

12. LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (LDCs)

What everyone is interested in is further improvement in human wellbeing, first for ourselves, and, if we are not utterly selfish, for others as well. When we learn of the utterly abysmal conditions of life for a billion or more people in the less developed countries, we have to hope that there is some way that they can also be raised to a decent economic standard of living over time, along with other billions of people in those countries who are only a little better off, while there are a few who are quite rich.

Economic improvement will come only as the per hour productivity of human labor in those countries rises, rises in terms of the things that improve human well-being, and the rise benefits the poor as equity requires.

Americans as individuals can become involved and help primarily in two ways. Most important, we can insist that our politicians become concerned enough to promote proper policies toward these people. Some of these policies that will be identified in this essay.

The other thing we can do is support, on whatever scale we can afford, various private voluntary organizations that are assisting people in the less developed countries in one way or another. Some of these will also be identified in this essay.

As has been noted in previous essays, it is quite important that population growth not outrun the rise in production but falls significantly behind it. This will require widespread education in family planning, especially for women, and the availability of contraceptives. It will also require a general improvement in the status of women.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT THE UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND BE WELL FINANCED BY THE U. S. GOVERNMENT AND OTHER GOVERNMENTS TO PROMOTE FAMILY PLANNING IN THE LESS DEVELOPED WORLD LEST THE WORLD POLULATION CONTINUE TO DOUBLE EVERY 35 YEARS. In some years the U. S. contributions have been reduced to save money--the poorest way in the world to save money. Too few Americans protested the cuts or demanded increases instead of cuts.

There are many private organizations in the U. S. promoting world family planning also, membership in them is inexpensive, and they are channels through which small scale private financing of family planning throughout the world can be financed. One is called the Internatinal Planned Parenthood Federation, 120 Wall Street, 9th floor, New York, NY 10053-3902. A source of current information on world population problems is from the World Population News Service Which publishes POPLINE, address is 107 Second Street, NE, Washington D.C. 20002.

Extension of family planning will not likely be able to come very

rapidly, but it should be promoted as fast and as steadily as possible.

Since most of the population in less developed countries is engaged in subsistence farming, and since most poor people are undernourished and malnourished, improvement in the farm situation is most imperative. The first thing that would help a lot would be to get the farmers out of debt to the usurious money lenders and provide access to farm credit on reasonable terms when needed.

A Pakistani (Yunus) developed what are called Grameen Banks that lend on good terms to successive individuals in groups of a dozen people in LDCs who all guarantee repayment of the loans, loans intended to help people develop small money making opportunities they did not have before (e.g. weaving baskets for sale, or knitting scarves, or raising chickens). This has proved to be remarkably successful in improving lives of farm people in LDCs. Now there are international groups setting up such loan schemes. One is called FINCA International. Another is called Women's Opportunity Fund.

In many countries it will be very desirable to break up the big landed estates and distribute the land to the farmers who now till it and are forced to give much of what they produce to the big landowners to sell. Such land redistribution usually needs to be accompanied by other changes that provide tillers of the soil easy access to seeds, tools, and markets for their farm products. Indeed many subsistence farmers need education in better farming methods.

It will only hinder agricultural improvement if LDC (less developed country) farmers are by one means or another put in the position of having to buy their seeds each year from foreign (likely American) companies which obtain patents on the company's seeds. American companies should be prohibited from engaging in any such practices that hurt LDC farmers.

Many a farm family in less developed countries could benefit by outside help in improving their technology or adding some animals to their farm or in other ways. Private small scale efforts in this direction may be more helpful than government programs. Those interested might explore Compatible Technology Inc., Hamline University, P.O. Bix 109, 1536 Hewett Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104-1284; or ACCION INTERNATIONAL, 56 Roland St., Suite 300, Boston MA, 02129. Then there is Heifer International which provides poor LDC farm families with a pair of animals to raise, trains them in raising them, and gets them to promise to give their progeny to other such families and train them similarly, the animals being a source of additional income to the families (chicken, sheep, goats, cows, etc).

Soil conservation practices need to be taught and employed in many countries. In Africa the Sahel desert is developed because it paid all the farmers individually to keep increasing the number of animals they put upon

the land to graze until they overgrazed the land, killing off the grass and turning the land into a desert. This sort of thing is now referred to as the "tragedy of the commons" (the common land overused by too many people). The globe is a common land coming to be overloaded with too many people trying to make a living off the land. As said before, many can have a high standard of living, but if far too many try to do so some of the land will become deserts and the earth will support only a smaller number of people thereafter.

