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More Food,

FRANCES MOORE LAPPÉ

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HUNGER is continually defined for us as a problem of inadequate production. Therefore, if people are hungry, the reason must be that there is not enough food. For at least 30 years, the fundamental goal of the "war on hunger" has been to produce more food.

Thus, we are treated almost daily to the "news release" approach to hunger. We learn of one new breakthrough after another—protein from petroleum, harvests of kelp, extracts from alfalfa—all to expand the food supply. Even pleas to cut consumption in rich countries are narrowed down to "eating one less hamburger a week" in order to increase the food supply for the hungry.

For many, the production approach is working. Today, more food is, in fact, being produced. The green revolution now adds an estimated 20 million tons annually to the grain larders of Asia. In Mexico, wheat yields tripled in only two decades.

But wait. There are now more hungry people than ever before. Since there is also more food than ever before, we are left with only two possible conclusions:

- ◆ Either the production focus is correct, but soaring numbers of people simply overrun even these dramatic production gains;
- ◆ Or the diagnosis is incorrect—scarcity is not the cause of hunger, and production increases, no matter how great, can never solve the problem.

Enough to feed everyone

The simple facts of world grain production make it clear that the over-population/scarcity diagnosis is actually incorrect. Present world grain production could more than adequately feed every person on earth. Even during the "scarcity" year, 1972 to 1973, there was nine per cent more grain per person than in an "ample" year like 1960. Inadequate production is clearly not the problem.

In fact, as ironic as it may sound, a narrow focus on increased production has actually compounded the problem of hunger. Because it goes against the popular wisdom, we found ourselves wanting to verify and re-verify this conclusion in our research at the Institute for Food and Development Policy.

What have we found? The production focus quickly becomes synonymous with "modernizing" agriculture—the drive to supply the "progressive"

farmer with imported technology: fertilizer, irrigation, pesticides and machinery. The green revolution seeds only reinforce this definition of development because their higher yields depend heavily on these inputs. Agricultural progress is thus transformed into a narrow technical problem instead of the sweeping social task of releasing vast, untapped human resources.

Governments, international lending agencies and foreign assistance programmes pushing for greater production "at all costs" willingly subsidize the heavy financial expense of this type of modernization.

Where the money is

The result? This influx of public funds quickly turns farming into a place to make money—sometimes big money. To profit, however, one needs some combination of land, money, credit-worthiness and political influence. This alone eliminates most of the farmers throughout the world.

Ignoring substantial evidence from around the world that small, carefully farmed plots are more productive per acre than large estates and use fewer costly inputs, government production programmes invariably pass over small farmers (not to mention the landless). The common rationalization is that working with bigger production units is a faster road to increased production.

Competition for lands suddenly made profitable by this official production strategy has brought rising land values. Not atypically, land values have increased by 300 to 500 per cent in the green revolution areas of India, setting off spiralling land speculation and even "land grabs".

The lure of greater profits tempts large landlords to take back land they formerly rented out. Many use their now higher profits to buy out small neighbouring farmers. Throughout the under-developed world, the landless now comprise 30 to 60 per cent of the agrarian population. This does not even take into account the millions of landless refugees who are the human products of the production strategy. Finding no farm work, they join an equally hopeless search for work in urban slums.

The big farming business

At the same time as the number of landless seeking work steadily grows, the number of jobs is shrinking. Mechanization enables the large landholder to cultivate more land himself without having to share

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More Hunger

PHILIP and JOSEPH COLLINS

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the produce with sharecroppers or labourers. Despite mounting unemployment, governments encourage mechanization by subsidizing imported machinery and exempting mechanized farms from land reform.

Agricultural production based on purchased inputs—fertilizers, hybrid seeds, pesticides, machinery—inevitably means that money-based relationships come to replace rent and wages traditionally paid in farm produce. To pay a cash rent, however, the tenant must go into debt even before planting—and often at exorbitant interest rates. While rent in kind meant that a bad harvest was shared by both landlord and tenant, payment in cash means that the tenant must come up with the same rent no matter how poor the harvest is.

We are thus witnessing the radical transformation of the control of food resources—both in the industrialized and throughout the non-socialist underdeveloped world. Agriculture, once the livelihood for millions of self-provisioning farmers in the Third World, is being turned into a profit base for a new class of "farmers". Traditional landed élites, money-lenders, military officers, city-based speculators, foreign corporations and even African tribal chieftains are now becoming agricultural entrepreneurs.

In the course of this transformation, the hungry are being severed from the production process. At best, they become insecure wage labourers with seasonal jobs. To be cut out of the production process is to be cut out of consumption.

There is more food, but people are still hungry—in fact, more hungry. The process of creating more food has actually reduced people's ability to grow or to buy food. Where is the increased production? Did it mysteriously disappear? No.

◆ **Some of it goes to urban middle income groups.** The Governments of the US and Pakistan collaborated with the New Jersey-based Corn Products Corporation to improve yields of Pakistani maize—historically, the staple food of the rural poor. Hybrid seeds of other inputs did increase yields. The maize, however, now grown by a relatively few large farmers, is processed into corn sweetener for soft drinks for the urban middle and upper classes.

◆ **Some of it gets fed to livestock.** The corn yields that were the pride of the green revolution in the US have ended up in the stomachs of livestock. By

1973, two thirds of the green revolution rice in Colombia was going to feedlots and breweries.

◆ **Some of it gets exported.** Having based an agricultural strategy on imported inputs, countries become locked into production for export to earn foreign exchange to pay for those inputs. Despite the malnutrition of 80 per cent of its rural population, Mexico in the late 1960s began to export its green revolution wheat. Central America exports between one third and one half of its beef to the United States.

