

CETIM ADVISES YOU THE FOLLOWING READINGS

Agrocarburants Impacts au Sud ?

Joint publication

Long considered the panacea for dealing with climate change, the production of biofuels poses a problem. In particular in Asia, in Latin America and in Africa, more often than not, it assumes the form of vast monocultures –sugar cane, palm, soya– in the hands of agribusiness. The ever greater outlet: rich countries concerned about diversifying and “greening” their energy supply.

The fundamental social and environmental effects observed in the South tend to aggravate the imbalances when they don't put in danger outright the food supply of the local populations through the shift in arable land use. Deforestation, private appropriation of resources, agricultural land grabbing, concentration of profits, soil and water pollution, biodiversity impoverishment, exploitation of vulnerable workers, population displacement, human rights violations... the “external costs” of the dynamic are multiple and highly variable.

Regarding the emission of green house gases, overall, the biofuels “alternative” fails to do any better than fossil fuels. As for “sustainability criteria” –lacking– to which the European Union and the United States intend to subject their imports, they change the deal less than they determine it.

Under what conditions are a fair reappropriation and sustainable development of production and consumption of biofuels imaginable? The solutions are to be found in total reworking of economic and agricultural policies.

Price: CHF 22.50 / 13 €, 201 pages, ISBN: 978-2-84950-296-9, Ed. CETRI/Syllepse, 2011. It can be ordered of CETIM.

La dette ou la vie

Direction Damien Millet and Eric Toussaint

In 2007-2008, the largest crisis since 1929 hit. Following the orders of global finance, the tin soldiers of the G20 saved their banks with multi-billion dollar rescue plans. Governments financed these rescues by applying to the North the very same structural adjustment strategies that had led to such disastrous consequences in the South. This book does a meticulous study of how one thing led to another in the North –from the United States to Greece, Iceland, Eastern Europe, on to Japan and back to the Euro zone– and what repercussions this had in the South. During the Cold War, the first world was the Western bloc; the second world was the Soviet bloc; the third world was made up of the peoples of the South, and was subjected to the diktats of the two other worlds. The second world collapsed in the early 1990's after the fall of the Berlin wall. Now, with the 2007-2008 crisis, the first world is reeling, and the face of the world has changed for good as a result of it. There remain two main categories: a handful of people who benefit from this unjust form of capitalism and the overwhelming majority who are victims of it.

This book seeks to explain this major change and offers radical alternatives to the current paradigm which must be done away with.

Price: 20 €, 384 pages, ISBN CADTM: 978-2-930443-16-4, Ed. CADTM/ADEN, juin 2011. It can be ordered of CADTM (www.cadtm.org) or of ADEN (www.aden.be/index.php?aden=la-dette-ou-la-vie).

WHO ARE WE?

Through its publications and its work with the UN, the CETIM denounces the maldevelopment in general, ecological as much as economic and social, and promotes an exchange of critical views from both Southern and Northern societies. The CETIM is focuses in particular on respect for, implementation and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights, as well as issues related to the right to development.

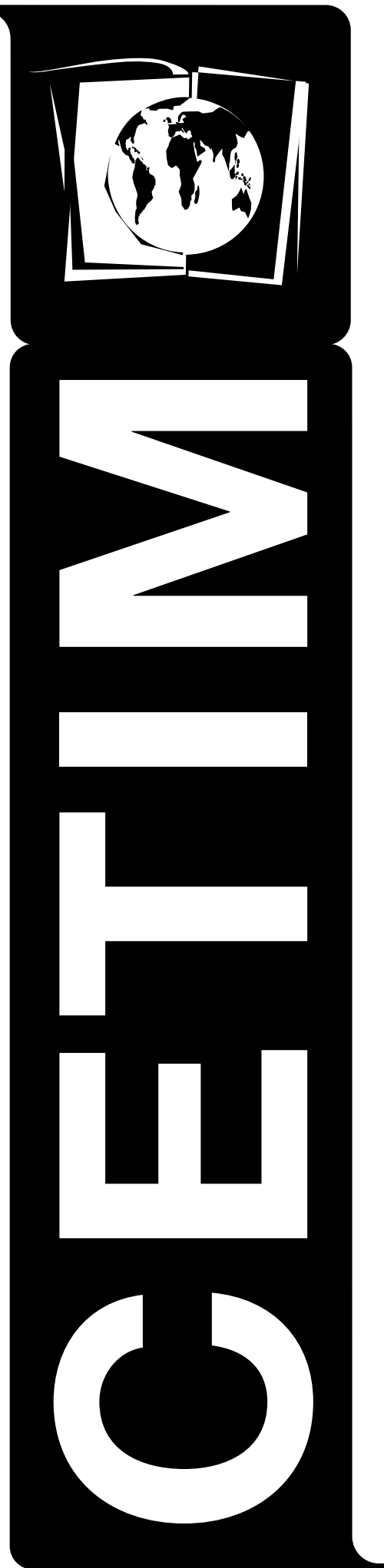
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EDITORIAL

