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**“CONSCIOUS PROCREATION” : NEO-MALTHUSIANISM IN SOUTHERN EUROPE  
AND LATIN AMERICA IN AROUND 1900**

**ABSTRACT**

**One main concern of Ecological Economics is the balance between human population and natural resources. This is rightly named “the Malthusian question” because Malthus predicted that human populations, if unchecked, would grow exponentially while agricultural production (and other land-based productions) would be subject to decreasing returns to the labour input. This article shows that over one hundred years ago, there was in Europe and America a successful social movement that called itself “Neo-Malthusianism”. In contrast to Malthus’ pessimism, it believed that population growth could be stopped among the poor classes by voluntary decisions. Women were entitled to choose the number of children they wanted to have. The movement did not appeal to the State to impose restrictions on population growth. On the contrary, in Southern Europe it was based on “bottom up” activism against governments and the Catholic Church.**

**KEY WORDS**

**Population growth. Demographic transition. Malthus. Feminist neo-malthusianism. Birth control. Anarchism.**

## INTRODUCTION

Many of today's concerns about the depletion of natural resources and the ecological impact of the increasing population are attributed to a contemporary rise in neo-Malthusian thought. Ecologists who wrote in the 1960s and 1970s on population and the environment such as Paul Ehrlich and Garrett Hardin embody the historical heritage of the international neo-Malthusian movement. Thus, it is a common place to say that Julian Simon was an anti-Malthusian economist of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century who saw in a growing population a stimulus to economic growth, while his opponent, Paul Ehrlich, is a noted "neo-Malthusian". Currently, neo-Malthusianism is identified with economic and political power. Any concern for the imbalance between natural resources and human demography is often suspected of being backed by contemporary neo-imperialism (Rao, 1994).

Neo-Malthusianism still arouses much enmity among nationalist movements, many religious churches or faiths, some of the remaining marxists, and even some economists. Malthus himself thought that improving the situation of the poor was useless because it would lead to the exponential growth of their population. The neo-Malthusians of 1900 thought that Malthus was wrong. They believed that, so to speak, poor people could and should take their own demography into their hands, controlling births not by chastity and late marriages or by pestilence and wars, as in the Malthusian scenarios, but by contraception. This was a successful movement. However, there are writers on the environment in Europe, in America and also in India, who ignore the neo-Malthusianism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They entertain a persistent confusion with regard to the history of the debate on population growth and sustainability. Between Malthus' *Essay on the Principle of Population* of 1798, and Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* of 1968, there were many proposals and movements concerned with population and natural resources which cannot be left aside.

Malthus's ideas were adopted but also changed by British, American and European authors and activists who advocated the use of contraception, thus creating a movement known as neo-Malthusianism. They refused the Malthusian choice between starvation by hunger because of overpopulation or starvation of sentiments because of lack of love. They thought that women were

entitled to choose the number of children they wanted to have. They considered that poverty arose from inequality, and not from overpopulation. However a situation could arise in which population would increase faster than subsistences. In Catholic Europe, where both the State and the Church were in favour of population growth, the neo-Malthusian movement attracted activists who were more radical than in northern Europe, often anarchists.

In this article, we shall show that there was a strong neo-Malthusian movement more than one hundred years ago that used yet questioned Malthus's thesis by defending the exercise of conscious, voluntary procreation. We shall also examine the influence of neo-Malthusianism in the advent of the new demographic order in Europe. At the same time, we shall ask why a movement like neo-Malthusianism, linked as it was to anarchism and revolutionary labour unionism, has fallen into oblivion, and why the word "neo-Malthusian" today has an imperialist connotation.

#### THE ORIGINS OF EUROPEAN NEO-MALTHUSIANISM

Ever since 1798, when Malthus formulated his essay on population, there arose concerns in his country, England, about avoiding the overpopulation of poor people. The Protestant pastor, who had claimed that there was no relief for the destiny of poor people who unconsciously procreated beyond their existing resources, held that the demographic regulators of the old regime based on war, misery and epidemics, were still valid. The alternative to the Malthusian trap, if there was one, went no further than some puritan advice on moral restraint, that is, celibacy, delay in the age of marriage and sexual abstinence. It took some time for Malthus's "remedies" to be transformed.

In England, the earliest recommendations for restricting working-class birth rates started to circulate through the radical sectors of society in 1822. Francis Place, a tailor by profession and associate of the utopian socialist, Robert Owen, first published in London his work *Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population*, in which he did not yet describe the details of the contraceptive methods which he would later anonymously disclose in his so-called *Diabolical Hand Bills*. Other personalities followed Place and Owen in the same concern for the welfare of the proletariat, including Richard Carlile (1790-1845), who in 1825 wrote his neo-Malthusian

work entitled *What is Love?* These and other neo-Malthusian works were republished and broadly disseminated in England during the first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; they had public impact and attracted considerable governmental persecution.

Neo-Malthusianism travelled to North America via Robert Owen himself, when he founded his communist-inspired colony, New Harmony. As early as 1835, Robert Owen's son, Robert Dale, published the neo-Malthusian booklet entitled *Moral Physiology* in New York, various editions of which were issued until 1877 in both England and the United States. Following this work, Charles Knowlton, a Boston physician, wrote *Fruits of Philosophy*.

Starting in 1854, concern for the condition of the proletariat and high infant mortality rates was spurred by the English doctor, George Drysdale, who published the first edition of his book entitled *The Elements of Social Sciences* under a pseudonym. This book discussed the much-needed sexual education of the proletariat in order to later voluntarily restrict its fertility. The remedies for overcoming the three evils of poverty, prostitution and celibacy, which the author claimed afflicted humanity, were explained in this work. Drysdale's work inspired the creation of the first neo-Malthusian organisation in the world, *The Malthusian League*, founded by his brother, Charles Drysdale, along with Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, in London in 1877. Starting this year, the rapid spread of contraception gave way to a drawn-out lawsuit involving those who wanted to re-issue the book by the American physician, Charles Knowlton, in England. The case challenged those who backed the publication, Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh, and was discussed in many countries. The creation of *The Malthusian League* and the Bradlaugh-Besant trial coincided with the declining birth rates England witnessed since that time, as it is acknowledged by historical demography (Sauvy, 1965: 65).

One key factor in the future development of neo-Malthusianism in the rest of Europe took place when at the same time, a member of the council of the First International, Paul Robin, was living in exile in England. His contact with the radical neo-Malthusian English thinkers led him to propose including the issue of population in the programme for workers' freedom as early as the 1870s, but his calls had no resonance on the international socialist agenda. (1)

Despite this initial lack of understanding, the rapid spread of Drysdale's work is a fact (2), and the English league's activities in the United States and England led to the spread of neo-Malthusianism around Europe. This is how, via its own theoretical and practical production, the second independent European neo-Malthusian league was founded in the Netherlands in 1881 under the name *De Nieuw-Malthusiaansche Bond*, the secretary of which was the physician, Jan Rutgers, who published the newsletter *Het Gellukkig Huisgezin (The Happy Family)*. From its beginnings, this league had valuable support by the member of parliament, M. S. van Houten. There is no indication that neo-Malthusianism was legally persecuted in Holland like it was at first in England, but there were two public morality (re-population) leagues which attempted to combat the spread of neo-Malthusian theories and practices called: *Rein Levenbeweging*, based in Utrecht, whose mechanism of dissemination was the newsletter *Levenskracht*; and the *Vereeniging tot Bestrijding van het Nieuw-Malthusianisme*, based in Gravenhage.

In 1889 in Stuttgart, Germany, the neo-Malthusian league *Sozial Harmonische Verein* was created, the secretary of which was the publicist Max Hausmeister. We do not know whether he was also a physician, although sometimes he appears as such. The league's means of spreading information was the newsletter *Die Sozial Harmonie*. After its founding, the region in central Europe where neo-Malthusianism was most widely spread was Bohemia. In 1911, the German government – in the phase leading up to World War I – proposed banning the travelling sale of contraceptive products by modifying article 56 of the Industrial Code (3).

In Sweden, one of the most active propagandists of neo-Malthusianism at the turn of the century was the Lund University economist Knut Wicksell (4).

The French neo-Malthusian league was created in 1896. Once again, the scholar of demographic issues, pedagogue and former member of the First International, Paul Robin, saw in the emerging neo-Malthusian movement in northern Europe the opportunity to examine demographic matters as they related to social issues. In 1877, Robin had already drawn attention to the problems posed by Malthus's law and had published his work *La Question Sexuelle*. He had not earned the support of anarchist personalities such as Kropotkin – this man's technological optimism led him to view the world's rising population as an insignificant problem.

