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farmers and farms. The number of hog farms has dropped from 64,500 in 1980 to 10,500 in 2000, though the number of hogs has increased by about 5 million.

Hog production is a factory operation these days, largely controlled by two major conglomerations: Tyson Foods and Smithfield Farms. Hogs are raised in stifling feedlots of concrete, corrugated iron and wire, housing 15,000 to 20,000 animals in a single building. Hog factories are the concentration camps of American agriculture, the filthy abattoirs of our hidden system of meat production.

Pig factories are the foulest operations in American agriculture. A single hog excretes nearly 3 gallons of waste per day, or 2.5 times the average human's daily total. A 6,000-sow hog factory will generate approximately 50 tons of raw manure a day. An operation of the size of Premium Standard Farms in northern Missouri, with more than 2 million pigs and sows, will generate five times as much sewage as the entire city of Indianapolis. But hog farms aren't required to treat the waste. Generally, the stream of fecal waste is simply sluiced into giant holding lagoons, where it can spill into creeks or leach into ground water. Increasingly, hog operations are disposing of their manure by spraying it on fields as fertilizer, with vile consequences for the environment and the general ambience of the neighborhood.

Over the past quarter century, Indiana hog farms were responsible for 201 animal waste spills, wiping out more than 750,000 fish. These hog-growing factories contribute more excrement spills than any other industry.

It's not just creeks and rivers that are getting flooded with pig shit. A recent study by the EPA found that more than 13 per cent of the domestic drinking-water wells in the Midwest contain unsafe levels of nitrates, attributable to manure from hog feedlots. Another study found that groundwater beneath fields which have been sprayed with hog manure contained five times as much nitrates as is considered safe for humans. Such nitrate-leaden water has been linked to spontaneous abortions and "blue baby" syndrome.

A typical hog operation these days is Pohlmann Farms in Montgomery County, Indiana. This giant facility once confined 35,000 hogs. The owner, Klaus Pohlmann, is a German, whose father, Anton, ran

the biggest egg factory in Europe, until numerous convictions for animal cruelty and environmental violations led to him being banned from ever again operating an animal enterprise in Germany.

Like father, like son. Pohlmann, the pig factory owner, has racked up an impressive rap sheet in Indiana. In 2002, Pohlmann was cited for dumping 50,000 gallons of hog excrement into the creek, killing more than 3,000 fish. He was fined \$230,000 for the fish kill. But that was far from the first incident. From 1979 to 2003, Pohlmann has been cited nine times for hog manure spills into Little Sugar Creek. The state Department of Natural Resources estimates that his operation alone has killed more than 70,000

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fish.

Pohlmann was arrested for drunk driving a couple of years ago, while he was careening his way to meet with state officials who were investigating yet another spill. It was his sixth arrest for drunk driving. Faced with mounting fines and possible jail time, Pohlmann offered his farm for sale. It was bought by National Pork Producers, Inc., an Iowa-based conglomerate, with its own history of environmental crimes. And the beat goes on.

My grandfather's farm is now a shopping mall. The black soil, milled to such fine fertility by the Wisconsin glaciation, now buried under a black sea of asphalt. The old Boatenwright pig farm is now a quick lube, servicing SUVs.

America is being ground apart from the inside, by heartless bankers, and insatiable conglomerates. We are a hollow nation, a poisonous shell of our former selves. CP

Born Under a Bad Sky, Jeffrey St Clair's collection of essays about the American environment, from which this piece is drawn, will be published by CounterPunch Books in the early spring.

"Free Trade" Rejected: Africa Says No – and Means It

By Ignacio Ramonet

The unimaginable has happened, to the displeasure of arrogant Europe. Africa, thought to be so poor that it would agree to anything, has said No in rebellious pride. No to the straitjacket of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), No to the complete liberalization of trade, No to the latest manifestations of the colonial pact.

It happened in December, at the second EU-Africa summit in Lisbon, where the main objective was to force the African countries to sign new trade agreements by December 31, 2007, in accordance with the Cotonou Convention of 2000, winding up the 1975 Lomé accords. Under these, goods from former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific are imported into the European Union more or less duty-free, except for products such as sugar, meat and bananas that are a problem for European pro-

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ducers. The World Trade Organization has insisted that these preferential arrangements be dismantled or replaced by trade agreements based on reciprocity, claiming that this is the only way African countries can continue to enjoy different treatment. The EU opted for completely free trade in the guise of EPAs. So, it was asking African, Caribbean and Pacific countries to allow EU goods and services to enter their markets duty-free. The Caribbean countries agreed to initial an EPA with the EU on December 16, 2007.

The president of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade, denounced these strong-arm tactics, refused to sign and stormed out. South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki immediately supported his stand, and Namibia also decided not to sign (bravely, since an increase in EU customs duties would make it impossible for Namibia to export or continue to produce beef). Even French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who made unfortunate remarks at Dakar in July 2007 (in his speech at the University of Dakar on July 26, 2007, he said the tragedy of Africa was that Africans had not really entered history and were not eager to embrace the future), supported the countries that were most strongly

opposed to these agreements, saying he was in favor of globalization but not the despoliation of countries that had nothing left.

The EPAs aroused wide public concern. Social movements and trade union organizations south of the Sahara mobi-

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lized against them. And the revolt against them bore fruit: the summit ended in failure. The president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, was forced to back down and accept the African countries' call for further discussions. He has promised to resume negotiations in February.

This crucial victory is another sign that things are improving for Africa. In the past few years, the bloodiest conflicts have been settled, with the exceptions of Darfur, Somalia and East Congo. Democratic progress has been consolidated, and local economies prosper under the guidance of a new generation of leaders, despite social inequalities.

Africa has another asset in the form of massive Chinese investments. China will overtake the EU as one of the continent's principal suppliers and could beat the United States to become its most important client by 2010. The time when Europe could impose disastrous structural adjustment programs is long gone. Africa has had enough. CP

Translated by Barbara Wilson.

Ignacio Ramonet is the outgoing editor-in-chief of *Le Monde Diplomatique* and co-author of *Fidel Castro: My Life: A Spoken Autobiography* by Ignacio Ramonet and Fidel Castro.

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