



The State of the Union and the Davos Forum, Singing From the Same Hymnbook

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Economic growth, big news in late January. President Bush focused on a “stimulus package” to jump start the economy in his State of The Union Address, stressing that the US economy is “strong, dynamic and resilient” and currently dealing with “short term disruptions”. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told the worlds rich and powerful gathered in the Swiss Alpine resort of Davos for the World Economic Forum that ” The US economy is resilient, it’s structure is sound and it’s long term economic fundamentals are healthy”. Like the President, downplaying the rumors of a pending deep recession.

The head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suggested to the Davos forum, a need for IMF countries to increase their spending, even countries with deficits. As with President Bush, the answer is always spending more money, even if you don’t have it. Who is this supposed to help? The Davos forum and the State of the Union, long on promises and short on delivery. The promise of pulling people out of poverty, providing health care and jobs, in short floating everyones boat is often made, never delivered.

Agriculture is the perennial stumbling block of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Davos forum. Developing nations want to protect their farmers and food supply from cheap subsidized imports. The industrialized nations of the north want market access and the multinational corporations want profit, it is survival vs. economic growth.

Agriculture was scarcely mentioned in the State of the Union Address. There was no mention of the 2007 Farm Bill which remains stalled and under threat of veto. No mention of biofuels which, with nuclear power, make up the Presidents renewable energy plan. Of course as Gertrude Falk from Food First stated “Biofuels are a very dangerous issue. It reduces the area available for food production and in the long run it drives the price of food up”. Perhaps in searching for his “legacy” controversy is best avoided?

The President did ask Congress to allow 25% of food aid to be purchased locally, (in cases of dire emergency) a departure from current law that provides only US commodities be purchased as food aid. Current law has the benefit of putting money into the pockets of US grain traders while at the same time undercutting indigenous farmers in the famine areas, thereby establishing permanent dependence on US commodity purchases. So, some local purchases, but food aid should still eventually turn a profit.

Bill Gates, pledged to spend over \$ 300 million on a “new green revolution” for Africa. The standard Davos formula for dumping food on the poor causes more harm than good as organizations like CARE



and Oxfam have noted. Will the Gates Foundation collaborate with local communities to develop systems of healthy, green, fair and affordable food, or dump more fertilizer, chemicals and GM seed on Africa and tell them to go to it?

President Bush cited the recent Free Trade Agreement with Peru as a “good agreement” and asked Congress to approve similar agreements with South Korea, Columbia and Panama. A “good agreement”, so long as corporations and agribusiness make a nice profit, why worry about the environment, labor standards or local food production?

Food and agriculture must be taken out of the WTO. This has long been the demand of indigenous farmers worldwide. The demand for food sovereignty, the right for people to define their own food and agriculture, has been the focus of protests against the WTO, the deals cut at Davos and US farm subsidies.

Still, it continues, the Davos forum, the WTO and President Bush; their tunnel vision allowing them to see economic growth as the only goal. The trip is of no consequence, only the destination. They say from their yachts, that they want to float everyones boat, never realizing that most people in the world have no boat. They express genuine concern about economic recession, never realizing the poor of the world know nothing but recession.

Bono, from the Irish band U2 criticized the Davos forum and the international community in general for making promises of development but never living up to them. “I would like to turn our moral compact into legally binding contracts. Then my advice to the developing world? Get a good lawyer and haul our arses into court,”. Bono had it right about Davos, they are “fat cats in the snow”.

[Jim Goodman](#) is an organic dairy farmer and farm activist from Wonewoc WI. The Irish famine of the mid 1800's, the failed British farm policy and mono-culture farming that caused it brought Jim's great grandfather to Wisconsin. Continuing failed farm policy in the US has compelled Jim to advocate for a farmer controlled, consumer oriented food system.