Food is readily available in nature, and can be produced or obtained through a variety of means (fishing, farming, herding...), yet agriculture still remains essential and, by virtue of its importance, dominant in feeding the planet.

Peasant communities have lived through, and continue to live through, two major transformations, the second of which is going on right now. The first one occurred during the Industrial Revolution in the West, when peasant families were dispossessed of their homes and little by little driven out of the countryside to be hired as factory workers. Starting in the 1970's, structural adjustment programs forced upon indebted countries of the South by international financial institutions slowly destroyed peasant communities which until then had been self-sufficient in food production. Promoting the market economy as a development model, neoliberal policies imposed by these institutions brought about a regressive type of agrarian reform: “latifundios” (huge land holdings) were strengthened, government aid to farmers and national policies for rural development were cut. Such factors as privatization, liberalization of agricultural markets, dumping of agricultural products, increasing biofuel trade or large-scale land grabbing are the components of this development model and have contributed to pushing tens of millions of farmers into exodus and/or exile every year.

Thus, the peasant communities of the world, which still represent nearly half of the global population, are at risk of disappearing completely. If nothing is done to reverse this trend, we will witness a silent genocide*. In this context, the fight led by La Vía Campesina (LVC) for an international convention on the rights of peasants is only logical. This newsletter touches upon the joint UN activities of LVC and FIAN International for the adoption of such a convention.

Discrimination does not, alas, affect just one social category. It is a universal malady that humanity has found difficult to stamp out. You will find a presentation of our new information brochure on the right to non-discrimination. It is available in three languages (English, French and Spanish) on our website and as a paper document for social movements.

Why an International Convention on the Rights of Peasants?

There are several arguments in favour of the La Via Campesina's (LVC) demand for an international convention on the rights of peasants: 1) wide-scale systematic violations of peasants' human rights; 2) the impact of globalisation; 3) the inadequacy of current international measures concerning human rights; 4) the importance, on a world-wide level, of maintaining the peasantry on the land; 5) the origin of this proposition.

The Wide-Scale Systematic Violations of Peasants' Human Rights

The peasant, just as any other citizen, should be able to enjoy all human rights, be they civic and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights or the right to development. However, it is obvious that, in practice, peasants are victims of wide-scale and systematic violations of their rights, such as the right to life, to food, to adequate housing, to health, to education, the right to join forces, to form trade unions etc. Today, approximately one billion of the world's people suffer from hunger or malnutrition. Of these people, 80% live in rural areas, and 50% are peasant families.

These violations also include the absence of agrarian reform¹ and aid to family farmers, the forced displacement of peasants, the confiscation of seeds by transnational corporations (TNCs) through the assertion of intellectual property rights² and the criminalisation of activists and peasant leaders demanding their fundamental rights.³

In the past few years, three new phenomena have significantly worsened the plight of peasants: i) land grabbing on a huge scale by certain governments and transnationals (with 20 million hectares at stake, a real agrarian counter-reform is under way);⁴ ii) the wide-scale production of agro-fuel on fertile land to the detriment of subsistence crops, with peasant families being forcibly displaced; iii) stock market speculation on agricultural commodities.

The Impact of Globalization

In the context of globalization and large scale structural adjustment programs, peasant farmers face other forms of violations given that they do not control either the processes or the tools of their production: they have been stripped of their resources and reduced to extreme poverty. They are systematically excluded from the decision making that con-

cerns them. Hence, the adoption of a convention on peasants' rights, such as that proposed by the LVC, guaranteeing, among other things, access to land, water, and other resources and agricultural means, as well as access to adequate public services, can offer an effective protection for peasant families faced with speculation and market domination by transnational corporations.

The Inadequacy of Existing International Measures

The LVC rightly asserts that existing international human rights conventions are insufficient to protect the specific needs of peasants. Nor do these conventions address violations of their rights.

