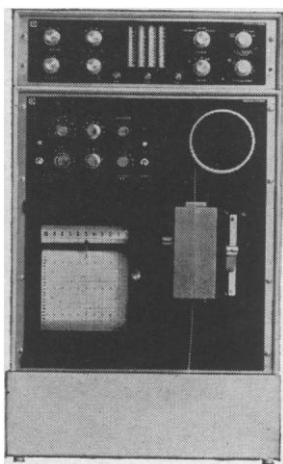


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to shorten the period during which people are finding means to achieve their new family-size desires. Creating new goals in the first place, or influencing them to the point of canceling population growth, is a function of the conditions, not of the contraceptive services. It follows that an effective population policy requires command over the social and economic conditions governing individual reproductive decisions.

Sweezy holds that family planning "prepares the way" for other measures. If so, why has it not prepared the way in countries that have long practiced contraception? The only case Sweezy cites—India's current desire to intensify its sterilization effort—is ironic, because the usual interpretation of this move is that it signifies the failure, not success, of India's family-planning program. In making this point, he holds that other approaches to population control have little chance anyway, in which case it is of no value to have family planning "prepare the way." Of course, the argument that other measures will not be accepted hardly proves that family planning alone will succeed. It may be that human societies are not ready to control their populations and that family planning is a convenient way of escaping from the problem while seeming to cope with it.

I do not say that family planning per se "stands in the way." I have consistently supported efforts to make contraceptives available. The family-planning emphasis in population control, however, has been self-defeating in two ways. First, it has not fully provided private birth control, by neglecting single women, denying all women the right of abortion, being cool to sterilization, and giving priority to religious taboos rather than biological effectiveness in recommending contraceptives. Second, having thus temporized in regard to private birth control, it has side-tracked population policy by confusing population control with private birth control, which it claims to provide. On both counts political expediency has been bought at the price of ineffectiveness. If, by "full" support of family planning, Sweezy means a blind belief that it alone is the answer to the population problem, he exemplifies the kind of commitment which, in my view, is blocking the development of efficient measures.

KINGSLEY DAVIS

Department of Demography,
University of California, Berkeley

Malononitrile Is Toxic

Abelson's editorial, "Meeting needs for heavy elements" (5 Jan., p. 37) contains the statement that malononitrile is an effective nontoxic substitute for HCN. This does not agree with other references on the toxicity of this compound. Williams states (1): "The toxicity of malononitrile is about the same as that of HCN, molecule for molecule, but if malononitrile were completely converted to HCN it should be twice as toxic." Cyanide is one of the metabolic products from malononitrile in mammalian tissue. Fasset, in a chapter on cyanides and nitriles, states in relation to malononitrile (2): "Based on the above facts, the precautions and medical therapy should be the same as for cyanide. Skin contact and inhalation of dust or vapor should be prevented."

RICHARD HENDERSON

Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation,
275 Winchester Avenue, New Haven,
Connecticut

References

1. R. T. Williams, *Detoxication Mechanisms* (Wiley, New York, 1959), p. 399.
2. *Industrial Hygiene and Toxicology*, F. A. Patty, Ed., (Interscience, New York, 1963), vol. 2, rev. ed. 2, p. 2028.

Curator Coates

Although Ruggieri provided an interesting description of the facilities, research in progress, and past and present staff members of the New York Aquarium and Osborn Laboratories of Marine Sciences (3 Nov., p. 675), I found missing the name of Christopher W. Coates, who was curator, aquarist, and, for many years until his recent retirement, director of the aquarium. He is inclined himself to undervalue his contributions to research and to disclaim any scientific training, but he is a very inquisitive and thoughtful observer and experimenter, with remarkable initiative, skill and practical knowledge, which he has always been ready to share with colleagues in research. It was during his association with the aquarium, and in large part on his initiative, that its field of research was extended beyond ichthyology into general physiology. His work deserves much more praise than I can give it in this brief comment. . . .

RICHARD T. COX

Department of Physics,
Johns Hopkins University,
Baltimore, Maryland 21218