

How Many Britons Should There Be?

The politics of UK population optimisation since 1945

by Jack Parsons

A monograph of Population Policy Press

*Originally commissioned by the late David Willey,
founder and Director of the UK Optimum Population Trust (OPT),
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With a new Foreword & a substantial Afterword

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New Foreword

When the late David Willey – then new to population studies – set up the Optimum Population Trust in 1991, he invited my help and I was very happy to oblige. He and his wife, Yvette, visited me to browse through my books and other materials and generally familiarise themselves with the broader background of the population problem. Not long afterwards he invited me to become an OPT patron – an honour which I readily accepted – and to write an article for the house-journal, *Better World*.

The object was to set out some of the highlights of my research and personal experiences in dealing with population in political thought and action within the UK over the last half century or so, and this monograph starts off with that original text. However, preparing it for republication in this new format made it obvious that the story – then ending in 1993 – needed to be brought up to date, hence the new Afterword.

One of the main objects of both the original article and the complete document as now presented, is to show that over the period examined there has always been at least some reluctance – very strong in some quarters – to accept the population problem even as a topic of discussion, let alone as a suitable subject for public policy.

As I argue right at the end, there has been a great double volte-face, reversing the two original levels of acceptability of open discussion of sexual matters and of population matters: as the first has risen, so the second has crashed. The present near-universal refusal to face the latter is now widely referred to by those in the know as the Hardinian Taboo, after the late Professor Garrett Hardin.

Garrett did not invent the basic idea of this taboo, quite a few individuals – including some of the few independent-minded journalists – have lamented the fact that there are serious blockages in this sphere of discourse, but in his usual clear and forthright manner he presented it in such a striking way that it subsequently became widely known – at least among the cognoscenti – as ‘the Hardinian Taboo’, possibly under the influence of one of his earlier books (1973), *Stalking the Wild Taboo*.

Sadly, the almost universally overpowering taboo on the population question means that in general – apart from the agitated and eccentric to-ings and fro-ings in the one population sector in which a small measure of discussion is permitted, migration-control – there have been almost no relevant developments except in the UK Green Party. In the light of the latter I have added an addendum setting out their new population policy.

The rationale underlying this is not that either the Green Party or its population policy has my full support (I am not a member and like some aspects, but not all) but that a modern political party can work out and adopt a radical population policy without the heavens falling. If this item interests you, please read the introductory note setting it in the appropriate context.

It also seems clear that a systematic survey of the population policies/ attitudes/values of our political parties at this time would be very useful and we hope it may prove possible to tackle this task and follow-up with an updated report on UK population politics in the not too distant future.

Meanwhile we trust, first, that the largely historical material in the original article will show that a lot of useful work was done before the rigid taboo took hold, and, second, that it – reinforced by the urgency of the Afterword – will help to stimulate quite a bit more.

Jack Parsons, 30 December 2004

Acknowledgement

Once again I acknowledge with gratitude the very appreciative but balanced appraisal of the near-final ms of this monograph provided by my PPP author-collaborator-friend, Professor JP Duguid, CBE. It proved possible to embody several of his lesser points directly into the already formatted pages, while the weightier ones are covered in the end-notes.

Population Optimisation in British Politics

Introduction

In asking me to cover this topic in two to three thousand words the Editor gave me a difficult task. One reason for this is that – unless one takes the really long view – there are strongly conflicting trends in Western thought on population and development issues, and these are very difficult to resolve into a single coherent frame. However, in the knowledge that small seeds grow into fair-sized plants I agreed to try, and in an effort to provide some sort of coherence I made it more autobiographical than would otherwise be desirable.

The Long View

Briefly harking back to the long view I must stress that population problems are hardy perennials. One of the oldest literary documents extant, a poem baked on to a clay tablet in ancient Babylon, is a cri-de-coeur for population control. Nearly two millennia later, the authors of the Bible also made many references to population pressure and conflict over scarce resources.

Again, the ancient Chinese, Indians, Greeks, and Romans all wrote copiously in both practical and highly sophisticated theoretical ways on these topics. They spelt out the allegedly Malthusian idea of exponential growth, the need for population controls, and – of special relevance in this context – very definite opinions on optimum sizes. Egyptian papyri nearly four thousand years old list biochemical birth control techniques and appliances and anyone wishing to think seriously about these issues should dip into some of these works: Aristotle's *Politics*, at the very least.

The Middle Term

Throughout the second millennium AD, many other scholars and men and women of affairs increasingly wrote about population issues with evergreater professionalism; for instance, Thomas Aquinas (b.1226), Ibn Khaldun (b.1332), Machiavelli (b.1469), Botero (b.1540), Francis Bacon (b.1561), Sir William Petty (b.1623), Edmund Halley (b.1646), Benjamin Franklin (b.1706), David Hume (b.1711), and numerous others, far too many to list here.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (b.1712) is worth a special mention in that he spelled out the idea of the optimum in considerable detail:

As nature has set bounds to the stature of a well-made man ... similarly, for the constitution of a state to be at its best. it is possible to fix limits that will make it neither too large for good government, nor too small for self-maintenance.

In every body politic there is a maximum strength which it cannot exceed and which it only loses by increasing in size. Every extension of the social tie means its weakening; and, generally speaking, a small State is stronger in proportion than a great one. (1947 edn. p.37)

Population Politics in Britain

Early Days

The beginning of systematic registration of births, marriages, and deaths in 1538 was a milestone in population politics, as was Queen Elizabeth I's personal interest. In 1558 she ordered these records to be kept on parchment for their better preservation and many are still extant.

The next major step was the proposal for a national census in 1753, comfortably carried by the Commons despite powerful opposition. However, an even more violent reaction in the House of Lords caused it to be thrown out and we had to wait nearly 50 years – until 1801 – for the first one.

Increasing concern about high mortality and public health in general, rural-urban migration, child labour, hours of work, insurance, and other questions stimulated interest and led to great strides in statistical techniques, in understanding population problems, and in recognising that these issues are not only legitimate but essential issues for discussion and – where appropriate – action in the political arena.

20th century – pre World War II

The biggest issue in this phase was the 1930's scare that the population of the UK was in terminal decline. Some demographers panicked and wrote books such as *Parents Revolt* and *The Menace of Underpopulation*, and a Government Commission on the Declining Birth Rate was set up.

In fact our numbers rose by over 1.8m in the decade 1931 - 41, (to 47.85m), and they have risen by about another ten million since.

This is roughly equal to a one-third increase in my lifetime.

20th century - post World War II

Towards the end of the war, residual concern about the possibility of a future decline in numbers led to the setting up of the Royal Commission on Population under King George VI, with the following remit:

Whereas we have deemed it expedient that a Commission should forthwith issue to examine the facts relating to the present population trends in Great Britain; to investigate the causes of these trends and consider their probable consequences; to consider what measures, if any, should be taken in the national interest to influence the future trend of population and to make recommendations ...

The Commission reported in 1949 and its two main findings – both in paragraph 654 – were as follows, first:

We have no hesitation in recommending ... a replacement size of family ... in Great Britain at the present time ...

In other words, although the commissioners had possibly been most concerned about a potential decline in numbers, they also rejected any recommendation for further increases in numbers and unhesitatingly came out in favour of what we now call ZPG, zero population growth.

Second, they stressed:

... it is impossible for policy, in its effects as distinct from its intentions, to be 'neutral' on this matter since over a wide range of affairs policy and administration have a continuous influence on the trend of family size.

They added:

Our enquiry has convinced us that the relation between ... family size and community outlook and policies is peculiarly close, and underlying all our recommendations is our concern to have this fact recognised so that in all relevant branches of policy and administration the population factor will be taken into account ... (para. 687)

The clear implication was that since the nation was already controlling its population, willy-nilly, we had better recognise this important fact henceforth and do it openly and systematically:

An educational effort is needed to spread throughout the community some understanding of the broad facts of the population trend and its consequences ... [and] we recommend that the Lord President of the Council should be made responsible for a continuous watch over population movements and their bearing on national policies. (paras. 680 & 685)

Fifteen years later the Royal Society took up the challenge and set up a Population Study Group comprising just about all the 'top people' in the field. The Chairman, Lord Florey, Provost of Queen's College, Oxford, opened his Foreword to the first report:

The correlation in an optimal way of human beings with their environment is probably the greatest task that confronts mankind.

However, there was little or no discussion of the basic issues. After publication of the third set of abstracts in 1967 the whole thing fizzled out. Not much help there for perplexed policymakers.

The Political Parties

Of course it must be borne in mind that most of the events above and below occurred in relation to parties, sometimes under them when they were in government, but the record on population issues of the parties qua parties is scrappy and mixed. It is hard indeed to generalise, so I can offer only some hints and highlights.

The one certain thing is that – with the possible exception of the Liberal Party for a time – no party or government has ever come near to paying attention to what the Royal Commission and other high-level bodies recommended and making the issues an ongoing part of the business of government.

Of course there have been honourable exceptions in all the main parties, notably Sir David (now Lord) Renton for the Conservatives, Lord Beaumont for the Liberals, and Douglas Houghton for Labour, all of whom kindly wrote short forewords to my 1971 book *Population Versus Liberty*, in an admittedly forlorn attempt to give it some political but non-partisan oomph.

The Liberals

Of the parties as corporate wholes I think the Liberals had the best record on population, with Labour second and the Conservatives third. In the late 60's and early 70's I did quite a lot of public speaking on these topics. As Hon. Education Officer of the then newish Conservation Society I was prepared to talk to any reputable group and the Liberal Party became so keen on the subject that the President, Mrs Stina (later Baroness) Robson, invited me – even as a long-time Labour supporter and member of the Fabian society – to address meetings, serve on the Party's Environment Panel and, later, on the Economic Growth and Optimum sub-panels.

I was further invited to address fringe meetings on population problems and economic growth at two Liberal national assemblies, and, on one occasion, was even smuggled in as a delegate to address the Assembly proper on a motion to adopt a substantial population policy. At the time I thought my presence was all above board – not to mention rather flattering – and was somewhat miffed to find out the truth shortly after.

In addition, I wrote for the Liberal 'ginger' journal, *LASER*, plus a substantial monograph for the International Liberal movement, circulated in French and English at Luxembourg, and conducted a survey of Liberal Party opinion concerning Britain's population problems, all by invitation.

55% of the respondents thought the UK as a whole was already over-populated (38% 'seriously') – a further 38.5% thinking 'some areas' overpopulated; 87.5% that 'pressure of population is having an adverse effect on the quality of our lives'; and 85.5% that 'measures for the control of numbers are necessary now or soon'.

However, my move in 1975 from Brunel University (at Uxbridge, near London) to Cardiff University's new Population Centre seemed operationally equivalent to emigration.

The Party – its own future ever more problematical – seemed to lose most of its momentum on these issues, although some tenuous strands of activism on environmental questions and economic growth persisted, and three years later (17 July 1978) I was asked back once more, this time to give a private talk to Liberal Peers in Lord Byers' room at the House of Lords.

It was probably this which delivered the coup-de-grâce to my 'Liberal' contributions. The agreed theme was the relationship between immigration and population problems, with me arguing that large migrations mostly cause large problems and that it is not much use talking about balancing native numbers against native resources without clear and effective immigration controls. Indeed, it was hard to formulate and operate the latter – and even more difficult to justify them morally – without a clear and generally acceptable overall population policy.

Putting it mildly, my reception was icy. Lord Byers, the Chairman, was plainly outraged and though I subsequently received an apology from both Baroness Robson and Lord Avebury, this – possibly reinforced by a lengthy and increasingly acerbic private correspondence on these issues with Lord Avebury, with whom I had previously enjoyed a very cordial relationship – was the end of my collaboration with the Liberals. [Or was it vice-versa?]

