A CORPORATE RESPONSE TO
HUNGER IN AMERICA

PRESENTED AT THE
SYMPOSIUM ON POVERTY AND WORLD HUNGER
JANUARY 18, 1986

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. CENTER FOR NONVIOLENT SOCIAL CHANGE, INC.

REMARKS BY
WILLIAM S. WOODSIDE
CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

AMERICAN CAN COMPANY
I DEEPLY APPRECIATE YOUR INVITATION TO ADDRESSES
THIS SECOND NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON POVERTY AND
WORLD HUNGER, IT IS MOST APPROPRIATE THAT
THIS SYMPOSIUM BE HELD AS PART OF KING WEEK --
FOR THE SOCIAL JUSTICE THAT DR. KING FOUGHT
FOR DOES MEAN AN END TO THE DEBILITATION OF
POVERTY AND HUNGER.

WORLD HUNGER HAS RECEIVED A LOT OF ATTENTION
THIS YEAR IN THE AMERICAN PRESS AND ON RADIO
AND TELEVISION. AND TODAY, YOU HAVE ADDED TO
THE EFFORT TO ALLEVIATE THESE PROBLEMS.

BUT, I AM AFRAID WE AMERICANS WHO RESPOND TO
THE DEVASTATION OVERSEAS STILL DO NOT PAY
ENOUGH ATTENTION TO THE HUNGER THAT EXISTS IN
OUR OWN COUNTRY.
WE SEEM TO ASSUME THAT BECAUSE WE ARE THE RICHEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD, HUNGER EITHER DOES NOT EXIST OR THAT IT EXISTS ONLY AS AN OCCASIONAL AND SHORT-LIVED PHENOMENA,

THAT IS NOT THE CASE,
HUNGER NOT ONLY EXISTS IN THIS COUNTRY. IT INCREASES EVERY DAY. THE U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS REPORTS CASELOADS HAVE INCREASED 300 TO 400 PERCENT IN THE FOOD PANTRIES AND SOUP KITCHENS OF THEIR CITIES. SIMILAR RESULTS ARE REPORTED BY THE FOOD RESEARCH AND ACTION CENTER, SECOND HARVEST AND THE PHYSICIANS TASK FORCE ON HUNGER.
BUT YOU CAN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND HUNGER IN AMERICA UNTIL YOU LOOK BEHIND THOSE NUMBERS AND THOSE REPORTS. THEN YOU FIND A WOMAN WHOSE DIET CONSISTS PRIMARILY OF COFFEE AND CRACKERS TWICE A DAY, SO HER CHILDREN CAN HAVE THE SMALL AMOUNT OF NOURISHING FOOD THAT IS AVAILABLE TO THE FAMILY,

YOU FIND A FAMILY THAT TRIES NOT TO SPEND ANY MONEY ON FOOD ONE WEEK A MONTH SO THE CHILDREN CAN HAVE SHOES AND CLOTHING AND THE FAMILY CAN STAY OUT OF DEBT,

YOU FIND AN ELDERLY WOMAN WHO EATS A CUP OF BEANS AND A SMALL SQUARE OF FRIED BREAD EACH DAY -- AND NOTHING ELSE -- BECAUSE SHE IS TOO EMBARRASSED TO ASK FOR HELP.
You find a one year old baby who weighs only 15 pounds and can barely sit up,

You find people who, deprived of
and constant stress:
insist they are not suffering from

These people are young, middle-aged and elderly. They are white, black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American. They live in cities, small towns and rural areas, they are found in every section of this nation, they include the chronically poor and the working poor. For some, the struggle for food is a familiar story. For others, it is a new experience.
BUT THOUGH THEIR SITUATIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES ARE DIFFERENT, THEY ALL SHARE A COMMON BOND: THEY ARE HUNGRY OR MALNOURISHED,

I MENTION ALL PEOPLE BELIEVE

THE HUNGER ISSUES ARE OVERSTATED OR OVER-DRAMATIZED IN THE U.S. THE SKEPTICS SAY THE FAMILY THAT MISSES FOUR MEALS A MONTH HAS A DIFFERENT LEVEL OF NEED THAN THE FAMILY THAT MISSES TEN MEALS A MONTH. THEY SAY ONE SHOULD NOT

COMPARE THE FAMILY THAT HAS BEEN UNABLE TO PROVIDE ENOUGH FOOD FOR THEIR CHILDREN FOR A YEAR WITH THE FAMILY THAT HAS ONLY BEEN IN THAT SITUATION FOR A FEW WEEKS. THEY SAY DO NOT PLACE THE PERSON WHO DOES NOT REGARD HIMSELF OR HERSELF AS A VICTIM
OF HUNGER IN THE SAME CATEGORY AS A

PERSON WHO DOES.
IN A NARROW SENSE, THESE CRITICS ARE RIGHT.

