WN *Update*

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Editor's note. *Big Food Watch*, on the cover of this issue of *WN*, is the topic of the commentary 'Words for our sponsors' that follows this *Update* section. The decision to include *BFW* as a regular feature in *WN* follows recommendations from Association members and colleagues, and responds to the *Bellagio Declaration*, 'Countering Big Food's Undermining of Healthy Food Policies'. All the contributions in this issue of *Update* are identified as from *Big Food Watch*. In future we plan to run series of *BFW* commentaries.

Big Food Watch. World Economic Forum
The big business band plays on



BIG FOOD WATCH

Access Spring 2004 The National Interest Samuel Huntington on Davos Man here
Access June 2011 WN editorial on food wars here
Access June 2011 WN Claudio Schuftan on food prices here

Claudio Schuftan of the People's Health Movement reports:





Schmoozing and tooting for helpful government and big business: Klaus Schwab, the boss of the World Economic Forum (left, with Hosni Mubarac). WEF forecasts growth in inequity in 2014

Cognitive dissonance is the uneasy experience of holding two or more contradictory beliefs at the same time. Attentive readers of the World Economic Forum *Outlook on the Global Agenda 2014*, published in late November (1) who, along with most world leaders believe that global affairs now are improving, may suffer a severe attack of

cognitive dissonance. Alternatively, those who believe that present trends point to an even deeper finance, food and fuel crash, may also feel acutely confused.

For on the one hand, the *Outlook* report shows that the WEF is failing in its commitment to 'improving the state of the world'. It states that inequity, instability and insecurity are booming. It emphasises, as noted by a news story (2) that: 'Widening wealth disparity affects every part of our lives… [as it] impacts social stability within countries and threatens security on a global scale… Incredible wealth created over the last decade in the [United States] has gone to a smaller and smaller portion of the population'. Further on it says: 'Nearly two-thirds of US citizens think that the current economic system favours the wealthy. But in some European countries, where people are still recovering from the global economic crisis that has left thousands of people out of work, the percentage is much higher'. No surprise in the above, except that inequity represents not just lack of money, it is a consequence of injustice and oppression that affect all aspects of life, not just ability to buy things.

The WEF meeting held 18-20 November had the purpose to set, predict and confirm its 2014 agenda. It was held in Abu Dhabi. Klaus Schwab, the 1971 founder of the WEF and for long its executive director, is seen sat (above left) with the hosts at the opening plenary session. Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates,(top above), is said to be the richest city in the world, and has grown from 25,000 population in 1960 to its current 1,450,000, three-quarters of whom are foreign nationals. UAE nationals who live in Abu Dhabi, including the ruling families and their followers, are said to have an average individual net personal worth of $US 17 million.





Abu Dhabi (top), location of the 18-20 November 2013 meeting of the World Economic Forum at which its global agenda for 2014 was set. Klaus Schwab (above) at the opening plenary session

The 'Top 10 Trends 2014' specified in the *Outlook* report include eight depicted as problems that, altogether, seem almost apocalyptic. These ten, as well as 'widening income disparities', are: 'rising societal tensions in the Middle East and North Africa' (known to the WEF as 'MENA'), 'persistent structural unemployment'; 'inaction on climate change'; 'intensifying cyber threats'; 'diminishing confidence in economic policies'; 'a lack of values in leadership'; and 'the rapid spread of misinformation online'. Only two of the ten are positioned as neutral. These are: 'the growing importance of megacities' and 'the expanding middle class in Asia'. 'Future Agendas' highlighted are: 'the future of shale gas'; 'the future of the Arctic'; 'the future of biotechnology'; 'the future of digital intelligence'; and 'the new space race'. Further ahead, are: 'mapping the future' and 'the future of democracy'.

What about rising food and nutrition insecurity, the collapse of primary health care, and the displacement of traditional food systems by ultra-processed branded products? These trends are not in the report. For a reason why, see Box 1.

Box 1

World Economic Forum Industry Partners

WEF 'Industry Partners' are, in the WEF's words, 'select member companies that are actively involved in the Forum's mission at the industry level. With privileged access to the Forum's multi-stakeholder networks and experts, this partnership brings visibility and insight to strategic decision-making on the most important industry and cross-industry related issues. This access and insight allows Industry Partners to contribute to leading positive change across these issues and to engage in action to support corporate global citizenship'.