Labour

As a rank and file MP, Harold Wilson said in a speech in Berne in 1952:

The growth of world population, far transcending ... food production, is threatening ... a global crisis ... before the end of this century.

Later, as Prime Minister, he was pronatalist with regard to Britain. In his reply to Sir David Renton's series of open letters to him, he argued that:

... an expanding population ... means an expanding market and ... should induce investment and technological development as well as help our longer-term manpower shortages. (Renton, 1967)

This attitude applied to immigration too, at first, although increasingly rigorous controls were subsequently imposed by all governments. As Prime Minister he signed the *World Leader's Declaration on Population* on Human Rights Day, in December 1967.

Nonetheless, there were some honourable exceptions. In the 1940s a pamphlet by the Assistant Secretary of the Fabian Society's Colonial Bureau on the topic of competing racial and tribal populations in the colonies – quite happily included comments such as:

It might be said that divisions according to race are unimportant ... only cleavages ... between class and class are really significant. Yet any knowledge of these societies shows immediately that this is wrong ... the most obvious storm-centre (being) East Africa ... (Nicholson, 1948, pp. 1&8)

In 1962 the Society published a radical and strongly worded pamphlet, *Too Many People*, about Britain's population problems, arguing that '*... control of numbers is both practical and a permanent necessity.*' (Carter, p.23)

As late as 1964 the Society was still putting out pamphlets in which overpopulation was discussed in a completely matter-of-fact way as, for instance, in Segal's *Massacre in Rwanda*:

Rwanda is today one of the world's most unfortunate countries, besodden (sic) with tragedy ... (with) the highest population density in Africa south of the Sahara ... and an annual increase of 3% ... pressure of men and animals on ... land was threatening rapidly to transform [it] into a desert. (Segal, pp.3,4 & 8)

Other Fabian authors discussed comparable problems in Fiji, Malaya, India, and elsewhere, with equal freedom and realism.

In 1965 I persuaded the left-wing journal *The New Statesman* to accept an article called 'The Population Explosion versus Socialism', throwing out a challenge to socialists as social engineers. Although – without my foreknowledge or consent – it appeared under the title 'The Population Explosion', the challenge was allowed to stay, emphasised by a haunting 'Vicky' cartoon. I wrote:

A socialist movement is committed to tackling, as near the source as possible, and removing or ameliorating, anything causing poverty, injustice or degradation ... Explosive population growth has caused and will cause more of these than all past wars and tyrannies put together.

Numbers have to be restricted now or very soon and it is the duty of a forward-looking movement to initiate the necessary measures earlier than parties which act only when they are forced to. ...

The population problem Britain now faces is clear, imminent, and inescapable – if 53m. Britons are not enough in 1965, will 106m. be enough in 2045, or 424m. in 2205? The nation has got to choose and act. What are socialists going to do about it? (Parsons, 1965, pp. 672-3)

Although I had to wait a quarter of a century, until 1990, for any direct response from the Left (an invitation from the Socialist Environment & Resources Association, SERA, to write an article for their house-journal); one of the Party's old war-horses, Tom Braddock, did speak out forcefully at the Annual Labour Conference the year after the 1965 article.

Comrades ... a population explosion has taken place, not only in this country but more significantly and dangerously in the rest of the world ... Quite recently, the Chairman of ... the British Association For The Advancement of Science said in his Presidential Address: 'This country already carries a population as great as the environment can support without degeneration.' ...

The time is past for resolutions, the time is now here for action, because, Comrades, until this problem is solved there is little hope of any real progress in human affairs or of avoiding great international disputes and possibly wars as a result of increasing populations. (Proceedings, mimeo, pp.60-1)

In 1969 I took up with the Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, a point in one of his open replies to David Renton in 1967:

... there are in fact certain studies in hand extending to the year 2000 [to] bring out the implications of ... population growth by that time. If any of these implications appeared to be intolerable, we could then consider what needed to be done.

I mentioned also a reinforcing remark in the Lords on July 28th, 1968, by Lord Kennett, Labour's Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Local Government. A prompt reply confirmed that these studies were taking place and that they were confidential – at least for the time being – as: 'It has not yet been decided whether or not to publish this work.'

Whilst appreciating the fullness and sincerity of the reply I took rather a dim view of this as I think that population problems and policies are very much public concerns and should accordingly be fully debated by the populace at large. I started calling the relevant body a 'secret committee' in public pronouncements and in October, Gerald Leach, Science Correspondent for *The Observer*, published a brief but telling article on the topic. ('Talks on control of population', 5/10/69)

In 1970, Lord Kennett tried hard to widen this debate, arguing in a substantial speech in the Lords:

The question should be asked ... and discussed publicly to a much greater extent than it is: Is there an optimum population for these islands ... What should we do to ensure that we do not go beyond it? ... I, for one should ... welcome a great widening ... and intensification ... of the debate on our own population. (Hansard, 299,(36), 19 Feb.1969. cols. 835-6)

The following month, in his address to the Labour Women's Conference, mentioned below, Lord Kennet went on to amplify:

Now let us retreat from this apocalyptic vision [of world standing-room only] and consider ... this little island of ours and its own population problem. Do we want [it] to continue rising at its present rate? Or is there a level – long before there is any question of starvation or war - when we should begin to find life uncomfortable through sheer weight of numbers?

In some places, particularly the South East ... already life [is] uncomfortable because of the sheer number of people. It is a safe guess that more and more ... will find it [so] as numbers rise and rise, and that, in time ... nearly everybody will agree that the increase ought to stop.(Labour Party Press & Publicity Dept. Sat., March 21, 1970)

In the same month, under the courteous but relentless pressure from Sir David Renton on the question of an optimum population for Britain, Prime Minister Harold Wilson replied:

The Rt. Hon. and learned gentleman's case has been taken seriously by the Government ... We have strengthened the interdepartmental machinery coordinated by the Chief Scientific Adviser ...

It is too early yet to say whether it will be possible to give an answer to the question ... [he] has raised. Obviously it cannot be an easy question to answer. But a population bureau has been set up in the Ministry of Overseas Development to deal with the world population question. (Hansard, 784.(121), 22 May, col. 658)

At the Annual Conference of Labour Women in 1970, population growth was emphasised as a factor in pollution problems, and their 1971 Conference dealt at length with a substantial document – prepared by Labour's Research Department – entirely about population problems.

The Conservatives

In the case of the Conservatives a lot of the ideas and pressures came from the Party's young Turks. At the 1971 Annual Conference, John Watson (Young Conservatives National Advisory Committee) moved a motion:

That this Conference expresses its concern at the problem of population growth in Britain and the world and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to aid practical schemes for population limitation. (Conference Report, pp.111-116)

This was strongly supported by the Lord President of the Council, Willie Whitelaw, and carried by 'a very large majority.'

Soon afterwards the Greater London Young Conservatives demanded that all local authorities be compelled by law to provide family planning facilities to avert the necessity '... in 10 years' time ... to introduce: compulsory control.' (Simple, Daily Telegraph, 26/10/71)

In a speech the next month, Peter Walker – Secretary for the Environment – told City of London workers that Britain was:

'unlikely' to be facing a serious population problem ... [provided] we developed the right kind of planning ... decided to conserve the best of our countryside, and ... where future developments should be ... (Daily Telegraph, 10/11/71)

In 1971 the first report of the Select Committee on Science and Technology concluded unhesitatingly that:

The Government must act to prevent the consequences of population growth from becoming intolerable ...

In its second report in 1972 the members tartly noted that they were:

Astonished that Sir Keith Joseph [then Minister for Health] should ... have no plans or policy for relating family planning services to population size or trends.

They again urged (in very bold type) the imperative need for a minister:

primarily charged with responsibility for population policy ... (with) a Special Office ... to advise the Government. (1972, paras. 1, 13, 17 & 18)

After much shilly-shallying, in the wake of this the Lord President's Population Panel reported in 1973:

While we do not know the optimum size of Britain's population, nor do we see how on the basis of present knowledge any such optimum might be calculated, our analysis ... leads us to the conclusion that Britain would do better ... with a stationary rather than an increasing population ... sooner or later, Britain must face the fact that [numbers] ... cannot go on increasing indefinitely.

Society will have to adapt itself to the social and economic implications of a ... stationary population ... the time has come when the Government should consider whether, and if so, how to act to influence the rate of population growth. (paras. 33 & 35)

The Heath Government rejected the recommendation of the Select Committee on Science and Technology for a new special office, responsible to the Prime Minister, but did set up the Ross Panel of experts.

I wrote to Mr Heath to ascertain the reasons for these decisions and though it took eleven months (7/9/71 to 21/7/72) to break down the bureaucracy's defenses, I did finally get a letter stating the terms of reference of the new body and enclosing a copy of the White Paper (Cmnd. 4748):

To assess the available evidence about the significance of population growth for both public affairs and private life in this country at present and in prospect; to make recommendations about further work required, and how it should be conducted: and to report within one year.

It seems likely from his answers in the Commons that Mr Heath was pressured by his colleagues into these actions. In response to a question from Sir Gilbert Longden:

Will Mr Heath not be influenced by those ... 'doomwatchers' who predict a population explosion if nothing is done?

Mr Heath replied:

That has been in existence for more than a century, since Malthus, and no more attention is paid to it now than was then. (The Times, 24/11/72)

In December 1972 the Conservative Party's Research Department put out a paper, *A Population Policy for Britain*, authored by Stanley Johnson, a well-known and very sound commentator on these issues.

In his concluding section, 'An Optimum Population', he underlined the difficulties of defining an optimum but leapfrogged this difficulty in masterly fashion by arguing that:

... a more pragmatic approach is ... required. The Government should accept the strong indications of opinion polls, Select Committees, correspondents to The Times, university lecturers, doctors against overpopulation, etc., that Britain's population is already too large and that further growth will merely serve to increase the degree of overpopulation.

The immediate goal of policy therefore becomes one of stabilising our numbers before the situation becomes worse. It is not necessary to know the 'optimum population' for Britain to seek population stability now. (Old Queen St. Paper No.18, p.382. Itals. added)

Naturally, this – along with all the other powerful recommendations from more official bodies – was ignored by the hierarchy.

Nevertheless, on the foundations laid by the Labour government, the Conservatives did make birth control part of the National Health Service – perhaps because public opinion was overwhelmingly in favour – and it must be borne in mind that in public debate. Much of the rationale for this development had been ecological rather than individualistic. It was seen as a legitimate means of reducing population growth and pressure.

Since 1979 Conservative administrations have given a higher profile to population control on the international agenda and the indefatigable efforts of Lynda Chalker have managed to raise the amount spent on foreign aid for voluntary family planning from the microscopic to the minuscule.

Nevertheless, all thought of possible population problems in Britain now seems to have flown out of the window for both Conservatives and their opponents.

Cross-Party Activities

It must be stressed that in addition to partisan activity on these issues, there has been a good deal of cross-party concern and action over the years. For instance, Edwin Brooks' 1968 All-Party Motion on Population was signed by more than 260 members from all parties. This called for:

permanent and adequate machinery for examining the difficulties to which ... population growth will give rise ... (Commons Circular Letter, 16 July 1968).

In addition, although this body concerns itself almost solely with overseas problems, the All-Party Parliamentary Committee on Population has done good work for many years.

The Royal Family

The Royal family should not be left out of the reckoning, either. Over the years, both Prince Philip and Prince Charles – particularly the former – have deeply concerned themselves with population and related issues.

