

Are There Too Many People?

THIRD OF A SERIES—POPULATION AND SUBSISTENCE

CAN IT be that, in normal times, there is an excess of people in America and that over-population is the cause of widespread unemployment and consequent low wages? To many observers, it seems more than a coincidence that the unemployment of the depression should come to an end only when 10,000,000 are in the armed forces. When Johnny comes marching home, will he step into a job only by disemploying some one who now has a job? After all, the present worker needs a job, too.

Hitler's cry for *Lebensraum*—living space—for the German people, Mussolini's aggression in Ethiopia and Japan's seizure of Manchuria received a degree of moral sanction from a large part of the world because it seemed that Germany, Italy and Japan were over-crowded.

Are there, in fact, too many people in these countries and in the world? Was the Reverend Thomas Malthus right when, in 1789, he published his *Essay on Population*, proclaiming the tendency of population to increase faster than the means of subsistence? Was he justified in believing that famine, disease and war are divinely ordained checks on excess population,

to which the only alternative is a reduced birth rate? Does density of population account for the poverty festering in every civilized nation?

What are the facts?

MIGHTY INHERITANCE

Geographers and other scientists agree that approximately 30 per cent of the land area of the world, or a little over 10 billion acres, is cultivable.¹ This is an average of five acres for each of the two billion inhabitants of the earth. Thus, for every family of five in the world there are 25 acres of arable land for the production of its foodstuffs and materials for wearing apparel. An additional 30 per cent of the land area of the world is poor grazing land, marsh, forest and high mountain land—reservoirs of valuable raw materials for industry. Even the deserts, which comprise 40 per cent of the land surface of the globe, are rich in potential satisfactions for the needs of mankind. Minerals under the deserts, the harnessing of desert sunlight, and the possibilities of irrigation suggest the untapped opportunities in these sand-swept wastes. The seas and oceans, too, yield man food and raw materials, as well as furnish

him with avenues of transportation.

A mighty inheritance for the human race!

Consider the potentialities of one acre of good earth. Planted in cabbage, one sprout to each four square feet, an acre will yield more than 10,000 heads. Only one-fifth of each individual's share of the cultivable portion of the planet would provide him with more than 27 heads of cabbage a day. What man, woman or child could eat in a day 27 heads of cabbage—or even the equivalent in other foods, such as fruits and grains, or meat from animals fed by these products of the soil! Oriental peoples find that enough soybeans can be grown on one-sixth of an acre to furnish the major portion of a family's nutritive diet.

Viewing the earth as a whole, man is far from pressing against the limits of land for the production of the necessities of life.

Equally distant is the prospect of over-crowding the earth's surface for living space. If the whole population of the earth were gathered into the State of Texas, each family of five could have its own home site, 100 feet by 150 feet, twice the size of the ordinary city lot, with enough space left for roadways.² All the people of the United States, housed no more densely than the residents of a spacious government housing project, would require an area less than seven times the size of Chicago.³

In fact, 65 per cent of the population of the United States lives and works

in three-fifths of one per cent of the total area and 35 per cent of the people have all the rest of the country—over 99 per cent of it—to live in and from which to produce the nation's food and raw materials.⁴

Think of the living and working room in the U.S.A.! Yet during the depression, 13,000,000 men were involuntarily idle. Had our population been less, would there have been fewer unemployed? Then Canada, with only 2.5 people per square mile of a vast country rich in natural resources, should have had no unemployment problem. But she did—one-third of her working population was idle, just as in the United States. The problem of unemployment was little less intense than in England and Wales, with a density of 742 people per square mile, or in Germany, with a density of 369 persons per square mile.

Taking into account only the cultivable land of Germany, the density of population, in 1938, was 811 persons per square mile. If this seems crowded, remember Switzerland with 2,111 persons per square mile of arable land—and a higher standard of living. In 1938 the population of Germany was 16 times that of Switzerland, and yet Germany produced 35 times as much wheat, 515 times as much barley, 279 times as much oats, and 278 times as much rye. Germany had 24 times as many horses, 26 times as many sheep, 12 times as many cattle, 25 times as many swine, and 12 times as many goats. Germany is rich in the rarest of essential plant foods, potash and

nitrate. While Switzerland is dependent almost entirely on importation of her raw minerals, Germany produces coal, lignite, coke, iron ore and pig iron in quantities sufficient to form a solid base on which to build a modern economy. It is obvious that in proportion to natural resources and capacity for production of foodstuffs, Germany has, if anything, an advantage over Switzerland, from which the world has heard no plea for *Lebensraum*.

