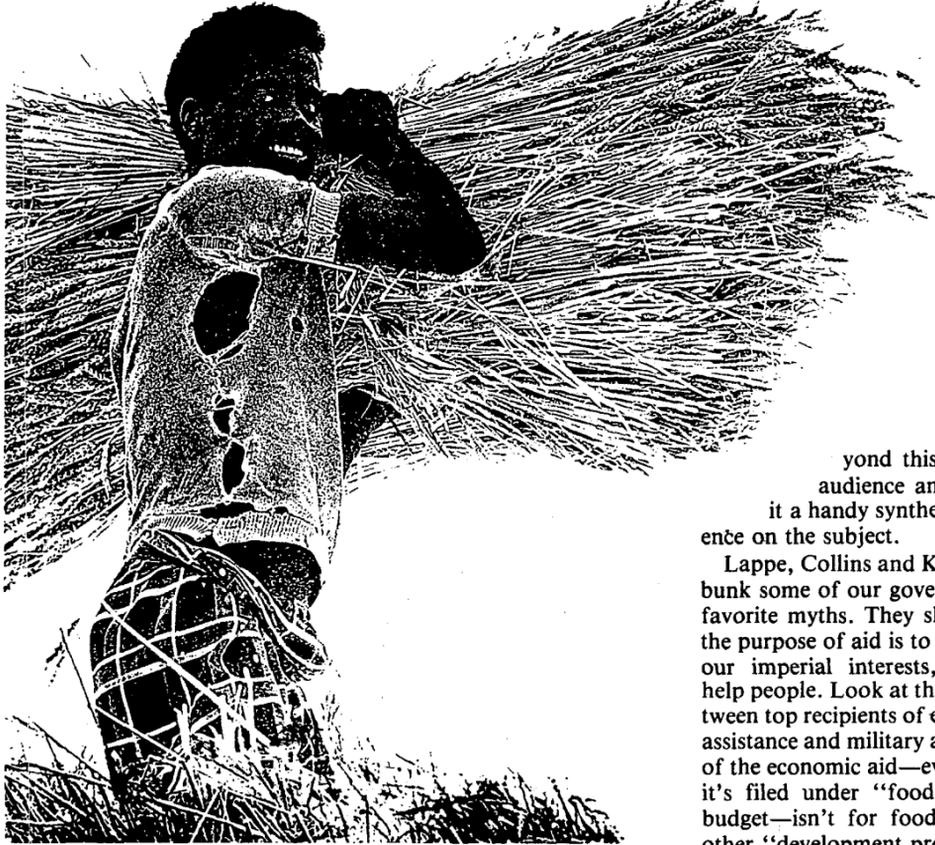


INPRINT

HUNGER

The big lie about foreign aid



Aid as Obstacle: 20 questions about our foreign aid and the hungry

By Frances Moore Lappe, Joseph Collins & David Kinley
Institute for Food and Development Policy, 2588 Mission St., San Francisco, CA 94110, \$4.95 plus 50¢ postage

By Pat Aufderheide

The people at the Institute for Food and Development Policy (*Food First*) are playing 20 questions with our foreign aid policy—and it's worth it to play along.

They start from the perspective of every well-intentioned liberal who, urged on by visions of starving foreigners, cleaned his or her plate as a child. So many people elsewhere are hungry; what can we do to help? The Institute has a clear answer—cut off America aid.

Why? They explain it most fully in answer to question 18, their "most frequently asked" question. That question asks them how they can abandon the hungry now, even if programs are corrupt. "Aren't there some good aid projects?"

No, they say. No, not in the sense that a well-fed socially-concerned American means them. Our aid programs increase hunger by increasing the power of the rich and fostering international dependence. They increase hunger in the long run, of course. They also increase hunger in the very short run, because food doesn't get to the poor, who can't compete when prices for produce are deflated and because "aid" strengthens their landlords and bosses' position over them.

The Institute doesn't expect its audience, humanitarians who see problems as issues ("world hunger") rather than as social and political problems, to believe them. So they have structured the book carefully, complete with vivid examples and quot-

...yond this specific audience and makes it a handy synthetic reference on the subject.

