

## **WE ARE HIGHLY CIVILIZED BARBARIANS, TISSA BALASURIYA O.M.I.**

We, the human race today, are a highly civilized people. We have conquered nature in many aspects. We can communicate to and from other planets. We can move mountains, cause rain and overcome many diseases. Humanity was never so skilled as now. We are civilized in that sense. We are also refined in some of our manners of behaviour. We know to talk suavely, we can be polished and diplomatic in our relationships. We have developed the sciences as well as the arts.

Yet we are also barbarians. We can destroy nature, and we do so. We pollute the earth. We kill lakes and seas. We erode mountain sides and plains. We destroy trees exterminate animals. We produce super powerful lethal weapons. We trade them. We improve them systematically, we use them for genocide. We are selfish, greedy and gluttonous. We have enough food for all men, women and children on the earth. Yet a few of us grab this food for ourselves, our animals and for our garbage cans. We feast while others starve to death. We see this on our T. V. screens and we pass pious resolutions about an ambiguous "aid" to those from whom we steal the food. We go to church on Sunday, we say "give us this day our daily bread" but our social and economic options deprive the multitudes of remunerative work.

We are barbarians, for we steal from the hungry, we rob the famine stricken. If two out of ten children ate the food of the eight others and gave knives to the half starved eight to fight, each other for the balance food we would condemn the children as barbarians. This is the position of the human race today. We the rich countries and the rich of the poor countries are "civilized", but we are barbarians. This article gives some aspects of this situation. This whole issue of Logos on "Food and Arms" deals with this civilization tragedy of our age.

### **South Asia, the worst affected**

Though the problems of food and hunger affect many countries of the world, the region that is worst hit is South Asia, i.e. from the "Middle-East to the Philippines with a population of 1,300 million in 1973. This is also a part of the world in which the population is still increasing at about 2.1% per year and that is above the world average. It is also largely on oil importing area.

Increasingly this area will be one of food deficits. It is estimated that in 50 years' time there will be about 3,800 million people in these countries. According to the Second Report of the Club of Rome the deficit of food would be 500 million tons of grain a year. Rene Dumont estimates the deficit to be between 300 and 400 million tons an year. This is a quantity which the richer countries cannot supply or transport even if they had the intention to do so. The Club of Rome reports that the nutritional deficiencies would be such that as many as 500 million children up to the age of 5 years would die of hunger in the next 50 years, if this part of Asia does not receive such massive aid as mentioned earlier. This is a no mere academic assumption, for already between 50,000 and 300,000 persons were estimated to have starved to death between August and December 1974, in the two Bangladesh provinces of Rangpur and Dinagpur, following severe floods.

South Asia is also a volcanic region of mass discontent, revolutionary uprisings and the military presence of big powers. Local animosities and international rivalries lead to conflicts and piling up of arms in this region. This is also an area that has been long colonised by foreign powers. Their economies have not yet recovered or being reconstructed after colonial misrule. In this region the multinational firms of North America, Western Europe and Japan are quite active disrupting their economies and further pauperising the people. The spread of dictatorships and emergency rule are a further indication of the growing crisis of food, population and social injustice within these countries.

In this region too hunger and the futile expenditure on arms are interconnected. The Indian Sub-Continent spends over \$2000 million a year on defence. This is ironical; for thereafter it begs till the rest of the world for food. Its foreign debts too are due in part to past expenditure on arms. The poor people of these countries are starved both due to past colonial expansion and their present waste on defence expenditure. It is the whole world geo-political system and the regional conflicts that condemn about 500 million people in the sub-Continent to dire need. Southern Asia and the Middle-East are the areas of continuing war since 1945 as it is here that the frontiers of new nations are being determined.. The big powers seek access to the markets and the rich reserves of raw materials in Africa, the Middle-East and Asia. This is also the region of teeming populations and mass hunger. Whereas the rest of the earth should be open to this one third of the human race, it is quite the contrary that is happening. The super-rich powers are prowling in the region for more booty. Neo-colonialism of multinational corporation has replaced "the overt political military colonialism of the British, Dutch, French', U. S. and Portuguese.