Robin repeated the principles for future generations of “good birth, good education and good social organisation”. Robin’s view breaks with the Malthusian resignation to so-called moral restraint. In its place, he emphasised the need for the proletariat to voluntarily and consciously reduce fertility rates through sexual education, contraception, and women’s freedom. With this, he proposed taking labour away from capital, weakening militarism, avoiding forced out-migration and most importantly, allowing working-class women to decide for themselves when to become pregnant. From France, and upon Robin’s impetus, the neo-Malthusian objectives became joined to those of the workers’ movement, and this was the neo-Malthusianism that took root in southern Europe and some Latin American countries.

The international union of the European and American neo-Malthusian movements materialised in August 1900 in Paris, when the first International Neo-Malthusian Conference was held, and the *International Federation of Human Regeneration* was created. Attending this congress were Paul Robin from France, Emma Goldman from the United States, Valentin Grandjean from Switzerland, the Spaniard Ferrer i Guàrdia, Dr Rutgers from Holland and England’s Dr Drysdale. In addition, personalities from the scientific, cultural and artistic fields joined in, as many more did subsequently. It was agreed that each neo-Malthusian branch with headquarters in each country would be independent, and that committees and groups would be organised as needed, either in cultural centres or labour unions. The progressive rationalist schools also took on a great deal of the burden of spreading the word about conscious procreation.

The spread of neo-Malthusian thought was based on the reasoning mentioned above, and it aimed at explaining the use of the contraceptives available at any given time. Frequently, medical and pharmaceutical personnel pledged to experiment with and dispense these contraceptives; while some had links to anarchism, others did so for purely commercial reasons.

Starting in 1900 neo-Malthusianism was firmly entrenched and organised in western and central Europe, as well as in the United States, where it was spread by Moses Harmann and his daughter, Lily, through the neo-Malthusian newsletter published in Boston, *The Lucifer*. They were joined by the anarchist Emma Goldman, in addition to sundry doctors and midwives. Thus Emma

Goldman (1869-1940) was a participant at the first neo-Malthusian conference in Paris in 1900. How could a feminist and anarchist such as Emma Goldman attend a neo-Malthusian conference? It certainly requires explanation, because Malthus was a true reactionary against the French Revolution. For Malthus, improving the situation of the poor was a hopeless task because population increase would immediately absorb such gains. The neo-Malthusians of 1900 took from Malthus his interest in the relations between population growth and food supplies. They often discussed the carrying capacity of the Earth, as many other authors did at the time (Martinez-Alier and Schlupmann, 1987, chapters on Pfaundler and Ballod-Atlanticus, and Cohen, 1995), framing the question as “how large a world population could be fed”. Thus, Paul Robin’s son-in-law, Gabriel Giroud, wrote a pessimistic book on *Population et Subsistances* published in Paris in 1904. The answers were not conclusive. Today the question must be asked in a different way: how large a human population can be fed and live sustainably at an acceptable standard of living, provided that 20 per cent or 40 per cent (or 60 per cent) of biomass production is not preempted for human use?

Goldman published *Mother Earth* between 1906 and 1917. Environmentalists of the 1960s and 1970s revived the title of her journal. She was active as a neo-Malthusian before Margaret Sanger (1879-1966), who also belonged to the same radical Greenwich Village group in New York and who is rightly credited as the main force behind the social and legal acceptance of contraception in the United States. Contraceptives were forbidden in the United States under the Comstock Act of 1873. Sanger was an IWW organizer, and therefore familiar with anarchist ideas. She learned about birth control techniques in France, and after her return in the United States in 1914, she began to publish the journal *The Woman Rebel* which supported socialism, feminism and contraception. She was indicted for violating the Comstock Act. Sanger did no longer use the word “neo-Malthusianism”, which (paradoxically) had become politically too radical, and used “birth control” instead, with emphasis on the prevention of abortions, to be substituted later by even less controversial words, “family planning” or “planned parenthood”. Margaret Sanger successfully pushed a half-open door.

Among the deliberations on demography that neo-Malthusianism inspired in America at that time, we have chosen one by Juanita Urteaga published in a Spanish journal in Los Angeles (Urteaga,

1916) in order to illustrate how working-class women defended reproductive freedom in the face of governmental persecution in the United States.

“... Emma Goldman, this anarchist, outstanding orator and old propagandist, publisher of the monthly magazine, *Mother Earth*, which is published in New York City, was arrested in that city and is currently free on \$500 bail. She is accused of propagating obscene theories, which is how the prudish authorities classify the propaganda in favour of conscious reproduction or family planning. This propaganda is quite beneficial for women, especially the proletariat, but it is not beneficial for the masters, because as the female proletariat gains the knowledge needed to avoid procreation, the bourgeoisie is threatened with a scarcity of slaves.

This is why Emma Goldman is being prosecuted.

While in all the other civilised countries, conscious reproduction is being discussed openly, in this so-called country of freedom its propagandists are being persecuted. The United States is marching arm-in-arm with Russia...”

**Fédération Universelle de la Régénération Humaine**  
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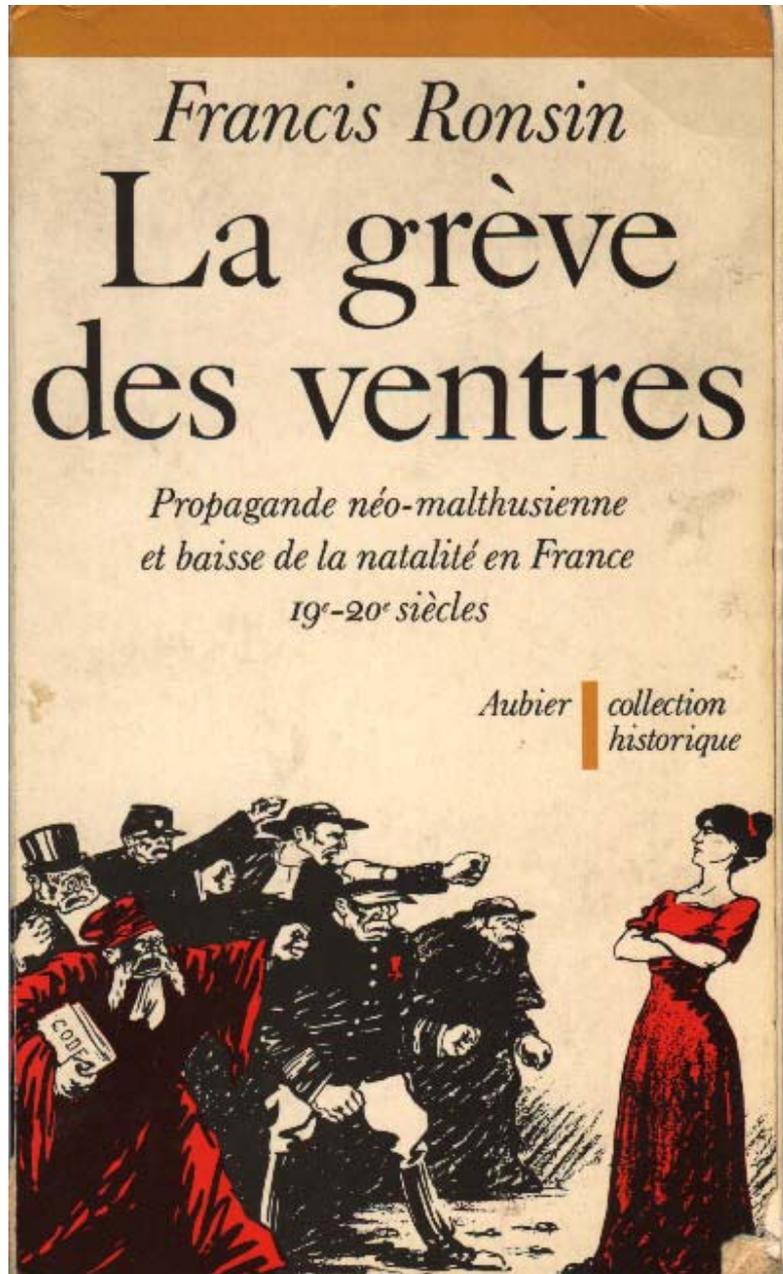
Source: *International Neo-Malthusian Bureau of Correspondence and Defence*

## MALTHUSIANISM AND NEO-MALTHUSIANISM IN SOUTHERN EUROPE

In France, Spain, Portugal and Italy, neo-Malthusianism was expressed as a transformation of the principles of Malthusianism through demographic education linked to the other socialist aspirations and to the practical action of dispensing and spreading contraceptives.

