

this in some detail in these pages before, and should not rehearse it now. Langer's views of tragedy are not the major weakness of this book.

That weakness is that the book is so tiresome, occasionally deadening. Not the subject, which is frightening and necessary, but Langer's laborious treatment. As I read I tried to recall an elegant and precise statement of what Langer is trying to say, and then I had it—an essay by the Austrian philosopher Gunther Anders in *Dissent* many years ago:

"We have just emerged from a period in which for Europeans natural death was an unnatural or at least exceptional occurrence. A man who died of old age aroused envy: he was looked upon as one who could afford the luxury of a peaceful and individual death....Occasionally natural death was viewed in a different light—as evidence of man's freedom and sovereignty, as a twin brother of Stoic suicide—but even then natural death was felt to be unnatural and exceptional. During the war, being killed was the most common form of dying: the model for our finitude was Abel, not Adam.

"In the extermination camps natural death was completely eliminated.

...There the venerable proposition, All Men are mortal, had already become an understatement....For the truth contained in the old proposition was now more adequately expressed in a new proposition—'All men are exterminable.'"

The Age of Atrocity, in other words, should have been a longish essay and not a book at all. Much of the literary analysis would have to go, but we and the subject could be spared it. For the book's title should be what the subtitle is: *Death in Modern Literature*, all the author can say about it, more than once. Ultimately the book becomes just another lit-crit exercise, drowning its subject. For example, Mme. Delbo takes a bath in a brook—her first after two months at Auschwitz: "The rehabilitation of flesh," drones Langer, "encrusted by the filth of atrocity is an essential step for anyone interested in rescuing the mind from memories of inappropriate death, though once more the first ritual does not guarantee the success of the second. But the bath rite is elaborate, a grotesque ballet of readjustment to life...." Why continue? It is obscene to obscure such a literal, pitiful, and terrible scene with such grad seminar cleverness—a minor atrocity.

sailing through stormy weather toward the promised land of plenty, they pioneered a campaign against hunger, unleashed a dramatic revolution, and convincingly demonstrated that mankind need not lose the food-population race. By their unique service these people have earned the abiding gratitude of the Third World and have, in the process, held aloft America's highest ideals of humanism and service to mankind at a time when the blasts of an intensifying cold war were driving those ideals into the background. Those who know Dr. Wortman and his writings cannot but be impressed by his forthrightness, his capacity to detect and reject whatever appears to him wrong or false, and his "can do" approach.

These qualities are richly supplemented by those of his young co-author. Cummings's concern for the food-and-hunger problem of the developing countries, his understanding of and empathy for traditional culture, the wisdom he imbibed from his illustrious father (the famous agronomist) during the formative years of life, all these are assets of rare value that virtually destined him for a work of this nature.

The keynote of the study, as one might expect, is a message of vibrant hope. The first era of agricultural development consists of traditional farming evolved over thousands of years; the vast majority of the world's farmers still subsist under that hoary system. The second era began when science and industry fueled a revolution. This is a surprisingly recent phenomenon—only in the last seventy-five years have the industrial nations radically transformed their agriculture with the help of science, technology, and manufactured products.

We are now on the threshold of a third phase, the era of what the authors call "accelerated, forced-pace agricultural and rural development." Scores of nations, stricken by poverty and hunger, are anxiously looking for ways to boost food production, incomes, and living standards, especially for the rural masses. They want to do this, not in fifty or seventy-five years, but in ten or fifteen. This, the authors believe, is entirely feasible. Now is the time, they assert, for a frontal attack on the food-poverty-population problem—and there is no time to lose.

To drive home their compelling sense of urgency, the authors have evoked a

To Feed This World —the Challenge and the Strategy by Sterling Wortman and Ralph W. Cummings, Jr.

(The Johns Hopkins University Press; xiv + 440 pp.; \$6.95 [paper])

Sudhir Sen

This is a most timely and welcome addition to the fast-multiplying literature on the apparently intractable "food-poverty-population problem" that plagues our world. Few people are better placed than the two authors (Wortman is president of the recently established International Agricultural Development Service and a vice-president of The Rockefeller Foundation, Cummings is an IADS program officer), to envision the problem in its broad, global sweep and to subject it to meticulous clinical analysis. They examine both the "forest"

and the "trees" to see the macro and micro aspects of international, national, and local farming realities.