Apparently there are considerations other than natural resources which give rise to the idea of "pressure of population." *The Junker land monopoly, and public expenditures that took one-half of the country's income in 1937-1938, mainly for war preparations, suggest why Germany appears in need of "living space."*⁵ Within her borders, given an economy based on production for exchange, Germany, with her natural resources, her technical and industrial skill, her intellectual energy, could bestow upon her people a cornucopia of economic goods.⁶

Last fall, headlines told anew the story of famine in India. "Die in streets of Calcutta as hunger stalks." "Report Bengal famine; cost of rice soars." "Figures on India hunger deaths called too low." Why? Too many people in fertile Hindustan—with a density of only 247 people per square mile compared to 742 for England and Wales, 369 for Germany, and 271 for New York State!

Hereditary tax-gatherers still rack-rent the toiling, long-suffering serf,

the first victim of famine, plague, malaria, and influenza. A single daily meal, thin gruel, and a loin cloth are his reward in years of plenty. What he might put into improvement of his living conditions or the purchase of live-stock is regularly diverted in clandestine fashion, in spite of tenant protective legislation, into the hands of landlords who tower above him on the economic ladder and in whose hands the land has long been concentrating.⁷ The great spur to industry, that of security, is taken away. Hence the cultivator raises no more grain than is barely sufficient to get by *this year*, and an unfavorable season produces famine.

No, Mother India, so long as your rack-rent system reduces your cultivators to starvation, deprives them of incentive and hope while others of your sons are among the world's richest; so long as your fertile soil and rich resources are not fully utilized, you cannot blame your troubles on the size of your population. The real cause of your want and famine, today as in the past, is the capacity of your man-made laws, not the niggardliness of nature.

Japan proper has a density of population of 490 people per square mile, in an area about the size of Montana. Of this, about two-thirds is mountainous and not arable. The remaining area, equal in size to New York State and four times as densely populated, supports 73 million people. As an outgrowth of the feudal system, the land is in the hands of a comparatively

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Domestic Rabbits Do Their Bit

By Marcellus W. Meek, L.L.B.

THE CONEYS," said the prophet, "are a feeble folk, but they make their houses in the rocks." The seer referred to the "shaphan," or rock-badger, translated in the King James edition of Holy Writ as "coney," or rabbit. But he wouldn't believe his eyes today if he could see the King Coneys of 1944.

Four solid economic rocks of American industry are built, more or less, upon the humble rabbit. To give a sketchy picture of how rabbits do their bit these war days, we'll disregard figures in the lower brackets and illustrate with nothing less than statistics running into six digits—into the millions. And these figures will serve to show that Br'er Rabbit, feeble though he may be, is tops at multiplication.

In the fur trade, they don't use the name "rabbit"—there it's "coney." But, dyed and processed into scores of imitations of more valuable pelts, rabbit fur stands on its own four feet as the most essential part of the fur garment trade. Metropolitan New York uses some 40,000,000 rabbit skins yearly in the manufacture of about 500,000 fur garments, and employs around 2,000 workers in over 350 manufacturing establishments.

Recently Joseph Brickner, president of the American Rabbit Dealers' Association, stated, in *Women's Wear*: "The rabbit coat again proved itself to be one of the most economical and serviceable garments to be produced by the industry, and it has done much to keep the entire fur industry from being classed as a luxury. In fact, rabbit coats are now being recognized by our Government agencies as a civilian-essential utility product. They represent a thrifty way of making the most of a limited wardrobe and, using the words of one of the Government agencies, 'a cost of living commodity'."

That's the picture in 1944. In 1265 A. D., or thereabouts, good St. Louis, King of France, insisted that his Queen wear rabbit furs instead of the costly furs of that day, reasoning in kingly fashion "that not only would the use of rabbit fur console the poor, but better would it instruct the rich." And from then on, because of its warmth, beauty, relatively low price, and adaptability to imitation of seal, beaver, nutria, mole, leopard, sable and ermine, rabbit fur has gone glamorous in a big way in America and

few large owners: descendants of former feudal chiefs, religious organizations, and modern industrialists who were astute enough to acquire large holdings. The Iwasaki family, for example, owners of the great Mitsubishi Company, acquired, for \$2,000 an acre, a tract of land in what is now the heart of Tokyo. The value of the tract has risen to six million dollars an acre, making the Iwasaki family one of the two most powerful families in Japan.