### *France*

Starting in 1896, but especially after 1900, neo-Malthusianism in this country was mainly devoted to raising women's awareness of their right to voluntarily procreate when they wanted to, and it advised the proletariat not to have large families in order to have access to hygiene and to be more demanding in their fight for emancipation from slave wages. It also fostered gender co-education and sexual education.



As Francis Ronsin points out in his classical work on neo-Malthusianism in France (Ronsin, 1980: 16-22), neo-Malthusian propaganda is partly responsible for the lowering of birth rates among the working class in this country. This public, systematic propaganda on conscious procreation sparked repression by the French state and church. The re-population leagues used religious and nationalist arguments, lamenting the decrease in the birth rate on behalf of the homeland. The proletariat was conceptualised as the historical subject that was to provision the army and industrial expansion through its plentiful offspring. Neo-Malthusianism in France forged an important presence not only in cities but also in rural areas. The “Womb Strike” was advocated via the neo-Malthusian periodicals *Régénération* (1900-1908), *Génération Consciente* (1908-1914), *Le Malthusien* and *Le Néo-malthusien* (1916-1919), along with a large number of public and private conferences, dramas, and prolific artistic production. These were the means neo-Malthusianism used to set forth its demographic reasoning. The sale and dispensing of contraceptives were always accompanied by an explanation of the neo-Malthusian demographic theories. One main point was that there was no inexorable “Malthus’ population law”. In France, neo-Malthusianism was seen as responsible for the weakness of French demography compared to Germany, given the danger of a new war with the neighbouring country. French neo-Malthusianism came to be viewed as a threat to the fatherland. Abroad it was seen as a pernicious demographic example. Neo-Malthusian propaganda was banned in France in June 1920 by law but behaviours had already changed. In France, propagandists were frequently imprisoned. Much later, in one of these arrests during World War II, the secretary of the French neo-Malthusian league, Eugène Humbert, died in jail in a bombardment of the Amiens prison. Some women and men accused of practising abortions were guillotined. Madeleine Pelletier, one woman who since 1900 worked the hardest to spread the idea of legalised abortion in France and southern Europe, was persecuted and confined to a psychiatric asylum, where she died in 1939 (5).

### *Spain*

Neo-Malthusianism was spread in Spain from Catalonia through the working-class press in Barcelona, including *El Boletín de la Escuela Moderna* (*Newsletter of the Modern School*) and *La Huelga General* (*General Strike*), which had been financed since 1901 by Ferrer i Guàrdia, one of the founders of the international neo-Malthusian league one year earlier, and Mateo Morral, the



One means to spread neo-Malthusianism in Spain from 1904 to 1914 was the magazine *Salud y Fuerza. Procreación consciente y limitada (Health and Strength: Conscious, Limited Procreation)*, in which the debates on the advisability of restricting fertility in light of colonial militarism, steady overseas out-migration and the condition of sexual slavery in which proletarian women found themselves were expounded.

In Spain, neo-Malthusianism was interpreted by the right wing as a new “leprosy” which would lead the nation to bankruptcy, and it was thus legally persecuted (Masjuan, 2000: 371-375)..

As in all the European countries, there was no dearth of detractors of neo-Malthusianism from the ranks of the working class itself, who understood neo-Malthusianism as a bourgeois doctrine that sapped numbers and strength from the proletariat’s revolutionary actions.

From 1900 to 1906 in Barcelona, the idea of the Womb Strike was proclaimed, as were the practical means for carrying it out. The rapid spread of this slogan among the proletariat had to be muffled, and to this end, starting in 1908 the Barcelona Town Hall – at the suggestion of the nationalist Catalan sectors – decided to create awards for parents, working class only, who had twelve children. These awards were clearly pro-populationist in a region with only two million inhabitants. The bourgeoisie and the Church had witnessed with alarm how from 1900 to 1905 Catalonia had gone from being the 14<sup>th</sup> ranked in terms of birth rate among twenty-two nations, to the 19<sup>th</sup>, thus following in the footsteps of France. For the populationists, it was necessary to have a Catalan population of ten million inhabitants. In the Catalan nationalist mindset, a country like Belgium was an apt model to follow.

Evidence that neo-Malthusianism had an effect on the decrease in the Spanish birth rate can be found in studies by the Catholic sociologist Severino Aznar, who claimed that Spain – overall still the country with the highest birth rate in Europe in 1930 – showed a good marriage rate but fewer and fewer offspring. Aznar lamented this through the knowledge that he gained from the confessions rural women made to priests, and he highlights these to provide evidence of the spread of neo-Malthusianism in Spain (Masjuan 2000a: 63-92).

Two opposing demographic strategies were deployed in Spain until 1939: first, restricting the working class birth rate and, second, bourgeois populationism. After this date, for obvious reasons, only the Spanish-nationalist and anti-feminist demographic discourse of the Franco regime remained valid. Any open propaganda in favour of limiting birth rates was penalised from that time forth. But changes were already underway.

### *Portugal*

Just as in Spain, restricting the working class birth rate in Portugal began in around 1900 in the working-class media and the medical sectors that worked with them. From 1902, neo-Malthusianism began to be propagated by a physician who sympathised with anarchism, Ângelo Vaz. Starting in 1905, the working class press from Oporto included neo-Malthusian ideas by supporting the publications by the Spaniard Luis Bulffi which were being persecuted in Spain. Soon thereafter the first Portuguese translation of the booklet *Huelga de Ventres: Medios práticos para evitar las familias numerosas (Womb Strike: Practical Means for Avoiding Large Families)* was published in that city, with the title *Greve de Ventres*. From Oporto, neo-Malthusianism – united with the International Neo-Malthusian Federation – radiated out to nuclei in and around Lisbon and then spread from there throughout the rest of Portugal.

Starting in 1901, the Oporto branch of neo-Malthusianism handed over its prime status to Lisbon and Setúbal. The spread of neo-Malthusianism in Portugal became part of the set of strategies for working class emancipation. Unlike in Spain, in Portugal there were no exclusively neo-Malthusian periodicals. *Paz e Liberdade (Peace and Freedom)* was eloquently subtitled as an anti-militaristic, anti-patriotic, revolutionary labour unionist and neo-Malthusian magazine. Similar examples were *O Agitador (The Agitator)* from Lisbon, *Germinal* from Setúbal, and others, in which information was provided and contraceptive products were sold.

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Important figures in the Portuguese workers' movement who introduced neo-Malthusianism in Portugal from 1900 until 1914 include: António da Silva Junior, an active anti-militarist propagandist; José Joaquim Teixeira Junior, a pharmacist by profession and author of treatises encouraging desertion, and also author of the most well-known neo-Malthusian tract in Portugal, for which he was arrested, entitled *Mulheres, não Procreéis! (Women! Do Not Procreate!)* which had three editions: one in Oporto and two in Lisbon in 1911; João Martins do Rego, also a pharmacist by profession and regular contributor to the Portuguese anarchist press as well as director of *A Humanidade (Humanity)* and owner of the newspaper, *O Anarquista (The Anarchist)*; Nobre Cid, also a pharmacist and contributor to the anarchist press; Amadeu Cardoso da Silva, tailor and correspondent in Portugal for the Spanish neo-Malthusian league; Gaspar Santos, a medical student in Lisbon; and Augusto Machado, an anarchist who undertook many actions in Portugal based on the group *Novos Horizontes (New Horizons)*, from Algés. The network of publications and selling points for the varied range of contraceptive products spread throughout the country in a sporadic fashion until 1913, when the first draft law against neo-Malthusianism was presented, setting a punishment of two years in prison. That was when the *Liga Portuguesa de Moralidade Pública*, the objective of which was to combat pornography, gambling, prostitution and neo-Malthusianism, came into existence. The vigilance committees from this league spread through the entire country. Similar kinds of "morality leagues" had appeared in Spain and Catalonia, where neo-Malthusianism was considered immoral and pornographic. The general right to sexual pleasure separate from reproduction and the need to provide offspring with a decent future were not accepted by the conservative sectors of society in these years.

