

Frances Moore Lappé
Toward a Politics of Hope:
Lessons from a Hungry World

Frances Moore Lappé is in the second phase of a unique and extraordinarily effective career. In 1971, as a very young woman, she wrote *Diet for a Small Planet*. Like *Small Is Beautiful* it had an impact that was diametrically opposite to small. Beyond the three million copies sold and the translation into six languages, it changed the way countless thousands of people thought about the growing of food and altered the eating habits of countless more. Until *Diet for a Small Planet* was published, few realized, for example, the extent to which the widespread consumption of beef contributes to human suffering. Most people simply did not know that the land used for cattle grazing and the grain used in feedstocks are directly depriving millions around the world who live racked by hunger and threatened by famine.

In this lecture Lappé examines the economic system underlying the politics of hunger. Again we hear an echo of E. F. Schumacher's analysis: "At the surface layer," she claims, "we can identify the root of hunger in powerlessness imposed by the increasing concentration of decision-making power over all that it takes to grow and distribute food. On a deeper level the root of hunger, I believe, lies in our self-imposed powerlessness before economic rules that, if taken dogmatically, create that concentration to begin with."

In 1971 Lappé cofounded the Institute for Food and Development Policy. The Institute has won worldwide recognition as an education and research center and has reshaped the international debate on

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hunger. More recently she has devoted her efforts to what she refers to as the root causes of poverty and hunger. Her 1989 book, *Rediscovering America's Values*, created a resource for the democratic renewal she considers fundamental to challenging our apparent social and political ineffectiveness.

In 1993, with her husband, Paul Martin Du Bois, she cofounded the Center for Living Democracy in Brattleboro, Vermont, a national organization intended to act as a catalyst in transforming democracy from theory to practice. It does so by actively engaging citizens in public problem-solving and by enabling them to acquire the skills needed for public life and the arts of democracy. Their most recent book, *The Quickening of America: Rebuilding our Nation, Remaking our Lives*, also teaches those skills and tells the success stories of hundreds of people across the country who are doing just that. Lappé and Du Bois believe that "the old measures aren't really adequate anymore in capturing the richness of citizen engagement in public life." As Lappé indicates here, in questioning ingrained economic dogma lie the seeds of a politics of hope.



Thinking back on when I began my present work in the early 1970s, now close to fifteen years ago, I recall the bewildered looks of my friends. Why would anyone choose to spend all day, every day, thinking about the most depressing subject in the world—hunger? What they failed to grasp, and what I want to share with you, is that world hunger, rather than being simply a depressing subject to be avoided, can give us a powerful tool for making sense out of our increasingly complex world. World hunger, I learned, holds the key to discovering where our own legitimate interests lie: they lie in common with the hungry.

Hunger: What Is It?

Today's headlines cry out the news of famine, now threatening thirty million people in Africa. Already hundreds of thousands have died. This is hunger in its acute form.

There is another form, however. It is less visible. It is the chronic day-in-day-out hunger that afflicts from five hundred million to as many as eight hundred million people. While chronic hunger rarely makes the evening news, it is just as deadly. Each year it kills as many as eighteen million people, more than twice the number who died annually during World War II.

These statistics are staggering. They shock and alarm us. But several years ago I began to doubt the usefulness of such numbers. Numbers can numb. They can distance us from what is actually very close to us. So I asked myself, What is

hunger, really? Is it the gnawing pain in the stomach when we try to stay on that new diet? Is it the physical depletion that comes with chronic undernutrition?

Yes, but it is more, and I became convinced that as long as we conceive of hunger only in physical measures, we will never truly understand it, certainly not its roots. What, I asked myself, would it mean to think of hunger in terms of universal human feelings, feelings that all of us have experienced at some time in our lives?

I'll mention only four such emotions, to give you an idea of what I mean.

To begin with, being hungry means making choices that no human being should ever have to make. In Guatemala today, many poor Indian families send a son to join the army. Yes, many know that this same army is responsible for killing tens of thousands of civilians, mostly the Indians themselves. But the \$25 a month the army pays each soldier's family—half the total income of a typical poor family in Guatemala—may be the only means the family has to keep the rest of the children alive.