### **Hunger is a Phenomenon of Capitalist Countries**

In the entire discussion on food and hunger it is absolutely important to see that hunger in the world today is a problem that affects only the free enterprise capitalist countries. This is not to say that people in socialist countries do not need food. They may even import food as the Soviet Union does on a large scale. But the policies of distribution in the Socialist societies are such that food is first made available in sufficient quantities for their entire population. This is an absolute priority in their planning. ' Basic essential's of all are seen to before the luxuries of a few are catered for. Even poor countries, which earlier faced severe famine and death by starvation, have resolved their problems of hunger after a socialist revolution. Twenty-five years ago China, Cuba, North Vietnam and North Korea could have been regarded as "over populated" by the experts and policy makers of the capitalist world. They have all gone through the socialist revolution within the last 25 years. Today even the U. N, sources indicate that people in these countries are no longer starving. Needless to say that in the Soviet Union and in the socialist republics of Eastern Europe the people are far from starving. In these countries there are not 10% below the "poverty line" who cannot obtain the basic essentials for living as in the capitalist countries, including the richest of them.

This is therefore a primary consideration to be borne in mind in any reflection on the problem of hunger, that the problem could be resolved and has been resolved in the socialist third of the world . Their solution was first a social and political revolution' in which the economic priorities were set right. Through this revolution they got rid of the foreign capitalist enterprises that had hitherto exploited their countries, especially in Asia. It is strange that very many in the Western World and in free enterprise countries of the so-called Third World do not give adequate importance to this basic and glaring truth that one third of humanity has overcome the problems of hunger through a socialist revolution. Whether we agree with Karl Marx or not we must give him the credit for inspiring socialistic revolutions that have led to the hungry obtaining food, and the thirsty drink.

As the authors of "the Earth Belongs to the People" write "We can: learn much from an interesting comparison: China, Brazil and United States are more or less equal in size, China has 800 million people, the United States 'has 200 million people, and Brazil has 180 million people. If a lot of people means over population and overpopulation means starvation, then China should be incomparably worse than the other two. But instead, Brazil has 40 million hungry people, America had 30 million and China has virtually none." (D N D 11)

For this consideration we should ask our selves very seriously whether a radical socialist revolution and the total exclusion of foreign capitalist enterprise is not one of the fundamental solutions to the problem of hunger in the poor countries.

While we said that the socialist countries have resolved the problem of hunger for all within them, we did not say that they have produced sufficient food for themselves, or that the type of food produced and

consumed is what is desirable in the context of world shortages. The Soviet Union has to import large quantities of grain for feeding its people and its animals. It has just concluded a five year contract with the United States to import millions of tons of grain annually from America. The meat consumption in the Soviet Union and the Socialist Countries of the Eastern Europe is increasing and this is a drain on the scarce resources of cereals in the world. In this sense the relative neglect of agriculture and the high extent of meat consumption in these rich socialist countries leads to the aggravation of the world food problem. The poorer peoples of the capitalist countries have to face hunger partly because the rich socialist countries can buy the grain they need for their human and animal population in the capitalist world market. In this sense these socialist countries are operating within the framework of capitalism and the values of consumerism that pay little heed to the urgent needs of the millions of starving people in the poor "free world".

### **Food Production and the Chinese Revolution**

On the other hand the priorities in China have been different. They adopted a policy of development which did not emphasize industry to the neglect of agriculture. They did not choose to first mechanise agriculture, but rather adopted technologies that were labour intensive and used organic manures instead of fertilizers imported from capitalist countries. Theirs was a policy of self-reliance with an accent on rural communes and small agro industries. Thus China is able to provide for its one-fifth of humanity in a rather self-reliant manner. The peoples of the poor Third World countries should therefore think not only of the socialist revolution in general but also of the strategies of socialist development in which their conditions of being poor and thickly populated have to be taken into account. Even if they do not opt for a socialist, revolution they should consider the policies of socialistic countries and specially of China.

