
Interview: Argentine Congressman Alberto Cantero

‘Put Doubling Food Output On the FAO Agenda’

Deputy Alberto Cantero, chairman of the Agriculture and Cattle-Ranching Committee of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies, was interviewed by Emiliano Andino of the La-Rouche Youth Movement in Argentina, on May 15.

Andino: We are faced with a worldwide crisis, which is affecting the entire planet. Several countries in the world have been forced to intervene with state policies to guarantee the food supply to their populations. You are presenting a bill for the creation of an agency that could reestablish the legitimate role of the state in the dynamics of production and marketing for agriculture and livestock. So, Congressman, how is your proposal coming along, to reorganize the way in which Argentina’s consumption and production sectors are related?

Cantero: Well, to reestablish the role that the state and all governments have with regard to the issue of food security, is

a very crucial matter. We think that food security was what originally gave rise to the European Economic Community. It is of that magnitude and importance, and even more so now, that after the mortgage boom collapse in the United States, the big investment groups are moving to capture food and the world’s food reserves, and prices of basic foods have practically doubled in 24 months, causing a very serious problem.

In Argentina, we have disorganization on this whole question. Or rather, a disorganization very well organized on behalf of certain interests, which are virtually all multinational financial corporations. We still have the organization inherited from the 1976 military dictatorship, consolidated and perfected with the political reforms of the 1990s, in which practically all aspects of production, trade, and technological models, as related to distribution and marketing of grains and food, were left in the hands of the free market.

What we are proposing, therefore, is the creation of an agency whose function, first of all, is promoting the quality of Argentine food throughout the world. Secondly, we want to avoid all the monopolistic practices, cartelization, and oligopolistic practices, because in Argentina, five large financial groups have concentrated domestic marketing of food. These large financial groups also determine the prices, conditions of sale, quality of food, as well as its distribution in the interior of the country.

Therefore, we need an entity with the capability to promote the sale of our food internationally, as well as to guarantee freedoms, so as to ensure transparency in marketing; an entity that can also guarantee the country’s food security, and one that can take the entire complex—or rather, the entire chain of production—starting from the production of wheat, and ending with the production of bread.

That food production chain also generates a chain of value, in which we have to be clear on how much value is being added, from the wheat that is produced to the bread that is marketed, to avoid a spurious intermediation that generally distorts not only the prices, but also the accessibility of the food. Here, there are always two victims: the one who produces food in the countryside, and the one who consumes it in the cities.

Thus, by helping the development of agriculture, agro-industry, and food processing, an agency of this nature also



LYM/Emiliano Andino

Congressman Alberto Cantero at the Argentine House of Representatives, May 13, 2008. “Today, it is a global immorality that there are children dying of hunger because they are unable to access food. Conditions exist in the world to produce food for everyone—quality food for everyone.”

helps to develop an economy that is both transparent and responsible. And, at the same time, it can help, albeit in different ways, those producers and food industry businessmen who have fewer resources, so they can come together, organize, and above all, have very good practices both for agricultural products and for the process of production, because these are related to food security. And it would provide compensation at those times when distortions appear in the process.

Naturally, this also provides the state with the tools it needs to purchase, store, sell, and distribute food or agricultural products, to the degree that distortions arise in the market.

Andino: The name of the agency is the ENPYCCAA.

Cantero: Yes, it's the National Agricultural Trade Control and Promotion Agency.

World Hunger Socially Immoral

Andino: Lyndon LaRouche's international movement is currently leading a worldwide campaign aimed at forcing the June 3-5 FAO [UN Food and Agriculture Organization] conference in Rome to change its agenda, to focus directly on making all the necessary changes in the dynamics of trade and regulation in order to double food production in the short and medium term. The idea is to be able to feed the entire planet.

What role, or responsibility do you think Argentina has in this mission?

Cantero: First of all, I think it's very important to introduce this agenda. Today, it is socially immoral on a global scale—so let's say we're talking about a planetary social immorality—to have hungry children, malnourished pregnant women, and people starving to death, especially given our level of scientific and technological progress. This can be applied to energy, as well as to food production, as it's very clear that what happens with energy always has an impact on food production.

I repeat: Today, it is a global immorality that there are children dying of hunger because they are unable to access food. Conditions exist in the world to produce food for everyone—*quality* food for everyone. So I think it is everyone's responsibility to put this on the FAO's agenda, and I think it's excellent that youth are really forcing this discussion.