A friend of mine, Dr. Charles Clements, a former Air Force pilot and Vietnam veteran, who as a medical doctor spent a year treating peasants in El Salvador, writes in *Witness to War* of a family he treated there whose son and daughter had died from fever and diarrhea. "Both had been lost," he writes, "in the years when Camila and her husband had chosen to pay their mortgage, a sum equal to half the value of their crop, rather than keep the money to feed their children. Each year, the choice was always the same: if they paid, their children's lives were endangered. If they didn't, their land could be repossessed."

Being hungry thus means anguish, the anguish of making impossible choices. But it is more than that.

Two years ago in Nicaragua I met Amanda Espinoza, who until then had never had enough to feed her family. She told me that she had endured five stillbirths and watched six of her children die before the age of one. To her, being hungry means watching people you love die. Therefore, hunger means grief.

In this country and throughout the world, the poor are made to blame themselves for their poverty. Walking into a home in the rural Philippines, the first words I heard were an apology for the poverty of the dwelling. Being hungry also means living in humiliation.

Anguish, grief, and humiliation are part of what hunger means. But increasingly throughout the world, hunger has a fourth dimension.

In Guatemala, in 1978, I met two highland peasants. With the help of a U.S.-based voluntary aid group, they were teaching other poor peasants to make "contour ditches" to reduce the erosion on the steep slopes to which they had been pushed by wealthy landowners in the valley. Two years later the friend who

had introduced us visited me at the Institute for Food and Development Policy in San Francisco. I learned that one of the peasants I had met had been forced underground; the other had been killed. Their crime was teaching their neighbors better farming techniques, for any change that might make the poor less dependent on low-paying plantation jobs threatens Guatemala's oligarchy. Increasingly, then, the fourth dimension of hunger is fear.

What if we were simply to refuse to count the hungry? What if we instead tried to understand hunger in terms of four universal emotions: anguish, grief, humiliation, and fear? We would discover, I believe, that how we understand hunger determines what we think its solutions are.

If we think of hunger in terms of numbers—numbers of people with too few calories—the solution also appears to us in terms of numbers—numbers of tons of food aid or numbers of dollars in economic assistance. But once we begin to understand hunger as real families coping with the most painful of human emotions, we can perceive its roots. We need only ask when we have experienced any of these emotions ourselves. Hasn't it been when we felt out of control of our lives, powerless to protect ourselves and those we love?

Hunger has thus become for me the ultimate symbol of powerlessness.

The Causes Of Powerlessness

We must go further. We must pull back the layers of misunderstanding that hide the roots of hunger. The first step is to ask, What are the causes of this powerlessness that lies at the very root of hunger?

Certainly it is not scarcity: not when the world is awash with grain (reserves are at record highs); not when the world produces five pounds of food every day for every woman, man, and child alive; not when a mere 2 percent of the world's grain output would eliminate the food deficit of all the world's 800 million hungry people.

No, we cannot blame nature—not even in Africa. Even there, experts tell us, the continent could well be food self-sufficient. Neither can we blame natural disasters, droughts, or floods. Between the 1960s and the 1970s, deaths from so-called natural disasters leapt sixfold, but climatologists tell us that no weather changes can account for this drastic increase. Instead, increased deaths from drought and flood reflect a social breakdown in the structures protecting people from nature's vagaries.

If it is not people's powerlessness before nature's scarcity and her unpredictability, what is the cause of growing hunger? On one level we can answer that the root cause lies not in a scarcity of food or land but in a scarcity of democracy. I mean by this the increasing concentration of decision-making power over all that

it takes to grow and distribute food—from the village level to the national level to the level of international commerce and finance.

Let's look briefly at these three levels. First, at the village level, fewer and fewer people control more and more land. A United Nations study of eighty-three countries showed that less than 5 percent of the rural landholders control three-quarters of the land. For example, in El Salvador six families have come to control as much land as do 300,000 peasant producers. With fewer families controlling an ever greater share, more and more people have no land at all. Since 1960 the number of landless in Central America has multiplied fourfold. By the mid-1970s, in twenty Third World countries 50 percent or more of the rural people were effectively landless, deprived of the most basic resource needed to feed their families.

The village is but one level of concentrated power. There is a second level: the concentration of decision-making in the hands of national governments that are unaccountable to their people. Such governments answer only to a small elite, lavishing credit and other help on them and on a military force that protects their privileges.