People depend upon a proper balance of natural elements on earth, including oxygen, much of which is produced by forests. America has cut down many of its forests and less developed countries are doing the same. Scientists say that it is very important even for world oxygen supply that the tropical rain forests not be cut down. When cut down they cannot be regenerated, and the land on which they grew can be used only for a relatively short time before the soil becomes useless. Yet economic incentives are leading business firms to cut big areas of tropical forests to raise cattle to get beef for American hamburgers, or mining companies cut the forests to mine for minerals, or farmers cut trees to get farm land.

It is in the world's interest to finance the preservation of tropical rain forests, but the countries in which they are found can profit individually by exploiting them. So far the world has not faced such world problems and found ways for the wealthier countries to finance what poor countries cannot. Can the U.S. take any leadership on such world problems, or are we too short-sighted to do so? We shall see.

Even some small private efforts can be of some help. There are numerous private organizations that accept small contributions for small scale projects to plant trees in less developed countries as part of reforestation projects. One of these is called Rainforest Alliance, 65 Bleecker Street, 6th floor, New York, NY 10012. Another is called Trees for the Future, Loret Miller Ruppe Center, P. O. Box 7027, Silver Spring, Maryland, 20907. And one is called Conservation International, 1015 18th Street, NW, Suite 1000, Washington D.C. 20036.

Of course not everybody in less developed countries are in farming. There are also many craftsmen, many small businesses, and some middle sized businesses. As agricultural productivity improves, fewer people will be needed to feed town and city dwellers so more people can engage in producing things other than food. LDC have or can fairly readily develop comparative advantages in producing some things and exporting them to more developed countries if the latter do not have trade restrictions against their exports as they still do to some extent. Exports enable them to buy in return more capital goods they will need to develop some of their other

industries. These other industries may need to erect tariffs or other trade barriers while their industries are developing to protect them against imports from more industrialized nations.

Here is where another foreign policy issue arises these days. In the more developed countries (MDCs) and especially in the U.S. what is called globalization is all the rage. The MDC transnational corporations that put various of their manufacturing operations in many different countries are now calling for free trade and free movement of capital between countries. This is all to their advantage presently, though in the early development of the U.S. we protected many of our developing industries against foreign competition. Now we insist LDCs not do that but let big MDC transnationals globalize the world economy for their advantage. It is claimed that will benefit all countries, although it is obviously a self-serving claim by MDC transnational corporations.

Since LDCs do need foreign capital, technologies, managerial and manufacturing skills, the problem is to foster only those relations between foreign transnational investing corporations and LDC countries and their governments that will be mutually advantageous--promoting LDC development as well as TNC profits. What is needed is a body of neutrals in a United Nations agency skilled in negotiations which can intervene in the economic agreements made between MDC transnationals and LDC governments to ensure that LDCs are not simply exploited by the big TNC corporations. Our big corporations can push the leaders of LDCs around or bribe them if need be to get concessions favorable only to the TNCs. The U.S. needs to support the UN in this matter, not simply support exploitation of LDCs by powerful TNCs. This can be a good test of whether U.S. policy is really concerned to help LDC people and will really help LDCs develop or whether U.S. policy is controlled by big TNC corporations. The American people who understand why so many hate U.S. foreign policy can help turn that around by pressure on our government on this matter. If we don't, hatred will only increase.

The U.S. has many laws that corporations here have to comply with that provide limited protection to the environment, that protect workers from unsafe machinery etc.; business pays taxes here and often good wages. But some U.S. businesses are transferring their manufacturing operations to foreign countries to escape all that, and then they import those products into the U.S. in competition with businesses that stay here and meet all those obligations. That is not fair, nor is it fair to import tariff free goods produced under sweatshop conditions in LDCs. We still need to decide, despite the alleged advantages of globalization, what industries it would pay to keep in this country rather than let abandon us and move to

foreign countries. Economists can show that some foreign trade is advantageous, but they cannot legitimately use the old free trade argument because it was based on the assumption that capital could not move between countries at all--now it flows as easily between countries as water flows downhill.

