WN *Columns*

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What do you think?
Geoffrey Cannon



Spirals: Vincent van Gogh's sky; earthworks; a caduceus shell; a nautilus; Gustav Klimt's Hygeia. The living and physical worlds abound in spirals. There are no straight lines in the natural world

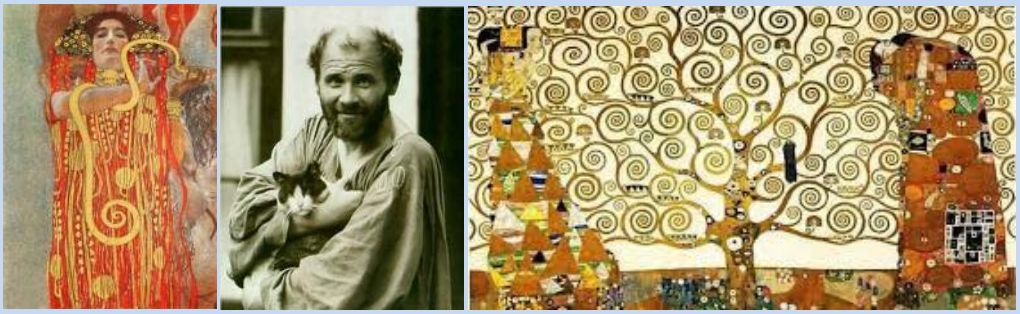
São Paulo, Granada, Cabo Frio. These are places visited as I prepared and wrote this column. As a result of my experience at the International Congress of Nutrition at Granada, the final item, under the *Big Food Watch* banner, wonders if nutrition congresses have now become Big Food trade fairs. First though, I reflect on the spiral symbol used in my columns, examples of which are above. These include the caduceus of serpents twined round a staff (centre), the symbol of health and healing, a version of which is the logo (motif) of the World Health Organization.

The second item below begins my celebration of the historian and public intellectual Robert Skidelsky, under the general title 'What they believe'. This is my next account of some of the beliefs and achievements of remarkable people whose work is outside nutrition and public health as conventionally now taught and practiced, with reasons why what they write, say and do, should shape our ideas and actions.

Then I continue the series 'What I believe'. My #10 belief explained below is: 'Good rules use clear terms'. Thus, it is not much use producing evidence and proposing policies on meat and 'meat products' until it is agreed what 'meat' is. As another example, what is a 'restaurant'? Following this, the column returns to 'What they believe'. Robert Skidelsky, as the biographer of John Maynard Keynes, believes that economics is designed to improve the conditions of life equitably and sustainably, and is not mere statistics and mathematics. The voices of many economists who basically agree with him, who have been sidelined until recently, are now being heard. To improve public health and nutrition we need to learn from them, right now.

Box 1

Spirals, cycles, and the secret of life



The symbolist and voluptuary Austrian painter Gustav Klimt and two of his masterpieces using the spiral of growth, life, health and wisdom: 'The tree of life' (right) and 'Hygeia' (left)

This and other columns include series of spiral images, like those on the previous page. For new readers, these derive from the original symbol of the *New Nutrition Science*, in which the discipline of nutrition is defined as having social (including cultural and political), economic, and environmental as well as biological and behavioural dimensions.

The spiral shape is not just a pattern. It has power. A masterpiece by Gustav Klimt (1862-1918;, he is above centre) was sold in 2006 for $US 135 million. Klimt uses the spiral as the symbol of his 'Tree of Life' (right). For all who profess well-being, his painting of 'Hygeia' (left) of the goddess of health and healing, shows a spiral shape made by a serpent, the symbol of wisdom, as shown in the caduceus of the World Health Organization.

Spirals, like those that introduce this column, are not just patterns. They give us an insight that we need to know and act on. There are no straight lines in nature. Even the horizon is curved. The linear ideology of progress, sometimes expressed as 'every day in every way, things are [or should be] getting better and better', which frames 'development' in terms of more and more material growth including increased gross national income and personal getting and spending, is a delusion, as well as being wrong and doomed.

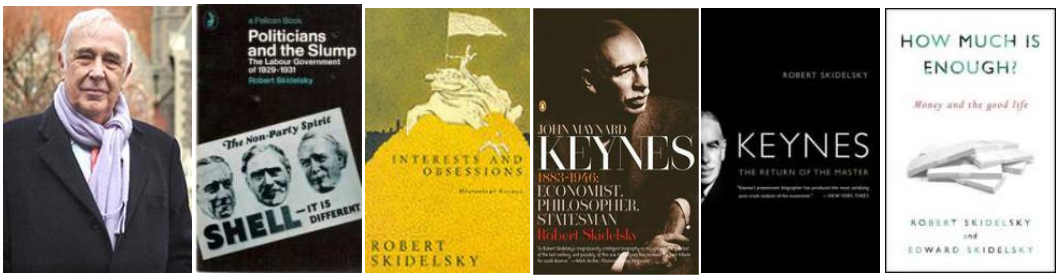
The line is an artificial construct. Lines are of course useful: current conventional science and technology depends on elaboration of lines and units, and we live and work in places constructed vertically and horizontally. This journal is designed geometrically. Knowledge needs lines. Wisdom, however, is found by thinking cyclically. Growth is not linear. History repeats itself. Trade has cycles. The seasons return. We return whence we came. If our times have been good, we return at a higher place, enlightened. This explains exaltation. If our times have been bad, we return at a lower place, diminished. This explains depression.

