

## The Josué de Castro centenary

With an extensive program of commemorative events, in Brazil, France and various international forums, this September sees the celebration of the centenary of the birth of the scientist and thinker from the Brazilian State of Pernambuco, Josué (Apolônio) de Castro, who became renowned for his studies and his struggle against one of the oldest and most characteristic of human afflictions, namely hunger.

It is thus an appropriate time to recall the ideas and events that marked his career as a scientist and public figure, not only as a way of remembering his story and the images associated with it, but, above all, because of the ever topical nature and forward-looking outlook of his teachings and reflections, which can help us to understand both the problems of today and the challenges of the future.

In fact, the universal drama of hunger, its biological and social consequences, and its structural roots firmly embedded in the sediment of the history of civilization and other societies, as portrayed in his books, which have been translated into 25 languages, are the most representative body of learning regarding the sharp inequalities that distort the structures and functioning of the social organism. Thus, quite apart from its epidemiological dimensions, afflicting 2/3 of the human population when "The Geography of Hunger"<sup>1</sup> and the "Geopolitics of Hunger" were published in their original editions, acute or chronic food deprivation lies at the heart of a question that opens out in various concentric circles. Alongside the lack of food, the lack of housing, clothing, education, good health, access to culturally and ethically acceptable employment, hunger is, as the health epistemologist, Djalma Agripino, would put it, a "trope".

Beyond its biological manifestation, the word "hunger" has many meanings, expressing many kinds of neediness, not only basic nutrition (calories, proteins, mineral salts and vitamins), but of principals founded on reasons and values of a moral and political order geared towards the collective interest. It is a question of justice, as in Aristotelian ethics, in the fundamentals of Taoism, in the "mores" of primitive socialism, in the discourse (if not the political practice) of the French Revolution, in the Marxist dialectic, in Thomas More's Utopia, or in the vision of a universal govern to manage human problems in solidarity, which Josué Castro himself came to espouse.

Beyond the specific knowledge provided by science and technology and specialists in these areas, of the universal powers of monopolies, oligopolies and systems of economic cartels, the persistent problem of the various forms of hunger can only be solved by way of a new model of development that is able to fuse together four objectives and strategies in a single process: the economic dimension, social interest, the preservation of the environment, and, on a political and cultural level, the rights and duties of collective participation. These are the foundations of a true "third way" that lies beyond the binary opposition of state intervention and liberal laissez faire, a dilemma that appeared to have been fully resolved 19 years ago, when the Berlin Wall was pulled down and the Iron Curtain was lifted. These were events that appeared to announce a new civilization characterized by the free competitive play of economic forces. We now know that this hope was misplaced.

Thirty years ago, Josué de Castro had already prophetically anticipated the crisis of our post-modern times, with the seriousness of environmental damage (the depletion of natural resources, the pollution of the air, soil, and land and sea waters), the energy shortage, the growing gap between the richest and the poorest nations, the ever more yawning divide between socio-economic strata, which has radically changed the agenda for human beings. These threats and their consequences had already been predicted by Josué de Castro. The environmental dimension of human development and its due course, as the analysts and thinkers that promote a new model, such as Daly *et al.*<sup>2</sup>, Sen<sup>3</sup> and Conway,<sup>4</sup> now believe, were already beginning to loom larger among Josué de Castro's concerns for the future.

What is the current definition of food security and adequate nutrition?

In short, it is the condition in which all people, in all places, for all time, have access to the basic foodstuffs necessary to meet their biological needs for energy and nutrients in full, in a balanced and adequate fashion, that is, with respect for their physiological, occupation, pathological conditions and the healthy food habits of each culture. Finally, it is recommended that these requirements be met without any restriction thereby being placed on other fundamental rights, such as health, education, housing, clothing and transport, through ethically and culturally acceptable professional employment. Furthermore, these fundamental rights should be upheld

as part of a system for the production and distribution of goods that is ecologically sustainable.

Re-reading Josué de Castro, it can be seen that the whole content of this revolutionary proposal is sketched out in the various books, articles, conference papers and collections that make up his life's work. It is the great challenge for human beings in the 21st century. Consequently, in celebrating the centenary of his birth, more than looking back over the past 100 years, we are recovering an idea and a proposal that should spur present and future generations to build up a new way for human beings to live with nature and with each other in solidarity.

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### **References**

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