

village view

by Andrea Leonard

While we fret and fume over insignificant details, the world's populations move step-by-step, as each day passes, closer and closer to the greatest crisis ever faced in all known history.

While we flip coins to decide who to vote for, while we watch ball games on our television sets, while we worry about electric bills and car payments, the spectre of famine sits at our doorstep, preparing to wage war upon every one of us. It's a war we cannot win.

There are, if we're lucky, perhaps twenty years left to us before we'll face starvation if we don't immediately wake up and look our predicament squarely in the eye and take whatever steps are necessary to assure that the world, as we know it, isn't in ruins before the year 2000.

You may think I'm foretelling doom, crying wolf, concerned about some faraway problems in distant lands that don't concern you. You may think the problems will solve themselves or be solved by some "great power".

Consider the facts: just these two facts.

One: World food production cannot keep pace with the galloping growth of population.

Two: "Family planning" cannot and will not, in the foreseeable future, check this runaway population growth.

If you don't wish to die of starvation, and if you aren't willing to imagine your children and your grandchildren starving to death, shake off your little worries and face up to the greatest problem the world has encountered to date.

Even now, our best hope is not to prevent tragedy, for tragedy is inevitable. All we can hope to do is reduce the dimensions of the coming disaster.

First, let us dispense with the illusion of food shortages. There is no food shortage today. World production of food in the 1970s is the greatest in history.

The problem isn't too little food; it's too many people.

It makes no difference whatever how much food the world produces if it produces people faster.

The nations that are, today, on the brink of famine are those with populations greater than the carrying capacity of their hand. Population growth has pushed people of Africa, Asia and Latin America onto land only marginally suitable for agriculture.

Nothing man can do will change this.

Since World War II, until very recently, the United States has had food surpluses. These have vanished. Since 1945 the United States has given away nearly 100 billion dollars in food and development aid.

What has this accomplished? Today developing countries are less able to feed their people than they were a quarter century ago.

A generation ago the population of poor countries was increasing by 16 million each year; today these populations increase by 67 million each year. The imbalance grows with

each passing day.

Our past generosity has encouraged governments of developing countries to hold us responsible for feeding their people no matter how many they produce.

Spokesmen for these countries asserted at the 1974 United Nations meetings that population problems didn't exist. They made the following policy statements:

One: The hungry nations have the **right** to produce as many children as they please.

Two: Others (the United States, primarily) have the responsibility to feed them.

How do **you** feel about that? If you question whether it's your responsibility to support and feed children born to the indigent in your own country — that is, if you think there's anything wrong with the welfare system in the United States — how do you feel about taking on the responsibility for 67 million new humans, this year? And, in ten or fifteen years, 200 million more, each year?

Some believe the answer lies in "family planning"; advocates insist parents everywhere may have as many children as they desire. If the number wanted averaged two, we wouldn't face a population crisis.

The crisis exists because parents want more than two children.

In Moslem countries the desired number, per couple, is "as many as God will send". It averages out to be seven. If each couple averages seven, it takes only two generations to beget fifty or more new mouths to feed. In poor countries, there's a new generation every fifteen years.

India has spent more money than any other country over the past 24 years on family planning. In 1951 its population grew by 3.6 million; in 1975 it increased by 16.2 million. Mexico adopted family planning only three years ago. The birthrate rose abruptly in that country.

Many Americans insist we've a moral obligation to continue, even to increase our aid. They overlook the fact it's impossible. Eighty per cent of the world's grain is grown outside the United States.

All we can sell or give away amounts to only 6% of the world's production. Less than three years' population increase will consume this.

There is no moral obligation to accomplish impossibilities.

While no one likes to take the hard line and select those nations most likely to survive and concentrate on providing aid to them, when the time comes that the world population outruns food resources — and the moment is predictably soon upon us — some people are going to die no matter what disposition is made of inadequate food supplies.

At some point, we in the United States must see we cannot feed the world and will be fortunate to feed ourselves.

The sovereign right of a country to permit its own reproduction to continue, unchecked, creates the twin responsibility to care for and feed those people.

The crisis doesn't come from food "shortages". Attempting to deal with it by producing and distributing more food — while doing nothing about population growth — is incubating disaster.

Now is the time to insist developing nations take care of their own. When aid-dependent nations understand there are limits to food resources, there is hope they will tackle their population problems in earnest.

We owe it to posterity — our own and that of the rest of the world — to promote policies leading to solutions instead of catastrophe.

We also owe it to posterity to promote policies leading to solutions instead of catastrophe within our own country. The hard line we take with other countries should be taken just as firmly within our own borders.

We are not uniquely singled out as a nation to survive amidst plenty while other nations go down under famine. If we try, the hungry of the world will take from us through force what they need to live. They have nothing to lose if they die trying.

If we assume responsibility for our own population growth, it will be easier to convince other nations they must do likewise.

Let us set an example for other countries at the same time we call upon them to take firm and positive steps toward limiting their populations at self-sustaining levels.

Let's show them we mean business by practicing what we preach!