Neo-Malthusian propaganda, organised and distributed publicly, thus ceased in Portugal, although this prohibition was challenged through clandestine publications. The reduction in the Portuguese birth rate was estimated at 18% in the five-year period from 1920 to 1924. The decrease began to be noticed in 1911 to 1912. Neo-Malthusianism was a contributing factor (Livi-Bacci, 1972). The classical neo-Malthusian pattern can be found in rural southern Portugal, with decreasing fertility rates without industrialisation and urbanisation as necessary factors. Meanwhile, in Lisbon, since the 1930s the birth rate remained at the same levels as in countries such as Belgium, Denmark and Finland. The influence of neo-Malthusianism in the decreasing birth rates was most likely not direct; however, it did contribute to the changes in mindset among the lower class population. In

Portugal, dispensing contraceptives was further penalised in 1929 after a protracted patriotic campaign by Catholic bishops and physicians. (Freire and Lousada, 1982: 1367-1395).

### *Italy*

In 1910, Italy had a population of almost 37 million inhabitants. At this time, a major wave of overseas migration started, sparked by inequality in the distribution of national income, despite the fact that decreases in birth rates and death rates began to be recorded. During the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Italian nationalist sectors advocated migration as a way to maintain the traditional demographic growth which would be needed in order to foster Italy's colonial expansion.

In Italy, neo-Malthusianism began to be disseminated among the poor people at around the turn of the century. It emerged as a political response to the high infant mortality rate, forced migration and deplorable working conditions, along with low literacy rates. Contraceptives were advertised and dispensed from the working class newspaper with the highest circulation in the country, *¡Avanti!*, accompanied by refutations of religious prejudices. The Catholic medical sectors called for a prohibition of neo-Malthusianism and tried to scientifically demonstrate the danger of using contraceptives. There was a tenacious campaign by Catholic physicians and certain labour unionists against the spread of neo-Malthusianism (6).

After systematic public propaganda in the workers' press, in 1910 the neo-Malthusians sponsored a national conference in Florence on whether the lower classes had the right to voluntarily restrict their procreation. This unprecedented event in a country with a Catholic culture marked a point of no return. At this conference in Florence, more than one hundred men and women from all corners of Italy and with the most diverse ideologies took part: conservatives, revolutionaries, monarchists, anarchists, republicans, socialists and labour unionists, along with professors of medicine, teachers, scholars of sexuality, middle and elementary school teachers, Protestant pastors and Catholic priests, in addition to participation by many Italian organisations and newspapers. The conference did not reach a unanimous decision on the advisability of spreading neo-Malthusian practices among the proletariat. Personalities such as the historian Gaetano Salvemini were

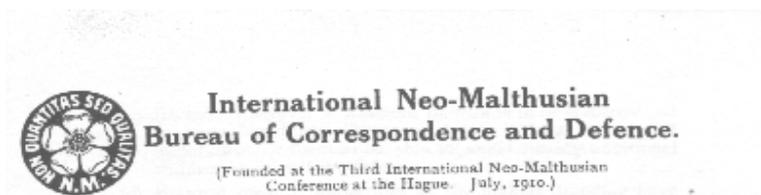
reluctant to support this because they believed that the low educational level of the Italian population still stood as an impediment. However, the sociologist Robert Michels and anarchists including Secondo Giorni and the physician Luigi Berta, decided on their own that spreading the theory and practice of neo-Malthusianism could be put off no longer.

Public surveys were promoted through the independent press, such as the one carried out by *Pagine Libere* from Lugano (whose director was A. O. Olivetti; editors were Paolo Orano and Francesco Chiesa) aimed at obtaining pro and con opinions from economists, jurists, demographers and personalities from Italian politics. Neo-Malthusianism was gaining more adherents, such as the demographer Napoleone Colajanni, who believed that limited procreation was characteristic of progress and civilisation, as did the economist Maffeo Pantaleoni. It is still surprising that in 1911 figures such as the demographer Corrado Gini answered that they attributed scant effects to the institutional demographic message that attempted to stimulate large families through economic perks, or that in 1913, at the request of the neo-Malthusian magazine *L'Educazione Sessuale*, the still-socialist Mussolini responded that neo-Malthusianism was an act of responsibility that was in no way immoral and was suitable for rational beings. Mussolini claimed that it was a duty to spread neo-Malthusianism at a society-wide and individual level as well as to people who suffered from hereditary illnesses. Mussolini concluded that he did not know of any court of law that would deem neo-Malthusianism immoral and pornographic. Mussolini made these declarations when the trial against some proponents of neo-Malthusianism in Italy was underway (7). Later, in the mid-1920s, Gini and Mussolini became of course enemies of neo-Malthusianism, and in its place they promoted the nationalist demographic discourse that claimed that population numbers were the strength of Italy. Neo-Malthusianism was an impediment to imperial dreams.

The spread of neo-Malthusianism in Italy was basically due to the anarchist and socialist workers' media. The leading work of neo-Malthusianism in Italy after 1911 was the book by Secondo Giorni entitled *L'arte di non far figli (The Art of Not Making Children)*, which was profusely illustrated with engravings that showed the application of contraceptives by physicians such as Jules Barian. The numerous articles in the anarchist press by the neo-Malthusian doctor, Luigi Berta, provided practical information on how to voluntarily limit births, along with the reasoning

behind resisting out-migration, the high infant mortality rate and especially the growing militarism. In 1911, Italy proceeded to invade Tripoli when Spain began its expansionist policy in Morocco; neo-Malthusian reasoning served to reinforce those who opposed compulsory military service. This is one of the reasons why neo-Malthusian publishers, Giorni, Belloni and Berta in Italy, and Bulffi in Spain, were to suffer imprisonment and fines.

During this time, neo-Malthusianism was truly international. To this effect, the *Universal League of Human Regeneration* created the *International Neo-Malthusian Bureau of Correspondence and Defence* at the neo-Malthusian conference at The Hague in 1910. It was presided over by Charles V. Drysdale of London; Dr. J. Rutgers of Holland was named secretary, and the Frenchman Gabriel Giroud (Paul Robin's son-in-law) was named treasurer. The existing documentation reveals that this organisation acted in unison and attempted to convince the governments of the southern European countries and the United States that criminal prosecution of the neo-Malthusians was unjustified given the fact that it was a peaceful movement that fostered the welfare of proletarian families. The legal and political support provided by the International Neo-Malthusian League was decisive when challenging the persecution of neo-Malthusianism in Spain, Italy and even the United States.



Once the initial trials mentioned above were over, in 1913 neo-Malthusian leagues were created in Turin and Milan. In Florence, the anarchists founded a neo-Malthusian institute that dispensed and facilitated contraceptives among workers at cost price, given the difficulties of finding them on the open market. In 1913, the specifically neo-Malthusian magazine, *L'Educazione Sessuale* (*Sexual Education*), was created by Luigi Berta, Secondo Giorni, Alfredo Polledro and M. Berardelli.



Neo-Malthusianism in Italy as an organized movement persisted until 1922, even during the wartime period from 1914 to 1918. Progressive schools and public universities included sexual education and neo-Malthusian theories in their curricula. All of this took place despite the fact that after the outbreak of World War I, the international neo-Malthusian league was dismembered. With the war, the pioneers of neo-Malthusianism disappeared in Italy. Luigi Berta departed to the Austrian front as a pacifist volunteer in charge of an ambulance and was killed in September 1916. Secondo Giorni, Luigi Fabbri and others had to leave their country in exile upon the advent of Fascism.

Neo-Malthusianism reappeared in Italy after World War II with the purpose of abolishing the Fascist demographic laws that would persist until the 1970s. The family of the Italian neo-Malthusian murdered in Barcelona in May 1937, Camillo Berneri, who had been living in exile,

returned to their country, as did Secondo Giorni, Cesare Zaccaria and the Milanese architect Giancarlo de Carlo, and in the 1950s they created the *Associazione per la Educazione Demografica* in Milan based on turn-of-the-century neo-Malthusianism. Some of them were once again brought to trial for publishing works about birth control.

## NEO-MALTHUSIANISM IN SOUTH AMERICA

Southern European neo-Malthusianism began to spread after 1900 by the migratory currents and political exiles at that time. In the case of Spain, out-migration in that period was not the product of a demographic explosion that might have exceeded the territory's capacity to sustain life. The causes lay in a considerable increase in the price of subsistence goods, along with unemployment and low salaries, plus the fact that average incomes were higher in some American countries than in Spain. This is what explains, especially after 1903 when passports were no longer needed to set sail, that during the period from 1904 to 1913 approximately one and a half million Spaniards migrated overseas, representing about 10% of the country's total population. This unprecedented flow gave Spanish and Italian neo-Malthusianism political overtones that were unknown in France, which was not facing this problem. Working class migration during these years was one of the most important arguments when attempting to convince workers of the need to limit their procreation.