We will make progress personally, professionally and as citizens, when we stop thinking in linear ways. The spiral lets us be aware that there is almost infinitely more knowledge than that available on electronic data-bases. As with other studies, nutrition research assumes that a solution, or even 'the truth', is – like the end of a rainbow – somewhere ahead of us. But much of what we need to understand is around and behind us – has already been learned. We need to notice and think, and to remember, refresh and renew previous knowledge and wisdom. This implies complete recycling – revolution – in the teaching and practice of many professions. This can begin with observing life and nature; respecting common sense; and learning from those who came before us and also from children.

Food and nutrition, health and well-being

What they believe: 2. Robert Skidelsky
Ideas come first

Access June-July 2013 Philip James As I see it on John Boyd Orr here
Access this issue Philip James As I see it on agriculture and food policy here



The historian of modern politics and economics Robert Skidelsky and five of his books on the value money and the good life well led. These go to the roots of all that should matter most to us now

My hero this issue is the political and economic historian Robert Skidelsky. He is hot now. There was a time when he was out in the cold. His 1975 biography of Oswald Mosley, founder of the British Union of Fascists, portrayed Mosley as a brilliant erratic tragic figure, who in other circumstances might have become prime minister. Written of a man whose second marriage in 1936 was in Berlin with Adolf Hitler as guest of honour, it is not surprising that the book was generally hated, and Skidelsky was blocked from university posts at Oxford and also Johns Hopkins.

Twenty years ago I was given his *Interests and Obsessions* (see above) as a Christmas present, by a man who before retirement had been a very senior UK civil servant. I devoured this series of essays mostly about the history of British public life early in the last century when Britain was still – just – Great, and have read them all again just now. Some point to the way things are now, and to what needs to be done.

At the time I remembered Robert Skidelsky as an exact contemporary of mine at Oxford. Then I got to know him as the biographer of the economist, philosopher and statesman *John Maynard Keynes*, in three volumes published over nearly 20 years between 1983 and 2000, and then in one condensed 1,000+ page volume, which I have been reading and consulting for ten years now. (Also see the pictures above). Then I realised that the author has been, since 1991, a life peer as Baron Skidelsky.

The case for Lords

This reminded me that at school I once defended the concept of a non-elected second chamber – such as a House of Lords – in an exam designed to train boys to

win an Oxford scholarship to study politics, philosophy and economics. Part of my argument was that the process of election as a member of any mass party attracts people mostly of a similar nature – plausible, vain, pliable, often lawyers – whereas peers, including hereditary aristocrats, don't have to sweat about what a party machine wants, or act against any principles they may have, and are more varied.

The argument applies well to Robert Skidelsky, with his deep scholarship and wisdom and his immediate relevance to our need to escape from the mad ideology of econometrics, not to mention his likely unwillingness to waste his time in the House of Commons. It is surely more and more obvious now that the preservation of the world depends not so much on elected politicians, as on those who engage in public policy on their merit as scholars, and who are also activists. These are the people to whom we should pay attention, and who should guide us. Robert Skidelsky is also charming: *the story he tells of his return to China* and to Harbin (once 'the Paris of the East') and to Tianjin, where he was born and then lived for a while as a boy, is delightful (1). People who have lived in different cultures have a sense of proportion.

The meaning of history



Very well, but what does this have to do with public health nutrition? One quick answer is to cite one of the series of principles that govern nutrition as how it needs to be framed, as a social, economic and environmental as well as a biological and behavioural science. Here above is the salient slide.

Please now also access the two sage columns *published in WN in June-July* and in *this issue of WN* by Philip James on the shaping of UK and international agriculture, food and nutrition practice and policy, and the impact on what people purchased and consumed, in the last 100 years. Philip James's examples include the impact of the two World Wars on the agriculture, food and nutrition policy of the UK, which

among other things created the factory farming of cattle fed grain (cereals) rather than grass. British food systems and supplies and thus dietary patterns changed dramatically, because of decisions taken well over half a century ago, at a time when the UK was fighting a war of national survival and then struggling to recover in the postwar period. When I was a young boy, the main agreed public health nutrition crises in the UK and Europe – especially the devastated lands of Eastern Europe – were malnutrition, deficiency, and food and nutrition insecurity, much as in sub-Saharan Africa now. The over-riding political and economic drive was to produce more and more cheap filling fatty, sugary, starchy food products, and also meat, milk and dairy products. Those policies have not been dismantled. Readers who live in the UK are invited to look around standard supermarkets.

