

The Food Crisis and Latin America

A real crisis or a conspiracy?

By [Eduardo Dimas](#)

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***'Control the oil and you'll control the nations; control the food and you'll control the people.'* — Henry Kissinger (1970)**

I've known that phrase from Kissinger for a good many years. I confess that until now I had not given it much importance. It is an absolute truth, almost an axiom, that could become a terrible reality.

The alimentary crisis is real. The price of foodstuffs climbs and climbs. The reserves drop. The same happens with oil, which places many nations and peoples who do not produce food or oil in a desperate situation. Is this the result of a set of random events that coincide in time, or is it the effect of a plan for world domination?

If we guide ourselves by Kissinger's words, it seems to be the latter rather than the former. And that leads us to ask ourselves other questions. Was the idea of increasing the production of ethanol (launched by George W. Bush in March 2007) by utilizing the basic grains for the feeding of humans and animals also a coincidence?

It is well known that in order to produce one liter of alcohol for use in car engines, 1.2 liters of fuel oil must be sacrificed. In other words, more fuel than the fuel produced. In addition to the fact that ethanol has become good business for the Bush family, Bush's acolytes, and the oligarchies of several countries, isn't this a way to provoke a greater shortage of food?

Is it by happenstance that the big corporations that trade in food and many investors are speculating with the price of grains, knowing that speculation can lead to the deaths of millions of human beings? According to the United Nations, every five seconds a child dies of hunger or the diseases that accompany hunger.

Was it pure coincidence that the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) promoted in the so-called Third World the production of food for export, instead of guaranteeing the production of crops that might guarantee food to the people who grow them? In that way, they left the poorest nations at the mercy of world-market prices.

At present, 78 nations in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean have a deficit in their basic food baskets, as a result of the high prices of food and the abandonment of traditional crops.

In 37 of those nations, the situation is particularly difficult. Already there have been demonstrations and the looting of grocery stores and supermarkets. Also repression and

death. Lest you've forgotten, hunger is the worst counselor.

Some countries have rationed rice; others, corn and wheat. The big Asian producers of rice, such as Thailand and Vietnam, have reduced their exports to guarantee domestic consumption. About 43 percent of the production of corn is used for the feeding of animals. Experts say that about 20 percent of the world's harvest of corn will be used for the production of ethanol. What's left for human beings?

Is all this fortuitous or the result of a plan to dominate nations through hunger? Rice is the basic food for 3 billion people. Corn is a staple for about 600 million people. Wheat, for hundreds of millions. In Peru, the Army is making potato bread to try to reduce the demand for wheat among the population.

In Haiti, a mixture of mud, salt and vegetable oil is the basic food of hundreds of thousands of people. The mud is not free. It costs 5 cents a biscuit, and causes abdominal pain and carries parasites and other diseases.

Haiti, one of the world's poorest countries, produced almost all the rice it needed before the neoliberal rules of the IMF and the WB were forced upon it. Every year, it requires 400,000 tons. It produces barely 40,000; the rest has to be imported. At the current prices, it is no wonder that its people have to eat mud biscuits.

The big producers of food, such as the United States and the European Union, along with Lula's Brazil, say the shortage of grain is caused by an increase in consumption in China, India and other Asian countries. No doubt, that can cause a slight increase in the prices. If that's so, why use grains for the production of ethanol? It is food, and it's denied to millions of human beings.

It is true that the prices of crude oil also affect the cost of production and transportation of foodstuffs. But who is to blame for the fact that the instability of the markets — derived from the situation in Iraq, the threats to Venezuela, and a possible attack on Iran — leads to speculation? What country with less than 5 percent of the world's population daily consumes about 25 percent of the crude oil produced in the world?

Should Iran be attacked, the price of crude oil could rise to US\$200 a barrel, an unsustainable price even for the most developed economies. A true tragedy for the poor countries. Some countries, such as the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador, are already experiencing serious difficulties with fuel and food, despite the unselfish aid provided by the government of Venezuela.

The recent Alimentary Summit held in Managua, summoned by the governments of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) and attended by representatives of 12 countries, including some presidents, was aimed at uniting the efforts to confront the alimentary crisis that beset mankind.

For most of the attendees, the essence of the alimentary crisis lies in the unequal distribution of wealth worldwide and, above all, on the neoliberal economic model imposed by some developed countries upon the rest of the world in the past 20 years.

Of course, not everyone agreed. President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica distanced himself from the document, because he's a devotee of "free trade." Mexico and El Salvador also

distanced themselves from a set of proposals made by the Venezuelan delegation that ended up in an addendum to the Final Declaration.

Among the Venezuelan proposals was the idea of creating a bank of agricultural products that would reduce the costs of small and mid-size producers, and to assign \$100 million through the Bank of ALBA to finance agricultural projects. Also, to create a plan within PetroCaribe to finance the production of foodstuffs.

So far, awareness has been raised about the gravity of the alimentary situation and the urgent measures that need to be taken to keep food from becoming a weapon of war, at least in Latin America. In fact, food already is a weapon in many parts of the world.

In any case, beware the great corporations that produce and trade in food. Beware the corporations that produce transgenic seeds, which are imposing their products throughout the world, to the detriment of natural varieties. They are already present in many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Transgenic seeds make the farmer totally dependent on the transnational corporation that produces them; every year, he must buy the seeds, the fertilizers and the insecticides. In India, 150,000 cotton farmers have committed suicide because they could not pay their debts to those transnationals.

The transnationals are in charge of dominating the food supply and, by extension, the people, as Henry Kissinger proposed. In a secret document called National Security Study Memorandum 200 (NSSM 200), Kissinger drew a plan of action for the world's population, aiming to control it and reduce it by hundreds of millions of people by using foodstuffs.

Kissinger wanted to reorganize the worldwide market of food, to destroy family farms and replace them with large *haciendas* and factories directed by the farm transnationals. Something like that has been happening since the early 1990s in Mexico and other Latin American countries. Don't you think it's time to take steps to stop it? I leave the answer to you.

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