

HAVANA DIARY

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The private monopoly of energy sources is ensured by clauses, in the bilateral or multilateral Free Trade Agreements.

The role of the peripheral nations is to produce cheap energy for the central wealthy nations, which represents a new phase in the colonization process.

It's necessary to demystify all the propaganda about the alleged benefits of *agrifuels*. In the case of *ethanol*, the growing and processing of sugarcane pollutes the soil and the sources of drinking water because it uses large amounts of chemical products.

Ethanol distillation produces a residue called vinasse. For every liter of ethanol produced, 10 to 13 liters of vinasse are generated. Part of this residue can be used as fertilizer, but most of it pollutes rivers and the sources of underground water. If Brazil were to produce 17 or 18 billion liters of ethanol per year, this means that at least 170 billion liters of vinasse would be deposited in the sugarcane field areas. Just imagine the environmental impact.

Burning sugarcane to facilitate the harvesting process, destroys many of the microorganisms in the soil, contaminates the air and causes many respiratory illnesses.

The Brazilian National Institute of Space Research issues a state of emergency almost every year in Sao Paulo—where 60% of Brazil's ethanol production takes place- because the burning-off has plunged the humidity levels in the air to extreme lows, between 13% and 15%; breathing is impossible during this period in the Sao Paulo area where the sugarcane harvest takes place.

The expansion of agrienergy production, is of great interest to the corporations dealing with genetically modified or transgenic organisms, such as Monsanto, Syngenta, Du pont, Bass and Bayer.

In the case of Brazil, the Votor-arvtim Corporation has developed technologies for the production of a non-edible transgenic sugarcane. Since there are no measures in place to avoid transgenic contamination in the native crop fields, this practice places food production at risk.

With regards to the denationalization of Brazilian territory, large companies have bought up sugar mills in Brazil: Bunge, Novo Group, ADM, Dreyfus as well as business magnates George Soros and Bill Gates.

As a result of all this, the expansion of ethanol production has led to the expulsion of peasants from their lands and has created a situation of dependency on what one calls the sugarcane economy, not because the sugarcane industry generates jobs, on the contrary, it generates unemployment because this industry controls the territory. This means that there is no room for other productive sectors.

Workers are paid according to the amount of sugar cane they cut, not according to number of hours they have worked.

In Sao Paulo State where the industry is most modern -"modern" is relative of course- and it is the country's biggest producer, the goal for each worker is to cut between 10 to 15 tons of cane per day.

Pedro Ramos, a professor at Campinas University, made these calculations: in the 1980's, the workers cut around 4 tons a day and were paid the equivalent of more or less 5 dollars. Today, they need to cut 15 tons of sugarcane to be paid.3 dollars a day.

Even the Ministry of Labor in Brazil made a study which shows that before, 100 square meters of sugarcane yielded 10 tons; today, with transgenetic cane one must cut 300 square meters to reach 10 tons. Thus, workers must work three times more to cut 10 tons. This pattern of exploitation has resulted in serious health problems and even death for the workers.

A researcher with the Ministry of Labor in Sao Paulo says that in Brazil, sugar and ethanol are soaked in blood, sweat and death. In 2005, the Ministry of Labor in Sao Paulo reported the death of 450 workers for other causes such as murder and accidents -would this be because transportation to the refineries is very unsafe ?-and also as a result of illnesses such as heart attack and cancer.

According to Maria Cristina Gonzaga, who carried out the survey, this Ministry of Labor research shows that in the last five years, 1,383 sugarcane workers have died in Sao Paulo State, alone.

Slave labor is also common in this sector. Workers are usually migrants from the northeast or from Minas Gerais, lured in by intermediaries. Normally the contract is not directly with the company, but through intermediaries -in Brazil we call them “gatos”— who chose the laborers for the sugar mills.

In 2006, the district attorney’s office of the Public Ministry inspected 74 sugar mills, only in Sao Paulo, and all of them were taken to court.

In March 2007 alone, the district attorney’s office of the Ministry of Labor rescued 288 workers from slavery in Sao Paulo.

That same month, in Mato Grosso State, 409 workers were pulled out of a sugar mill that produces ethanol; among them was a group of 150 indigenous people. In Mato Grosso, the central area of the country, indigenous people are used as slave labor force in the sugar industry.

Every year, hundreds of workers suffer similar conditions in the fields. What are these conditions? They work without being legally reported, with no protective equipment, without adequate food or water, without access to washrooms and with very precarious housing; moreover, they have to pay for their housing and food, which is very expensive, and they also have to buy their implements such as boots and machetes and, of course, when work-related accidents occur, which is often, they do not receive adequate care.

THE ENGLISH SUBMARINE

The press dispatches bring the news; it belongs to the Astute Class, the first of its kind to be constructed in Great Britain in more than two decades.