What can Argentina do in this regard? Today Argentina produces around 100 million tons of agricultural and livestock products on about 30 million hectares of land [about 73 million acres]. When we double-crop, using new technologies, we can increase that to between 33 and 34 million hectares. With climate change, we can expand the area under cul-



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The wheat harvest in Argentina. "One hundred years ago," said Cantero, "Argentina was the breadbasket of the world, producing grain for the entire world. Today, in this 21st Century, Argentina must become a food producer."

tivation to around 40 million hectares (although taking precautions, because while climate change moves us into a more humid cycle, it is also one that is climactically much more unstable).

That is, there is a higher average temperature, a larger quantity of rain, but also a greater disturbance in the atmosphere which generates climate change and instability. We also have an enormous quantity of high-intensity rainfall which forces us to organize our land use so as to prevent erosion or destruction of the soil.

So, Argentina can increase the area [under cultivation] to produce close to 40 million tons, and within another ten years, given scientific and technological advances, it could produce 150 million tons of food. With the technological advances which genetic engineering and all related fields will be incorporating, within 15 years, Argentina could be producing 200 million tons of primary products.

With a population of 40 million people, Argentina is in a position to produce high-quality food for 500 to 600 million people in the world. This is tremendously important for our country, but it will also have an impact on the global economy.

We have the case of highly developed countries with large subsidies, which I respect, because these are subsidies which have a social and economic function in those countries. But at the same time, they also distort the global economy.

On the one hand, they are proposing food security for themselves in the Northern Hemisphere. But in that food self-sufficiency, they are also proposing that their food surpluses enter into world trade. So, fundamentally, they are relegating Argentina to the role of producing balanced food for the animals of the First World, or producing biofuels. I don't think that is good for Argentina, or for the world. We have to be



The LaRouche Youth Movement organizes for global development, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, July 2007.

we're just handing over soybeans, wheat, and corn to the world. Rather, we're giving the world the food derived from that transformed grain. And when we talk about transformation, we're talking about agro-industries, about centers of creation and innovation of the entire technological side of things.

We have to deal with genetic engineering, everything to do with biocides, and fertilizers, and we have to deal with our ecosystem in an integrated way so as not to destroy the environment in which production takes place. When we talk about food producers, we're also talking about mastering the most advanced technologies, both in terms of materials and information technology—electronics, genetic engineering and bio-technology, which will really allow us to produce the highest quality food with the greatest efficiency.

food producers for those 500 million people, which will allow for our own economic development, progress, and generation of wealth—but also allow us to meet our *social obligation* to humanity.

Use the Highest Agricultural Technology

Andino: Clearly, to increase the level of production—for example, on the question of handling a fundamental resource like water—we will need infrastructure projects that can channel the water from where it is abundant to where it is scarce, as well as energy distribution and rural electrification. This is all a fundamental part of making this reality. It's not just a question of making changes on the level of marketing.

Cantero: No, no, no. This implies integrated policies, and above all, those that take the human being into account. Many policies define public works as something allowing for greater production of pigs, cows, soy, wheat, or corn. But we have to account for the human being to produce them, living with a quality of life, and we have to change the concept of public works to one of public investment. That is, those public works that truly improve infrastructure, so as not to destroy either the land or its people.

Andino: It isn't just a question of production either. A lot of people might think that we should become only an agro exporter, rather than strengthening the agricultural sector so it develops in tandem with an industrial Argentina, which is also developing at the same time.

Cantero: One hundred years ago, Argentina was the breadbasket of the world, producing grain for the entire world. Today, in this 21st Century, Argentina must become a food producer. And when we say that we produce food, it's not that

Andino: Something like this emerged from the Green Revolution that came after [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt's government in the United States, and spun off scientific and technological research institutions all over the world. Today, due to a lack of funds, these have been relegated to tertiary tasks, while private-sector technology firms have become dominant.

Cantero: We humbly welcome private enterprise in the world. But it's important that each country really have a well-defined policy, such that the investment and private enterprise that enter the country work according to the definition of each country's state policies. Above all, the world can't be controlled by 50 multinational corporations, with huge financial surpluses, that rip up economies and peaceful existence, and even promote war. In this 21st Century, the world has to live in peace, and in that peaceful world, there must be justice for all. If not, there won't be enough food for all of humanity.

Andino: It seems clear that to make all this happen, the whole world economic system would have to be changed, right? LaRouche is proposing a change: to kick over the chessboard in methods of evaluating the economy, and it would appear that it is necessary to take on at least the discussion of how much we have to change, and put everything into this.

Cantero: The intention is valid, but it is not going to happen just like that, and I congratulate you for doing it. But we really face a tremendous concentration of financial power, which, at times, runs even the most developed countries. Let's hope we can have the importance and the strength, so that the United Nations really helps to redirect this process towards peace.