Hunger and Homelessness: The Solutions Are Inside Us

by Eric Falkenstein

Hunger and homelessness are a national and an international disgrace. Most everyone interested enough to read this blurb has probably heard all kinds of facts, stories, statistics, etc. If you want more, just stop in the Sunken Lounge. But I want to talk solution. I want to be a practical idealist: forgive the oxymoron. There may be as many offered “solutions” to these problems than there are root causes. If the governments of the world would just do this... If the Americans would just... If the economy would just... If... If... If... If... I think it’s kind of just up to us. We’ve lost it... We don’t have what a proud nation, a proud world has. Where has our spirit, our pride, our dignity gone? The one that brings people together, that unites, that loves. For Americans, where has the spirit gone from the days of Independence, from the days of Civil War, from the time of President Kennedy, the one that is gone, so gone... I’m not saying these times were better, but we had a purpose, a soul, a conscience. The world can; no, the world CAN end poverty. It’s up to everyone, it must become an imperative. Why not work with other nations, cut back expenditures which are based on mistrust? You and I, She and He, Mr. George Bush and Mr. Joe Shmoe could all have been born in Ethiopia, in Kampuchea... No, WE COULD HAVE.

It’s not political anymore. It takes politics, but it takes money~ But it takes concern. But it takes more than we want to give. Why? We’ve lost a loving feeling. In fact, you, the reader may not be a loser of the spirit. Ask yourself; you’ll know. Just no. JUST do you care? Jim Chapin told me about a study in which happiness is not correlated with earnings, as long as one earns enough to be secure. TO BE SECURE. Do we care? You can be rich and care; you can be poor and not care. Would the Great men and women of the world care, or would they be rather be rich and uncaring? Did Jesus, Moses, Mohammed, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa care? Well, politics seems to be where it’s at. That’s my solution. That’s where the money is, the power, the potential to show us all who cares. WHO CARES? Well if we don’t care we better not care about a lot of things: fulfillment, life, afterlife, reincarnation... After all if we get reincarnated, we’ll wish poverty were solved. The chances of being born well off aren’t too good. Who cares? Want some solutions? Sorry, none here. Dig deep inside yourself; they’re there.

Opinions expressed in this section are those of the authors. Content of this section has in no way been determined by The News.
Each One Of Us Can Make a Difference

by Kate Salathe

"What can I do?"

It's a big question, really, to ask what we can do to make a difference, to make any significant impact on this big ugly problem. After all, we've had people working at it for years and what's really changed?

We are, after all, students. We are investing too much time and money to lose sight of that primary role. But I recently heard a quote by Mark Twain that sums up what I believe is the essence of our Liberal Arts education: "Don't let your schooling get in the way of your education." What are we in school for, anyway? If we merely wanted a good job in four years, there are quicker and less painful ways to get there. If we want to become people, to take active control of our lives, and, most importantly, to have any positive effect on the world around us, we come to school to learn about that world.

The fact that we are students, preparing ourselves for the future, however, does not exempt us from responsibility in the present. We have to take advantage of our concern, time, knowledge, and enthusiasm to help those our soci-

Facts About Homelessness

- Prevalent estimates place the number of homeless Americans at 3 million.
- Families with children represent the fastest growing sector of the homeless population.
- A recently released, Congressionally-funded study predicts that another nearly 19 million people will face the prospect of homelessness in America in the next 15 years.
- Since 1980, Budget Authority for all federal housing assistance programs has been cut by more than 75 percent—from $32 billion to $7.5 billion a year.
- At the start of Reagan's first term, the U.S. spent $7 on defense for every $1 spent on housing. Today, the ratio is $44 to $1.
- Only one-third of all American families who meet the government's own test of need are receiving federal housing subsidies.
- In 1983, nearly 10 million households occupied housing that did not meet minimum quality standards.
- From 1970-1985, the number of units with gross rents below $125 per month dropped from 15 million to 2 million.
- Nearly three-quarters of low income renters receive no housing subsidies.
- Sixteen million households pay more than 35 percent of its income for rent alone. Eighty million families pay more than 60 percent of its income for rent.
- In 1985, nearly 10 percent of all renter households (3 million) annually spent more than 70 percent of their living income for housing.
- Rent burdens among single female householders have skyrocketed from an average of 38 percent in 1974 to 58 percent in 1996.
- Housing needs are so great and housing assistance so scarce that families wait an average of 24 months for a Section 8 Certificate, with families in some cities facing a wait of nearly 30 years at the present rate.
- In the past eight years, federal support for low income housing programs has fallen 77 percent to less than $8 billion a year, while government subsidies for upper-income homeowners, in the form of mortgage tax-exemptions has grown to the $46 billion a year.

