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UN's World Food Sham

Once again, and to no-one's great surprise, the United Nations demonstrates for all to see its irrelevance and incompetence when it comes to important global matters. For what is more important than issues of human rights, health and education for all, security from murder and genocide, protection from natural catastrophe? Actually, food is. Food is the most important issue to face mankind everywhere and always has been, for the very simple reason that without it you die.

Average food price are suddenly increasing at an astonishing rate: over 50% in only the first four months of this year; in Britain, food costs are increasing the national grocery bill by half a billion pounds a month. As a direct result of such trends people at the very bottom of the economic scale (think North

Korea or Zimbabwe or Ethiopia) have died and are dying of malnutrition and starvation. 850 million people are at such risk.

So it is entirely appropriate that a distinguished world body such as the UN, through its Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), should have called an international three-day World Food Summit where 183 countries could debate global trade policies, agricultural subsidies and biofuels and agree methods and policies that would solve the crisis and alleviate the inhumane human suffering and death.

And who better to invite as an expert witness in proven techniques to be eschewed because they result in the certain starvation of an entire population than Zimbabwe's very own Tyrant-4-Life Robert Mugabe. To add to his existing accomplishments, just last week he took a leaf out of the Burmese Junta's book by banning international NGOs from distributing food aid to his destitute citizens. Only North Korea's T4L Kim Jong Il does it better but he is too scared of flying to go to Rome - his last trip beyond Asia, to Moscow in 2001, took nine days each way in a specially-built armoured train.

But lo, T4L Mugabe was not invited to share his shocking expertise with other delegates. Instead it seems he was expected to contribute to learned discussions on how to bring down the price of food as an alternative to starving people to death.

After three days of debating in the FAO's Rome headquarters (with T4L Mugabe and his 16-man entourage staying at the five-star Ambasciatori Palace Hotel, one of Rome's most expensive hotels at up to a thousand Euros a night), the best the summit could come up with was a generic document which as we will see later is strong on platitudes but silent on concrete action. The delegates might as well have declared world peace while they were at it.

High prices of any commodity are a two-edged sword:

- if you are buying you hate them,
- but if you are a seller you are in nirvana.

As a result buyers try not to buy and sellers try to produce and sell even more. The net result - lower demand and higher stocks - drives the price back down again in search of a new point of equilibrium. The process then repeats itself in reverse, and so price variations continue, up and down in small swings or large, forever.

It's the capitalist and free-trade system that is uniquely responsible for the massive increase, in real terms, of the mean wealth of the world's people over the last two centuries since the industrial revolution burst onto the scene.

- In Jesus Christ's days the average world GDP per person - expressed in constant 1990 US dollars - was \$470, according to economist Professor Angus Maddison, of the University of Groningen in northern Holland.
- By the time the revolution began in the late 18th century, it had crept up to only \$650, ie at a miserly 10¢ a year.
- But a hundred years of industrialisation later, it stood at \$870, having suddenly screamed up at a rate of over two dollars a year.
- By the turn of the millennium it had risen to \$6,000 (\$40 a year),
- while today it stands at \$10,000 per person, and that plump average incorporates the abject poverty of billions.

However the pricing system only works if it is allowed to work. If someone attempts to prop up the price, say with subsidies, or to control the price, or to force the price down by decree, or to ration provisions, or to prevent or tax

imports and/or exports, supply goes haywire leading to gluts and shortages. Yet the small minorities who make money from such situations, whether through receiving subsidies, hoarding scarce supplies, running smuggling networks and so forth, will move heaven and earth to protect their lucrative privileges. It is very easy and popular to grant privileges; infinitely harder to remove them.

Food prices are high today for a variety of reasons:

- The incredible economic growth in recent years of China and India - due to their wholehearted embrace of capitalism - has made newly enriched millions understandably want to eat better, in particular more meat. This puts pressure on the cereals that livestock consume - for example 7-8 kilos are needed for each kilo of beef.
- The unprecedented explosion of oil prices has ratcheted up food costs in terms of inputs like fuel for agricultural machinery, petroleum-based fertilisers, transport of product to market.

- Whole swathes of agricultural land have been switched from food production to maize in order to avail of generous subsidies for the production of ethanol, the latest "*carbon-neutral*" fad for your car. High oil prices have reinforced this switch. But it has been estimated that were Ireland's cars to be powered by entirely home-grown biofuels, every acre of the island would be needed to grow the necessary crops. (Then where would we get our spuds?)