On average, Third World governments devote less than 10 percent of their budgets to agriculture. Their expenditures on arms, however, leapt fourfold in the decade ending in 1980. In Ethiopia the government is spending 50 percent more on its military than on all other budget categories combined. Such governments actively—and with increasing brutality—resist genuine reforms that would make the distribution of control over food resources more equitable.

They love terms like "land reform," but we must not be deceived. In El Salvador the "land to the tiller" program failed to distribute land to two-thirds of the eligible recipients because poor peasants were too afraid of retaliation to apply for land or for this same reason relinquished the land they were given. This U.S.A.I.D.-designed reform left the most powerful—the owners of the big coffee estates—untouched and the most powerless—the 60 percent or more of rural people—with no land at all. By selling land, on time, to tenant farmers unable to afford it, all the "reform" accomplished was to lock poor families into perpetual debt for plots too infertile and too small to support them.

Similarly, in the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos promised land reform as soon as he took over in 1972. But under this one-family rule, land ownership in the Philippines has become more concentrated, not less, and the Filipino people are among the hungriest in all of Asia, according to the World Health Organization.

Honduras provides yet another example. In that country, pressure from the peasants has shifted the land reform from paper to action, but at the present pace of government action, it will take over one hundred years to achieve the stated goals of the reform. As one Honduran explained so clearly, "Waiting for the

government to give you land is like waiting for the Second Coming." Meanwhile, since 1980 aid to Honduras has increased 500 percent. Thus, the second level on which we can document the increasing concentration of decision-making at the root of hunger is that of national governments beholden to self-serving elites.

There is yet a third level on which democracy is scarce: the international arena of commerce and finance. A handful of corporations dominate world trade in most of the raw commodities that are the lifeblood of Third World economies. According to the United Nations, of the approximately \$200 billion that consumers in the industrial countries pay for agricultural products from the Third World, only 15 percent returns to the Third World countries, and of course only a fraction of that returns to the producers themselves.

Dependent on international markets over which they have no control, Third World producing countries have seen the price of every single one of their commodities—with the exception of cocoa—fall in real terms over the past thirty years.

So far, however, we have pulled off only one layer in our effort to grasp the roots of hunger. We have identified the problem: it exists not in the scarcity of resources but in the scarcity of democracy, reflected in the tightening control over economic resources.

But we must dig deeper. We must ask why. Why have we allowed this to happen at the cost of millions of needless deaths each year? Why do we rationalize, condone, and indeed shore up with our tax dollars systems that generate such needless suffering? Even here in our own country, according to the recent Harvard physicians' study, one in ten of us is so poor that we are at risk of hunger.

I have asked myself these questions many times. I have thought long and hard, and I have come to an important realization.

Powerlessness Self-Imposed by Economic Dogma

Peeling off another layer, I have concluded that at the root of hunger lies our own self-imposed powerlessness before economic dogma.

Eighteenth-century intellectual advances forced us to relinquish our ever-so-comforting notion of an interventionist God who would put the house aright. We then faced a frightening void. We have desperately sought a substitute concept—something, anything, to relieve us of the responsibility of moral reasoning. With Newton's discovery of laws governing the physical world and with Darwin's discovery of laws governing nature, we seized upon the notion of parallel laws governing the social world, absolutes that we could place above human intervention.

These absolutes I call our false gods, precisely because, though they be human

inventions, we have made them sacred. Placing ourselves at the mercy of dogma, we acquiesce in hunger. This is the tragedy.

I will mention only two tenets of the economic dogma now ruling the West, the market and property rights, and the consequences of making them absolutes rather than simply devices to serve our values.

We certainly hear a lot about the free market's virtues these days, and who can deny that it is a handy device for distributing goods? Any society that has tried to do away with it has faced some mighty serious headaches.

The problem arises when we convert a useful device into an absolute. We become blind to its pitfalls. Unfortunately, this has been the Reagan administration's response to hunger. What are the central pitfalls of the market that directly relate to the causes of hunger?

I recently had the dubious pleasure of debating Milton Friedman, Nobel Laureate Friedman insists that the greatest virtue of the free market is that it responds to individual preferences. "But wait," I said to Dr. Friedman, "I thought that the preference of most individuals is to eat when they are hungry. Yet more than half a billion people living in market economies are not eating." The lesson is unmistakable: the market does not respond to individual preferences; it responds to money.

