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NATIONAL OFFICE
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
Telephone (615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Jim Newton, Assistant Director

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Food For Poor Stifled At Local Level, Hearing Testimony Says

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Billy Keith, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lynn M. Davis, Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203, Telephone (615) 254-1631
RICHMOND Jesse C. Fletcher, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (703) 353-0151
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

by Beth Hayworth

WASHINGTON (BP)--A private citizens group set up to study the problems of hunger in the nation heard reports here that large numbers of poor people are still hungry, that government efforts to feed them are being frustrated at the local level, and that church people are largely unaware of the needs and extent of the problem.

Witnesses from 12 states appeared before the Citizen's Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States in an all-day hearing planned to study progress of government food programs for poor families.

With the exception of witnesses from Collier County, Fla., where a "substantial reduction in hunger" was reported, all of the witnesses in the hearing painted a dismal picture of hunger problems in communities where they lived and worked.

The exception, Collier County, Fla., had no federal food program before 1969, and the program initiated since still does not include many migrant families, the testimony indicated.

Throughout the day-long hearing, witnesses recited their frustrations and accusations, often charging government officials with "administrative bungling," or indifference and neglect. Most of the witnesses were community leaders or the poor themselves.

At several points during the testimony, the role of the church in facing the problem of hunger in America came up.

A Lutheran College professor from Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pa., said that "church people, public officials, professionals and business people, for the most part, lack knowledge of the poverty in their midst, its cost to the community and the kind of people the poor really are."

In a later interview with Baptist Press, the professor, J. Russell Hale, said there was "strong leadership among the clergy" to correct this situation, but that the "gap between clergy and laity prevents grassroots following."

Hale's testimony centered on "hidden hunger" among elderly persons and hundreds of families in Pennsylvania's Adams County, where he lives, which has no federal food programs. County commissioners have vowed to keep it that way, he charged.

From Eastern Kentucky, a welfare rights worker said that the poor whites in his area are denied welfare and food benefits because the federal regulations are not enforced at the local level.

Nick Frasure, an organizer with the Appalachian Research and Defense Fund, told Baptist Press that two church groups had been "very helpful" in programs to help the poor. The two groups named are the Brothers of Charity, a Catholic relief organization, and PACE, an ecumenical group. There has been "very little" response from Baptist congregations as such, he said.

Complicated certification procedures and humiliating practices of local administrators were cited as some of the reasons why many poor people do not get the help that is available for them.

From Washington, D.C., an elderly woman told of getting up early to go to the welfare office to be certified for food stamps. At 7:00 in the morning there were 200 people ahead of her. She waited in line all day to complete her application.

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Others testified that many elderly poor live too far from the welfare centers or they are too old or too ill to go to the proper places for certification. There are not enough welfare workers to visit them in their homes, the testimony indicated.

From San Antonio, Tex., a spokesman for the Mexican-American population reported that "malnutrition has grown worse" in the last two years. Mrs. Marcella Hubbard cited examples of humiliation by public officials who, she said, are uninformed about federal policies for eligibility for the food programs.

One of the problems among the poor is that they do not know they are eligible for help, Mrs. Hubbard said, and the public officials in the community "do not give out this information."

From Arkansas, a spokesman for that state's Committee on Food, Nutrition and Health reported that more than one-half million of Arkansas' poor receive no benefits from federal food programs.

"Underfunding and complicated administration and auditing procedures" were among the problems cited by the Arkansas official as reasons why federal food programs were reaching only 46 per cent of the poor in that state.

The Children's Foundation, a Washington-based organization, reported that failures in the school lunch program are "especially acute" in northeastern states where 9,101 schools have no school lunch program. In the southern states this figure is 1,248, said Robert Read, field representative for the foundation.

Across the country, according to Read, there are 23,097 schools without lunch programs. Many of these schools are in the inner city or in rural areas serving large numbers of needy children, he reported.

A Vanderbilt University professor who was prominent in the leadership of the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health, suggested to the board the need for a new kind of survey relative to problems of hunger and malnutrition. Dr. James P. Carter, a pediatrician, asked for behavioral and social science studies to study the "dehumanized bureaucrats" who are the bottleneck for the government's food programs.

Citing the priority of human values, Dr. Carter said studies needed to be made on the "victimizer and the victimizing circumstances" of poverty.

"The main problem is in the human being," Dr. Carter continued. "If we can ever straighten him out, effective administration and effective remedial programs will fall into place."

President Nixon has pledged "to end hunger in America for all time," and his 1971 budget for federal food programs is more than four times larger than it was in 1968 when he took office.

The private board which sponsored the hearings was created by the Citizen's Crusade against Poverty, and is the same group that released the report, Hunger in America, in 1968. The board is made up of 25 prominent Americans representing the fields of religion, health, education business and law.

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Glorieta To Pay Taxes
On Three Property Areas

2/19/71

SANTA FE, N.M. (BP)--Glorieta Baptist Assembly will pay taxes on three areas of property as the result of a compromise finalized between the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and Santa Fe County, N.M.