### **Successful Capitalistic Food Production**

On the other hand we have to note that there are success stories of food production in the capitalist world. The United States of America employing only about 4 million people on their farms feed about 25% of the world's population. They are the leading exporters of grain. It is true that capitalistic agriculture, specially from North and South America, has to feed many areas of the world- It is possible given ample fertile land and large capital inputs in terms of machinery and fertilizers to produce vast quantities of food. In fact in 1958 the U. S. spent 4,000,000,000 in supporting the farmers for not cultivating 35 million acres in order to keep up the world market prices. Otherwise the bumper crops from this land would have glutted the world market and made prices fall. The problem for the U. S. and Canada is not production but distribution within their countries and in the world. Food is a net income earner for the United States and it is becoming very important for its foreign exchange earnings along with oil and the sale of arms. The big companies that handle their food sales are interested in the tropics and have designed U. S. policies in such a way as to not encourage food production beyond a certain level in other countries. The U. S. policies of food aid under P. L. 480 have to be studied in this perspective also.

### **Multinationals cause Hunger and Sell Arms**

The present world market in the processing and distribution of food as well as the production and sale of arms and of oil is controlled by a few giant multinational corporations such as Unilever, "Nestles,"- Brooke Bond, General Motors, General Electric , Exxon. All of them have profit maximization as their ultimate goal. It does not matter to them whether people have more food or , less, whether people live or are killed. They are only concerned with profit. And this they seek with the help of the most sophisticated machinery and methods of advertising which the modern world possesses.

### **Misuse of Land**

The multinational companies are the agencies through which the Western capitalist countries and Japan own and control vast areas of agricultural land in the poor countries. Thus in Latin America, Brazil has more arable land than all of Europe, but most of this land is controlled by a tiny elite and by wealthy corporations from America and other Western nations. And what do they grow in their enormous plantations? Not food for the hungry Brazilians, but coffee for export. There is not much food value in coffee, but there is a lot of profit in it. Unfortunately the profit! all goes to a handful of big landlords. The situation is the same for the rest of the Third World. While landless people starve the immense plantations and foreign owned estates occupy the most fertile land, and produce only one or two basic crops.

A land that could produce basic food products goes to grow cotton and tea in India, coffee and cotton in Guatemala, bananas and coffee in Honduras, tea and rubber in Sri Lanka, rubber in Indonesia and Malaysia, sugar, coffee and cotton in Mexico the list could go on and on. The shortage of food in the poor countries is thus part of the colonial legacy with which the multinationals have been long associated.

While peoples of these countries have been pauperised, these firms have become some of the world's richest economic empires. As the Minister for Rural Development of Mauritania, Mr. Diob Mamadou Amadou complained at the World Food Conference.

"The agricultural crisis has not arisen now nor even recently, and it is not different by the increase in oil prices. For decades the producer of copper, bauxite, rubber, coffee and other raw materials sought better prices for their exports in order to be able to finance their agricultural development."

For many centuries the land of the poor has been taken, away from them and from food production and made to fit into the, world strategy of empire builders and giant companies. Thus in order that the British could have their cup of tea at 5 o' clock and their profits from tea to Liptons and Brooke Bonds, Sri Lanka and India had to give their best lands for tea, and the West Indies had to produce the sugar. Even after the independence of the colonies this situation continues in most areas of the so called Free World. It is even becoming worse due to poverty compelling the poor farmers to sell their land to rich landlords and big companies.

The multinationals impede food production by other means. The process of change often misnamed "modernization" and "development" is integrating the poorer agricultural countries within the world market.

This endangers the traditional nutrition balance that people maintained through the food they produced and consumed and can lead to serious malnutrition. The International Peace Research Association analysed a series of case studies and identified agri-business as a leading force in this process. In a preliminary report they mentioned "The links between the establishment of ground nut plantations in Senegal and deterioration of the nutritional balance in the local community. Also the introduction of industrialised fisheries at Lake Turkana in Kenya exemplifies the serious effects resulting from depriving the local community of their means of subsistence. The famine in the Sahel has partly been the result of exploitation. But even after, the drought, agribusiness linked with local bureaucracies is effectively preventing the reconstruction of a socio-economic and ecological balance. The initiation of large 'Texas style ranches' for the purpose of meat export further accelerates this process."

In Sri Lanka the growth of the tourist industry and the export of fish and prawns have deprived the local people of prawns and lobsters, which they have traditionally eaten and also sent up the price of fish. Little of the foreign exchange earned in these exports help the fishermen or the poor people.

