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THE OVERPOPULATION MYTH

"Overpopulation is the only really grave problem mankind faces. All other problems are secondary.... The population explosion is a recipe for disaster for all nations, underpopulated or overpopulated." This quotation is from one of many newspaper and magazine articles which currently argue that we have too many children.

A decade ago, this theme, led by a book called "The Population Bomb," was being taught in high school science classes. Then its dire predictions of disaster dimmed in the face of the dramatic fall in the American birth rate. Closed miternity **wards** in hospitals were soon followed by closed elementary schools.

Now this myth has surfaced again, often under the revised caption "the population clock." It has even less substance now than ten years ago. Contrary to its thesis, a large population is a blessing and not a recipe for disaster.

The most densely populated countries are also among the most prosperous, even when they lack any mineral resources such as oil or gas. The Netherlands, a nation of high average income and very dense population, has 970 persons per square mile. Belgium, another high-income country, has 840 persons per square mile. Japan has 785 persons, West Germany has 642, and Switzerland has 398.

It is significant that the high-income nations of West Germany, Japan and Switzerland are countries whose money, the mark, yen and franc, respectively, are going up in value while our dollar is rapidly declining. Switzerland has the highest average income per person of all nations in the world except several tiny oil-rtch countries in the Persian Gulf.

The United States 11s blessed with far more agricultural, mineral, timber and water-power wea1th than a11 those nations added together. Why are they getting richer while we are becoming poorer? One reason could be that those nations have

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an abundance of what the anti-population books and articles argue is a liability, namely, a very dense population.

There are other factors, of course. Japan has not had to spend its own money for military defense because it i.s provided by the United States. On the other hand, some of the densely populated nations, such as Japan and West GErmany, were heavily damaged in World War II.

The Republic of China on Taiwan started out in 1947 as the most war-devastated area in Asia. It is now the second most prosperous country in the Far East despite its large annual expenditures for military defense against threatened invasions by Red China. Taiwan's very large population of 1,181 persons per square mile is a Splendid asset for its economic growth.

In contrast to these densely populated countries, the United States -- even if we exclude sparsely populated Alaska -- has only 66 persons to the square mile. Despite this underpopulation, our birthrate has fallen to 1.76 child per woman, far below the bare replacement figure of 2.1 per woman.

Yet weird arguments are made in current articles to justify further U.S. popu lation reduction. One suggestion is· that, s:ince "we are already struggling with a complex of 'domestic problems' that are either caused by domestic overcrowding or aggravated by world overpopulation," the solution is to find "a birth-control method that simply permits parents to choose a son in preference to a daughter. After all, God did.[11] This "solution" is based on the premise that a nation's population multiplies only in proportion to its females, rather than in oportion to its persons.

The overpopulation myth goes hand in glove with the no-growth attitude toward energy. Its basic rationale is: Assume that progress has come to an end and there are no more frontiers, therefore divide up the shortages, grin and bear it. The United States became a great n ion because previous generations belie\(J:lin every kind of growth: population, scientific, industrial, and technological. This is no time to put the lid on progress and growth.

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