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POPULATION POLICY: IS IT A QUESTION OF VOLUNTARISM OR COERCION?

*By W. Murray Todd**

One of America's well-known demographers is fond of riveting the attention of his audiences by announcing that the only alternatives to fertility limitation are infanticide, cannibalism, and homosexuality.¹ In this spirit it was tempting to entitle this essay "The Federal Coitus Interruptus Act of 1984," following in the footsteps of the authors who use such titles as "The Population Bomb" (Paul Erlich); "The Case for Compulsory Birth Control" (Edgar R. Chasteen); "Nobody Ever Dies of Overpopulation" (Garrett Hardin); "Famine 1975" (The Paddock Brothers) and "Everybody's Guilty—The Ecological Dilemma" (Garrett Hardin).

Only a very few people still think the world can roll along at the rate of population growth it now sustains. The rest of us recognize the need for some sort of limitation on the present growth pattern, and vast numbers of us are seeking ways to cut that growth rate. Therefore, it is not just academic to ask whether the majority of population-conscious people operate from a sound philosophic base when they advocate voluntary family planning as a solution. All of the authors just mentioned say they do not. These authors say in various ways and with slightly differing shades of emphasis that some sort of compulsory regulation of fertility is necessary to curb the rate of population growth. Some would try to turn back the population clock to some optimum "steady state" population and others would settle for an immediate goal of "zero population growth," but there are few significant philosophical differences between these two positions.

At the outset, let me stipulate that in discussing the nature of this argument about voluntarism (sometimes inaccurately described as "only family planning") and compulsory birth control

(also known as coercion), I am *not* taking a position on, or discussing, compulsory sterilization to reduce the transmission of genetic defects and problems of like genre. I am addressing the question of whether physically and mentally sound people should be enjoined by the community to limit their offspring, under threat of some sort of state-imposed penalty if they do not comply?

When we talk about "voluntarism," we are talking about an approach to fertility limitation that permits people to have control over the number and spacing of their children and freedom of choice. It is important to note that "freedom of choice" includes the freedom *not* to have children; it does not, as so often stated, mean simply the freedom to have as many children as a couple can conceive or support.

THE COMPULSORY BIRTH CONTROL ARGUMENT

The argument for compulsory birth control has a rather well-established pattern. It is beginning to take on a literary style that puts it in the same category as the "who-dun-it?" or the classic western. First there is a wealth of statistical material showing where we were, where we are now, and then the absolutely appalling prediction of where we are going if present birth rates continue to some date in the future when we either cannot feed or otherwise sustain the numbers of people projected. There is no point in arguing with this statistical material. It is as correct as demographic studies and mathematical extrapolation can make it. The prospect is genuinely frightening, and it is usually told without embellishment because it needs none.

In the early days of this literary genre the figures about numbers of people were matched against tons of grain and other food production indices and there was an obvious mismatch of significant proportions. Since the "Green Revolution," the predictions about food and people have been tempered by the almost unbelievable turnaround in agricultural productivity. It now appears to many experts that there may be enough food for some time to come; in fact, perhaps enough to take the world to the point of population stability assuming that point can be reached within the next 75-100 years. I should also like to submit that the Green Revolution has, to some observers, demonstrated that relying on simple extrapolation of numbers into the future is

fought with peril when it is possible for human institutions deliberately to intervene.

This literature then exposes the reader to the horrors of environmental commission and omission we have perpetrated on our planet (usually known as "spaceship earth"). Frequently this material is anecdotal, with heart-rending glimpses of the author trying valiantly to find his tiny spot of unblemished nature, only to discover a rusty beer can or a nonbiodegradable plastic container smack-dab in the middle of his sylvan glade. This aspect of the literature has a rather extraordinary pull for the sensitive reader because he finds himself nodding and saying "isn't that true" while recalling some similar incident that has happened to him. It also gives the reader the sense that he and the author share comparable values, when in truth this may be very far from the fact.