The Iberian neo-Malthusian press sporadically published figures for those departing from each of the Spanish ports, in some cases accompanied by the amounts that the Spanish state earmarked for religious congregations and the royal family, all with the purpose of showing the injustice of this migration. Just as they had wanted to avoid producing military "cannon fodder", now the neo-Malthusians of the day said they also avoided procreating even in scarcely populated countries such as Uruguay, Argentina and Cuba, where the greatest number of Iberian emigrants were received. For the working class neo-Malthusian immigrants in these countries, although the favourable population-to-resources ratio could circumvent poverty, the prevailing capitalist system based on attracting plentiful labour in order to pay lower salaries prevented them from overcoming the very poverty which had led them to migrate. Thus, the neo-Malthusian doctrine recognised the need to spread conscious and limited procreation wherever capitalism existed. Migration could not

be viewed as a palliative to demographic and economic imbalances; the neo-Malthusians attributed it to the proletariat's shirking its duties, since in order to subsist, it had implicitly given up the social battle in their place of origin. To them, a lack of reproductive caution along with social injustice is what irremediably led to working class migration.

### *Uruguay*

The demographic transition in Uruguay took place at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, accompanied by the neo-Malthusian theories spread by Iberian emigrants and refugees. In Uruguay as elsewhere, neo-Malthusianism was condemned by the Church and persecuted by governments that viewed the country's low birth rate as the nation's bankruptcy: the spectre of France was ever-present. The Spanish neo-Malthusian league's representatives in Uruguay – in Montevideo and the rural regions – promoted public, systematic propaganda on the neo-Malthusian theories and means, and to this end, in 1907 an anarchist committee was formed in Montevideo, called the *Comité Neo-Malthusiano del Río de la Plata* (8). In Uruguay, the practice and spread of conscious procreation was reflected in almost all the working-class publications from the period. The question arises of to what extent neo-Malthusian agitation was partly responsible, along with urbanisation and economic, cultural and medical changes, for the decrease in Uruguayan birth rates.

### *Argentina*

In Argentina, the spread of conscious procreation among the working class emerged from the arguments on living conditions and the restrictive Residence Law dating from 1902. Foreigners in Argentina were seen as the detritus that Europe expelled from its own soil. What is more, the immigrants had to put up with the bourgeoisie's accusation that they were responsible for all the country's social ills. Given the abusive working conditions existing in Argentina, the main objective of the neo-Malthusianism that the Iberian migrants propagated in Argentina was to prevent migration. Neo-Malthusian practices gained the greatest following in the anarchist working-class centres. Women with knowledge about obstetrics such as Lola Sánchez, and the neo-Romantic poet and painter of Cuban descent, Félix Nieves, along with the working class press,

were the ones who initially spread neo-Malthusianism in Argentina in connection with Spain. This is how in 1908 in Buenos Aires, a propagandist group in favour of conscious procreation called *Pro-Salud y Fuerza* was created in association with the *International Federation of Human Regeneration*. The objectives of the group were analogous to those of the Montevideo committee and consisted of: “Spreading and disseminating scientific ideas in order to practise voluntary procreation and, using the means within its scope, contributing to social emancipation and human regeneration”.

The conditions of misery and abuse suffered by the emigrants to Argentina at the hands of the government – which still used Alberdi’s motto of “to govern is to populate” – and the local capitalists influenced the advent of conscious procreation in Argentina. To the neo-Malthusians in Argentina, preventing workers from having large families formed part of their strategy for avoiding what they called the “Argentine slaughterhouse”.

After 1910, the majority of the pioneers of neo-Malthusianism in Argentina were deported, and the working class newspapers were closed down. The depuration of immigrant flows was stepped up with the 1910 Law on Social Defence. But neo-Malthusian propaganda did not cease. By 1911, there were already four editions of the Luis Bulffi book published by the working class newspaper with the highest circulation in Argentina, *La Protesta*, and neo-Malthusian propaganda had reached the country’s second largest city, Rosario de Santa Fe, through the neo-Malthusian library, *Libertad y Amor (Freedom and Love)*. By the end of 1911, Argentina had three representatives from the Spanish league.

Neo-Malthusianism had taken firm root in the country, and the authorities of the day became concerned when the number of immigrants began to decrease on the eve of World War I. Starting then, institutional concern for neo-Malthusian practices, which were deemed to be a social peril, began to be manifested publicly. New generations of proponents of neo-Malthusianism emerged independently in Argentina. The development of neo-Malthusianism was tied to the secular nature of the society. Thus, when in 1940, marriage rates increased and nevertheless birth rates decreased in the federal capital, the responsibility for this was attributed to neo-Malthusianism by *Acción Católica Argentina*, which at the same time attempted to once again uproot it in the name of

patriotism and called for a return to Catholic morals in order to overcome the “suicide of the white race” and the bankruptcy of the nation. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated that wherever neo-Malthusian practices are introduced, a return to past demographic models is impossible.

### *Cuba*

Cuba is yet another Latin American country where Iberian neo-Malthusianism was propagated. Cuba joined the modern demographic model based on low birth rates because of the process of forced urbanisation in the period of its war with Spain at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When Cuba recovered growing birth rates between 1899 and 1907, and also a large number of immigrants reached the island in the period of prosperity up to the early 1920s, neo-Malthusian propaganda burst forth with force, and population growth slowed down.

The first neo-Malthusian groups in Latin America can be found in Cuba. Since the turn of the century, the neo-Malthusian publications from Barcelona had been broadly distributed on the island. In 1907, the *Sección neo-Malthusiana de Cuba*, part of the *International Federation of Human Regeneration*, was founded in Havana. The Cuban working-class press widely disseminated theories on the voluntary restriction of procreation among the working class. The dispensing of contraceptives did not exclusively take place from the neo-Malthusian branch but also from the working class publishing houses. Since they were scattered all over the island, the Iberian contingent of immigrants led to the presence of neo-Malthusianism in small cities, too, such as Cienfuegos and Manzanillo. Through the widespread practice of readings in the tobacco factories, many neo-Malthusian works, which ideologically went beyond mere birth control, were shared. With its publication, *Pro-Vida (Pro-Life)*, Cuban neo-Malthusianism made significant contributions to the neo-Malthusian debate at that time. From this publication, a significant grass-roots vegetarian and naturalist movement developed which attempted to raise the Cuban population’s awareness of the need to forego fictitious needs and have access to greater social justice. Theosophers, spiritualists, Masons, socialists and anarchists all took part in this movement.

Puerto Rico, another magnet for working class immigration during those years, also witnessed the broad dissemination of neo-Malthusianism. Starting at the turn of the century, progressive women such as Luisa Capetillo and the Caguas newspaper *Voz Humana* contributed to spreading conscious procreation. The attempts at spreading neo-Malthusianism in Puerto Rico from 1900 onwards would make an interesting study yet to be done. The country was under the rule of the United States but it had close ties with southern Europe.

#### THE ECOLOGICAL DISCOURSE OF NEO-MALTHUSIANISM

The balance between population and natural resources was one of the most intense concerns for the neo-Malthusians. They were aware as the world population reached two billion people in 1914, that the depletion of resources such as coal, iron and fertile agricultural land was a problem that would take some time to emerge, but one that future generations would ineluctably be forced to face. Some neo-Malthusian theoreticians, just like some of its detractors, were in agreement that the depletion of non-renewable resources was unquestionable. What distinguished them was the faith in the technological progress which would come about in the future; the question was whether this technology would provide a solution to the imbalance between population and resources.

Because of the growth of the European and world population at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some neo-Malthusians claimed that: “Given what could happen to our descendants, we are once again authorised to repeat the need to put a fence around the disorderly growth of the human species” (UASE, 1913: 20-26). The neo-Malthusians in general acknowledged that they did not know the limits of the Earth’s potential to produce, and they recognised advances being made in the field of chemistry for obtaining food. Nonetheless, this did not lead them to abdicate their own generation’s responsibility. In their opinion, the growing population on the planet could produce enough for its well-being were it not for capitalism. However, if population growth continued, limiting birth rates would end up being necessary regardless of which social system prevailed. The neo-Malthusians argued that no one was at this point able to state that scientific progress was going to be made in accordance with human needs, and thus it was legitimate for the defenders of conscious procreation to set forth the issue.