Nowhere is this obvious truth clearer than in the flow of food in world trade. While we think of the Third World as dependent on imports, in fact we in the industrial countries are the largest importers of agricultural commodities, importing almost 70 percent of all farm commodities traded. The United States, known for its cowboys and sixteen-ounce steaks, is actually one of the world's largest importers of beef. This flow from the hungry to the overfed is simply the market at work.

As the Third World poor are increasingly pushed from the land and must compete for jobs as day laborers, they are less able to make their demand for food register in the market. With a stagnant or shrinking domestic market for basic foods, naturally those who remain in control of the land orient their production to the highest-paying consumers, and these consumers are abroad. Voilà! We have the Global Supermarket, in which even Fido the dog and Felix the cat in North America can outbid the hungry in the Third World.

I had my first glimpse of the Global Supermarket when I was driving in northwestern Mexico in the late 1970s. I wound through land made productive by means of expensive irrigation systems, paid for with billions of pesos from the Mexican government, purportedly installed to grow food for hungry Mexican peasants. But I didn't see corn or beans growing. Instead I saw mile after mile of cotton and then tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers—all destined for North America!

Stopping at a government agricultural research station, I asked, "Why are these farmers growing tomatoes and specialty vegetables for North American tables when Mexicans are going hungry?" The agronomist sat down and scratched out a few numbers. "It's quite simple," he said. "An entrepreneur here can make twenty times more growing tomatoes for export than growing the basic foods of our people."

I recall landing in the rural Philippines several years later. From my airplane window I noticed banana trees growing as far as the eye could see. Only a few years earlier that same land had grown a variety of crops, many for local consumption. Then transnational firms, including Del Monte and Dole, offered contracts to the biggest local land owners to produce bananas for the lucrative Japanese market. It was not difficult to push the peasants from the land. After all, who in the Third World has a legal title to the land? And what poor peasant can afford a lawyer's defense? So within ten years, fifty thousand acres were taken over by banana trees.

Overall since 1970, while hunger deepens, export crop production throughout the world has grown two-and-one-half times faster than the production of basic foods.

To me, the most dramatically telling consequence of the market's distribution within a world of gross inequalities is the disposition of the world's grain supply. When I wrote *Diet for a Small Planet* in 1971, I was shocked to learn that about one third of the world's grain was going to feed livestock. When I did further research for the tenth anniversary of the book, I learned that fully one half of the world's grain was now going to feed livestock. Even in famine-stricken Africa the demand for feed (that is, the demand that the market can register) is growing twice as fast as the demand for food for human consumption.

The growth of the Global Supermarket is a reflection of the problem, not the problem itself. It reflects the increasing gap between rich and poor, between those few who can live by their wealth and the many who are unable to live by their work. The lesson is clear: left to its own devices, the market simply reflects and reinforces the deadly wealth gap in our world. Thus, it must be seen for what it is, a useful device and nothing more. We must no longer delude ourselves into thinking that it registers the needs and wishes of real people; it measures the power of wealth.

The second pitfall of the market is that it is blind and therefore misleads us. It is blind to the human and resource costs of the productive impetus it claims to foster.

Let us return to an example close to home. Throughout the 1970s our agricultural exports boomed, growing sixfold in value in only a decade. In one year

our agricultural exports brought in over \$40 billion in foreign exchange. What a bonanza, the market told us. All that grain we exported could pay for imported oil.

What did the market fail to tell us? The market could not tell us that producing so much grain required an energy expenditure equivalent to at least one third of what we earn by exporting it. Neither could the market tell us about the topsoil eroded from prime farmland at an accelerated rate, up by 39 percent in just the first three years of the export boom. Nor could it tell us that the push to export means that groundwater is being pumped from the earth much faster than nature can replenish it.

Neither did, neither could, the market inform us of the social cost of all-out production: the tens of thousands of good farmers pushed from the land and the hundreds of rural communities destroyed. In theory the market rewards hard work and production but rewards only those who can expand. And who are those whom the market rewards? Just as in the Third World, they are those with considerable equity, which gives them access to credit. They can therefore expand to make up in volume what they are losing in profits per acre as the production push leads to price-depressing gluts. From the social cost of the devastation of livelihoods to the increased rural landlessness to the shocking phenomenon of farmers, even entire rural communities, on food stamps—to all of this the market is blind.