- Some blame Al Gore's climate change for instigating floods and droughts which have played havoc with agriculture in some countries, such as Myanmar and Australia.

Meanwhile, the obscenity of long-standing agricultural subsidies in the rich world combined with the cheap exports that result and the protectionism which obstructs imports have managed to penalise countless developing-world farmers, who could otherwise produce the same food without subsidies and at less cost. It's like pouring gasoline on a fire.

Surely it is obvious that allowing high prices to spur increased production, while removing market-distorting and trade-suppressing subsidies, tariffs

and fiats, will result in more food production which would bring prices back down to sensible levels.

The best example of what even little-educated sons of the soil in the developing world can do if left alone to their own devices is the free-market poppy production of war-torn, infrastructureless Afghanistan. With no help from anyone, these hardened men fill over 90% of global demand for (illegal) heroin and other opiates, thanks also to the absence of subsidies or tariffs either at home or in the export markets. Moreover some of these canny Afghan capitalist-farmers are now switching to wheat whose price has trebled this year, making it more profitable than poppies (whose own value coincidentally has been dropping of late). Thus do they contribute to the food-shortage solution.

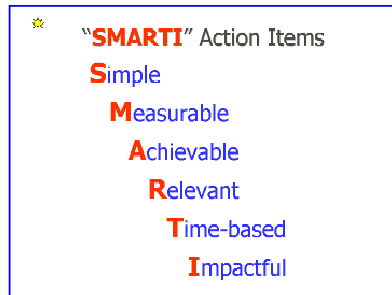
The International Food Policy Research Institute estimates that biofuel demand has contributed to 30% of the recent increase in cereal prices. The US subsidises, to the tune of \$7 billion per year, the production of some 300,000 barrels a day of maize ethanol in exchange for a supposed greenhouse-gas reduction of a derisory one-nineteenth percent. It doesn't take much nous to figure out that if the Americans stopped frittering so much of their citizens' money on such pointless subsidies, the land freed up to restore food production would contribute to the food-shortage

problem - cutting prices by 20% say some. But the Bush administration is disgracefully urging on the US to even more subsidised biofuel production.

The EU's Common Agricultural Policy continues to distribute largesse to its farmers: €43 billion in 2005 representing 44% of the budget. And for what? So that farmers can continue to produce food at a cost no consumer will pay. This largesse is removed from the pockets only of taxpayers who **do** produce stuff that people are willing to buy. Thus failing enterprises (most farmers) are rewarded while the successes (profit-makers) are punished. To keep the system going, cheaper food from the developing world must be banned, taxed or restricted, to protect the local produce from too much competition in the supermarket. And excess food is then dumped, with further subsidy to make it cheap, in the developing world to compete with local farmers and put them out of business. That's why the CAP is an obscenity on every level. Demolishing it and opening the EU's markets to the developing world would certainly contribute to the food-shortage problem, while at the same time delivering a better deal to long-suffering EU taxpayers.

These simple and obvious measures would far exceed any good done by the splodges of aid furnished by well-meaning governments and NGOs.

So has the UN FAO come up with any such measures in its hunger jamoboree? Did it heck! This World Food Sham didn't in fact come up with a single measure that would even meet the classic SMARTI criteria for action items.



Notwithstanding sterling declarations of intent, its final communiqué is full of do-nothing steps (not to mention opt-outs by Argentina, Cuba and Venezuela):

- resources should be assured ...
- organisations should enhance their cooperation ...
- efforts should be made ...
- countries should be prepared to assist ...
- partners should undertake initiatives to moderate fluctuations ...
- we will strive to ensure food security ...

Now ask yourself how any of these items, littered as they are with fuzzy verbs, can for example be measured, for if they can't be measured they simply won't be done - that's human nature. And that's the precise reason the declaration is full of "assuring", "enhancing", "making efforts", "striving", because such words commit no-one to actually do anything but talk.

No-one has promised to tear down trade barriers, open markets, cut subsidies by certain defined dates, the only actions that will sustainably solve the food-shortage/high-price problem, just as they have solved every other major supply problem facing the world.