The "population-environment" argument frequently tends to confuse the number of people with their level of consumption. It almost invariably is filled with dire predictions about the rate of utilization of nonrenewable resources and the developed world's exploitation of natural resources from the developing world. It usually fails to note the variety of very densely populated places and the vast differences in the environmental problems they experience. Compare, for example, The Netherlands and the Nile Delta. The argument almost always fails to offer alternatives to the exploitation of natural resources as a way for developing nations to earn desperately needed hard currency. Rarely is it pointed out that substitution of nonrenewable resources (if there really are such things) is possible through product substitution, the development of alternatives, and synthetic raw materials. When these authors note that, by definition, "nonrenewable resources" have to run out some time in the future no matter what the population may be, the explicit or implicit argument is that the human race should, *ipso facto*, put off its destiny for as long as possible. There is no recognition that it may be wise to deliberately choose to preserve certain values at the expense of certain resources. For example, we currently have the capacity to derive much of our energy needs from nuclear power, yet we still use petroleum products for this purpose. The economics of power provide one set of values while the alternative uses of petroleum (pharmaceuticals, proteins and petrochemical products) provide another. These economic and social "trade-offs"—

in the terms of the economist—have not been fully illuminated for the public.

There are compelling arguments about the quality of life and the effects of overcrowding. It is not unusual to find Desmond Morris, Robert Ardey, Konrad Lorenz, John B. Calhoun, and other ethologists and investigators of animal behavior quoted to demonstrate what either has happened or can happen to people when they are packed too closely together or their “natural” proclivities are thwarted. In most cases this is a disservice to the author quoted, because, on the whole, students of animal behavior are reasonably careful about reporting their findings, and they distinguish between their often fascinating speculations as to how these findings may apply to human behavior and the results of their experimentation and observation.

The case for compulsory birth control to enhance the “quality of life” is one of the most pernicious and insidious arguments used in the literature of coercion. These authors regularly apply their yardsticks of the quality of life with few, if any, references to the myriad approaches to this complex of values as they are manifested among the varied cultures, religious backgrounds and national and ethical points of view that abound in the world. The quality of life to be maintained, or achieved, is usually a purely personal, ethnocentric vision held by the author.

These books and articles usually also describe the limitations of family planning programs and harken back to Kingsley Davis’s 1967 article in *Science*² which was one of the first close examinations of the argument for compulsion. It may be useful to note that we have come a long way since 1967, as the recently released figures on U.S. population show. This is not to say that family planning caused the drop in the U.S. fertility rate from 3.8 in 1957 to *less than 2.5* in 1970,³ but it is hard to deny that providing contraceptives, making sterilization and abortion legal and accessible, and significantly changed attitudes have been a contributing factor.

To digress momentarily let us look at the results of the New York abortion laws in the brief period since legal abortions have become freely available.

This data is instructive in many ways. It is said, for example, that a particularly liberal law was brought before the New York Legislature with the expectation that its very looseness would ensure its rejection. Once the law was passed, it was predicted

that the effect would be to so overburden the medical facilities that other patients would suffer from neglect or that the results of the program would be to create a situation even less desirable than the one that existed (the prevalence of illegal abortions). The net effect, interestingly enough, has been spectacularly positive in almost all ways: the poor have been served at no cost, if necessary; the rate of "incomplete abortions" has dropped (i.e. the cases of illegal abortions that require subsequent hospital care); maternal and infant mortality and illegitimacy have declined; and there is clear evidence that women from all socio-economic strata will avail themselves of this service.⁴

It is tempting, but obviously premature, to hope this evidence bears out the contention of the voluntarists that given the means, the knowledge, and the will, people will indeed take the steps needed to markedly reduce the rate of population growth. Speculate for a moment on what might happen if, as is quite probable, a simple, cheap, abortifacient (morning-after pill) is developed and made easily accessible to the women of the developing world!

If one agrees that making it easy for people not to have babies is a good idea, it is extremely difficult not to accept the program of the family planning camp. A little later I will try to point out some of the obstacles the advocates of voluntary family planning have yet to overcome and leave it to the reader to speculate on how the advocates of compulsion would go about things differently.