Lappe, Collins and Kinley debunk some of our government's favorite myths. They show that the purpose of aid is to shore up our imperial interests, not to help people. Look at the link between top recipients of economic assistance and military aid. Most of the economic aid—even when it's filed under "food" in the budget—isn't for food but for other "development projects."

Agricultural development is aimed at commercializing agriculture, fostering experts and turning peasants into consumers at the expense of their standard of living. Most of the hardware to make it happen must, under our terms, be bought from the

U.S. at noncompetitive prices.

But we do give food to poor countries, don't we? Well, no—or hardly. Mostly we sell it, without looking too closely at how it's distributed. The book recounts some effects of Public Law 480, which created a new market for burgeoning U.S. agricultural surpluses by allowing poor nations to buy our crops with their (weak) currency. This encourages dependence on our food and leaves them vulnerable. Look at what happened to Bolivia, where for years P.L. 480 food fed Bolivians until they stopped growing their local crops. Then the U.S. stopped letting Bolivians buy our food with their currency. Now they ante up hard-won foreign exchange to feed their people. If you do it right, P.L. 480 cookies don't even have to pass through many of the local elite's hands. Cargill, Inc., one of the handful of multinationals controlling the grain market, used P.L.480 currency to float a chicken-farming operation in Korea. Not only did the money subsidize Cargill's operation, but it increased Korea's dependence on imported grain.

But we do help out in emergencies, right? What about disasters and famines, when we donate food? The authors tell you about Bangladesh, where a hefty 80 percent of people who receive

ed grain sent to alleviate famine had the cash to buy it (that cuts out the ones who needed it). Or Ethiopia, where in the middle of a drought in the mid-'70s the corrupt government offered to sell the U.S. four thousand tons of grain so the U.S. could give it back. Or Guatemala after the earthquake, when farmers whose last hope was to sell their locally grown products at market were undercut by our flown-in food.

The stories roll out, not only about the manipulation of aid overseas but also about the agencies that make it happen. Both within the 20 questions format and in an appended primer on the "aid establishment," the institutions that organize this hustle are outlined. They are both national and international. One of the chilling implications of the Institute's information is the growing overt formality of the interlock between them, and between them and national and multinational corporations. Of particular interest is the scandalous behavior of the "World Bank Group," described here with terrifying proof as a "reckless lender."

Institute research found a small sprinkling of good news in all of this. They cite a consulting firm, the Economic Development Bureau, that takes local advice and uses appropriate technology. They also cite an Oxfam-funded program of peasant education in Bangladesh.

By and large, though, their answer stands. Cut off foreign aid. They leave the "how" of it open, except to say that that is our problem within the wider problems of world hunger. The problems developing countries have will be solved by people there. Meanwhile, with Jesse Helms likely to be the head of the Senate Agriculture Committee, we have lots of work to do at home.

NOTEBOOK

Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union:

A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World

By Alexander A. Benningsen and S. Enders Wimbush
University of Chicago Press, 267 pp., \$7.95

A critical chapter in Soviet history, one fraught with vital contemporary implications, is treated in detail but not altogether satisfactorily. The best of the book consists of the assembling, both in the text and in appendices, of documents by and about Mir-Said

Sultan Galiev, the leader of the Muslim Communist movement during the Bolshevik Revolution. Also of value is the description of Galiev's contributions to the theories of nationality and of his fall from power and subsequent persecution during the Stalinist period. However, the authors seize too readily on the "paradox" of rural people trying to forge a revolutionary strategy out of an industrial theory like Marxism and fail to situate the Muslim Communist concept of "proletarian nations" within

Experimental photography (below) and film (right) became important in the German cultural scene.



an existing body of Marxist thought. Also missing is a sustained consideration of the mass appeal of Galiev's ideas. **DRR**