The settlement came as the result of a complaint filed by the board in 1969 against the tax assessor, the Board of Commissions and the treasurer of Santa Fe County, N.M., in the district court of Santa Fe County after the assembly was placed on the county assessment list at a value of \$10 million. The complaint called for a judgment acknowledging that the assembly property and all its buildings are Southern Baptist church property used for religious, charitable and educational purposes and thus exempt from taxation under the New Mexico Constitution.

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The three areas of property involved in the compromise are the gift and camera shop, the washateria and the service station. New Mexico officials have not yet notified the assembly of the amount of taxes to be assessed on these properties.

Witnesses in behalf of the Sunday School Board at a hearing last August were Harry Stagg, former executive secretary of the Baptist Convention of New Mexico and James L. Sullivan, executive secretary-treasurer of the board.

Stagg discussed the establishment of the assembly and efforts on the part of New Mexico Baptists to have it built in New Mexico.

Sullivan explained the purpose and use of the assembly and the relationships of the assembly, the Sunday School Board and the Southern Baptist Convention.

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Press Association Elects
Odle, Decries Postal Rates

2/19/71

SARASOTA, Fla. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Press Association, meeting for its annual session here, elected a Mississippi editor as its president and adopted resolutions opposing proposed new postal regulations, and urging Baptist agencies, boards and institutions to invite Baptist newsmen to attend their board meetings.

Elected President of the organization, composed primarily of the editors of Baptist state papers, was Joe T. Odle, editor of the Baptist Record, Jackson, Miss. Named president elect was James O. Duncan, editor of the Capital Baptist, Washington, D.C.

After debating the issue in the final hour of the meeting, the editors adopted a brief resolution expressing opposition to proposed new federal postal regulations. The substitute motion, offered by Indiana Baptist Editor Al Shackelford, stated:

"In view of the proposed radical change in postal rates, we urge serious consideration be given to the handicap such regulations would impose on non-profit publications."

An earlier resolution proposed by Editor John Roberts of the Baptist Courier in Columbia, S.C., urged that due consideration be given to the special hardships that second and third class postal rate increases would cause among the 33 Baptist publications with a combined circulation of 1.6 million. The proposal would increase postage costs about 150 per cent for the Baptist publications, the editors said.

In the discussion, several editors pointed out that the original resolution sounded as if the editors were asking for government subsidies and for special privileges and that the arguments were similar to those used by advocates of federal aid to parochial and church-related schools and institutions.

Another resolution expressed appreciation "to those agencies, boards and institutions that have invited representatives of the Baptist news media to attend their official board meeting," and expressing "our wish that this be a future practice of all these bodies."

Earlier, Editor Robert Hastings of the Illinois Baptist, Carbondale, reported on results of a survey he conducted among SBC agencies and state Baptist conventions asking whether their policies permitted new reporters to attend their board meetings.

Generally, Hastings said, the responses indicated that representatives of Baptist news media could attend such board meetings, but there was greater vagueness on the policies among Baptist seminaries.

Voicing opposition to closed door meetings in Baptist life, Hastings said that "the executive session is a device to build egos," and that "when we close the door, we are trying to play God."

He pointed out that an Illinois state law states that any government body supported by public tax funds must be open by the public, on the basis that if the public is paying the bill, then the public has a right to know what happens. The parallel to that is, Hastings said, if the average church member is paying the bill, he has a right to know what happens at Baptist board meetings.

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The director of the School of Journalism at Southern Illinois University, H.R. Long, said in another speech that in the secular press, a trend toward centralization is marked by the purchase of newspapers by corporations "which have no more interest in the public right to have access to information than a butcher."

Most of the addresses were brought by editors of Baptist state papers who outlined their philosophies of editing, editorial writing, and the role of the editor.

Albert McClellan, program planning secretary for the Southern Baptist Executive Committee and a former editor of the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger, brought three addresses on the history influence and future of Baptist journalism.

In other actions, the association approved a committee report recommending that the dues structure be doubled, and approved on first reading for final action next year a constitution change which would limit membership to "news-oriented" Baptist publications with associate membership available to non-news oriented Baptist journals.

Shackleford, editor of the Indiana Baptist, was re-elected as secretary of the association.

Next year, the editors will meet in Kentucky, Feb. 14-16, 1972, with sessions slated in Biloxi, Miss., Feb. 12-14, 1973.

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DAVIS C. WOOLLEY
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
127 NINTH AVE. N.
NASHVILLE, TENN. 37203

CUTLINES FOR BP RELEASED FEB. 19, 1971

EDITORS ELECT ODLE: Editors of the Baptist state papers, during annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Press Association at the Sheraton Sandcastle Motor Inn at Sarasota, Fla., elected Joe T. Odle, (center), editor of the Baptist Record in Jackson, Miss., as president. Named president-elect was James O. Duncan, (right) editor of the Capital Baptist, Washington, D.C. Alvin C. Shackelford (left), editor of the Indiana Baptist, was re-elected secretary treasurer. (BP) Photo.