

"HUNGER U.S.A.", *A Report by the Citizens' Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States, With An Introductory Comment By Robert F. Kennedy*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969. 96 pp. \$4.95.

"And the children go to bed hungry—sometimes they cry—"

Perhaps as a premonition to his tragic death, Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed an appropriate epitaph in February 1968 when he asked all those who had the dream "to say that . . . I did try to feed the hungry."

Yet hunger is what this Report is all about. And hunger, like you could never imagine, because if you try to empathize, your mind recoils at this type of existence. Yet hunger exists in such magnitude and causes such incredible repercussions in this country that one wonders whether anybody does know how to feed the hungry.

In 1958 John Kenneth Galbraith published his classic work *The Affluent Society*, which, some said, placed the subject of poverty on the national conscience as a separate subject to which governmental action as well as private initiative should be directed. Galbraith was being read, finally, because he was a respected economist. But you could have gotten the same impact by reading Richard Wright's brilliant work, *Black Boy*, years earlier. Poverty, according to Galbraith, affected not only blacks, but Appalachian whites, Mexican-Americans, Indians and Orientals in this country. This Report picks up where Galbraith left off, and presents a comprehensive analysis of the depth of poverty in this nation.

In many cases, these are second and third generation poor who long ago accepted their condition as permanent. Consequently, they are a silent minority whose needs far exceed the understanding of those in power. Indeed, as a counterpoint to the concern for Nixon's "silent majority" whom the rest of the public supposedly has so rudely been treating lately, the attention given to the poor has been microscopic.

The Citizens' Crusade Against Poverty through its chairman, Walter Reuther, established this Board of Inquiry to conduct an objective inquiry into:

1. The scope of starvation and hunger in selected poverty areas throughout the country;
2. The extent of nutritional knowledge at medical schools, among medical practitioners, and within the United States Public Health Service;
3. The extent and quality of public and private programs now under way to meet this need;

4. Immediate strategy recommendations to deal with the problem; and
5. Long-range recommendations to attack the basic causes of the problem.

The results were horrifying. As the introductory comment by Robert F. Kennedy in April 1968 sets forth:

[the Board] found that American babies die in infancy, because their mothers cannot nurse them and cannot buy the milk to keep them alive. They found that thousands of American children are anemic and listless, their physical growth stunted because they lack adequate protein. They found that scurvy and rickets, surely diseases of an alien past, cripple American children who never drink citrus juice, and who rarely drink milk. They found that American children in large numbers suffer from hookworms and roundworms, parasitic infections that drain what strength these children have. They found that hundreds of thousands of school children cannot learn their lessons, because they go to school without breakfast, have no money for lunch, and return to a supper without meat or green vegetable. And they found that countless old people in America exist almost entirely on liquids, because they cannot buy or find a decent meal.

Kennedy went on to say that

whatever our differences in this coming election, whatever issues of policy or programs divide us, surely we can stand united on this necessity: that starvation in this land of enormous wealth is nothing short of indecent—and that a policy which fails to use the tools at hand to feed the hungry, is a policy unworthy of our support. We cannot wait until November or January to change these programs. We can change them now—and we must.

It is tragic and frightening to read the Mississippi story where the Board found that such long heard political assurances as “the really poor and needy have access to adequate surplus commodities and food stamps if they are in danger of starving,” and “progress is being made as a result of massive federal efforts in which multimillion dollar food programs take care of more people now than ever before,” and “hunger and starvation must be restricted to terrible places of need, such as Mississippi, which will not institute programs to take adequate care of its people,” were nothing more than myths.

On the contrary, the Board found that hunger and malnutrition take their toll in this country in the form of infant deaths, organic brain damage, retarded growth and learning rates, increased vulnerability to disease, withdrawal, apathy, alienation, frustration and violence.

But if all of this is so obvious, then the logical inquiry is why

isn't someone doing anything about it. Yet, there appears to be a philosophy in certain state governments and in some parts of Washington that has become an all-too-familiar refrain. It is said in many ways, but it amounts to the following point: "The poor are poor because they are lazy." This precisely seems to be the motivating force behind the voting record and lack of concern by certain officials in office. They seem to follow Friedmanese Economics (Milton) as dogma, instead of looking at the faces of those who truly are in need. This could never more be accurately typified than by Senator George Murphy's remark as a member of the Board when it first started looking into the problem (and this is 1968, mind you) when he said "I didn't know that we were going to be dealing with a situation of starving people and starving youngsters." Incredible! This country is not a collection of two hundred million vacuums. It must be made aware—and aware now.

