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Soviet Population Theory

A genuine difference of opinion seems to have opened among Russian economists and demographers over the Marxist doctrine that overpopulation can exist only under capitalism and that in a Communist world of constantly expanding production, economic and cultural advances automatically bring population into balance with resources. Primary emphasis on economic and social progress and planning has not been abandoned, but that there is need for concurrent population planning is the message of a number of recent articles in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and other Russian publications that Robert Cook analyzes in the October issue of the *Population Bulletin*, published by the Population Reference Bureau.*

Some of these articles defend the traditional Marxist position, but others, by a number of authors, recognize inadequacies of the traditional position. Some authors ridicule projections of a possible world population of 3, 4, or even 13 million million people that have been advanced as possibilities if we use solar energy more effectively for photosynthesis, cultivate the land more intensively, and grow plants in the ocean on the scale possible on land. They criticize these estimates as exercises in arithmetic that make no economic or social sense, and contend that we should plan for "a comfortable way of life" for the world's population, that we must "create conditions worthy of humanity," and that the goal should be the "maximum per capita happiness of the people" rather than the maximum number of people.

Several of the authors deny that Russia has a population problem but recognize that many other countries do. And, indeed, population has been growing more slowly in Russia than in most of the less developed nations. Nevertheless, the comparison with other countries makes it probable that Russia will be accused, as the United States has been, of advocating population control measures for the less developed parts of the world but of failing to practice at home what it preaches to others. Russia has, however, already cut some of the ground from under such accusations by several actions that will reduce the Russian birth rate: relegalizing abortion, substantially reducing family allowances, and announcing that the government will no longer support illegitimate children.

The United Nations Population Commission met in Geneva from 30 October through 10 November. Although observers noted no further change in Soviet attitudes, it is nevertheless noteworthy that three times in 1966 the U.S.S.R. joined with the U.S. and other countries in voting affirmatively on United Nations actions in the population field.

Agreement within the U.N. not only strengthens current U.N. population programs but also increases a bit the likelihood that we may be able to move on to a problem that most of us have been dodging. Recently in *Science* (10 November) Kingsley Davis pointed out that the increasingly widespread endorsement of contraception throughout the world, with justification on the grounds that married couples should be free to decide for themselves how many children they will have, is completely insufficient for reducing the rate of population growth and constitutes only the barest beginning of a social policy on population. The current Russian debate will be most constructive if it helps the U.N., and individual countries, advance to the stage of meaningful analysis of population planning and adoption of measures to curb the runaway growth of the world's population.—DAEL WOLFLE

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