THE MILLIONS OF HUNGRY OR MALNOURISHED AMERICANS ARE NOT ALL IN THE SAME CIRCUMSTANCES. THEIR LEVELS OF NEED DO VARY. THEIR VIEWS OF THEMSELVES VARY. THEIR HOPES, EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES ALL VARY, SO DO THE BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES THEY V\!ERCOME IN ORDER TO OBTAIN FOOD FROM GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS.

BUT HUNGER IS NOT A COMPETITION TO DETERMINE WHO IS THE MOST HUNGRY, THE MOST NEEDY, THE MOST DESERVING, IT IS NOT A CONTEST IN WHICH THE GOAL IS TO DEVISE A SCALE OF NEED AND THEN RIGOROUSLY DOLE OUT OUR COMPASSION AND ASSISTANCE TO THOSE WHO MEET THE APPROPRIATE CRITERIA.
Do we want a standard of need that says only the desperate should apply?

Do we honestly believe that people who have maintained their pride and dignity do not feel the pangs of hunger or the pain of being unable to adequately care for their families? Of course not.

The issues we need to address are not whether family A is hungrier than family B; Mr. X more capable of providing for his children than Mr. Z; or the ratio between the number of people who are chronically hungry and the number who are episodically hungry.

That debate helps nobody, the issues we need to address are:
FIRST, OUR INADEQUATE RESPONSE TO THE HUNGER THAT EXISTS IN THIS COUNTRY TODAY.

SECOND, THE POVERTY THAT IS THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF HUNGER,

THIRD, THE VERY REAL POSSIBILITY THAT WE ARE BECOMING A TWO-TIERED SOCIETY - A SOCIETY DIVIDED BY INCOME, LIVING STANDARD,

EDUCATION,

HEALTH AND OPPORTUNITY; A SOCIETY THAT IS PERHAPS TOO COMPLACENT ABOUT POVERTY AND HUNGER.
THE SHORTCOMINGS OF FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN AMPLY DOCUMENTED BY MANY DIFFERENT SOURCES. SOME $12 BILLION HAS BEEN CUT FROM THESE PROGRAMS IN THE PAST THREE YEARS -- $7 BILLION FROM THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM AND $5 BILLION FROM THE SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS,
THE FEDERAL FOOD STAMP PROGRAM NO LONGER IS A PROGRAM BASED ON HOW MUCH IT ACTUALLY COSTS PEOPLE TO EAT. IT'S A PROGRAM DESIGNED TO KEEP FEDERAL SPE'-' "WM, THE "THRIFTY FOOD F_ CH THE PROGRAM IS BASED IS THE CHEAPEST FOOD PLAN EVER DEVISED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE. "THE THRIFTY FOOD PLAN," AS ONE TASK FORCE NOTED, "IS AN EXAMPLE OF BUREAUCRACY GONE AWRY. A FEDERAL EXPENDITURE LEVEL WAS SET, AND A COMPUTER WAS PROGRAMMED TO DESIGN A FOOD PLAN EQUAL TO THAT LEVEL -- IRRESPECTIVE OF HUMAN NEEDS,"
THE SECOND ISSUE WE HAVE TO ADDRESS IS WHY PEOPLE ARE HUNGRY OR MALNOURISHED, MANY REASONS CAN BE CITED: UNEMPLOYMENT, REDUCED UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE, BUDGET CUTS IN FEDERAL AND STATE "SAFETY NET" PROGRAMS, THE INCREASED TAX BURDEN PLACED ON THE WORKING POOR, INCREASED LIVING COSTS WHILE INCOME REMAINS STABLE OR DECLINES, AND INADEQUATE NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION,

BUT THE BASIC REASON MOST PEOPLE GO HUNGRY IS THAT THEY ARE POOR, THEY JUST DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY THE FOOD THEY AND THEIR FAMILIES NEED.
LAST FALL, YOU MAY REMEMBER, THE CENSUS BUREAU REPORTED THAT POVERTY HAD DECLINED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN SEVERAL YEARS, DROPPING FROM THE 15.2 PERCENT TGI.TF 1983 TO 14.4 PERCENT IN 1984 OF THE MOST SUBSTANTIAL DECLINES IN THE PAST 17 YEARS. SINCE THE POVERTY RATE TRADITIONALLY MOVES IN CLOSE TANDEM WITH THE ECONOMY, THIS DATA PROVIDED GROUNDS FOR SOME OPTIMISM.

