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by.PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY
Box 618, **Alton, Illinois 62002**
Phone: **618-462-5415**

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CENSUS REPORT

Sometimes news events of the most far-reaching consequences appear in newspapers only in inconspicuous stories on the back pages. One such little-noticed item was the recent U.S. Census Bureau report that we suffered a record decline in American birth rates for 1974.

The decline was so dramatic that a Census Bureau analyst tried to explain it as a temporary phenomenon. He argued that postpone ment rather than abandonment of child-bearing may be the cause.

How does a Census Bureau analyst know whether women are post poning rather than abandoning the bearing of children? His own figures indicate a rather permanent form of postponement because 1974 was the third consecutive year in which the total American fertility rate was below the level at which births and deaths balance.

The rapid decline in American births has tremendous economic and social consequences. First affected are the hospitals which have closed their maternity wards, and the baby food, clothing and equipment industries which have suffered major cutbacks. Next affected are the teachers, many of whom face permanent unemployment or giving up their chosen profession.

The comes the effect on the housing industry, now already in a major depression. There really is no need for more homes except to replace those worn out or located in blighted areas.

Adoption agencies are now undergoing a traumatic readjustment.

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They have no way to supply the demand from prospective adoptive parents, so eager for babies that they will gladly pay $12,000 to $24,000 on the baby black market. A major adoption agency in Chicago reports that requests for babies are outrunning available babies at the rate of twenty to one, and many of the children they do have are toddlers all the way up to school age.

Of long-range economic importance is the effect on Social Security. To avoid going broke, Social Security must have an in creasing number of young workers paying Social Security taxes. Instead, our number of young workers is rapidly declining.

More than two million potential young workers were killed in abortion clinics during the last 30 months. This means less Social Security benefits can be collected for our senior citizens.

There are many causes for the decline in the birth rate, in cluding the spiraling percentage of divorces, the movement of large numbers of women into the labor force, the rise in .the cost of living, abortion and contraception, the zero population growth lobby, and evai the new organization glorifying non-parenthood.

But individual decisions made to cope with personal problems can create a collective calamity. The strength of a nation is its number of vigorous productive workers. The Census Bureau statis tics indicate that our nation may be starting a long period of decline.

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