Threatening a particular country, most of us don't realize the con-

Hunger: A Problem of Shocking Magnitude

by Peter Furia

In the back of our minds somewhere, most of us realize that hunger is a world problem. Yet while we may see the American homeless when we go into the city, or become aware of a famine occurring in some African country, it is hard to imagine that there is a problem with food in this country.

The facts are as follows: Each day, about 35,000 people die of hunger related deaths, 24,000 of whom are children under the age of five. That comes out to around 15,000,000 deaths per year. The favorite cheesy visualization for this is 100 jumbo jets full of children crashing every day. Yet largely because this situation is so constant, it rarely gains the public's attention. Also, famines - isolated occurrences of society-wide starvation, usually due to drought or war - account for only ten percent of hunger deaths. The other ninety percent result from what's termed chronic hunger, chronic persistent hunger or the unparalleled major hunger, depending on who you ask, and this is far from being an isolated or temporary problem. Victims of this type of hunger do not simply "starve to death." Rather, their immune systems are so weakened from long term malnutrition that common diseases such as the flu and even simple diarrhea become fatal.

While famines need to be swiftly dealt with by donations of food, and the world is getting pretty good at publicizing and responding to them, chronic persistent hunger is far from being handled. It's generally agreed that various types of "self suffi-

ciency" aid are needed, including long term agricultural development programs and "micro-loans" to peasants wishing to turn a simple skill into a life sustaining small business. It is becoming more apparent that, eventually, third world governments will need to provide for the general welfare of their own people, although aid from the West is currently an indispensable component for survival.

Yet experts agree that the end of world hunger is within reach.

There was enough food being produced five years ago to feed the projected population of the year 2000. Furthermore, in societies where hunger "ends", subsequent decreases in population growth most always follow, due to the decreased need to have multiple children. Hunger is said to be ended in a nation as a society threatening problem when the Infant Mortality Rate or IMR (deaths before the age of 1 per 1000 live births) falls below 50. The U.S. has an IMR of 10, and our problems are far from being completely solved, but many countries' IMRs exceed 150. While not a perfect measurement, IMR's are the most widely accepted barometer of hunger problems in a nation. Recognizing that many countries are fifteen times worse off than we are is pretty sobering thought. Yet a leading food policy scholar has estimated that it would take just 613 billion dollars to sustainably end hunger for the entire world. Add a week of global military spending ($19 billion) for fifteen years to the world's current expenditures on hunger programs and you'd have it. What is needed most is awareness of the issues, so they can be moved up on the world political and economic agenda.

Not only is it National Hunger and Homelessness Week, November 1989 is National "Ending Hunger" Education Month. The "think globally, act locally" cliché has perhaps never been more appropriate. Several campus organizations can provide you with the opportunity to do just that.

(Continued on Insert page 3)
Sweden: No Homelessness, No Hunger, and No Volunteers

by Eric Falkenstein

This article is a follow-up in an essay for a sociology newsletter about Sweden. Last semester I spent four months at the University of Lund in the southern tip of the Scandinavian peninsula. Sweden has often been seen as the "Middle way," a model of advanced welfare systems in the most advanced nations. Well, the weather was chilly, the prices were high, and the people were initially "stand-offish." Sweden is a neutral country, unaligned with either NATO or The Warsaw Pact. It has not been involved in a major war for over 100 years, and it is a "Nuclear Free Zone." But the Swedish experience (at least mine) focused on Swedish society. It is a society not unlike our own in most aspects, worlds apart in a few.

Sweden society is far more liberal and progressive than our own. Allocation of inequality to Swedish socio-political culture takes on a meaning of very broadly-based change. The government takes an active role in stamping out certain forms of racial, gender, and economic inequalities. Let me qualify this statement; the elimination of gross inequalities does not involve striving towards perfect equality because, for the majority, this is not advocated.

