Population Growth and Living Standards

Replies to Mr. Clark's Article

The article by Mr. Colin Clark on "Population Growth and Living Standards" published in the August 1953 issue of the Review *has prompted a number of readers to send to the Office their views on this controversial subject. We reproduce below articles received from Mr. Derek T. Healey, of the Department of Applied Economics in the University of Cambridge, and Mr. Sten S. Nilson, of the Norwegian Central Bureau of Statistics.*

The Problem of Population Growth

by Derek T. HEALEY

Since Mr. Clark has chosen to preface his study on resources and population with his opinions on the ethics of reproductivity, any discussion of the problem cannot allow these views to go unchallenged. It is clear that a system of values is being presented, and though Mr. Clark's right to hold certain metaphysical beliefs about the universe cannot be questioned it must be emphasised that as no conclusive evidence can be brought to support such beliefs they represent simply Mr. Clark's preferences. The question at issue is whether these preferences are likely to add to the sum happiness of the human race or to detract from it; for no matter how many religions speak in favour of a certain practice, and supposing their adherents carry out their commands, if the final result is deleterious to man the advocacy of these precepts is surely to be condemned. We speak, of course, from the humanistic outlook which recognises that the task of science is to improve, on this planet, the well-being of man in every aspect, and reject the Catholic attitude that "man is a unity whose various functions and capacities are ordered by nature to a single end—achievement of beatitude in life to come".[1] Lest it should be objected that "strong materialist preconceptions" are being brought to bear on this subject it may perhaps be pointed out that Mr. Clark himself, in his concern for obtaining the fruits of increasing returns, appears to regard man as a producing-machine.

But, fortunately for the human race, the pronouncements of the leaders of religion condemning interference with the natural rate of procreation have been increasingly ignored in modern times. The growth of contraceptive practices in the Western world has certainly

[1] Rev. W. J. GIBBONS, S.J.: "The Catholic Value System in Relation to Human Fertility", in *Studies in Population* (ed. G. F. Mair).

had no encouragement from any religious group and yet, in the case of Great Britain, the Royal Commission on Population came to the definite conclusion that—

(1) the great majority of married couples nowadays practice some form of birth control in order to limit their families, and

(2) that they are successful . . . in the sense that it reduces the number of conceptions considerably below the number that would otherwise take place.[1]

There is no reason to suppose that the reproductivity *mores* of the Asian will prove any less susceptible to change than those of his European counterpart in the last century. Already there is evidence that increasing interest is being taken in the possibilities of family limitation in India, as is shown by the following publication of the Indian Embassy in Washington (United States) :

A family planning pilot research project being conducted in several villages of Uttar Pradesh has revealed that 60 per cent. of the mothers and 55 per cent. of the fathers in these rural areas were eager to learn methods of family planning. About 70 per cent. of the married women in these villages recorded that they did not want to have more than three or four children in all, at an average spacing of three and a half years.[2]

And Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the Vice-President of India, speaking in Bombay in November 1952 to the Third International Conference on Planned Parenthood, after emphasising that concentration on long-term measures (e.g., altering the social structure) was inappropriate, declared—

Our need is desperate, the claims of humanity appeal to us, and it is essential that we should do something for regulating population. We have interfered with nature in lowering the death rate, postponing death, combating disease, prolonging human life. . . . In all these matters we are using human intelligence.

Why, then, Dr. Radhakrishnan asks, should we not interfere with the production of offspring ?

In Mr. Clark's discussion of the important role played by the size of the market in the economical production of goods, two different aspects are confused. It is true, as he says, that " the law of increasing returns prevails in any industry where, *as a consequence of an increased scale of output*, we can expect to obtain increasing returns per unit of labour or other economic resources employed " (our italics). It is the " scale of output " which matters, and we can easily imagine an enterprise which starts with a small scale of operations and supplies part of a large market increasing its production to cater for a larger section of the sum total population. To the " large and densely settled population of North America and Western Europe " is ascribed the fact that industries there are not " working under great difficulties and at very high costs " : here, Mr. Clark is obviously not referring to the number of persons engaged in agriculture per unit of cultivable land [3] but to persons

[1] Cmd. 7695, H.M. Stationery Office, p. 33.