EXCEPT THAT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT NEW DATA TO EMERGE FROM THE NEW CENSUS REPORT WERE NOT THE NUMBERS SHOWING A DECLINE IN POVERTY BETWEEN THIS YEAR AND LAST YEAR. THEY WERE THE NUMBERS SHOWING HIGH RATES OF POVERTY CONTINUING TO PERSIST OVER TIME IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT UNEMPLOYMENT HAS BEEN STEADILY DECLINING.
THE IMPLICATIONS ARE STUNNING, BECAUSE THE DATA SUGGESTS THAT DESPITE YEAR-TO-YEAR SHIFTS IN POVERTY RATES, A DRAMATIC INCREASE HAS OCCURRED IN THE BASIC BEDROCK OF POVERTY, IN OTHER WORDS, A SUBSTANTIALLY LARGER GROUP OF PEOPLE IS RELATIVELY UNAFFECTED BY IMPROVEMENTS IN OVERALL ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE, WE HAVE, IT SEEMS, REACHED A NEW PLATEAU OF POVERTY, AND IT'S A HIGHER PLATEAU, NOT A LOWER ONE,

THIS BRINGS ME TO MY THIRD POINT,
FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, WE HAVE WITNESSED THE
FULL DEBILITATING EFFECT OF POVERTY -- OF
HOMELESSNESS, HUNGER, UNEMPLOYMENT, ILLITERACY,
ISOLATION, LACK OF OPPORTUNITY; NOT NECESSARILY
ALL AT ONCE, BUT FREQUENTLY ENOUGH AND IN
COMBINATIONS THAT MAKE IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE
FOR LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE TO ESCAPE FROM
THIS TRAP INTO WHICH THEY HAVE FALLEN,

NOW, HOWEVER, I FEAR WE MAY BE WITNESSING
SOMETHING ELSE: A NATION ON THE WAY TO
BECOMING A TWO-TIERED SOCIETY: ONE AFFLUENT,
WELL-HOUSING, WELL-EDUCATED, WELL-FED, IN GOOD
HEALTH AND FULLY EMPLOYED; THE OTHER POOR,
INADEQUATELY HOUSED, INADEQUATELY FED,
UNEMPLOYED OR UNDEREMPLOYED, AND IN POOR
HEALTH,
THE NEW YORK TIMES TOOK NOTE OF THIS TREND IN A FRONT PAGE ARTICLE ON POVERTY AND YOUTH ON OCTOBER 20. "COMPLEX SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FACTORS ARE CREATING A VAST NEW CLASS OF POOR AMERICANS WHO ARE MUCH YOUNGER, LESS EDUCATED AND LIKELY TO GIVE BIRTH SOONER THAN RECENT GENERATIONS OF THE POOR," THE TIMES NOTED,

THE ARTICLE POINTED OUT THAT 32 PERCENT OF ALL CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY WERE BLACK EVEN THOUGH BLACKS COMPRISED ONLY 15 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION; MORE THAN HALF OF ALL POOR CHILDREN LIVED WITH THEIR MOTHERS IN A SINGLE-PARENT HOME; AND THAT POVERTY RATES NOW WERE INCREASING AMONG TWO-PARENT
HOUSEHOLDS AS WELL.
THE REASONS FOR AND IMPLICATIONS ABOUT THE DATA WERE NOT FULLY CLEAR. BUT THE TRENDS WERE FRIGHTENING ENOUGH TO DRAW THE FOLLOWING COMMENT FROM SENATOR DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN:

"THE U.S. TODAY MAY BE THE FIRST SOCIETY IN HISTORY WHERE CHILDREN MUCH WORSE OFF THAN ADULTS. I REALIZED WE HAVE A PROBLEM OF SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL CHANGE UNLIKE ANYTHING WE HAVE EXPERIENCED IN THE PAST, AND WE ARE COMPLETELY IGNORING IT."

SO HOW DO WE AVOID THIS CHAIN OF EVENTS?

