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FOREIGN AID AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC

May 29, 1963

Discussion about the foreign aid program this past two months has invariably centered around the Clay Report. Some of this discussion has been illuminating and helpful; much has been confused and harmful.

One of the most mis-guided arguments raised in the discussion of the Clay Report is that which contends that since the foreign aid program is more unpopular today than ever before, a critical report will only tend to increase the unpopularity of foreign aid among the American public. This argument is based on a fundamentally unsound premise -- that foreign aid is unpopular with the American people. On the question of the popularity of foreign aid, I should like to call attention to a recent Gallup Poll ~~release~~ which indicated that, contrary to a widespread mythology, foreign aid is more popular with the American public today than ever before.

A study of a whole sequence of findings of the Gallup Polls

Alvord

from 1955 to 1963 shows that:

Popular support of the foreign aid program is at a high point for the entire nine-year period.

Today 58 per cent of the American people record themselves as approving foreign aid, 30 per cent oppose, and 12 per cent are neither for nor against it.

There is no great variation between the different sections of the country: in the South 55 per cent approve; East, 60 per cent; Midwest, 58 per cent; Far West 59 per cent.

In recent years, despite the appropriation of about \$4 billion annually, popular support has not, as widely believed, been declining; voter approval has been going up and voter opposition has been going down.

Despite this evidence of increasing public acceptance of and support for the foreign aid program, the myth is still widely circulated that foreign aid is more unpopular today than ever before.

Indeed, this line appears to have become the "conventional wisdom"

for journalists writing on the problem of foreign aid. If the evidence cited from these Gallup Polls is reliable, the American public may well be ahead of the Congress in its acceptance of the value of the foreign aid program.

as usual

But if the American public is disposed to accept the foreign aid program, it is also clear that the public is very badly informed about it. The same Gallup Poll revealed that most Americans believe that our foreign aid appropriation is much higher than \$4 billion dollars, is a much larger percentage of the American gross national product than the actual 1 per cent. Forty per cent of the people polled think that foreign aid appropriations represent over 10 per cent of the national budget rather than the actual 5 per cent. More than 80 per cent of the people did not know the approximate amount appropriated for foreign aid.

What is more important than this ignorance about the statistics

of the foreign aid program is a widespread unawareness of what actually has been accomplished by the ~~program~~^g -- of the thousands of people that have been fed by the Food for Peace program, of the people who have received decent housing and health facilities, of the people who have seen new schools built and teachers trained to educate their children. There is a lack of awareness of the accomplishments of the foreign aid program in creating ~~more~~ viable economies by building dams, roads, and industries; by modernizing agricultural systems and aiding in the training of the public administrators and technicians needed to run a modern government and a modern economy.

Samplings of American public opinion have indicated clearly that support for the foreign aid program increases in direct proportion to knowledge of the foreign aid program. Among those well informed on foreign aid, support for the program was 40 per cent higher than among the uninformed. There is therefore a great opportunity and a great responsibility for a group like this to take the lead in

informing the American public on the true record of the foreign aid program. A public that is not only receptive to foreign aid by well-informed on it will actively support those members of the Congress who take the lead in assuring adequate appropriations for foreign aid.

In telling the story about foreign aid to the American public, you can draw upon a record of proven success. We have had four foreign aid programs that have achieved unquestionable success. The first was the most successful of all -- the Marshall Plan. Americans know something about its success -- and cannot resist the temptation to judge all later aid programs by the standard of success achieved by the Marshall Plan. They fail to remember that this program aided the reconstruction of the war-ravaged economies of highly developed, highly skilled European nations which are radically different from underdeveloped countries of the southern half of the world.

The second success in the field of foreign aid was the Point Four program which sent trained American technicians to all parts

of the world. On two trips to Latin America during the past two years most of the people I spoke to referred to American foreign aid as "Point Four." "Point Four" was the program they remembered.

#3 The third success in the field of foreign aid has been the Food for Peace program. Through this program, millions of persons, both children and adults, have been able to share in America's agricultural miracle. This success continues as the program expands. Today U. S. food is reaching an average of 92 million people a day in more than 100 countries throughout the world.

Food
for
Peace

#4 A fourth success in foreign aid should be mentioned -- even though it is only slightly more than a year old. I refer of course to the Peace Corps -- by any standard a smashing success.