Art and Politics in the Weimar Period: The New Sobriety, 1917-1933

By John Willett
Pantheon, 272 pp., \$8.95

This comprehensive study of Weimar era culture is finally in paperback, and most welcome. It is essential reading for those interested in relations between art and a social and political context. The times were highly politicized, and so was art—plentiful illustrations, well-captioned, make a good case for the energy of the movement. Willett takes the study well past German boundaries, showing links between socially-committed German, central European and Russian artists, and the influence of American industrial and technological trends on them. Eventually Willett faces the hard question: "no Weimar culture," he asserts and then explains, "without Hitler's rise to power." A valuable chronology of political and artistic events is provided. **PA**

Al Qalam (The Pen)

No. 2, Oct. 1980
343 S. Dearborn St., #1607
Chicago, IL 60604

\$9 for six months, \$18/year
Each issue of this new monthly is devoted to a single topic. This month is "Focus on Iran, demystifying the Islamic revolution." The lead article discusses the relationship of politics



and religion in Iran. Other articles discuss the hostage crisis (including Khomeini's comments to the Pope's special envoy concerning THE HOSTAGES). The text of "Bill Moyer's journal: Voices on Iran" is included. Eqbal Ahmad is among *Al Qalam's* contributing writers. **JW**

Contributors: Pat Aufderheide, David Roediger, Jim Weinstein

ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

FOLK MUSIC

Been so long, been good to know you

By Ron Radosh

It was Christmas eve 1955, three years after America's foremost folk quartet, the Weavers, had been silenced by the McCarthy-era blacklist. The group—Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, Ronnie Gilbert and Fred Hellerman—decided to try and get together for one concert. They used to play the relatively small Town Hall, but the owners refused to rent it to the now controversial singers. So producer Harold Leventhal rented Carnegie Hall—"Harold was scared to death," Hellerman recalls.

His fears turned out to be groundless. The hall sold out and the concert album became the first big seller for the reunited group, which stayed together—with Erik Darling and later Frank Hamilton replacing Seeger—until 1963.

Now, 25 years later, the Weavers are singing once again—a reunion long awaited by folk aficionados—perhaps as much as children of the '60s hope for a reunion of the Beatles. The Weavers, after all, were the first group to popularize folk music, and as Joe Klein writes in his new biography of Woody Guthrie, "they were an interesting combination: Hellerman's baritone fit snugly between Hays' bass and Seeger's tenor, and Gilbert had an impressive voice that seemed capable of almost anything."

Record company executives and music publishers had been impressed when they heard the group back in 1949.

The quartet had sung at Max Gordon's club, the Village Vanguard, where they were heard by Decca records' orchestra leader and producer, Gordon Jenkins. Within six months—by mid-1950—the Weavers had a hit single, "Zena, Zena," soon followed by a string of others—"Kisses Sweeter Than Wine," "On Top of Old Smokey," Leadbelly's "Irene" and Woody Guthrie's "So Long, It's Been Good to Know You."

The quick success came to a crashing and sudden end. The Weavers' rise to fame coincided with the Korean war, the red-hunt at home and the deepening Cold War abroad. The time was not right for a group whose roots were in the democratic culture which had emerged from the era of the Popular Front. When *Red Channels* (the blacklist's basic compendium on who was not to be hired by the media) listed Pete Seeger's name, all air play for Weavers records ended and the group's appearances were cancelled. After informer Harvey Matusow named them before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) as Communists, they became total "untouchables," as David K. Dunaway wrote.

Their record sales totaled four million copies, yet Seeger marched in the 1952 May Day parade in New York wearing his World War II army uniform, carrying a sign that read "Censored." So it

was with great joy that the 1955 concert was greeted by the Weavers legion of loyal fans—who were testifying that the blacklists could not silence the music they had come to love.

But since their 1966 reunion concert, the Weavers' music has been but a memory, kept alive on the old Vanguard and Decca albums.

On the eve of their 25th Anniversary concert (31, if you count the year of formation) I spoke separately with three of the Weavers—Seeger, Hellerman and Gilbert—(Lee Hays was in

ers who made up the Weavers ready for the issues that position would raise.