Obviously, if the existing international conventions⁵, ratified by the overwhelming majority of United Nations member states, were implemented as they should be, the peasants' situation would dramatically improve. But most governments are subjected to very strong pressure to go by the letter of the international trade agreements (e.g. those drafted by the WTO)⁶ and have completely abandoned the policy-making dimension of the economic field, "relinquishing" de facto their sovereignty⁷ and ignoring their commitments under, for example, The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Yet many United Nations texts emphasize the primacy of human rights over trade agreement provisions.⁸

It is not only necessary but indispensable to fight for the effective implementation of the existing international instruments and to complete these instruments where needed. Thus, conventions on the rights of peasants and on binding international norms for judicial supervision of STN activities are in order.

It should be noted that, on the international level, there are already conventions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and on the rights of children, as well as a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. Inspired by this declaration, a future convention on peasants' rights would be complementary to current international human rights norms.

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LAST CETIM BROCHURE

The right to non-discrimination

The creation of the United Nations and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights opened the way to the democratization of societies. With the codification of human rights, there was much progress, in particular in the legislative sphere, even if the practical implementation of this legislation is still not a reality for everybody everywhere in the world.

Non-discrimination, with its counterpart equality, has a special place among the human rights provisions, considering that all human rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural) must be implemented for everybody without discrimination and in full equality.

To summarize, discrimination consists of different treatment for two persons, or groups of persons, when both are in a comparable situation. Conversely, treating equally two persons or groups of persons when both are in different situations can also constitute discrimination. The international human rights instruments prohibit all distinction, exclusion, restriction or other forms of differentiated treatment within any given community – but also between communities – that cannot be justified and that compromises the enjoyment of human rights for all based on the principle of equality.

When one observes the contemporary world from this perspective, one notices that hundreds of millions of persons continue to suffer discrimination throughout the world because they belong to a people or an ethnic group, because of their language, their religious belief, their social and/or economic situation, their political opinions, their sex, their age (the elderly, "a burden on society" or the young lacking education, training and employment) or because of their sexual orientation.

Although neo-liberal globalization has blurred national distinctions, it is far from having reduced discrimination. Rather, it has displaced it. In some respects, this discrimination is more frankly overt, insidious, and sometimes also exacerbated and expressed through unspeakable subtle brutality. Globalization has not only weakened governments, questioning the validity of universal public services, but, worse, it has favored the expression of new forms of discrimination within societies. In some places, the male-female divide has taken on new forms while other places have experienced a most emphatic return to traditional cleavages. One can be said to be witnessing the ascendancy of a sort

of world-wide apartheid: a divide between nationals and non-nationals, between generations, between the healthy and the handicapped, between rural and urban dwellers etc. All undermine social cohesion and democracy.

Moreover, the outbreak and/or pursuit of many conflicts, including armed conflicts, throughout the various regions of the world, the increase in international migration and forced internal displacements, as well as social regression and the emergence of clearly xenophobic and/or "racist" political parties (in Europe in particular), the inequalities at all levels... constitute so many illustrations of discrimination.

The "permanent war" proclaimed against terrorism by the United States president George Walker Bush, has further exacerbated racism and discrimination. This war, moreover, has been exploited by many other governments to criminalize their political opposition. In fact, while the United States' war against terrorism targeted in particular Arab Muslims, considered "potential terrorists", it has served as an excuse for numerous other countries to reduce their political adversaries to silence.

However, as already emphasized, the principles of equality and non-discrimination are part of the fundamental pillars of human rights. Both are intimately linked and essential to the enjoyment of the other human rights.

There is an abundance of publications on the question of non-discrimination, but they are concentrated most often on one of its aspects (education, work, freedom of opinion and expression etc.) or on one category of persons (women, indigenous peoples, religious groups, migrants etc.). This booklet intends to give a "panorama" of the many facets of discrimination.

At a time when, in spite of the obvious legislative and educational endeavors in this area, discrimination remains current, undermining civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights and is the cause of multiple discords among the stakeholders of society, there is good reason to present an overview of the scope of the right to non-discrimination.

Many examples throughout this booklet, like milestones, covering various situations, will, it is hoped, facilitate its reading and allow the reader to appreciate the scope of non-discrimination in human rights provisions.