[2] Quoted in *News of Population and Birth Control* (International Planned Parenthood Committee), Sep. 1953.

[3] In the article under review the " number of *persons* engaged in agriculture per square km. of cultivable land " is given as 25-30 for India. In Mr. Clark's contribution to the U.N. Conference on the Conservation and Utilisation of Resources, it is the number of *males* that are calculated (giving the figure of 27.1 for India and Pakistan).

per unit of territory, and the following table [1] provides some revealing comparisons :

Country	Population per sq. km. (1951)
United States	20
North and west Europe	60
India	117
Ceylon	118
Japan	229

The figures hardly substantiate the thesis.

Turning to the question of diminishing returns in agriculture and its relevance to an increasing population in a primarily agricultural country, Mr. Clark implies that its operation is of limited applicability since " the use of improved farming methods and greater quantities of capital per man are precisely the steps taken by progressive countries when they find their population increasing and their area of agricultural land limited ". Surely that is solving the problem in advance ! The problem of finding sufficient domestic capital for (among other things) improving agricultural yields is rendered all the more difficult by the very fact of rapid population growth.

The table on page 104 in the article is very interesting, but what in fact does it prove ? Solely that *if* one of the poorer countries adopted the same techniques, applied as much capital, possessed equally skilled workers, etc., as the " advanced " countries it would be as efficient as those advanced countries ! That this may eventually be done is at least a possibility, but what about the interim period ? Even to raise the Indian efficiency to the Italian can surely not be done very rapidly and, in the case of Italy (no less than Japan), was it not the case that pressure of population proved fertile breeding ground for Fascist ideas of expansion ? Mr. Clark poses a false and absurd alternative to the plan of raising India's efficiency when he implies that " Malthusians " would advocate a drastic and immediate cut in numbers : what is really involved is the establishment of a more reasonable relationship between the possible (and probable) rate of growth of food production and the rate of growth of population. The problem can be approached from two angles, neither of which excludes the other : *(a)* food production can be increased and *(b)* the rate of population expansion can be retarded. Unfortunately, Mr. Clark appears to believe that the advocates of birth control are antagonistic to the former, which is far from the truth.

On any rational understanding of what can be accomplished in increasing agricultural efficiency over the next few decades it is surely sanguine to imagine that India, for example, can attain to Denmark's standards in 20 or even 40 years. Yet Mr. Clark admits that with low mortality rates and a rate of increase in population of 1 to 2 per cent. per annum [2], population will double every twenty years. Thus unless more than 25-30 agriculturally engaged persons (or 50 per cent.)—a wildly optimistic figure—are removed from their unit acreage within that time, the density will be greater, and individual standards of living even lower than initially.

At the high Danish standards of productivity and diet, Mr. Clark avers, 200 people can be maintained per square km. of cultivable land.

[1] Based on statistics in UNITED NATIONS : *Demographic Yearbook, 1952.*

[2] India's first Five-Year Plan envisages a rate of 1.25 per cent. per annum.

He thus calculates that the world could support 12,000 million instead of the present 2,300 million. With present rates of population increase we should have 4,600 million in 20 years' time and 9,200 million—a figure approaching our limit—in 40 years' time (the improvement in Danish-equivalent yields would probably not suffice to alter the argument significantly). So what happens in A.D. 2,000 if the population increase is maintained ? Mr. Clark, it seems, rather hopes that population will not continue increasing at the rate of 1 to 2 per cent. per annum, for, he says, it " all turns on the question of whether the average family is likely to remain as high as six " and he quotes examples of a tendency to family size reduction. There can be little doubt that this is due to the growth of urbanisation [1], but his willingness to ascribe this to later marriage rather than to the beginnings of conscious family limitations involves a neglect of the processes which occurred in the industrialising of Europe in the late nineteenth century. (And it must be remembered that birth control propaganda receives the support of the Government of India whereas it was violently opposed by the State in Europe.)

