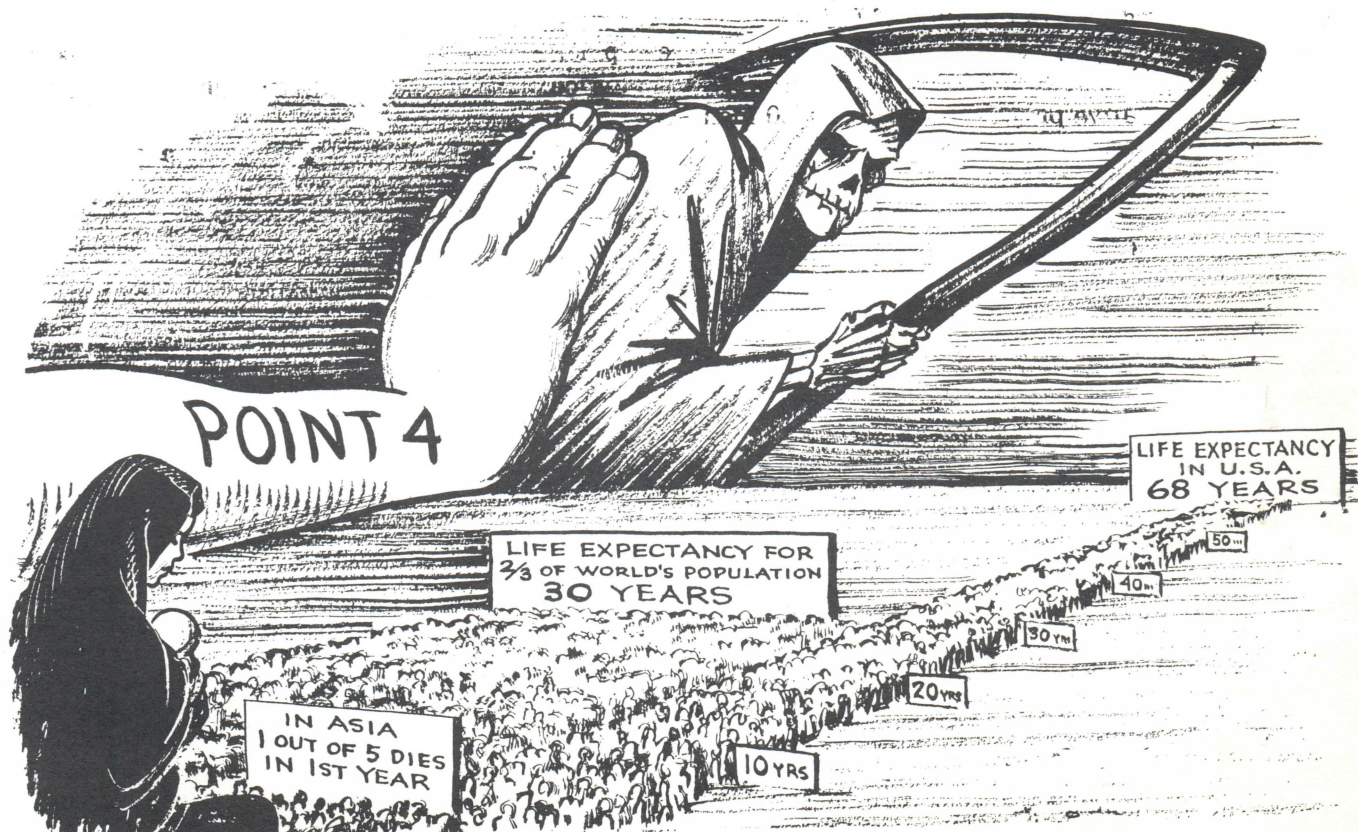


Primer on World Politics

By Leonard S. Kenworthy



Primer on World Politics

By Leonard S. Kenworthy

SOME PEOPLE say that the world is getting smaller and in a sense that is true. But in another sense it is constantly growing larger, for the informed citizen of this second half of the 20th Century must cope with fast-breaking events in 85 to 90 nations instead of the few which monopolized the limelight a few years ago. In addition, he must keep in touch with the work of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, with the foreign policy of the United States, and with domestic policies as they relate to the world scene.

That seems like a large order for anyone—and it is. The task is so great that many people recoil from even beginning their basic training on world affairs.

Yet there are a few basic facts which should serve as a background for any thinking about the world community today. These are facts which we should have at our fingertips as we read the newspapers, listen to the radio, or watch TV.

At the risk of oversimplification, the writer would like to suggest six facts which might well serve as a "Primer on World Affairs" for all citizens in the United States. With them in mind anyone should have a better perspective on the contemporary world scene.

Here are the six:

Fact One—Most of the World Lives in Asia

Of the seven most populous countries in the world, six are in the East. First comes China with 464 million, then India with 358 million, followed by the U.S.S.R. with about 200 million, and the United States with 157 million. The next three

are fairly close in the number of their inhabitants, but the most recent figures released by the UN give Japan 83 million, Pakistan 75 million, and Indonesia 74 million.