WE START WITH A CHANGE OF ATTITUDES.
AMERICA IN 1985 IS A COUNTRY THAT, ON THE WHOLE, IS PRETTY SATISFIED WITH ITSELF, MOST OF US ARE IN GOOD FINANCIAL SHAPE, WE CERTAINLY HAVE MORE LUXURIES AND LEISURE TIME THAN WE EVER EXPECTED TO HAVE, AND WE WANT TO PROTECT AND MAINTAIN ALL THAT WE HAVE ACCUMULATED.

THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH THAT. BUT I WONDER IF TOO MANY OF US ARE STARTING TO FEEL THAT THE ONLY WAY TO KEEP WHAT WE HAVE IS TO MAKE SURE NOBODY ELSE GETS ANY. I WONDER IF THE EMOTIONAL GENEROSITY THAT ONCE WAS THE HALLMARK OF THIS COUNTRY IS BEGINNING TO GIVE WAY TO A MEAN-SPIRITEDNESS; A SENSE OF I'VE-GOT-MINE-AND-THAT'S-ALL-THAT-COUNTS;

A FEELING THAT IF YOU'RE POOR, IT'S YOUR OWN FAULT; IF YOU'RE HANDICAPPED, IT'S BECAUSE YOU
DON'T HAVE THE WILL TO CHANGE,
WE USE WORDS LIKE "FAMILY," "COMMUNITY," "SHARING," AND "UNDERSTANDING," BUT THOSE WORDS WILL HAVE LITTLE MEANING IF OUR PEOPLE AND OUR INSTITUTIONS BECOME INCREASINGLY DISCONNECTED AND ISOLATED FROM EACH OTHER.

ALL OF US WANT OURSELVES WE ARE DOING MORE FOR OTHERS, WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL THAT WHEN WE TALK THE LANGUAGE OF SACRIFICE,

WE DO NOT PRACTICE THE POLITICS OF SELFISHNESS,
PERHAPS OUR AWARENESS THAT THE ECONOMIC PIE, ONCE CONSIDERED INFINITE, ACTUALLY HAS SOME LIMITS IS THE REASON FOR THIS APPARENT SHIFT IN NATIONAL ATTITUDES, WHATEVER THE REASON, THE TASK BEFORE US REMAINS THE SAME, THIS NATION NEEDS TO REDISCOVER THE SOCIAL VISION IT HAS HAD IN YEARS PAST: A SOCIAL VISION BASED ON SOMETHING MORE MEANINGFUL AND MORE ENDURING THAN A DESIRE TO PROTECT THE PERSONAL POSSESSIONS WE HAVE ACCUMULATED AND THE STATUS WE HAVE ATTAINED IN OUR PRIVATE LIVES. WE NEED TO DEVELOP A CONSENSUS BASED ON COMPASSION FOR OTHERS, THAT LOOKS AT HUNGER, POVERTY AND LACK OF OPPORTUNITY NOT AS ECONOMIC, MEDICAL OR EVEN POLITICAL ISSUES; BUT AS HUMAN ISSUES.

I BELIEVE WE CAN REAWAKEN THAT SENSE OF CARING AND COMPASSION.
MANY PROPOSALS HAVE BEEN ADVANCED THAT WOULD ALLOW THIS NATION TO COMBAT HUNGER, REDUCE POVERTY AND STOP APPARENT DRIFT TOWARD A TWO-TIERED SOCIETY. THOSE THAT MERIT SPECIAL ATTENTION INCLUDE:

0 AN UNEQUIVOCAL PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO PROVIDE PEOPLE IN NEED WITH ACCESS TO A DIET THAT IS BOTH NUTRITIOUS AND AFFORDABLE,

0 JOB CREATION STRATEGIES THAT ENABLE LOW-INCOME PERSONS TO COMPETE MORE EFFECTIVELY IN THE JOB MARKET.
USING OUR TAX SYSTEM AS A MEANS OF KEEPING PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY,

NATIONAL MINIMUM BENEFIT LEVELS TIED TO INFLATION FOR THOSE WHO WILL CONTINUE TO NEED PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS SUCH AS AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN,