The literary scenario of compulsory birth control usually includes examples of other ways governments compel social behavior and coerce individuals. Sometimes there is a pseudo-legal set of arguments about the differences between rights and privileges and the conclusion is drawn that as between the rights of the individual and the rights of society, those of society must prevail if civilization as we know it is to continue. This very genuine question has engaged the attention of philosophers for centuries. Today the question is acute because it relates to a wide array of seemingly intractable political and economic problems with profound ethical overtones. In stark contrast to contemporary political and ethical thinkers, the compulsion-oriented group settles the matter with a speed and facility that is truly astonishing and goes on to its "final solution" which inevitably reduces individual freedom.

The legal arguments of the compulsory birth controllers are

curiously devoid of reference to the actual problems of changing existing legislation to make contraception, sterilization, and abortion so freely available that the populace could conform. This is not an insignificant point, but it is usually glossed over with a sweeping legal formula that is designed to take precedence over all existing laws relating to the provision of sexual education and practice, information about contraception, the medical protocols surrounding sterilization and abortion, and the provision of public funds and resources for these purposes. Luke Lee, writing for a World Health Organization group has summarized the difficulties faced by many countries in bringing their legal apparatus into conjunction with the 1968 Teheran U.N. Proclamation that family planning is a basic human right.⁵

Lee notes that rights imply a legal as well as moral obligation on the states that uphold them; the legal systems of many countries are woefully inadequate to the task of making this a working principle of political life upon which people can rely.

This is a fascinating problem and one with which it is impossible to more than touch upon here, but for those who are seriously interested in doing something about the population problem, it might be instructive to examine with some care the legal impediments to the full exercise of this right in their immediate jurisdiction. The impact of administrative regulation should not be ignored in such a search. In the United States a marvelous example of this paradox is the current state of contraceptive research as it is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. Carl Djerassi has pointed out that under today's rules it would take approximately 17½ years and 18 million dollars from start to finish to produce, test, and have accepted a new abortifacient agent in the United States.⁶ As it now stands, in this country we rely on the private drug manufacturers to undertake this research and reward them by permitting them to recoup the costs from the profits made on the sales of their products. His point is simple. The time and the investment required, the chance of failure and the prognosis that over the life-span of the project the rules will again change, make the risk most unattractive. Who then will conduct this research and undertake the testing? Do we rely on a state institution to do this, and, if so, have we set a precedent for the research, testing, and evaluation of other pharmaceutical products with inherent patient risk?

In India, which has long been attempting to cope with its

population problems, it was only in August 1971 that legislation was passed providing for legal abortions

. . . where the continuance of the pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the pregnant woman or of grave injury to her physical or mental health . . .

and in explanation,

Where any pregnancy occurs as a result of failure of any device or method used by any married woman or her husband for the purpose of limiting the number of children; the anguish caused by such unwanted pregnancy may be presumed to constitute a grave injury to the mental health of the pregnant woman.⁷

This legislation appears to omit the unmarried woman, but sets an interesting and useful precedent for the determination of "grave injury."

Back to the literature of compulsory birth control: having set the stage for compulsion and marshalled their arguments, the usual prescription of the compulsory birth controllers first insists that contraceptive information and materials, voluntary sterilization and abortion be made completely accessible to everyone of reproductive age. This, of course, is the platform of the voluntarists as well. Next, the advocates of compulsion suggest that there must be a national zero-population-growth goal, and some legislative basis for this is offered. Finally, they argue that since population is an issue that cannot be well regulated under strictly construed legal devices, it is necessary to draft legislation in terms of broad policy and leave the implementation of these laws to executive agencies that would be given wide latitude in creating their own administrative law to enforce. Most, if not all, of the authors prescribing this path immediately disclaim any personal liking for coercion or administrative law, but profess to see no alternative for "survival."

There are often ancillary policy dicta attached to this scenario—for example, it is frequently argued that the United States first demonstrate to the rest of the world its willingness to abandon this aspect of personal freedom before it demands it of others, but then it follows with the statement that we must not furnish bilateral aid (sometimes specified to include food assistance) to any country that will not take the same draconian steps.

The authors of plans for compulsory birth control are uniformly secretive about revealing their methods of enforcing the

laws they advocate. Paul Erlich has predicted "criminal prosecution" of those who have more than two children, but neither he nor his literary colleagues offer workable notions of what the penalties for "overbreeding" would be, upon whom they would be imposed, or even how the state determines who has how many children.⁸ (It might not be too easy, considering the freedom with which we change partners.)