In 1964, for instance, as part of a substantial speech on the topic, Prince Philip strongly supported population control:

We make so many ... claims for ourselves as beings with a superior intelligence ... that I think the least we can do is to prove (it) by controlling our numbers and standard of existence deliberately and willingly.

(Address to 6th formers, Freedom from Hunger Campaign, November 26, 1964. Transcript kindly supplied by Buckingham Palace)

Conclusions

In the absence of space for a discussion of the underlying political and moral 'whys' and 'wherefores' and speculation about the future, that seems a good note to end on, in the hope that there is enough food for thought here to be going on with.

My two main points are that although all parties and governments have failed dismally to come to grips with these profound issues, there has been, nonetheless, a great deal of concern and serious thought in many quarters. These have laid a good foundation for us to build on. [End of the original article]

New Afterword

The clamp-down on open debate

Exploring and reporting in the same detail on the intervening period – between the year of the original publication (1993) and late 2004 – could be a very interesting and useful exercise if only anything positive had happened on the population policy front.

Sadly, it has not. With the exception of a few closely restricted, arbitrary, and unexplained aspects, the Hardinian Taboo has increasingly rigorously censored this vitally necessary public debate on population dynamics and policy. In this epoch, virtually the whole country and its various specialist organs – which in a sane society might be expected to examine dispassionately every aspect of the ecosystem – systematically avoid the numbers problem.

Nearly all departments and staff members in our schools, colleges, universities, think-tanks, religious bodies, foreign aid organisations, environment groups, media, political parties, civil service departments, social and political commentators, allegedly independent intellectuals, and of course the national leaders themselves, are all of one mind on this issue. The population problem seems to be permanently "off" the national menu!

The few aspects which *are* allowed into the public domain

Despite the dogged determination of the present Labour government to avoid the central issues of population policy, a vague and blinkered awareness of some its aspects, and even vaguer need for sub-policies to try to deal with them, cannot be entirely suppressed. However, I have found it quite impossible to ascertain from my MP – or via any other channel – what the basic rationale is, even whether or not one exists.

Nevertheless, it is proving impossible to stifle debate on all of the basic components of a balanced population policy all of the time, a few *are* allowed – in some cases even *made* – to surface now and again, always in the context of the imperative need for ever-increasing economic growth.

The reasons given for New Labour's current policy of mass immigration are almost entirely economic, also. In trying to get to the bottom of Labour thinking on these issues – if the thought-processes going into these policies are worthy of that label – about all we can be fairly sure of is some admixture of the following six points:

1) That they (admittedly along with the other main parties, and with wide support from outside) act as though they are dedicated to the view that the alleged needs of the economy must in the main take preference over virtually every other consideration.

2) Given the conviction that the economy is by far the most important aspect of our being, that the natural tendency of economies is to grow and as ours has grown substantially over recent centuries, it seems only natural to some that it will continue to grow indefinitely into the future.

On the basis of these ideas it again seems natural that further economic growth should continue to be actively pursued at the highest feasible rate.

3) Not only is unending economic growth an obvious necessity – good in itself – we are in an economic race, pitted against other countries, notably Germany, Japan and the USA – possibly, in the future, even the giant population mass of China?. Economic growth overall must take precedence over growth per capita; it is the size of the GNP that matters.

4) The normal need for economic growth is reinforced by the alleged age-imbalance in the population because of increased life expectancies and the accompanying pensions problem.

5) *The solution of the present pensions problem requires a somewhat larger workforce now, while the maximisation of economic growth and GNP naturally requires an ever-larger workforce, especially skilled labour and entrepreneurial skills.*

6) *If the workforce is not growing quickly enough to enable this imperative goal to be met through the mechanism of natural increase (an excess of births over deaths) then it must be boosted by mass-immigration*

Sadly, however, except on the part of a tiny minority of concerned activists, no attempt is ever made to put these admittedly important factors together in a balanced ecologically, politically, socially, and ethically sound frame of reference. Nor is any attempt ever made to provide a rational basis for this course of action. Let us examine some of these items.

Economic growthmanship

It must of course be granted at the outset that all societies have to acquire and maintain an effective economy or go under: economies are very important. The only partial exceptions to the rule are those with an umbilical cord to another economy with a surplus of necessities and the willingness to supply enough of these gratis. Nevertheless, a viable economy and an ever-growing economy are two very different things.

Although the pursuit of never-ending economic growth as the major political goal is fairly new in history and cannot possibly go on much longer in a finite world, in the West it has almost acquired the status of economic jihad – a holy war to make the GDP ever-larger and everybody ever-richer. Many people seem to be convinced that both individual wealth and the economy as a whole can and will grow for ever. With the exception of the Green Party, all the political parties – from extreme left to extreme right – say something like:

'Vote for us and we'll make the economy grow faster and further.'

We have set ourselves an infinite and therefore unattainable goal, and – as Durkheim drily pointed out – 'insatiability is rightly considered a sign of morbidity.' (1951, p.247) In some important respects, growth in the GDP might be better regarded as a measure of the destruction of our basic environmental support-system.

Virtually all the reasons given by EEC enthusiasts are economic: more labour mobility, more investment-opportunities, etc, with the greatest stress on the overall size of the market and alleged economies of scale as the combined populations attain an even more massive size. The few scientific studies of environmental impact, ecological footprints, carrying capacity, and limits to growth, tend to be ridiculed or ignored.

Of course it is perfectly true that in many circumstances and within certain ranges, economies of scale are readily obtained, but – as both commonsense and any decent economics textbook will show – *diseconomies* of scale almost inevitably appear and tend to become crippling if size continues to increase beyond some approximation to the optimum scale for a given kind of activity at a specific time and place.

The allegedly insatiable labour-market

Surely it is a great irony that the 21st century's New Labour government has decided to turn a blind eye on the urgent recommendation of the Royal Commission on Population for a positive end to population growth in this country, a firm policy of ZPG.

The Blair government has adopted instead an energetic (if equally blind) pursuit of a Tory manpower and immigration philosophy set forth about the same time – just over half a century ago – by Quintin Hogg (later, as Lord Hailsham, Lord Chancellor):

One would have thought that by now any child would know that our man-power situation was extremely menacing ... There are too few hands now, and ... in a few years time the shortage will become even more acute ...

The close of the war presented a priceless opportunity, possibly never to be repeated, to absorb into our population all sorts of new and virile strains ... our stable civilisation ... [is] simply crying out for men of all trades and skills, anxious to work, able to work, and desirous of becoming British.

On the other side of the water a displaced population of twenty millions, willing to put up for a time with barrack-room conditions ...

What an opportunity for a Government of vision and understanding of our basic economic needs!
(Hogg, 1947, p.141)

At the time when the strong recommendations of the Royal Commission for population control policy and ZPG were set forth, our numbers were around 49 million. So far – up to late 2004 – succeeding parties and governments have failed to pull in from outside the whole of the then recommended pool of 20 millions, nevertheless, they have managed to swell our numbers by around 11 millions – more than a one-fifth increase in less than a single average lifespan.

UK numbers have increased by another two and a half million since 1993, when the *Better World* article was first published, making a total of about 16 millions (about 37%) over the lifespan of the present author. The official projection is that numbers are likely to rise by a further four million over the next 20 years and still be growing. With current trends and New Labour's plans it will take two more generations (until 2050 or so) to swell our numbers by the full 20 million demanded by Mr Hogg.

If and when this population goal is achieved, will that number then be large enough to enable us to manage our economy and society effectively? Already some strident voices are demanding the abolition of all frontier controls and a target population of 100 million.

Since 1945, the UK immigrant and immigrant-descended population has increased, officially, by about four million. Some possibly pessimistic, possibly realistic commentators (see below) believe that, in addition to that number, there may well be a million or so illegal settlers here (roughly the same proportion as that estimated for the USA) who do not show up in the official figures.

Over and above the continuing population growth stemming from natural increase, illegals and asylum-seekers, the Labour Government's declared policy is to further swell our numbers each year by 148,000 legal immigrants, a number roughly equivalent to the population of Brighton.

This means that every year – simply to ensure that the official immigrant population will be equipped at the existing national average standard – out of our always-limited existing resources we must find the space, investment capital, labour, building and all other materials, power-stations, liquid fuels, water, sewage-disposal, food and health provisions, amenities and so forth, to construct the approximate equivalent of another Brighton, Bournemouth, Blackpool, Southend, Middlesborough, Reading, or Sunderland.

The annual total of unofficial immigrants, asylum-seekers, and those granted what is surely jestingly called 'exceptional leave to remain' – anything but exceptional in reality – could well add the financial and environmental costs of another Brighton or Reading about every other year.

The iron law of opportunity-cost ensures that all of this wealth – which could have been invested for the benefit of the original population – must now be denied them for the current financial year, and if – as the government plans – the inflow continues; for the next year, and the next, and the next, and the year after that, and so on, as long as the influx continues.

According to the ecological theory of one of our most powerful government ministers, Mr David Blunkett, Home Secretary (who is in charge of the population-boosting policy) this can go on *ad libitum*. His opinion – indelibly on the public record – is that there are 'no obvious limits' to immigration into Britain and this dictum has the obvious but so far unacknowledged logical corollary that there cannot be any obvious limit to our country's population size, either.

Mr Blunkett is correct in a trivial sense, one he clearly didn't intend, giving no support to his foolish argument. In virtually all other areas of decision-making and government policy, it is taken for granted that thorough reviews of the evidence followed by considerable care and thought are needed before important plans are made and executed. Unless we settle for grossly over-simplified criteria – such as 10 persons per hectare of land surface – the limit to our numbers is not and never will be obvious. We can be pretty sure it will never be universally agreed, either.

There is not and could not be a scientific theory which provides the answer; all the relevant information must be collected, collated, discussed, and weighted by a body of human decision-makers; a dictator and his cronies, an elite of some other kind, political, religious, military, scientific, or – and surely much more desirably – by means of the widest possible democratic consultation between all concerned.

Readers will not be surprised to learn that no replies are forthcoming (at least, not for the present author or for anyone else he knows about) from Mr Blunkett or his staff to probing but polite letters seeking further enlightenment on this question of limits.

In the spheres of understanding the problems and its policies on foreign aid for development, New Labour again uses the Nelsonian approach, applying its ecological telescope to the blind eye.

The preliminary appraisal and planning of Mr Blair's allegedly radical new Africa Commission has only a few syllables on Africa's exploding numbers and no syllables at all on possible policies to address them.

Since the publication of my original article in 1993, world population has increased by getting on for another billion (from 5,500 to 6,400 millions). Using the same yardstick as before – the present author's lifespan (not quite over) – world numbers, from 1,810 millions in 1920, are rapidly approaching their second doubling, which, of course, will be twice as big as the one before. They are projected to continue for some time to increase by around 75-80 million each year (about the present size of the population of the Philippines) to nearly eight billions by 2025, and more than nine billions by 2050.

However, in correspondence, Mr Hilary Benn, the Minister in charge, does show signs of being open to persuasion on this score. I – possibly along with others – strongly criticised the Commission's original plans and have subsequently been encouraged by him to keep writing in.

The burden of dependency (BoD)

The increasing number of people past the retiring age does present problems, but these are hardly ever presented realistically. The old-age problem is part – but only a part – of what is technically called the 'burden of dependency', (BoD) the two other components being the population of working-age, of course – against which the number of the old is usually compared – and the number of the young, those below working-age.

Clearly, the total burden which must be supported by the working population is composed of the young plus the old. It follows that if there is – or is merely thought to be – an excessive BoD on account of the increasing number of old people, a successful call for more babies to compensate will only increase the overall BoD for the substantial period taken by the extra children to reach working-age.