As a leading agricultural specialist, Wortman has long been involved in the development of "tropical" (embracing the tropics and subtropics) agriculture. Moreover, he is spiritually in a direct line with that remarkable band of America's dedicated and defiant scientist-missionaries who started in the early Forties in Mexico and have persevered ever since. Mocking the capricious winds of triage and dauntlessly

familiar but telling analogy. In dealing with the world food situation, mankind now stands at a point similar to that reached by the U.S. around 1960, when it decided to put a man on the moon in a decade. The achievement of the goal, then as now, is technically feasible. There is, however, "a major difference." We "dare not fail to make the effort" to solve the world food problem, for "the nature and the existence of civilization are at stake."

After a careful review and a forceful restatement of the daunting challenges, the authors address some cherished myths and misconceptions. They argue, for example, that North America and other surplus-producers cannot solve the world food problem because poor nations can ill afford to pay for food imports. Similarly, large-scale mechanized crop production in densely populated areas would be inappropriate. Without jobs and incomes the hungry will lack the means to buy the food they need, and such farming is not as productive in terms of acre-outputs as is labor-intensive gardening-type cultivation. As another example, synthetic foods such as single-cell proteins, often dangled before the hungry world by some enthusiasts, are an evasion rather than a solution, if only because they will remain beyond the reach of the jobless, penniless poor.

As for food aid, the U.S. programs have been "closely associated with the existence of U.S. surpluses." Some looked upon them as "a form of *domestic surplus disposal* rather than as a true foreign-aid effort." The authors then go on to say that "the large and burdensome surpluses that existed until 1968 encouraged the USA to maintain *its policy of not assisting other nations directly with basic food-crop research or production programs.*" Much of the American food aid went to countries where the U.S. had "obvious political interests," while the "recurrent supply of free food" encouraged some governments "to ignore their farmers" (italics supplied).

Such perceptiveness and candor are rare. Coming from the super-donor nation, they present a refreshing contrast to the routinely held assumption that the food-aid program is an offspring of unalloyed generosity which, like all charity, is twice blessed.

The disappearance of America's unwanted surplus and the reorientation of

its aid policy to increase emphasis on food production within the developing countries provides an important basis for hope about the future. That hope is strengthened by several other factors, such as new biological technologies (high-yielding varieties of crops and breeds of animals) that are being developed for the tropics and subtropics after decades of neglect, the abundance of unused and underused land that can be safely and more productively cultivated, the improved and increasing supplies of fertilizers, the response of farmers who have demonstrated their ability to shift rapidly from traditional to scientific methods of farming, the willingness of governments to take strong action to speed food production, and the network of international agencies ready to help them. These and other factors taken together have created "for the first time in history" the capabilities to tackle the world food problem effectively. This is a "magnificent opportunity," but it has to be seized now, since it may be "a fleeting one."

"...mankind, for the first time in history, has the capability to abolish hunger and poverty within ten to fifteen years."

Too many people, including experts, in both developed and developing countries, have grossly underrated the potential of tropical agriculture. The authors take considerable pains to dismantle this misperception and to establish, with comprehensive resource analysis and scientific data, the fact that there is "tremendous scope for increasing food-crop production in most developing countries." This is followed by an analysis, supported by a wealth of detail, of all the ingredients that must be integrated to develop a modern, science-based agriculture. They cover the whole gamut of what are by now familiar items: land reform, inputs (seed, fertilizer, pesticides, and herbicides), irrigation and drainage, energy, equipment, roads and markets, rural finance, price support, research and training, administration. As was to be expected from Dr. Wortman, scientific research and training have been dealt with in depth and at considerable length, no doubt largely on

the basis of personal experience. The systematic review he provides, especially of the recent technological advances made in food-crops and animals, should be most useful to all who want a quick initiation into this fascinating but complex field.