The same general point applies to other countries. US food and agriculture half a century ago and more, became locked into policies and programmes to go flat out for growth, abundance and surplus. Again, the creation of vast foreign debt in many countries in the global South, has forced farmers in these countries to grow cash crops for foreign exchange. Food systems and supplies and thus dietary patterns become transformed, for deep reasons. It is in my view almost futile to propose nutritional reforms of any significance without being aware of the historic forces that have shaped food systems, and thus what people buy and consume now.

Lack of knowledge of the past and its impact on the present helps to explain why so many good people engaged with nutrition fiddle around with trivial policies that make little or no difference, or even make bad worse. These include education and information programmes advising how to improve 'individual lifestyles'. They also include tinkering with formulation of energy-dense ready-to-consume fatty sugary or salty ultra-processed products, to achieve marginally improved 'nutrient profiles' as a result of which manufacturers advertise the reformulated products with spurious health claims. In any case, such approaches cannot possibly be of use to most people who live in the countryside and also in cities, in most countries in the global South, or indeed to impoverished people in high-income countries.

It is only when we set aside the cascades of data that these days obsess researchers, and study the origins of the political, economic and social public policies and practices that now beset us, that we can begin to see the big picture and where we and our times now fit within it. It is only then that we can gain the insight and the strength and stamina seriously to address the big issues of public health nutrition. A sense of the significance of history helps us to become effective citizens.

In search of the good life

Later in this column I touch on Robert Skidelsky's championing of John Maynard Keynes, co-architect of the Bretton Woods institutions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Keynes believed in economics as a social science, and

as a vital tool in the promotion of justice and equity for an increasing proportion of people, and a means to the end of a civilised and cultured life. His work, and the institutions built from it, were trashed or distorted by powerful governments as from the 1980s in favour of monetarism, which positions economics as a branch of mathematics, and money – or rather profit – as an end in itself. This has caused an outrageous increase of inequity and misery, and then the almost terminal crisis of the international banking system, and this has proved to be mad as well as bad.

One idea that Robert Skidelsky has developed from Keynes, is that of the good life well led, and what this can mean now. His new book *Money and the Good Life,* written with his son the moral and political philosopher Edward Skidelsky (2) comes to some wise conclusions. Thus: 'First, we must convince ourselves that there is something called the good life, and that money is simply a means to it. To say that my purpose in life is to make more and more money is as insane as saying my purpose in eating is to get fatter and fatter'.

'But second, there are measures we can take collectively to nudge us off the consumption treadmill. One is to improve job security… [Another is to] institute an unconditional basic income for all citizens'. And third – which circles back to food and nutrition – 'Government should reduce the pressure to consume by curbs on advertising. We already have curbs to guard against specific harms: it would not be a big jump to recognise that excessive consumption is itself harmful – to the environment, to contentment, to any mature conception of the good life' (3).

Box 1

Books by Robert Skidelsky

Politicians and the Slump: the Labour Government of 1929-31, 1967; English Progressive Schools, 1969; Oswald Mosley, 1975; John Maynard Keynes: Hopes Betrayed 1883-1920, 1983; John Maynard Keynes: The Economist as Saviour, 1992; Interests and Obsessions. Historical Essays, 1993; The Wold After Communism: a Polemic for Our Times, 1995; John Maynard Keynes: Fighting for Britain 1937-1946, 2000; John Maynard Keynes: Economist, Philosopher, Statesman 1883-1946 (abridged from the three volumes above), 2003; Keynes: the Return of the Master, 2009; How Much is Enough?; Skidelsky on the European Crisis, 2008-2011, 2012; Money and the Good Life (with Edward Skidelsky), 2012

References

1 Skidelsky R. A Chinese homecoming. *Prospect*, January 2006. *Access pdf here.*

2 Skidelsky R, Skidelsky E. *How Much is Enough? Money and the Good Life*. London: Allen Lane, 2012.

3 Skidelsky R, Skidelsky E. Enough is enough of the age of consumption. *The Financial Times,* 4 July 2012. *Access pdf here.*

Food and nutrition, health and well-being

What I believe. The series: 10

Access February 2013 column on ideas and meals here
Access March 2013 column on dimensions of nutrition and on best being small here
Access April 2013 WN column on dietetics as the mother of nutrition here
Access May 2013 WN column on the need to agitate here
Access June-July 2013 WN column on language and its abuse here
Access August-September WN column on laws in the public interest here

As you see, I am interweaving celebrations of thinkers we can learn from, with continuations of my own 'What I believe' series. You can access previous columns on these themes above. These owe much to many colleagues, and in the past have been recorded and written for countless years and centuries, in different ways. My job is to express these beliefs as cogently and clearly as I can. So here goes, for #10.
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The Food System. Regulation

Good rules use clear words

Access December 2012 WN Carlos Monteiro et al on The Food System here
Access March 2013 WN on The Food System: Big Food bitten here
Access July-August 2013 WN What do you think? on 'hotel' and 'school' here




This 'What I believe' #10, develops 'Public health requires the use of law', in the previous issue of *WN*. It is about the right use of words and terms as an essential part of good laws and rules. We need to think straight and define our terms, in order to devise rational policies which can be the basis of effective actions.