The enthusiastic promotion of artificial baby food by multinational agri-business in developing nations has generated severe nutritional problems. The present law suit in the Courts in Switzerland regarding "Mestie's Kill Babies" is sensitizing the world to some of the dangers of the proliferate processed food by multinationals in place of normal food such as breast milk for children. In Zaire a specialist in nutrition commented unequivocally that artificial feeding had killed more children in his district than it had saved.

The multinationals also help accustom the people to exotic foods which only the affluent can afford and thus neglect the production of food for all. In some countries the advertisement for dog and cat food is such that many poor peoples of Asia and Africa would be jealous of these privileged pets. But the food producers make profits on these. The multinational firms are those responsible for keeping down the prices of raw material exports from ' countries and this makes it more difficult for the latter to buy adequate food, fertilizers and oil in the capitalistic world market. The prices for most of these primary commodities such as tea, coffee, rubber, tin, sugar are dominated by a few companies. The disenchantment with the green revolution was also due to its dependence on agro-chemical inputs and mechanization. Here too it is the Multinationals like Exxon, Shell and imperial Industries that profit. The policy of development powerfully encouraged by the multinationals, sometimes through the medium of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and even the foreign policies of the western powers, encourages the introduction of inappropriate technology which may neglect the existing potential of the local population and their needs.

The Forbes Annual Directory of business shows that 16 out of the 20 most profitable corporations in 1973 were involved to some extent in the basic components of Agriculture. Their profits depend on high food prices.

In the past three years the OPEC countries and the Oil multinationals have combined to increase enormously the burden of poverty, hunger and famine of the poor in the poor countries. Costs of transport, fertilizers, agro chemicals and food have also increased along with the higher oil bills of non-oil producing Third World countries. In addition to land shortage, floods, drought and war, the OPEC Sheiks and Oil Company have worsened the misery of millions. Their new riches have made the oil countries and their rulers less secure in a power hungry world. The assassination of King Feisal of Saudi Arabia showed this. A consequence is their demand for more arms. The Shah of Iran, for instance, has placed arms orders for over 2 billion dollars. Money squeezed from starving workers and peasants of the poor countries is squandered by the oil sheiks on buying arms. The same multinationals, that share oil revenue with them rake in further profits. The new rich Arabs are only a little better than the older rich in the super powers, which supply the arms. The competitive and capitalistic spirit largely pervades in international relations - and the condition of the poor in non-oil producing countries has greatly deteriorated in the past two years.

The Non-Aligned nations will have to face this issue squarely. What is the meaning of their being Non-Aligned with such callous causing of famine by the O P E C Group? What is the value of Afro-Asian solidarity? Will OPEC join the exploiting "aid" givers? After first removing the funds from the poor peoples?

### **Inadequate Approaches**

The problems of hunger and armaments can no longer be resolved by the traditional social service approach. The Red Cross and Red Crescent aid is valuable in times of crisis; but, it cannot resolve the issues. Crisis will continue with increasing harmfulness. The Lions Club, Rotary and Jaycees traditional approaches of marginal social services will be less than even patch work in the face of this immense tragedy. Policies of the Development Decades based on aid and trade within the world capitalistic system has failed to even improve the situation. P L 480 aid is ,no, long term solution. Birth control is inadequate and "triage" is grossly, inhuman. So far religions have done little to face this great challenge meaningfully.

### **Law 410 Food No Solution.**

The U. S. Public Law 410 (Food for Peace Program) provides ' for the sale of food to other countries at concessional, terms - such as on long-term loans at low rates of interest. Cereals may be given on a 40 year loan with a grace period often years and an interest rate of 2 - 3 %. From the U. S. point of view this helps to keep the world free market prices high by taking away from it such quantities as would