Sweden is a socialist country! It is a social democracy, and there is a tremendous difference. Roughly 80% of the means of production are privately owned. One of the most interesting aspects of this social democracy was the fact that volunteerism is not allowed. I would have liked to get a job, but that was impossible as an American citizen and student. I tried to get a volunteer position with the welfare agency, but I was told that volunteers are not permitted because they take away potential work away from others. One rationale is just this, but there also exists an ethic in Sweden of recreational time, no need to participate in extra work. What was most impressive was the superb care Sweden takes of its people. Every Swede is entitled to housing, food, clothing, medical care no matter what color, what age, or what gender. A Swede falls under the poverty level and applies for welfare, she will unfailingly receive either cash relief or sometimes governmentally-created jobs. More stunningly, health services are provided at virtually no cost. For the average person, a visit to most doctors costs a fee of 30-40 kronor or $5 to $10. Medicine as well is set at a maximum of $10. Dental care is free for children, and even routine operations are subsidized. Childcare is provided by the surrounding community, and fees depend upon the means of the family. In sharp contrast to the U.S., Sweden has a universal sick leave policy. If you are sick and do not attend work, you will be paid 90% anyway; if your children are sick, the same policy exists for up to 60 days per year. Women receive allowances during pregnancy leave. After birth, there is an allowance paid for a total of 12 months to a mother or father who stays home with the newborn! But Sweden is not heaven on earth. It is not without its social and economic problems. Here are a few of them. Women and minorities may ideally be valued equally, but are far from equal in various respects. Not all people are of the large middle class. Of particular importance are the people in (primarily) Stockholm who may well be unhomeless. Like any large city, there are people on the streets and in the subways who are obviously economically financially secure. There exists an underclass even in this great nation.

Problems permeate all strata of society though. Everyone depends on childcare. It is guaranteed and fully provided for in Sweden, but not always available in practice. There are still communal facilities that lack the necessary capacities and facilitators. Taxes are outrageous high. Sales tax in the U.S. is generally around 7%; in Sweden it is 23%! Income tax is more stunning. Many pay more than half their income to taxes, some paying more like 80%. In fact there is (a true) anecdote I heard while there. The author of Pippi Longstocking made so much from her novel that she was taxed 103% of her income; she had to go to court to fight it. My friend began a lucrative business have moved out of the country so as to avoid the relentless taxation. In addition there are individuals who "ride the system" either because they receive benefits without actively seeking them because they get a certain pay without working at their highest efficiency or productivity level. The question why work hard when taxes will take most of it away? Sweden does suffer from a certain lack of innovation and hard-work ethic that is definitely inherent in our own culture. These are serious concerns which cause Sweden to be a model for the future.

The US and Sweden: two different countries, two fairly distinct outcomes, but not always available in practice. Everyone in Sweden has a (true) anecdote I heard while there. The author of Pippi Longstocking made so much from her novel that she was taxed 103% of her income; she had to go to court to fight it. My friend began a lucrative business have moved out of the country so as to avoid the relentless taxation. In addition there are individuals who "ride the system" either because they receive benefits without actively seeking them because they get a certain pay without working at their highest efficiency or productivity level. The question why work hard when taxes will take most of it away? Sweden does suffer from a certain lack of innovation and hard-work ethic that is definitely inherent in our culture. These are serious concerns which cause Sweden to be a model for the future.

Making a difference, Continued.

Wrong, you can do something. It doesn't matter in what form you choose to act. Bob Hayes, a lawyer who founded the National Coalition for the Homeless, pointed out that some people feel more comfortable in pin stripes, and how you want to direct your opportunities to be exposed to be respected. In sharp contrast to the U.S., Sweden has a universal sick

...
Sometimes you are what you don't eat.

Think fast November 16.

Don't eat a thing on the Thursday before Thanksgiving. Then join the six million Americans who, since 1973, have mailed us the money they saved to support our life-saving projects. You'll not only learn what it's like to go hungry. You'll know how good it feels to help those who are. Please write: "Fast for a World Harvest,"

115 Broadway, Dept. 4000, Boston, MA 02116.
Or call for more information: (617) 482-1211.