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The food wars

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In Doc Prudente's wake, the book recounts an important declaration from a life-long friend of the Doc: "Henry Aguilan caused a stir when, toward the end of the service, he suddenly stood up and said: 'I just want to make a point that Doc Prudente was not a communist, he was never a communist. All he did was to serve his country that he loved so much in the best way he knew how (183).' Then he sat down. Ruth later crossed the aisle to embrace him."

These are just a sample of what can catch and sustain the reader's interest as the life of Doc Prudente unfolds through the words of Navarro. There should be something for all of us students of social reality in this superb story of a nationalist educator.

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The food wars, by Walden Bello, Manila, Anvil Publishing Inc., 2010, 176 pp., PHP 250.00, ISBN 97127-24404

In *Food Wars*, Walden Belo situates the food crisis in the context of globalization and the promotion of neo-liberal economic policies. He notes that the global food crisis is not a new phenomenon. It commenced when the peasant and family based subsistence farming system was displaced to pave the way for a more capitalist and industrial based farming structure brought about by the immense and swift commercialization of the agricultural sector. This happened first in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Capitalist expansion continues but has not completely taken the fight out of the farmers. The continuous struggle of farmers against the ills and evils of industrial farming remains the only consistent contending force against capitalism. In Chapters 4 and 7, the author presents the various achievements, activities, advocacies, and heroic life-changing sacrifices of individual farmers, international and national peasant based movements, in their continuous fight against industrial based farming.

The author argues that neo-liberalism brought economic devastation to the developing world. The food crisis is an amalgamation of several factors, including the forceful imposition of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), free trade policies, extraction of surplus from agriculture for industrialization, and the production of agro-fuels. The book clearly depicts the negative repercussions and callousness of the implementation of the SAP in the developing world. It negates the promise of the SAP to bring economic efficiency and growth to countries that are bound by it. It was proven untrue that economic prosperity will commence the moment the state backs off and allows the market and the private sector to operate freely as shown in the cases of Mexico and the Philippines. In Africa, the withdrawal of the state through reduced public spending was seen as a risky venture by the private sector. What happened in Africa was the crowding-out rather than crowding-in of private investments.

In many countries, the shift towards market-led land reform created massive displacements and destabilized the peasant based farming systems of these countries. For instance, the complete reversal of the land reform program in Mexico created a depressing panorama of social unrests, namely, severe economic catastrophes, acute food crisis and insecurities. These exacerbated the already problematic political instability of the country and drove Mexico to the brink of collapse. The Mexican experience with the SAP embodies the malevolent nature of the neo-liberal economic paradigm.

The land reform program of the Philippines was deemed to be problematic and half-baked, and unable to reach its full potential. In the case of China, its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), economic liberalization, and rapid industrialization facilitated a shift in the policy priority of the country from food self-sufficiency, which was quite highly regarded during the time of Mao Zedong, to a more export-oriented agricultural strategy. Consequently, all these caused massive peasant displacement and huge destabilization in rural China. This led to the massive influx of peasants to the urban centers to work in the industrial sector as wage laborers. Farming as an economic activity became a costly economic activity for rural families.

In general, the cases presented serve as powerful examples in Bello's portrayal of the inappropriateness of neo-liberalism as a development model. Nonetheless, the author faltered in his analysis of China. He predicted that its economy would slow down the moment it became part of the WTO. On the contrary, China is one country that benefited much from globalization. Its economy grew faster than expected, and is still expanding at a comparatively faster rate compared to other economies. The way China is calibrating and adapting to the fast pace of globalization is remarkable. Despite embracing WTO and its neo-liberal economic policies, China is not submissive to the mandates of WTO.

Agro-fuel production is blamed for heightening the global food crisis. However, the problem is not agro-fuels. The truth remains that agro-fuels are still the cheapest and cleanest sources of energy, compared to nuclear energy and other forms of conventional energy. The real problem is not agro-fuels as an alternative energy resource, but the challenge of how to make the production of agro-fuels more sustainable, responsible, and devoid of the corporate interests of big corporations. On the other hand, the book would have benefited from the inclusion of other relevant topics, including climate change, population growth, urbanization and modernization, and wars and conflicts that contribute to the rise of the global food crisis.

The book provides information, examples, and case studies in support of the highly critical and contested anti-globalization stand of the author in relation to the food problems. This makes it an important reference material for scholars who are studying political economy and the impact and dynamics of globalization and capitalism. Another distinguishing quality of the book is that it not only offered criticisms, but actually proposed alternative solutions to the contentious global food crisis.

Bello enumerates two possible alternative solutions to the global food crisis. He calls for the promotion of de-globalization and food security. Walden Bello asks developing countries to withdraw from the claws of globalization and capitalism. However, these prescriptions are quite precarious. The author's analysis of the systemic defects of capitalism and globalization is lucid and valid in many respects. Nevertheless, it is on the other hand sensible and fair to recognize that globalization brought a great deal of benefits that make the world a more convenient place to live in than before. The immediate challenge of today's world is not so much about withdrawing from globalization but rather in humanizing the process, and making the benefits from globalization more accessible to a greater number of people and nations.

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