The United Nations, a club which ranks

- criminal, illegitimate T4Ls such as Mr Mugabe, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, Omar al-Bashir of Sudan
- on a par with impeccably democratic leaders such as New Zealand's Helen Clark, India's Manmohan Singh, France's Nicolas Sarkozy or America's George Bush,

has become an irrelevant talking shop. The inclusion of so many thugs in its membership makes it structurally incapable of solving

global problems, and indeed it adds to them. Tyrants are succoured, democracies such as Israel are denigrated, its peace-keepers are notorious for sex abuse, to name but a few egregious UN characteristics, yet it is funded mainly by the democracies (the US pay 22%).

As I've argued previously, the democracies should walk away from the UN, allow it to implode, and form their own United Democracies. At least if the UD were then to decide it wanted to tackle a particular global problem, you could pretty sure it would achieve something constructive, rather than sham conferences such as the UN-FAO's latest charade.

Oily Debate

On 31st May, the Irish Times kindly afforded me its prime Saturday OpEd slot for an article entitled "Simplistic prediction of looming oil drought are wide of the mark". Intended as a primer for the layman/woman, it tries to answer the question "when will the oil run out?", a subject I first wrote about back in 2005. With oil exceeding \$130 a barrel it is a topical theme.

Having seen my column, Ireland's state broadcaster RTE then invited me to discuss and debate on live radio oil issues with a Colin Campbell, on its morning chat-show, Today with Pat Kenny. It was my first such experience

and I found it a bit nerve-wracking, but I seemed to survive.

My antagonist Mr Campbell is an experienced ex-BP oilfield geologist who runs an international think-tank and has written a book devoted to the cult of "Peak Oil". But I was surprised at how thin his arguments turned out to be. A few months ago I wrote a post, "Beware the Peak Oil Salesman", deriding the Peak Oil concept, which provided me with some ammunition.

You can listen to the 20-minute oily debate here.

Anonymous Donor's Daughter

Last week I was privileged to attend a talk and Q&A session, under the auspices of the Iona Institute, given by a 35-year-old Englishwoman, Joanna Rose, who is the result of an artificial conception by her mother using an anonymous sperm donor. She is the first such person ever to speak publically in Ireland about her situation, and her central message is that the offspring of in-vitro-fertilisation are never consulted - or indeed rarely even considered - in the debate over the use of IVF. From her special perspective, she believes this - and IVF itself - are deeply wrong.

Delivered without self-pity, I found the session extremely moving in that it raised jolting considerations that would rarely cross the mind of anyone who is fortunate enough to have been naturally conceived

and raised by his/her biological parents. Here are a few of the points she made, some of which are touched on by the International Donor Offspring Alliance, a grouping of IVF offspring. Make your own judgements.

- Ms Rose believes that her biological father was a serial donor, and estimates that as a result she probably has between a hundred and three hundred half-siblings, none of whom she knows. Besides being naturally very curious about this extended family, she worries that she may unbeknownst end up falling in love with a brother.
- She is disgusted by the veil of secrecy and silence that surrounds IVF. In her own case, her father does not appear on her birth certificate; her mother cannot bring herself to discuss the matter; when she tries to trace her father through the IVF agencies she is told lies - successively, that the records have been destroyed in an office fire, then in an office flooding, then accidentally dumped in a skip.
- Hypocrisy too. Adults who seek out IVF are desperate for

a baby that is as genetically close to them as possible.

- Ideally the couple will use their own sperm and eggs, implanted in a surrogate if necessary. Failing that, one donor will be used, and only failing that will two donors be sought.
- Single people and gays wanting children will likewise seek out as much genetic kinship as possible,
- and in all cases consanguinity will be gladden the hearts of other family members (grandparents, siblings etc).

Yet throughout, there is blithe insouciance about the the importance of kinship for the actual baby, whose future needs to know its biological family are rarely even considered.

- Her experience, and that of other similar offspring, is that going public about her origins and unhappiness is akin to a gay coming out of the closet - a life-changing event which is difficult, embarrassing and makes others uncomfortable.
- She sees herself and her colleagues as being part of a social experiment solely for the

gratification of adult desires, effectively guinea pigs who have not been consulted about their involvement.

- IVF can lead to extraordinary family situations. Consider a mum with three IVF children by different donors, and perhaps a husband. Perhaps she separates from him and takes up with another man. Before long the family can have five different Dads which can lead to all kinds of confusion among the children.
- Donors themselves are often finding themselves with issues.