This brochure, as other CETIM publications on human rights, is available in French, English and Spanish on paper or on our website: www.cetim.ch/en/publications_brochures.php

tion, the Council mandated the Advisory Committee, its expert body)¹² to make recommendations on new measures to implement the right to food (§34).

In March and April 2009, two LVC leaders, Paul Nicholson (Europe member of LVC) and Henri Sargih (international coordinator of LVC), were invited to the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly to give their opinion on the world food crisis and the means to remedy it. In their statements and in the discussions that followed, the LVC representatives insisted that the violation of peasant farmers' human rights had worsened during the food crisis. They then proposed the LVC's declaration on the rights of peasants and the UN's adopting of a convention on those rights as remedies to discrimination against peasants and to the food crisis.¹³

Studies of the Advisory Committee

Following these activities and the worsening of the situation on a global level, the question of peasants rights was finally put on the Council's agenda.

During its first working session, the Advisory Committee created a drafting group on the right to food.¹⁴ Their report was to be divided into three parts: the world food crisis and the right to food; governments' obligations; recommendations of measures to be taken. In the report presented to the Council in March 2009, the Advisory Committee analyzed the consequences of the food crisis on the peasants' situation. The Committee recommended that the Council mandate it to conduct a study on "the food crisis, the right to food, agricultural subsidies and the rights of peasants".¹⁵

The Advisory Committee's recommendations generated lively debates in the Council. Many countries (African, Asian and Latin American) favored the study on the food crisis, the right to food and the rights of the peasants, while others (in particular the Western States) were opposed. A compromise was found in asking the Advisory Committee to make a study on "discrimination in the context of the right to food, listing particularly good practices with regards to policies and strategies in the fight against discrimination".¹⁶

The Advisory Committee presented a preliminary study to the HRC's 13th Session in March 2010.¹⁷ The bulk of the study was devoted to discrimination against peasants. The LVC's declaration on peasants' rights appeared in the annex. The UN experts think, just as we do, that it is an important tool in the fight against violation of peasants' human rights. It is for this reason that they proposed that the HRC undertake a study on the role and the importance of an international judicial instrument on peasants' rights.¹⁸ Again, certain Western countries voiced their opposition, saying that peasant farmers don't consti-

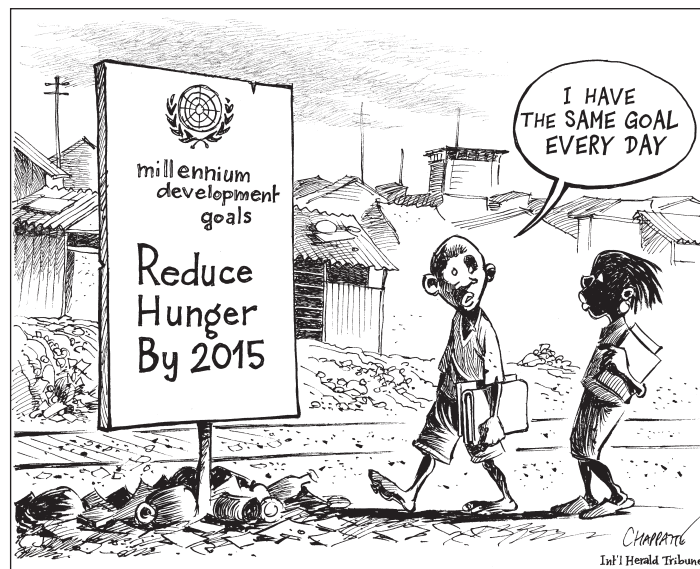
tute a vulnerable group. However, after negotiations, they accepted the idea that the study look at all people living in rural zones.¹⁹

This explains why the word "peasant" was deleted from the resolution. However, this is not a handicap - on the contrary. Although peasants make up the majority of the rural population, agricultural workers, peasants without land, shepherds, fishermen, hunter-gatherers and others are also victims of serious human rights violations. It is therefore necessary to include these groups in the future convention.

Further, as already mentioned, the definition of "peasant", as it stands in the LVC's declaration on the rights of peasants, is not exclusive but inclusive.

At its 6th session (January 2011), the Advisory Committee on the advancement of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas discussed the preliminary study on this issue²⁰ and focused, inter alia, on the causes of discrimination against peasants and other people living in rural areas, the scope of the protection afforded these groups in current international law, and the possible ways to enhance this protection (drafting of a new legal instrument, for example). The study emphasized how important it is that the interested parties (peasants, farmworkers, fisher-folk, herders, nomads...) be involved in the creating of this new instrument. The experts who took part in the discussion tended to prefer a UN *declaration* on peasants' rights to a *convention* per se.