The market, left to its own devices, has yet a third fatal drawback, which undermines deeply held values. It leads to a concentration of economic power that directly contributes to hunger and makes genuine political democracy impossible. This situation is apparent when we look at the Third World. The connection between hunger in El Salvador and six families controlling as much land as 300,000 peasants, mentioned earlier, is obvious. Why can't we see this connection at home between the growing concentration of economic power and need-less human suffering?

Left more fully to the mercy of international markets, in the 1970s American farmers experienced perhaps the most dramatic concentration of reward in our history: in just one decade the top 1 percent of farmers in terms of sales increased their share of net farm income from 16 to 60 percent.

This third pitfall of the market, its tendency to concentrate economic power beyond anything efficiency justifies, draws our attention to the fourth and final point I want to make about the market as a dogma. Clinging with blind faith to the ideology of the market as price setter and allocator of resources hides the truth that nowhere are markets free. Whereas ideologues view the market as the

interplay of impersonal, automatic forces, in fact all markets—because they lead to concentration—reflect the disproportionate power of a relatively few actors. Nowhere is this more true than in world agricultural trade, as we have seen.

Facing unflinchingly the pitfalls of the market does not mean that we throw out the market in favor of another dogma such as top-down state planning. No, it means that we approach the market as a useful device and nothing more. We ask ourselves, "Under what circumstances can the market serve our values?" And then we work to ensure those conditions.

Let us pause to ask, Under what conditions could market distribution serve to reduce hunger? Under what conditions could the market respond to human preferences, as Milton Friedman would have it? I put forth this simple proposition for your consideration: the more widely dispersed is purchasing power, the more the market will respond to actual human preferences.

As we have already seen, the opposite is true. That is, where incomes are highly skewed, the preferences of the majority are ignored by the market, whether it be in the Philippines, where bananas are grown in the midst of hunger for the Japanese market, or in Central America, where beef is raised in the midst of hunger for our tables.

What can we say in a positive vein? Is there evidence of relative equality of income allowing the market to eliminate hunger? We can say that those few market economies in the world that have successfully eliminated hunger—the Scandinavian countries, for example—enjoy a more even distribution of income than we do here. In the Third World we see some indicative examples. Compare the Indian state of Kerala with other states in India. In Kerala the death rate of babies (a good measure of nutrition) is half the all-India average, in part because land reform and a strong union movement there resulted in a wider distribution of economic power.

If we truly believe in the value of the market in enhancing human freedom, then the challenge should be clear: to work for all politics that reduce rather than reinforce the concentration of income and wealth.

But within a market system where land, food, and human skills are bought and sold with no restriction, how can we work toward a more equal distribution of buying power? The answer is that we cannot. For the historical record shows that the market leads in the opposite direction—toward concentration. In other words, the market, left to its own devices, undermines the very condition so obviously necessary for it to serve human needs.

If we agree that tossing out the market would be foolish, yet we want to let go of rigid dogma and take our rightful responsibility as moral agents, what do we do? Unfortunately, to answer this question we must face the second major stum-

bling block posed by our economic dogma—the absolute notion of unlimited private control over productive property.

The dogma of property rights allows us to accept as fair and inevitable the accelerating consolidation of our farmland in fewer hands and in absentee ownership, just as we have long seen happening in the Third World. In Iowa, the very symbol of family-farm America, half or more of the land is now rented, not owner operated. Similarly, we accept the accelerating concentration of corporate power: one-tenth of one percent of U.S. corporations control two-thirds of corporate assets.

Believing that our very nation was built on the right to unlimited private control of productive property, many Americans view this right—certainly President Ronald Reagan does—as the most basic protector of our freedom. But Yale economic philosopher Charles Lindblom points out what we often overlook. He has written, “Income producing property is the bulwark of liberty only for those who have it!” And, I will add, most Americans do not have it. Eighty percent of us own no stock at all. Not only do most of us have no income-producing property, the majority of Americans have no net savings.