In some cases it is simply remorse that they have parented children whom they know nothing about. But it can be more direct. A family man may be contacted by an adult child resulting from a donation made when he was a student. This often creates immediate tensions

- with his wife who feels undermined by the intrusion,
- with grandparents who welcome it,
- with the existing children who may or may not feel threatened with the news.
- Inheritance can likewise create unwelcome pressures,

- exacerbated by the fear that another 50 such offspring could suddenly emerge.

- It is extraordinary and wrong that although women are counselled about such issues before donating, men are not. For men it is regarded as the same as blood donation. Indeed, in Britain a tastelessly-named pro-donation site says exactly this.
- IVF research is centred almost entirely on IVF technology, IVF medicine, and IVF parents, and is usually paid for by IVF companies. Almost never are IVF offspring included. The inevitable result is findings that are always skewed in favour of IVF, which just happens to have become a very lucrative business.
- A medical technology originally created to help childless married couples is now being promoted, as a money-spinning venture, to unmarrieds, singles, gays and lesbians. The businesses are aided and abetted by governments, especially in the English-speaking world (though not Ireland).
 - Whereas the paradigm underlying (natural) conception has throughout history been “*creating a human being*”, the IVF paradigm has become that of “*treating the childless*”. This is seen as a

- purely medical issue, with success measured solely in terms of healthy babies.
- Extraordinarily, there is apparently more money today in fertility treatment than in plastic surgery.
 - Even IVF children of married parents can experience emotional difficulties, sometimes linking their problems with their conception. The link may be false but it is real to the person concerned.
 - A drug addict connects his addition to the thought that he was conceived using a syringe.
 - Bulimia is blamed on the fact that she began life as sperm in a spoon.
 - Excessive sensitivity to cold is imputed to having once been a frozen embryo.

Ms Rose's bottom line is that there are no circumstance whatsoever that justify the conception of a child via IVF. Its sole purpose is to satisfy the wants of adults whilst disregarding the needs of the resultant children. With the possible exception of married couples, I agree with her.

In the coming days, I am expecting Ms Rose to be appear on a national radio interview which I helped set up, in which case I will add the link.

Donations to China and Burma by Text

Four charities, the Irish Red Cross, Oxfam Ireland, Trócaire and Concern Worldwide, are using text-messaging for the first time in Ireland in order to appeal for funds to help alleviate the disasters in Burma and China. Even though the latter two are my most unfavourite charities, it is such a slick and easy way to donate that I would recommend it to all. Moreover, I don't for a moment think that any of the charities would misuse such money.

In both these stricken countries, entire villages and towns have been reduced to rubble, with thousands dead, wounded and homeless. From the TV screens, it may appear that the Chinese are suffering more, but that is only because the Burmese Junta is keeping foreign news media away.

If you live in the Republic of Ireland, you simply text the word **AID** to **57500** to send an automatic donation of €2.50 to charities on the front line, which appears on your phone bill or comes out of your credit.

Go on, do it now! You won't even feel it.

Piggybacking on the Lisbon Treaty

Ireland has been exploding with excitement over its upcoming referendum on the Lisbon treaty. (Readers will be familiar with the low opinion I hold of this execrable document and my advice to vote No.)

- Newspapers have been devoting not column-inches but entire pages to it and in some cases special supplements.
- The chat shows on radio and TV seem to talk about little else.
- Opinion pollsters are coining money as they frighten the establishment by showing public sentiment shifting steadily from a Yes to a No.
- Politicians, businessmen, trade unionists and independent citizens are criss-crossing the country in painted battle-buses.
- Each side accuses the other of lies, myth-making and nefarious money-raising.
- No-one has actually read the wretched document, not even the Taoiseach or Ireland's EU Commissioner.
- Cities and towns are plastered with posters.

But some of the more canny politicians, aware that there are local elections next year for which they are not yet permitted to campaign, have come up with a



cunning ruse. It is abundantly clear that many of them remain unconvinced by the arguments for a Yes, but are under whips' orders to campaign for one. Their little scheme, therefore, is to produce posters like this one. Big photo, big name and in tiny pale letters "Vote YES to Europe". Subliminally, they're saying "Forget about Lisbon, but please remember me at next year's local election!". And all paid for by piggybacking on the limitless coffers of the Yes (or No) campaign. Smart, eh?