How should a Third World representative react to this study? My personal reactions are twofold. For quite some time I have advocated a food-first approach to development as the shortest and surest road to freedom from want. I have urged, for example, a doubling of food production in a country like India within ten to fifteen years in order to rescue some 300 million people from chronic hunger and abject poverty. (See *Richer Harvest—New Horizon for Developing Countries*, 1973, and *Reaping the Green Revolution—Food and Jobs for All*, 1975, Orbis Books, N.Y., and Tata McGraw-Hill, New Delhi.) Therefore I cannot help but rejoice over the Wortman-Cummings study, which, let us hope, will fulfill the purpose for which it has obviously been written.

That purpose is to prod leaders and policymakers in both rich and poor nations, and to rouse the conscience of mankind to launch a concerted campaign to banish hunger from the earth within the next decade or so.

However, when it comes to the question of strategy, I cannot help but confess to a haunting sense of the study's inadequacy. In fact, what we are offered is not a strategy but, rather, discussions of various strategic options. They are all relevant, valid, in most cases even vital, but they are not enough to ensure a victory in the war on hunger.

In my judgment, given the advances already made in several directions, an effective—and truly *failsafe*—strategy will emerge only when we launch an attack, aggressively and simultaneously, on four different fronts. (See my discussion in "Ringing Declaration and Limping Action on World Hunger," *Worldview*, October, 1978.) First, land reform

is an absolute must—to abolish feudal-type landlordism, to turn tillers into owners, and to establish owner-cultivation to the maximum feasible extent.

Wortman and Cummings rightly put great emphasis on the potential of small farms, especially in densely populated but physically well-endowed countries. Through intensive gardening-type farming, hundreds of millions of small farmers can give a tremendous boost to food production while raising their own incomes and living standards, but clearly they can do so only if they are rescued first from their present exploited status of serfdom or semi-serfdom.

Second, the importance of all-weather roads with readily accessible market towns cannot be overstressed. This is recognized by all concerned, yet in actual practice it is not given the priority it deserves. Roads and markets are the most powerful levers to catapult static traditional farming into the self-propelling scientific modernism of the late twentieth century. What the authors have said about "rural centering" is absolutely true, but it deserves a more central place in the strategy for action than they seem to have accorded it.

Third, rural electrification is not only an indispensable underpinning of agriculture, especially in the hot and humid tropics and subtropics, but it also has an enormous impact on the living standards and outlook of village people in a great many ways.

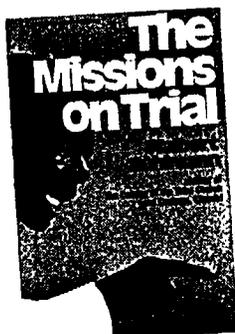
The fourth factor is something that, curiously enough, is seldom mentioned in the discussions of strategy emanating from the West and from Western-trained planners and economists: how to mobilize the idle manpower in rural areas and harness it to productive work, especially to build roads, market towns, irrigation projects, and other agri-related facilities. Those billions of idle man-hours are worth potentially billions of dollars, and they should not be allowed to run to waste out of mindlessness.

To all these I would like to add one more component, which is intangible but nonetheless crucial. It may be called *persuasion*. The aid-givers have an implicit responsibility to work out the right strategy and then to persuade the governments of the aid-receiving nations to adopt and apply it for the benefit of the masses of their people. It is not enough to say that the governments of the poor nations must have the political will. It is high time also for the rich

nations to muster enough political will to refrain from selling commercial or military hardware to them and, rather than attempt to keep them in their own ideological camp, try for a change to persuade them to do what is good for themselves and for the masses of their own people. The rich nations should use the full leverage of their aid programs to that end.

Wortman and Cummings have written a great book. They are right in asserting that mankind, for the first

time in history, has the capability to abolish hunger and poverty within ten to fifteen years. They are also right in insisting that the world must make an all-out effort to maximize progress through forced-pace programs before it runs out of time to win the fateful food-population race. But the strategy they have outlined has to be redesigned and reinforced. Otherwise, despite all their pleadings, progress is likely to remain frustratingly slow and the fleeting opportunity may be lost.



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