reduce prices in a time of excess production or low demand due to the poverty of buying countries. The American farmer gets a guaranteed price and high profits. The American taxpayer is compelled to contribute to the costs. The U. S. Government can use food as a political and military weapon. In 1974 the U. S. Governments gave South Vietnam and Cambodia \$499.7 million of food aid via P. L. 480 mainly to support the war effort. But 40 million in the famine region of Africa 's Sub-Sahel region received only \$56"3 million via P, L. 480. The U. S. Government has the advantage of being able to make governments of Third World Countries dependent on and beholden to it for their survival. For the poor countries P. L. 480 can be a help in the short term, •specially if the aid is used to build a long term base of economic growth. But the danger is that it tends to be used to subsidize consumption without much growth. Even the effort at food production is neglected. The cheap food is a disincentive to local food production Dependence on the U. S grows. Soon the short term become s a long term. Five, ten years pass and the loans become repayable. This adds to their debt servicing charges. Then it becomes more difficult to buy food in the open market. More P, L. 480 aid becomes necessary. Dependence increases. The U. S. control over the economies and policies of countries augments... So the vicious circle escalates. Through P. L. 480 "aid" the U.S. is able to exercise price discrimination in the world market and get in whatever money it can immediately obtain from poor countries for high priced free market sales and also mortgage the future of these countries through F.L. -80 "aid". Thus the long term position of the poor becomes worse thanks to such a dubious and basically ill- intruded form of profiting from the poverty and need of the poor. If there were P. L. 480 sales the quantity of food in the world market would be greater, presuming American farmers would produce as much. Then the world food prices would be lower and the poor countries would have to pay less for their ' free market purchases. '

The non-aligned countries could campaign against P. L. 480 sales and try to create a buyers market for food with combined action.

### **Solutions of Despair**

While the world abounds in food, lands are uncultivated and the animals are well fed by the affluent, there is a near despair concerning the poor humans who cannot buy the food. The solutions proposed include the Green Revolution, family planning, arms sales (expecting/hoping) war to reduce population and now triage or the life boat ethics of allowing the poor to perish.

The Green Revolution had a limited success but it depends too much on agro-chemical inputs and mechanization, which the poor cannot afford. It favours large scale producers and hence the additional food produced does not get to the poor whose condition deteriorates. The Green Revolution neglected social justice and distribution.

Such control can reduce population to a certain degree. The snag is that poverty itself is an incentive to greater re production due to the need to counteract infant mortality and the insecurities of life. The feverish efforts at birth prevention, sterilization and abortion, which the rich countries are prepared to make among the poor, may fail precisely due to the poverty that the world capitalistic economic system aggravates.

Death by starvation, war and triage or the elimination of the weakest is likely to be the consequences of the worsening situation.

Triage or the lifeboat ethics is utterly false in its premises is inhuman in its consequences. The earth is not a life boat into which the poor are trying to climb. We are all in the boat. The resources are also not fully utilized on earth. There is a great deal of use less and even harmful baggage in the life boat that could, with advantage, be got rid of - e. g. luxuries, waste and armaments. The poverty of the poor was induced by exploitation, further they subsidize the rich. The carrying capacity of the earth is not a fixed quantity. As Norman J. Faramet of the Boston Industrial Mission writes - "The position of the rich (the fittest who have survived in the grandest style) is not based on iron-clad natural laws, but on the

aggressive and manipulate actions of our white- supremacist ancestors and contemporaries. Must we accept the condition of present inequalities as one of the givens we are powerless to change?" (Church and Society, March- April 1975)

It is surprising to what extents the mind can go in its inhumanity to human beings . In order to preserve the affluence of the rich these writers like Garrett Hardin of California Dr. Jay Forrester of M. I. T. are prepared to recommend the offering of large scale human sacrifices to the mammon of capitalism. The poor peoples of the poor capitalistic countries are facing an immense human tragedy. Food is their aspiration, and not arms. To meet this challenge an intense global campaign is required to awaken consciences and lead to action. We need to produce more food; hence to cultivate more and better in all countries.

Less waste, more sharing; less meat for the affluent, more cereals for all human beings. Campaigns to stop the armaments race and arms sales. New life styles and a new human sensitivity are required among all.

Many limited and short-term solutions are being adopted or proposed for the world food problem •

Emergency food aid - as under P. L. 480 from the U. S.

an international grain bank - to meet bad harvests

"soft loans" to poorer countries for food production or buying food. Making fuel and fertilizer available to poor countries. A world fertilizer fund, greater use of organic fertilizers and less energy intensive agricultural techniques.