Either explicitly or implicitly the arguments presented by the people advocating compulsory birth control appear to be based on the following perceptions and assumptions:

- That there are too many people in the world already;
- That because these people cannot be counted upon to understand their own best interests, somebody has to tell them what those interests are;
- That society has an overriding right to control the most intimate elements of the lives of individuals; and
- That this right of society is assumed because "survival" is the paramount goal of mankind.

The reader will have to decide whether there is merit to any or all of these assumptions and perceptions. In my view they are misapplied to the problems of population growth.

The literature on compulsory birth control tells us a lot about the people who write it and their views of the society in which they live.

A REPLY TO THE ARGUMENT

The inherent weaknesses of this literature, aside from occasional factual distortions, appear to me to stem from a curious blindness about existing human values as compared to the assumed values Garrett Hardin ascribes to the tragic people who populate his commons.⁹ I have great difficulty in accepting the validity of his assumption that the only appeal to parents to limit their offspring is through conscience. Doubtless this is one important appeal, but it appears to be a remarkable oversimplification to build the case for compulsion by ignoring the powerful positive forces at work which motivate people to have a limited number of children. He says, "Unfortunately, logic and experience show that continuing to support the right to breed is suicidal."¹⁰ Some forms of logic may indeed lead to this conclusion, but he presents no evidence that experience bears out this contention.

Historical demography has established that over time and in

many places, people have limited their populations voluntarily, and are still doing so in some cases (notably France and other parts of Western Europe). The appeal of the small family from an economic standpoint, for maternal and child health reasons, because of a shortage of housing or other logistic factors, simply cannot be ignored.

This brings me to a pair of related concerns about this literature: The scientists who have written about compulsory birth control are eminent men in their fields—which are not the disciplines of national policy makers. They reveal their ideas lucidly and base them on selected scientific data; simultaneously they offer their speculative and prescriptive opinions in precisely the same tone of voice and with identical authority. Although their public airing of the population problem indeed is an important service to the community, their technique can overwhelm the findings of more sober scholars, may amuse politicians while deflecting their attention from the real issues, and most assuredly frighten a gullible public or galvanize portions of it into faddish actions that are useless and shortlived.

To be sure, the advocates of family planning also can, and have, overstated their case thereby generating a significant reaction from groups that offer radical solutions. For example, the *New York Times* carried a series of full-page advertisements in 1968–69 by the “Campaign to Check the Population Explosion.” These ads, carrying the names of many prominent family planning advocates, were remarkable examples of the propagandists’ craft. What appeared to many readers to be deliberately misleading innuendoes were coupled with an hysterical tone and a plea for funds that combined to cause acute anguish within the small, but dedicated, fraternity of people who have devoted their lives and careers to prudent and well-designed programs of family planning. These ads are now cited as evidence of establishment degeneracy by advocates of social revolution who say: “To sum up, it appears that population control is a program developed by, and to serve the interests of, the U.S. ruling class. All the humanitarian rhetoric in the world cannot mask the fact that the exploitation can continue.”¹¹

Other critics of population control, fertility limitation, and family planning cite the obvious fact that it is the white well-to-do, educated, powerful elite that provides the funds and the propaganda to control the births of the black, brown, yellow, poor, uneducated, and weak. Whether these accusations have

merit is important, but even more important is that those who make them have indeed put their accusatory finger on a very real weakness in some family planning programs and have pinpointed a weakness in the arguments offered by most of the advocates of compulsory birth control; they have identified the issue of social justice. An articulate approach to this problem was offered the President's Commission on Population Growth and the American Future by Dr. Charles V. Willie, a black sociologist, who pointed out that, "A national population policy must demonstrate that it is more concerned about the health and wealth of black people than it is about the number of children they have. I am talking about a positive population policy which is the preferred way to deal with a negative effect."¹²

