



THE JEREMIAHS' BAND— WAGON

By Robert Clancy

HAS MANKIND progressed too fast and too far? Should further growth in industry and population be slowed down, even halted? Do we have to hold down everything in order to regain our balance?

A few years ago this suggestion would have been attributed to a lunatic fringe. Now it is a rising opinion among responsible leaders. This view was expressed recently by Arthur Burns, presidential economic adviser, in testimony before the U.S. Senate. He said he wished everybody would keep quiet for a while - that students would stop rioting, that industries would stop trying to expand, that legislators would stop pushing new laws - even that his colleagues would stop promoting new theories - so that we could all catch our breath. One can feel sympathetic toward this nostalgic sign in the midst of what is widely conceded to be a "rat race".

The population bugaboo has been with us for several years in a neo-Malthusian revival that began soon after World War II. The goal now set by the demographic alarmists is "zero population growth." They feel we are now at the critical point (which Malthus also felt around 1800) and that any further increase would endanger the whole human species.

A more recent phenomenon is the concern over industrial growth. The current fear is that modern technology is using up natural resources at a frightening pace and is spewing forth waste products that are a menace to the environment, to the balance of nature, and to ourselves.

A recent very serious study on this matter is *The Limits to Growth*, a report by a group of international scholars, business men and leaders, called the Club of Rome. This project was done in co-operation with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and made use of computerized data. Concerned about the "predicament of mankind" this group constructed a mathematical model of the present world system, including population, food supply, natural resources and industrial production. The computerized results predicted disaster ahead in the near future if current trends continue.

This report has created a stir, some considering it as of overwhelming importance and others scoffing at it. Some think it is a blueprint for the future;

others challenge its reliability. It is pointed out that the kind of data fed into a computer determines the results - and the accuracy of the world model made by those who conducted this project has been called into question. How much data did they really have? How much did they neglect? Did not their computerized set-up give them the answers they had to begin with?

The Club of Rome wants vast sweeping reforms - the stabilization of population, the slowing of industrial production, the clearing up of pollution - but it does not specify how all this is to be done. "The report is vague," says the *New York Times*, "about how all this is to be achieved in a world in which leaders often disagree even over the shape of a conference table". A point which may be considered flippant but which should not be overlooked in discussing great issues.

Whatever one's opinion on the merits or demerits of *The Limits to Growth* - and a good number of other reports which bear on the same theme - it must be noticed that this type of concern is increasing and that sooner or later it must yield consequences. (Alarmists often do not realize that people are listening to them, and do not quite know what to do when people are ready to heed their advice.)

The attitude which would halt progress is in opposition to a drive within human nature to seek constantly to improve the human condition. Our society is suffering from schizophrenia in so many different ways. The drive to mate and to have children - and the intuition that more people will enable more good jobs to be done - is countered by dire warnings about overpopulation. The desire to progress toward a better life is checkmated by prophecies of doom if we attempt to improve our amenities.

There is certainly something wrong. But is it progress itself that is at fault? Must we check all our drives and impulses to fulfill ourselves and to better our condition? Are the prophets of doom right in summoning us back from a dangerous brink?

Or have they missed the real problem? It is not progress itself that is to blame, but problems that arise in accompaniment with progress. It is not improved methods of production that are at fault but problems in distributing the product. It is not rising population that is causing disaster but denial to people of access to the resources of nature. The answer to pollution is not to stop progress but to give all people a stake in our common heritage, the land, so that they will together work out the common problem.

Let us not stop progress and growth. Let us rather seek to solve the problems that accompany progress so that we may continue to move forward and fulfill our destiny as human beings.