AND YES, COALITIONS AND PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS THAT INVOLVE ALL SECTORS IN THE EFFORT TO STIMULATE OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES TO SET APPROPRIATE PRIORITIES AND ACT ON THEM.
WHEN THE CHAIRMAN OF A MAJOR AMERICAN CORPORATION PROPOSES INCREASED FEDERAL SPENDING FOR PROGRAMS DEALING WITH HUNGER AND POVERTY, SOMEONE - WHAT ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR? CLEARLY, THERE IS A ROLE FOR VOLUNTARISM AND PRIVATE SECTOR PROGRAMS AIMED AT COMBATING HUNGER AND POVERTY, PRIVATE OR VOLUNTARY EFFORTS ARE FREQUENTLY MORE RESPONSIVE TO INDIVIDUALS THAN LARGE BUREAUCRACIES, AND THERE ARE ASPECTS TO THESE PROBLEMS THAT DO NOT LEND THEMSELVES TO POLITICAL OR PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTIONS,
I AM A BUSINESSMAN WHO WAS TRAINED

AS AN ECONOMIST, I KNOW THE DANGERS

OF DEFICIT

SPENDING, AND I STRONGLY FAVOR A PROGRAM

THAT REDUCES THE DEFICIT, I KNOW WE

NEED TO

SUSTAIN LONG-TERM, NON-INFLATIONARY

ECONOMIC GROWTH, I KNOW REDRESS OUR

STAGGERING TRADE.
Basically, though, the tasks before us are ones in which the Federal Government must take the major leadership role, the private sector can help, but the basic leadership, commitment and funding must come from government, there simply is no other way, we have seen history repeat itself in the past five years with the increase in hunger and we have the models for an effective solution, we cannot be deterred by those who say the Federal deficit is our first priority,
BUT I AM UNWILLING TO PUT OFF
RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT TO THE POOR
AND THE HUNGRY UNTIL WE PUT OUR
ECONOMIC HOUSE IN ORDER. I AM
UNWILLING BECAUSE WE ARE SEEING MORE
AND MORE EVIDENCE THAT THE GAP
BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR CAN
WIDEN EVEN WHEN THERE IS ECONOMIC
GROWTH. I AM UNWILLING BECAUSE

THINK PROGRAMS TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY AND
HUNGER SHOULD BE DETERMINED BY NATIONAL
NEED, NOT THE OFTEN ABSTRACT AND
UNATTAINABLE CONCEPT OF

"DOLLAR AVAILABILITY." I AM UNWILLING
BECAUSE THE POOR AND THE HUNGRY HAVE
BEEN ASKED TO SHOULDER TOO MANY BUDGET
CUTS ALREADY.
CUTS IN SOCIAL PROGRAMS DEALING WITH
POVERTY AND HUNGER ONLY INCREASE
SUFFERING WHILE MAKING A TOKEN IMPACT
ON THE DEFICIT, IF WE REALLY WANT TO
MAKE A DENT IN THE DEFICIT, THERE IS
MORE THAN ENOUGH FAT IN THE DEFENSE
BUDGET TO SUPPORT DEFICIT REDUCTION AND
INCREASED SPENDING FOR THE HUNGER AND
POVERTY PROGRAMS I HAVE DESCRIBED, WE ARE
CONTINUALLY TOLD WE MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN
GUNS AND BUTTER. BUT THIS COUNTRY DOESN'T
NEED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN GUNS AND BUTTER.
THIS COUNTRY NEEDS TO STOP USING THE
BUTTER MONEY TO BUY GUNS. THIS IS
ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT AS WE GRAPPLE
WITH BALANCED BUDGET LEGISLATION, WE CAN
NOT ALLOW FURTHER CUTS IN HUNGER AND
POVERTY PROGRAMS.
FINALLY, WE NEED TO
REMEMBER THAT WE ARE NOT
JUST A PLURALISTIC
SOCIETY; WE ARE ALSO AN
INTERDEPENDENT SOCIETY.
AND NO SOCIETY, NO MATTER
HOW STRONG OR SECURE IT
FEELS AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT,
CAN SURVIVE IF ITS PEOPLE
LOSE
SIGHT OF EACH THEY EXIST APART FROM
EACH OTHER AND TO RESPOND TO EACH OTHER.

THAT IS THE DANGER BEFORE
US AND WHY, IN MY
JUDGEMENT, WE SHOULD PAY
PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO
WHAT FRANKLIN DELANO
ROOSEVELT TOLD US

MORE THAN 50 YEARS AGO. "THE TEST OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY, ROOSEVELT SAID, IS NOT HOW WELL WE TAKE CARE OF OUR AFFLUENT. IT IS HOW WELL WE TAKE CARE OF OUR POOR."

THANK YOU.