

Man, Scientists and Monkeys

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GUESSTIMATING the future population of the world and making dire predictions as to the fate of mankind compelled to live like sardines in a tin, would be a harmless enough pastime did it not lead many people to the false belief that poverty, hunger, overcrowding and various other social evils were due to over-population—thus turning people's minds away from the real cause.

Playing with this most dangerous form of statistics, some alarming but completely un-scientific prognostications have been made as to the future population of this country and of the world.

It has all been pretty one-sided. Articles on over population seem to come round in cycles, and appear to start with the "top" papers and gradually filter their way down to the more popular papers and magazines, journalists vying with each other in the horrific picture of what will be our lot in the future if we do not do something about it.

Now and then a voice of protest is heard, but it quickly dies away—a journalist can't do much with a proposition that we are not after all going to overflow into the seas.

Now the scientists have been having another go at the problem. The British Association met last month to discuss among other things "Our Crowded World."

Oblivious to the fact that the whole population of the United Kingdom could be housed in modern suburban-type homes with front and back gardens within an area not much larger than Greater London itself, and ignoring the high cost of land (twenty to twenty-five per cent. of the total cost of a new home), Dr. M. S. Russell, Lecturer in Social Biology, Reading University, and Mrs. Claire Russell, research worker, proclaimed that over-population was aggravating the housing problem! As evidence, the "scientists" pointed to the fact that Britain's new homes of 1966 had less floor space than those of 1962, although they cost much more!

Not content to confine their scientific research to housing, they also proclaimed that since the rise in the crime rate began precisely when our birthrate began to rise in 1955, the former was the result of the latter. Violent crimes doubled between 1950 and 1960, it was stated. This would appear to indicate that violent crimes were committed by infants. Perhaps not; perhaps parents were driven to violent crimes by their squabbling children.

According to Mr. John Peel, senior lecturer in sociology, Hull University, although it had taken half a million years of human development to produce a world population of 3,000 million, at current rates of growth, the

next 3,000 million people would be with us within the next thirty-five years. The remedy for our "modern" problem sounded like a commercial for contraceptives, with abortion and sterilisation thrown in for good measure.

These modern Cassandras did not, however, have it all their own way. The anti-population hysteria in Britain, with its talk of overcrowding, was just a philosophy of defeatism, said Dr. D. E. C. Eversley, reader in population studies, Sussex University. He condemned eminent biological scientists for inaccurate views on population problems and defeatist and reactionary proposals for solving them. Some social scientists had made great play with the discovery that monkeys and other animals were more aggressive if crowded together, and applied it to mankind generally. Dr. Eversley dismissed this in no uncertain terms. Population was not causing people to crowd, particularly as a third of the world's population was living at immeasurably higher levels than those known to our ancestors—even though there were fewer of them.

The aggressiveness of monkeys in artificially overcrowded conditions doesn't prove anything except that monkeys don't like being overcrowded.

Since our sociologists have taken such an interest in monkey behaviour, they might conduct some research into the natural laws of monkeys and report if they should ever discover them up to man-tricks—charging each other for space to live.

Royal Dutch v Double Dutch

WE HAVE been deluged by a host of new names for some old and tawdry ideas, which even the Soviet Union is in the process of discarding.

A capricious environment has been created by theoretical economists dominating the Government—and it is not surprising that private investment has fallen.

We have productivity conferences: we have declarations of intent; we have Neddies big and small; we have shake-outs; purposive use of labour; check lists for action, and, last week, we were assured by a new Minister that with his new race of frontiersmen he would force industry to follow the three Rs—reorganisation, re-equipment and retraining . . . all utterly irrelevant to the problems confronting the U.K.

—Mr. F. S. McFadzean, a managing director of Royal Dutch-Shell