

Frank Shefrin

World Food Programme— High Marks in the Class

■ When Frank Shefrin retired at the end of 1978 as chairperson of Canada's Interdepartmental Committee on the World Food Programme, he called the WFP (with some of the pride of authorship) "the greatest success story in the United Nations system." Certainly it had shown remarkable growth: from \$100 million in the first three-year pledging period (from 1963 to 1965) to a target of \$950 million for the two years 1979 and 1980. But the then executive director of the WFP (and another Canadian), Gerry Vogel, spoke more modestly about its quality: "We are far from perfect, but I think we do quite a good job, considering all the circumstances."

By the time of Shefrin's retirement, a total of 942 projects of food aid for economic and social development had been approved through the WFP in 108 countries. These included projects of land development and land settlement, forestry and fishery schemes, public utility and community development projects, education and training programs, improved hospital feeding, and food for nutritionally vulnerable groups, particularly mothers and children. Another 411 emergency operations—following droughts, cyclones, floods and disasters such as wars—had been undertaken in 93 countries. The cumulative cost to the WFP over 16 years of the development projects and emergency operations in cash and services came to about \$3.75 billion.

Frank Shefrin says that "by sheer accident of the time of my birth I was in at the start of the Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO]. I sort of fell into the job." There was a little more to it than that. Born in Winnipeg in 1913, he graduated from the University of Manitoba in agriculture and economics in 1934, hardly the best time to find a good first job. But he was resourceful and worked as an ice cream maker, an egg-drying operator and a cheese maker before finding work for which he had been trained, analysing economic and agricultural data.

In 1941, after working for farmers' organizations, Shefrin joined the Canada Department of Agriculture, staying with it for the rest of his working career. Consequently, he was working in the conference secretariat in Quebec City in 1945 when the FAO was launched. He was a member of the Canadian delegation to every FAO biennial conference between 1955 and 1978, and he also served on a host of FAO intergovernmental committees as Canada's liaison with that agency. From 1951 to 1953, he worked for the FAO as an economist, on leave of absence from the Department of Agriculture.

Here, Shefrin's comments concentrate on the World Food Programme, which was established jointly by the United Nations and the FAO on an experimental basis for three years starting in January 1963:

"Very soon after FAO was established, the search began for a means to ensure that nobody in the world went to bed hungry and that food surpluses were handled intelligently. It had to be politically, economically and socially feasible. In 1946, the director-general proposed a World Food Board, but governments were not sufficiently motivated or politically ready for it. Then, in 1949, FAO proposed an International Commodity Clearing House, but that didn't get off the ground, either. Finally, in 1959, [FAO] began a third and