all forms of normative (rights-based) or social control of markets.

Member nations' ambassadors and delegates to the WTO, as well as Lamy's colleagues, are obviously fascinated by him. And like Savonarola in fifteenth-century Florence, nothing escapes Lamy. He is constantly on alert, pitilessly hunting down deviants from free-trade dogma. His informants are everywhere.

I myself once experienced this. Every September, an extraordinary man named Jean-François Noblet hosts a Festival of Life in the little town of Albenc, in the mountains of the Dauphiné, a few dozen miles from Grenoble, bringing together representatives of the region's social movements, unions, and religious communities. I was invited to speak there in 2009. In my address, I criticized, in measured fashion, the WTO's policies regarding trade in food. A full moon shone in the sky. The big tent was full of people. The impassioned discussion that ensued continued past midnight.

But one of Lamy's men (or women) was in the audience. On September 29, 2009, I received the following letter from him:

Dear Jean,

To my consternation, I have been made aware, once again, of remarks that you have made, this time during a conference in Albenc, casting me in a defamatory light: my actions are, according to you, "totally contrary to the interests of the victims of famine." On the contrary! The WTO is eager to conclude the Doha Round . . . which will be equivalent to killing more people . . . ? [ . . ]

Obviously absurd! The members of the WTO have been negotiating for eight years the mandate that they have given themselves, at the request of the developing countries, to open up agricultural markets further, and above all those of the developed countries, to which they [the developing countries] want to be able to have access. [ . . ]

The simplest thing, to give you some idea of the reality of the situation, would be for you to ask the representatives

of these countries what they think. This is, by the way, what your successor, Olivier De Schutter, did, in the course of a discussion during a WTO Agriculture Committee meeting, whose outcome left little doubt about the position of the countries in question. [ . . . ]

With the hope that this reminder of a few political realities will prevent you in future from making such false accusations, my dear Jean, I remain,

Yours, etc.

Obviously I didn't need anyone to suggest that I "consult" representatives of the governments of the South. In fulfilling my duties, I met with them daily. Some are my friends. But Lamy is right on one point: few among them openly oppose the WTO's policies regarding agricultural trade. The reason is obvious: many governments in the southern hemisphere depend for their very survival on development aid, capital investments, and infrastructure credits from the Western countries. Without regular remittances from the European Development Fund (EDF), for example, many governments in sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and Central America would be unable to pay the salaries of their government ministers, their bureaucrats, and their soldiers year-round. The WTO is a club of the rich and dominant nations. This fact inspires prudence.

Lamy mentions the opening of markets in the industrialized countries to the products of Southern farmers. In this he sees proof of the willingness of the WTO to come to the aid of Third World farmers. But this "proof" is unconvincing.

During the WTO Ministerial Conference in Cancún in 2003, an international accord on agriculture was supposed to be formalized that would, among other things, open agricultural markets in the South to the multinational food industry corporations of the North in return for providing access to the markets in the North to certain products from the South. In Cancún, the Brazilian ambassador, Luiz Felipe de Seixas Corrêa, organized resistance to the accord. The countries of the South refused to open their markets to global private corporations and foreign sovereign wealth

funds (state-owned investment funds). Cancún was a complete fiasco. And to this day, the international accord on agriculture—the centerpiece of the Doha Round—has not been signed. For everyone in the South knows that the prospect Lamy holds out of opening Northern agricultural markets to Southern products is just an illusion. (One reservation, however: for the fifty least developed countries, certain products are permitted exceptional access to Northern markets.)

In the philippic that he sent me, Lamy talks about the elimination of export subsidies that rich countries pay their farmers. The WTO's 2005 Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration states: "We agree to ensure the parallel elimination of all forms of export subsidies and disciplines on all export measures with equivalent effect to be completed by the end of 2013. This will be achieved in a progressive and parallel manner."

The problem is that negotiations leading to the elimination of export subsidies have never proceeded beyond the stage of declarations of intention. Negotiations with a view to an international accord on agriculture are at a standstill. And the rich countries continue to subsidize their farmers massively. In any African market, in Dakar, Ouagadougou, Niamey, or Bamako, a housewife can buy vegetables, fruits, or chickens from France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Greece . . . at one-half or one-third the price of equivalent African products. A few miles away, Wolof, Bambara, or Mossi farmers, their wives, and their children exhaust themselves working twelve hours a day under the blazing sun without the least chance of ensuring for themselves the bare subsistence minimum.

As for Olivier De Schutter, my outstanding successor, Lamy has no doubt not read the report he wrote following his mission to the WTO. This report principally discusses the international accord on agriculture that the WTO has failed to conclude since the setback at the Cancún conference in 2003. In it, De Schutter severely criticizes the WTO's policies, writing:

The report argues that, if trade is to work for development and to contribute to the realization of the right to food, it

needs to recognize the specificity of agricultural products, rather than to treat them as any other commodities; and to allow more flexibilities to developing countries, particularly in order to shield their agricultural producers from the competition from industrialized countries' farmers.

Virtually all NGOs and farmers' unions, as well as the governments of many countries in the South, have demanded that the accord on trade in agricultural goods be excluded from WTO oversight and removed from the Doha Round. Food, they say, should be considered as a public good. De Schutter has come round to this view.

Rereading Lamy's letter, I think of the man of exceptional gifts, but proud, whom Ecclesiastes addresses: "The lord will smite you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind."

## PART IV

### THE COLLAPSE OF THE WFP AND THE FAO'S IMPOTENCE

The Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme are the great and beautiful legacy of John D. Rockefeller. They were born at a time when Rockefeller, out of his own deepening understanding of the world, was the driving force behind the creation of the FAO in 1945 and the WFP in 1961. Today, they are the mainstays of the world.

The WFP arose from a vision of the world after the 1940s. Its world headquarters is located in a rather plain suburb of Rome, adjacent to a university, some vacant lots, and a Catholic church. Nonetheless, the WFP is the most powerful humanitarian organization in the world, a part of the most effective. The WFP's mission is to provide emergency humanitarian aid. In 2010, the list of recipients of WFP aid included nearly 100 million hungry men, women and children. The WFP currently employs slightly more than 100,000 people, 93 percent of whom work in the field with the victims of hunger.

Within the UN system, the WFP enjoys great independence. It is directed by an administrator named emergency relief coordinator of the UN member states. One member state, the United States, provides about 60 percent of the contributions to the WFP. Over the decades, American contributions have been above all in kind, the United States has donated its enormous