The WEF 'agriculture, food and beverage' 'Industry Partners' are either manufacturers of ultra-processed food and drink products, or alcoholic drinks, or agrichemicals. They include Anheuser Busch-Inbev, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation*, Bunge, Cargill, Carlsberg, Coca-Cola, Diageo, Du Pont, General Mills, Heineken, Mondelēz (ex-Kraft), Monsanto, Nestlé, Pepsi-Co, SAB Miller, Syngenta, Unilever, and Yum! Brands. The list is illustrated with a nice picture (above) of a young Indian woman in a market selling oranges. None of these Industry Partners has headquarters in India (although the CEO of PepsiCo is an Indian as well as a US national) and no business partner is from the primary production, fresh food or retailing sectors (unless agrichemical corporations and Yum! Brands are counted).

**The inclusion of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation may be because of its massive shareholdings in Coca-Cola and McDonald's (3).*

Who are 'us' and 'we'?

The *Outlook* report states that masses of people all over the world are rising up in anger, but does not seriously try to explain why this is so. Instead, despite the appalling trends it outlines, the report is curiously optimistic. Thus Helene D. Gayle, the president and CEO of CARE USA, says: 'In order to counteract income inequality, it is essential to tackle poverty in an integrated way that has long-term impact. We need to give people the capacity to be resilient, to take-on challenges and to learn the skills they need to work towards more prosperous futures. We should also look broadly at social inequalities'. These remarks stop short of saying anything meaningful.



Martina Gmür, head of the WEF 'network of global agenda councils', and Drew Gilpin Faust, the Harvard president, see hope and light ahead. Meanwhile (right) the street fighting continues

Martina Gmür (above, left), a former Nestlé marketing executive, is head of the WEF network of global agenda councils. Introducing the *Outlook* report she says: 'Our experts overwhelmingly agreed that rising societal tensions in the Middle East and North Africa will be the defining trend of 2014, alongside increasing inequality and unemployment. Respondents also showed their dissatisfaction with the state of global co-operation on major challenges such as climate change, youth unemployment and poverty'. She is also upbeat. 'On a brighter note, they were optimistic about the future and about mankind's ability to address emerging issues in biotechnology, surveillance, energy security and a host of other issues'.

Historian Drew Gilpin Faust (above, middle) is president of Harvard, following the resignation in 2006 of economist Lawrence Summers (who as a member of the Clinton administration helped to deregulate the banking industry and thus to create casino capitalism). She says as published in the *Outlook* report: 'The increasingly interconnected nature of the world's most pressing problems demands new approaches to the development of solutions. Traditional intellectual fields are shifting and converging in order to answer the complex questions facing our globalised society, just as organisations such as the World Economic Forum… are bringing together thought leaders from across a wide range of disciplines to provide new perspectives on our greatest opportunities. As we look ahead, we have to be optimistic that this growing spirit of collaboration across disciplines and across borders will enable us to meet the challenges of 2014'. What these warm words mean is anybody's guess.

But who in the *Outlook* report are 'we' and 'us'? Apparently, these are the people who participate in WEF meetings usually held in Davos, Switzerland, and especially 'our experts'. Mostly, these are wealthy white middle-aged men from high-income countries and settings. Samuel Huntington, who invented the term *'Davos Man',* says that they typically 'have little need for national loyalty, view national boundaries as obstacles that thankfully are vanishing, and see national governments as residues from the past whose only useful function is to facilitate the élite's global operations'.

That is to say, the overwhelming bias of the WEF is towards transnational business. Most 'Davos Men' are from huge corporations and associated business enterprises. Most of the rest are from governments. Some, who may be somewhat less wealthy, are academics and public intellectuals, with a few authors, journalists and celebrities. Very few are from public interest organisations or social movements.

The 'world' of the WEF is big business. For the WEF 'development' means more exploitation of human, material and natural resources. Hence its 2014 Top Trends, and hence the cognitive dissonance. The WEF is 'improving the state of the world'. But for whom? For transnational corporations, *including Big Food* (see Box 1, above). The 2014 Trends represent 'the view from the top'. Other Trends could have been added, such as degradation of soil, pollution of oceans, depletion of water, exhaustion of oil, land-grabbing, child labour, food insecurity, soaring cost of medicines, patenting of life forms, suicide of family farmers, civil wars, forced migration, corporate ownership of life forms, and indeed pandemic obesity and diabetes. These and other sensitive topics are not mentioned in the *Outlook* report Instead, its ends cheerily reminding us about 'the new space race' now joined by India and China, with 250 launches planned next year, and 'the role space could play in humanity's future'. Anyone for a Happy Meal on Mars?