Have you ever considered eating laundry starch for dinner; or clay, or corn starch? Well, the Report sets forth the horrible story of thousands of pregnant black women in Louisiana and Alabama as well as Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles who must do so because of no money. Or how about this? A 26 year old woman with two small children whose husband is unable to find work, testified before the Board that:

I had a steak once, about three months ago. A boyfriend of my husband's was servin' it and invited us over. Imagine that, me going 26 years without tastin' a steak. I took one little bitty bite and said 'boy it sure was worth waitin' for.'

Based upon the stories of many others who testified, she was a gourmet. One woman said:

There was no food in the house and I didn't want them to go to school hungry and then come home hungry too. I felt that if I kept them at home with me, at least when they cried and asked for a piece of bread, I would be with them and put my arms around them.

Predictably, the Board concluded that poverty leads to other social ills. Also, predictably, it found that the medical schools and the American Medical Association were grossly inadequate in their understanding of the problem and their educational process as a first step toward reducing poverty. It would be interesting to compare the total expenses of the AMA on lobbying against Medicare, with the amount of money allocated toward educating doctors on the diseases of the poor and directly spending money for these people.

And then there are the photographs. You cannot look at these poignant depictions of LIFE around us without becoming compassionate and, indeed, passionate.

Ordinarily when a person reads such a Report, he will conclude that deference to governmental agencies is always the best bet, that certainly the government is doing "the best thing in the right way". But is it the right way when food stamps are so expensive that even though they provide a discount, the poor cannot afford them? You can't very well buy food stamps to save money on your total bill when you don't have an income. Moreover, it becomes exceedingly difficult for these people, even when they can afford food stamps, or when they get their welfare check at the beginning of every month, when the "humanitarian" grocery stores just coincidentally happen to raise prices around that time. There is no consumer protection against this type of conduct, but it occurs all over this country. And so the poor become apathetic and some become violent.

So the person hearing and reading such a Report says, "Well, if the government isn't doing it, I'm sure that the churches and private charities are doing their part." Are they? The Report found that churches and private charities do little more than donate goods on Thanksgiving and Christmas, and then enjoy the warmth of charity. This gross misconception that what the poor want is charity should not be excused. What these people are in need of is dignity and not charity. Yet the churches go on asking "Why are we continually losing membership?" They are losing it because of misdirection and misunderstanding, and because all the public seems to hear are the pious platitudes of Reverends "Blessyour-hearts" whose patronizing preaching seems to satisfy, incredibly, a great many people, that they have done their part.

John F. Kennedy said it so very well in these words: "I do not say that all men are equal in their ability, their character or their motivation; but I say they should be equal in their chance to develop their character, their motivation and their ability."

One recommendation of the Commission? Create a free food stamp program keyed to the need and to the objective of a completely adequate diet, and one which would be administered with minimum controls. The fear of the bureaucracy is overwhelming, particularly if it is administered on a state level. An educational process of the poor must begin to teach them to trust those who are administering these plans. Yet, government must start listening to those who should have been consulted originally: the poor.

It is an unfortunate phenomenon in American politics that those

who are the most well off think that they have a monopoly on knowing the best way for the poor to avoid their problems. Yet this myopic approach totally ignores the needs of the poor and what is the best way to go about correcting them. Let's face it—some in government will never care. Bluntly, we should write them off. What is needed, is action now. As lawyers, the first step we should undertake is an education of those who are on the borderline or unsure as to what can be done. Tell them the problem as this Report does. Show them the pictures, as this Report does. One who is truly neutral or unaware, who reads this Report, cannot help but become educated and gain understanding; and with understanding comes compassion; with compassion comes passion; and with passion in the final analysis, comes results.

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THE CHEMICAL FEAST—*Ralph Nader's Study Group Report on the Food and Drug Administration*, By James S. Turner, New York: Grossman Publishers, Inc., 1970, \$6.95, (Paperback, pp. 273, 95¢).

In 1906, the condition of the American meat supply was vividly depicted for the people of this country in a book entitled *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair.¹ Mr. Sinclair became one of the best known of that group of writers called the "muckrackers," men of social conscience who used their mastery of the literary art to expose various social, political, and economic ills. *The Jungle* has become a classic of American literature, and is widely reputed to have been the catalyst which stimulated passage of this country's first pure food and drug act.²

The fate of the various pure food and drug acts which have followed since 1906, and more importantly, of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), a regulatory agency created to enforce those acts, is the subject of a new book called *The Chemical Feast* by James S. Turner. Like Upton Sinclair, Mr. Turner is a member of a group of socially aware people dedicated to the protection of the

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1. U. SINCLAIR, *THE JUNGLE* (1906).
2. Federal Food and Drug Act of 1906, 21 U.S.C. § 1 *et. seq.* (1964) has been superceded by the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, 21 U.S.C. § 301 *et seq.* (1964).