Quotes for Issue 177

----- A M E R I C A -----

Quote: "I will do everything in my power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon - everything."

As part of an astonishing U-turn following his defeat of Hillary Clinton in the nomination battle, Barack Obama virtually guarantees he will attack Iran if it doesn't abandon its nuclear ambitions.

He also guarantees the defence of Israel and a united Jerusalem, and hedges his earlier irresponsible pledge

<p>to enter talks with Iran “without pre-conditions”.</p> <p><u>Quote</u> (from the subscription-only Irish Times): “It is the right of the American nation to elect who they want. But we hope they won’t make a mistake, like the last time.”</p> <p>Hassan Kazemi Qomi, Iran’s ambassador to Iraq, makes it plain that Iran is backing Barack Obama, whom it hopes the Americans will elect, unlike their “mistake” in 2004 when they failed to elect John Kerry.</p> <p>Thus Mr Obama secures another embarrassing endorsement, to add to <u>that</u> of Hamas through its political adviser Ahmed Yousef.</p> <p>----- Z I M B A B W E -----</p> <p>---</p> <p><u>Quote</u>: “This is the person who has presided over the starvation of his people. This is the person who has used food aid in a politically motivated way. So Robert Mugabe turning up to a conference dealing with food security or food issues is, in my view, frankly obscene.”</p> <p>Australian foreign affairs minister Stephen Smith on the arrival in Rome for a conference of the UN’s</p>	<p>Food and Agriculture Organisation, referring to Zimbabwe’s dictator Robert Mugabe, responsible for impoverishing his country and driving out three million starving refugees in search of food</p> <p><u>Quote</u>: “[Robert Mugabe is] a pariah - a mad dog on two legs. The only contact a civilised nation should have with him is to put him in handcuffs and lead him to trial.”</p> <p>Lord Tebbit, a cabinet minister under Margaret Thatcher, who thinks Mr Mugabe is exhibiting symptoms of tertiary syphilis.</p> <p>If ever there were a candidate for kidnapping while in Rome followed by extraordinary rendition, surely he (Mugabe, not Tebbit) is it.</p> <p>----- C A N A D A -----</p> <p><u>Quote</u> (Minute 61): “There can’t be enough laws to deal with the issue [of hate].”</p> <p>Ian Fine, Director of the General Dispute Resolution Branch of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, defends outrageous practices aimed at constraining free speech which it chooses to find offensive.</p> <p>The remark was made at a televised debate discussing human rights and an ongoing controversy over the limits of free speech</p>	<p>at a conference of the Canadian Association of Journalists in Edmonton on 29 May 2008.</p> <p>I wonder would he like to invoke anti-hate laws against me if I were to say I hate Nazis?</p> <p>----- I R E L A N D -----</p> <p><u>Quote</u> (from the subscription-only Irish Times): “In the case of the Lisbon Treaty, voters can be reassured by the fact that politicians and civil servants have pored over every word to ensure that their interests [whose interests?] were protected.”</p> <p>Ambassador John Bruton, former Irish Taoiseach, and now illustrious EU Ambassador to the USA and avid EU apparatchik, based in a huge, luxurious taxpayer-funded mansion in Washington, lives in terror that his fellow-Irish will vote down the Lisbon Treaty and thereby invoke incredulity and derision from his fellow apparatchiks.</p> <p>In fact his sentence tells you exactly why voters should vote NO.</p> <p>For this native English-speaker should really have paid more attention during his English syntax classes in secondary school.</p> <p>Then he wouldn’t have laid himself open to ridicule by correspondent Damien Flinter who cheekily <u>ripostes</u>,</p>	<p>“Could the devil be in that possessive pronoun?”</p> <p><u>Quote</u>: “I think if you ask them [Toulouse] they’ll feel like a team beat them playing boring and ugly stuff, but we don’t care. I have a medal in my arse pocket.”</p> <p><u>Munster</u>’s second-row forward Donnacha O’Callaghan reflects on his team’s seizure from <u>Toulouse</u> of the Heineken European Cup in a pulsating final on 24th May.</p> <p>Munster are now deserved champions of Europe for a second time in three years.</p> <p>If only they could now play the <u>Blue Bulls</u> from Pretoria, South Africa who are current champions of the Southern Hemisphere’s comparable Super 14 competition, in order to establish a World Champion club team</p>
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