

Rise and Fall of Population

by PHILIPP KNAB

LANDOWNERS and vested interests have found a bogey with which to support and defend their privileges. We are in a population explosion they moan, and drawing a pitiful picture, they show us an overcrowded anthill with teeming millions stifling and devouring each other.

The views of Malthus have been refuted every so often since Homer, and especially by Henry George, with convincing vigor, but still they come back periodically. With increasing urbanization the perplexed professors of economics are more sure than ever of this bankrupt ideology. There are 3300 million people, half of them underfed, they tell us—and by the year 2000 there will be 6000 million! What will become of us?

A century ago the astronomer, Herschel, reckoning without the aid of cybernetics, estimated that if all couples since Adam and Eve had borne four children, and if there had been no wars or famines, human beings would cover the surface of the earth and form a pyramid reaching to the moon. Yet ancient Rome had to pass laws to prevent its native stock from dying out, and most western countries have established subsidies to encourage offspring. Even now the whole of mankind could stand on a tiny spot no larger than the state of Rhode Island; and housed in garden homes, each with quarter-acre plots, the world's population would fit into a territory no larger than Egypt.

Whereas actual production takes place in regions with comparatively little sunshine, we learn that far better land with a maximum of light and water still awaits development. Furthermore, algae, if harvested like wheat, could defeat hunger, and petroleum fermentation would close the

existing protein gap quickly and more cheaply than fish. The amount spent by the U.S. Government in sending a man to the moon could, if invested in manure, solve the entire food problem of our time. In short, modern science provides a practically infinite margin of nutrition.

Will population ever press against this margin? It seems unlikely. The more civilization advances the more the birthrate diminishes. Later marriages, more sophisticated selection, unfavorable surroundings for the rearing of children in cities, all tend to keep our numbers in check—unfortunately at the price of misery and individual unhappiness. The much discussed and still problematic anti-baby pill is but one instrument of birth control.

So we must not worry about the rationing and licensing of children by legislation as advocated by Malthusian zealots. Limitation of numbers without regard to quality never will be a solution. It would only favor inferior individuals and races at the expense of the responsible and culturally advanced. But will it be possible to agree on a method for producing desirable citizens? Bernard Shaw asked this question and confessed his inability to answer it.

The prophet of San Francisco gave us the key: fair, and therefore peaceful, competition through equal access to the land, and abolition of all taxation curtailing work and production. These principles would, if adhered to, lead to survival of desirable types whatever they would be like. But as there would also be a general increase of wealth and just distribution, without the present extremes of opulence and misery, there would be a brake on
(Next page)

No Contradictions, Please

by J. J. POT

HENRY GEORGE taught us to take nothing for granted. So the best way for us to honor him is to think for ourselves—not to follow blindly but to examine his works critically if we wish to further the cause.

When we speak of "common ownership" (confiscation of rent) and "leaving a percentage"—a contradiction occurs. If you argue that the economic rent belongs to the community and then suggest leaving a percentage to the landowners, your argument loses validity.

Taxation of rent must be increased just as we abolish other taxes, wrote Henry George. As long as you leave a diminishing part of the rent to the landowners you renounce your principle and defeat your case. The rent belongs to the people—not a part, but the whole. Not in the future, but now.

Today's constitution is wrong. Whose fault is this? Henry George said, good faith gives no right or claim whatever. But this is no argument. Without good faith a society "living together" is impossible. But even this is beside the point. Buying land for money is legal, and has been for centuries. It is the law that sanctions the conversion of money into land, and vice versa. It's the law that is wrong. This has nothing to do with good faith.

And who made the law — government, parliament, the people? Who then has to pay for the mistake? Not the legal landowner, not the poor widow, but the people who voted for

it. So the state has to convert the land into money (or bonds), that is, it has to buy the land from the landowners.

At this moment the benefit for the landowner and the community is zero. The landowner who wishes to continue owning his land has to pay a rent that equals the interest, and the community has to pay interest that equals the rent. But at the same instant our goal is attained. The land is "common property," the rent goes to the common treasury, and all the benefits summed up by Henry George are at once realized.

Now the people have to suffer payment of the debt! For years they will be fined to pay taxes (as usual) to pay for their mistake — to pay the interest and redemption of the bonds until, with the increased prosperity of the community and increased rents, the bonds will be paid off.

The price which the community will pay for the land is easy to ascertain. Ask the owner what rent he is willing to pay after conversion, and give him a bond with interest equaling this rent. Notice that switching land for bonds under this condition is not inflationary. The land is taken out of circulation, without dislocation or shock — it can be done at once or little by little, and no change of law is needed.

If Henry George had not written *Progress and Poverty* we would today not have had the opportunity of thinking on these things and contributing to community betterment through the application of his principles.

(From previous page)
irresponsible, prolific breeding, which is often the result of despair. Equally far from exploding in numbers and

from dying out, mankind would have established a harmony between its growth and its economic and social evolution.