

# Diogène Senny

## Prosper or Perish: An Introduction to The Geopolitics of Hunger and Poverty

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that at least 13 billion people, twice the world's population today, could be fed by the world's agriculture. Therefore, the destruction of tens of millions of women, men and children by hunger is unworthy of such a rich century! Can we seriously consider alternatives to hunger, poverty and ill health while maintaining a historical amnesia on matters of the economic and social rights of peoples?

### **The Fight Against Amnesia**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Who remembers that a third of the civilian and military deaths of the Second World War were due to malnutrition, tuberculosis and anemia? Who remembers the heaps of coffins that piled up in the churches of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, because of hunger? And especially in Poland and Norway, the fact that some families survived by eating rats and the bark of trees?

Two years after this appalling reality, in 1947—who recalls still this attack by the ambassador of Great Britain, while working with the Commission responsible for drawing up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “We want free men, not well-fed slaves!” Who recalls the direct response of his Ukrainian counterpart: “Even free men can starve to death.” This exchange illustrates the beginning of a new geopolitical order, that is to say, the Cold War, and the defeat of the recognition of economic and social rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of December 10, 1948.

Ladies and Gentlemen, far from the one-off event, the circumstances in which this conference takes place make of it an Historical Moment, because the enormous health, economic and social consequences connected to COVID-19, are like the “Challenges” and “Confrontations” launched against societies and men in the sense of the British historian, Arnold Toynbee.

For once, we are going to connect the issues of Hunger, Poverty and Health with History, not only in a memorial function, but also and above all to view history as the most powerful manifestation of social energy and the will of man to survive.

*Storismo*, as the Italians would say, in other words historicism, is the act by which one creates one's own action, one's own thought, one's own poetry, by moving from the present consciousness of the past. We know

However, how to believe that the civil and political rights can be effective, without the economic and social rights? It took 45 years, almost half a century, in June 1993 for the UN to adopt a new Declaration in Vienna, making all rights (civic, political, economic, social and cultural) indivisible and interdependent. Alas, what wasted time!

### **The Disappointments of the End of the Cold War**

Ladies and Gentlemen, The hope raised by the end of the cold war in terms of economic and social rights was very quickly lost because of the fact that the planetary power of transcontinental agro-industrial companies and hedge funds, these funds that speculate on food prices, arable land, seeds, fertilizers, credits, etc., is significantly higher than that of states. Hunger is not inevitable, it comes from organized crime. Ninety percent of peasants in the south, in the 21st century, only have the following working tools: hoe, machete and scythe.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports in the 2010s indicate that 500 million farmers in the South have no access to selected seeds, mineral fertilizers, or manure, and do not own animals. The overwhelming majority of farmers in India, Peru, Burkina Faso, Niger, Ecuador, etc. have no irrigation system. How can you be surprised then that one hectare of cereals gives about 700 kilograms to Africans, against 10,000 kilograms for the same space for their colleagues from the Gironde in France. As we have already said, hunger is not inevitable. It is the result of the will of a few. And it is by the determination of men that she will be defeated.

Some examples to illustrate predation situations by multinationals of the agro-industry in Africa:

In Cameroon: In 2006, we remember the admirable struggle led by the Development Committee of the N'do region, which brought together farmers' unions and civil society in the fight against the grabbing of 11,000 hectares of arable land by SOSUCAM (Société Sucrière du Cameroun), authorized by the Cameroonian government. It should be noted that SOSUCAM is the property of Alexandre Vilgrain, a French industrialist, and that this company had already acquired 10,000 hectares in Cameroon in 1965. Here, the colonial continuum is still in full swing in the economic field.

In Senegal: Here it was the Great Senegalese Estates

(GDS), belonging to French, Spanish, Moroccan, etc. financial groups which acquired tens of thousands of hectares of arable land in Saint-Louis, depriving the peasants of necessary space for basic crops. As in Cameroon, the farmers of Walo, who were reduced to modest harvests on only one hectare of rice, organized themselves to resist with much dignity.

In Nigeria, Benin and Mali: International hedge funds also rely on local oligarchs to organize land grabs.

This is how the wealthy Nigerian merchants of Sokoto and Kano got hold of tens of thousands of hectares of food land.

In Benin, it is the political and economic barons who accumulate hectares, deliberately leaving them fallow, while waiting to resell them for a higher price, instead of investing in the region of Zou, the former breadbasket of Benin's wheat.

Finally, we note the same trading mechanism in Mali, where wealthy businessmen from Bamako are used to acquire arable land at low prices for resale at enormous profit to Saudi princes or New York hedge funds.

### **In Conclusion**

Ladies and Gentlemen, The ruin of the economy and the disasters that are looming following the coronavirus pandemic, are part of what is known as Cyclical Hunger. Its peculiarity lies in the suddenness and unpredictability of the highly visible damage generated. Its spectacular nature should not blind us to these real causes. However, what has been described throughout this intervention is structural hunger. Structural hunger has root causes. It is permanent and unspectacular, psychologically and physically destroying millions of human beings. Structural hunger exposes millions of malnourished mothers to give birth to deficient children.

Ladies and Gentlemen, We will precede the alternative presented by this conference, "Prosper or Perish," by the word Unity. Because, for us pan-Africanists, the question of hunger is less about food security than food sovereignty. Only political unity will give us the weapons necessary to protect the immense resource of arable land all over the African continent. It is at this price that Food Sovereignty will be guaranteed to all Africans!

*Umoja Ni Nguvu.* Thank you.