

At the Cliff's Edge

Almost everyone would agree that there is something terribly wrong with the world today. There is too much poverty, too much hunger, too much war, and an oversupply of anger; too little clean air and water, and for most of the world's people, nothing like enough of *anything* that makes life liveable or even possible.

But why is it so?

How can the richest, the most productive, and the most knowledgeable world in history at the same time be a world in which almost *half* of its 6 billion people suffer and die in poverty? At the same time a few million people are multimillionaires and about 500 are even billionaires.

How is it that 14,000 children die from malnutrition *every day* in poor countries, while their countries' farmers are ruined by the agricultural policies of the rich countries?

How can it be that, although more and better education is wanted and badly needed by so many, teachers in the USA (the world's richest country) have trouble getting a job? They are told, "Sorry — there is not enough money." At the same time, there *is* enough money for \$500 *billion* a year to be spent on the military.

That's the short list. Explaining how it got this way, *but need not stay this way*, is one purpose of this book. We need to understand how U.S. power threatens the entire world and everyone in it.

But understanding by itself cannot bring about needed and desirable changes. Political work is necessary. But if we are to know what to work for and what to fight against, we must understand how and why such a cruel, insane, and dangerous world came to be and why it keeps getting worse.

Finally, there is a great difference between the past and the present that must be emphasized: The opportunities for the world today are *utterly unprecedented*. Before the twentieth century, problems such as poverty, hunger, poor health, and disease were taken for granted as a normal part of life. Now they can be done away with. In the modern world, they need not and should not exist *anywhere on earth*.

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