Of course it is true both that the BoD has changed markedly since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution – especially over the last two or three generations – and that it presents society with new problems.

However, it is nothing like true to picture this – as so many commentators do – as the result of our being struck out of the blue by a sort of demographic asteroid, a catastrophe which no-one could have foreseen or made any preparations to deal with when it inevitably arrived.

Surely the whole point of the welfare state – which many countries have been struggling for decades to develop and maintain – is, as far as possible, to keep all citizens in good health so that they can live out full and healthy lifespans. How can our resounding success in helping most people to live a full life be looked on as a social and economic disaster?

The pensions problem

Clearly, this is closely related to the 'Burden ...' problem, above. Once again, there is no doubt that it is real, but, once more, it is not one of those demographic asteroids which has smitten us from outer space. Our long-sustained policies of welfare-statism have deliberately brought it about.

Of course, the new situation requires significant adjustments to our traditional values and institutions (some of which are already under way) such as revaluing older citizens and changing retirement and pension plans.

However, the problems are by no means insoluble: they certainly do not necessitate endless waves of immigrants to plug the alleged gaps. If they are brought in (and treated decently, of course) – immigrants must also grow old and land us with still bigger future problems.

We have willed it upon ourselves, there is no going back, (at least, not purposefully – it could happen through mismanagement) and the problems are soluble, even if they involve some sacrifice in the material living standards of those in the working age-bracket. The great majority now lives high on the hog – consuming vast quantities of luxuries – and can do perfectly well a bit lower down.

If, through taxation, we switch a little purchasing-power from the earners to the pensioners, then it will still be swishing around in the economy and there need be no great economic, social, or political catastrophe.

If we attempt to 'cure' the pensions or the overall BoD problem by encouraging extra births instead of immigration, then this will inevitably have the effect of significantly increasing the total burden for a substantial period as the extra babies will take many years to mature before entering the workforce. Despite this substantial and inevitable lead-time, if we do decide not to prop up our population by immigration, it will eventually become necessary to stimulate births up to the replacement-level (ie, if they do not increase spontaneously), otherwise we would die out.

One possible way of doing this – short of a campaign of general pronatalism, which could overrun – would be to invite mothers-to-be who are seeking terminations to bear the child in the national interest, and then, on delivery, give them the option of accepting sufficient aid and encouragement to rear the child in the normal way, or to give it up for adoption; thereby helping to alleviate the backlog of couples wanting to adopt as well reducing often unsavoury international trade in babies.

Cooking the population books

It can almost go without saying that none of these problems can be understood, let alone solved, without sound knowledge and understanding of all the relevant variables, clear thinking, honest appraisal, and intelligent long-term planning, execution, and monitoring of results. Sadly, in many spheres, private and public, for much of the time, there is a temptation to rearrange reality or even ignore it completely in order to put the best possible face on one's own pet enterprises, or on those of one's party, religion, nationality – whatever.

It would be surprising if this deeply ingrained tendency did not manifest itself in the population sphere: of course it does, abundantly. The often emotive and sometimes threatening aspects of population dynamics tend to reinforce our natural tendency to put the best gloss on the statistics, theoretical interpretations, etc., in the service of party interest or personal prejudice. There is ample evidence from many societies – including the highly 'developed' ones – that, when it suits their purposes, public authorities deliberately suppress or even falsify population data.

The UK PO polls – as elsewhere – have for years shown conclusively that the public as a whole believes that far too much immigration has been allowed already, and that much tighter restrictions should be applied in the future. Somewhat surprisingly, quite substantial segments of our immigrant sub-populations have from time to time also registered similar views.

Though it seems likely that these surges of public opinion have on occasion played a part in pressurising succeeding governments into restricting the inflow of immigrants to some degree, all of them have strenuously avoided – as in the sphere of capital punishment – given anything remotely like full effect to the people's wishes.

In a number of countries subject to these joint pressures – on the one hand from the increasing numbers wanting to settle in the developed countries, (reinforced by employers demanding more cheap labour, and high but impractical moralisers calling for the abolition of all restrictions), and on the other from the increasingly restive natives – the authorities have tried up to a point to satisfy both sides.

This they have done by allowing in large numbers to placate the proimmigration lobbies, while deliberately fiddling the figures to mislead their electorates on the scale of these very large population flows. In my recent book on human population competition (1998 & 2002) I devoted a whole chapter to the massive official 'cooking of the books' in general and on population in particular. Chapter 20 goes into the cooking of the population statistics, particularly – though by no means solely – on immigration. Out of many well-documented examples from Australia, France, Nigeria, the USA, and other countries, one UK example must suffice here.

Cooking Britain's immigration books

In his published diaries, Labour Minister Richard Crossman, described with gusto how the political machine in Britain operates to negate the will of the people when it doesn't suit the elite, even a Labour elite.

In the last volume, Crossman frankly admitted that – as Home Secretary – he had prevented the publication of the Registrar-General's (RG) official statistics on immigration, later insisting on their presentation in a form in which their true significance was made completely unrecognisable to most lay persons.

In outraged tones he described how the RG's office had included *all* immigrants in its immigration statistics, even 'Cypriots, Maltese, and Gibraltarians, who are Mediterranean people', whereas the Race Relations Board's much smaller total was comprised only of 'genuine New Commonwealth citizens' (p. 590). He says he and his colleagues had:

a most fascinating meeting [with the RG's staff] on the statistics of the coloured population ... [and] I became convinced that there was a real ideological pattern ... [in] this office.

We almost came to open warfare when I bluntly told them they could not publish figures designed to disprove the Race Relations Board's figures ... I said 'We must have the figures projected to 1986 and it must be a logarithmic, not a linear projection'. (p. 609)

Population graphs mostly show time along the horizontal axis and numbers on the vertical, and Lord Kaldor publicly confirmed ('Blacks Total Was Altered', 1977, p. 1) that he was the person who showed Mr Crossman how a logarithmic scale on the latter axis could be used in place of the standard linear scale in order to flatten out the immigrant population graph of the RG without actually falsifying the data. A logarithmic scale, he claimed, was 'more scientific'.

Although it is true that these scales are mostly used in scientific/technical contexts, the Kaldor argument is specious. Linear scales are standard in all contexts except where the variables depicted have special features (i.e. they are so large or varying so much that they just cannot be accommodated on linear scales). Only these cases need one or both axes to be logarithmic. In the population sphere, both popular and professional, virtually all graphs – even those for the world as a whole, more than 6.4 billion (ie. late 2004) – are shown in the standard linear form.

The strong Crossman-Kaldor objection to this standard with respect to the immigration statistics can only have been that it would give the layperson a clear picture of the rapid growth of immigrant numbers, whereas the logarithmic vertical scale would flatten the graph and mislead in the desired direction all but the small maths-sophisticated minority.

Crossman gleefully summarised. 'The person who really runs' the RG's office:

is a tough, ruthless lady, whom we must check all the time because these two are hell-bent on providing [Enoch] Powell with the statistics he really wants. We had only just stopped them doing this four months ago ... They had described one of their [graph] lines, the one which showed the greatest number of coloured children, as the most realistic projection, but that was easily taken out. Nicky [Lord Kaldor], Brian, and David Ennals were there and we got the officials tight in our Procrustean bed, so that was a useful job.' (p. 828)

Even if there was a 'real ideological pattern' in the Registrar-General's office, as alleged, which led to the maximisation of immigrant numbers, surely some attempt should have been made to acknowledge and compensate for the no less 'real ideological pattern' in the Race Relations Board's publications, which always used graphs with a logarithmic vertical axis to flatten the graph and steer the facts in the opposite direction.

According to a substantial recent article by Peter Tompkins, CBE – Head of the UK Immigration Service for ten years – Civil Service and Governmental deception in this sphere continues on the grand scale:

Britain has traditionally given asylum to those fleeing persecution ... something I support to the hilt. Where I differ from the official line is that I believe the level of immigration should be a matter of public knowledge, so that people can judge for themselves whether ... it is too high ... or too low.

That, surely, is a key element in the democratic process: giving the great mass of the people the facts so that they can, if they feel so moved, use their voting powers to challenge policies imposed upon them.

His figures on the alleged discrepancies, showed that in some spheres they were 'spectacularly higher' than the Home Office admits. For instance, the published figure for those given permission to settle in 1993 (excluding EEC citizens) was 55,000, whereas he was sure that another 58,000, including some 40,000 illegals, should be added to the official total.

Peter Tompkins went on to argue forcefully that: 'the danger with concealing the truth is obvious', as racists will be able to:

twist the ... figures ... to spread their obnoxious beliefs. Others ... will twist them in another direction, seizing on immigration controls to cry: 'Xenophobia!' ... [and] demand the opening of the doors ... [with] no ceiling on ... numbers. (Tompkins, 1992, p. 8)

He returned to the theme in another article in 1995, stating that Home Office figure for settlers in the five years to 1993 was 264,500, whereas the correct total was 625,000. He stressed that at no time have his figures been criticised by Home Office or other officials, and, once again, he challenged them to put up a spokesperson with whom the figures could be debated in public (Tompkins, 1995, p. 8).

Winston S Churchill, MP, took up these figures in Parliament, arguing that our immigration control policy is 'neither firm nor fair', as the Government claims, and linked them to the rising total of racial harassment and violence. He also raised the key question, whether the latter is related to the ever-increasing ethnic sub-populations. In other words, is there a 'threshold-effect'? (Churchill, 1995, pp. 1 & 2).

However much argumentation there may be on the topic of immigration, and however heated it gets, there is rarely, if ever, any attempt whatever to relate the debate to the wider economic and ecological frame of reference.

How many Britons should there be – how many human beings can live in reasonable comfort and security on this small earth-platform set in the northern seas?

Pretty well all of us assiduously collude in maintaining the absurd pretence that overall population numbers and rates of change are simply irrelevant to the understanding and sensible management of individual societies or of the world as a whole.

Most of us, most of the time, agree that a completely blind eye will be turned upon the elephant in the drawing-room. It is the done thing, decent folk would not dream of rocking this particular boat.

The numbers wanting homes, gardens, schools, places to work and spend their leisure, freedom to produce and dump large quantities of waste, to munch their way through the rest of our decimated deep-sea fish stocks, to drive on our crowded roads, fly around in our congested air-space, discharge their share (sometimes rather more than their share) of CO₂ into the atmosphere, and generally get in each other's way as they gulp down our scarce resources, is almost universally agreed simply not to be a relevant factor in our thought, planning, or resultant policies.

Of course we prattle on endlessly about some aspects of the population problem, alleged labour-shortages, the need to build many hundreds of thousands of new homes (some on flood-plains), etc., but hardly anyone, ever, relates these admittedly vital problems to the still more important and even more pressing issue: how many of us, *in toto*, how many are we, how many could be supported even in the reasonably near future, let alone in the longer run; how many do we need to generate a vibrant and satisfying society; how many – subjectively speaking – do we *want*?

Cooking the books by our intellectuals

It may be argued – though this is an elitist view – that most citizens are too bogged down in the pressing problems of everyday life to get deeply involved with the really big questions of long-term survival. But whatever the merits of that point of view, there can be no excuse whatever for the near-total avoidance of the subject by our professional elites in academe, the media, the churches, think-tanks, governments, and so forth.

Their near-complete moral abdication is a striking example of what the French author, Julien Benda, condemned in his 1927 book, *La Trahison Des Clercs*, which appeared the following year in an English translation by Richard Aldington as *The Great Betrayal*, and Benda's theme as 'the treason of the intellectuals'.

