

Population Control Today—and Tomorrow?

by Jacqueline R. Kasun

The success of the population control movement over the past four decades has been nothing less than astonishing. Places like Bangladesh and Kenya are awash in condoms (even though basic medicines are scarce), and population is actually falling in some countries and heading in that direction in many others.

Yet the movement is astonishing in another way, too: Despite its success, it is expanding at a breakneck pace in terms of both funding and programs.

One of the least-remarked events of the year 2000 was the announcement by the UN Population Division that “in the next 50 years, the populations of most developed countries are projected to become smaller and older as a result of low fertility and increased longevity.... Population decline is inevitable in the absence of replacement migration.”

The division reported that 44 percent of the world’s population lives in countries where birthrates are too low to prevent population decline. If present trends continue, there will be 100 million fewer people in Europe and 21 million fewer in Japan 50 years from now. The birthrate in the United States has fallen from 24.3 per thousand population in 1950–55 to 14.6 in 1998, a trend that is likely to continue for some time because the female population of reproductive age will decline by several million during the next decade (unless offset by immigration). Also, the U.S. death rate has been rising slightly but perceptibly, because the population is aging. (The death rate for a

fixed group of people is still 100 percent sooner or later, despite rising life expectancy, and older populations have higher death rates, other factors being equal.)

The UN Population Division predicts that world fertility will continue to decline from its present average of less than three children per woman (the one-child family is now typical in Europe and Japan) while the death rate rises. Thus, the proportion of people over 60 will rise to exceed the proportion of people under 15, for the first time in history.

Nevertheless, groups supporting population control continue to press for more funding for their programs both at home and abroad. Population Action International, for example, reported in June 2000 that “the Clinton administration intends to fight for additional funds” and that “Hollywood celebrities mingled with top policymakers and international family planning advocates on... World Health Day... to show the... administration’s support for population assistance.”

ROOTS OF THE MOVEMENT

The quest of those in power to control population is at least as old as the Exodus story of Pharaoh killing Hebrew baby boys. In our time, the movement has received stimuli from both eugenics and environmental worries.

Eugenics was a rather popular cause in the first half of the twentieth century in the United States and England. “More

children from the fit, less from the unfit,” Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, wrote in her popular magazine, *Birth Control Review*, in 1919. Thirty-one states passed compulsory sterilization laws in the first half of the century.

Early this year, the Virginia State legislature expressed its “regrets” to Raymond Ludlow for forcibly sterilizing him at the age of 16 in 1941 for repeatedly running away from home. Ludlow, one of thousands sterilized by force across the country, subsequently served as a radioman in the Army, earning a Bronze Star, a Purple Heart, and a Prisoner of War Medal.

To reduce the U.S. birthrate, Planned Parenthood proposed ideas like putting “fertility control agents” in the water supply and encouraging homosexuality.

At the close of World War II, Guy Irving Burch, the founder of the Population Reference Bureau, submitted his plan to solve all world problems through compulsory sterilization of “all persons who are inadequate, either biologically or socially,” as he wrote in *Population*

Roads to Peace or War. Although Congress did not endorse Burch's plan, his bureau subsequently received millions of dollars in government grants and contracts for "population education" and other activities.

THE 'EXPLOSION'

New concerns emerged in the postwar years. A sudden spurt in population growth occurred in the 1960s as antibiotics and improvements in sanitation sharply reduced death rates. (Birthrates had been declining throughout the century as women joined the workforce and curtailed childbearing.) As death rates plunged below the falling birthrates, world population grew at an unprecedented pace. The response was intense.

Population Negation

- Birthrates have been declining precipitously around the world.
- Forty-four percent of the world's people live in nations whose population has shrunk or at least stalled in its growth.
- If present trends continue, Europe's population will fall by 100 million and Japan's by 21 million in the next 50 years.
- Yet funding and programs for population control are increasing.
- The population-control market is saturated, with a surfeit of contraceptives in many developing countries that otherwise lack basic medicines.
- Many Third World countries are suffering from the cultural seeds planted by the family planning movement, especially promiscuity, which spreads sexually transmitted diseases.

Congress held hearings. President Johnson recommended legislation, which Congress passed in 1965 and '67,

providing for the world's largest program of publicly financed birth control, targeted both at home and abroad.

In 1970, President Nixon appointed the Commission on Population and the American Future, under the chairmanship of John D. Rockefeller III, founder of the Population Council. That same year, Planned Parenthood published a list of "proposed measures to reduce U.S. fertility," among them putting "fertility control agents" in the water supply, encouraging homosexuality, imposing a "substantial" marriage tax, discouraging home ownership, requiring permits for couples to have children, making abortion compulsory, and mandating sterilization of all women who had borne two children. The United Nations proclaimed a World Population Year in 1974.

