

The War on Food and the War on Humanity: Platforms of Control and the Unbreakable Spirit

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#),
[Intelligence](#)

Max Weber (1864-1920) was a prominent German sociologist who developed influential theories on rationality and authority. He examined different types of rationality that underpinned systems of authority. He argued that modern Western societies were based on legal-rational authority and had moved away from systems that were based on traditional authority and charismatic authority.

Traditional authority derives its power from long-standing customs and traditions, while charismatic authority is based on the exceptional personal qualities or charisma of a leader.

According to Weber, the legal-rational authority that characterises Western capitalist industrial society is based on instrumental rationality that focuses on the most efficient means to achieve given ends. This type of rationality manifest in bureaucratic power. Weber contrasted this with another form of rationality: value rationality that is based on conscious beliefs in the inherent value of certain behaviour.

While Weber saw the benefits of instrumental rationality in terms of increased efficiency, he feared that this could lead to a stifling “iron cage” of a rule-based order and rule following (instrumental rationality) as an end in itself. The result would be humanity’s “polar night of icy darkness.”

Today, technological change is sweeping across the planet and presents many challenges. The danger is of a technological iron cage in the hands of an elite that uses technology for malevolent purposes.

[Lewis Coyne](#) of Exeter University says:

“We do not — or should not — want to become a society in which things of deeper significance are appreciated only for any instrumental value. The challenge, therefore, is to delimit instrumental rationality and the technologies that embody it by protecting that which we value *intrinsically*, above and beyond mere utility.”

He adds that we must decide which technologies we are for, to what ends, and how they can be democratically managed, with a view to the kind of society we wish to be.

A major change that we have seen in recent years is the increasing dominance of cloud-based services and platforms. In the food and agriculture sector, we are seeing the rollout of these phenomena tied to a techno solutionist ‘data-driven’ or ‘precision’ agriculture legitimised by ‘humanitarian’ notions of ‘helping farmers’, ‘saving the planet’ and ‘feeding the world’ in the face of some kind of impending Malthusian catastrophe.

A part-fear mongering, part-self-aggrandisement narrative promoted by those who have fuelled ecological devastation, corporate dependency, land dispossession, food insecurity and farmer indebtedness as a result of the global food regime that they helped to create and profited from. Now, with a highly profitable but flawed carbon credit trading scheme and a greenwashed technology-driven eco-modernism, they are going to save humanity from itself.

The World According to Bayer

In the agrifood sector, we are seeing the rollout of data-driven or precision approaches to agriculture by the likes of [Microsoft](#), [Syngenta](#), [Bayer](#) and [Amazon](#) centred on cloud-based data information services. Data-driven agriculture mines data to be exploited by the agribusiness/big tech giants to instruct farmers what and how much to produce and what type of proprietary inputs they must purchase and from whom.

Data owners (Microsoft, Amazon, Alphabet etc.), input suppliers (Bayer, Corteva, Syngenta, Cargill etc.) and retail concerns (Amazon, Walmart etc) aim to secure the commanding heights of the global agrifood economy through their monopolistic platforms.

But what does this model of agriculture look like in practice?

Let us use Bayer's digital platform Climate FieldView as an example. It collects data from satellites and sensors in fields and on tractors and then uses algorithms to advise farmers on their farming practices: when and what to plant, how much pesticide to spray, how much fertiliser to apply etc.



To be part of Bayer's Carbon Program, farmers have to be enrolled in FieldView. Bayer then uses the FieldView app to instruct farmers on the implementation of just two practices that are said to sequester carbon in the soils: reduced tillage or no-till farming and the planting of cover crops.

Through the app, the company monitors these two practices and estimates the amount of carbon that the participating farmers have sequestered. Farmers are then supposed to be paid according to Bayer's calculations, and Bayer uses that information to claim carbon credits and sell these in carbon markets.

Bayer also has a programme in the US called [ForGround](#). Upstream companies can use the platform to advertise and offer discounts for equipment, seeds and other inputs.

For example, getting more farmers to use reduced tillage or no-till is of huge benefit to Bayer (sold on the basis of it being 'climate friendly'). The kind of reduced tillage or no-till

promoted by Bayer requires dousing fields with its RoundUp ([toxic glyphosate](#)) herbicide and planting seeds of its genetically engineered Roundup resistant soybeans or hybrid maize.

And what of the cover crops referred to above? Bayer also intends to profit from the promotion of cover crops. It has taken majority ownership of a seed company developing a gene-edited cover crop, called [CoverCress](#). Seeds of CoverCress will be sold to farmers who are enrolled in ForGround and the crop will be sold as a biofuel.

But Bayer's big target is the downstream food companies which can use the platform to claim emissions reductions in their supply chains.

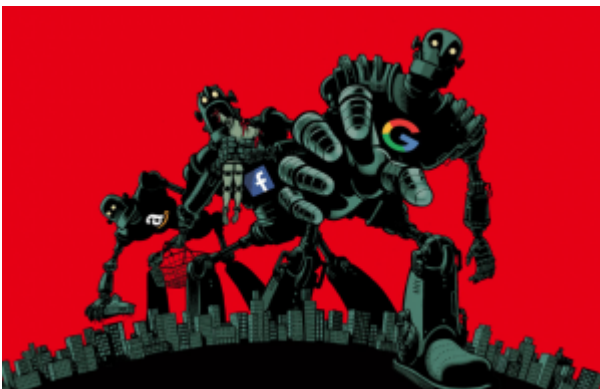
Agribusiness corporations and the big tech companies are jointly developing carbon farming platforms to influence farmers on their choice of inputs and farming practices (big tech companies, like Microsoft and IBM, are major buyers of carbon credits).

