

Great Hunger 2008

Farooque Chowdhury

The present food crisis, Great Hunger 2008, is a crisis of the dominating classes in the present world system. It shows the dominating system's failure to develop a sustainable system that can free the humanity from hunger and starvation. It also shows the system's incapacity to deal with a crisis touching the lives of the billions across the globe. The World Commission on Environment and Development said : "Global food security depends not only on rising global production, but on reducing distortions in the structure of the world food market and on shifting the focus of food production to food-deficit countries, regions and households"(p.128). Has the world encompassing system with its strong arms—the World Bank, IMF, ADB and others in the retinue—reduced "distortions in the structure of the world food market"? The suffering billions in the present world know the answer from the reality of their lives. Was the focus shifted to the food-deficit households by the world system? Not only the food-deficit households, the middle income groups also know the best. The commission led by Brundtland also said: "Global food security also depends on ensuring that all people, even the poorest of the poor, can get food"(p.129). Has that been ensured? All people across the continents, even in the US, the land of plenty, now know the answer. The world has been made more insecure from the perspective of food security by the world system with its neo-liberal policies. People have been made prey to the private sector, the wand of the neo-liberals.

With all the modern mechanism, management and information technology the present world system has failed to forecast the food crisis revealing not the limitations of the mechanism, etc. but the incapacities of the dominating system that owns, operates and manipulates these. It shows that mechanism, management, information technology, etc. are not the determining factors that could forecast, avert or tackle a crisis that was cropping up over the years spanning continents. It has also busted the myth that information technology, etc. helps policy makers to take appropriate steps at appropriate time. Rather, it shows that ownership and motive determine the effectiveness / ineffectiveness of a mechanism, etc. that have nothing to do other than serving the owner's interest. Satellite images, state-of-the-art weather forecasting system, cell phone network within the reach of the small farmers and women and "free" flow of information in the "free" world, as was advised by the propagators of entitlement on the "basis" of Mao-led China's "experience", are not enough to foretell a globalized food crisis and foretelling is not enough to avert a crisis that has taken a global size. Even, these are not capable of resolving such a crisis within a national frontier. Recent experience with food crisis in different countries shows this. So, it has also busted the myth of Mao—"controlled" information system. This means, a "free" media is not enough to warn a burgeoning crisis. The present situation nullifies the much propagated "theory" of famine and "free" media. Even, if the media is free, hypothetically and in abstract sense, free of class inclination / biasness / interest and free of class control, the forewarning may not be raised in all the times, in all the cases, in proper form, and if the forewarnings are made

properly and timely it may not help policy makers to create wrinkles on their foreheads. This means "free" media is a myth and it can never change the basic dynamics of a phenomena growing out of political economy. But, all these observations will turn secondary if the class character of "free" media is kept into view. This will expose the shackled condition of "free" media, shackled to the capital that brings up crisis like the present food crisis on the surface.

This crisis unmasks the ideological incapacity of the system that does never go for the betterment of the humanity but for profit. This ideological incapacity is the reflection of the failure of the dominating ideology. It, in real sense, is a crisis of the neo-liberal policies that is an offshoot of the dominating ideology and was operating unbridled for decades in countries. The ideology and the policies growing out of the ideology are failing to locate the gravitational point of the crisis, the real cause(s) of the current food crisis. The dominating ideology has shown its heart—it is devoid of the principle of equity.

Inherent characteristics of the dominating system—bring in crisis—does not only encompass financial and related sectors, but also food and agriculture sectors that have been revealed in the present food crisis. The dominating system is incapable of escaping the dynamic equilibrium, a reaction of a number of factors in the society. At the same time, it creates its problems while it goes for higher and higher attainment, profit, and is incapable of ensuring "entitlements" for the people. So, "entitlements" cannot be ensured without having a basic change in the basic structure.

The dominating system is in direct conflict with environment of which agriculture and food are parts. It is eroding the environmental base upon which humankind depends for its survival. At the same time, it brings into light the theoretical hollowness of the mainstream environmental "talks" that talks a lot about the symptoms only but never steps into the base of the problem.

The failures of the states in the Third and Fourth Worlds in providing adequate essential foods to the majority of its citizens is a failure of the dominating system that has created and is patronizing these states within its orbit. Even, the failures / near-failures of a number of states in these two Worlds have exacerbated the food crisis within the borders of these states and these failures are the failures of the ruling classes / segments in these states which in turn are the class allies of the dominating world system. A state machine that is devoid of the capacity to attain acceptability by the ruled, the consent of the governed, is a major failure of these states that in turn creates a crisis of acceptability of these states. Crises like the present food crisis in these states aggravate this crisis of acceptability of the ruling system in these states. This, consequently, aggravates the class rule situation in these failed or near-failed states. It is almost a cyclical process one pulling in the next into the theatre of crisis only by enlarging the circle and by complicating the crises till the cycle bursts out of the increasingly growing circle. This situation while increases the suffering of the people ultimately endangers the dominating system. This is nothing but an evidence of the historically determined class / segment limitations of the dominant classes / segments and of the system at the global level that feeds / patronizes it. The system at the global level fails or is failing to rectify this

weakness despite resorting to new and newer "policies", tact and implementation procedures. In that sense, it is also the failure of the dominating world system.

This sequence of events shows that the Great Hunger 2008 is not only embedded in the economic realm but also is ingrained in the political field and the dominating system is failing to resolve the crisis in the economic as well as in the political fields. In that sense, it, the present food crisis, is a reflection of the political limitations of the system itself.

The utter ineffectiveness of the social relations built up over the course of development of the system, especially in the field of agriculture, has also again come into the forefront through this food crisis. The same goes with the commodity now at the centre of discussion—food. The relations that is established while making food a commodity and a commodity to make profit at higher and higher rate at the cost of people's misery has come to light with its cruel face.

The myth, constructed and propagated by a motivated section, and the narrow, mechanical view upheld by a section of class "neutral"-technology oriented persons, that a modernized agriculture, even no reform is made there, will resolve the problem of lower cropping intensity and lower productivity and in turn the problem of hunger of millions will wither away has got busted through this food crisis. Now, a few can deny the observation of Marx: "[A]ll progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility. The more a country starts its development on the foundation of modern industry, like the United States, for example, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the labourer" (Capital. vol. 1, pp. 474-5).

Non-governmental organizations, almost all of which were floated to smoothen down class conflicts, have appeared ineffective in the face of macro crisis like the present one to ensure food and nutrition for the majority of the people. Moreover, their mechanisms including micro credit/micro finance appear incapable of sheltering the poor in front of the onslaught of the macro forces of market. The food crisis that stemmed years ago was not on the agenda of the most of the NGOs showing in their theoretical incompleteness in their "fight" against hunger. The crisis shows that the macro problem of poverty and hunger cannot be resolved through individual / household based production or petty trading units. It, the food crisis, will bring in newer problems in the courtyard of these NGOs including bankruptcies and destitution of the micro credit debtors at a higher rate, migration of the NGO organized group members, and, transfer of household items of the members of these groups along with the other poor, the "constituency" of many of the NGOs, making the map of poverty more difficult to comprehend by these NGOs. Consequently, the feeling for a radical change in the entire relationship will get strengthened as contradictions will sharpen due to increase of misery of the people, due to eroding acceptability of the state machines in many countries, and, due to more unequal concentration of

property. This sharpening of the contradictions will make these NGOs' inroad difficult.

The present food crisis has once again showed that the capitalist system goes for higher profit even by endangering its own existence and by shrinking its market, one of its places to find its prey. □