In a document that remained classified from 1974 to 1980, the U.S. State Department warned that "mandatory population control measures" might be necessary to bring about a "two-child family on the average" throughout the world by the year 2000. By 1975, the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) was the world's chief player in world population control, spending more money on it than did all other countries combined.

In 1978, AID officials initiated and Congress enacted Section 104(d) of the new foreign aid legislation, which stipulated that "all... activities proposed for financing... shall be designed to build motivation for smaller families." The World Bank also began to impose population control requirements on its lending, as did other international institutions and countries. Henceforth, developing countries seeking international aid would be required to give evidence of their "commitment" to the "control of population growth."

PROMISED CALAMITIES

The justifications were a long, varied list of calamities that would ensue in the absence of swift, stern action. Starvation was looming, according to experts such as biologist Paul Ehrlich of Stanford University. The Sierra Club published his book *The Population Bomb*, which

became required reading in many high schools and colleges.

The House Select Committee on Population announced in 1978 that the "major biological systems that humanity depends upon... are being strained by rapid population growth... [and] in some cases, they are... losing productive capacity." Created by the Smithsonian Institution at about the same time, a traveling exhibit for schoolchildren called "Population: The Problem Is Us" featured a picture of a dead rat on a dinner plate as an example of "future food sources."

The Carter administration's Council on Environmental Quality and State Department together warned that "the staggering growth of human population... [was creating]... possibilities of... permanent damage to the planet's resource base." Robert McNamara, then director of the World Bank, warned in 1977 that continued population growth would cause "poverty, hunger, stress, crowding, and frustration" that would threaten social, economic, and military stability.

Sen. (later Vice President) Al Gore warned in his 1992 book *Earth in the Balance* of the approach of an "environmental holocaust without precedent," like a "black hole" caused by "expansion beyond the environment's carrying capacity." To stave off this catastrophe, he wrote, "the first strategic goal should be the stabilizing of world population."

Herman Daly, a World Bank economist, proposed in his 1990 book *For the Common Good* that, as a step toward the "sustainable society," births be limited by a government-operated licensing system. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA, not to be confused with the UN Population Division, a statistical agency) gave millions of dollars a year starting in 1979 to China's population control program, which featured forced abortion.

The funding increased along with the pressure. By 1994, federal and state governments were spending more than \$2 billion a year directly on domestic and foreign population control. (Probably much more was being spent due to population-control requirements attached to

Population Control Pillar

Margaret Sanger, who founded the Planned Parenthood Federation of America in 1942, is often viewed as the patron saint of the modern population control movement.

Her critics, citing numerous references in her writings, denounce her as a white supremacist, Nazi sympathizer, and an advocate of free sex.

Her supporters dismiss the criticism, saying that the references are confined to a small number of sources and are often taken out of context. Esther Katz, editor and director of the Margaret Sanger Papers Project, has said, “As a historian, I take issue with [such] gross misuse of historical sources to support those views.”

One thing that critics often say about Sanger is that she viewed blacks as inferior and wanted to use birth control and abortion to reduce their numbers. They cite Sanger’s quotation: “We don’t want word to get out that we want to exterminate the Negro population.”

Supporters say the full context of the quote proves Sanger did not want to eliminate blacks. In a letter to philanthropist Clarence Gamble in 1939 about her “Negro Project,” she said: “The minister’s work is also important and also he should be trained, perhaps by the [Birth Control] Federation [of America] as to our ideals and the goal that we hope to reach. We do not want word to go out that we want to exterminate the Negro population, and the minister is the man who can straighten out that idea if it ever occurs to any of their more rebellious members.”

Alexander Sanger, president of Planned Parenthood of New York City and Sanger’s grandson, says Sanger was committed to helping all women “regardless of race or nationality.” He highlights her slogan “Let every child be a wanted child.”

But Sanger’s extensive written comments over several decades continue to make life difficult for population control

advocates who would otherwise like to unreservedly embrace her. For example:

- In her 1922 *Pivot of Civilization*, she clearly called for the sterilization of “genetically inferior races,” the elimination of “human weeds” and the cessation of charity.
- In the same book, she advocated the segregation of “morons, misfits, and maladjusted.”
- The *Birth Control Review*, founded by Sanger in 1917, sounded eugenics themes for decades and categorized blacks, southern Europeans, and other immigrants as mentally inferior, calling them a nuisance and a menace to society.