Given the huge pressure that certain governments (mostly Western, with the exception of Luxembourg) were putting on the Council to remove the item from the agenda, it was clear that the Council's March 2011 session would be crucial for the Advisory Committee's work. For this reason, an impressive LVC delegation of members from Indonesia, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Spain made the trip. Through broad consultations with Council member states



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and non-member states, the delegation sought to demonstrate just how important and urgent it is for the Advisory Committee to continue its work.

Parallel to this 16th session of the Council, the CETIM organised a conference attended by ambassadors and high-level representatives from South Africa, Luxemburg, Ecuador, Indonesia and Cuba as well as the two successive Special Rapporteurs on the right to food (Jean Ziegler and Olivier de Schutter). This conference allowed us to clarify a number of points and questions brought up by delegations and also gave the opportunity to various stakeholders (governments, experts, NGOs) to explicitly voice their support for the protection of peasant rights.

On March 25th, the Council adopted by consensus Resolution 16/27, thereby endorsing the above-mentioned Advisory Committee's study. It also requested the Committee to "continue to work on the issue of discrimination in the context of the right to food and, in that regard, welcomes its preliminary study on the advancement of the rights of people working in rural areas, including women, in particular smallholders engaged in the production of food and/or other agricultural products, including from directly working the land, traditional fishing, hunting and herding activities".

It must be noted however that the Council rejected the proposal made by the Advisory Committee to hold a working seminar in August 2011 with the participation of representatives of stakeholder communities (peasants, farmworkers, fisher-folk, herders, nomads, etc.).

The adoption of this resolution is an important step for the future work of the Advisory Committee, but is only an intermediate stage in the UN process. The Committee will submit its final study to the Council in March 2012. This will be decisive, given that governments will have the last word on the issue.²¹

* "Genocide" may seem too strong, but only at first glance. One can of course argue that extermination is not the "explicit intention" of policies which victimize peasant communities, but, given their consequences, which are now widely known, the objection is moot. Throughout history, most genocides were not presented as such and often had economic underpinnings, too. In this case, the elimination of hundreds of millions of peasants is the result of food market monopolies, landgrabbing and the rush for natural resources. In addition, even if the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) is specific about the killing of the members of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group (definition of the act of genocide, Art. II), it also defines as genocide "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." (Art. II. c). Taking into consideration that most States are multiethnic, and include indigenous peoples (who for the most part still live in rural and forest areas) and Afro-descendants, the crime of genocide can be applied in relation to peasants, for millions are forcefully displaced or obliged to leave rural areas and deprived of a meaningful future.

¹ Even if we discount governments' solemn promises at world summits, the 160 states parties to the International Covenant on



Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are obliged to undertake agrarian reform (art.11.2.a) in favour of peasants who are landless or own too little fertile land, not to mention the countries including it in their constitution (ex. Brazil).

² *La nature sous licence ou le processus d'un pillage. Diversité biologique en péril*, de Vandana Shiva and al., PUBLICETIM, n°20/21, 1994, 148 pp.; and *La propriété intellectuelle contre la biodiversité ? Géopolitique de la diversité biologique*, PUBLICETIM, n°35, 2011, 224 pages.

³ Inter alia, the FIAN's 2005 Report: <http://www.fian.org/resources/documents/others/violation-of-peasant-rights/pdf>

⁴ Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food Mr. O. de Schutter, A/HCR/13/33/Add.2, 28 December 2009.

⁵ In particular: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

⁶ Most of the international trade agreements, as well as regional and bilateral ones, totally ignore the question of human rights. See the CETIM's Critical Report n°7, *International, Regional, Subregional and Bilateral Free Trade Agreements*, July 2010, http://www.cetim.ch/en/publications_cahiers.php#trade.

⁷ V. the CETIM's *The Right of peoples to self-determination*, October 2010, http://www.cetim.ch/en/publications_autodetermination.php

⁸ V. the CETIM's booklets *The Right to Health* (2006) and *Transnational Corporations and Human Rights* (2005), http://www.cetim.ch/en/publications_brochures.php

⁹ There are only 28 million tractors in the world. Those who own one often own others. (V. *Via campesina : une alternative paysanne à la mondialisation néolibérale*, Publicetim n°23/24, October 2002).