Peace
Corps

There are at least three striking characteristics which should be noted about the last of these three successful programs (Point Four, Food for Peace and the Peace Corps). All three of these

involve the outlay of comparatively small amounts of American dollars. All three have an immediate impact upon the recipient country. All three benefit the common people, rather than the elite group. Because they benefit the common people, they have been gratefully received.

Although the record is mixed when we come to the area of long-range economic aid, there have been some notable successes here also.

In Greece, Israel and Taiwan, U. S. assistance has helped build strong economies that will soon be able to stand on their own. In

*Greek
headline
Today*

India and Pakistan, American aid has contributed much to building economies which, despite almost insuperable obstacles, are flourishing, which provide the economic basis for the preservation of democracy on the Asian mainland. Here too is a record of solid success which the American people should know about.

One final program, which is undoubtedly the most important American effort in the foreign aid field today, is also beginning

to show signs of success. I refer to the Alliance for Progress
program for Latin America. It is not only the most important
program as far as American foreign policy is concerned but it
is also the program of greatest interest to the American public,
the program which has more latent or active support from the public
than any other foreign aid program in which the U. S. is involved.
I say that, despite tremendous obstacles and temporary failures,
there are indications that some successes are being recorded in
Latin America.

I learned something about the progress being made on a trip
last fall to the Caribbean area. I visited Venezuela, Panama,
Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico. I visited
gleaming new health centers and was impressed by the simple drugs
on hand. I saw hundreds of clean new houses, some of them priced
to sell for less than \$1,000 with monthly payments of less than
\$10. The Alianza has moved further in housing than in perhaps any

other field; it is beginning to make a dent -- but only a dent -- in the appalling slums which fester in almost every Latin American city and in much of the countryside. I likewise say dozens of new schools, many of them built with the donated labor of local residents using materials furnished by the national government and the Alianza. And I learned of an exciting new program which is making simple paperback textbooks available to all elementary school children at a cost of between 10 and 15 cents per book.

I visited land resettlement and rural housing projects, indicating that "agrarian reform" is becoming a reality. The cooperative movement both on the farm and in the cities is spreading. I saw foreign private companies flourishing in Venezuela and Mexico. The administrative competence of many governments has improved.

I was favorably impressed with improvements in the work of the United States Information Agency; its activities seem to have a better sense of proportion and of priority. Progress has been made

in Latin American universities in combating Communist student activity; more effort is still needed in this field. The Voice of America is better, but not yet as good as it ought to be, especially as regards its signal strength. Service to local broadcasters has been effectively strengthened.

This is but a brief summary of some of the progress being made in Latin America today. I have spelled out my own views at length on the progress and problems of the Alliance in a report issued in March to the Senate Appropriations and Foreign Relations Committees, and therefore will not expand my views here.

I do not wish to ignore the difficulties we face in Latin America. The problems confronting the Alliance are staggering -- and will not be solved in a few years. There will continue to be bad news from Latin America. But I would hope that the American public will hear the good news about Latin America as well as the bad. In the past, the headlines have regularly informed us of all

the bad news. The good news, when it has been reported at all, is found on the bottom of page 28. This situation has improved some in the past year, but if the American public is to be fully informed on the successes of the Alliance Program, it will require a great deal of hard work by people like yourselves.

I am convinced that the American public has a special interest in the welfare of neighbors in this hemisphere. If they are convinced that our support of the Alliance Program is achieving good results, they will continue to make the sacrifices needed to support this program. Quite candidly, it is not easy for a member of Congress to support the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars in Southeast Asia. He may acquiesce on expenditures for programs in that area, but he knows full well that there is little active support back home for this program. But when it comes to Latin America, I believe the situation is different. On programs for this area, a Senator or Congressman can count on widespread interest in and active support of the public. I know of few Congressmen who believe there

is great political risk in supporting appropriations for the Alliance for Progress. American officials administering the foreign aid program, and groups like this one with a special interest in foreign aid should keep this in mind in their efforts to educate the public. There is not much mileage in talking about Laos when the real interest of the public is -- and should be -- in Brazil. If this is kept in mind, I am convinced that the Congress and the public will continue to support a foreign aid program commensurate with America's responsibilities as the chief defender of freedom in the world today.

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