Of these nations the United States is the only one definitely not in Asia. The U.S.S.R., of course, is partially in Europe and partially in Asia, but with more affinity for Asia than for its Western neighbors.

The great majority of mankind lives in Asia—a fact which is having a far greater impact on world affairs than most Americans realize.

Fact Two—Most of the World Is Non-White

Coupled with our recognition of the fact that most of the world lives in Asia should be a realization that most people are not white. It seems strange to most Americans to think in terms of belonging to the "white minority" of the world, but some day we must begin to reckon with this fact—and the sooner the better.

What would happen to our international relations with Africa or Southeast Asia or to our domestic policies regarding discrimination and segregation if the majority of U.S. citizens began to think of themselves as part of a racial minority in our contemporary world? Certainly there would be some radical readjustments at home and abroad.

LEONARD S. KENWORTHY, associate professor of education at Brooklyn College, is consultant to the School Affiliation Service of the American Friends Service Committee. A former member of the UNESCO secretariat and former president of the Middle States Council for Social Studies, Kenworthy has written a number of works on the personalities and policies of the UN for schools and the general public.

Fact Three—Most of the World Is Poor

Another fact we must face as Americans is the staggering poverty of the world. In the United States we tend to assume a high standard of living. An automobile, a radio, a refrigerator, and even a TV set are now considered "normal." It is difficult for us to realize that these are all dazzling luxuries far beyond the reach of most of mankind.

According to figures supplied by the UN, each American has an average income of \$1453—three times the average for Western Europe, nearly ten times the average for Latin America, almost 14 times the average for Africa, more than 16 times the average for the Middle East, more than 25 times the average for South Asia, and nearly 50 times the average for Southeast Asia.

The specific figures are: United States, \$1453; Western Europe, \$473; Latin America, \$152; Africa, \$118; the Middle East, \$89; South Asia, \$55, and Southeast Asia, \$30.

It is true that many families in the world live off the land, and their incomes add up to more than these "averages." Yet, because the figures are "averages," millions of people live on far less than the sums cited.

If we were more fully aware of these facts, we might have a much clearer concept of our role in the world and we might be willing to make major changes in our approach to the "have-not" nations of the world.

Fact Four—Most of the World Is Ill-Fed

A corollary of Fact Three is the fact that most of the world is hungry. Perhaps two-thirds of the world goes to bed each night undernourished. That is almost incomprehensible to those of us who have enough—and to spare—all our lives.

The facts are easily available to support this assertion. In its recent study of the world food supply, the Food and Agriculture Organization

secured as reliable data as can be found. In its published reports it states that a "calorie intake of 2550-2650 is the minimum level to which the low-calorie countries should be raised. . ." Among the countries subsisting on less than this diet are Japan, Pakistan, Indo-China, India, Burma, Ceylon, Egypt, Chile, Colombia, and Italy.

Is it any wonder that the peoples of many parts of the world look with envy and sometimes with a little malice on the surplus foods stored in bins and silos across the United States and wonder, when they read of rotting and rancid piles of food, why aid to India or some other country is debated so long in Congress and elsewhere?

Fact Five—Most of The World Is Sick

Largely because they are poor and underfed, most of the world is sick. According to the World Health Organization, malaria claims 300 million victims a year and kills three million. Tuberculosis kills five million people throughout the world every year. Trachoma covers four-fifths of the globe; in a country like Egypt, over half of the people are affected by it. Treponematoses (a name which embraces such diseases as syphilis, yaws, bejel, and pinta) claims millions of men, women, and children annually.

A child born today in the Netherlands can expect to live approximately 70 years; in the United States, about 68 years. In India and in many other parts of the world the average life expectancy has not yet passed 30. Such are the extremes in a world which some persons characterize as "One."

It is exciting to think what might be accomplished if the United States and some of the other nations became concerned about the health of the world. It might radically alter our niggardly contribution to the World Health Organization, which was just under \$3,000,000 in 1953. It might change our approach to the Point Four program. It might also alter the thinking of many people about medical mission-

aries in many parts of this globe.

Fact Six—Most of The World Is Illiterate

It is difficult to get reliable figures on illiteracy. The word is not easily defined, and figures for a given country may vary considerably according to the definition used. But authorities are agreed that at least half of the world is illiterate. Some place the figure for illiteracy at 60 per cent, some at 65 or 70 per cent, and a few as high as 75 per cent.

In recent years Mexico, Turkey, the U.S.S.R., Puerto Rico, and other countries have made strides in extending educational opportunities to a larger proportion of their children and adults, but vast areas of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe are still far behind the more developed nations in their efforts to combat illiteracy.

Again, it would be interesting to see what would happen to the support of UNESCO and its fundamental education program if these statistics were really comprehended and people knew what that organization is doing in the drive for a literate world.

* * *

Here are six basic facts for every enlightened citizen in the United States. They have been briefly stated here, but the implications that can be drawn from them are staggering and revolutionary. Perhaps these points should constitute a "Primer on World Affairs" for every boy and girl in American schools and for every adult study group in our rich, powerful, predominantly white, well-fed, relatively healthy, literate Western world nation.