This statement about the black community in the United States may just be a capsule summary of the philosophy of the underprivileged anywhere on the face of the earth. Newspaper reports in the fall of 1971 provided ample evidence of the growing intensity of official feeling in less developed countries that "indefinite coexistence between poverty and affluence is no longer possible."¹³ Barbara Ward Jackson has denounced the "obsession" of the affluent white community with birth control as the solution to the world's problems of hunger and poverty. In a pungent phrase this eminent Catholic laywoman declared, "If a man asks you for bread and you offer him a pill, he'll spit in your eye."¹⁴ Paul Erlich, in his recent book *How To Be A Survivor*, has come to grips with an interesting aspect of the social justice question. In constructing an ethic of survival he has opted for a redistribution of wealth based on a lowered level of consumption by the affluent. To me this is backing into the issue, and freedom is not a part of his ethic—nonetheless it is a step beyond the rest of the advocates of compulsion.

A contra-literature is now being written—and read—and it may be epitomized by Richard Neuhaus, a Brooklyn minister who is challenging the "ecology movement" to straighten out its priorities, noting that, "the goal is not survival, but survival as human beings." He notes that, "the important questions are political and moral."¹⁵

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

Population policy is a political matter. One critical dimension of the problem is that only women can bear children, so population policy must inevitably be directly related to women. It is

estimated that there are roughly 795,626,000 women in the fertile age group (15-44) in the world today.¹⁶ They live in over 144 nations with thousands of local jurisdictions. They speak 154 major languages (defined as having over 1 million speakers) and an incredible number of minor languages and dialects. As of 1957, UNESCO estimated that there were 690-720 million adult illiterates in the world, and one could assume at least half were women. (Actually the number of women was probably far more than half because of the unequal educational opportunities for women in so many underprivileged parts of the earth.)

What are we asking these women to do? We are asking them to so regulate their lives that they bear only two children (one out of three can bear one more) between the time they first menstruate and the time of the onset of the menopause, roughly a 30 year period with a rate of "exposure" to impregnation that is dependent entirely on the woman's sexual activity.

That is some task.

My point is obvious. Trying to devise and enforce laws that will accomplish these ends, if not impossible, would entail such a diversion of real and psychic resources, energy, talent, and manpower that it staggers the imagination. In my view it would doubtless also be so controversial that great harm might result for all fertility-limiting endeavors. The fundamental question is whether there is any evidence that preparing and implementing coercive measures now would affect the course of world population growth faster or more effectively than doing all the other things we can do to reduce that growth through acceptable existing measures? Or, put in a different frame of reference, a more appealing goal is to extend the freedom *not* to have children.

Two futures loom. The "Club of Rome" through a series of studies commissioned at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology under the leadership of Jay Forrester and Dennis Meadows has a model of the world which, in essence, sets the maximum sustainable world population at something less than 14 billion within the next 100 years. This means, say these prognosticators, that because of a doubling time of 32 years, the current rate of growth must drop precipitously before year 2030, or enormous social disruptions can be expected. In making these judgments from their computer-assisted mode, Messrs. Forrester and Meadows have brought into play another analytical tool to buttress the arguments of both the voluntarists and the coercive

controllers. They have set two boundaries—the total number of people and a time scale. In theory at least, we now have some sort of a yardstick against which to measure the need for any given set of policies or actions and one by which we can assess their success. Whether you like the yardstick or the way it was constructed (and many critics find it somewhat elastic) it is a challenging intellectual approach to the problem.

A more optimistic Roger Revelle, Director of the Harvard Center for Population Studies, predicts that, “. . . the earth’s human population could level off at less than 10 thousand million people by the latter half of the 21st century.”¹⁷ This again gives us some grasp of the dimensions of the problem and some capacity to face its political and moral implications for policy makers and for parents.

THE MAKING OF POPULATION POLICY

As every reader recognizes, the global dimensions of the population problem are not those faced by the individual policy maker in any given country. However, there are common threads to population policy, no matter where the policy is made (the issue is women and children). There are also global trends that cannot be ignored locally (the quest for social justice), tides of opinion that cut across national boundaries (the multilateral vs. bilateral technical assistance controversy), natural or contrived enthusiasms—fads—that sweep people up and then deposit them someplace they did not expect to be (the initial enthusiasm for the Intra-Uterine Device), and the grim reminder that it is imperative that something be done. This last, in my view, is a singularly important fact of political life; it stimulates action but carries the risk that it can be the wrong action or the wrong time for it. It may also be pertinent to note that people engaged in this task will tend to seek and use the data and experience developed elsewhere. They do not have to reinvent the wheel.

