

THOMAS MALTHUS knew there was something wrong: there were so many poor people around. But he could not figure out that the problem lay in an economic system which prevented able-bodied people from earning a decent living.

So he blamed the poor; he decided that they were reproducing too fast for their own good. And that is the notion that still holds sway, to an important extent, among people who are concerned about economic development in the Third World today.

Advocates of the need for more family planning services tend to turn a blind eye to the fact that, for hundreds of thousands of years, through countless generations, men and women have been able to reproduce themselves at a stable rate in relation to their ability to tap the ecological environment for food, clothes and shelter.

Why is this apparently not so today?

The answer, surely, has to be found in some substantial change in culture, a change which has ripped apart the customary constraints on fecundity, rather than a change in either morality or biological propensities.

A NEW school of thought has now emerged which side-steps the Malthusian problem. It suggests that population growth and density rates are not a problem at all.

Julian L. Simon, a professor of economics at the College of Business and Management, University of Maryland, is a leading exponent of this thesis, and he delivered his evidence at a recent conference.*

His statistics showed that free market economies had faster rates of population growth, and greater population densities - and yet, when the statistics on *per capita* incomes are studied, we discover they out-performed the command economies of eastern Europe and China!

The moral for the professor was

'Growth is not now an issue'

By FRED HARRISON

clear: since faster population growth was not associated with slower economic growth, family planning programmes were "extremely damaging," in that they offered palliatives which distracted people from examining the economic systems of the Third World.

This analysis is simple-minded.

- Prof. Simon ignores the distribution of income within the faster-growing economies. Low-income families also tend to be larger than high-income families; but that, in itself, does not prove a causal connection.

- *Per capita* incomes are not a good measure of prosperity. In fact, it's an absurd measure. The birth of a child immediately reduces *per capita* income, whereas the birth of a calf is logged in the national statistics as an increase in *per capita* income. As an index of living standards and progress, it is useless; as a

means of comparison, it is dangerous.

- Not all fast-growing economies have fast-growing populations, pointed out Eric Deakins, a former Member of Parliament in Britain and consultant to the International Planned Parenthood Federation. He offered a scathing attack on Prof. Simon's statistics, pointing out, for example, that "to claim that fast economic growth has co-existed with high population increase is not true."

The reverse was true, he said, pointing to Haiti (2.3% population growth rate) and Honduras (3.1%), both of which were free market economies but which suffered from appallingly low economic growth rates.

Kenya is an example of a politically stable country with a free market economy - yet it has the highest population growth rate in the world and a very low economic growth rate.

What the counter-evidence

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POPULATION DENSITY AND GROWTH, 1950-83

	East Germany	West Germany	North Korea	South Korea	China	Taiwan	USA
pop. per sq km 1950	171	201	76	212	57	212	16
% change in pop.							
1950	1.2	1.1	-7.8	0.1	1.9	3.3	1.7
1955	-1.3	1.2	3.5	2.2	2.4	3.5	1.8
1960	-0.7	1.3	3.0	3.3	1.8	3.1	1.7
1970	-0.1	1.0	3.0	2.4	2.4	2.2	1.1
1983	-0.3	-0.2	2.6	1.6	1.6	1.8	0.9

Limit families! Prince makes a further plea



• Philip: "Out of their minds"

PRINCE PHILIP, the consort to the British Queen, says that families should limit their size "in order to maintain a balance between births and deaths." Expressing despair at the continued global hunger, despite the increase in the output of food, the prince - the father of four children, whose wife is a major landowner - failed to offer an explanation for this paradox.

Instead, he resorted to the idea of an optimum population size. "It is wholly against the interests of human happiness and survival for the size of the human population to reach the ultimate limit," he insisted, without suggesting what that limit was.

The prince's speech, at the Royal Society of Arts in London on March 23, was addressed to environmentalists. It was the second time he had become involved in the controversial subject. In 1982, while visiting the Solomon Islands, he was told the annual population growth was 5%. He pronounced of the islanders: "They must be out of their minds."

Now, he says it is "ridiculous" that despite improvements in food production there were more starving people in the world than 200 years ago. And his

prescription - a limit on fertility - was founded on the idea that an optimum population size would ensure future generations enjoyed a "fair share" of the world's finite resources.

Paul Knight comments: The problem with this theory is that, no matter how severely people limited their population growth rates, today's proprietorial rights over natural resources guarantees an unfair distribution of resources. A static population, by itself, is no safeguard against poverty; the growers of food, for example, could still continue to stockpile their output and withhold it from the hungry.

If hunger is an index of over-population, the world has already gone beyond that point! There were one billion people on earth in 1800; since then, the number has grown to five billion today. But according to Professor Colin Clark, the former Director of the Institute of Agricultural Economics at Oxford University, the world has the technical and ecological capacity to carry well over 100 billion people.

• See editorial comment on Page 50.

AQUINO IS WARNED

MANILA: Thousands of protesters marched on the presidential palace on April 21 to warn Cory Aquino that she faced the "wrath of peasants" if demands for land reform went unheeded. They chanted "land not bullets" and carried signs proclaiming "farms not arms" - a reference to 13 protesters who were killed when troops fired on a similar march in January last year. Mrs Aquino has called for a land reform law to distribute 13.3 million acres to 2.5 million landless farmers. The bill has been stalled by months of debate in Congress, where many members are landowners.

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shows is that the introduction of data on the relative performance of the free market and the command economy into the Malthusian debate does not get us far.

At least the Malthusians, in expressing alarm about the size of the population, do so by measuring demographic indices against natural resources. This reintroduces into the debate the concept of land, which is largely ignored by orthodox economists today.

Prof. Simon made it clear which camp he favoured: in suggesting that the United States would be

better off if all of its people were moved east of the Mississippi, creating higher densities which would lead to faster economic growth, he asserted:

"For the first time in history, land has become unimportant."

In the final analysis, we believe that the interplay between demography and finite resources will only be understood when social scientists examine "land" specifically, land tenure arrangements, and the way that these have been changed in the last 200 years.

Until then, the debate will continue to go round in circles. People will continue to die of hunger. And societies around the world will remain politically unstable as they resist the mass of peasants who seem to want but one thing to keep body and soul together: land.

* *Population Growth, Economic Development, and Foreign Aid*, London: Institute of Economic Affairs, March 17, 1988.