This much-neglected classic accuses the 'clerks', the intellectuals – after more than 2,000 years of disinterested dedication to the search for truth – of betraying their true calling by prostituting their talents in the service of sectarian parties, causes, and politics. 'Until modern times', he says:

I see an uninterrupted series of philosophers, men of religion ... literature ... learning ... artists ... whose influence, whose [lives], were in direct opposition to [those] ... of the multitudes ... to [their] political passions – the 'clerks' were in opposition ... in two ways.

They were either entirely indifferent to these passions, and – like Leonardo da Vinci, Malebranche, and Goethe – set an example of attachment to purely disinterested activity of the mind ... or, gazing as moralists upon the conflict of human egotisms, like Erasmus, Kant, Renan, they preached, in the name of humanity or justice, the adoption of an abstract principle ... directly opposed to these passions

[they] founded the modern state to the extent that it dominates individual egotisms ... [but] they were unable to prevent the laymen from filling all history with the noise of their hatreds and ... slaughters ...

But, the 'clerks' did prevent the laymen from setting up their actions as a religion, they did prevent them from thinking themselves great men as they carried out these activities ... thanks to [the intellectuals, while], humanity did evil for two thousand years [it nevertheless, at least] honoured good ...

[However] at the end of the 19th century, a fundamental change occurred: the 'clerks' began to play the game of political passions. The men who had acted as a check on the ... people began to act as its stimulators ... [producing an] upheaval in the moral behaviour of humanity (Aldington, 1928, pp 31-2. Discussed at greater length in Parsons 1998/2002, pp. 617ff)

Surely we need a population/ecological Mikhail Gorbachev to both educate and liberate our elites and generally show us all the way to ecological/population 'Glasnost' (openness) as an essential preliminary to population 'Perestroika' (restructuring), by means of open, informed, democratic, and generally sane debate and policy-making.

The possible cost of cooking to the democratic process

There is much heart-searching on the part of our politicians and professional pundits about political apathy in general and low voting turnouts in particular: what are the reasons for this troubling state of affairs?

This could stem from the fundamental fact that no government wants to pay much attention to the realisation of what the electorate really wants. Vis-a-vis the important question of UK immigration-control, the Labour Home Secretary, Richard Crossman, quoted earlier, described a hectic period in April 1968:

There's no doubt how last week has got to be described. It was [Enoch] Powell week ... [He] is stimulating the real revolt of the masses ... his 40 – 50,000 letters streaming in, the marches from the docks and from Smithfield, all part of a mass response to a very simple appeal, 'No more bloody immigrants'. He has changed the whole shape of politics overnight. There have been amazing demonstrations ... Ian Mikado being howled down ... by the dockers ... while ... Westminster is filled with awareness of this mass movement.

Talk about plebiscitary democracy, here it is in action, making its impression directly on the Government. It has been the real Labour core, the illiterate industrial proletariat who have turned up in strength and revolted against the literate. (Morgan, 1981, p. 29)

He went on to note, condescendingly, how:

the respectable public has disregarded the views of the masses vis-à-vis capital punishment, homosexuality, and all other liberal causes where a minority of the well-informed public has leapt well ahead and dragged mass opinion resentfully behind it. (p. 30)

And finally, with the greatest satisfaction, he described the highly efficient mechanism by which the will of the majority is thwarted:

In crises, the constitution is like a rock against which the wave of popular emotion breaks ...

That is the strength of our system ... though in one sense we have plebiscitary democracy, actually the leadership is insulated from the masses by ... Parliament ... the buffer which enables our leadership to avoid saying yes or no to the electorate in the hope that, given time, the situation can be eased away ... and the rock stand untouched. (p. 30)

Although the utter contempt in which this prestigious Labour intellectual held the concerns of the 'illiterate proletariat' is salutary to behold, this high-handedness doesn't let the rest of us off the hook: we, the people, cannot escape all responsibility.

Though understandable up to a point, it is our own fault if we allow ourselves to become apathetic and opt out. Citizens still have not only an opportunity but also a heavy duty to be aware and to participate in the process of self-government. Insofar as we opt out we dilute our number-power and leave the field open for the self-seekers, the power-hungry, and exploiters in general.

The huge US demonstrations for civil rights and against the Vietnam War profoundly affected the political process, as did the great democratic protest in Tiananmen Square, the mass demonstrations in Belgium against the crimes and sexual depredations of highly placed people and the attempted cover-up by police, judiciary, and government, and – only days ago – the mass meetings in Kiev against the rigged Ukrainian election.

What needs to be done ?

The most pressing need is an end to all cooking of the books. We must somehow overcome our almost invincible reluctance to look reality in the face, stop prevaricating, and adopt a policy of honest, open, informed and democratic discussion. This essential reform will be almost impossible to attain, however, as long as our intellectuals continue to use their considerable power and privilege to distort and suppress this debate instead of leading it. In Julien Benda's terms, their timidity, escapism – even, to some extent, craven cowardice – constitutes by far the greatest treason.

A human society, a polity, must inevitably constitute a highly complex ecosystem which cannot possibly be properly understood or managed reasonably effectively even over the medium term in the absence of deep and continuous awareness of, concern about, and effective action on one or more of its fundamental components, in this case, human numbers.

One big thing, which many right-thinking citizens enthusiastically do agree, at least in principle, is the need to reduce wasteful consumption, pollution, etc, per head, but the trouble with this is that the number of heads is given little or no salience. If the basic elements not merely of ecology but arithmetic can indefinitely continue to be ignored then all will be well? If they can't, then we have to look out.

Numbers and our impact on the environment

The second basic thing we have to get right is a full and clear understanding of our impact on the environment and all its resources, renewable and non-renewable. This has now become so obvious and so pressing that something is being done about some of the problems. The Thames, other waterways, beaches, vehicle emissions, and atmosphere have to some degree been cleaned up, and we have begun to make lame attempts to deal with CO₂ and global warming. However, none of these problems were tackled until they became really serious and we still completely fail to make the connection between them and human numbers.

A society's total environmental impact, **I**, can be straightforwardly expressed by the simple equation: **N** (the number of individuals), multiplied by **i** (the average individual impact):

$$\mathbf{I} = \mathbf{N} \times \mathbf{i}$$

Surely there is no way that any workable or even sane appraisal (of our CO₂ emissions, eg) can be embarked upon in the complete absence of **N** – the overall human numbers factor.

In fact, if our blinkers were to slip momentarily – so that the situation could be appraised realistically – we might have to agree that the looming presence in our national drawing-room (and that of the whole world?) turns out to be not an elephant but a mammoth – far bigger, hungrier, and generally more difficult to live with.

Methuselah's Choice

The third basic thing we have to do is to make a clear and honest choice on this matter. Given that the natural resources of Britain are finite – as are those of all other countries and the whole earth – societies sooner or later have to face the fact (though hardly any of them will admit it) that – except in the very short run – it is impossible to have both a high birth rate and a high life-expectancy. This hard fact, lands us all with what the American professor, Joel Cohen, has called 'Methuselah's Choice'.

This stems from the inescapable implication of the fact that the finiteness of resources means that human population must sooner or later stop growing. By some means or other, births and deaths must be brought into balance with each other: ie – to give the process its technical label – populations must either become 'stationary' (NB, technically not the same as being 'stable'), at a level which is sustainable, or continue to oscillate somewhere in the region of that level.

With the exception of the limiting case – that in which the death rate is so high that as many births as possible are required to prevent a reduction in numbers – then no society can escape the choice between a high figure for births and a high figure for life-expectancy. Except in the very short run, it is impossible for any group to experience both together.

However, all groups do have a wide range of choices on the means by which this balance is struck. Leaving aside any net migration – which also must be regulated – these two figures must be made to equalise.

If a society fails to make the choice to manage this matter with wisdom and purpose – and continue to see it through effectively – it will inevitably be regulated by mechanisms lacking both of these essential qualities. This is the essence of Methuselah's Choice, broadly between these three main options:

- 1) Place the highest possible value on the number of children (and large population size?) and maximise this through the sacrifice of enjoying long lives.*
- 2) Place the highest possible value on long lives and reduce the number of children to the level needed to prevent a reduction in numbers.*
- 3) Choose a compromise between these two extremes: sacrifice to some degree the highest possible life-expectancy to allow the production of more children than would be necessary for replacement purposes if choice no. (2) were to be made.*

There is a deep paradox in all this. The underlying choice – the often difficult and painful one between quantity and quality – is one which occurs in many contexts.

In the poignant examples listed above, the question must be raised whether those who choose to have lots of babies – as many individuals and groups continue to do today because they claim that they value children – can possibly be producing the highest value offspring. The latter must surely be those able to benefit from the best (often the biggest) inputs of love, care, tenderness, food, housing, education, health-care, etc – all that gives a child the best chance of achieving a full, happy, fruitful, and worthy life. We should not produce children we cannot care for.

The choice between a homogeneous and a heterogeneous society

This issue – only indirectly linked to the overall carrying-capacity/impact/ footprint problem – is perhaps the most difficult of all. I refer to the desirability or otherwise of multiculturalism. For our opinion-makers/enforcers, it is now an article of faith that a multicultural society is a good thing, and that no one can have too much of *a good thing* – the more languages, cultures, religions and sects, dress-codes and cuisines etc that we import and foster, the better off we all must become. This seems to me to be the most arrant nonsense. The 'quality' aspect of society needs to be approximately optimised just as much as the quantity aspect, and by the same means – democratic debate and decision-making.

While I am perfectly happy to accept both the concept and the practice of the multicultural ideal, within reason, I am equally sure that it can easily become too much of a good thing. If the native majority begins to feel that its way of life, its economic security, territory and even sovereignty are coming under serious threat, then homage to the ideal has begun to get out of hand and the situation is in urgent need of remedial action.

It is obvious to many of us that mature and reasonably well-run societies will benefit from a seasoning of non-native peoples and cultures, it is even more blindingly obvious that – if they are to continue to function well – all societies need a critical level of shared values, expectations, and behaviour patterns, particularly in language and communications in general. Given these two parameters, the big question which needs to be put, but never is – is how big a seasoning is best for the home culture?

The most enthusiastic proponents of this cause seem to believe that the greater the degree of dilution of the home culture, the better things will be for all concerned and that anyone who has reservations about this is ignorant, stupid, or actively racist. Tony Benn, former MP, is on public record as saying that it will be a great day when the native white British become a minority in their own country and how sorry he is that he will probably not still be around to celebrate. (2001. TV, 'Brown Britain')

Mr Benn's view seems to stem from be a particularly insidious form of racism as it must rest on the implicit view that the native Britons – our own people – are in general such unworthy specimens of the human race that we are not worth preserving. Most immigrants are so superior to the natives that – having already taken over some schools, streets, and boroughs – the sooner they take over completely, the better it will be for Britain and the world as a whole.

Most of us do not wish to be associated with either this view or that of the extreme right wing, but this still leaves a serious problem for what is probably the great mass of the people; those who are not deeply prejudiced but who, nonetheless, at some point begin to think: 'Well, enough is enough – things are beginning to get out of hand.'

Because of their distaste for – and their consequent unwillingness to risk being associated with – the extreme right, these people are put in a very awkward position. It is very difficult for them to come out and make a moderate case against what they feel sure in their hearts is an excess of enthusiasm for the endless alleged improvement of our economy and society as a whole via mass immigration and multiculturalism.