More full use of U. S. and Canadian farm lands. Elimination of waste through pests, bad storage and in transport specially in poor countries. Fair terms of trade for exports of poor countries (h) a world food production program.

### **World Order must be Changed.**

While these and many other intermediate steps are taken we should have no illusion that the problem of food and hunger in •the poor free enterprise countries can be resolved satisfactorily within the framework of world capitalism and its acquisitive values. Within each country or region it is necessary to opt for different priorities in planning and production. A revolution in social priorities is essential if the poor are not to starve. So# long as countries remain within t he capitalistic system, tht poor will be at a serious disadvantage. The system operates for tfic benefit of the rich and powerful, Wealth accumulates among a few while others rot in misery. This system of wealth accumulation must be fought and eliminated. The exploitative multinational corporations must be contested and at least strongly controlled - if not expelled and expropriated. Food production and self-reliance must be given the highest priority. In the poor countries we must make maximum use of our abundant manpower and natural resources^

### **Global Land Redistribution**

Given solutions within countries are inadequate in terms of the global perspective. The present world distribution of land to population must be altered. The prevailing distribution of land is merely a legitimization of Euro-American (including Russian) conquests in the past five centuries. The white races carved out the world for themselves when they had superior military power. Their population was expanding. They underdeveloped the rest of the world, for their advantage. The other peoples of Asia and Africa are today increasing in population, - thanks to the scientific revolution itself. But their land space is very limited - specialty in South Asia, which has the further disadvantage of oil imports. A long-term solution well have to include a reallocation of the" earth's land space to the compressed peoples of Asia.

The presentation of relatively empty continents in Australia, New Zealand, North and South America will not be tolerated by the human conscience, when millions begin to perish of hunger. The White

racers are aware of this demand - hence their solutions of birth control, arms and triage. The need is for the people of "the rich under populated countries to transcend their' prejudices of race, language and culture and open up their countries to the workers and peasants of Asia. They should not merely attract our professionals and technicians, but rather absorb large numbers of workers who can transform their uncultivated lands into plentiful fields.

It is strange that in spite of starvation of such vast proportions the U. N. and even intellectuals are not advocating, as yet the better use of the earth's land surface. There is a concern with the seas and space; but not enough attention is being paid to the neglect of the principal source of food. When Europeans took over North and South America, Australia and New Zealand and established their colonial empires, Europe had a smaller population than Bangladesh today. Britain had about "4 million people in the 18th century and yet it occupied so much of the earth's space. The people of India and Bangladesh must be found land in the wide world. If the governments of the world want to do so, they can make provision for such transfers. Or else the South Asian countries must cut themselves off from the capitalistic world order as China did in 1949 and ' reorganize their economies on socialist lines. Even the New International Economic Order of the U. N. (May 1974) does not go far enough though it has many valuable recommendations.

### **Population and Land Use Planning**

In addition to family and population planning there should be a global planning on food and land use. The poor countries must insist with the rich on these at least as much as the rich insist on birth control. Food rationing at a global level seems an essential requirement for meeting the present dangers. This has to begin with rationing within countries and the avoidance of waste and the manufacture of exotic foods. A world authority should be able at least, to charge a heavy tax on the fertile uncultivated land of rich countries such as the U. S. The funds from such a tax could be used for food production in Bangladesh and the Sahelian region. If population and land are not redistributed, at least the incomes from high prices. of food should be channelled to help the poor. All these depend on the creation of World public opinion Human beings must learn to live in a civilized manner in the one world situation. Action groups in all countries must take up the problems of "food not arms" as a major part in their programs of consciousness raising and effecting changes.

World peace cannot be achieved so long as millions are starving-" and not allowed to use the resources which the earth provides. Peace is still more precarious when the rich peoples prey on the poor countries to increase the gap in incomes and wealth. The arms race itself is due to this world imbalance and acquisitiveness.

There will be no effective disarmament till the peoples of the world are prepared to live as one human family on this planet earth. A world government can eliminate the vast multinational exploration, control arms, distribute food rationally, redistribute the population to the earth's empty lands is essential for human survival today.

Food not arms will not be realized in our time without fundamental revolutionary changes within countries and at the world level. All persons of goodwill everywhere have a great responsibility for achieving these preconditions for justice and peace.

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