1985

FACT SHEET ON HUNGER: HERE AND ABROAD-- Who's responsible?

Hunger is growing in the U.S. as the Reagan Administration's cutbacks and unemployment bites deeper. Hunger hits the most vulnerable--infants, children, women, and the elderly. It is made crueler by the indisputable fact that there is absolutely no lack of food in the United States. In fact, food productivity is extremely high. Warehouses full of "surplus" food are overflowing with dairy products, crops, poultry, and much more. What are the facts?

The Physician Task Force on Hunger in America reports that hunger has become an epidemic in the U.S. (2/27/85), affecting 22.5 million people at least a part of each month, according to government figures. (This equals the total populations of Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama and Guatemala combined). The rport blames the recession and cutbacks by the Reagan Administration in income and nutrition programs, which have left 35 million people with incomes below the federal poverty line. The study says 15.5 million in the U.S. who live below the poverty line, cannot get food stamps and thus cannot get an adequate diet. And those right above the poverty line who can't get food aid but need it are another 7 million, which totals 22.5 million who are inadequately fed. The study found:

A) a 700% increase in food distributions by food banks since 1980; B) cases of kwashiorkor and marasmus, two diseases of advanced malnutrition, that were hardly ever seen before in the U.S.; as well as vitamin deficiencies, diabetes, growth stunting, lethargy, severe underweight and other problems directly related to malnutrition and hunger: C) an infant mortality rate in the U.S. worse than that of other industrial nations--at 10.9 infant deaths per 1,000 in 1983, and higher rates as 25.6 infant deaths per 1,000 in Harlem; (In other areas, for example, Michigan, 25% of funding for maternal and child health programs has been lost since 1981. Black infant mortality has reached 23.1% and in some parts of Detroit, 33 infants die per 1,000 births); D) from 1983-84, $12.2 billion was cut from federal food stamp and child nutrition programs.

Hunger can be the lack of enough food (starvation) and it is also considered to be the lack of 45 essential nutrients (malnutrition). Both are increasing in the U.S. Yet, although 22.5 million are considered hungry, the number may be much higher. All over the country, new soup kitchens, food pantries, meals-on-wheels and free food distributions are opening up and are overwhelmed with clients. And the poorest people and the homeless are forced to go through garbage cans and dumpsters, looking for food for their survival. The Physicians Task Force has reported that in the winter of 1985, 17 Navajo children starved to death.

Unemployment and Cutbacks: Today 10 million workers are unemployed, yet only 1/3 receive any benefits; millions of women