This unfortunate fact, coupled with the great reluctance of the dedicated advocates of immigration and multiculturalism to admit, let alone negotiate, reasonable levels or even any limits at all to either the rate of entry or the cultural admixture, means that there is virtually no open discussion of these very important questions.

What is badly needed on this 'quality' problem is the same as that needed to find a viable solution for the 'quantity' problem (the most sensible population size to aim for); open and wide-ranging public debate.

I explored these issues at some length in my opus on population competition (1998 & 2002), looking at 'threshold-levels', 'tipping-points', 'critical-mass', and 'takeovers', and came to the tentative conclusion that when a rapidly built-up immigrant mass reaches five to ten percent of the host population, severe disturbances are likely. I proposed a thought-experiment to help focus on the equally vital necessity for us to seek optimality in this sphere, as in the numbers sphere. This went as follows:

The thought-experiment, based on two polar positions:

1) Complete homogeneity: every member of society being of the same biological origins, culture, language, religion, political persuasion, etc.

2) Complete heterogeneity: every member of society being as different from every other member as it is possible to be, racially, culturally, in sexual orientation, language, religion, politics, and so forth.

Equally clearly, both are pretty well impossible to achieve in their perfect form, but (1) does approximate to some existing societies, and fitted many more quite well in the past. Case (2), on the other hand, seems to be quite impossible to attain in real life – at least on any other than a miniature scale: it is difficult enough even to imagine. It is almost as difficult to believe that even the most dedicated multiculturalists would want it.

If the latter do not want to achieve the ultimate multicultural goal – as we must surely be able to assume, everyone as far as possible different from everyone else – then the onus is on them to spell out for the still existing native majority how far along that road they want to take the country, and why. How many desire Tony Benn's ideal, a society in which native white Britons are thoroughly outnumbered?

Of course it is theoretically possible that the Benn ideal is morally superior to anything that most of us can aspire to – even envisage – but, if so, how can this be proven, and how should it be realised; by stealth, by compulsion, or slowly, carefully, by means of education, gentle acculturation and – above all – via the institutions of true democracy.

The stakhanovites of multiculturalism must set their plans clearly before the people and let the rest of us see them, assess their merits in the overall situation, and come to a democratic decision on this crucial issue. First the goals, then the means of realising them. The two really basic questions needing sound answers followed by effective action are:

Quantity versus quality

1) Numbers of people – quantity

a) Does the number of human beings living – or wishing to live – in our country *matter*, or not: is this a significant question; yes/no/not sure?

b) If the question above is significant, if it *does* matter – then to whom, how much, and why?

2) Kinds of people – quality

(It needs to be made clear that – as used here – the term 'quality' does not imply that, when compared with Group B, members of Group A are superior or inferior human specimens. The term 'quality' is intended to convey qualities – the general notion of differing properties rather than superiority/inferiority – although, with due care, those comparisons can be quite legitimate. (Eg, a person who has passed the driving-test is superior in this regard to one who has failed, and the person with two languages is superior – in linguistic matters – to all those with only one).

a) Does it matter what kinds of people live – or wish to live – in our country?

b) As in 1 b), above, the questions to whom does it matter?, why?, and how much?, also apply.

3) Who should decide the quantity/quality questions?

a) If the above questions are undoubtedly significant but also worryingly problematic, then *how* could/should we set about finding reasonably valid *answers* to them?

b) As noted earlier, decisions of this kind could be made by a dictator and his cronies, an elite of some other kind, political, religious, military, scientific, or – and surely much more desirably – by means of the widest possible democratic consultation between all concerned, through politics, mass-meetings, referenda, PO polls, the whole panoply of participatory mechanisms.

4) By what measures could a population policy be carried out?

a) If questions 1) to 3) can be resolved, deciding that the problems are real and urgently need effective solutions, then:

b) What semi-permanent measures and mechanisms – if found acceptable and put into effect – might bring about the desired end-products, notably striking an appropriate balance in the reasonably long-term between numbers, resources, and the desired – or at least acceptable – quality of life?

c) If we adopted ruthless dictatorship, the elite would have a very wide portfolio of methods, for instance making – as the French did at one time – induced abortion a capital offence, what President Ceaucescu did in Romania – making birth control illegal and doing his best to stop the flow of supplies – or do what the Vatican hierarchy continues to do – its utmost, worldwide, to prevent the supply and use of modern contraceptives, especially of condoms which, in addition, are by far the best preventative against the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Beyond these already authoritarian methods, even more drastic measures are not merely possible but have been widely practised: forced sterilisation, separation of partners, setting up breeding units, forced translocation, population exchanges, expulsions, etc. – up to and including genocide.

d) On the assumption that we shall never stoop to these depths, the methods could – and almost certainly should – include a thorough and universal education in the basics of ecology, population dynamics, environmental resources, renewable and non-renewable, realistic economics (ie. not the cornucopian kind) pollution, the many and subtle components of a good quality of life, the ethics of conservation and of trade and the distribution of wealth, and so forth.

We could also employ economic incentives and disincentives to influence the birthrate and other key variables and/or make conscious attempts to influence the public value system to produce the desired end-product, a balance between numbers, resources, and the desired quality of life for the foreseeable future in 'our country'.

Who is entitled to say 'my/our country'?

This point needs to be raised as the answer is not obvious, the use of the word 'our' in 'our country' – who is entitled to use this possessive form, and why? It seems to the present writer that these must in the main be those with the undoubted nationally and internationally recognised quality of legitimate citizenship, those born and bred here who are entitled to vote (when of age), receive state benefits, have passports, and so forth.

These are the 'natives', 'belongers', 'indigines', 'aboriginals', or any one of the scores of terms in use around the world to identify and legitimate those with what is generally taken to be the unquestioned right to belong.

The next question has to be whether or not these people are the only ones with the right (plus, it must surely be argued, the duty), to use the expression 'our country' and make the vital decisions concerning quantity and quality of citizens, temporary visitors, and intending settlers.

How many and what kinds of other humans shall be allowed to come and live in our country, be granted their due rights as citizens at the cost of taking on the full duties enjoyed and defended by the host population.

Even this does not fully answer the question, 'who decides?' since even in the most compact society, guests, small children, and, perhaps the very sick or old will be excluded, *de facto* or *de jure*, from decision-making.

In the most developed and democratic societies, different individuals and groups will have differing degrees and kinds of power and influence and it seems crucial that as far as humanly possible all this should be out in the open.

None of the really basic decisions – most certainly including those involving the quantity and quality of human beings – should be left to the political parties or their governments alone.

We must adapt Clemenceau's famous dictum; 'War is too important a matter to be left to the generals', to our even more important subject: 'Population policy is too important a matter to be left to the politicians.' Just look what a hash they have made of things so far.

Equally, it is too important a matter to be left to scientists, intellectuals or moralists. Certainly, the inputs of all these citizens are vitally necessary, but, preferably, the decisions should not be allowed to be resolved even by the regular voters alone – except insofar as they are finally urged – after massive consultations – to endeavour to represent the interests of society as a whole. Ideally, these really big decisions with profound and long-lasting repercussions on the whole fabric of culture, economy and society – even on group survival – should be as widely and soundly based as it is possible to achieve.

Sadly, in the present climate of opinion – in which virtually all channels of communication systematically block any reporting or discussion on the basic questions of population policy – we cannot even begin this great public debate. The record of the media over the last two decades – especially that of the BBC with its special duty of public service – can only be described as shameful.

The main function of literature such as this monograph and of bodies such as the Optimum Population Trust is by no means to present allegedly authoritative, cut and dried answers but to draw wide attention to the Taboo, to help dissolve it, to stimulate interest, concern, and participation in a great public debate, to turn the gaze of as large a proportion as possible of the whole society steadily upon the mammoth in our drawing-room and democratically decide how to handle it.

The great sex-population volte-face

My final thought on the matter in this context concerns the almost unbelievably manic irrationality with which our society is run and the sheep-like behaviour of our scientific and intellectual elites. My own involvement started in the 1950s when I began to be uneasily aware of the seriousness of the population/resources/quality of life problem.

However, it was not until the early 1960s that I got down to some homework and in a small way become an activist on these issues – with letters to the press, etc. My second reasonably substantial article on the subject – published in the *New Statesman* and *Nation* in 1965 – was a challenge to the Labour Party and the Left – the parties wedded to ethical social engineering – to take the subject on board and give it some careful thought, but 40 years on I am still waiting for a serious response.

Populations consist of people, people start off as babies, and virtually all of these come from sexual activity between males and females. (The other kinds not being too productive in this regard). At the time I am speaking of, anything but the most superficial mention of sex was strictly taboo. We were not allowed to read *The Kama Sutra* or the original version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and when the f-word was used in public by Ken Tynan it seemed that the end of civilisation had come.

Despite the strong taboo on sex, it was quite all right to talk about the looming population explosion. Articles appeared regularly in the press, the BBC did programs on it, even the Fabian Society published one of its famous pamphlets on the subject in 1962, arguing forcefully that the UK was already overpopulated. (A Carter. *Too Many People*. I recently sought the permission of the Fabians to republish this timely and admirably argued document through PPP but got a very dusty answer.)

When my first book came out in 1971 – arguing forcefully for a UK population control policy (on grounds of optimising individual liberty, as it happened) – the BBC sent a chauffeur-driven limousine to take me the 27 miles from my then home in Chalfont St Peter to Broadcasting House to be interviewed – searchingly but fairly by Robert Robinson – on peak-time morning radio news.

The same VIP treatment got me safely home, and – once again – the heavens failed to fall. Several pressure groups appeared and thrived for years: putting on hundreds of lectures and broadcasts all over the country; Population Stabilisation, Doctors & Overpopulation, the Conservation Society, and Population Concern. All then slowly died off except for the latter, which survived only by abandoning both its name and its mission).

As well as those by activists, there were many articles and broadcasts by regular journalists, even such august bodies as the Royal Society 'came out' on the population problem, setting up a special Study Group and starting to publish a series of monographs on the subject.

That was Stage One of The Great Sex/Population Volte-Face, sex almost totally taboo, population widely reported and freely discussed in many contexts with only moderate opposition. Reminding ourselves that population is people who come from babies who come from heterosexual activity, what do we have today, in Stage Two?

Stage 1: Population in: Sex out

40 years later, human numbers having more than trebled:

Stage 2: Sex in: Population out

We now have an exact reversal of the previous situation. Population policy is almost totally taboo in all spheres of communication from the BBC to the Open University, while every conceivable aspect of sex in all its aspects is dinned into our ears and/or seared into our vision day and night from every imaginable source and direction.

From the time when Ken Tynan and the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* trial caused force-10 shocks on the moral and cultural Richter Scales, we have reached a situation in which some of our best known comedians find it hard to get through a single sentence without at least one naughty word.

Cataracts of porn flood our email inboxes, hard core porn is openly and readily available in the cinema and on TV, through which medium we are regularly treated by the regular broadcasting companies to detailed tutorials on such subjects as more varied positions and deeper and more satisfying penetration in copulation, more voluptuous masturbation, fisting, most satisfactory employment of the various forms of the dildo, more inventive oral sex, and so on, *ad lib*.

These lessons are not taught on real genitals, not yet, only by playing around with such life-like models that they might just as well have the real thing and perform these operations in style. All good clean fun, no doubt, far be it from me to knock it, but what does all this tell us about our level of knowledge, intelligence, understanding, empathy, values, overall rationality, and social control system?

How is it that we can discuss in the most minute detail the anatomy, physiology, and psychology of our use of our reproductive equipment, while being absolutely forbidden to discuss the normal outcome of its employment in the full natural way, babies, people, populations, and their tendency to keep growing.