◆ **Some of it gets dumped.** Fruits and vegetables produced in Central America for export to the United States are frequently either shut out from an over-supplied market or fail to meet US "quality" standards—size, colour, smoothness. Since the local population—mostly landless—are too poor to buy anything, fully 65 per cent of production is fed to livestock (which, in turn, are exported) or literally dumped.

A "global supermarket"

As food production is taken out of the hands of self-provisioning farmers and tied more and more into a world-wide marketing system, local food resources go less and less to feed local people. We see emerging a "global supermarket" in which the poorest in Central America or Africa must now compete for food with millions of Americans, Japanese and Europeans whose incomes are many times greater. Our "interdependent world" may be leading us to the same supermarket, but most have neither money to buy nor even welfare food stamps.

Development pegged to sheer production increases is taking us backward, not forward. It is more than just a diversion from the real task of reconstructing society to enable the majority of people to control and participate in the food production process. It is entrenching a new class of local and international profiteers who are better positioned than ever to fight against the slightest change.

If producing more food is the wrong solution, what then is the right one? In order to answer that question, we first have to understand that there is no developing country in which the food resources could not feed the local people. More importantly, because the under-developed countries are portrayed to us as helpless and pitifully in need of our aid, we lose



sight of the simple truth that hungry people can and will feed themselves, if they are allowed to do so.

If people are not feeding themselves, you can be

sure powerful obstacles are in the way. These obstacles are not, however, the hunger myths—over-population, too little land, laziness, religious taboos, inhospitable climate, lack of technology, unequal terms of trade, and so forth. In our research, we found that the most fundamental constraint to food self-reliance is that the majority of the people are not themselves in control of the production process and, therefore, more and more frequently they are not even participants.

How do we remove the obstacles preventing people from taking control of the production process and feeding themselves? What we have learned is that the path we are suggesting—the path of people taking control of food—is the *only* guarantee of long-term productivity and food security. It is the land monopolizers—both the traditional landed élites and corporate agribusiness—that have proven themselves to be the most inefficient, unreliable and destructive

users of agricultural resources.

Many, who have come to see that the problem of hunger is not simply a problem of production, conclude that instead it is a problem of distribution—getting the food to the hungry instead of the well-fed. We are saying something else. The issue of distribution is only a reflection of the more basic problem of control and participation in the production process itself.

Once we grasp these fundamentals, we will then begin to see that the “poor, hungry masses” whom we are repeatedly being told to fear are in reality our allies. Consciously or not, we are all joined in a common struggle for control of the most basic human need—food. “More food”, or even redistribution programmes like food aid and food stamps, will continue to mean more hunger until we first come to grips with the problem of who controls and who takes part in the production process.

The Air is Dark

ROY DOUGLAS

“WHEN did the Irish problem start and when will it end?” Around 1920, one of the Irish leaders gave a sombre answer to those questions. “The Irish problem started when Strongbow came to Ireland. It will end when Cromwell gets out of Hell.” Between Strongbow and Cromwell fit the Elizabethan “plantations”.

The Anglo-Irish settlers had a sort of base in the “English Pale” round Dublin. Beyond that, the country was to a greater or less degree governed by Gaelic lords of one kind or another, who acknowledged that some kind of shadowy suzerainty was vested in the English Crown.

Why, we may ask, did anybody bother to interfere? The answer is quite important, not only for an understanding of British motives in Ireland, but for an understanding of the motives of many imperial powers in many places. Ireland had very few attractions for the English “Imperialists”. Most English folk, from the Queen down, would probably have preferred that the whole island should disappear beneath the waves. The trouble was that a hostile Ireland, or an Ireland in occupation of a foreign enemy, was a tremendous danger to England. For that

*The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established, Harvester Press; £10.50.

reason, Gaelic Ireland must be subdued.

The story of what followed is told by Nicholas Canny.* His book is aimed at the scholar, rather than the layman. It is learned, erudite and fascinating.

Dr. Canny tells us a tale which strikes chords of memory. There is muddle at the start over political objectives. Assuming that the English wished to control Ireland, how should they set about it? Should they treat the Gaelic chieftains as enemies to be fought and



conquered, or as loyal if errant subjects whose allegiance should be reclaimed? Should Englishmen be settled in Ireland, or should Irishmen be turned into quiet and loyal subjects? Does religion fit into the story?

Now we see why the tale has a familiar ring. All the old story of conflicting motives which seems to beset every human situation is told in the sixteenth century Irish context. The colonists were sent out to colonise and settle; they wanted to make their pile and come home. The Anglo-Irish

were cast for the role of model countrymen for the rest of Ireland to emulate; yet they found themselves profoundly unhappy in that role, and finished by leaning towards the Gaels.

Dr. Canny's book is a powerful refutation of the romantic stories of later times. The English myth that Ireland was colonised in order to civilise the Irish for their own good is demonstrable nonsense. Francis Drake (*The Francis Drake?* We are not told) and a colleague gathered a gang of ruffians who put the six hundred inhabitants of Rathlin Island—men, women and children—to the sword. Yet the Gaelic chieftains do not emerge as heroes or even patriots; they obviously had a keen eye for the main chance, and would freely submit to Elizabeth when it suited their purpose.

As for those at the bottom of the heap—the peasants—their story is again the usual one. Whether the local magnates were Anglo-Irish or Gaelic or incomers mattered little to them. They were rack-rented to the limit, whoever was around. In a few places within the Pale, the peasants might accumulate a surplus in a good year; but for most peasants life was at the edge of subsistence.

Yes, it is a grim, unedifying, story. There are no heroes, not many real villains, just a lot of sufferers. To that extent, the pattern of twentieth century Ireland was already set.