The non-profit GRAIN says (see the article [The corporate agenda behind carbon farming](#)) that Bayer is gaining increasing control over farmers in various countries, dictating exactly how they farm and what inputs they use through its 'Carbon Program'.

GRAIN argues that, for corporations, carbon farming is all about increasing their control within the food system and is certainly [not about sequestering carbon](#).

Digital platforms are intended to be one-stop shops for carbon credits, seeds, pesticides and fertilisers and agronomic advice, all supplied by the company, which gets the added benefit of control over the data harvested from the participating farms.

Technofeudalism



Yanis Varoufakis, former finance minister of Greece, argues that what we are seeing is a shift from capitalism to technofeudalism. He argues that tech giants like Apple, Meta and Amazon act as modern-day feudal lords. Users of digital platforms (such as companies or farmers) essentially become 'cloud serfs', and 'rent' (fees, data etc) is extracted from them for being on a platform.

In feudalism (land) rent drives the system. In capitalism, profits drive the system. Varoufakis says that markets are being replaced by algorithmic 'digital fiefdoms'.

Although digital platforms require some form of capitalist production, as companies like Amazon need manufacturers to produce goods for their platforms, the new system represents a significant shift in power dynamics, favouring those who own and control the

platforms.

Whether this system is technofeudalism, hypercapitalism or something else is open to debate. But we should at least be able to agree on one thing: the changes we are seeing are having profound impacts on economies and populations that are increasingly surveilled as they are compelled to shift their lives online.

The very corporations that are responsible for the problems of the prevailing food system merely offer more of the same, this time packaged in a genetically engineered, ecomodernist, fake-green wrapping (see the online article [From net zero to glyphosate: agritech's greenwashed corporate power grab](#)).

Elected officials are facilitating this by putting the needs of monopolistic global interests ahead of ordinary people's personal freedoms and [workers' rights](#), as well as the needs of independent local producers, enterprises and markets.

For instance, the Indian government has in recent times signed memoranda of understanding (MoU) with Amazon, Bayer, Microsoft and Syngenta to rollout data-driven, precision agriculture. A '[one world agriculture](#)' under their control based on genetically engineered seeds, laboratory created products that resemble food and farming without farmers, with the entire agrifood chain, from field (or lab) to retail in their hands.

This is part of a broader strategy to shift hundreds of millions out of agriculture, ensure India's food dependence on foreign corporations and eradicate any semblance of food democracy (or national sovereignty).

In response, a 'citizen letter' (July 2024) was sent to the government. It stated that it is not clear what the [Indian Council of Agricultural Research \(ICAR\)](#) will learn from Bayer that the well-paid public sector scientists of the institution cannot develop themselves. The letter says entities that have been responsible for causing an economic and environmental crisis in Indian agriculture are being partnered by ICAR for so-called solutions when these entities are only interested in their profits and not sustainability (or any other nomenclature they use).

The letter poses raises some key concerns. Where is the democratic debate on carbon credit markets. Is the ICAR ensuring that the farmers get the best rather than biased advice that boosts the further rollout of proprietary products? Is there a system in place for the ICAR to develop research and education agendas from the farmers it is supposed to serve as opposed to being led by the whims and business ideas of corporations?

The authors of the letter note that copies of the MoUs are not being shared proactively in the public domain by the ICAR. The letter asks that the ICAR suspends the signed MoUs, shares all details in the public domain and desists from signing any more such MoUs without necessary public debate.

Valuing Humanity

[Genuine approaches](#) to addressing the challenges humanity faces are being ignored by policymakers or cynically attacked by corporate lobbyists. These solutions involve systemic shifts in agricultural, food and economic systems with a focus on low consumption (energy) lifestyles, localisation and an ecologically sustainable agroecology.

As activist [John Wilson](#) says, this is based on creative solutions, a connection to nature and the land, nurturing people, peaceful transformation and solidarity.

This is something discussed in the recent article [From Agrarianism to Transhumanism: The Long March to Dystopia](#) in which it is argued that co-operative labour, fellowship and our long-standing spiritual connection to the land should inform how as a society we should live. This stands in stark contrast to the values and impacts of capitalism and technology based on instrumental rationality and too often fuelled by revenue streams and the goal to control populations.

When we hear talk of a 'spiritual connection', what is meant by 'spiritual'? In a broad sense it can be regarded as a concept that refers to thoughts, beliefs and feelings about the meaning of life, rather than just physical existence. A sense of connection to something greater than ourselves. Something akin to Weber's concept of value rationality. The spiritual, the diverse and the local are juxtaposed with the selfishness of modern urban society, the increasing homogeneity of thought and practice and an instrumental rationality which becomes an end in itself.

Having a direct link with nature/the land is fundamental to developing an appreciation of a type of 'being' and an 'understanding' that results in a reality worth living in.

However, what we are seeing is an agenda based on a different set of values rooted in a lust for power and money and the total subjugation of ordinary people being rammed through under the false promise of techno solutionism (transhumanism, vaccines in food, neural laces to detect moods implanted in the skull, programmable digital money, track and trace technology etc.) and some distant notion of a techno utopia that leave malevolent power relations intact and unchallenged.

Is this then to be humanity's never-ending "polar night of icy darkness"? Hopefully not. This vision is being imposed from above. Ordinary people (whether, for example, farmers in India or those being beaten down through austerity policies) find themselves on the receiving end of a class war being waged against them by a mega rich elite.

Indeed, in 1941, [Herbert Marcuse stated](#) that technology could be used as an instrument for control and domination. Precisely the agenda of the likes of Bayer, the Gates Foundation, BlackRock and the World Bank, which are trying to eradicate genuine diversity and impose a one-size-fits-all model of thinking and behaviour.

A final thought courtesy of civil rights campaigner [Frederick Douglass](#) in a speech from 1857:

"Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress."

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