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Chapter 5 Controversies Surrounding Fertility Policies

The Rise of a Population Control Movement

The concerns of a small group of American demographers would have meant little if they had not been amplified by the actions of certain wealthy individuals and foundations that also worried about the geo-political significance of developing world demographic trends. During the early 1950s, John D. Rockefeller 3rd and the leadership of the Ford and Rockefeller foundations worked to establish a neoMalthusian movement with a global focus. Their goal was to establish family planning programs throughout the developing world, lower fertility, and lessen population growth. They recognized that only governments could implement effective family planning programs, and their immediate task became convincing government leaders, in both developed and developing countries, that high fertility and rapid population growth were major social problems in need of state intervention. They determined that a dramatic increase in academic research on international population issues was a necessary first step in this conversion process. During the next two decades they expended millions of dollars to develop demographic research centers that focused on international population issues as well as on bio-medical research to develop new contraceptives. The expenditures on demographic research had a profound impact. In the United States in 1950, for example, courses in demography could be found at the graduate level in only three universities. Between 1951 and 1967 major population research centers were established at 16 US universities; all owed their existence to foundation funding, largely from the Ford Foundation. Similar expenditures helped to establish internationally oriented population centers at a number of major universities in Europe and Australia. Funding from the Population Council, a research and technical assistance organization established by John D. Rockefeller 3rd in 1952 to provide a leadership role for the international population control movement, helped establish UN regional centers for demographic training and research in Bombay, India (1957), Santiago, Chile (1958), and Cairo, Egypt (1963). Additionally, its fellowship program brought hundreds of developing world students to major population research centers in developed countries for graduate training in demography. The international population movement experienced heady times in the 1960s. In March 1963 the Ford Foundation trustees stated their intention to "maintain strong efforts both in the United States and abroad to achieve breakthroughs on the problems of population control" (Harkavy, 1995: 39). That same year the Rockefeller Foundation population program announced their bold goal to "bring about reduction of the growth rate of the world's population and its eventual stabilization" (Harkavy, 1995: 44). Such a goal became more credible with the conversion of previously reluctant First World governments to neo-Malthusianism. In January 1965 President Johnson (1965a) endorsed international family planning programs in his State of the Union message, promising to "seek new ways to use our knowledge to help deal with the explosion in world population and the growing scarcity in world resources." That year USAID began providing technical assistance in family planning, with President Johnson (1965b) presenting an economic argument for family planning: "Let us act on the fact that less than \$5 invested in population control is worth \$100 invested in economic growth." When he (Johnson, 1966: 321) first asked Congress for fertility control funds, he did so on the basis that high population growth rates "challenge our own security."

The US government immediately began to expend significant funds on fertility control. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare expenditures increased from \$4.6 million in 1965 to \$14.7 million in 1969; USAID funding increased from \$10.5 million in 1965 to \$45.4 million in 1969 and to \$123 million by 1972 (Caldwell & