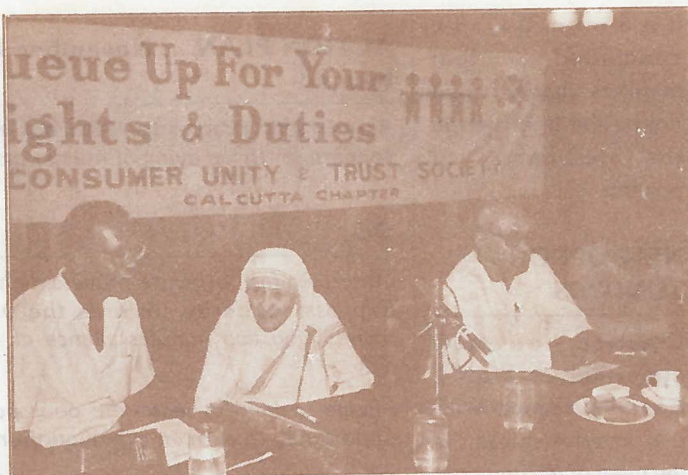


TOWARDS A HUNGER FREE FUTURE . . . WITH LOVE



L TO R : POLICE CHIEF T. TALUKDAR, MOTHER TERESA, DY. MAYOR M. SANYAL AND MODERATOR PROF. D. K. SINHA.

"Money is not enough The poor need our hands to love them," said Mother Teresa, on the occasion of the Third World Anti-Poverty Day, November 1st, 1992 in a panel discussion on "Poverty Eradication : Dole vs. Opportunities," organised by **CUTS** Calcutta. Her words serve to remind us anew that a large section of the world's population is still struggling to get even Two Square Meals a Day.

In these panel discussions organised by CUTS in Jaipur and Calcutta, silence was observed for two minutes at 11 A.M to express solidarity with the forgotten millions who die every day of hunger.

Eminent personalities speaking at the occasion were Mr. Moni Sanyal, Deputy Mayor, Calcutta, and Mr. Tushar Talukdar, the City Police Commissioner (at Calcutta), and Mr Nathu Singh, ex-parliamentarian and social activist and Mr. R. N. Dey, President, CUTS (at Jaipur).

Mr. Sanyal observed that the fate of the poverty-stricken in our country is similar to India's plight in the world economy. Mr. Talukdar, on the other hand, acknowledged that poverty was the outcome of the incessant exploitation of the weaker sections of the society by the affluent ones.

BACKDROP

As part of its November Day Initiative, taken up first on Nov 1, 1990, CUTS intends to make sincere efforts to improve the lot of the needy. Nov 1, 1990, then, was known as the World Poverty Day. But the third National Convention of Consumer Activists held in Nov, 1991 at Calcutta, redefined the day as "Anti-Poverty Day," recognising poverty as a major consumer issue.

The Action Plan follows logically from the consumer's first inalienable right recognised by the United Nations - "The Right to Basic Needs, needed not only to survive, but to lead a life with dignity: food, clothing, shelter, energy, transportation, health care, education and sanitation."

The Brundtland Report : *Our Common Future*, holds "poverty to be a major cause of environmental damage". This feeling is echoed by the World Development Report, 1992 of the World Bank. A war on poverty is both a moral imperative and a pre-requisite for environmental stewardship.

ACTION

The Action Plan (see box) urges each individual to pledge to help at least one poor person to get an opportunity to earn an exploitation-free sustenance; and to adopt a life-style which is friendly to environment and humanity.

Several long-term plans, like these, have been drawn up by CUTS to tackle this issue. Yet the onus is on the individual's effort to help the needy, as Mother Teresa pointed out, "The truest service to the poor can come in the shape of love and compassion."

She cited the cases of a young married couple in Calcutta, who decided to dispense with expensive marriage rituals and instead, donated the money to the Missionaries of Charity, and that of a young boy of United States who sent her his pocket money. Her message to the masses: "Share with them what you have."

The Right to Basic Needs, especially in the context of poverty stricken consumers, was acknowledged as a vital consumer right in the Third National Convention of Consumer Activists, held in 1991. It was also

unanimously concluded that mindless charity would not be the right step in the eradication of poverty.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Creation of new opportunities after a close interaction with the poverty-stricken is the need of the day - not doles tinged with condescension.

The renowned economist, Professor Amartya Sen shares a similar view. In his convocation address on "Poverty Alleviation: Targeting vs. Universalism" at the Management Development Institute, Gurgaon, India on 3 July, 1992, he said "It is important to see the

beneficiaries of the poverty removal programme as active agents, and not merely as passive recipients of hand-outs."

The role played by the voluntary organisations overseas on the issue of poverty eradication must be lauded. The India Committee of Netherlands, in support of the "Right to work" movement going on in India, have supported the campaign of tackling rural poverty in India, in form of guaranteed employment.

Such an Employment Guarantee Scheme incidentally, exists in Maharashtra, in Western India, where the government provides a minimum level of employment to the rural unemployed. CUTS intends to pursue the enactment and implementation of the Employment Guarantee law, in collaboration with other national NGOs.

The Freedom from Hunger Campaign/Action for Development was launched in 1959 by FAO, another

ACTION PLAN ... November 1, 1992 and beyond

A synergetic process to reach out and awaken mankind's concern for those dying of hunger alone:

DO

Observe a fast, organise prayers, light lamps and ring bells. Express solidarity towards the victims of hunger by maintaining two minutes silence at 11 am this November Day.

Pledge to help at least one poor person get a job or an opportunity to earn an exploitation-free sustenance.

Not leave left overs for half the world is hungry.

Resolve to lead a life of simplicity. Teach your young to conserve water, power and food.

CALL UPON

Governments ... to spend more on doctors than soldiers, on opportunities than dole.

Community leaders ... to organise meetings and demonstrations to end public indifference towards poverty.

Teachers ... to write articles and creative works highlighting the daily exploitation of 1 billion people worldwide.

The world's rich ... to live simply so that the other half can simply live.

Their governments ... to pay an International Poverty Tax.

pioneer in this field. Since then, it has been working closely with non-governmental organisations throughout the world, to bring a smile on the faces of the hungry millions.

The Hunger Project, Switzerland, is also working ceaselessly to establish a future free from hunger. The Bellagio Declaration for "overcoming hunger in the 1990's," taken up by the World Hunger Programme, USA, has established goals for reduction of hunger by half by the year 2000.

ANVIL

Guaranteeing minimum basic needs to the 250 million rural poor in India should occupy a prime slot in the political

agenda. Mr. P. N. Bhagwati, former Chief Justice of India, while launching the November Day Initiative, emphasised this at a press conference in New Delhi on Oct. 14, 1990. He said, "The people will have to become aware of the need to end poverty and exert pressure on the government and society to act."

The situation, therefore, requires a step in the right direction - for individuals to reach out to those dying of hunger and - as Amartya Sen said - "An urgent public action is required to save the forgotten millions who die of persistent hunger around the world."

Lastly, in the words of Pradeep S. Mehta, the initiator of the Anti Poverty Day : "Let us hope there will be no occasion for any more Anti Poverty Days from the year 2000 AD. Let us resolve that the 21st century does not carry over a single hungry human being."

Suparna Ganguli

SAVE MAN



SAVE EARTH