

The World as Connected

Introduction by Dr. Adrian Grima at the Seminar on Food Security organized by Koperattiva Kummerċ Ġust

On behalf of the Maltese fair trade organization, Koperattiva Kummerċ Ġust, I welcome you to this public conference about the Right for Food organized within the framework of the Enlarging Fair project, Capacity Building on Fair Trade, co-financed by the European Commission.

Apart from our cooperative, the fair trade organizations participating in this project are from Italy, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Hungary. The project is led by our partners of the Italian fair trade organization aptly called Pangea-Niente Troppo.

In 1996, an international peasant movement, actually one of the largest social movements in the world today with, by some estimates, up to one hundred million members in rich and poor countries, came up with a new vision for a worldwide future for food. It's called "food sovereignty." I like to look at it as the "food revolution," "ir-Rivoluzzjoni tal-Ikel," but more about the vital issue of language, and, in our case, the Maltese language, in a minute.

This movement, comprised of the world's poorest farmers and landless workers, and which Fra Ġwann Xerri, over here, knows well, is called Via Campesina.

Food sovereignty is "a vision with some fairly clear ideas about what needs to happen so that small farmers can survive, that the environment is maintained, and that there is global justice. In his foreword to Wayne Roberts' *No Nonsense Guide to World Food* (2008), a timely but also fiery book published earlier this year by *New Internationalist*, Raj Patel writes that "food sovereignty embodies perhaps the most important lesson from years of struggle around food and agriculture: the best way to arrive at a balanced, just and sustainable food system is to have a democratic conversation about it. The power should be in our hands, and all too often it isn't. [] The way our food comes to us has been shaped by corporations and governments, international institutions and oligarchs,"¹ and it doesn't feel like we have much of a say in the larger debate.

¹ Patel in Roberts 5.

In his *No Nonsense Guide*, Wayne Roberts notes that the subject of food helped him “feel the world as connected.”² He also points out that “Life is rich and it’s great to be part of a movement based on the joy of sharing abundance,” which, for him, “is what the food movement is all about.” It’s the “food revolution.” “Joy, not hairshirts or self-righteousness, is the prescribed additive, of [the] food revolution.”³

It’s a revolution because “moving on hunger advances the agenda on all eight Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations: eradicate extreme poverty, promote universal primary education, empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat infectious disease, ensure environmental sustainability, and encourage global development partnerships. “That,” writes Wayne Roberts, “says a mouthful about the need for conversations that raise the profile, priority and utility of food issues.”⁴

A word about the Mediterranean. Small farmers in our region are facing three threats to their survival: expulsion from their lands because of industrial agriculture; exclusion from internal markets which are saturated with foreign imported produce; and the inability of states to invest in food, education, and health. These force young, dynamic countryside people to leave the countryside and search for a future in the city or abroad.

But the neoliberal model is in crisis. to resist these threats and construct an agriculture that is able to feed its population, Attac France calls for all people to count, first of all, on its own resources, its own forces, in a way that allows local production to defend itself against the domination of the world markets, against an industrial agriculture that threatens to take the lands of small farmers in order to focus on an agriculture that pollutes and is export oriented. We must also support local communities: they are the only ones who are able to strike a just, centuries’ old balance with nature. This applies to all sides of the Mediterranean. And then there’s the issue of water, of course, which is unevenly spread in the Mediterranean. The North has 74% of the water in the region; the East has 21%; the South has 4% of the total water resources of our region. But I leave all this to the experts who will address this conference.

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² Roberts 8.

³ Roberts 24.

⁴ Roberts 25.