In recent decades powerful politicians and other heavy hitters have been indoctrinating us all to believe that statutory regulations – meaning, laws – are horrible impediments to the rights and liberties of citizens. Many have been and some are, of course. But the first duty of governments is to govern, and that means laws and regulations. Wise regulations enacted after open and informed discussion protect us, and also are in the interests of responsible commercial enterprises. An unregulated society serves the interests above all of criminals.

The next move of those who want 'free markets', meaning perfect liberty for the most ferocious and reckless corporations, is to rely on voluntary agreements made by those who gain most from being able to do whatever boosts sales and profits. To excuse this usurpation, they say that standard regulations are impossibly complicated. Some are. But the best laws are essentially clear and simple. This is where words and terms defined and used in ways that serve the public interest, are vital.

Enabling well-being



Guests may be welcomed with inviting stairs (Los Jeronimos, Granada, Spain, left). Or they may be confronted by emergency fire doors seeming to forbid entrance (Lorena, São Paulo, Brazil, right)

Thus in the previous issue of *WN* I showed how at a stroke, hotels can be made more healthy, by the use of law and thus also of language. All that is needed are statutes saying that to be defined and registered as a 'hotel', all buildings not yet constructed must have stairs that are at least as prominent as the elevators. Existing buildings not able to reconstruct, or at least to refurbish their stairs to the same standards at the other public areas, would lose one star, on the basis that safe attractive stairs are a fundamental and necessary amenity.

Thus Los Jeronimos, where I stayed in Granada on the occasion of the International Congress of Nutrition, with its beautiful stairs and inconspicuous elevator, should be upgraded a star. Whereas the Lorena, where I stay in São Paulo, whose stairs, like those of so many other places, are shut off by fire doors marked 'emergency exit' (above, right) and are dark, dismal and dirty, should be downgraded a star. The same principle applies to schools. An establishment should qualify to be registered as a 'school' only when it includes adequate independently assessed facilities for food preparation and cooking and for recreation and sports, on-site or nearby.

This is not just a flight of fancy. After all, 'football' and 'Lego'™ are subject to precise specifications. And come to think of it, how come processed food manufacturers are so keen on doing whatever they want, while at the same time they protect the brand names and precise formulations of their products by law with™ and ® and may sue ferociously any firm, large or small, they think is an imitator? Food for ultra-processed thought…

What is 'meat'?



Beef cuts (left). This is meat. Extruded sludge (right). This is not meat. If degraded and disgusting material, a snug home for pathogenic bacteria, is not called 'meat', more customers will get the picture

Names matter. This year's great British food scandal was the news that mountains of meat products were being sold as beef, whereas they also contained horse material. An issue not then discussed, is what is 'beef' or 'pork' or 'chicken' – or 'horse' – and what is 'meat'? With fresh meat and its products, the answer is fairly obvious. Meat is flesh with or without attached fat, off or on the bone, and also heads, tails, feet and organs ('offals') sold as such. Most people do not think of hide or feathers or bone, or tendons, or spinal cord, as meat. This matters, because cheaper meat products, including 'nuggets', may contain a lot of 'mechanically recovered meat', a slurry or slime of animal remnants extruded under pressure (above, right).

What is needed is a definition of 'meat' which excludes animal material that in any ordinary or normal sense of the word is not meat. Usually this is seen merely as a labelling issue, such that ultra-processed products of animal origin tricked up as meat with flavours, colours, bulkers and other additives, state on the ingredients list something more candid, like 'mechanically recovered material of animal origin, 25 per cent'. But the better option is to prohibit the use of such material in food for human consumption and in animal feed as well, a sufficient reason being that the slurry or slime is an ideal culture for pathogenic microbes.

What is a 'restaurant'?



French restaurateurs insist that the place on the left is a 'restaurant' because its meals are made on the spot, and that the place on the right is not a 'restaurant'. Long live French restaurateurs!

Now here is another example concerning the right use of language. McDonald's call the places where their products are sold and consumed, 'restaurants'. This induces customers mentally to group them with places that serve simple fresh meals prepared and cooked on the spot for comparable prices. But they are different.

It is often suggested that rates of obesity and heart disease are relatively low in France, because the French see gastronomy as part of their good life and care about their meals, irrespective of their nutritional profiles. France is also well-known as a country that cares about language. Now, the trades union representing French restaurateurs is pressing for a national law that will reserve the word 'restaurant' for establishments that prepare and cook their dishes and meals fresh on site. Good. Alain Fontaine, who runs Le Mesturet restaurant near the Opera in Paris (above, left), whose meals are prepared and cooked fresh, is a union member who is hostile to factory-made dishes. He says this is a fraud that cheats diners and means that everybody ends up eating the same mass-produced meals with the same taste: 'The main target of our proposal is to stop fooling consumers'.