While President Reagan and many other Americans may believe that the right to unlimited private control over productive property is the essence of “the American Way,” this was certainly not the vision of our nation’s founders. It was not their understanding of property. In their eyes property rights were not absolutes but were linked to the concept of the common good. Dismayed by the misery caused by land concentration in Europe, Thomas Jefferson wrote to James Madison in 1785, “Legislators cannot invent too many devices for subdividing property.” Indeed, Jefferson wanted to redistribute land every generation.

In the view of the founders, property could serve liberty only when widely dispersed. The right to property was legitimate only when it served a useful function in society—that is, when it did not interfere with all people’s need to own property. Benjamin Franklin, for example, argued that society had the right to reclaim “superfluous property” and use it as deemed best for the common good.

Thus, central to my concept of “a politics of hope,” one that breaks free from constraints of dogma, is a fundamental rethinking of the meaning of ownership, certainly ownership of resources on which all humanity depends. Indeed, we see a worldwide movement toward such rethinking already underway, with ownership of productive resources as a cluster of rights and responsibilities in the service of our values, not as an absolute to place above other values. It is neither the rigid capitalist concept of private ownership nor the rigid statist concept of public ownership.

Where do I see movement toward such rethinking? In 1982 I visited one of the most productive industrial complexes in Europe, Mondragon in the Basque region of Spain. There, ninety or so enterprises—integrated into their own banking system, technical training school, and social services—are entirely owned and governed by the workers themselves. This noncapitalist, nonstatist form of ownership results in very different priorities, in another set of values. For example, during the recession of the early 1980s when Spain suffered 15 percent unemployment, virtually no one in Mondragon was laid off. Worker-owners were retrained to meet the needs of the changing economy.

We can detect a values-first approach to ownership in the Third World too. Since 1979 our Institute has served as an unpaid advisor to the Nicaraguan agrarian reform. Nicaragua’s flexible, nondogmatic approach to reform has impressed us. The keystone of the agrarian reform is not the elimination of private property; indeed, many more landowners have been generated by the reform. The keystone is attaching an obligation to the right of ownership.

If you know anything about Latin America, you are undoubtedly aware that historically the large land owners, in control of the best land, have left most of it unplanted, preferring to graze cattle or simply let it sit idle. A study of Central America in the 1970s showed that only 14 percent of the land held by the biggest land owners was actually planted. In this context the theme of the Nicaraguan reform is simple: “Idle land to working hands.”

If you are directly working your land, not renting it out, and you are making it produce, there is no ceiling to the amount of land you can own (in contrast to so many reforms that have tried to enforce a rigid limit). If you are not making the land produce, you will have it taken away and given to those who have gone hungry for want of land. The land is given free of charge, again in contrast to so many other so-called reforms that leave peasants as indebted after the reform as they were before. The concept of ownership is thus protected but not above a higher value—life itself, the right of all human beings to eat.

Do these examples sound far away, irrelevant, even alien to our own experience? Closer to home, consider the recent decision of Nebraskans on this very question of farmland ownership. A few years ago they passed an amendment to their state’s constitution that said, in effect, you have to be a farmer to own farmland. Corporations like Prudential Insurance, which had been buying up Nebraska farmland, could buy no more. In their overwhelming support for this amendment, Nebraskans put the value of dispersed ownership of family farms above the absolute notion of the right to buy whatever one’s dollars can pay for.

You may recall that I introduced my comments on property rights in response to the question, What would be required to achieve such a dispersion of economic power that the market could actually reflect human needs rather than the

demands of wealth? Part of the answer, I have suggested, lies in rethinking property rights by regarding them as a device to serve higher values, not as ends in themselves. There is an additional approach worthy of consideration.

Given that the movement toward more fair distribution of buying power requires time and that even under the best of circumstances the market by its very nature has its ups and downs, many civilized people have simply decided that what is necessary to life itself should not be left to the vagaries of the market.

In Sweden the people decided that family-farm agriculture is too precious to be left to the market. Therefore, wholesale food prices are set by negotiation, not by the market; representatives of the government, food companies, retail food co-ops, and farmers themselves sit down periodically at the bargaining table. Retail food prices, however, are determined by the market. (Contrast this to the experience of American farmers, who do not know from one day to the next what price their commodities will bring.)

We should not overlook the fact that all Western industrialized countries have concluded that health care is too important to life itself to be left to the market—all countries except ours, that is.