What is the rationale for this great moral and intellectual double volte-face over the past few decades. Could there conceivably be one? Why does virtually everyone unquestioningly accept it? How is that possible? What is wrong with us? Are we blind, deaf, incurably stupid, in denial, or what? Can a society teetering on the very edge of group lunacy survive? Does it deserve to survive? More to the point, perhaps, is it even capable of surviving? (The Parsons Survival Theory might help here. See end-notes.)

Conclusions

Though the omens are not good, there still seems to be a faint glimmer of hope if only – though too little and too late – we can intellectually and morally backtrack half a century, finally take on board the findings of the Royal Commission on Population and much of the other material listed in the original article reprinted here.

If only we can rekindle the earnest desires of very many concerned citizens in the 60s and 70s to take the problem seriously, understand the issues, formulate effective policies, put them into effect, and from then on continue – as long as our society lasts and as the Royal Commission stressed – to monitor the population/resources/quality of life problem and make rapid and appropriate adjustments as and when necessary. No final solution can ever be found as this is a tracking-task which must be carried out with reasonable efficiency as long as our society exists.

History shows that most societies sooner or later fail the test and go under. Can things be different in the future?

Only time can tell. Is it possible that all this just too much to ask of homo ludens? – the new boys and girls on the evolutionary scene? Surely it ought not to be: all known 'primitive', 'undeveloped', 'traditional' societies still have – or recently had – very effective cultural values and behaviour patterns to keep, generation after generation, numbers and resources in balance with each other around the desired quality of life. Even the doyen of the Cornucopians, the late Professor Julian Simon, readily admitted this truth. (1977, p.496) Before the crass incursion of the white man's 'civilisation', the Australian Aboriginals managed to avoid a population explosion for some 60,000 years.

But then, we are now so much more highly 'developed', 'educated', and 'scientific', that things are not so easy any more. Nevertheless, it will be a pity if we drive ourselves to extinction long before the physical evolution of the universe finally turns up the Regulo and overcooks our solar-system.

The four big questions now facing Britain are:

- 1) *How many Britons should there be?*
- 2) *What sort of Britons should they be?*
- 3) *What social mechanisms should be employed to find the answers?*
- 4) *When should we make a start on dealing with these great issues?*

My own answers to these questions, in reverse order, are:

- 4) *Start immediately, first halting any further growth in numbers while the issues are studied, debated, and resolved*
- 3) *The fullest possible public, political and expert debate*
- 2) *A population varied enough to add a little spice to life but homogeneous enough to permit reasonable harmony and social control*
- 1) *About half – over the long term, of course – the present 60 million.*

Jack Parsons, 24 December 2004

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End-notes

JP points:

1) The Parsons Survival Theory.

This idea – not intended as a weighty contribution to sociological theory, rather, as a focussing tool or talking-point – was put forward as part of my invited contribution to a conference at Reading University on 26 June, 1976, on the subject; 'Britain's Crisis in Sociological Perspective', the proceedings later being published in a slender volume of that name. (See bibliog., above. Parsons, 1977)

Although, as far I am aware, the notion has subsequently been greeted with a resounding silence, I still retain a possibly touching faith that one fine day it may – in some non-academic circles, at least – stimulate a bit of useful debate on this most important topic.

The idea was expressed as follows:

'In winding up my brief contribution, I leave you with four questions: the first three of which I lump together as my "survival theory", a modest contribution to sociological theory:

i) Do societies in the main try to act so as to ensure their reasonably long-term survival?

ii) If they do not, then why don't they?

iii) If they do, then why do nearly all of them get it wrong, and go under?

iv) A compound and rather parochial question, I am afraid: Where does Britain stand in respect of the above three questions, and what do sociologists propose to do to enlighten us and prepare the way ahead?' (p.43) (NB, Postscript)

2) A possible evolutionary factor underlying the population taboo

Much too late to incorporate into the running text I received an email in the evolutionary psychology group, to which I belong, briefly setting out the results of some fairly hard-science research on human brain structure and function, which may – though possibly in a paradoxical way – throw some light on this tenacious taboo.

Dr John Cacioppo, now at the University of Chicago, got his results by showing his subjects pictures known to stimulate three distinct types of reaction, positive, neutral, and negative, and measured the location and amount of the accompanying electrical activity in the cerebral cortex of the subjects.

He found what he called the brain's 'negativity bias'. The report continues; the brain is ... 'built with a greater sensitivity to unpleasant news. Thus, our attitudes are more heavily influenced by downbeat news than good news. Our capacity to weigh negative input so heavily most likely evolved for a good reason – to keep us out of harm's way. From the dawn of human history, our very survival was dependant on our skill at dodging danger. The brain developed systems that would make it [almost impossible] for us not to notice danger and ... respond to it.'

If a mother's eyes or ears present her with a sight or sound of someone about to steal her sleeping child, or a tiger about to spring, it is possible that something might be done – brandishing a flaming branch from the fire, perhaps – to ward off the danger, the danger is clear and immediate, and action must be taken.

With respect to perceptions of the danger posed by serious overpopulation, conflict over scarce resources, powerful migration pushes, etc, the paradox stems from the fact that – if the findings and their interpretation are valid – then the ecological, economic, and other evidence about overpopulation should scare us half to death and pretty well compel us to do everything possible to set in motion all possible corrective measures. The trouble here is finding what these actions could be – and what a single individual could possibly do to begin to make the slightest impact on such a huge, multi-faceted, and long-term problem?

We know that fight and flight are two basic survival mechanisms, but we also know that in some situations the potential victim is simply paralysed by indecision or fear. In our contemporary situation, those who feel they *ought* to speak up on the subject and call for positive action, but remain hesitant, are very likely to have their restraint reinforced by the fact – as they are very likely to know from past experience – that a posse of self-righteous antimalthusians may be on hand to abuse and shout them down merely for raising the topic.

(The email report about was abstracted from an article by H. Marano in *Psychology Today*, 20 June, 2003)

Professor Duguid's comments:

1) 'Page 1. This page stimulates me to a thought, which cannot of course be put into your original text. There is a danger of unsophisticated readers drawing an incorrect conclusion from the fact that many ancient scholars worried about overpopulation when numbers were then so much smaller than today's. They may argue that the scholar's worries were shown to be wrong, because the world became able to sustain much larger numbers as agriculture, technology ... etc developed, and that continued development will support much larger numbers in the future.'

JP. response:

It is probably true that some will slip into this rather naive error, but of course there is a reasonable answer. The first stage of this is to become aware that there are two technical concepts which split the simple notion of overpopulation into two distinct categories. One of these is 'relative' over-population, and the other, 'absolute' overpopulation.

The first applies to any here and now situation in which a country has in principle quite enough basic natural resources for the time being but which has failed to develop those resources to the level needed to provide an adequate quality of life for its existing numbers. The concept can apply even to a country which is very well endowed with natural resources but at the same time has a current population already much too large for the current state of development and growing too rapidly ever to permit catching up as long as numbers continue to explode. Whether knowingly and intentionally or through ignorance, prejudice, bungling, adhering to dysfunctional traditional values, or whatever reason, and by whatever means, it has chosen quantity of citizens before quality of citizens.

That constitutes relative overpopulation which can in principle be cured either by speeding up development so that is much faster than population growth – widely recognised to be a very difficult task in many LDCs – or by reducing population growth to a level well below the rate of development, or, of course, by some combination of the two, thereby creating greater wealth per head.

Absolute overpopulation, on the other hand, refers to a situation in which the full development of all known resources would still be inadequate for the existing population, let alone the much larger one expected in the near future. This idea needs to be handled with care, of course, because it involves forecasting, an inexact science – the future may hold many surprises, though miracles may continue to be quite rare.

The second refutation of the 'naive' response is that even if its advocates were to be right about the past, their argument collapses if – as many ecologists now believe – the world population is already well above its long-term level of sustainability with a reasonable quality of life – perhaps two billion, maybe even less.

2) 'Page 29. I think the failing of today's intellectuals, experts and scientists is due mainly to timidity rather than treason. Each expert has had to specialise and work very hard within a narrow field to gain his expertise. He knows that experts in other fields know far more about those fields than he does, and so is reluctant to venture his views on broad issues and expose himself to [their] contradictions and criticisms The problem is how can society encourage those intelligent and preoccupied men [and women?] to take a wide interest in social issues?'

JP. Response:

*With respect to this point, readers need to bear in mind the fact that Professor Duguid received a civic honour for his contributions to medical science. Of course I must accept that there is probably a lot of force in this argument as a fact of social and individual psychology, but how worthy is timidity as a reason for adopting the ostrich policy? Pretty feeble, surely. Very many top physical scientists have unhesitatingly taken a stance on questions of population, pollution, ecological balance, and the quality of life. At the time of writing this section, Professor Sir Martin Rees, the Astronomer Royal, is holding forth intelligently on a great variety of subjects - including the survival of our species – in the lengthy Channel 4 TV series, *What We Still Don't Know*.*

Half a century ago, Einstein came out strongly on the population problem as – not long after – did Sir Fred Hoyle, FRS, and many other really eminent scientists have followed suit. In any case, appreciation of the essence of the population problem doesn't need any science, merely simple arithmetic and a minimal dollop of commonsense.

The inhabitants – or at least the elders – of nearly all so-called 'primitive', 'undeveloped', or 'traditional societies have understood the issue perfectly clearly and set up or encouraged the measures evolved by the tribe /village/whatever, to keep things in balance.

Malthus was transported with delight when – on holiday in the Swiss Alps – he met a peasant who had worked out for himself not merely an understanding of the practical necessity for a population-resource balance, but an underlying theory (give or take five or six hundred pages of scholarly documentation and analysis) almost identical with his own. (See Parsons 2000/2005)

Numbers, resources, quality of life: is there some sort of balance between these variables? If not, how do we set about putting things right? Present-day scientists in the main manage many complex decisions outside their sphere of special competence, choosing someone as a life-partner, which political party to vote for, whether the present British government is right or wrong to identify so closely with American foreign policy, right or wrong to invade Iraq, whether or not induced abortion, family planning as part of the Health Service, stem-cell research and the cloning of human beings are permissible.

What is so special about deciding whether or not in their personal opinion – perhaps tentatively in the first place – the country is already too crowded or still underpopulated, bewilderingly multicultural or still too boringly homogeneous.

A final important point in this regard is that – as with everyone else – our scientists are living longer. Many, after retirement, will enjoy 15 or more years of well-paid, healthy, active life free of both the burdens of office and much of the competition with other scientists. There is no strong reason why they should any longer be tightly bound by the timidity to which Professor Duguid alludes. They can give the establishment the two-finger salute and get on with things – in or outside their specialist fields – which they have known for ages in their hearts are really important – and help change the world for the better.

3) Re pages 18-23. Statistics on the pensions/labour-shortage/burden of dependency problem. Professor Duguid favoured providing fairly substantial documentation on this point and for a time I was more than half-convinced. However, I finally decided against this on three grounds, the first being that no one without a reasonable level of education and intelligence is likely to read this monograph and that such readers must have a fair idea what it is all about from the torrent of material in the media.

People are living longer and adding to the numbers needing care and pensions, the resources for which must be provided by the productive sector of the population. I wanted to concentrate mainly on the attitudes, ideas, arguments, logic and values embedded in such debate as is permitted, ie, in the materials from which the wall of silence on the fundamentals is constructed.

The last point is that I want to keep it reasonably compact – a view with which my good friend the professor strongly concurs – the trouble is that we have different ideas where to economise. If anyone really does want to pursue this aspect in more detail, I hope I am justified in recommending chapters 11 & 12 of my 1977 book, *Population Fallacies* as a starting-point. Of course the statistics there are dated and one or two of my speculations weren't too sound, but I hope the basic structure of all these problems is set out clearly: all that is needed is the latest figures and these are readily available.

