

# The Ghost of Malthus Walks

By Frank Chodorov

The refuge of befuddled intellectuals, seeking to account for increasing poverty without disturbing an economy which permits the robbing of the worker, has been, for over a century, the theory that population increases faster than the means of subsistence.

The ghost of Malthus cannot be permanently laid. For nearly fifty years the cadaverous idea that there are too many people in this world has been more or less quiescent in learned circles. Its resurrection, however, is inevitable because without it the statistical sages cannot account for the persistence of poverty in the midst of plenty—unless, forsooth, they permit themselves to see the truth.

Now, again, in the year of Our Lord 1938, we are told in the insidious phraseology that passes for learning, that not Mammon but Jehovah, not an unholy maldistribution of wealth but the niggardliness of nature, not robbery but too many babies explain the hunger that drives men to unsocial deeds.

But the ghost is not brought forward in its blood-curdling form. It isn't a decent, honest ghost—one that permits you to enjoy a legitimate shudder. It is dressed up in a cap and gown, with a scroll under its arm, pince-nez on its nose, and around its neck a ribbon of bureaucracy to assure its claim to respectability.

For this time the theory appears in a "report"—presented to the President of the United States by the Committee of Population Problems of the National Resources Committee. The very ponderosity of these titles gives the apparition a verisimilitude of corporeal reality that robs it of its innate horror. And the accompanying array of statistics infuses a red-ink likeness of blood into this modern shade of Malthus—so that its acceptance in decent society may be assured.

The "report" tells us that the population of the United States will reach its zenith somewhere between

1955 and 1980, after which the number of babies born will about equal the number of departures from this life. To one familiar with historical process this picture of our population is not news. Civilizations decline and disappear with the growth of fortunes and the increase of poverty. It has always been so. When living becomes so difficult as to be less desirable than death, mother love expresses itself in race suicide. War, that hideous monster of uneconomic living, decimates the expectant fathers, and sterile senility dies off. The "report"—in an untold number of words—merely embellishes the obvious. Then, instead of telling us that our civilization, like its predecessors, is doomed because of our economic maladjustment, it opens up the closet and brings forth this charming ghost:

"It (a smaller population) may on the whole be beneficial rather than injurious to the life of the nation. It insures the continuance of a **favorable ratio of population to natural resources** of the United States. Each citizen will continue to have (the "report" does not say how) a larger amount of arable land, minerals and other natural resources than the citizen of any of the countries of the Old World. (Our ghost here waxes patriotic.) This supplies the material basis for a high level of living (the "report" does not say for whom) if these resources are used wisely and if cultural conditions are stimulating to initiative and **cooperative endeavor**."

This last phrase is significant. By "cooperative endeavor" the professors hint at their economic and political philosophy. They are hoping that declining population will bring with it (as it will) that form of society in

which professors will be employed to direct the "cooperative endeavor" which is their euphemism for a planned economy. It used to be called socialism.

All of which brings us to this: What reliance can the average citizen have on the professorial class who see only in declining population a hope for economic betterment? That poverty is not necessarily attendant upon increased population, that we had depressions even in the early history of our country, that Canada with a very sparse population is suffering from the same uneconomic conditions that prevail in densely populated England—that there is absolutely no logic in the assumption of a ratio between the wealth of the citizens and the natural resources of the country when these are privately monopolized does not seem to even occur to these learned men. Blinded by statistics, made stupid by the arrogance of assumed wisdom, hiding their subservience to predatory interests in a cloud of meaningless verbiage, our professional teachers will lead us only into confusion worst confounded. We must seek the truth ourselves.