

Calling Dr. Malthus!

by ALAN ST. DENIS

I KNOW men who would bridle with offense if you called them superstitious—yet they never light three smokes with one match, put a hat on a bed, or open an umbrella indoors. Similarly, there are countless intelligent people who scoff scornfully at the theories of Thomas Robert Malthus—but vaguely believe many worldly woes exist because there are too many inhabitants on this earth. The so-called population explosion, shibboleth that it is, having been widely publicized as a political, social and economic evil, is smugly accepted as incontrovertible fact.

One would assume that if density of population really caused economic catastrophe, logically there would be a tendency for denizens of thickly populated areas to flee such places and hie to more sparsely occupied environs. However, if we read our newspapers, and perhaps engage in a bit of statistical research, we find that quite a contrary phenomenon prevails. Not only do denizens of over-crowded territories fail to decamp for more *Lebensraum*, those with room to spare trek constantly to the most crowded of precincts.

Let us, as Governor Smith did, "look at the record." First, let us look south of the border, toward Mexico, from whence thousands of *braceros*, eager for work, would gladly travel (or even swim) to the U.S.A., if we'd let them. (The population of our good neighbor is a small fraction of our own.) Then let us look eastward, across the ocean, toward Europe, where we see an exodus more curious still: not away from "over-population," but to it.

Almost two million workers have flocked to West Germany in recent years—Spaniards, Portuguese, Italians, Greeks, and Turks. Holland has welcomed hordes of immigrants from southern Europe. Switzerland has "imported" so many foreign laborers that twenty percent of its labor is non-Swiss. In France, where there are already a half million Poles, the authorities are urging more to immigrate. And thousands of Yugoslavs, taking advantage of Tito's lenient brand of communism, have traversed the Iron Curtain for a taste of capitalistic life.

Obviously, the southern Europeans who so eagerly journey north do so in quest of better jobs, to earn more, and live a richer life, but that is but one incidental aspect of the situation. What is more noteworthy is that these errant venturers find prosperity where the population is densest; that they thrive where there are more people, not fewer; that they know (almost instinctively, it would seem) that the pressure of population *increases* productive capacity, and that greater production means more wealth to share. Never mind, for the moment, that no matter where they are or where they go, they will be bilked out of much of their earnings by taxes and private rent. They still enjoy the greater benefit in more highly populated, and hence more highly industrialized areas.

Thus, as is often the case, while egg-headed pundits mournfully decry such economic evils as "the population explosion," the *hoi polloi*, having less learning but more common sense, ignore the dire warnings of disaster, and go where it is more rewarding to be.

We have in modern times seen many communities advance in population. Have they not at the same time advanced even more rapidly in wealth?

— Henry George