¹⁰ Cf. Marcel Mazoyer, figures 2007. http://www.agter.asso.fr/IMG/pdf/Marcel_Mazoyer-Instituto_Nacional_de_Agronomia_Francesa.pdf and *Via Campesina*, already cited.

¹¹ The reports of J. Ziegler and O. de Schutter can be found on their internet websites, <http://www.righttofood.org> and <http://www.srfood.org> and on the High Commissioner for Human Rights website: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/index.htm>

¹² A detailed discussion of the HRC's mechanisms is to be found in the CETIM's Critical Report n°1, *The Human Rights Council and its Mechanisms*, 2008, http://www.cetim.ch/en/publications_cahiers.php?currentyear=&pid=#council

¹³ V. The LVC's declaration to the UN General Assembly (April 6th 2009), available on the LVC's website, and the second by P. Nicholson: <http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/0/65DF61E68314E027C1257574005599EF?opendocument>.

¹⁴ In accordance with fair geographic distribution applied by the UN, the following experts were appointed members of the drafting group: Mr José Antonio Bengoa Cabello (Chile), Ms Chung Chinsung (South Korea), Mr Lataif Hüseyinov (Azerbaijan), Mr. Jean Ziegler (Switzerland) and Ms Mona Zulficar (Egypt). V. the *Final report of the Advisory Committee on its first session*, 4-15 August 2008, A/HRC/AC/2008/1/2.

¹⁵ The *Final report of the Advisory Committee on its second session*, 26-30 January 2009, A7HRC/10/68.

¹⁶ HRC Resolution 10/12, 20 March 2009, §36.

¹⁷ A/HRC/13/32, 22 February 2010.

¹⁸ The *Advisory Committee's Recommendation 4/3*, 24 March 2010

¹⁹ HRC Resolution 13/4, 24 March 2010, §44.

²⁰ A/HCR/AC/6/CRP.2, 22 December 2010.

²¹ A part of this article is extract from Melik Özden's statement published in the Proceeding of the Seminar *Les instruments de gouvernance internationale des systèmes alimentaires (The instruments of international Governance of Food Systems)*. This seminar was organized by the Quebec coalition "Souveraineté alimentaire" at the University of Montreal, 26 November 2010.

READER'S NOTES BY FLORIAN ROCHAT*

La loi de la valeur mondialisée:
pour un Marx sans rivages

by Samir Amin

An excellent initiative from Samir Amin: a “new, revisited and enlarged” edition of his book *Le matérialisme historique et la loi de la valeur* [*Historical Materialism and the law of value*] (1977). With his explorations of “unequal development” and unequal exchange” (subjects of two of his books published in 1973), his ideas on “globalized value” constitute most certainly one of this author’s most fertile contributions to contemporary Marxism. Moreover, they all remain highly relevant.

In the nineteenth century, he writes in his introduction, “Marx initiated radical criticism of modern times, first of all that of the real world”. The concept of value occupies a central place within it and emerges from his criticism of the fundamentals of commercial alienation and of the exploitation of work, peculiar to capitalism. Unfortunately, his famous *Capital* remained an unfinished work: books V and VI, intended to deal, respectively, with international trade and world markets, according to a letter from Marx to Lassalle, were never written. At most, all we know is the glimpse we get of them from disparate notes. Yet development, and underdevelopment, produced by capitalism in the course of the last century and half, the singular interpenetration of relations between “classes and nations” (a reference to a 1979 work by S. Amin) characterizing the current world, require more than ever a thorough exploration for anybody wanting to understand the new realities.

Using Marx’s methodologies, S. Amin has been long at this task: distinguish the successive stages of capitalistic globalization and grasp the current particularities. This has made him for more than half a century one of the most stimulating “Marxist” authors of our times. He has persistently focused on obsessive questions, those of “underdevelopment”, of “development” and of the complex relations between “centers” and “peripheries”. Perhaps this is related to his having grown up in Egypt, on the cusp of Africa and Asia...

The book, recently published by Le Temps des Cerises, deals in particular with: accumulation in the capitalist mode of production (Chapter 1); monetary equilibrium and interest rate theory (Chapter 2); distribution of profit among capitalists and landed property owners and the theory of rent (Chapter 3); accu-

mulation on a world-wide scale within the imperialist system, labor force price hierarchy and imperialist rent (Chapter 4).