The availability of energy became another neo-Malthusian concern during those years. To some neo-Malthusians, even more important than the question of subsistence was that of energy resources for a world population that was estimated to reach a maximum of five billion inhabitants by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Antich, 1931:28). The means of transport and machinery known at that time could not meet the needs of a world population of that size. There were heated disagreements between neo-Malthusian anarchists (such as Sebastien Faure) and anti-Malthusian anarchists (such as Kropotkin or Reclus, who were technological optimists). Kropotkin believed that food supply could increase enormously through greenhouse agriculture, as shown in the islands of Guernsey and Jersey - he was criticized by Popper-Lynkeus (1912), himself a proto-ecological economist and a neo-Malthusian social reformer. Kropotkin was no feminist, either, and Emma Goldman had a sisterly debate with him on women's rights.

We can thus speak about a neo-Malthusianism that opened a discussion on natural resources and the population, and it conveyed this as a vitally important factor which future generations would have to face. What is more, the neo-Malthusians were antagonistic toward any type of imperialism that might involve the submission of other lands and cultures in order to secure resources (Giorni, 1922). However, at the same time they were described as being bourgeois and anti-socialist merely because they wanted to reduce the size of the proletarian families. Some believed that the greater the number of poor people, the sooner revolution would take place – to which the neo-Malthusians responded that revolution based on misery would be an utter failure.

#### NEO-MALTHUSIANISM IN OTHER COUNTRIES AND CONTINENTS

Until now we have summarised our research on European and American neo-Malthusianism, especially that which was spread in Catholic cultures. Along these lines, it would also be interesting to discover the impact this movement had in Algeria (French and Muslim), where neo-Malthusianism was present via the Iberian migrants from the south of the peninsula and the French people deported at the time of the 1871 Parisian *Commune*. These groups maintained relations with the radical sectors in France, and through them neo-Malthusian theories reached Algiers. At the turn of the century, a neo-Malthusian branch was established with headquarters at the *Maison*

*du Peuple* at Rampe Magenta no. 10 in Algiers. Iberian neo-Malthusian publications also reached Algeria.

The neo-Malthusian theories on conscious procreation also reached Russia with articles in the newspaper *Rússkoe Slovo* and by some physicians. They were rejected by Lenin in 1913 in an article in *Pravda* which would become an article of faith after the 1917 revolution. In later years, the editors of Lenin's works introduced this article with the following words:

(...) In the 1870s, Malthusianism was reborn under the guise of neo-Malthusianism, which attempted to conceal the impoverishment of the workers which was becoming more and more pronounced by using pseudo-scientific theories on "absolute overpopulation", on the supposed decreasing fertility of the land, and so forth. Neo-Malthusianism views the reduction of birth rates through the use of contraceptive measures, wars and epidemics as the means of strengthening capitalism and mitigating the calamities resulting from it. Many of the representatives of neo-Malthusianism advocate racism (...) (9).

In India, there were some links with European neo-Malthusianism. India's representative, P. Murugesu Mudaliar lived in Madras; however, we do not know about the neo-Malthusian activities that took place in this country. In 1925, the sixth international neo-Malthusian conference was held in New York, and we know from Milly Witkop-Rocker's chronicle that the representative from India, Basanta Koomar Roy, reported on the incipient neo-Malthusian movement there (Witkop-Rocker, 1925:3) (10). Thus, the first steps in the still not much travelled path to feminist neo-Malthusianism and the exercise of free motherhood in India had been taken. This 1925 New York conference demonstrated the vitality of Anglo-Saxon neo-Malthusianism compared to the weakened neo-Malthusianism of southern Europe. Margaret Sanger's efforts had managed to spread birth control as far as imperial Japan (where she was accused of being an American imperialist agent) and China.

The neo-Malthusians had linked "conscious procreation" to the social objectives of equality, freedom for women, education for the working class, anti-militarism, concern about natural resources, and an anti-capitalist change in social and economic organization. Some of such radical social objectives were given up by the Birth Control movement for tactical reasons. By giving

them up the idea of limiting the birth rate could be spread with fewer impediments. Was neo-Malthusianism too revolutionary for its time?

## CONFUSIONS ON NEO-MALTHUSIANISM IN INDIA AND ELSEWHERE

European fertility came down *not* because of state policies, but *against* state policies. Democratic governments in Europe forbade neo-Malthusian activism as late as the 1920s, and Fascist governments even later. Between 1865 and 1945, the Prussian, and later the German state wanted more soldiers to fight the French, and vice-versa. The French state, which had done so much for the depopulation of France in 1914-1918, patriotically forbade the neo-Malthusian movement in 1920 (Ronsin, 1980:83-84). In European history, the words “state population policy” meant attempts to increase population by increasing the birth rate. In America, it meant increasing the immigration of populations of suitable origins. Recent interventions in China, India and elsewhere have changed the meaning of “state population policies”. The science of demography was sponsored in France by populationist governments, producing fervent anti-Malthusian scholars such as Alfred Sauvy still after 1945. Demographers have usually been silent on ecology (“this is not my department”), and it fell on a biologist such as Ehrlich, to rise stridently again in 1968 the population/ environment question with his book *The Population Bomb*, given the silence (in the best of cases) not only of demographers but also of many economists (though Wicksell had been a militant neo-Malthusian).

Most Communist governments allowed freedom of contraception and abortion, with exceptions such as Ceaucescu in Romania in the 1970s and 1980s, but they also emphasized Marx’s political critique against Malthus’ reactionarism. Marx had also an economic argument against Malthus: there were no decreasing returns in agricultural production, rather, as the British experience was already showing in the 1850s and 1860s, yields increased and simultaneously the rural labor input diminished through migration to cities. Marx was not an ecological economist. Nowadays we dispute the economists’ measurement of agricultural productivity for reasons which Marx mentioned but did not incorporate into his analysis (soil erosion and loss of nutrients). Thus, we think of the decreased energy efficiency of modern agriculture, the chemical pollution, the genetic

erosion. Is agricultural productivity really increasing? Ecological analysis moves the debate on agriculture much beyond the old economists' quarrels on "decreasing returns".

Many feminists still tend to dismiss the link between population growth and environmental deterioration (e.g. Silliman and King, 1999) instead of putting it center stage as the neo-Malthusians did one hundred years ago by their very choice of name. They are seemingly unaware of the feminist-environmental debates in their own ancestry. They are rightly irked by the racism of those insensitive to the plight of disappearing populations and minority cultures in the world, and indignant at patriarchal and state arrogance in the choice of contraceptive methods forcibly introduced in the Third World. However, why not combine again the issues of women's freedom, reproductive rights (including the choice of abortion when other methods have failed), and the alarming pressure of human population on the environment? Of course, environmental problems are not only population problems. From the beginning of Political Ecology (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987) a strong distinction has been traced between population pressure on resources and production pressure on resources. Africa and Latin America are both poor and not overpopulated (on average) (Leach and Mearns, 1996). New illnesses are spreading, old illnesses coming back, and populations might even decline in some African countries. All this is known, but it does not explain why the feminist movement, which supports women's right to safe birth control and abortion (still illegal in so many countries) as part of comprehensive health care, can forget its own historical role in the demographic transitions. Why not be proud instead of the courage shown by women against social and political structures and, often, male irresponsibility, in taking control of their own reproductive capacity, collectively achieving demographic transitions without which the world environment would eventually be ruined?

Among feminists today, the very idea of neo-Malthusianism appears abhorrent. Today's neo-Malthusianism is linked to state population policies, as in China, or to pressure from international bullies such as the World Bank. In India there has been a high reliance on female sterilization, although Indira Gandhi also promoted mass male sterilization (with politically counterproductive effects). Research shows that a declining fertility rate because of female sterilization is linked in India (with the well known exception of Kerala and other states) to greater female infanticide (because of the preference for male children). Moreover, sterilized women seem to be subject to

greater physical abuse by insecure husbands. Women who will not have children get perhaps less food at home than otherwise (Krishnaraj et al., 1998). Such consequences of birth control arise because of gender-biased cultural values and not because of birth control itself. However, there is no denying that such state-imposed population policies are not at all inspired by the feminist movement, and that their consequences are terrible from a feminist perspective, and from a general humanist perspective. On the contrary, it is well understood among scholars in India that “engendering population policy involves moving beyond family planning to focus on changes in social structure that would allow women to make marital and fertility choices free of social or economic constraints” (Desai, 1998: 49). Notice here how lack of freedom in “marital choices” goes together with lack of freedom in “fertility choices”. Women are in a weak position in India, because of a cultural context which often still links caste membership to control of women’s sexuality. Notice also that India has population density as high as the most densely populated European countries.