Clearly, the Weavers had a big appeal. Hellerman remembers that the response they elicited was best described for him at a party by one of the Andrews sisters. A bit soused, she told him, "You know why you're great? Take a bunch of guys sitting at a bar. The juke box is playing the Weavers—or the Andrews Sisters—and they say, 'Hell, I can sing better than that.' We communicated that feeling. It wasn't really true, but

find slightly different opinions and attitudes. Ronnie Gilbert, the sole woman member, is now a feminist actress. She has lived the past few years in British Columbia and, until recently, has not paid much attention to music. It was not until she became acquainted with the songs of Holly Near, and after she listened to the work of Dory Previn, she tells me, that she again started concentrating on music. "I remembered I was a woman," she puts it, "and not just a part of the Weavers."

Ronnie Gilbert sees the Weavers' contribution as opening up folk music to the commercial arena. "We don't like to think of it this way," she says, "but the Weavers were part of the commercial world from the start." But their music retained an integrity. It was not tampered with, "not cutesy."

Unlike the other members, Gilbert liked the nightclub work—a change from the usual rallies, marches and meetings at which the other members had always sung. Audiences gravitated to them and the group soon had somewhat of a cult following. They would tell her that their singing made them feel wholesome. "We brought out the best in people," Gilbert says proudly. "When they heard us, they saw four different people

working together in a joyous way."

And she does not bemoan the commercial quality of the music. "We made the 'real thing' accessible. The next step was for people to want to hear Leadbelly, not just depend on our interpretation of his songs." Quoting Lee Hays, she agrees with him that the Weavers had a "gift" that they could use well. And she deprecates white singers who tried to imitate a black sound, rather than, as the Weavers did, seek to incorporate black music into their repertoire.

Two of the group—Hays and Seeger—had worked together for years as part of the legendary Almanac Singers, the group of folk musicians who toured the country in the '30s and '40s for the fledgling CIO unions, and before that, had sung for the American Youth Congress in the anti-war phase of the Communist movement. That association has led some commentators to see the Weavers as an attempt to reconstruct the Almanacs for a new era, or to recapture the experience of that past decade.

"I think we approached politics in an aesthetic way," Hellerman answered. "If art's going to be a weapon, it's still got to be art. So many of our songs might have had immediate merit, but

Continued on following page

The reunion of the Weavers at Carnegie Hall was as eagerly awaited by "folkies" as children of the '60s would a Beatles reunion.

poor health and saving his energy for the concert) about their reflections on their music and the times in which they have played such a vital part.

The Weavers are remembered for their commercial success as forerunners of groups that emerged in the early '60s—Peter, Paul and Mary, the Kingston Trio, the Limelites and the Tarrriers. But when they began singing in 1949 their hopes were modest. "We certainly didn't say 'Let's get a group together and make a lot of money,'" Hellerman says. "The people we were singing for in those days couldn't support one person, not alone a few."

Indeed, Hellerman and the other Weavers were part of a group of friends who met on Wednesday afternoons in Pete Seeger's basement on MacDougal Street, where they sang harmony for fun. "It was a rough time for all of us," he says. Seeger had just come through a stint of campaigning across the country with Henry Wallace in 1948, and his overwhelming defeat dashed hopes for the Progressive Party. In addition its singing vehicle, People's Songs, also closed shop. They decided to take a job singing at the Village Vanguard, when owner/producer Max Gordon decided to give them a chance, "so we could still get together on Wednesday afternoons," Hellerman says. "But the thought of making a living from it was ludicrous—we got \$50 a week each, plus sandwiches."

But the group quickly became a commercial success, much to the Weavers' amazement. That success, however, produced tension and some conflict. The group had come out of a left cultural tradition, defined in 1947 by folklorist Alan Lomax as a "democratic art," in which the folksinger consciously spoke as "the advocate of the common man." Such a cultural context was never supposed to lead to major success in the capitalist marketplace, nor were the sing-

it was a sense that the person listening could do it on his own. People feel a kind of intimacy with us; our music becomes theirs."

Differences.

The Weavers, as Seeger says, are composed of four strong individuals. It is not surprising to



The Weavers then: left to right, Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, Ronnie Gilbert and Fred Hellerman.