Now if the reader will put himself in the position of the cabinet-minister-in-the-street of a developing country for a few moments, it may be instructive to see how these complex and occasionally contrary forces bear on policy making and political decisions. Let us assume there exists a robust will to “get this population problem under control” and that steps are to be taken. Harken back to a prescription offered by Bernard Berelson some years ago when he offered six criteria for any operational fertility control

programs: "(i) scientific, medical, and technological readiness; (ii) political viability; (iii) administrative feasibility; (iv) economic capability; (v) moral, ethical, and philosophical acceptability; and (vi) presumed effectiveness."¹⁸ Couple this checklist to the critical variables of population matters: age, sex, and spatial distribution patterns. These are the initial elements of a very rough political decision-making matrix. It is manifest immediately that Barry Commoner's ecological principle that "we can never merely do one thing," is a precept working politicians know instinctively.

Rationally conceived population policies require a strong strategic base and tactical flexibility. They can be "counter-productive" unless due consideration is given to as many of the secondary effects as the fertile imagination can conjure up. They should be adaptable in the light of changing circumstances and the development of new knowledge and take into account technical constraints, our current state of knowledge, and what we perceive to be our priority needs.

Regrettably much of the literature on population policy has been based on a static view of the situation. Many of us have failed to note peoples' changing demographic behavior and the changing state of knowledge. But while students of population policy take the time to organize their thoughts and amass data, it is quite impractical for leaders to wait to do something, for then they cease to lead. One result of this gap is that some less-than-statemanager-like leaders transform the problem into a devil ("I will not go against God's law," or "It is a capitalist-imperialist trick," or "This is genocide.") which is one way to evade the issue.

Within the matrix offered above it is possible for those who take their responsibilities in a more pragmatic light to envision a rough approximation of the characteristics of workable population policies. Based on the strategic desirability of the small family norm—i.e., replacement level at some point in the future—such a policy should be contrived to enhance maternal and child health, facilitate socially and economically useful education for both young and old, help balance the population with respect to age and sex and spatial distribution, provide for social justice through adequate employment and social security, permit sexual and other purely individual freedoms and pleasures, and meet the ethical needs and goals of the culture.

The population policy maker will perceive that, taken in this context, the problem becomes one of creating a series of public goals, only one of which will be fertility limitation. The institutional support required to make these goals workable far transcends the agencies of the state as such, but governmentally supported institutions, the schools and health and welfare organizations, will most assuredly figure prominently in the actual operational aspects of most population policies. It is hard to see how population policies will work without the underpinning of a private climate of opinion and a set of attitudes (through the churches, unions, co-ops, cultural media, and so on) which will run parallel to actual state-supported programs.

Seen in this light it is reasonable to assert that the checking of rapid population growth will result from a galaxy of positive measures and incentives motivating parents to have fewer children than they do now for reasons they perceive to be of substantial advantage to themselves and to the children they produce. This will be a voluntary process in the very real sense that the institutions of society will present evidence of these advantages to parents, and they will act in accord with that evidence. It will not be coercive in either the legal sense or in the context of deliberate deception or contrived incentives that subvert the value systems of those affected.

Population policies can be divided into two general categories. The first category encompasses those policies that are population-responsive (i.e., that are created as a result of the numbers of people, their age, or sex balance, or their spatial distribution). The second category encompasses those policies that are population-influencing (i.e., those that actually affect the rate of population growth or the distribution of people, the balance of their ages, sexes, or their demographic behavior).¹⁹

Here, in very short compass, are some of the *population-responsive* policies that result from high fertility rates and consequent rapid population growth:

- The numbers of doctors, nurses, midwives, and other providers of health services and the numbers of teachers and educational administrators must expand more rapidly than the number of people for whom they care and educate, otherwise the existing level of per capita health service and education will, in all likelihood, drop.
- The new and conventional agricultural technology must be so utilized that the rate of growth of agricultural production exceeds

the rate of population growth and the nutritional quality of peoples' diets continues to improve. In other words, it will not be enough merely to increase the rate of food production quantitatively; this increase must be qualitative as well. While improvement in the use of agricultural technology takes place, policies must be contrived to absorb the ever-increasing numbers of marginal farmers (who cannot use the new technology effectively) into productive employment either in service or industrial occupations.