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Claudio Schuftan states. I declare an interest as a member of the People's Health Movement, and as such committed to universal primary health care and to hastening the end of casino capitalism.

Schuftan C. *Big Food Watch.World Economic Forum. The big business band plays on. [Update]. World Nutrition October-December 2013, **4,** 8, 597-601*

Big Food Watch. Taxes on ultra-processed products
Mexico makes a move



BIG FOOD WATCH

Access July 2012 PLoS Medicine Carlos Monteiro on Big Food here
Access November 2012 WN Enrique Jacoby on Latin American food law here
Access April 2013 British Medical Journal on Mexican crusade here
Access May 2013 open letter to the Mexican president here
Access February 2013 The Lancet on Profits and Pandemics here
Access June-July 2013 WN Update on obesity in Mexico here
Access 22 November 2013 Huffington Post Larry Cohen report here

Big Food Watch convenor Fabio Gomes reports:



In Mexico rates of consumption of Coca-Cola and of obesity are practically the worst in the world. Now Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto (right) is speaking out for a 'change of culture'.

'New soda tax makes Mexico a leading guardian of public health'. This was a headline in the *Huffington Post* in late November (1). The tax 'also applies to all foods with added sugar, not including milk or yogurt. The… tax is on high-calorie foods that pack 275 or more calories into 100 grams of food including chips, candies, pudding, peanut and hazelnut butters, milk, sugary cereals and ice cream. Meanwhile, federal regulators have announced their intention to issues rules to regulate TV advertising… that would ban ads for sugary drinks, fried foods and other unhealthy food items from appearing on television at certain times of day when large numbers of children watch' (1). The report congratulates Mexico's *El Poder del Consumidor* ('Consumer Power') organisation for bringing together legislators, academics, professional and public interest groups, and the public, to protect the Mexican people.

Junk food taxes have come to Latin America, and in a big way. Big Food – and Big Snack and Big Soda – are not invincible. The Mexican Senate by a vote of 72-2 (with

54 not voting) at the beginning of November passed a law imposing an 8 per cent tax on candy, chips (crisps) and other energy-dense ultra-processed products, together with a 1 peso (roughly US 2.5 cents) per litre tax on cola and other soft drinks (2,3).

Says Juan Rivera of the Mexican National Institute of Public Health, who has campaigned for statutory regulation of 'junk food' in Mexico for years: 'this is a huge achievement'. The law is expected to come into effect on 1 January 2014.

As a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement, which is heavily weighted in the interests of the USA and of transnational corporations, average per head consumption of sugared drinks in Mexico is now 163 litres or 43 gallons a year. Mexico now also has a higher rate of overweight and obese people than the United States, and 32 per cent of all Mexican adults are now obese (4). Mexico also now has the highest prevalence of diabetes among the 34-nation Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development. Almost 10 per cent of Mexican children are diabetic. All these rates are higher than practically any other substantial size country in the world. Mexicans remember that Vicente Fox, Mexican president from 2000 to 2006, is a former chief executive of Coca-Cola in Mexico.

United for success

Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto (right above) and Mexican legislators, have in effect responded to an open letter to the president sent by Consumers' International, International Obesity Task Force, the World Public Health Nutrition Association and eight other international civil society bodies in May (5).

This warned: 'Your Ministry of Health has shown that Mexicans are 2-5 times more likely to have the diabetes and high blood pressure complications of weight gain than US citizens… Mexicans become more vulnerable as their diet deteriorates and the consumption of unhealthy manufactured and pre-prepared foods and sugar-rich drinks increases – steadily replacing traditional healthier dietary patterns. It is now predicted that the costs of treating these diseases will soon overwhelm your health services and already particularly affects the poor. If Mexico is to combat maternal and childhood malnutrition and obesity, it needs to take even more radical preventive steps than those adopted by the West'.

