

· C O M M E N T ·

On George and Malthusianism

PROFESSOR GLENN E. HOOVER, in his article, "Henry George, Reconsidered,"¹ pays high tribute to Henry George, but he is probably too young to realize how strong was the belief sixty years ago that population tends to outrun subsistence, that poverty is ordained by God and it is sinful to question Divine Providence. I think the work of George was largely responsible for the abandonment of the wage-fund theory and the theory that poverty is necessary.

Many deny the operation of an economic law because they do not see it work. What happens is due to economic laws as invariable in action as the law of gravity, but there are many forces pulling different ways and the outcome is the result of these various forces. Henry George saw this with extraordinary clarity and his prophecies have come true.

Professor Hoover says that George assumes that the tendency to reproduce is correlated with poverty and toil rather than with comfort and leisure. Of this theory Professor Hoover says: "I am sure that there is not a scintilla of evidence to support it."²

In the Nineteenth Century there was a great increase in population in Europe, which culminated in 1876, on the eve of the writing of "Progress and Poverty." Thereafter the rate declined. In the article on the "Birth-Rate" in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Fourteenth Edition, it is stated that in the greater part of Europe about 1876, the birthrate was near the maximum. A table is given showing the rate in eleven European countries for 1876, 1901, 1913 and 1926. I give the figures for England and Wales and for Germany. The rates are per one thousand of population:

	<i>England and Wales</i>	<i>Germany</i>
1876	36.3	40.9
1901	28.5	35.7
1913	23.1	27.5
1926	17.8	20.7

In this article it is said that "The birth-rate is in inverse ratio to the social scale—it is highest among laborers, etc., and lowest among the professional classes."

In the same volume, in the article on "Birth Control," is a table comparing fertility in social classes. It gives for five classes the number of

¹ AM. JOUR. ECON. SOCIO., Vol. 4, No. 1 (Oct., 1944), pp. 45-52.

² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

legitimate births per one thousand married males under fifty-five years of age for the years 1911 and 1921, in England and Wales:

	<i>Rate in 1911</i>	<i>Rate in 1921</i>
1—Upper and Middle Class . .	119	98
2—Intermediate	132	104
3—Skilled Workers	153	141
4—Intermediate	158	162
5—Unskilled Workers	213	178

"These data," said the report of the National Birth-Rate Commission, "amount to a complete statistical demonstration that fertility is closely correlated with social status. The more prosperous the social class, the lower is the fertility. This initial difference is not removed by subsequent differential mortality in the offspring in favor of the more wealthy classes."

Vital statistics in the United States were scanty and are still inadequate, but as far as they go they tend to prove the same conclusions. Various students of population trends think the population of the United States will stabilize about 1970.

I have believed in Henry George's doctrine of freedom and equal rights for nearly sixty years. George warned that if we did not follow the path of freedom we would have more and more socialism, which we surely have. In the early days we hoped for freedom soon. Within ten years most of us saw that it would be long delayed. Probably there were many causes. It is reported³ that Lenin said George was right but the concept was too intellectual for the Russian people.

It may be that the concept of the equal rights of all men to the use of the earth will grow in strength and be applied in various ways in many places. This may be the thought of Professor Hoover. It is true that short steps in the direction to which George pointed have led to better ways.

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³ By Col. Raymond Robins. See his letter to Mrs. Anna George de Mille, Henry George Collection, New York Public Library.