According to one estimate, more than 50 per cent of the annual income of Japan goes to 15 per cent of Japan's families.* Ordinary farm land on which the Japanese farmer strives to make a living would cost him about \$2,000 an acre if he could afford to buy it. The average farm is less than two acres, and almost every farmer is hopelessly in debt. He has done well if, after payment of rent, he grosses \$100 annually with which to feed, clothe, house, and educate his family.⁸ Japan's problem is not one of resources but of distribution.

Wherever the searchlight of inquiry turns, the vice and misery attributed to over-population can, in fact, be traced to oppression, tyranny, or war. These social and economic evils prevent the knowledge of science from being fully utilized in peaceful pursuits and deprive the individual of incentive for efficient production by confiscating the product of his labor.

*According to the Brookings Institute report, *America's Capacity to Produce*, 1934, p. 228, one-half of our national income went to 12.7% of the population. The other half was shared by the remaining 87.3%. *Economics Editor*.

MAN IS DIFFERENT

Ultimately, though, will not man press against the limits of subsistence as do animal and plant life?

The very profligacy of nature in the animal and vegetable kingdoms is man's salvation. A single pair of salmon might, if preserved from natural enemies for a few years, fill the ocean. So what does man do? Desiring salmon, he places their spawn under favorable conditions, with the result that no matter how many people the world should ever have, there would be no lack of salmon! This is but one illustration among thousands of how man puts to his own service the more powerful reproductive forces of animal and vegetable life—forces which then go forward at a pace his own powers of reproduction cannot rival.

It is not the increase of food that makes possible the increase of man, as Malthus assumed, but the increase of man that brings the increase of food. Until all the natural materials and forces on and in the earth are exhausted, man need never be in want. And these materials and forces cannot finally be destroyed by man. Each generation of men can but harness and use them.

San Francisco was built on an uninviting sandy waste. Manhattan Island, the most densely populated borough of New York City, was a barren rock. St. Petersburg, now Leningrad, was built on marsh land. The food and raiment of the people of these cities are drawn from the world. Their

subsistence is limited only by the limit of the globe to furnish them food and raw materials in exchange for their services and finished products.

That animal and vegetable life tend to press against the limits of space does not prove the same tendency in human life. Unlike those of the animal, man's desires increase as they are attained, and are never satisfied. The wants of all other living things are uniform and fixed. The only use animals and plants can make of additional supplies or opportunities is to multiply. Not so with man. As his animal wants are satisfied, new wants arise. Desires he has in common with the beast become extended, refined, exalted. With the elevation of his intellect, a check to population comes into play, as though in obedience to a natural law. Exhaustive research shows a marked tendency to a lower birth-rate among people whose improved economic condition places them above mere animal existence.⁸ Therefore, any danger that human beings may be brought into a world where they cannot be provided for arises, not from the insufficiencies of nature, but from the social maladjustments that, in the midst of wealth, condemn men to want.

POPULATION AND PRODUCTION

"A greater number of people cannot, in any given state of civilization, be collectively so well provided for as a smaller number," wrote John Stuart Mill, in 1848, in support of the

Malthusian theory.¹⁰ The years that have elapsed since the time of Malthus and Mill tell a different story.

Between 1870 and 1930, the population of the United States more than tripled, increasing from 38,558,371 to 122,775,046. In that sixty year period, the output of each individual worker, both in agriculture and in industry, increased at least two and a half times; the productive power of the nation increased $7\frac{1}{2}$ times. To illustrate, in 1870, let us say, 10 workers produced 10 units. In 1930, roughly speaking, 30 workers were producing, not 30 units—or less than 30 units, as Malthus would have expected—but 75 units. This accounts, for instance, for our output of radios and automobiles without the sacrifice of per capita production of food. In fact, during this period, despite a 60 per cent reduction in the proportion of workers on the farm, the farm output per capita of population increased 122 per cent; and the shift of labor from agriculture to industry increased factory output per capita of population by 450 per cent.¹¹

In the same period, the population of Japan doubled, and its *average* real income per person also doubled.¹² India's Census Report of 1921, observing the growth of population in that country from 100 million in 1600 to more than 300 million, concluded that "it seems unquestionable that up to the present time the number of people and the average standard of living have been rising together."¹³ This is confirmed by the head of the Department of Economics at Lucknow Uni-

