

“Democratic Alternatives to Corporate Globalization”

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Hi, I'm really sorry that I won't be able to join your convention. But I would just like to share a few words about our common struggle against the kind of corporate industrial agriculture that has wrecked so many societies, and also outline some of the points in a common agenda that we could have to begin, or to pursue, or to maintain, or to increase, our counter-offensive against industrial agriculture.



Well, I think that I do not need to tell you, since you are on the front lines of the struggle, about the tremendous negative impact that industrial agriculture has had in marginalizing small farmers or in creating major health problems. Or also in terms of its very negative impact on the environment and of course in terms of the erosion that it has had on democracy.

On this question of democracy and corporate agriculture, I think the increasing monopolization of production, both industrial and agricultural production, as well as the centralization of finance, has had a major impact in effectively depriving so many people – and not just small farmers, but rural populations, workers and sectors of the middle class - of an effective say in terms of who runs their societies. Increasingly, whether it has been in the North or the South, we have seen corporate capitalism, especially in the era of globalization, basically hand power over to unaccountable economic elites working with political elites, and tighten their hold over our societies.

While we are said to be living formally in democratic systems, and we hear constantly about the right to vote – we have electoral exercises, and we have ourselves being part of the exercises and the motions of democracy – in fact, our impact on the democratic process and the impact on the political process is increasingly becoming even more minimal. I think what has, of course, happened, whether it is in formal democracies in the North or the so-called “new democracies” in the South, has been the erosion of people’s power. Indeed, that erosion is evident in the way that unaccountable elites have determined both major decisions – or rather – made the major decisions – in both economic life and in political life. Over the last several years, of course, we have seen that all throughout the world we have had the rise of resistance movements. Whether it's been among workers or among professionals; in the South or in the North, this has been a

major development because of the increasingly negative impacts that have been felt, especially in the era of corporate-driven globalization.

Since the late 1980s, and during the 1990s, and speeding up during this decade, we have in fact seen everywhere the destruction or the erosion of national economies and the growing integration of production and markets under the aegis of big corporations. While, of course, in the past, we did live under capitalist orders and capitalist societies, I think that to some extent the existence of national governments and national policies provided people with a certain measure of protection against the worst excesses of global capitalism. But that has no longer been the case over the last few years as the power of government has been eroded, and increasingly the power of naked corporate capital has become increasingly dominant. Increasingly, people have not been shielded from the effects of this force. And indeed, what we have seen is that the rise of multilateral negotiations, but especially of the World Trade Organization, we have seen this very over-arching attempt to restructure the world completely along lines that would benefit corporate agriculture in terms of its search for higher and higher profits.

Of course, this is not something that was limited to corporate agriculture alone, but basically is the case with corporate capitalism in all areas of life. That, of course, has created the resistance that we know today. We, of course, participated in this. We had Seattle, we had the collapse of the WTO Ministerial meeting in Cancun, and more recently, the failure to push and to complete the Doha Round of negotiations. But beyond this, we have seen the rise of farmers' movements, of many organizations that have been brought under the umbrella of Via Campesina, of people throughout the world - and not just farmers - who have rallied around the issue, or the paradigm, of Food Sovereignty. They have rallied around not only Food Sovereignty, but real and substantive democracy.

I think we have seen coalitions of people – that has seen farming organizations and farmers in the forefront – coming together. And this coalition basically has put forward demands that are essentially the core of democracy:

- the ability of people to be able to determine the kind of work and the pace of work that they do,
- the desire of people to be able to pursue the economic occupations, including farming, as they should,
- the ability of people to be able to, indeed, be the ones that would determine the direction of where society should be going.

So, increasingly, we have had this very sweeping movement against the impersonal market forces, and to use the words of Carl Polanyi, the efforts to bring the market under control, to bring corporations under control, and to make sure that the market is re-embedded in society, that society controls the market instead of the market and corporations controlling and driving society.

So this movement, of course, has had many manifestations and had many fronts. We saw that this movement has been at the forefront of the struggle against the WTO, but not only that, I think basically we've seen this movement not only in resistance, but also offering a positive

vision for the future. We continue to struggle for that vision, but at the centre of it is, in fact, a number of things.

One is the principle of subsidiarity*- that production should take place at the local level, wherever that is possible. We are talking about the centrality of economic democracy, that decisions about key economic questions should be in the hands of the people. And we are talking, of course, about the relationship between political democracy and economic democracy. Unless there is equality, unless there is equity, the political democratic process will always be a farce. And of course, the question of justice: that justice is so central to the way that society should be organized. And of course, this is related to the question of peace. Without peace, without the kind of harmonious relations between societies, there can really be no effective way that we can enforce justice or that we can achieve equality.

So I would just like to say, therefore, that in both the North and the South, people's movements are coming together. Of course, there's a great deal of challenges that are before us and there is no guarantee that the kind of vision that we are united with, which puts subsidiarity, equity, justice and democracy at the centre of things. There is no guarantee that that will triumph. But unless we struggle, and we struggle hard, and we struggle in solidarity and in cooperation with one another, that vision will not be realized.

So let me just say therefore, that I wish you all a very, very fruitful convention, and let us go forward in solidarity with one another towards a better future. Another world is, indeed, possible and I think that is the feeling that many of us share and we will indeed create this new world. Thank you very much, and I hope you have a really good conference.

* **subsidiarity** [səbɪsɪdɪəntɪ]

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1. (Christianity / Roman Catholic Church) (in the Roman Catholic Church) a principle of social doctrine that all social bodies exist for the sake of the individual so that what individuals are able to do, society should not take over, and what small societies can do, larger societies should not take over
2. (Government, Politics & Diplomacy) (in political systems) the principle of devolving decisions to the lowest practical level

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