

# Candid Comments

## Hunger And The Agenda

It is very possible that 30 million people will die of hunger this coming year. But that is only the beginning of the problem.



Raab

Suppose you lived in a town of 100 people, which mirrored the world as it now exists. About 45 of your townspeople would go to bed hungry every night. About 20 of those would not only be constantly hungry, but would suffer from the kind of serious malnutrition which causes disability, illness and early death. (Five of you would be Americans and would have a total income equal to the total income of the other 95). The

population of your town is growing apace and will double in thirty years. And the amount of food your town produced is diminishing rather than expanding. Even if the town's population remained the same, more people would die of hunger.

This current situation is the result of crop failures, drought, high prices, and a fertilizer shortage. Part of the problem is the price gouging of oil-producing nations. Oil is a big component of nitrogen fertilizer. Also, food production depends on irrigation. In Asia two million irrigation wells are often pumped by small motors. Many of them are not pumping now, because of the cost of oil. But there are other problems. Even the world fish catch, rising steadily for the last quarter century, has dropped by about 10 percent.

The long-range problem (growing population and diminishing food supplies) requires massive attention and world cooperation. One short-range problem (the sensible use of the oil reserves which do exist) requires coordinated political action. But while we can hope and work for some world attention to these matters, there remains the immediate problem of . . . food . . . tomorrow and the next day, for starving millions. The only solution to that is some kind of sharing.

**But, today, no country including the U.S. is sitting on piles of unused food. "Sharing" inevitably means some reduction in food consumption by the more affluent. To return to the image of a small town: it would be as though those five of us (plus a few other fortunates) would decide to forego one or more of the 20 slices of bread we normally eat every week, and give it to the starving families across the street. Certainly, if we lived in such a town, we would do that. We do live in such a world.**

A saving of about a hundred calories a day per person, or around three percent in the food Americans buy would be enough to save the lives of about 21 million people. That could be done by "fringe" efforts, if they were widespread enough: non-waste of food, two-thirds portions of food in restaurants, dieters starting their diets now, cutting down to one drink instead of two before dinner. If that happened on an organized basis, as it did during World War II, then the government could declare a certain amount of food available for famine relief — and hopefully could deal with the problems of transportation.

Even this becomes more difficult to do as our own national economy deteriorates. But the main problem is one of "attention." How many problems can we have at the "top of the agenda?" For example: As Americans, we need to place the state of our economy, and of our democracy, at the top of our agenda. As American Jews, we need to place the threatened survival of Israeli Jews at the top of our agenda. And, as Jews, we need to place the problem of people starving to death at the top of our agenda. Otherwise, there is no point in being Jews.

How do we manage such a top-heavy agenda? In the practical way people have always had to, in order to remain human: by giving priority to whatever needs priority at any given moment, starting with their own survival — but by always finding time and energy to participate somehow, in some measure, in more than one top-agenda item.

For that purpose, and for those individuals or groups who want to give some attention to the problem of world hunger — long-range, short-range or immediate — there is a World Hunger Crisis Kit of information and suggestions which can be made available to you through the Jewish Bulletin.