A news feature in *The Washington Post* (1) states that… 'A third of French restaurants acknowledged serving factory-frozen products to clients. Restaurant owners estimated that the real number is substantially higher. Many chefs were embarrassed to admit the shortcuts that hoodwink their customers…Serving factory-prepared dishes, chefs pointed out, also amounts to betraying the national heritage of fine eating. The practice has spread across the country in recent years, as freezing techniques improve and restaurant owners seek to maximize profits by reducing the number of chefs and *sous-chefs* in the kitchen. In addition, it coincides with the increasing industrialization of the food industry across Europe'.

Sylvia Pinel, the French minister responsible for artisanship, commerce and tourism, has introduced a law enabling restaurants that prepare their food on the premises to use a logo saying 'house-made' The restaurateurs want to go further. They propose that eating places, including those styled as if they are traditional, whose food is wholly or basically made in factories and trucked in to be merely heated and served on site, could be called 'café', 'brasserie' or 'inn', but never 'restaurant'. They are also pressing for a designation of 'artisan restaurant', granted when all dishes and meals are prepared fresh on the premises. It is estimated that 20,000 French restaurants would qualify for the designation, out of about 150,000 establishments that sell food.

So, what about McDonald's? 'Outlet'? 'Joint' would be better. Or simply leave them as 'McDonald's' – which is what these places are – as a warning to the well-informed.

Reference

1 Cody E. Dramatic rise of factory-made meals in France causes outrage. *The Washington Post*, 11 July 2013.

Robert Skidelsky. Values

Economics and the good life



Adam Smith, John Maynard Keynes, Gunnar Myrdal, Joan Robinson, John Kenneth Galbraith. All, believers in economics as an art as well as a science, whose purpose is to improve society

Now back to Robert Skidelsky. He has spent over 20 years studying John Maynard Keynes as a thinker and an economist. He is well able to judge why the econometric ideology that still mesmerises most powerful governments and dominates world political, industrial, agricultural, trade, employment, and social policies, is wrong. In *The Return of the Master*, a brilliant short book written after the most recent world financial crash, he outlines why in most ways Keynes (second from the left above) was right at the time, and why the fundamentals of his thinking are right now.

Our lives and work are affected by the latest Great Crash. We need to know what has gone bad, and what needs to be done for the good, now and for the future. Very briefly, here is what Robert Skidelsky says, in plain and clear language.

First, it all depends on what is most valued. The monetarists whose theories have been dominant since the 1980s assume that the accumulation and growth of money is more important than anything else. By contrast Keynes (1883-1946), in common with most economists of his day, did not see money as an end in itself, but as a means to the end of the good life, believing that peace, justice, fairness, opportunity and equity are more important than money.

Second, the monetarists are also known as 'neo-classicists' or 'neo-liberals' because they revived while distorting the 18th and 19th century 'free trade' or '*laissez-faire'* theory that trade and industry activity is self-regulating and not government's business. By contrast Keynes, in common with most politicians of his day, believed that a prime duty of governments is to regulate in the public interest and to protect vulnerable and impoverished populations.

Third, the monetarists are econometricians, rather than economists. Like speculative bankers, they see their trade as a branch of mathematics and statistics, whose laws transcend other human activity. By contrast Keynes, in common with most thinking

people of his day, insists that human judgements and decisions are always fallible, and need to be informed by common sense and wisdom.

Economics is a human activity

For Keynes, economics is a human activity whose basic concepts should be clear to any educated or experienced interested person, and whose governing purpose is to improve the conditions of life of the greatest possible proportion of all people. Economists who followed him, such as (above, to his right) Gunnar Myrdal in Sweden (1898-1987), Joan Robinson in the UK (1903-1983), and John Kenneth Galbraith in the US (1908-2006), all of whom have had great international impact, shared his humanitarian philosophy. Further, Adam Smith (1723-1790, left) was a political philosopher first and foremost He saw money as a measure of wealth, and he saw the wealth of nations as including all that is rightly held dear.

You might suppose that all the great economists whose philosophy has been the improvement of the conditions of the people, as well as the increase of material goods and improved security of employment, property and money, are dead. Not so. Here below are five Nobel prizewinners: Elinor Ostrom (born 1933, who died last year), Amartya Sen (1933-), Daniel Kahneman (1934-), Joseph Stiglitz (1943-), and Paul Krugman (1953-). It is time, I suggest, for a great purge of the monetarists. Let them be sent off to study chess or join departments of statistics – just as long as they stay away from epidemiology, another social science in need of a purge.

Nobody should imagine that those nations with the highest average income are really wealthy. Not so. They suffer too. Here is what David Simon, a US citizen who as founder of *Wired* magazine is committed to globalisation and capitalism, has to say (1). 'That notion that capital is the metric, that profit is the metric by which we're going to measure the health of our society, is one of the fundamental mistakes of the last 30 years. I would date it in my country to about 1980 exactly, and it has triumphed. In my country you're seeing a horror show. You're seeing a retrenchment in terms of family income, you're seeing the abandonment of basic services, such as public education, functional public education. You're seeing the underclass hunted through an alleged war on dangerous drugs that is in fact merely a war on the poor'.