I do not present these examples as the final word; I present them as signs of growing courage to confront the rigidisms in which we have trapped ourselves, courage to put our deepest values first and judge economic policies according to how they serve those values—not the other way around.

Let me take a moment to recap before the final portion of my talk. I have been attempting to peel away the layers of cause and misunderstanding that surround world hunger. At the surface layer we can identify the root of hunger in powerlessness imposed by the increasing concentration of decision-making power over all that it takes to grow and distribute food. On a deeper level the root of hunger, I believe, lies in our self-imposed powerlessness before economic rules that, if taken dogmatically, create that concentration to begin with. It is thus this rule of dogma that must be challenged if we are to end hunger.

The Impact of Our Dogma on the Hungry Abroad

The rule of dogma—the war of the giantisms, capitalism versus statism—has its perhaps most devastating impact on the hungry through the way it directs our country's foreign policy. Viewing the world as divided between two competingisms, our government becomes blind to hunger. Worse, it willingly abets the concentration of power at the very roots of hunger.

Our foreign aid becomes, therefore, not a channel through which we can put ourselves on the side of hungry people but a weapon our government uses to make the world conform to its dogma. As a result, the direction of our foreign aid

has nothing to do with need. High-income recipients of U.S. foreign aid receive almost \$12 per capita, but the low-income countries are given 50 cents per person, a twenty-fourfold difference. Today Central American allies receive per capita six times more food aid than sub-Saharan Africa, despite the terrible famine there.

Military aid and general budgetary support to our allies have grown from about half to almost three-fourths of our foreign aid under the Reagan administration. Militarization is dramatic: from 1980 to 1985 the number of African countries receiving U.S. military assistance has leapt from sixteen to thirty-seven. While food aid to Africa has fallen, military assistance in the proposed 1986 allocations to that continent has shot up threefold compared to 1980.

The role of U.S. foreign aid—lavished on anti-democratic regimes in countries like El Salvador (right behind Israel as the second biggest per-capita recipient), the Philippines, and Pakistan—is not to reduce poverty but to shore up governments no matter how brutally they deny basic human rights, as long as they at least claim to be on "our side" in the contest of economic ideology.

Under the Reagan administration our foreign aid is also explicitly conditioned on recipient countries removing any restrictions on the market and promoting exports. "Free enterprise development" has replaced "basic needs" as the favored rhetoric of aid officials.

If not foreign aid, what is our responsibility to the hungry? To answer means, first, that we admit the tragic failure in meeting human needs on the part of both capitalism as we know it and statism as we fear it. Can this failure be denied when deaths from hunger equal the toll of a Hiroshima bomb every three days?

Second, accepting failure means accepting the need for fundamental change.

Third, we must understand that pressure for such change is inevitable. We do not have to create it. People will not watch indefinitely while their children die needlessly of hunger. At first they protest peaceably, for few of us risk our lives if we can avoid it. But if our peaceful demands are met with violence, we will risk our lives. I recall a Central American peasant telling me why he had ultimately taken up arms: "For years I watched the owner of the plantation call in a doctor to treat his sick dogs, while my own children, weakened by hunger, died of simple childhood diseases."

Since pressure for change is inevitable, our choice is between whether we block it—shoring up governments that stand in the way of the hungry—or, if we truly understand the roots of hunger, whether we get out of the way. I believe we must remove the obstacles to change. We must give change a chance.

Many Americans might agree, I hope, with much of what I have said, but when faced with the implications, they hesitate. "But, but, but . . . We can't do

that! If we remove our support and 'give change a chance,' the Soviet Union will fill in the void, imposing its own version of economic dogma. Nothing new will be allowed to emerge, only another Cuba."

I have thought about this fear long and hard. I understand it. Let us look at what our choices are.

On the one hand, we can let our government continue on its present course. Where will that lead? One country has come to symbolize for me the horror of that course: Guatemala. There we have consistently blocked change; our military and economic aid since the 1950s has abetted the overthrow of a democratic government carrying out genuine land reform and has strengthened the hand of the elite-controlled succession of governments that have murdered tens of thousands of Indians, all opposition leaders (even moderate Christian Democrats), and hundreds of churchpeople. Guatemala has the worst human rights record in Latin America. Poor Guatemalans are living in a state of siege—Guatemala is "a nation of prisoners" according to Amnesty International. March Mejia said, "Even to ask about the disappeared is a subversive act."

