

World Bank, U.S. at Odds on Population

The Administration has issued a final policy statement for the August population conference in Mexico City that essentially resembles a controversial early draft (*Science*, 22 June, p. 1321). While modifying its opposition to family planning aid for countries that accept abortion, it says this country will no longer support nongovernmental organizations that "perform or actively promote" abortions. This could lead to a loss of \$50 million in annual contributions to the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. UNFPA would get no money unless it furnished assurances that none of its funds go for abortions.

The World Bank, meanwhile, has produced an extensive analysis of world population trends which calls into question the Administration's emphasis on the free market as the ultimate force for economic development and stabilization of the population. *World Development Report 1984* says, on the contrary, that rapid population growth is impeding development in many places.

It is significant that the report has been produced by the World Bank, which is geared toward large-scale development projects and has put only a tiny fraction of its resources—\$50 million a year—into its population, health, and nutrition program. The report makes a strong case for more foreign aid for population programs: "... inaction today could mean that more drastic steps, less compatible with individual choice and freedom, will seem necessary tomorrow to slow population growth."

The report says world population continues to grow in line with U.N. projections made in 1963. Although significant reductions in fertility have been achieved, the net growth rate in developing countries (leaving out China) has stayed the same—2 percent—over the past 10 years because of reductions in death rates. By 2050, the population will have doubled—to 10 billion, with 80 percent of the increase in developing countries. By 2000, 50 percent of the people in those countries will be under 15. Some 600 million new jobs will be required in the next 15 years. Many cities will metastasize into sprawling conurbations with few services, hosts for disease, pollution, crime, unemployment, and political unrest. Mexico City, to name the largest, will double in size from 16 million to 31 million. Bangladesh, the size of Wisconsin, will have 157 million people, a 60 percent increase, by 2000. In Kenya, which has the world's highest birthrate, the average woman used to have eight babies and four living children. Now, with improved health measures, she has eight children.

Despite all this, external family planning assistance—discounting for inflation—has not risen since 1977. And worldwide expenditures on contraception research are no higher, in constant dollars, than they were in 1971.

The bank report, addressing the development versus family planning argument, finds that wealth does not necessarily lead to reduced fertility. Colombia, which has well-developed family planning services, is not reproducing as fast as its wealthy neighbor, Brazil. The idea that higher fertility leads to more production is also belied by a chart showing that in the 30 years from 1950 to 1980, after the Green Revolution and billions of dollars in foreign aid, the Third World's share of world production declined

slightly in proportion to its share of world population.

The bank report does not enter the abortion controversy, but it recounts what has happened in pronatalist countries where abortion has been outlawed. In Romania, for example, the crude birthrate shot up and then decreased as illegal abortions became widespread. By 1977 they accounted for about 70 percent of maternal deaths.

Population groups have observed considerable apathy about world population matters among the general public in recent years, which they attribute partially to the data showing declining birthrates in the Third World. But a heavily disproportionate contribution has been made by China, whose population of 1.1 billion makes up 30 percent of the developing world.

A new report from the National Research Council documents China's rapid fertility drop since its rugged antinatalist campaign began in 1969. China has released a wealth of population data in the past 5 years, including its 1953 and 1964 censuses, and the results of a million-woman fertility survey in 1982. Statistics show the death rate has fallen dramatically, and the average number of children per woman has dropped from 6.47 to 2.66 in the past 30 years.

Committee chairman Ansley J. Coale of Princeton said China is paying a harsh social price for its gains, and said he had "no doubt" that "plenty of coercive measures" were being used, including compelling women to have abortions in their third trimester. The report also hints that female infanticide is not a rare occurrence. The normal ratio of girl to boy babies is 100:106. But in China, the ratio for third births is 100:113. In 1981, third births were 10 percent of the total, which means 60,000 girl babies were either unreported or done away with.

Some observers worry that if voluntary family planning does not get more support, more governments will follow China's example. Former World Bank president Robert McNamara, in a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, wrote that "If present growth trends continue, I expect such coercive measures by governments and such brutal actions by families to be common by the end of the century."

A similar note of alarm has been sounded in a report by Population Reports International, a new Washington study group. This report contends that family planning programs alone are inadequate because people still want too many children. It argues that countries have "no choice" but to inaugurate housing, education, and fiscal incentive programs like those in Singapore, South Korea, and China with the aim of limiting families to two offspring. It predicts that failure to do this will invite coercion, followed by a disastrous social backlash.

At the last U.N. population conference, in Bucharest in 1974, a popular slogan among developing countries was "development is the best contraceptive." That position, which matches the White House philosophy, has long been abandoned by the experts as well as by much of the Third World, where about 40 percent of the population now has access to family planning programs. It would appear, however, that the Administration has done more to draw attention to the problem than could possibly have been elicited by an innocuous affirmation of current policies.

—CONSTANCE HOLDEN