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Equity seen as key to well-fed world

by Andrew Meade

Redistribution of wealth and social revolution were among the solutions to world hunger proposed at a symposium last night in Hauck Auditorium by three experts in the field.

Cheryl Payer, visiting lecturer from the New School for Social Research, New York, and an acclaimed critic of American food policy, led off the evening by saying, “It is a scandal that hunger should exist in a world where we send people into space, and a shock to watch people starve on TV.”

She said the problem is not scientific or technological, but political, and represents “the greatest indictment of our social system.”

The symposium addressed the “myths and realities” of world hunger. Payer felt the biggest myth was that many people think that all that’s necessary to solve the problem is to ship food to Third World countries.

Nicholas Raymond, public affairs advisor to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for the North American region, spoke next. Raymond stressed the need for equity, and that there is no hope for the Third World countries unless there is some sharing of resources.

The FAO advisor addressed a myth he found very prevalent, that we have the means to end hunger if we have the political will. He said that 500,000,000 people suffer from undernutrition, that they receive at the most each day about as much as is required by the body for sleeping. He thinks it unlikely that the United States or any other major producer will be able to solve the hunger problem; he believes that offers must come from the afflicted countries.

“People are hungry because of the lack of social organization, not the lack of food.” Raymond thought it “rather odd” that most of the starvation is in the rural areas where most of the food is grown in Third World countries.

International Development Economist Said Shah, the final speaker, first praised his colleagues for “addressing the problem with the seriousness it deserves.”

Shah said there have been significant social and technological advances in recent years, but these have been geared in the wrong direction. Political repression has accompanied more complex social organization, he said, and technological improvements have been mostly for destructive purposes. According to the United Nations, said the economist, feeding the world’s needy would cost $90 billion for a 10-15 year span. Eleven hundred billion was spent on “means of destruction” in the period between 1975-1979 alone.

All three agreed that the present system channels aid to the rich leaders of recipient countries, rather than to people who really need it.