4) General points. It proved possible to sandwich several other of Professor Duguid's points in the running text so they are not repeated here, and of course, there remain a couple of other small issues we don't wholly agree about, so these remain roughly in their original form and – though with deep gratitude for his valuable input – I must shoulder full responsibility for what is presented here.

Jack Parsons, 24 December 2004

Postscript, re JP Survival Theory

At the very last moment before production started, I came across a book – or, rather, news of a forthcoming book – in my email. It is by a well-known author, Jared Diamond, and it seems to really tackle the issues I was concerned about in formulating my set of survival questions. The book is called: *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail, or Succeed*, and it is reviewed by Sir Martin Rees in a recent issue of *Nature*. No further details as yet, but it sounds as though it hits the spot and will save me the trouble of writing the book I have been collecting material for since the 70s. Other tasks had a higher priority.

Addendum:

New Population Policy of the Green Party of England and Wales

Introductory note:

I knew that an attempt was to be made by the more ecologically-aware Green Party members to strengthen the Party policy on population at the 2003 Annual Conference (Sept. 14th-15th), and consequently kept in close touch.

Sadly, from the point of view of this sub-group (and mine), their proposals were greatly weakened by the opposing faction which is convinced that overpopulation is insignificant compared with over-consumption by the rich countries. The clauses reproduced here show the outcome of the resulting compromises.

Email received 18th September 2003

Dear Jack

Following O's email, here is the official text of the Population Policy. There were one of two errors in O's draft, and the synopsis he included is not part of our policy. You should therefore use the following text.

With kind regards, Danny Bates

Policy Development Co-ordinator, Green Party of England and Wales.

Policy Agreed at the Autumn Conference, September 2003

P100 All Green Party policies are based on the principles of ecological sustainability, equity and justice.

P101 There is a limit to the level of ecological impact the Earth can sustain. The number of people on the planet, their levels of consumption and their local and global impacts are key factors determining how far the Earth's ability to renew its resources and to support all life is compromised. Even within this limit, high rates of population growth, as well as local depopulation can have a damaging effect on sustainability, equity and justice.

P102 Carrying capacity is the term used to describe the population that can be sustainably supported in any given region. It is not a fixed number but depends on consumption patterns.

P103 There is a need to explicitly consider population since, if it is ignored indefinitely, the risk of over-consumption of natural resources will increase, leading to conflict and ultimately a reduction in carrying capacity.

P104 There are many causes of population growth and some of these must be addressed to avoid overpopulation. Causes may be as basic as a lack of family planning information and contraceptives. Inequality and lack of opportunities can result in people having more children than they would otherwise want. On a wider scale, it has been observed that populations often increase following wars, social strife and environmental disasters.

P105 Green Party policies as a whole aim to reduce inequality, both global and local and to make educational and work opportunities available to all, throughout life. Green Party policies also aim to avoid social and environmental disruption that can trigger population growth.

P106 The Green Party holds that the number of children people have should be a matter of free choice.

P107 Long term trends in population size are proper considerations for public debate and government policy in order to plan housing, health, education and other needs.

P108 The Green Party notes that the population of the UK currently supports its way of life by consuming more resources than can be sustainably supplied from within the UK, and more than its fair share of global resources – often to the detriment of the people and the environment in producing areas.

P109 A measure of the impact of a population is its ecological footprint. [We] ... believe that it is essential to reduce the UK's total ecological foot-print.

To this end the Green Party aims to reduce total resource consumption, ensuring maximum use of renewable resources, in order to reduce per capita consumption. This will ensure that the UK population leaves a reduced ecological footprint, eventually enabling it to become sustainable.

P110 The Green Party believes that it will be socially and environmentally beneficial for a decrease in resource consumption to be brought about by a range of policies. These policies will reduce overall resource use, maximise the use of technologies based on renewable energy, adopt a sustainable approach to economic development, design, planning and infrastructure, and will promote socially and environmentally sustainable population levels.

P111 The Green Party has a liberal migration policy and wants greater global justice and equality, so people [can] migrate ... on the basis of choice, not economic hardship. Where migration patterns increase or decrease population levels it is essential that social, economic and environmental pressures are mitigated in such a way which fully respects the rights of migrants and existing local populations.

P112 There is a need for regional economic and land use policies that are sustainable with a stable or falling population rather than dependant on a continuing influx of, often exploited, labour from elsewhere in the UK or overseas. The Green Party seeks a more balanced and just approach to regional development in the UK so that there are not huge growth pressures in some areas and none in others.

P113 As the birth rate falls, and the so-called "baby boom" generation approaches retirement, the population will be one with a higher proportion of the elderly and very elderly.

P114 With Green health policies emphasising the need to further improve health with prevention rather than cure, we look forward to a society in which people of all ages continue to work as long as they wish.

This, together with the reduced consumption of resources and the increased commitment to social welfare characteristic of a Green society, means that the increased proportion of elderly people will be economically manageable. We reject an economic order that supposes the need for an ever-growing younger population to support the retired.

P115 The UK, as one of the world's richest countries, owes the rest of the world far more in overseas aid than it now gives. The UK casts its ecological footprint over the world reflecting the real costs of a high, and still growing, population with high consumption.

A Green government would seek to help poorer countries to develop their economies in a sustainable way so that migration was based on choice rather than economic necessity.

P116 It is essential that women have greater control over reproductive health care. Many of the world's poorest countries have formal government policies - often assisted by development agencies - which further this objective and also thereby lead to more stable, sustainable population levels.

The Green Party acknowledges that poverty alleviation and education are crucial for women in poor countries to be able to exercise their reproductive health rights and take control over their own family planning.

The UK and other rich countries should do more to support initiatives - both globally and locally - which uphold women's rights over reproductive health, increase education and which address poverty and potential pressures on the global environment.

Given the much greater impact on the world's resources each person in a rich country has, the rich countries have a major responsibility to minimise their own impact as well as provide resources to poorer countries to ensure that they can develop sustainably.

Policy Objectives

Long Term

P117 To achieve a level of consumption and, through education and the free provision of family planning services, a birth rate consistent with the goal of long term sustainability.

P118 To achieve consumption and population levels that are globally sustainable and respect carrying capacity.

P119 To work towards a world where people are free to move between countries and are not forced to do so by terror, hunger, environmental degradation or economic need.

Medium Term

P120 To promote debate on sustainable population levels for the UK - to include consideration of levels of consumption and material comfort. The aim is to increase awareness of the issues - not to set specific population targets.

P121 To reduce the ecological footprint of the UK, the rest of the EU and other countries in the developed world as an essential step towards reducing exploitation of the environment and the poorest peoples of the world.

P122 The Office of National Statistics (ONS) will continue to monitor the UK population trends, and develop natural resource and footprint accounts to monitor the ecological impact of that population.

Short Term

P123 To provide comprehensive sex education in schools that covers the wider emotional, personal and societal aspects of relationships not the mere biological. [See ED307]

P124 To provide a comprehensive, free family planning service, available to everyone, in convenient high-street locations, funded by a separate budget within the NHS. This will include information, facilities and the materials necessary for people to plan their families [See H314]

P125 Condoms will be supplied free on demand from chemists and at a subsidised price from machines in public places.

P126 To support research into new methods of contraception.

P127 To address the issue of an ageing population in the UK and the EU. Measures would include the removal of the compulsory retirement age and the introduction of more flexible working arrangements.

P128 To encourage debate as to how sustainable lifestyles can be developed to provide meaningful and satisfying lives with or without children.

Stop Press

(1) After the first short print-run and the review copies had gone off, an important article appeared, throwing a different light on my summary on pp vi and 14 of this monograph. Professors David Coleman & Robert Rowthorn have argued convincingly that when Labour took over in 1997 there was a major but covert shift in population policy – from tight UK immigration control, to a policy of boosting our numbers by a large annual increment via immigration, to continue indefinitely.

My theme here is that of failure on the part of government and our elites in general both to consider optimising our numbers in the light of the long-term resource situation and a desirable quality of life, and to have the widest possible democratic involvement in understanding and making decisions on these vital matters, as the Royal Commission strongly urged. I now think I should have given more emphasis on this empirical shift. In their opening paragraphs the two authors state, on a basis of close reasoning and the most detailed evidence:

'Since 1997 a new UK immigration policy has displaced previous policy aims, which were focussed on minimising settlement. Large-scale immigration is now officially considered to be essential for the UK's economic well-being and beneficial for its society: measures have been introduced to increase inflows.

The benefits claimed include fiscal advantages, increased gross domestic product per head, a ready supply of labour, and improvements to the age-structure. Fears that large-scale immigration might damage the interests of unskilled native workers are discounted.

*We conclude that the economic consequences of large-scale immigration are mostly trivial, transient, or negative, that ... the more vulnerable sections of the domestic population may well be damaged; and that any small ... economic benefits are unlikely to bear comparison with immigration's substantial and permanent demographic and environmental impact. We demonstrate that such findings are in line with those from other developed countries.' (Coleman & Rowthorn, 'The Economic Effects of Immigration into the United Kingdom'. *Population & Development Review*. 30 (4) Dec. 2004 pp.579-624)*

This article is essential reading for all who want to understand these issues.

(2) Just as Stop Press (1) was completed and printing was about to restart, the battle between the Conservative Opposition and the Labour Government burst out, throwing a new light on the issues raised here and the body politic in general. I have written to both leaders in what is probably a forlorn attempt to persuade them to take the extra step to open up and debate the migration control problem within the wider population question, overall numbers, resources, and the quality of life over the long term.

My main argument is that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to work out and apply an effective and ethically justifiable migration control policy other than within a democratic and ecologically sound framework enveloping the whole complex: population, resources, and the quality of life, bearing in mind pollution, carrying capacity, ecological footprints, and the ethical imperative not to injure other populations.

In the meantime, Charles Clarke, the new Home Secretary, has stoutly supported his predecessor's declaration that 'there are no obvious limits' to immigration into this country, and flatly refused to give any hint whatsoever of the numbers desired or to be allowed in under the proposed – and allegedly tough – new Labour scheme.

Looking and sounding like a not too salubrious nightclub bouncer, he aggressively silenced his interviewer, Jeremy Paxman, (on BBC TV Newsnight, Mon. 7/2/05) with the inane slogan, 'I'm not going to play the numbers game.' In other words, the Government's chief spokesperson on this vitally important topic, just refuses to answer the question that nearly everyone wants answered: 'How many, and over how long a period?'

Nearly all the leading spokespersons of all three main parties are now hiding behind the weasel-words, 'managed immigration', without giving any clue about the fundamental question, at what level it is to be managed. At the moment we 'manage' the speeds supposedly allowed on our roads, 5 mph in car parks, 10, 15, 20, 25 in others areas, 30 mph in urban areas generally, 50 on many main roads, and 70 – again allegedly - on the motorways, on which the motoring fanatics demand that we 'manage' it at speeds up to 100 mph or more

What the great majority wants to know is THE LEVEL AT WHICH migration is to be 'managed', and FOR HOW LONG? Are there, or are there not, limits, and, if so, where are they, who decides, when do we hit them, do we need to prepare measures to deal with the flow when the limit is reached, even some time before the limit is reached so that the transition is not too violent?

The parties are still warped by political correctness while the citizenry is crying out for earthy reality, truth, and justice! Will any party, ever, deliver these?

Jack Parsons, 08 February 2005