In the *Huffington Post* commentary (1), Larry Cohen of the Prevention Institute says: 'I also believe that all of this will reduce the consumption of junk food and soda –and all the sugar and "wasted calories" these foods and drinks contain – helping slow the dramatic rise in diabetes, stroke and other chronic diseases that is taking place in so many countries. While the revenue from the tax has not specifically been earmarked to support health efforts, legislation is pending in the Mexican Congress to provide at least 3.5 billion pesos (about $US 270 million) to install water fountains in schools'.

Box 1

Can transnationals overturn national laws?

The one-word answer is yes. When governments sign up to binding international trade agreements, they are subject to the laws thus made. Such laws characteristically favour the interests of the most powerful players, such as the USA and the EU. Any national government passing laws that in the corporate view impedes commercial trade or investment in ways that are as they see it against international law, can be challenged.

As of this summer of 2013, transnational biotechnology and agrichemical corporations are pushing to force the EU to 'harmonise' European laws that restrict genetically engineered crops food products, with the much more industry-friendly US deregulated system, in the name of 'regulatory coherence' (6). Under the Trans Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA) now being negotiated, an Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) would give corporations the right to sue governments with the purpose of overturning laws that impeded their investment or profits. Including ISDS in TAFTA would give corporations more power to challenge national public health legislation. If ISDS is agreed, it is very likely to be proposed for parts of the world whose governments are not as strong as those of the EU. The ISDS option has already been used by corporations to challenge national laws on toxic waste dumps, labelling on cigarette packages, and limits on imports of high fructose corn syrup.

When obliged to do so, national governments have invoked their over-riding duty to protect public health. This was how the Brazilian government was able to introduce its generic drugs programme, which had been fiercely opposed by Big Pharma. So far the BRIC countries, which include Brazil, are resisting moves such as ISDS that would give transnational corporations more freedom to challenge and over-ride national governments (6).

In Mexico, Coca Cola and other Big Soda corporations have lobbied heavily against statutory regulation. *Televisa,* the main television station owned magnate Emilio Ascárraga, refused to carry advertising in favour of the soda tax, but broadcast much anti-tax coverage. In response *El Poder del Consumidor* ran a grassroots campaign, using cable TV, radio commercials, subway publicity and billboards with messages like 'In your right mind, would you give your child 12 teaspoons of sugar?'(1).

More battles coming

So far so good, but the war is not finally won. In Brazil in 2013 lawyers representing Big Food corporations succeeded in overturning a proposed law restricting advertising of ultra-processed products to children, on the grounds that such a law would be unconstitutional (7). It seems unlikely that big business will formally confront a national president now committed to tax reform, but you never know. Also new corporate-friendly international trade laws are now being proposed that could eventually make any laws passed by national governments in the interests of public health, vulnerable to aggressive challenges from corporations. (See Box 1).

Larry Cohen in his *Huffington Post* commentary (1) says 'My hope is that the audaciousness of Mexico's action also will trigger more activity here in the US. The big soda and food companies have increasingly been using racially charged

divide-and-conquer tactics, suggesting that soda or junk food taxes are a "nanny state" idea advanced by white liberals that will unfairly harm black and Latino families. Mexico's new law turns this idea on its head. *El Poder del Consumidor* and its allies have pushed the soda and junk-food taxes precisely because of the links between poverty and health and precisely because people of color – indigenous people in the Mexican context – bear the greatest burden of an unhealthy food environment that leaves drinking water largely unavailable while Cokes and fast-food restaurants are ubiquitous'.

In Mexico, Big Food lobbying continues. Alejandro Calvillo, director of *El Poder del Consumidor*, which is supported by the Bloomberg Foundation, says that corporations hate statutory regulation and that a Mexican law creates a precedent for the governments of other countries in Latin America. 'Their fear is not the economic impact, nor the loss of jobs, that doesn't interest them. What interests them is how this could affect the region' (8,9).

Coca-Cola chief executive Muhtar Kent has telephoned Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto and also the national finance minister Luis Videgaray to protest against the soda tax, saying that it won't work, that it will raise prices, and that it penalises impoverished people as well as being bad for trade. So far he has been politely told to mind his own business (10). But until now Mexico has very much been Coke's business. The story is not ended.