“A nuclear reactor will allow it to navigate without refuelling during its 25 year of service. Since, it makes its own oxygen and drinking water, it can circumnavigate the globe without needing to surface,” was the statement to the BBC by Nigel Ward, head of the shipyards.

“It’s a mean looking beast”, says another.

“Looming above us is a construction shed 12 storeys high. Within it are 3 nuclear-powered submarines at different stages of construction,” assures yet another.

Someone says that “it can observe the movements of cruisers in New York Harbor right from the English Channel, drawing close to the coast without being detected and listen to conversations on cell phones”. “In addition, it can transport special troops in mini-sub that, at the same time, will be able to fire lethal Tomahawk missiles for distances of 1,400 miles”, a fourth person declares.

‘El Mercurio’, the Chilean newspaper, emphatically spreads the news.

The UK Royal Navy declares that it will be one of the most advanced in the world. The first of them will be launched on June 8 and will go into service in January of 2009.

It can transport up to 38 Tomahawk cruise missiles and Spearfish torpedoes, capable of destroying a large warship. It will possess a permanent crew of 98 sailors who will even be able to watch movies on giant plasma screens.

The new Astute will carry the latest generation of Block 4 Tomahawk torpedoes which can be reprogrammed in flight. It will be the first one not having a system of conventional periscopes and, instead, will be using fibre optics, infrared waves and thermal imaging.

“BAE Systems, the armaments manufacturer, will build two other submarines of the same class,” AP reported. The total cost of the three submarines, according to calculations that will certainly be below the mark, is 7.5 billion dollars.

What a feat for the British! The intelligent and tenacious people of that nation will surely not feel any sense of pride. What is most amazing is that with such an amount of money, 75 thousand doctors could be trained to care for 150 million people, assuming that the cost of training a doctor would be one-third of what it costs in the United States. You could build 3 thousand polyclinics, outfitted with sophisticated equipment, ten times what our country possesses.

Cuba is currently training thousands of young people from other countries as medical doctors.

In any remote African village, a Cuban doctor can impart medical knowledge to any youth from the village or from the surrounding municipality who has the equivalent of a grade twelve education, using videos and computers energized by a small solar panel; the youth does not even have to leave his hometown, nor does he need to be contaminated with the consumer habits of a large city.

The important thing is the patients who are suffering from malaria or any other of the typical and unmistakable diseases that the student will be seeing together the doctor.

The method has been tested with surprising results. The knowledge and practical experience accumulated for years have no possible comparison.

The non-lucrative practice of medicine is capable of winning over all noble hearts.

Since the beginning of the Revolution, Cuba has been engaged in training doctors, teachers and other professionals; with a population of less than 12 million inhabitants, today we have more Comprehensive General Medicine specialists than all the doctors in sub-Saharan Africa where the population exceeds 700 million people.

We must bow our heads in awe after reading the news about the English submarine. It teaches us, among other things, about the sophisticated weapons that are needed to maintain the untenable order developed by the United States imperial system.

Churchill said: Sink the Bismarck! Today Blair says: Sink whatever remains of Great Britain's prestige! For that purpose, or for the holocaust of the species, is what his “marvellous submarine” will be good for.

IDEAS CANNOT BE KILLED

More than 600,000 people have lost their lives in Iraq and more than 2 million have been forced to emigrate since the American invasion began.

In the United States, around 50 million people do not have medical insurance. The blind market laws govern how this vital service is provided, and prices make it inaccessible for many,

even in the developed countries. Medical services feed into the Gross Domestic Product of the United States, but they do not generate conscience for those providing them nor peace of mind for those who receive it.

The countries with less development and more diseases have the least number of medical doctors: one for every 5,000, 10,000, 15,000, 20,000 or more people. When new sexually transmitted diseases appear such as AIDS, which in merely 20 years has killed millions of persons, — while tens of millions are afflicted, among them many mothers and children, although palliative measures now exist— the price of medications per patient could add up to 5,000, 10,000 or up to 15,000 dollars each year. These are fantasy figures for the great majority of Third World countries where the few public hospitals are overflowing with the ill who die piled up like animals under the scourge of a sudden epidemic.

To reflect on these realities could help people to better understand the tragedy. It is not a matter of commercial advertising that costs so much money and technology. Add up the starvation afflicting hundreds of millions of human beings; add to that the idea of transforming food into fuels; look for a symbol and the answer will be George W. Bush.

When he was recently asked by an important personality about his Cuba policy, his answer was this: “I am a hard-line President and I am just waiting for Castro’s demise.” The wishes of such a powerful gentleman are no privilege. Castro is not the first nor will he be the last that Bush has ordered to be killed; nor one of those people who he intends to go on killing individually or en masse.

“Ideas cannot be killed”, Sarria emphatically said. Sarria was the black lieutenant, a patrol leader in Batista’s army who arrested Cuban revolutionaries after the attempt to seize the Moncada Garrison. □□□

[Excerpted from Castro’s Reflection on international issues affecting people globally]