

Sharing the Earth's Riches

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We are much concerned these days with problems of war, violence, and rapid social change. At times they may divert attention from two related problems which may seem less urgent, but which may be of equal significance in the long run.

One of these problems is whether or not the earth has in fact enough resources to support its future population at a humane level. The other is how citizens of the United States live in a world in which there are tremendous differences in the living conditions and opportunities which individuals may enjoy.

If one looks at the farms in the midwest, one finds that the output per acre has doubled since 1940, and perhaps tripled since 1930. The average farmer now produces about 6 times as much as he did in 1930, while his net contribution to the national income is perhaps four times what it was then. His net profit may be no larger than it was then, but his output is on a much larger scale. Farther north in the wheat belt, the farmer there produces enough from his season's work to feed 273 people.

The immediate explanation for the change is that by development and use of hybrid seed, new fertilizer and fertilizer combinations, new cultivation methods, and new harvesting machinery, man has tremendously increased his capacity to garner the riches of the earth.

This is not a small, isolated episode, either for the cornbelt, the United States, or the world. It symbolizes a development in human history which is unique.

Had an international group of scientists and technicians been asked 25 years ago if man could produce enough from the earth to support all the people on the globe at a decent minimum level of living, they would have been uncertain in their answers. But in 1963 a group of such scientists from more than 100 nations was asked this question by the United Nations. The answer was rather confident; there is enough technical knowledge to do so. If this knowledge were applied within a reasonable period, a substantial increase in the present population of the earth could be supported.

This is the first time that mankind has been able to say this. The great change is that the technical possibilities at last are within theoretical reach. Always before we've been obliged to look on pockets of poverty and conditions of desparate living without feeling fully confident that the tools were in hand to correct them.

But if we have reached this stage of technology why haven't we eliminated poverty? Two sets of factors are especially worth noting. One is the simple, hard fact that social change takes a long time. And yet think of the Iowa farmers who, in 1933 had just heard of hybrid corn. One per cent of them planted it that year. By 1950, 99% of them planted it. This was an extraordinary change in behavior. Very few communities around the world have been able to change as rapidly when the knowledge was there. One of the great gulfs in social development is that between proven knowledge and its application, in the farm, in the factory, and elsewhere.

Science and technology continue to grow, and they grow at a more rapid rate in most countries than application grows. Hence there is a progressively widening gap between theoretical possibilities and daily action.

One indication of the rate at which science is growing is that today there are alive and working in laboratories as many scientists as have ever lived in the whole history of the world before. We have as many people now directly trying to change technology as have worked on these problems since man emerged. The new knowledge and the rate of change that result are proportionate.

Another set of obstacles relate to population. The population of the world, now about 3 1/2 billion, has roughly doubled since 1920, and is increasing for the present at an increasing rate. India is a case in point. When it is through with a 5-year plan, it has been able to improve its products of farm and factories at just about the same rate as it has increased in population. In other countries the prospect is not so promising. In Indonesia it seems that the rate of population growth is outstripping the rate at which technology is being improved. Probably today the average Indonesian is worse off than he was 5 years ago, and his opportunities to share in the products of the earth are smaller.

At the other extreme are countries such as the United States or Denmark, where the rate of growth in technology has been so rapid that we can look ahead a century or so and foresee no very serious problems in meeting future needs of the population.

Some scholars feel deeply concerned about the implications of continued population growth. There is the possibility of doubling the world's population in less than 40 years. Would this bring us beyond what the world could support at a reasonable level?

The situation is more encouraging than it was a few years ago. There have been remarkable developments in birth control including pills and intra-uterine devices. Methods are being found which as applied by the wife, are highly effective, and do not seem to have any serious side effects. They are simple, inexpensive, and apparently quite acceptable in most cultures in which they have been tried.

There have been efforts by Friends and others using these new devices which offer hope for a major change in rates of population growth within a generation or so. This is a promising prospect which science has provided. But even if this were achieved in a generation there would remain the consequences of present population growth, and disproportionate bunching of age groups to deal with. Of equal importance, there remains the problem of disparity.

Disparity can be illustrated by referring to Kenya, where Friends are numerous and active. A reasonable estimate of the expendable income for the average individual in Kenya is about \$100 a year. This compares to a similarly calculated figure for the United States of \$1,750 per year per person. Thus, there is a gap between income of members of East Africa Yearly Meeting and those of Illinois Yearly Meeting of at least \$1,650 a year per person. Kenya is growing as fast as any country economically, about 7 per cent a year. Japan reached this rate at one time, as did West Germany, and a few other countries. The United States has not grown this fast since the turn of the century. It probably grows at a rate of 3 per cent a year.

What will the situation be then 20 years from now if these rates continue? Kenya would have made extraordinary progress, and then have an income per person of about \$370. The United States, moving along at a slower rate, would have an income around \$2,700. The gap would have grown from about \$1,650 to over \$2,300 between the two countries.

How do we live in the world community with the people of Kenya over this next 20 year period, and where do we stand with them then? What will we have reaped from this new miracle of the loaves and the fishes which science has presented to us?

Students at the technical school in Nairobi can learn just as much as those from Urbana or Minneapolis about the possibilities of the technology that is available. They will not be saying "can it be done?" but rather "when?" As has been widely recognized, the revolution in communication has led to a revolution of rising expectations. There is sobering reality in the wide realization of man's capacity to deal with and prevent poverty and suffering, and the expectation that somehow it can be achieved.

Certainly half the people of the world have severe deprivation of diet, shelter, clothing, or medical services. This half or more are likely to have their lot improved but to be farther removed from the material level of the United States 20 years from now than they are today, and they will be much more acutely aware of it then than they are today.

