

Editorial Reflections

Hunger, Not the Root Problem

In the mail today came two letters from significant mission agencies reporting serious hunger and malnutrition problems all around the globe, being accentuated in part by the massive siphoning off of food sources for fuel: the corn necessary to provide ethanol for a single SUV tank of gas is enough food for an individual for a year. Obviously, were all the world's energy needs to be filled by biofuels, food costs would truly skyrocket.

However, the long-term needs that all people have for food, medicines, shelter, etc., can only be met on a short-term basis when these things are "provided" by outside agencies. People receiving food cannot buy food the next day *unless they are enabled to earn a living so that they can buy the things they need*. To be enabled to buy I don't mean to be given money either. People are being cut out of productive labors that used to supply their needs. Globalization means that any human activity that can be done more efficiently will be done more efficiently. People need to be enabled to participate in new and different ways that are efficiently productive.

One of the two letters that came today said,

[Our organization] has been providing nutritional and humanitarian aid to Haiti since 1984... we've also shipped nutritional aid to other countries... and additional shipments are currently in transit [to other countries].

Nowhere in the two-page letter is there any hint of doing anything but continuing to provide food (since 1984). But if children need food, their parents and older siblings need work. In addition, we ought to know by now that it is both degrading and destructive to the human spirit for needs to be met forever on a dole basis. Human beings die inside if they cannot do things that foster their self-respect. This leads me to another, huge problem that is largely unnoticed.

Invisible Self-Destruction in the USA— and Missions

It may strike you as bizarre for me to describe a "mission frontier" in terms of unemployed people in the USA (who are not even usually considered unemployed). What could that have to do with missions? Fewer donors? Maybe. But that is not the key point.

A perfectly massive and crucial problem exists, unlike that in most nations of the world. Amazingly, this bizarre problem is mainly unnoticed. I speak of the fact that two large age-ranges of our young and our elderly are extensively and arbitrarily missing from the labor force.

Around the world, both young and old have been mistreated for centuries by being forced to work under dangerous circumstances and for terribly long hours. Granted, that the same kind of abuse is still going on in many countries. That tragic reality, however, surely must not conceal a different kind of abuse going on in the USA in the same age ranges.

First, let's reflect a moment on the phenomenon of retirement. When Social Security was instituted, funds necessary to pay retired people were small and were few due to the fact that those living longer than age 65 were a relatively small percentage of the population. As that percentage of those living longer than 65 increased, payments coming in were less and less able to cover the increased money being paid out. Between 1940 and 2008 the percentage of US population 65 or over has skyrocketed, and those paying in cannot possibly support what is being given out. The amount potentially owed is now \$3 trillion (3,000 billion). The money paid out in 1940 was a little over \$200,000 per year. Now it is closer to \$40 billion.

It was plain to see at every point that this would not have happened had the retirement age continually been raised across the years so that the percentage of the population receiving payments stayed the same. Instead, and in vain, withholding taxes from younger workers again and again increased so as to retain the same retirement age.

But never mind what is irrational about Social Security. It is obvious that a higher and higher percentage of our population is being tempted to retire at 65 even though, unlike in the past, they may nowadays easily expect to live another twenty years. The chart shows that today there are 25 million Americans aged 65 to 84, most of whom cannot be very proud of their daily contribution to the world. Instead many of them become more self-concerned than ever, worrying more and more about making ends meet, coping with health issues, etc.

The chart also shows that there is another group—50 million ages 8-19. These people too are humans, who for that simple reason do not do well if fed and clothed and educated without making any significant contribution justifying that dole. Under these circumstances it is soon true that many are not even inclined to earn their way, or worse, they do find work not offered to them officially by our society—

pushing drugs, buying and selling guns, roving in gangs, etc. School pressures often are the major reason they have no time for work.

The lack of time is one of the great aids in keeping younger people out of harm, but the piling on of homework is not as good a solution as being enabled to work at least part of every week. Thus, in the chart, note the assumptions for eight-year-olds. Don't laugh at this age; cry. In some countries, children as young as six work 16 hours a day and are amazingly productive (but half die by age 12).

That is why for 8- and 9-year-olds the chart accepts that they might be able to work—beyond a reduced school load—for 10 hours a week. That is the second column. For 65-year-olds, for example, the suggestion is 30 hours. As a matter of fact, many 65-year-olds are working 40 or more hours.

So what is this chart? In all six age brackets listed it makes two conservative guesses: the amount of feasibly available time for work, and the amount of feasible monetary value of that work. Other than those two shaded columns all other figures are from the U. S. Census Bureau or are the result of simple arithmetic.

But what do I think this means? Since no one knows for sure exactly how many people in these age brackets are effectively employed, even part-time, this exercise is valuable only in its general implications.

Of course we know that prolonged confinement in school (plus labor laws) demolish for most youth any serious par-

ticipation in the adult world. We know we have to shield our eyes from the harmful effects of prolonged adolescence—sex, drugs, gangs, prison time. Those well-known symptoms we try to deal with, ignoring the root problem involved in postponing marriage and adulthood ten or twenty years.

We also know that most people over 65 unthinkingly feel that they have a right not to work (rather than a right to work!) and that the only problem is to cope with financial constriction, health reduction and still stay happy. Many millions retire totally unprepared to discover that as humans they cannot thrive if they simply merely survive.

Ipso facto, according to the chart, which gives purely financial measurements, young people could be worth \$161 billion and older people \$399 billion, but are not worth remotely that much by anyone's guess, are suffering significant personality damage, and are limited in money they can give to missions. Far worse, however, young people extract a heavy toll on society just to keep them out of self-inflicted damage and out of societal mischief ranging from tagging to drugs to the highest murder rate among teens in the world. Is it any wonder that since two-thirds of German teenagers work at least part-time, in formal adult roles they have one-fifth as many in prison? And, older people, instead of finding a snug little home in an American community in Mexico, if gainfully employed could not only give billions to good causes but could often find work, and greater meaning working within those causes. **IJFM**

Figure 1: U.S. Populations Suffering Low Expectations (and thus personal abuse) along with Estimates of Their Potential Productivity (in \$Billions)

Age Range	Hours/week	Hour Value	Value per week	Feasible Weeks/Year	Value per year, one person	Number People (millions)	Total Annual Value (Billions)
8-9	10	\$4	\$40	40	\$1,600	7.92	\$13
10-14	15	\$5	\$75	40	\$3,000	20.7	\$62
15-19	20	\$5	\$100	40	\$4,000	21.6	\$86
8-19						50	\$161
65-69	30	\$20	\$600	45	\$27,000	10.5	\$284
70-74	20	\$15	\$300	40	\$12,000	8.7	\$104
80-84	10	\$10	\$100	20	\$2,000	5.7	\$11
65-84						25	\$399
						Total: 75	\$560

Note: Only the shaded columns are guesses, otherwise U. S. Census Bureau or arithmetic.