



A Message from the President

A few days ago the PBS television stations broadcast an hour-long discussion among former recipients of the Nobel Prize. The individuals represented all the sciences and humanities. They were asked to consider one question: whether science and technology have advanced or thwarted the general well-being of mankind during the twentieth century. The question was put in the form of a resolution, and a distinguished panel debated for and against. After an hour, and only by a small majority, the assembly voted that science and technology have had a positive impact on humanity.

Among the points made by the participants, one of the most telling is that none of the scientists present thought science could solve the problem of widespread poverty. If any consensus arose, it was that the growth in the population of mankind is placing demands on the earth - and on science - that cannot be met. One panelist suggested that unless we consciously take steps to drastically curtail the birth rate, nature would solve the problem for us.

Virtually nothing was said during this debate about replacing the socio-political arrangements and institutions to which poverty (and high reproductive rates) can be traced.

What we know about human reproductive behavior is consistent with common sense. People who must struggle daily for survival are sociologically trapped. Few are able to rise above their circumstances, and most view children as both an opportunity for status and the source of their security in old age. In many societies around the globe, the very poor have been concentrated into sprawling urban ghettos where all the ills of their condition are magnified. Or, they have migrated to the least productive and most environmentally sensitive land in a desperate effort to survive. In both instances, however, the effects have spilled over into the world of the more affluent, whose reactions range from enlightened assistance to genocide.

The condition of the poor is a serious human tragedy. Equally tragic is that among our best minds there is so little understanding of the fundamental causes and what must be done to eradicate poverty and human suffering.

We who have learned from Henry George understand that poverty arises when human beings are denied their birth-right of equal access to the earth.

Where the majority denies a minority, the poverty is concentrated and somewhat mitigated by the welfare state. Where a minority denies the majority, poverty is widespread and looked upon by behaviorists as a population problem. Monopoly is the root cause of poverty, and the monopoly privileges inherent in the sanctioning of titleholdings to nature without just compensation to society are the most egregious of all.

The population problem will not and cannot be solved without an end to land monopoly. In this year of continued political upheaval, we must do all we can to spread the knowledge and understanding we possess. Our responsibility is moral and fundamental to our survival as a species.

- Edward J. Dodson, President, Henry George School