

fortunate people from the hungry world, clamouring to climb aboard. The lifeboats of the rich nations do have some extra capacity, which, however, they must retain as a safety margin. They cannot accommodate all those trying to keep afloat. If they try to do so, their boats will capsize. Thus the lifeboats must be constantly on guard against boarding parties.

Pressing the lifeboat ethics and triage morality to its logical conclusion, Dr. J. Forrester of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology argues that food relief is unethical because it creates more misery in the long run than it alleviates. Massive relief to overpopulated and poverty-stricken countries disrupts the natural mechanisms that control population. The people saved by such relief breed more people and compound the problems, to the point where they cannot be solved by any relief at all.

### Starve now

The advocates of new situational ethics are pressing for a policy of letting people starve to death now to prevent them from starving at some future date. Acceptance of such a morality will mean the murder by omission of millions of people, a decision based on a moral and empirical judgments about the future that may, in effect, prove to be wholly erroneous. If we are, in fact, fast approaching the absolute limits of this planet's productive capacity, we cannot propose triage for the poor and continue to erode the world's resources by over-use and waste in the rich countries. Equally naive is the underlying assumption of lifeboat ethics and triage that "food haves" are completely independent and can unilaterally shut-off the supply of food to "food have-nots" without any reprisals.

The consequences of these policies for international trade and the operation of multinational corporations will be grave. The world system today is characterized more by "interdependence" than by "independence". Consequently, a "co-operative" model rather than a "conflict-escalation" model will be more suitable for the future world. It may also be noted that this new morality of food allocation takes an extremely pessimistic view of human destiny, discounting population-planning experiences in China, Japan and Taiwan. It ignores the positive effects of the green revolution in India, Pakistan and the Philippines. It disregards the possibility of a breakthrough in food technology.

If one looks at the food-aid policies, particularly that of the United States, the ideas of triage and lifeboat ethics seem to

be quite irrelevant. Humanitarian considerations may be one of the many factors in the complex decision-making arena of food aid, but certainly the most important criterion is the self-interest of the donor countries. Food aid has largely been an instrument of power politics and not a function of the recipients' capacity to respond positively to such aid.

### Food aid politics

The United States has been by far the largest food donor during the last 25 years. Its food-aid program was originally conceived under Public Law 480. It was the declared intent of this act to promote stability in American agriculture, dispose of huge agricultural surpluses and use food aid in furtherance of foreign policy. Consequently, over the past 20 years, a large amount of U.S. food aid has gone to countries that formed the U.S. defence perimeter, or countries that were of special political importance. Thus South Korea, South Vietnam, Indonesia, Pakistan and Israel have received the lion's share of food aid. During 1974, for example, Israel, with a population of three million, received more food aid than Bangladesh, whose population is over 70 million. The U.S. Government refused to sell wheat to the Government of President Allende just a few days before his assassination, but it readily approved a huge credit sale a month later to the new Government. It is said that, during his 1974 visit to India, Henry Kissinger tried to strike a bargain assuring sufficient quantities of food aid if India would let the U.S. build a naval base on Diego Garcia. U.S. Congressman Yatron, a member of the House Sub-Committee on International Resources, Food and Energy, admits that U.S. food aid continues to be used for "international economic and political leverage".

From a short-term perspective, food aid is extremely beneficial — yet, in the long run, paradoxically enough, aid has negative effects on the capacity of the recipient countries to become self-sufficient in food. It has been pointed out that the dumping of surplus food in the developing countries retards the growth of indigenous agriculture (particularly food-production) and thus keeps the poor nations dependent on the rich. Large-scale American food aid in the past has led indirectly to a delay in land reforms in South Asia and Latin America. It enables the leaders of the developing nations to give low priority to agricultural development and instead to build shiny factories, television networks and nuclear reactors and to indulge in armament

*Independence  
of 'food haves'  
a naive idea*