Elinor Ostrom, Amartya Sen, Daniel Kahneman, Joseph Stiglitz, Paul Krugman: all Nobel prizewinners. Four are still alive and active, all committed to economics in the service of humanity

We are all, in every country, in this together. Now we all need to get to a better place. This is the message of John Maynard Keynes, and of his champion Robert Skidelsky.

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1 Simon D. There are two Americas. My country is a horror show. *The Observer*, 8 December 2013.

Big Food Watch
Granada: Scientific meeting or trade fair?

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Access 2013 ICN Granada sponsored presentations here
Access 2013 ICN Granada sponsors, opportunities here
Access August-September WN Update on Big Food Watch here
Access August-September WN commentary on Big Food Watch here
Access this issue WN Big Food Watch on nutritionists and congresses here



BIG FOOD WATCH





Granada. A view from my hotel, and the view from our restaurant on the final evening. Granada is an awesome city, and the company was delightful. Thus far so very good, But – well, read on…

In September, in company with many friends, colleagues and readers of this column, I participated in the XX International Congress of Nutrition in Granada, Spain, held as ICNs always are under the aegis of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences. I was shocked, but having already seen the ICN programme with its vague motto of 'Joining cultures through nutrition', not surprised.

Before I get into the issue of Big Food and the Granada ICN, *and more of that elsewhere in this issue of WN*, some warm words. Granada and the southern part of the region of Andalusia were Islamic as *Al-Andaluz* for 800 years. The quality of nutrition in Iberia is commonly sniffed at by US and UK scientists. This is because the quality of its nourishment has been so high. The basic traditional meals and cuisines of Spain express the genius and savour of successions of empires and civilisations since 2,000 years ago, and are wonders of the world (1).

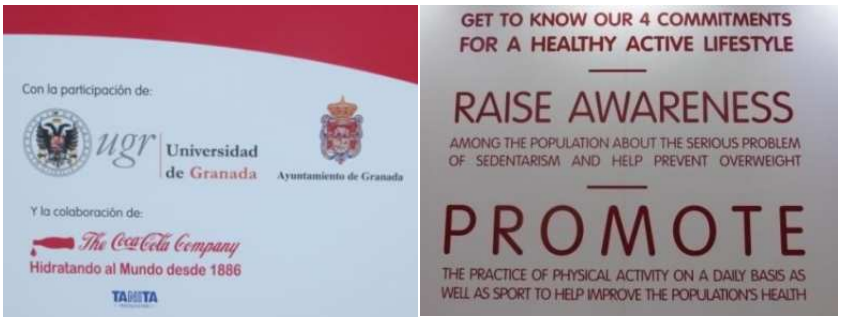
You may have noticed that nutrition science is most developed where food supplies are most intensively industrialised and where the rates of diet-related diseases and disorders are most prevalent and atrocious. One is the cause of the other. This may seem to be a cynical observation, but it makes common sense. My Spanish colleagues care mostly about food, meals, conviviality, and the Mediterranean diet – or, more accurately diets, for while all are harmonious, there are many. All the food we ate outside the congress centre was excellent. Inside, I avoided the back-of-the-plane tourist class-style plastic packed lunches – a crummy deal for a crummy 'meal'. At the back of the splendiferous commercial exhibition hall, I found a bar used by the local staff. This served excellent filling soups, Spanish tortillas made on the spot in the kitchen behind the bar, and real coffee, all served by friendly waiters.

Los Jeronimos, the family-style hotel booked by our hosts the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, was excellent and economical. As I show in an item above, its stairs get full marks. The mini-market down its street sold crisp moist fresh artisan-style bread, a delicious bottled *guacamole* with plenty of onion, and fragrant red wine. And the pastry shop – well, its almond cakes were very wonderful. The Spanish know how to live well. Sarah Kehoe of the Association organised a convivial tapas-style evening, where I was charmed and delighted among many others by Ian Darnton-Hill, Mike Rayner, and Michael Nelson, as well as Phil James. On the last evening our hosts took us to an Arab restaurant underlooking the Alhambra (see above), and I paid my heartfelt respects to Harriet Kuhnlein and Mark Wahlqvist. Plus breakfasts on the rooftop terrace of Los Jeronimos, with the view of the great monastery (see above) with Carlos Monteiro, Jean-Claude Moubarac, Renata Bertazzi-Levy, and our FAO hosts and other colleagues, were memorable.

So all that was good. But I should have taken a couple of days out like sensible colleagues do, to explore the city and the countryside. For the congress itself was – well, read on.

Platinum private partners

The taxi drivers of Granada and their families were confused, during the XX ICN. The reason was Coca-Cola. One of the congress's six €75,000 'platinum' sponsors, Coke must have spent a total of well over €250,000 on their whole propaganda show throughout Granada, Andalusia and Spain, and on the internet (2).



Coca-Cola: one of the transnational corporations that were platinum, gold or else silver sponsors of the Granada XX International Congress of Nutrition. Here you see two of its advertisements

Here for example above, left, is the audacious statement made on the side of Coke tents erected in Granada on public land during the congress, including immediately opposite the entrance to the venue. Underneath the red swoosh, it says that the congress is the responsibility of the city and the university of Granada, *with the collaboration of Coca-Cola*, which has been 'hydrating the world since 1886'. 'Syruping the world' would be a more accurate while less beguiling motto.