On your personal role in all this, consider not only how U. S. public interest organizations that you can join may influence U.S. government policies, consider again what we can all do with our small contributions. The oldest private organization that provides what help to LDCs it can in many ways, starting with famine relief but including many other things, is CARE, 151 Ellis Street NE, Atlanta, GA 30303-2440. Ex-President Jimmy Carter and his wife have been doing some of the most remarkable things to help people worldwide improve their situation in many ways through what they call THE CARTER CENTER, One Copenhill Ave., P.O. Box 105107, Atlanta, GA 30348-9940. A letter to them indicating interest and the possibility of a small contribution will bring information.

There are ways that anyone can become involved personally in volunteering to help in an LDC. A guide book showing a whole range of such possibilities is provided in a book by David Beckman that you can get in a library; its title is THE OVERSEAS LIST.

Scientists have warned the world that the global economy is in danger of worsening global warming, which could become a big problem. Not until the 1990s and the UN RIO conference on environmental problems did the LDCs generally admit that their development was adversely affected by environmental problems and agree to help work toward global solutions.

The biggest single LDC is China, with nearly a quarter of the world's population, so its future course is significant for the entire globe. Unfortunately China is likely to depend primarily on fossil fuels, coal and oil in its industrialization, and upon gasoline powered automobiles for transportation. China is the biggest single potential polluter in the future.

The U.S., the biggest actual polluter, refused to adhere to the Kyoto protocol on the environment because the administration feared it might hurt our economy. LDCs wonder when we will do our part on a global problem. For any country, environmental protection is likely to alter "business as usual" some, though the cost of environmental protection is usually primarily a labor cost, so it creates jobs in the short run. Failure to protect the environment for the whole world will produce a heavy economic toll in reduced standards of living in the long run.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this little set of essays we should seek to set some things we said in a proper perspective again, so that in the end readers appreciate both the vast amount of good in the world and also the real possibility of making the world much better by individual efforts of a lot of people than it now is in some respects. Only in the last essay, on less developed countries, where readers might have seen the least possibility of doing anything themselves did I identify specific organizations that can be joined and supported as a way of doing something effective in addition to trying to influence government policy. Actually anyone interested can find similar opportunities to make a difference individually by joining organizations working in the areas covered by essays #6 to #11.

As suggested in the Preface, needed changes in the structures and operations of our social institutions can be facilitated by changes in ideologies suggested in essays #1 to #3. Whether people anywhere are more appreciative of the beauties of nature now than they were a century ago, or any time earlier, is not accurately knowable, but whenever it is, it would likely lead to more creativity in the fine arts. There was in the 20th century much progress in scientific understanding nature, and that continues, though further progress is not needed to induce profound wonder at it all. The social significance of science lies in its contribution to our ways of thinking, namely a recognition that our supposed knowledge should not be held dogmatically but tentatively and subject to further exploration. Though a larger proportion of the educated population now thinks this way, most people still live mentally in a pre-scientific era in this important respect. Dealing intelligently with social problems does require scientific thinking and attitudes.

Essays #2 and #3 painted the contrast between the “smart guy ethic” and human compassion for others and their well-being. People the world over do show compassion when disasters or famines strike even in other countries. But some astute observers of social trends have contended that the past couple of decades have seen a decline in this country in the feeling that Americans constitute a big national community in which we are concerned about each other’s well-being. Instead our national political process has degenerated into a conflict among different interest groups who act as though they had nothing in common. We are highly interdependent, however, and can all benefit from that if we act accordingly. When interest groups act independently and ignore community interests they are operating, as groups, like the “smart guy ethic” of individuals, without compassion for anyone else. A few politicians in different parties have

sensed this troubling trend and have been elected by claiming they would bring the country together again. Unfortunately, once elected, their behavior has shown almost no effort to do so. The country is evidently more community minded than the politicians really are.

We can brag about some social accomplishments in the first 3/4 of the 20th century in this country and in some other industrial countries, but there is no bragging to be done about our failure in this country to correct some things that badly need to be corrected now. For a notable example, most people respond favorably to the idea that “we should leave no child behind”. But that would require among other things a substantial amount of federal money to correct what Jonathan Kozol calls in his book on education “Savage Inequalities”. The “haves” provide their children good educations. The “have-nots” cannot even afford to keep some of their school building roofs from leaking into the classrooms, provide adequate textbooks, or even keep all the toilets working.

Human well-being has increased in some places and in some respects. What we call the standard of living has increased substantially for many people, though recently worsening even for the middle class in the U. S. People are generally healthier and live longer, though more people are hooked on habit-forming drugs, and AIDS has assumed alarming proportions. We are mostly better fed, better housed and better clothed. in this country, while some other countries suffer famines. Our community facilities are better. Science has increased our understanding of nature, and technological applications have more frequently replaced the use of people as machines in production in industrial countries. New technologies have also given us nice new grow-up consumer toys so we can sit at home and see events taking place almost anywhere in the world.