Guatemala represents one choice. I have rejected it. The other choice, as I have said, is to give change a chance. Primarily, this would mean simply forcing our government to obey the law—both U.S. law and international treaties that forbid much of our government's policy of shoring up repressive governments and attempting to overthrow those like Nicaragua's that do not fit our dogma.

I think there are two possible outcomes. Yes, one could be the emergence of another Cuba. Then we have to ask, What harm has been caused us by Cuba? One could make the case that it has been more a drain on our adversary, the Soviet Union, than a threat to us. Indeed, if we had been trading with Cuba as we now are with China, Cuba's development would have been a boon to our economy.

I would argue that there is another possibility, however. Having studied underdevelopment all these years, I feel certain of one thing. Every country emerging from decades, even centuries, of domination by an elite beholden to outsiders will, above all else, want to chart its own path. Such peoples will want to do it their way. The last thing they will want is to become a puppet of another superpower.

My close-up observation of Nicaragua during the past six years has strongly confirmed my hunch. Determined not to be a satellite of the Soviet Union, yet knowing that it needs support from abroad, Nicaragua has worked for what it calls "mixed dependency." Until the mid-1980s only 20 percent of its aid and trade has been with the Soviet bloc. Eighty percent of agriculture and 60 percent of the economy as a whole are in private hands.

Perhaps Nicaragua's most dramatic break with past revolutions was one of the

first acts of the interim Sandinista government that took over when Somoza fled. It abolished the death penalty, and it gave every captured National Guardsman the benefit of a trial.

Thus, if we can escape the spell cast by Washington, we can view Nicaragua as an example, not of a new model of development but a lesson in the possibility of real change. Just because something is not like us, it does not have to be our enemy. Emerging peoples do want to break free of both rigid dogmas—capitalism and statism.

To appreciate this truth requires a great deal of us but not more than we should be capable of. After all, of all people on earth we should be open to the possibility of something new. Remember that when our nation was born, its very principles were considered madness. Of the Declaration of Independence a high-ranking British officer wrote, "A more false and atrocious document was never fabricated by the hands of man." Shortly before his death James Madison said of our new-born nation, "America has proved what before was believed to be impossible."

Thus, our birthright as Americans should be the belief that something new is indeed possible under the sun. That conviction should allow us to give change a chance in the Third World.

Concluding Remarks

You may think that I have come a long way from the topic of hunger and its roots. I have not. I believe that the causes of hunger are located in belief systems that rob us of our power and teach us to abdicate before the false gods of economic dogma both our moral responsibility and our innate human sympathies for one another's well being.

I have challenged us to break loose. This is a risk, but there is no change without risk. We must risk challenging deeply ingrained ways of thinking, for only if we can experience ourselves changing will we believe the world can change. This challenge takes place in every aspect of our lives, in making choices about where we eat, sleep, study, and save, to name a few.

Willing to change ourselves, we are ready to understand "a politics of hope." We are not putting blind faith in models but putting forth honest hope gleaned from looking at real examples of human courage and innovation from Nebraska to Nicaragua, from Spain to Kerala, India.

My father turned seventy not too long ago. He is a thoughtful man, and he found himself mulling over the fact that if you just multiply his age by one hundred, you have virtually the span of civilization as we know it. I was taken aback. I tend to think of human civilization as being so old that surely we should have given up our folly by now. But if my father's lifetime represents one hun-

dredth of our history, maybe we are merely in our adolescence! Maybe our tragic stubbornness, as we cling to forms that sacrifice life to human-made economic law, is just a sign of the fanaticism of youth. Maybe we are on the brink of a new confidence born of greater maturity, which brings with it the courage to put our values first.

We were warned against the consequences of following false gods, but we mortals did not listen. Now the ante has been upped. Now the stakes are ultimate—the survival of life on earth. Perhaps with this realization we will be jolted into the higher stage of maturity now required of us.

Thus, "a politics of hope" lies in our courage to challenge unflinchingly the false gods of economic dogma. A politics of hope lies in garnering the confidence to trust in our deepest moral sensibilities, our deepest emotional intuitions about our connectedness to others' well-being. Only on this basis can we challenge all dogma, demanding that it serve our values instead of continuing to contort them—while our fellow human beings starve in the midst of plenty.

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