Among the countries that would be still overpopulated according to Mr. Clark's calculations, even on the Danish standards of productivity, is Japan.[2] But it is not hypothetical possibilities that are of much value at the present time and the recent comments of a correspondent of *The Times* (London) are apposite :

> Meanwhile, 85 million people, their number increasing by more than a million a year, must make a living in four small islands which only a century ago supported no more than 30 million people. This pressure of population is the biggest single factor in Japan's economic instability today ; in the past it was the driving force in her expansion. Because of the mountainous nature of the land, only one-sixth of the total area is arable. Yet the people are so skilled in cultivation that they produce four-fifths of their normal food supply. Japan cannot produce much more food ; the alternatives are to import or to starve, large-scale emigration being out of the question. The prime task before Japanese statesmanship is clearly to encourage birth control by every legitimate modern means. Only when Japan's population is stabilised will she cease to be a menace to her neighbours.

The solution, says Mr. Clark, is to expand exports, but Japan's present difficulties with regard to membership of G.A.T.T. are an indication that no easy immediate solution is to be found along these lines. Nor can every country that is intent on industrialising hope to rely on exports to provide food for its population ; international trade is unlikely to expand so rapidly. In any case, there is no guarantee that food surpluses that may occur in some parts of the world will be readily transferable for the goods that the newly industrialised countries have to offer. The fact that surpluses may be available confers upon a needy country no right to receive them free of charge, unless it is as an interim measure while positive action is being taken (yes, by subsidising contraceptives if need be) to curtail population expansion. For the most part each country must take responsibility for feeding its own population : as the latest report of the F.A.O. points out, although world food production has caught up

[1] See UNITED NATIONS : *Demographic Yearbook, 1952*, ch. 1, p. 15.

[2] Mr. Clark's figures for China, which he quotes as being " in a stationary or declining phase ever since 1850 ", obviously stand in need of some revision since the preliminary results of the Chinese census were revealed in September 1953. The census gives 500 million (which, however, includes Tibet) against the following figures quoted in the U.N. Conference on Conservation and Utilization of Resources (p. 26) : 1950, 350 million ; 1960, 363.5 million ; 1970, 399.5 million.

with the growth of world population, 70 per cent. of the world's people are below the average world diet. And it goes on to say—

> Compared with the real human needs of the deficit countries, as distinct from what they can afford to buy, food stocks now accumulating shrink into insignificance. . . . A basic improvement in their food supply must come primarily from a steady increase in their own production.

Mr. Clark concludes by examining the question of the proportion of the national income that must be saved to provide an increasing labour force with the same average capital per head as previously. The proportion is obtained by multiplying fourfold the rate of increase of population.[1] If the Five-Year Plan estimate of 1.25 per cent.[2] per annum is the expected rate of increase of India's population, the requisite proportion of national income saved would be 6 per cent. Since Mr. Clark states that the proportion saved in that country has fallen from the pre-war level of 6 per cent.[3] it seems that capital per head is not being maintained intact. Even if Mr. Clark has been including Pakistan (with a rate of population growth of 0.8 per cent. per annum) it is difficult to see on what he bases his conclusion that " if anything like this figure (6 per cent. saved) prevails now it is well in excess of four times the population growth, and therefore leaves a margin . . . for industrialisation, before any inflow of external capital is considered ".

But that there will be any large influx of capital to supplement domestic resources should not be taken for granted. A recent American survey [4] of the prospects for United States investment abroad lists numerous difficulties standing in the way of investment in the Far East. They range from " the uncertainty created by the present political situation " to " the policies or practices of most Far Eastern countries with respect to foreign capital investment (which) tend to discourage foreign investors ". And the possibility of significant capital exports from Britain (whether channelled directly or through some international institution) must wait upon the securing by that country of a vastly more favourable balance of payments.

