

Are We Abandoning Ordinary People?

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Are we abandoning ordinary people?

We are. Our government is doing it in our name.

Unfortunately, that is what this issue of *Hunger Notes* is about.

Ordinary people are poor and they live in the rest of the world. Ordinary is poor, and so ordinary people live in the United States too. They're poor. It's not a disgrace, it's much more a function of where, and in what status, we are born. If you were born in Bangladesh of parents who were (landless) agricultural laborers, you'd almost certainly be poor too, no matter how intrinsically great you or your parents were. And if you were black and born in certain parts of Washington, D.C., ditto.

Those of us who read *Hunger Notes* like to think of ourselves as common folk, but we're not. We're way up there in the income distribution. Anybody who is below the 90th percentile of world income who is reading this please write in. And if you are in Congress and think you are below the 90th percentile-- the answer is no.

The foreign policy of the United States is not adjusted to the modern world.

It is fighting the last war, the Cold War.

What confronts the world, and us, is not the same. And indeed the Cold War was mistaken on profound levels while it was happening.

Thus, our foreign policy is not functional.

It has an almost total lack of understanding of the strength of ordinary people. It lacks both an intellectual and moral understanding of ordinary people. It lacks the human and financial commitment that we must make to them.

At the level of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate--judging by bills passed, and some mercifully not yet passed--Congress, and our foreign policy, has a very inadequate notion of ordinary people as allies. Officially, Congress considers assistance to people who are poor in the world as charity--humanitarian assistance-- which it is unfortunately necessary to cut substantially, given our budget deficit. What confronts the world is not

so much about ourselves. It is about the problems that a clear majority of the world faces: Poverty, the harm to the human potential that brings, and being harmed by others. It is a major failing that our absorption with ourselves keeps us from seeing that the major problems of the world--the problems we have to contribute to solving-- are not, narrowly speaking, our problems.

Neither does Congress or U.S. foreign policy have an understanding of the strength of goodness, justice and fairness in the world. These are incredibly powerful ideas for a number of reasons. I mention a few.

They are values that enable us to live in peace, not spend large amounts of resources defending ourselves from other people, engage in the productive creation and exchange of ideas and goods, and--last but not least-- enjoy the simple human pleasures of life.

They are values held by a large number of people-- a substantial majority of people, I think. We treasure these values, and are willing to sacrifice for them. They are values that create ties that bind. I haven't heard one presidential candidate address our relations with people in developing countries, let alone address the power of these values.

To summarize-- I do not think that I am repeating what the McLaughlin Group and other hyperactive forums for "policy debates" have said-- the U.S. at the foreign policy level lacks understanding of the problems of ordinary people, their value as allies, and the power of justice, kindness and human understanding.

These are major criticisms!

This is what this issue of *Hunger Notes* is about.

The problem of poor people is that they are poor-- really poor-- with the limitation of human happiness and possibility that such poverty means. They are also being harmed by others.

We begin with harm by others because it can make the news, and that is the entry point of the U.S. psyche into foreign affairs.

The article by Steven Hansch of the Refugee Policy Group points out the startling growth of humanitarian emergencies caused

by conflict-- 21 in developing countries, with others in Bosnia and elsewhere.

The article by Nobel Prize Winner Rigoberta Menchu Tum, "Poverty and Democracy Don't Mix," brings out the link between poverty and (the lack of) democracy and peace.

The third article, "Helping Ordinary People Take Control of Their Lives," a background paper of the recent International Conference on Hunger and Poverty, brings out what must be a keystone of our foreign policy: empowerment of the poor.

The next two articles concern our progress in preventing hunger and improving the chance of survival of ordinary people. "Progress in Hunger and Poverty," also a background paper of the Conference on Hunger and Poverty, shows that we have made progress in reducing hunger, and shows where progress still needs to be made. The article by Jim Fox points out the dramatic gains that have been made in keeping children alive and in educating our next generation.

The first article in the U.S. budget section, "If You Talk the Talk you gotta walk the walk," by Chuck Woolery, describes contributions of the U.S., a leader of the world, to ordinary people in the world. The second article, "Sacred Cows and Sacrificial Lambs," by Martin Calhoun, describes how military expenditure has taken over the budget and presumably the psyche of the U.S. legislative and executive branches.

In our departments are information on the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China and the Conference on Hunger and Poverty held in Brussels, two examples of the progress that is being made in empowering people. The Beijing Conference, for example, was attended by over 40,000 women, primarily representing groups, not governments. Why shut down this increasing participation of poor people in the issues that affect them? Why do we think that our protection lies in military expenditure, rather than addressing the causes of world unrest? It is up to us to insist on the importance of these issues in political debate in the U.S. and elsewhere. □