PROGRESS GUIDE'S COURSE IN
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LESSON IV

The Laws of Distribution

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Reading Assignment

Progress and Poverty by Henry George, Book III

Pages 153-226

Questions for Discussion

- 1 What are the three factors in the production of wealth? Define. (156)
- 2 What are the three avenues of the distribution of wealth? Define. (162)
- 3 If the user of the land is also the owner, is there rent? (165)
- 4 When does rent arise? (166)
- 5 If we learn what share of production goes for the use of land, how will our inquiry be advanced? (167)
- 6 What determines rent? (168)
- 7 What is the corollary of the law of rent? (171)
- 8 If a man can employ himself what will be the lowest wages for which he will work for others? (205)
- 9 What may happen to wages when land is all monopolized? (213)
- 10 What is the margin of production? (207 and 212)
- 11 What is the law of wages? (207 and 213)
- 12 Why is it that in spite of the increase of productive power, wages do not rise proportionately? (216-222)

Numbers refer to pages in *Progress and Poverty*

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Specially printed copies of this and previous lesson assignments, with space for inserting answers, may be had free on request to the Economics Editor, PROGRESS GUIDE, Pontiac Bldg., Chicago 5, Illinois. (Answers to questions from reader-students on the subject of this lesson will be published in the next issue.)

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- 8—Moss, R. F., *Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, N.Y., Address, Sept. 2, '43.*
 - 9—Notestein, Frank W., "The American People, Studies in Population"; *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science, Phila., 1936: pp. 26-36.*
 - 10—Mill, John Stuart, "Principles of Political Economy," Book I, Chap. XIII, Sec. 2.
 - 11—Ezekiel, Mordecai, "The American People, Studies in Population," *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science, Phila., 1936: pp. 238-239.*
 - 12—Carr-Saunders, A. M., "World Population, Past and Present Trends," Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1936: p. 265.
 - 13—Ibid.: pp. 273-274.

versity in India, who, in 1939, stated that "in India the wealth *per capita* has increased during the last 50 years."⁷

That increased population increases productive power is clear. Twenty men working together will produce more than twenty times the wealth that one man working alone can produce. The denser the population, the more minute can become the division of labor and the greater the economies throughout the productive process. Thus any reduction in the power of the natural resources is more than offset by the increased power of the human factor.

A nation that burdens its people with war and preparations for war cannot attribute the poverty of its people to the lack of natural resources at its disposal. And a country that saddles upon its producers a coterie of economic drones must not be shocked at recurring famines and lingering malnutrition.

The fact that the *average* well-being of a nation has improved does not imply that the well-being of all the people in it has improved. Production per producer, and even per inhabitant, can increase and still leave the great mass of people at the same low level of comfort as before, while, as in Japan, vastly enriching a relatively small number of families.

"In the modern mechanized world," says Louis I. Dublin, president of the Population Association of America, "population growth certainly does not outstrip the expanding means of sub-

sistence. Productivity has increased at a far greater rate than has population; this destroys the fundamental thesis upon which the whole Malthusian theory rests. . . Far more important than finding ways to keep down the population is the discovery of some method to distribute more equitably the goods that are being produced in such mass volume. We have at our disposal the use of tools which have immensely increased man's power over nature; it is for us to utilize them to better advantage."¹¹

When Johnny comes marching home to the U.S.A.; when Heinrich returns to his Fatherland; when Tony gets back to his village in sunny Italy; when Tom is again in Piccadilly, yes, and when Yukio finds himself at home in the land of cherry blossoms, and Lee Ho in a peaceful China, each one, if he looks beneath the economic superstitions of the past, will find, in his own country, a wealth of opportunity for himself and all his fellows.

REFERENCES

- 1—*Chicago Daily News Almanac*, 1932: p. 59.
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- 3—*Laboratory Lesson, Revised*, Henry George School of Social Science, Chicago, May, '42: p. 18.
- 4—Lewis, Frances H., in *Ken Magazine*, Feb. 23, '39.
- 5—Brinkman, Herr, Reich Asst. Minister of Economics, in *New International Yearbook*, 1938.
- 6—Abelson, Sidney J., in *The Freeman Magazine*, July, '39: p. 15.
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