Conclusion

Our main conclusion is that it is idle to speculate on how many people the world could maintain if all were as agriculturally productive as the best European countries whose techniques and scientific attitudes

[1] The United Nations report on *Measures for the Economic Development of Underdeveloped Countries* quotes (p. 47) estimates of 2 to 5 per cent. of the national income for a 1 per cent. increase in population.

[2] The *Demographic Yearbook, 1952* gives the rate of increase between 1941 and 1951 as 1.26 per cent.

[3] The United States Department of Commerce report on *Factors Limiting U.S. Investment Abroad* (1953) states that in the Far East in recent years " the annual net investment in several countries [is] equivalent to less than 5 per cent. of the national income " (p. 100).

[4] U.S. Department of Commerce, op. cit., p. 101. Bearing out many of this report's views is a letter to *The Times* (18 Sep. 1953) by Mr. D. K. Rangnekar, who discusses the failure of the Indian Government to encourage the flow of private direct investment. " It is not return that is discouraging the flow of foreign capital into private Indian business enterprises or into direct investments. It is the crippling taxation and above all the public attitude. . . . The undercurrent of suspicion . . . cannot be easily overcome. . . . The recent amendment to the Industries (Development and Control) Act denying even consultation with shareholders when a concern passes under government management has also caused considerable uneasiness among investors."

have evolved over many centuries. But this does not mean that skilled assistance should not be offered to improve low yields ; on the contrary, the whole aim of international as well as national action should be to raise the standard of living of the individual. That is why we cannot stand aside and watch while the fruits of scientific efforts are nullified by the appearance of ever increasing numbers of mouths. Mr. Clark's attitude of facing the current increase in the world's population as though it were an inevitable, unalterable law of nature implies the subservience of man's intellect to his animal instincts ; such an approach, if generally adopted, would be disastrous to the human race. From our experiences of the Western world, however, we can hope with some certainty that wiser views will prevail—if only on account of the emancipation of the women of the East.

Childbearing and the Standard of Life

by Sten S. NILSON

Mr. Colin Clark raises a question of the greatest importance. Can the future increase in world population be economically provided for ? Mr. Clark is certainly much too optimistic when he concludes that this can be done, subject only to three conditions : increased freedom of trade, freedom of emigration from a few small and isolated areas, and transfer of capital to the smaller among the underdeveloped countries.

The problem is much larger than Mr. Clark wants us to believe. It is quite true that some Malthusian writers have tried to make it look even greater than it actually is, but let us not refer to any of them. We should rather look at a standard work like the report on the world social situation, with special reference to standards of living, which was published last year by the United Nations Department of Social Affairs.[1] Here every effort has been made to reduce to its proper proportions the problem of how to feed the world's rapidly increasing population. The report warns us that it is as dangerous to exaggerate the difficulties as it is to underestimate them. After reading Mr. Clark's article one begins to wonder if the danger of underestimation is not greater than that of exaggeration. The United Nations report shows how " totally inadequate " the post-war increase in food production has been when compared to the accelerating growth of the population. The present and the prospective rate of increase of population are such that, as stated in the report, " even a moderate advance towards better nutritional levels for the world as a whole within a reasonable time is a formidable problem " (p. 44).

Mr. Clark is certainly right in insisting that everything possible should be done to ease the present pressure. I myself have repeatedly advocated a more liberal practice in regard to immigration into my own country, Norway, so I do not think I belong to the " uncharitable Malthusians " mentioned in the last paragraph of his article. But migration can only be a palliative. The permanent solution is to be found in limiting the present growth of population, which seems too rapid for any increase in production that is practically possible, or at least likely to materialise.

[1] *Preliminary Report on the World Social Situation* (New York, 1952).