Dharma Kumar, the Indian social and economic historian, an *esprit fort* already at an early age, when she went up to Bombay’s Elphinstone College in the early 1940s, was asked to write down her religion and other particulars in a form. She tried “atheist” and “no religion”, but such descriptions were not allowed. She then wrote “neo-Malthusian” (Guha, 2004, p. 168). From an intellectual Tamil family from Madras she might have heard of the Indian members of the international neo-Malthusian league active still in the 1920s (Caldwell, 1998). Related to ecofeminism, the link between women’s “reproductive rights”, and the awareness of population pressure on the environment, is a preoccupation which did not start at the U.N. Cairo Conference on Population and Development of 1994 but rather one hundred years earlier. Social radicals, including the feminists, were in favour of limiting population growth, with three main arguments: women’s freedom (still so scarce in India), the downward pressure of excessive population on wages, and the threat to the environment and subsistences. Loss of wilderness was less emphasized than food scarcity, and in this they were truly Malthusian. Two other arguments were added in the European and American context of one hundred years ago: anti-militarism, and resistance to migration overseas.

Today, in leftist circles in India, the radical, feminist neo-Malthusian movement is unknown. When looking to the West, some remember what Lenin wrote in 1913 against neo-Malthusianism better than the speeches of Emma Goldman. Neo-Malthusians are taken to be enemies of the people. Among environmentalists in India, one current definition of neo-Malthusianism is that it is a doctrine that sees “sheer excess in human numbers” as “the primary (or) sole burden on scarce resources” (D’Souza, 2003). It is true that neo-Malthusians emphasize population density, although they also take into account per capita consumption and the technologies employed. If one uses (Patricia Hynes, in Silliman and King, 1999:196-9, also D’ Souza, 2003: 25) “ecological footprint” analysis (an index that basically translates food energy, other biomass, and fossil fuels, into spatial requirements), we see that the average Indian has an ecological footprint of nearly 0.5 ha. With a population density of 3 persons per ha, India’s ecological footprint is already larger than her territory. It is increasing fast because of population growth coupled with rapid economic growth. Population pressure on the environment is not a “myth” (Rao, 1994). When appeal is made to Ecological Footprint analysis in order to emphasize wealth as the main threat to the environment, one cannot evade the importance of both consumption per capita and population density. Canada, despite its much larger ecological footprint per capita than India, has an aggregate ecological footprint smaller than its own territory. The reverse applies to India - or Bangladesh for that matter. If India went up to a European per capita ecological footprint of about 3 ha, then of course India’s footprint would grow six fold even if her population would increase no further. Ecological footprint analysis shows the relevance both of population density and per capita energy consumption. The importance of population density would be better shown by HANPP, “Human appropriation of net primary production”.

The speed in the decrease in fertility depends on social structures and on the willingness and ability of women to have fewer children. There is some danger in India that political competition among religious faiths, and among castes (increasingly assertive politically even as they lose importance in the division of labour and the allocation of natural resources), brings calls for more children -as the French and German states used to call for more soldiers. Let us hope Indians now behave as good Malthusians.

## CONCLUSIONS

Ecological economists emphasize both the pressure of population and the pressure of production (and consumption) on resources. Has humankind exceeded “carrying capacity”? This is defined in ecology as the maximum population of a given species, such as frogs in a lake, which can be supported sustainably in a given territory without spoiling its resource base. However, the large differences internal to the human species in the exosomatic use of energy and materials, mean that the first question is, maximum population at which level of consumption? Second, human technologies change at a quick pace. Already Boserup’s thesis (1965) of endogenous technical change according to which *pre-industrial* agricultural systems had changed in response to increases in population density, turned the tables on the Malthusian argument. Third, the territories occupied by humans are not “given”, other species are pushed into corners or into oblivion (as the index HANPP implies), and, internal to the human species, territoriality is politically constructed through state migration policies. Fourth, international trade (similar to horizontal transport in ecology, but which humans can regulate consciously) may imply “ecologically unequal exchange”, though if one territory lacks a very necessary item which is abundantly present in another territory, then Liebig’s law of the minimum would recommend exchange. Then, the joint carrying capacity of all territories would be larger than the sum of the carrying capacities of all autarchic territories (Pfaundler, 1902). This could link up with NGO proposals for Fair and Ecological Trade.

Because of the shortcomings of “carrying capacity” as an index of (un)sustainability for humans, and because of Barry Commoner’s arguments against Paul Ehrlich’s fixation on population growth, forgetting that overconsumption is the main environmental threat, the formula  $I=P.A.T$  was proposed by Ehrlich since the mid-1970s, where I is environmental impact, P is population, A is affluence per capita, and T stands for the environmental effects of technology. Efforts are being made to operationalize  $I=PAT$ . True, population remains one important variable. True also, top-down neo-Malthusian policies inspired and legitimized by the image of the “population bomb” have caused in recent years many forced sterilizations and large-scale female infanticide in some

countries, and they threaten small surviving ethnic groups. However, as we have seen, one hundred years ago another neo-Malthusian movement in Europe and America, *the* original neo-Malthusian movement, opposed Malthus' view that poverty was due to overpopulation rather than social inequality, and simultaneously fought successfully for limiting births by exercising women's reproductive rights (to use today's language), appealing sometimes also to ecological arguments of pressure of population on resources. The demographic transitions are not mere automatic responses to exogenous social changes, such as urbanization, and their timing does not depend only on social institutions, such as inheritance patterns and family forms. Human demography is self-conscious or reflective. Though it also follows Verhulst's curve, it is different from the ecology of a population of frogs in a lake.

Despite a common origin in Drysdale and other 19<sup>th</sup> century Malthusians, the neo-Malthusianism of 1900 that was adopted in the Catholic countries in southern Europe and some countries in Latin America was more radical than English and Nordic neo-Malthusianism. Much remains to be studied, including its practical influence on the falling birth rates. There is also much to study about central European neo-Malthusianism, especially the Czech, Austrian and Hungarian leagues. More in-depth studies must also be made on neo-Malthusianism in terms of justice and the law, neo-Malthusians' relations with the working class, women's responses to conscious procreation and the actions by re-population leagues. Furthermore, neo-Malthusianism generated plentiful literature both pro and con on moral values, the political economy, historical demography, the right to hygiene, the ecological debate, that is important to recover as topics of environmental history that are truly relevant one century later.

Also in need of further study is the debate among the neo-Malthusians themselves on the purposes for limiting the birth rate among the poor. We should recall that neo-Malthusianism in southern Europe viewed contraceptives as a means to reach objectives that, in their own words, were as follows:

*"In terms of the bourgeoisie: (...) Procreation must be limited so that the bourgeoisie will never again snatch even one of our children to serve as a beast of burden; so that prostitution does not snatch even one of our daughters to present her on the infamous market of carnal pleasure; so that war will no longer be fed with the cannon fodder that the proletariat provides with such abundance.*

*In terms of the Church:* The Church is highly uninterested in the actions of the free thinkers, as long as while they are vociferating against the clergy at meetings or going to Rome with banners and pendants, brass bands and choirs, their women are obligated to go with the children they cannot support to beg for Christian charity and baptise their children, thus making them Catholic.

*In terms of the Army:* The Army shows little concern for anti-militarist conferences as long as the proletariat does not stop reproducing itself on a grand scale. While there is an excess of population, empty stomachs and idle hands, war will be inevitable in one way or another in the fight for life". (Bulffi, 1913: 4-5).

To all that, some neo-Malthusians such as Luigi Fabbri in 1914 – with the experience of the European war – stated that neo-Malthusianism was not a panacea to avoid migration and militarism in and of itself, since countries could appeal to the colonies to enlarge the metropolitan armies just as they could appeal to them to obtain plentiful, cheap labour. Luigi Fabbri viewed neo-Malthusianism at the turn of the century as a long-term movement aimed at a task of worldwide awareness-raising on the issues of demography, war and the Earth's capacity to provide sustenance.

