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## Common Sense Should Impel Moves to End U.S. Hunger

CONTROVERSY over priorities for effective action quickly dissipates our verbal compassion about poverty. Do we stress racial self-esteem or integration, jobs or schools, reform or law and order? We argue, and we procrastinate. Meanwhile, children go hungry, a crime that no civilized community knowingly tolerates.

The most recent documentation of "Hunger, U.S.A." was issued a few weeks ago by an unimpeachable Citizens Board of Inquiry inspired by Walter Reuther. Its findings were mainly anecdotal; but a few realistic pictures of starvation may

have more human impact than do scientific statistics.

THESE GRAPHIC portrayals of misery have been widely publicized and have received the most compassionate editorial comment. It still has to be seen whether the Government will respond to some common sense proposals for Federal salvage of local irresponsibility in existing programs.

The most cogent indictment in the report was that food subsidy programs have been geared more closely to the management of agricultural surpluses than to the needs of the poor and hungry. The same criticism must, of course, be lodged against our programs of foreign food aid.

The more analytical parts of the report deserve more attention than they have received. "We have been startled by the absence of knowledge, research, experimentation, affirmative action—and even concern. The sad truth is that the extent of recorded medical knowledge about dietary intake and malnutrition among the poor in the U.S. consists of approximately 30 studies. Those who have gained expertise in malnutrition problems among the poor have done so . . . in other countries. The problems at home have been ignored.

"Society uses the lack of data as the basis of its inability to move quickly toward solutions."

IN FACT, the inquiry is not, in a scientific sense, an important contribution to the statistics of hunger in the United States. There was no difficulty in finding too many poignant examples of starving children; but it had no tools to assess the actual magnitude of the problem, or to define it more sharply in terms of the specific nutrients that were lacking in the diets of particular people.

The board's approach to a solution is the only one that can be mounted quickly enough to meet the immediate emergency: make an abundance of food more readily available. Where cash is lacking, distribute food stamps more widely to the poor, and they will eat enough.

The urgency of these measures is sharpened by increasing evidence of the stunting effect of malnutrition during the early years of life. Recent studies by Dr. Stephen Zamenhof at the University of California at Los Angeles have verified that when pregnant mice are fed protein-deficient diets, their offspring are born with neurone-deficient brains. Since there is good evidence that brain neurones do not multiply significantly after birth, these studies give a firm biological basis to clinical observations on mental retardation in protein-starved children. Dr. B. F. Chow at Johns Hopkins University has led several studies on rats with similar effects on learning behavior. ("intelligence?") of the offspring. Furthermore, female

rats that had been congenitally stunted by starvation did not fully sustain the nutrition of their offspring, even though they were adequately fed during their own pregnancy.

IN THE LONG RUN, the whole society will pay for the imposed retardation of its human resources. There is no surer mortgage against our future than to neglect present-day hunger. But the response must be twofold: prompt intervention with common-sense but crude measures like food stamps, especially for mothers and children, and a long-range program of nutritional research, field study and education in elementary domestic science for the most efficient use of our total resources.

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