It is not necessary to discuss here the statistical evidence relating to these facts. I should rather like to draw the attention of readers to another and equally interesting aspect of the matter, which is not mentioned by Mr. Clark. One of the major social and health problems of the world today results from the too frequent childbearing of women in all underdeveloped countries. Curiously enough there is only a very brief reference to this fact in the *Preliminary Report on the World Social Situation* (p. 144). The problem deserves much more earnest attention than it has received hitherto. It is no excuse that many men have always considered this whole matter in an attitude of serene indifference. The women have not. As Queen Victoria wrote in a letter to the King of the Belgians in 1841 :

I think, dearest Uncle, you cannot *really* wish me to be the " Maman d'une nombreuse famille ", for I think you will see with me the great inconvenience a *large* family would be to us all, and particularly to myself ; men never think, at least seldom think, what a hard task it is for us women to go through this *very often*.

It may be true that excessive childbearing is accepted in a spirit of fatalistic resignation by most women in the countries concerned today, but such is equally the attitude of large parts of these populations to hunger, illness and poverty. And we see how the fatalism is rapidly giving way to a new spitit, a spirit of unrest, of dissatisfaction with miserable conditions and demands for a better life. Here is opened up a road to the future fraught with great possibilities, but also with great dangers. Although the new spirit is a potent force for good, it may easily lead to the blocking of further progress. Its results may be not so much to substitute hopeful and energetic enterprise for lethargy, but rather to increase people's insistence on immediate consumption and reduce their willingness to save anything for the future. In this situation it is a great and unqualified advantage if women come to realise that there exists a possibility of rearing stronger and healthier children, fewer in number than those who are being born at present. Here is the best possible form of investment : giving the next generation proper care, good health and instruction. Moreover in such an investment the parents can clearly see the advantage to themselves.

Mr. Clark contends that people in the Orient get their many children because they want to have them. This is not a valid generalisation, although it would be equally erroneous to believe that the women of Asia are crying out for birth control. Indeed many among them might be shocked and horrified if they were told about contraception ; but the majority would probably react in a different manner. No doubt millions and millions of women, in a more or less dumb sort of way, do desire release from perpetual childbearing and all the misery that so often accompanies it. Such an attitude is sometimes said to be incompatible with the Oriental frame of mind. However, there is clear evidence to the contrary, evidence coming not from Westerners comfortably seated at their writing-desks to explore the mysteries of Orientalism, but from workers in the field. Read for instance the words of Mrs. Shakuntala Paranjpye, who has been working in different parts of India for over 13 years. In her report to the First All-India Conference on Family Planning (Bombay, 1951) she says—

It has been my experience that most people, regardless of their social status, are willing and grateful to receive advice in spacing and limiting their families. In slums and rural areas I have met with the same response from

people as in middle class localities. In fact, people of the working classes, whether they work in the cities or villages, have their roots in the rural parts of the land and readily realise that while they multiply, their holdings do not; that when a tree bears too much fruit it often succumbs under the burden and in any case such fruit is of a less quality than when it bears less.... One woman said, " . . . What is the good of going on having children ? You can clothe one while the other goes naked. You can feed them in the morning, at night they have to sleep on an empty stomach ". Once I came across a woman in a village who surprised me with her wisdom. She was a leather-monger's wife. Her daughter-in-law had a miscarriage, and the old woman wanted me to teach the young woman how to prevent conception for a few years. Knowing how our women long to be grandmothers, I was a little surprised at the request. Whereupon the old woman said : " Sure, I want a grandson. But the girl is a child herself. Don't we pluck the blossom of a young tree for a few years at first and let the tree grow up well before we allow it to bear fruit ? "

Such instances only go to show that, though poor and illiterate, our common people possess a lot of horse sense and if you can talk their language it does not take long to make them realise the benefits of planned parenthood. Of course, a certain amount of tact and a great deal of patience are required on the part of the worker who undertakes the work. Above all, the worker needs to have the knack of being one of them. Not condescension but a feeling of true equality does the work. The subject is delicate and very personal, and it is better for the worker to wait for the right opportunity before broaching it. In fact, it is even better to direct the conversation so that at some stage those in need of limiting their families voluntarily come out with their wishes to that effect. It can be very easily managed if you get women to talk about their children. On such occasions it often helps if the worker volunteers information about her own limited family or of her relatives or friends who have planned their families. Direct advice is resented, but indirect suggestion goes home.

