 Senator scores US hunger

By Bert Halstead

Senator Ernest Hollings of South Carolina was the speaker at the National Food Science Seminar last Tuesday evening.

Around fifty students and faculty members came to 9-150 to hear about "Fighting Hunger in America - The Sad Political Realities.

Senator Hollings, the assistant majority whip of the US Senate, is a strong advocate of legislation to wipe out the hunger problem, and is the author of a book, The Case Against Hunger.

He began by stating that attempts at solving the hunger problem are complicated by the political situation. Most politicians (and voters) are not aware of the magnitude of the problem, and that is why there has been no national policy on fighting hunger. "Another common misconception," he pointed out, "is that the hunger problem can be equated to the poverty problem."

Though they are clearly related, what he means by "hunger in America" is mainly malnutrition. This is not under-nourishment, the classical idea of "hunger." Many of America's hungry are not undernourished, but are just not getting anything resembling a balanced diet. A recent survey showed that there are fifteen million malnourished (or "hard-core hungry") in the United States.

The Senator went on to tell of the consequences of not addressing ourselves to the problem. He said that a malnourished young child is a prime candidate for mental retardation. He presented a typical scenario in which, because of having been fed improperly as an infant, a child falls behind in school, eventually drops out, gets into trouble and sooner or later into jail. Senator Hollings then gave some statistics about the cost of caring for convicts and retarded children, and pointed out that it would have cost less to feed these people properly than it is now costing to care for them.

Why is nothing being done? Hollings cited several political reasons, typified by what a farmer in a small South Carolina town said to him one day: "If you feed 'em, they'll never work."

Feeding programs are just not politically popular. Vice-President Agnew said, "You've seen one, you've seen them all," and was elected, while Hubert Humphrey who said, "If I were them, I'd start a riot, too." Senator Hollings said that most of the programs to alleviate hunger which are now in existence were designed mainly to solve other problems, such as surplus disposal.

The talk was followed by a question and answer period, during which Hollings clarified his position on various issues. Notably, he mentioned his feeling that a successful fight against hunger will have to be supervised locally, and not by some bureau-cracy in Washington. He also stated that he did not see a guaranteed annual income as a solution, because people would not, by and large, use the extra money to improve their diets.

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