While countries differ a lot in their different stages of development, none can claim to provide everyone with fair and ample opportunities to develop their fine potentialities, and none are not even trying very hard to do so. Business seems to have improved in some respects in most countries, but even in the U. S. it is now focussed primarily upon rewarding speculator stockholders instead of protecting and advancing its more important stakeholders. Smart guys can make millions of dollars by promoting business mergers, while some others work full time producing goods and services but remain in poverty. Business is not required to pay living wages. Some labor has no bargaining power when business competes to lower costs so it can create more value for speculative stockholders, while CEOs with power virtually set their own salaries and stock options. They take excessive amounts of the jointly produced income.

Democracies now have better prospects everywhere than ever

before, and we and others enjoy more recognition of human rights. But even in this country we run our democracy very poorly, dominated by money, as indicated in one of the essays. And religious dogmatism threatens to destroy democracy wherever it can in the world.

More people get more schooling than ever before, worldwide. But even here, family breakdown in portions of this country and youth counter-cultures developed anti-social elements that all the goodness in the world has not yet been able to handle satisfactorily.

We enjoy bragging about the progress made, though we quickly take too much of it for granted. In this country, our national vanity presumes that we are and must be the best in the world in every respect. So we don't do better in areas where we are not doing as well as we could and should. Many don't vote and so elections are won by those who do not promote the general well-being.

We have recently become aware of the fact that neither the world economy nor ours is on a sustainable basis, because so many places are overloading the life support system with over-population, over-cropping, overgrazing, over-forestry, over-fishing, over-depleting, and over-polluting it. It will require changed ideas and practices and much more organized business-household-government cooperation to handle this. It cannot be handled if business as usual must not be disturbed, though it need not be hard on normal business profits. It requires attention to the somewhat longer run than we are accustomed to. Globalization is touted as helping everyone, but the big gainers are transnational corporations which will soon be more powerful than national governments unless people wake up and prevent it.

Modern technology in the military field has enabled government leaders to destroy foreign cities thousands of miles away. We pretend to be civilized, but wars still produce enormous human suffering, and now everyone is threatened by terrorism. It is not a sensible way to organize human societies so that people who do not even know each other are every now and then obliged to kill each other rather than having conflicts worked out peacefully. A little compassion should reorganize society so such killing could not be used by whole nations. Whatever enrages some people enough for them to become terrorists also needs to be dealt with constructively rather than by heaping violence on violence endlessly.

Afterword

This is no promised land. But it is a land of our own molding out of what we inherited. We can be proud of it in some respects. Clearly we are not doing well as a people in other respects. Surely we can do better.

What can each of us do to contribute to make this a more admirable

civilization? Can we help make it one which counts success not just in terms of money or output, but in terms of how equitable the system is, and in terms of the quality of life for everyone? How well can we harmonize our creativities with the realities that determine the consequences of all we do?

Life itself is a great privilege. It is a wondrous thing. And if we are not among the less fortunate, it may indeed be wonderful. And what makes any of us feel especially good personally is if we can feel that we are doing something to improve life for others. All of us can do that to a degree by making ourselves pleasant in all our inter-personal relations. But beyond that there is the satisfaction to be gained if we are doing our bit to make this world better for the next generations.

What greater challenge could a generation have than that of saving future generations from the scourge of war, the main cause of unnecessary human suffering throughout history? We also need to develop a less violent culture domestically. Our generation has the challenge of getting our economies on a sustainable basis. Birth rates must fall, and we must contribute to the solution of our economic and social problems.

Indeed few generations have had the possibility of making so much difference in the future of the human race.

We all have the possibility of contributing to the building of a much better world in many respects. So it is a great time to be alive. Doubtless most of us cannot make world-shaking contributions, but there is real danger if too many of us do not do what we actually can do. We can all care. We can all count for something even on the great issues of our day.

We each matter. We must never give up trying to better things, though we cannot expect to finish the whole task. We must never lose hope either, whatever the disappointments when some things get worse despite our best efforts. To make our own contribution to building a better world can be a really wonderful and enjoyable role in life.

Slowly weigh and consider all of the above over time.

If you think any of this should be published, find me a publisher.

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