The Director of the United Nations Office for Population Studies in New Delhi last year published the results of a survey carried out in Mysore. Here it turned out that 60 per cent. of the urban and 40 per cent. of the rural dwellers interviewed took a positive interest in the limitation of births; in other areas the percentage rose as high as 70. Evidence of another and more alarming kind shows that people are willing to go to great lengths to escape a burden which often must be intolerable. There are signs that induced abortion is very frequent in the big Oriental cities and, further, that this most objectionable method of " birth control " is also well known in a number of rural areas. The Norwegian Bishop Fjellbu, who recently returned from a visit to the missionary stations in Santalistan, reported among other things on the health situation. Morbidity is great among the Santili, he said. There is cancer, tuberculosis and malaria, and a large number of women are brought every year to the mission hospitals after having tried to cut short one of their many pregnancies. It seems that in their desperation they drink some sort of poisonous herb, with results often ruinous to their health.

Mr. Clark says that all great religions welcome the creation of new life. While this proposition is essentially true, the consequences following from it may be easily exaggerated. The Royal Commission on Population in Great Britain, which published its report a few years ago, quotes as follows from a statement on the Roman Catholic position :

The charge must not, however, be brought against Catholic teaching that it is in favour of what the fanatical defenders of birth control call " avalanches " of babies. This attribution to Catholics of a desire of popu-

tion growth to an alarming extent and at every hazard is a mere rhetorical flourish. It has neither sense nor meaning. Catholic teaching, if loyally adopted, cannot possibly lead to an excessive and haphazard population, for the Catholic husband is taught, provided the moral law on marital relations is preserved, to exercise self-control in marriage, not to overtax the strength of his wife, not to procreate more children than he can hope to educate and rear healthily, and to make suitable provision for every child he has, so that all his children may become healthy, vigorous, and loyal citizens.

The difference of opinion concerns not so much the end as the means. The Catholic Church recognises only the use of periodic abstinence. While this of course is due to moral considerations it should be remarked that abstinence has in fact, quite apart from its moral significance, one great advantage, perhaps a decisive advantage when people living on or near the level of subsistence are concerned : it costs nothing in terms of money.

At the request of the Indian Government, an expert from the World Health Organisation has recently been working in India on the problem of the practical application of this method. It will probably never become a wholly efficient one as far as the control of births in individual cases is concerned, and for this reason it is rejected by many advocates of family limitation. However, with the progress of knowledge the method may be applied with less uncertain results than is the case at present. The Pope himself gave expression to this view in a recent pronouncement (here quoted from the French review *Population*, 1952 (p. 303), " Allocution du Pape au Fronte della Famiglia le 28 novembre 1951 ") :

> One may even hope—although the Church naturally leaves this aspect of the matter to medical science—that science will succeed in providing a sufficiently secure basis for this permissible method, and our most recent information seems to confirm such a hope.

It looks as if some people are " more Catholic than the Pope " in these matters, an attitude which I think there is every reason to regret. One may refuse, as does Mr. Clark, to believe in the threat of over-population. Although all available evidence seems to me to show that it is a very real danger indeed, one can seldom be a hundred per cent. certain about things that concern the future of human society. Yet quite apart from what the future may bring, we should not forget one of the great problems facing humanity at the present day, a problem that has been too long neglected : the sickness and misery, the drudgery and ill-health for mothers as well as for children, which is the result of excessively frequent childbearing.