- The problems of urbanization (which hardly need be detailed here) are accentuated in developing countries by the *push* off the land and the *pull* of the city. Without labor-intensive (vs. capital intensive) industrialization and a vast expansion of service occupations in these countries, the problems of unemployment and underemployment can become the nightmare of the 21st century. Thus, the policies contrived for economic development are, by definition, essentially population-responsive policies particularly in developing countries.
- In countries with heterogenous populations, effective population policies will stress social justice and equity among different racial, religious, tribal, ethnic, and cultural groups, or these groups may perceive such policies as a direct threat to their existence as groups. This is particularly important in those countries where legislative representation is based on effective popular voting and the presence of two or more groups in perceived conflict puts an apparent premium on the numbers of voters and hence, may affect attitudes toward limiting population.

Population-influencing policies designed to reduce population growth and alter fertility patterns can be viewed by the policy maker as directly applicable to the problems of economic development and social improvement. If they are *not* so viewed, their context becomes essentially negative. Here are some examples of such policies:

- The reduction of infant and maternal mortality are necessary. In fact, it is very likely that the reduction of infant mortality is a necessary precondition to the reduction of fertility because families will continue to have babies unless they are reasonably sure those they already have stand a strong chance of surviving to adulthood.²⁰
- Governments and private institutions must improve the accessibility to, and reduce the cost of, fertility-limiting materials and services and educate parents (really everyone of reproductive age) in their acceptability and use. In a sense this is the beginning of wisdom in any serious population program that seeks to limit fertility,

but it is not at all an easy task because it requires the application of very substantial resources over a long period at a sustained rate.

- The case for the small-family norm must be advanced by educating parents to the advantages of the small family. There is ample evidence from both developed and developing countries that the children from small, well-spaced families “do better” in terms of health, education, and economic status than their counterparts from large families—no matter what the income level of the parents. Equally compelling evidence is being accumulated that the small family “does better” than the large family under similar circumstances. This statement is so sweeping in its inclusiveness that I can only refer the reader to the current literature—which admittedly is spotty—for confirmation, but the National Academy of Sciences study, *Rapid Population Growth*²¹ presents a substantial body of the evidence that supports this contention.
- Provide for the health and the status of women by concentrating on maternal and child health care and by offering women equal educational and employment opportunities. It is intriguing to worry along with the population policy maker in the cost-benefit analysis of the increased employment of women. On the one hand, the immediate expansion of the labor force may well increase the rate of unemployment and underemployment. On the other hand, the incentives to women not to have children may, over a generation or so, materially reduce the number of children born and therefore reduce the work force.

The reader will doubtless realize that the implicit choices in all of the positive policy suggestions made above would have to be coped with, whether one opts for compulsory or voluntary fertility limitation. Voluntarism requires positive motivation and the will to take the necessary time and effort to educate parents. It is costly in these terms, but at least it has two obvious benefits: (1) it does not generate a raging argument about people’s rights and freedoms with all the costs that would entail, and (2) it builds on a growing body of institutional expertise that can, and is, adjusting to such changing manifestations of the global social will as the expanding demands for social justice and the concern for the natural and human environment.

CONCLUSION

Arguing the case for compulsory birth control, using the premise that people will have as many children as they can, is a little like saying that our society is faced with a moral breakdown be-

cause of the prevalence of sexual promiscuity as it is measured by soaring rates of illegitimacy and venereal disease. Obviously increased illegitimacy and venereal disease may be the result of moral turpitude. It may also be that we have suddenly become more aware of these problems because of accentuated publicity, modifications in sexual habits, or a greater freedom in revealing them because of fundamental changes in society. There is, as far as I know, little or no evidence that a reduced level of sexual education, restricted availability of contraceptive information and devices, or refusal of legal abortions would improve "morality." Very few indeed really want an illegitimate child and nobody wants VD. It may also be that there is not too much interest in being moral—as that term may be defined by its public guardians—thus, it is useful, in conclusion, to take a very brief look at our original question. Is voluntarism an effective philosophy with which to tackle the world population problem? There is no conclusive evidence to answer that question either way, but there is strong presumptive evidence suggesting that policy makers have to capitalize upon people's propensity to do what they wish and guide—not force—those wishes.