Above right is one of the corporation's mission statements, which was on its big stand in the exhibition hall. The general idea is that the more you jog the more Coke you can chug without getting fat – or fatter. An even more audacious notion is proposed by Steven Blair, a professor of physical activity at the University of South Carolina, as at an ICN session organised and funded by Coca-Cola, and at meeting all round the world. This is that if you are physically fit, it is OK to be obese – perhaps up to the point when you are so fat that vigorous activity is impossible (3).

Thus the confusion, expressed by drivers to Spanish speaking colleagues, saying things like 'my wife says your congress is all about Coca-Cola, but I thought Coca-Cola is bad for health, so do you people think it is good for you after all?' There was no simple answer to that.

During one of the genuine scientific sessions, not paid for by Big Food, I stood up and asked Frank Hu of the Harvard School of Public Health, after he had made a compelling presentation on the impact of sugared soft drinks on obesity, diabetes and heart disease (4), if he would prefer that the congress not be 'supported' by food and drink product corporations whose interests conflict with those of public health. Yes, he said, although this was not for him to say. Fair enough.

So who was responsible? It was time to try to find out. Was it J Alfredo Martinez from the University of Navarra in Pamplona, president of the ICN scientific committee? A check in the tortuous ICN programme found him chairing sessions on personalised nutrition, 'The resolution of inflammation', and 'OMICS technologies', and speaking on nutriepigenomics and also on 'the benefits and mechanism of moderately high protein and high fiber diets'. He is a white-coated lab man, whose

work, like that of other clinical nutritionists, is quasi-medical. He is a member of the scientific advisory committee of the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI Europe) as well as being a member of the IUNS council. His appointment as president of IUNS from 2017 to 2021 was announced at the end of the Granada congress. Did the ICN scientific committee encourage Big Food penetration of its programme? This seemed unlikely. More likely this was the organising committee, whose president was Ángel Gil of the University of Granada. But I cannot say.

The trade fair



Two more Granada platinum sponsors: here are Nestlé (left) and Unilever (right) together with their plans and pledges to help to make the world a better place – though not from their products

The presence of Coca-Cola throughout Granada, and that of Nestlé, Unilever, Danone, Mondelēz (formerly Kraft), DSM, and other corporations within the congress sponsors' hall, was blatant. Above, you see (left) a Nestlé salesman styled a little like an informal physician, giving a round-the-clock teach-in at the entrance to the hall, and (right) the Unilever plan to protect the health of a billion people, presumably by eating or washing with Unilever products (5). By the way, judging from a report from the US published in October (6) *which you can access here*, in due course participants may well be banned from taking photographs of corporate sponsor activities in nutrition conferences, so take your snaps while you can.

But the Granada exhibits in the sponsors' hall were only incremental increases from previous ICNs, such as those at Bangkok (2009) and Durban (2005). What was new, *as featured in the commentary in WN this issue,* as that on every single day of the congress, all the sessions – a total of 38 with over 200 speakers and chairs – between 17.00 and 19.00 had been purchased and controlled mostly by Big Food – transnational and other big corporations whose profits depend on unhealthy products, with associated industries and supporting foundations and front organisations.

Thus on Wednesday, the main presentations in this time slot were 'Micronutrients for optimum health' (controlled and organised by Bayer); 'Physical activity: Can it

prevent cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease' (Coca-Cola); 'Public-private partnerships in practice' (Nestlé, a session co-chaired by congress president Ángel Gil and IUNS president Ibrahim Elmadfa); 'Nutrition and health benefits of emerging fibers' (Tate & Lyle); and 'Guidelines for adequate water intake' (European Federation of Bottled Waters). On principle I was not going to attend any such sessions, but at 17.00 I blundered by mistake into the entrance of the swish Lorca auditorium – and had my name scanned, as if I was entering a high-security zone. Why, I asked. An executive-styled woman materialised. As I guessed, the scan would enable the sponsor – in this case Tate & Lyle – to send me emailed propaganda. Could the scan be wiped right now, I asked, and she said yes, in a sharp tone that suggested to me that I was practically alone in making any kind of fuss.

Ibrahim Elmadfa, outgoing IUNS president, told me proudly that over 4,000 people were attending the congress, an all-time record. He was pleased that the 38 17.00-19.00 sessions were designated as being sponsored, and as such labelled yellow in the 'pocket programme' summary. As helpfully stated on *the congress website exhibitors' manual*, these had all been sold for sums between €9,000 and €20,000 a pop plus 21 per cent VAT, to commercial and other sponsors, depending on the size and prestige of the room and the day of the congress. Thus unless some deal was done, Tate & Lyle paid €20,000 plus VAT to explain about emerging fibres.