For S. Amin, Marx is by no means a guru or a prophet. One must not make him a subject of endless and often contradictory exegesis. On the contrary, being “Marxist” according to Amin “is not stopping at Marx but using him as a point of departure”. In other words, “Marx is without borders, for the radical criticism he sets in motion is itself without borders. Always incomplete, it must always be the object of its own criticism, must constantly enrich itself from radical criticism of what the real system newly produces as new fields open to exploration”.

He concludes his book with these words: “It is for the reader to judge if this Marxist theory of the world-wide capitalist system and the law of globalized value stands up to scrutiny, extends Marx’s work and respects its spirit. In any event, I wish this publication to open the discussion of the question.”

Price: 15 €, 185 pages, ISBN: 978-2-84109-855-2,
Le Temps des Cerises, Paris, 2011.
Can be ordered on: <http://www.letempsdescerises.net>

* Former director of CETIM.

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The Positions of the Special Rapporteurs

In this context, we must mention the valuable help of the first two United Nations Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler and Olivier de Schutter. Not only have they reported on the human rights violations to which peasant farmers have been subjected, but they have also explored in their reports the concept of food sovereignty, the need to rehabilitate the role of peasant families in the fight against famine and malnutrition and the implications of implementing the right to food for all. Thus, in the reports presented to the Human Rights Council (HRC) and to the U.N. General Assembly,¹¹ Mr Ziegler and Mr de Schutter have dealt with such aspects of the right to food as: access to land; agrarian reform; the role of transnational corporations; food sovereignty; extraterritorial obligations of governments in implementing the right to food; solutions to the food crisis; the impact of bio-fuels; seed policies; large-scale land grabbing; agribusiness etc.

The last special rapporteur’s report (to the 16th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2011) emphasized the importance of government policy in developing agro-ecology. These reports, with their sound analysis and substantive proposals, are an invaluable scientific and institutional aid in support not only of the LVC demands but also of government formulation of public policy and the concomitant implementation of the right to food for all.

Human Rights Council Position

In 2000, the Commission on Human Rights (since superseded by the Human Rights Council) created the mandate of a special reporter on the right to food (the first two special reporters are introduced above.) Since then, the right to food has become one of the main themes of the Council, which even held a special session on the world food crisis in 2008.

Several of the Council on Human Right’s resolutions have stressed the need to protect peasants. One example can be found in Resolution 7/14 of March 27th 2008 on the right to food: the Council for Human Rights found that “80% of those people suffering from hunger lived in rural zones and 50% of them were small farmers and particularly exposed to food insecurity because of the rise in cost of the means of production and the decline in agricultural income. The access to water, seeds and other natural resources was becoming more and more difficult for poor producers to bear, and government aid to small farmers, fishing communities and local industries was a key element to food security and the exercising of the right to food.” (§10) In this same resolu-

The Importance of Keeping the Peasants on the Land in Every Country

The following figures need no explanation to demonstrate the need and the importance of maintaining the peasantry on the land in every country. Today, almost half the world’s working population is made up of peasants and their families. Some 1.340 million “agricultural workers” have been counted, and for each worker there is a farm, a family, a cooperative farm or some other grouping. Only a tiny 2.1% minority of these own a tractor;⁹ +/-250 million have access to ploughs with draft animals; more than a billion (¾) use only hand tools.¹⁰ The annual rural exodus is estimated at 50 million per year. The problems arising from rural exodus are well known, negatively affecting food, the environment and equality, as well as financial, migratory and urban configurations... And the list goes on.

Such “development” on a world-wide scale fuels innumerable conflicts. If it continues, the situation throughout the world will obviously continue to deteriorate, in certain cases becoming irreversible and endangering much of humanity’s food supply.

The Origin of the Proposition

The proposal of an international covenant on the rights of peasants emanates from the peasants themselves. This is important and decisive because it provides legitimacy for the convention and is a guarantor of its future success.

Courses of Action at the United Nations and the CETIM’s Involvement

For over 15 years, the CETIM has been denouncing violations of peasants’ rights and relaying their demands within the Human Rights Council (previously, the Commission on Human Rights) and the Advisory Committee (previously, the Sub Commission for the Promotion and the Protection of Human Rights). Since undertaking the drafting of international annual reports with LVC-FIAN International in 2003, the CETIM, in collaboration with LVC and FIAN International, has organized several parallel conferences and done intensive lobbying during the sessions of both UN bodies. The CETIM also welcomed to Geneva the LVC head staff and organized workshops to familiarize them with UN procedures.