Another problem arising in the study of neo-Malthusianism is its relationship with the eugenics movement which was its contemporary in Europe in around 1910. It should be made clear that neo-Malthusianism was used to raise the proletariat's awareness about the risk of transmitting hereditary illnesses, including alcoholism, and sexual diseases that wreaked such devastation amongst the population at the time. However, southern European neo-Malthusianism rejected ties with eugenics from the outset, as expressed by the neo-Malthusian from Aragon, José Chueca, in 1914:

(...) Although they claim to pursue the same end, the regeneration of the human species, eugenics and neo-Malthusianism have no relationship whatsoever; the former is essentially bourgeois and based on false science, while the latter goes against the bourgeoisie and ranks among the things that truly belong in the realm of science; the former vainly attempts to regenerate humanity by attempting to brutally prevent certain people from reproducing, while the latter aspires to convince people to procreate consciously by affording them the means to prevent fertilisation aiding them in achieving this, since neo-Malthusianism does not wish to impose itself on anyone by violent means, nor does it wish to deny the right to love to the most lowly, the most degenerate of men (...) (Chueca, 1914: 321-2).

Certainly in England, the Netherlands and the United States, neo-Malthusianism evolved toward an attempt at eugenic perfection, before Fascism and Nazism, while in the southern European

countries there was no relationship between neo-Malthusianism and eugenics in its forceful or sterilising sense.

Nor could all neo-Malthusians be considered to be in favour of abortion, since they considered it avoidable due to the new contraceptives which posed no health risk to the mother. However, in general neo-Malthusians considered abortion as one more means of contraception.

Thus, one hundred years ago Malthus's pessimistic prognosis was transformed into the idea of conscious, voluntary procreation. The association with Malthus remained so explicit that one brand of contraceptives was dispensed in Spain and Portugal under the name of "Malthus Pills".



Source: *Solidaridad Obrera (Workers' Solidarity)*, Barcelona no. 484 from 1917.]

Neo-Malthusianism was an international political movement linked to anarchism and revolutionary labour unionism which posed the question of why poor people could and should voluntarily restrict their fertility. This neo-Malthusianism of 1900 is a different doctrine from today's top-down neo-Malthusianism. Historical neo-Malthusianism in southern Europe posited the transformation of society by including awareness of demographic trends and the preservation of the Earth's ability to provide sustenance. To do this, it impugned the existing social organisation. Poor people, and especially poor women, were deemed capable of "conscious procreation". This was a feminist and proto-environmental movement. Instead, today's neo-Malthusianism addresses the problems of

demographic growth and environmental deterioration without questioning the current social system. Today's neo-Malthusianism considers the larger reproductive rate among the world's poor as a threat to their own environment and also through migration as a threat to the quality of life in the rich countries. In Hardin's case this developed into a so-called "life boat ethics". Hence, the need for top-down population policies. Such policies have been considered to be neo-imperialist and anti-feminist. Instead, the neo-Malthusianism of 1900 was not a top-down doctrine imposing population policies from above. It was the opposite. In Southern Europe, it challenged the political and religious authorities of the time through the idea of a "womb strike", and also through anti-militarism and anti-capitalism. It defended "rational feminism" (11).

In Table 1 we summarize the main characteristics of the different varieties of Malthusianism and neo-Malthusianism in the last two hundred years.

**Table 1 - Varieties of Malthusianism**

<b>MALTHUSIANISM</b>	<b>Human populations would grow exponentially unless checked by war and pestilence, or by the unlikely restraint of chastity and late marriages. Food would grow less than proportionately to the growth of the labour input, because of decreasing returns. Hence, subsistence crises.</b>
<b>NEO-MALTHUSIANISM OF 1900</b>	<b>Human populations could regulate their own growth through contraception. Women's freedom was required for this, and it was desirable for its own sake. Poverty was explained by social inequality. "Conscious procreation" was required in order to prevent low wages, and pressure on natural resources. This was a successful bottom-up movement in Europe and America against States (which wanted more soldiers) and against the Catholic Church.</b>
<b>NEO-MALTHUSIANISM AFTER 1970</b>	<b>A top-down doctrine and practice sponsored by international organizations and some governments. Population growth is seen as one main cause of poverty and environmental degradation. Therefore states must introduce contraceptive methods, even sometimes without the populations' (particularly women's) prior consent.</b>
<b>ANTI-MALTHUSIANISM</b>	<b>The view that assumes that human population growth is no major threat to the natural environment, and that it is even conducive to economic growth.</b>

The neo-Malthusians of one hundred years ago agreed with Malthus that poor people had too many children, but they did not believe in chastity and late marriages. They promoted more vigorous “preventive checks” than Malthus had foreseen, exhorting the poor populations of Europe and America to use contraceptives, and to separate love making from child bearing and even from marriage. The movement was careful to insist that they were not Malthusians but *neo*-Malthusians, devoted to “sexual freedom and parental prudence” (Paul Robin in 1896, cf. Ronsin, 1980:70). Many clerics of 1900 found the neo-Malthusian ideas and practices sinful. Many statesmen found them subversive. Neo-Malthusians urged women’s and men’s agency to turn Malthus’ exponential curve into a logistic curve, the true law of population. Human demography became in Europe and America socially self-reflective, perhaps more so than it had been in other societies (except for some small “primitive” groups which closely controlled reproduction). Only strong-willed radicals dared preach contraception in late 19th century and early 20th century. One main figure of neo-Malthusianism in Brazil was the feminist and anarchist Maria Lacerda de Moura who wrote several books in the 1920s and 1930s, one of them entitled “Love one another, and do not multiply”. Active feminists in French neo-Malthusianism had been Marie Huot (who used the words *la grève des ventres*) and Madaleine Pelletier, who proposed not only contraceptives but also the legalization of abortion. (Gordon, 1976, Ronsin, 1980, Morton, 1992, Masjuan, 2000).

Historians might debate whether neo-Malthusian propaganda (with many printed copies of journals and books) had an influence on the demographic transition, or whether the causality runs the other way, in the sense that a social practice of birth control made neo-Malthusianism acceptable despite court-cases and brochure seizures. Among the contraceptive methods recommended by the neo-Malthusian movement in Europe and America, some were geared to women, but condoms were popular. Vasectomies started to be endorsed in French anarchist circles in the early 1930s - the state’s response was a court-case (Ronsin, 1980:202). However, by the 1920s and 1930s, despite state populationist policies, in Europe the debate on the freedom to choose the number of children was already settled in practice. The feminist neo-Malthusians of one hundred years ago deserve some credit.

## NOTES

- 1 To find out about Paul Robin's extensive career in social matters, teaching and neo-Malthusianism, refer to: Giroud, G. (1937) *Paul Robin, Sa vie, Ses idées, Son action*. Paris: G. Mignolet & Storz, Éditeurs.
- 2 Within thirty-three years, twenty-six editions of this book were published and it was translated into twenty-six different languages. Significantly, there is no complete translation into Spanish, although there is one into Portuguese dating from 1876.
- 3 See the petition and memo to the members of the Reichstag in February 1914 by the *Sozial Harmonische Verein* so that neo-Malthusianism would not be subject to persecution in Germany. In *De Nieuw Malthusiansche Band*, folder no. 98 of the IISG from Amsterdam.
- 4 See Jorberg, L. and Kranz, O. (1989) *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*. Volume. VIII. *The Industrial Economics: The Development of Economic and Social Policies*. Chapter XV Economic and Social Policy in Sweden, 1850-1939. Cambridge University Press..
- 5 See the introduction by F. Ronsin in: de Boer, T. (1994) *Inventaire des archives d'Eugène Jean Baptiste Humbert (1870-1944) et Henriette Jeanne Humbert-Rigaudin (1890-1986) 1896-1986 (-1993)*. IISG Working Paper 28.
- 6 To see the oppositions, the nation-wide debates and the response that neo-Malthusianism devised against colonialism and repression, see Masjuan, E. (2002b: 195-217).
- 7 Mussolini's response in the neo-Malthusian magazine, *L' Educazione Sessuale*, Turin. II:3
- 8 To see the objectives and means used by this committee and responses by the conservatives to the spread of neo-Malthusianism in Uruguay, Argentina and Cuba, see: Masjuan, E. (2004: II in press).
- 9 Editor's note to Lenin's text of 1913 , *The working class and neo-Malthusianism* (1975: 130).
- 10 Basanta Koomar Roy was a man of letters and translator of Tagore, as well as a regular contributor to *Birth Control Review*. See his article "Diamond Men and Men of Flesh" (Roy, 1925).
- 11 In 1909, Alexandra David (1868-1969) published in Belgium the work entitled *Rational Feminism*, also published in Spain by the neo-Malthusian league. She was known around the world for her efforts on behalf of boys and girls in India and Tibet after long sojourns in these countries. Her contribution to neo-Malthusianism at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was considerable.

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