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Big Food Watch. Coca-Cola
The hydration in Spain



BIG FOOD WATCH

Access November 2010 WN news on Janet Voûte joining Nestlé here
Access March 2011 WN news on Ann Veneman joining Nestlé here
Access November 2011 WN editorial on public-private partnerships here
Access February 2013 The Lancet paper on Profits and Pandemics here
Access 2013 ICN Granada sponsors, opportunities here

Fabio Gomes, Big Food Watch convenor, reports:



Coke executives from Spain Marcos do Quinto, Ángela López de Sá (left and centre) and from the US Rhona Applebaum (right). Their mission: hydration, but not with water that comes from taps

Coca-Cola was one of the six 'platinum' commercial sponsors that collectively contributed €450,000 + VAT to the International Congress of Nutrition held in Granada in September. Coke has a history of close engagement with public partners in Spain. Its mission statement as used in public health contexts, displayed at the Granada congress, is 'hydrating the world since 1886'. This refers to the fact that by volume (not calories) the main single ingredient of Coke and other ultra-processed products made by the corporation is water. 'Syruping the world since 1886', while more relevant, might discourage partnerships with the public health community.

Coke is also in the business of setting public health agenda and creating as well as funding scientific meetings. On 28-29 November 2011 Coca-Cola Iberia held its II National Hydration Congress in Madrid (1). The event was a private-public partnership with an impressive list of what may be a complete set of Spanish national nutrition professional organisations. These were SEN, FEN, SENC, FINUT, AEN and FIN, which are the Spanish Nutrition Society, the Spanish Nutrition Foundation, the Spanish Society for Community Nutrition, the Iberoamerican Nutrition Foundation, the Spanish Nutrition and Food Science Academy, and the Foundation for Nutrition Research. Nine Spanish universities including that of Granada also collaborated, as did the Spanish Heart Foundation and the Diabetes Foundation; and SEGG, SEGO and FEMEDE, the Spanish Society of Geriatrics and Gerontology, the Spanish Society of Gynecology and Obstetrics, and the Spanish Federation of Sports Medicine. Attendance at the congress was formally accredited by two of the collaborating universities as a contribution to relevant degree courses. A number of presentations were on the benefits of hydration in sport, and hydration as a way to prevent mental deterioration.

Private-public partnership

Collaboration with Big Food in the form of formal and informal partnerships, and also other types of mutual support, is apparently seen by the leaders of medical, health and nutrition professional organisations in Spain not as a problem but as an opportunity. This tendency will have been encouraged by the rising profits, available cash and munificent spending of transnational Big Food, Snack and Soda corporations at a time when the Spanish national economy is damaged, leaving government and universities insolvent. This creates a situation where collaboration is generally felt to be desirable or at least unavoidable.

In his introduction to the hydration congress Marcos do Quinto, president of Coca-Cola Iberia (above, left), said 'We must give special thanks to the different participating organisations.... They have put their trust in our ability to promote and communicate the importance that hydration is gaining on the scientific scene and in today's society'. The four Coke executives who formed the organising committee included Coca-Cola Scientific and Regulatory Affairs Director for Iberia Ángela López de Sá (centre), who gave a closing presentation, and Coca-Cola global Chief Scientific and Regulatory Officer and Vice-President Rhona Applebaum (right), who gave an opening presentations, as did Marcos do Quinto.

The first session of the congress was chaired by Ángel Gil, head of the department of biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of Granada, already confirmed as president and chairman of the September 2013 International Congress of Nutrition at Granada. Other senior scientists, mostly from Spain (including three professors of bromatology, which means the study of food), some from other countries, spoke at or chaired other sessions.

As recorded in *WN* and elsewhere (see links above), there is a tendency for valuable UN and other government officials to move to senior executive posts in Big Food corporations. Sometimes the moves are the other way round. The fact that a former CEO of Coca-Cola in Mexico became the country's president and that the rates of consumption of sugared soft drinks and of obesity in Mexico are now the highest of any sizeable country in the world, is well known (3). Another example is Spain. Four months after the hydration congress, in March 2012, Ángela López de Sá moved from Coca-Cola to become executive director of AESAN, the official Spanish government Agency for Food Safety and Nutrition (2). In this role she will continue to guide European policy-making, which is already officially committed to 'win-win' outcomes, seen to be both in the public and in the private interest.

In this sense, replacement of soft drink vending machines in schools and hospitals, and instead to make safe fresh tap water fully available, is a win-lose situation. Whether the win-wins turn out to include real reduction of consumption of sugared soft drinks and of obesity in Spain and in Europe, and whether traditional Spanish food systems and culture (4) will survive until say 2020, remains to be researched.

References and note

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How to respond

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