—The Editor

many other programs in the \$12–15 billion a year U.S. foreign aid budget.)

Eventually, unmistakable signs of population-control market saturation became evident around the world. In 1994, at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Margaret Ogola, a Kenyan pediatrician, reported that clinics in her country had an abundance of every kind of contraceptive but lacked the “simplest medicines” to treat common childhood diseases. Similar reports came from other places. In Bangladesh, newspapers reported that unwanted birth control pills were piling up in warehouses.

In addition, many Third World countries have been put off by the cultural aperturances of the family-planning movement. A sticking point in Cairo, for example, was the insistence by the United Nations that countries provide “sexual health care” for adolescents without their parents’ supervision or knowledge, as is done in the United

States. Gadul Haqq Ali Gadul Haqq, the grand imam sheikh of al-Azar University, one of many critics of this policy, said, “Islam can by no means agree to give young generations full freedom to do what they like.” Other countries also objected, but International Planned Parenthood and other agencies funded by the United States have continued to promote sexual freedom.

CONDOM FAILURE

Stephen Karanja, a Kenyan gynecologist, visited the United States in 2000 to report on what he said were the devastating effects of U.S. population programs in his country. Under the pretext of preventing AIDS, he said, foreign-paid family-planning workers promote promiscuity by indiscriminately distributing condoms and are taking over the health-care system to perform sterilizations.

“Over and over, we have seen it in Africa—condoms do not stop HIV/AIDS,” he said. “In the last two years in Kenya,

more than 100 million condoms have been used [while] the number of HIV/AIDS people doubled. Stopping HIV/AIDS is a behavior thing. It is a thing to do with not having sexual activity outside of marriage. We do not need the African family to be attacked.”

As to the reputed economic benefits of lowering fertility, several countries said in Cairo that they had reduced or eliminated population growth without improving their economies. But those nations with free economies—even those as densely populated as South Korea—reported not only sturdy growth in wealth but no problems of overpopulation.

Shortly before the Cairo conference, economists at the IMF listed the causes of Africa’s severe economic problems. They blamed excessive government spending, high taxes on farmers, inflation, restrictions on trade (a Zambian representative in Cairo said that “trade barriers by developed countries cost developing countries 10 times as much in

lost trade as they receive in development assistance”), too much government ownership, overregulation of private economic activity, and government creation of “powerful vested interests.” There was no mention of overpopulation—not surprisingly, since Africa has fewer than one-fourth as many people per square mile as prosperous Europe.

Nevertheless, the Sierra Club announced in Cairo its support for increased “international population assistance” and a “sustainable population level within the carrying capacity” of the United States—with its “local activists” being the ones determining that “carrying capacity.”

MORE MONEY, MORE COMMITMENT

After the conference, the Clinton administration and the population-control network redoubled their efforts. By 1998, world flow of international aid for population programs amounted to \$2.06 billion, with another \$9 billion in local funds being reported by the targeted countries themselves.

In 1998, two of the largest U.S. recipients of federal family-planning funds, Planned Parenthood Federation of America and its affiliate, the Alan Guttmacher Institute, received \$122 million from the federal government and addi-

tional amounts from the states. Medicaid alone spent \$449 million for family-planning services in 1998, up over \$100 million from 1994.

“More children from the fit, less from the unfit,” wrote Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood.

AID, which cites stabilizing population growth as one of its foreign policy goals, asked for “total funding of \$542 million from all grant-funded accounts” for population control and \$569 million for “protecting human health” in its 2001 budget request. The agency also asked for \$254 million for work against AIDS.

In the meantime, failing economies continue to fail, and, as the high-level negotiations regarding “sustainable development” and “reproductive health” proceed, the evidence of the programs’ innate tendencies toward coercion mounts. Paid by the head for recruiting women and men for sterilization and other birth control procedures, local family-planning workers press forward to meet their

targets in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Yet birthrates continue to fall throughout the world as more women work outside their homes. World food availability rose to unprecedented levels, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). World forest acreage remained at the same levels as in the 1950s, according to FAO data. Some 19,000 scientists have signed a petition stating that there is “no convincing scientific evidence” that human release of greenhouse gases will cause “disruption of Earth’s climate” (www.sitewave.net/project/s33p427.htm).

What the future will bring is anyone’s guess. Perhaps the new Bush administration will exercise its conservative sinews and stanch the flow of federal funds to population control groups. Perhaps a cultural backlash in the Third World will gain strength and slow the population-control juggernaut to a crawl. But it may very well be that current programs, propelled by political inertia and sluiced by already open funding spigots, will continue and even grow.

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