Last year two French Cabinet Ministers (Defense, and Labor Employment and Population) spoke out about the "underpopulation" of France. The situation was attributed by one of them to a psychological climate of insecurity, the propensity of young Frenchmen to have fatal automobile accidents, and of their seniors to become alcoholics. Are the Cabinet Ministers correct in assessing the French problem as "underpopulation," or is the public telling the Government something about French society that happens to manifest itself in the population growth rate? At a population conference in Strasbourg last year it was reported that the populations of the Federal Republic of Germany, Denmark, France, Sweden, and Portugal are not growing at the replacement rate; and the net effect will be an aging and therefore "less dynamic" population. The fact that it will be an aging population is doubtless true, but the evidence for the absence of dynamism—however that is measured—is far less conclusive. In 1969 Japan's Prime Minister advocated an increase in the Japanese birthrate despite the fact that Japan is made up of the most crowded and densely populated islands in the world. In this instance the recommendation was made with an eye to an increasingly serious labor shortage and again with respect to the

aging population and to the burden it creates for the working fraction of the population.

Somehow I find it difficult to imagine the French Cabinet Ministers having much success in curbing the propensity of young Frenchmen to drive with Gallic insouciance, or weaning the older Frenchman from his aperitif. It also seems unlikely that the Japanese Prime Minister will convince Japanese parents that more little productive units is just what they want.

How paradoxical that in most developing countries of the world there is an enormous surplus of labor and in some of the most developed there is a shortage (leaving aside the differences in skills for the moment); in most of the developing countries of the world there is an economic burden based on a preponderance of nonproductive youth (in some of these countries 45 percent of the population is 15 and under) while some of the highly developed countries are worried about the costs of supporting the aged.

This sort of essay does not permit the drawing of precise conclusions; however, perhaps it is worth noting my own hypothesis about the future. It is based on the assumption that in the great sweep of history people have made some horrendous mistakes as individuals and societies, but that we are here today because, on balance, they managed to make the choices that were in their own best interests. If this be so, it seems that the philosophy of helping each other to learn what is in our own best interest and extending the freedom to choose is supported by the weight of human experience and preference. Just as jails are inefficient places to teach good citizenship, so coercive and compulsory legislation is inefficient from both the economic and social viewpoint. There are vast arrays of things to do to make it easy and acceptable for people to limit their fertility. Doing these things—a few of which have been suggested in this essay—seems to be the natural order of business for the concerned.



FOOTNOTES

❖ Executive Secretary of the Office of the Foreign Secretary of the National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D. C. The opinions expressed are those of the author and have not been endorsed by any officer or committee of the Academy. The kind assistance of Academy staff colleagues in the library research, typing and editorial preparation of this essay is gratefully acknowledged by the author.

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- ⁵ Luke Lee, "Law and Family Planning," *Studies in Family Planning*, Vol. 2, No. 4, (April 1971).
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- ¹⁴ *Washington Post*, October 25, 1971.
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- ¹⁶ U. S. Bureau of the Census, International Demographic Statistics Center, International Statistics Program Division.
- ¹⁷ Roger Revelle, "Introduction," *Psychiatric Annals*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (September 1971).
- ¹⁸ Bernard Berelson, "Beyond Family Planning," *Science*, Vol. 163, p. 533 (February 7, 1969).
- ¹⁹ National Academy of Sciences, *Rapid Population Growth*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore (1971).
- ²⁰ Walsh McDermott, "Demography, Culture and Economics and the Evolutionary Stages of Medicine," in Edwin D. Kilbourne and Wilson G. Smillie, *Human Ecology and Public Health*, The Macmillan Company, London (1969).
- ²¹ See *supra* note 19.