We are citizens of a country with the highest per capita material consumption of any country in the world, using up natural resources more rapidly than any other part of the world. What do we have to say, and how do we live with the people of this other half of the world over the decades ahead?

What we are talking about here, in comparing Americans with the peasants in Kenya or Vietnam, is similar to the character of the problem of our relations to minority groups in their own country. We know that the Civil Rights Bill, even if admirably implemented, is only the beginning of confronting the disparities in levels of living and opportunities that fetter the Negro or the Spanish American.

One answer is a fundamentally Christian answer, that we are brothers and we must share. In view of our Friends experience and tradition, do we have anything more specific to say than that? There are at least to testimonies that suggest themselves.

First, there are bound to be emergency situations in the years immediately ahead. Some of them may be of high proportions. Suppose there were to be serious social disorganization in India for a few years, and its production were to fall behind its population growth. Suffering in India could be intense. Or the same could happen in Indonesia. In either case, famine would become widespread, not limited to pockets.

Are we prepared as a people to share in relieving a kind of suffering caused by the incapacity of mankind to put to work instruments that are almost in his hands? It seems likely that Americans will be called upon to help in such emergency situations on a fairly wide scale.

Yet if the chilly winds of criticism of bilateral aid that now blow in this country are a sign of public thinking about our responsibilities, it may be very difficult for us as a nation to accept what many regard as a simple Christian responsibility to help in an emergency. There is no suggestion of a permanent international dole. Simple arithmetic would rule this out, because even half the income of every American would add rather little on a regular basis to that of the needy in the world today. In coping with drastic emergencies, it could make a sizeable difference.

One style of action to which Friends have contributed is in giving aid impartially, without regard to race, religion or politics. This is hardly a Quaker invention, though rarely practiced by others, and Friends have no monopoly on it. Might future Quaker contributions be limited to repeating this and expressing the meaning of it?

Take the case of Vietnam. In the present critical political situation in South Vietnam, guerilla warfare confronts the United States with several possible solutions. One is to go on with the prospect, in the eyes of most observers, of eventual loss of the area to Communist authoritarian power. A second solution is to carry the war to North Vietnam. This solution seems morally reprehensible and desparately hazardous. A third solution might be to neutralize the whole area under some kind of political police management of the United Nations.

A fourth possible solution would avoid primary concern with holding the line politically, or with seeing that the Vietnamese peasants are under American rather than North Vietnamese domination. It would focus the attention of other nations on improving the lot of the peasants of South Vietnam and adjoining countries in the Mekong basin, who now have an income of around \$90 a year.

The four countries in this area, though they have found themselves unable to agree on anything else and have broken off certain diplomatic relations with each other, have managed to carry out concrete and forward-looking plans.

If the primary concern is the welfare of these people and the ways of bridging this gap which is widening between us from economic and social growth, then the focus would be on a

constructive program for developing the land and water of the Mekong basin. To support such an effort there might be need for police services from an international force. With these as goals the financial and technical resources of all of the 20 countries that have already participated in some way in the planning might be enlisted and enlarged. It would perhaps raise people's sights above the immediate political situation to a new level in which nations find it possible to collaborate, instead of slugging it out along strictly political and ideological lines.

Southeast Asian reconstruction offers an example of the kind of thinking about emergency situations around the world which will ask not how will this benefit the United States politically in the short run but how will it affect the welfare of the people and their success in attaining a minimum level of living. This is essentially a Christian answer. Insofar as it emphasizes action without regard to race or politics or religion it may have a strong Quaker flavor.

A second way in which Friends might have a contribution to make is to the solution of problems of sufficiency and disparity. Are there ways in which rate of change can be accelerated and still retain the sense of personal value that is deep in family structure, deep in religious life, and which tends to be sacrificed so brutally when communities change rapidly, and particularly when people move from farm to city? The need is for a means of speeding change and retaining a value system inherent in human nature. Friends have had a little experience in that direction, and there have been a few near-inventions. For example the work camps that were started in the United States and spread to Mexico was one kind of innovation for which Friends had some responsibility. The farm cooperative work in Jordan is a case of social invention in ways in which young agriculturists were able to apply technical knowledge in a context in which both cooperation among people and a sense of religious values was strengthened. Are there other such inventions in which we could have a part? We ought to be alert for ways in which we can put to work the peculiar heritage of the traditional meeting house, the heritage it has of finding practical kinds of solutions without losing sight of the central character of religious life.

Economic studies indicate that one of the powerful instruments of economic growth is education. Friends have had a major hand in schools and training schools. Strict missionary activity undoubtedly is at an end in Kenya and most other parts of the world. Is it possible to work out some new kind of device in which the rate of growth can be maintained in areas such as Kenya while enhancing the spiritual values of individual and family life? One of the exciting opportunities that Friends have ahead of them in the world today is the possibility of finding some greatly refreshed and invigorated kind of relationship between Friends in this wealthiest of all lands and Friends in poorer lands.

Every high-yielding American cornfield symbolizes a special kind of challenge. It is a challenge that is with us not only now but for our generation and the next generation. It asks how citizens of the United States can live for a whole lifetime in a situation in which they are a minority group enjoying a disproportionate share of the world's resources and increasingly separated from other people in the world in terms of material level of living. To do so will call for an extraordinary generosity both of goods and spirit. It will require a kind of sharing which is uncommon in our society. It will presume a kind of consistent application not for a year but for a lifetime on a scale unprecedented in human history. It is one for which there may be distinctively

Quaker solutions by bringing together the science of the laboratory, the husbandry of the cornfield, and the seeking of the meeting house.