IUNS in a bind

Having worked with him in convivial circumstances in Las Palmas in 1999, in Vienna for the 2001 XVII ICN which he masterminded, then at Giessen for our three-day workshop in 2005, and then at other congresses, I regard Ibrahim as a friend, and have a lot of respect for him. His four-year term as IUNS president has not been easy. One of the difficulties, which previous presidents such as Mark Wahlqvist and Ricardo Uauy have also struggled with, is the relationship between IUNS and its 'adhering bodies' – the national nutrition societies who are the electors of IUNS officers, and who are the candidates to host ICNs. For me, the Vienna congress, though more clinically-inclined than I would have preferred, was a great success. But the 2005 ICN in Durban and the 2009 ICN in Bangkok, were problematic for all who question intense and systematic overt and also covert penetration of nutrition congresses by Big Food, and in particular the colossal transnationals such as Nestlé, Unilever, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and Danone.

The problem is this. The income of IUNS itself has until recently been small. Once an 'adhering body' – meaning, a national nutrition society – wins the bid to mount an ICN, it and its congress volunteer organisers call the shots, and IUNS presidents and officers can do little more than advise and consent. The professional paid organisers work on a percentage – the more revenue, the better for them. So they push hard for more and more commercial presence, and the local nutrition people who form the

organising committees don't or won't do much about this, because they also want their congress to make a thumping surplus, a lot of which goes to IUNS.

IUNS can't do much about this, for three reasons at least. One: the local organisers are liable to warn that any restrictions for ethical-type reasons will hurt the revenue and the surplus and even result in a loss. No hair shirts! Two: a substantial number of IUNS council members have been and are all for partnerships with industry. Win-wins! Three: in these troubled times, people concerned to raise revenue for anything get less and less fussy. Thus if Coca-Cola wants to put a lot of cash and oomph and hoopla into a congress – great! Congress organisers may feel that it is anyway only 'activists' who care about such things. Coke tastes nice. Don't worry, be happy!

Big Food creep

It was in this context that my chat with Ibrahim became a little uneasy. As well as the sponsored session bonanza, the Granada congress exhibitor's manual also advertised the sale of parallel symposia – those labelled not yellow but blue, orange, green, mauve or grey in the pocket mini- programme – to 'international projects', at between €4,500 and €9,000 plus VAT a pop. Hm. What were these? Before the congress, word had got around that academic initiatives and non-profit organisations were being told that once the scientific committee chaired by J Alfredo Martinez had OKd their proposals, they would also have to pay. This seemed to mean that any session proposed by public interest and other organisations unable or unwilling to stump up at least €4,500 plus VAT would for this reason be rejected, unless the scientific committee was keen on it. Such an unworthy thought might be quite wrong, but some academic departments and non-profit organisations got the impression that most of the sessions positioned as non-sponsored were for sale (7).

I didn't ask Ibrahim about this, not wanting to make him miserable. But what I did ask him about, was the presence within the multi-labelled non-yellow parts of the programme during the morning and early afternoon, of four sessions supported by the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) and the European Food Information Council (EUFIC). How come, I asked Ibrahim. We all know these are industry front organisations. Ibrahim, who is a discreet person, looked uneasy. He said well, the local people pointed out that these are non-profit organisations. I sensed that given a free hand he would have placed these sessions in the 17.00-19.00 slots.

I attended the EUFIC sessions, and I will tell the story in my next column. The climax for me was while I was persistently asking a pertinent question, which session chair EUFIC director-general Josephine Wills (previously director of science and regulatory affairs for Mars Bars) persistently refused to answer. Somebody behind me bellowed at me: 'Go home to North Korea!' I have been called a Food Leninist and even a Food Lentilist, but this was a new one on me.

Notes and references

1 Claudia Roden's wonderful latest book is Roden C. *The Food of Spain. A celebration.* London: Harper-Collins, 2011.

2 This is a guess. As soon as Coke produces an independently audited figure for all expenditure on events in Spain, I will publish it.

3 An example of the Blair Hypothesis is Blair S (ed). *Obesity, Lifestyle and Weight Management.* Special issue. *Obesity Research,* October 2003, **11**, S10, S1-59. The project and the supplement were funded by the International Life Sciences Institute.

4 Hu F. Resolved: there is sufficient scientific evidence that decreasing sugar-sweetened beverage consumption will reduce the prevalence of obesity and obesity-related diseases. *Obesity Research* 2013, **14,** 8, 606-619. DOI: 10.1111/obr.12040.

5 As the second largest edible product manufacturer in the world, Unilever is now best known as a manufacturer of margarines, ice-creams and pot noodles. It also makes soaps and detergents from the palm oil and other oils and fats that supply most of the calories in its ultra-processed food products.

6 *Food Navigator USA* 23 October 2013. Watson E. Dietitians for Professional Integrity: https://www.facebook.com /DietitiansForProfessionalIntegrity/ info. *Access pdf here*

7 My guess is that this rule was waived in the case of WHO and FAO, who were said to be iffy about the Big Food presence, but whose participation in the congress was seen by IUNS and the local organisers as essential. If the point about some Granada symposia indicated as open and independent actually being for sale is reliably shown to be not fair or not true, I will retract it.

Status

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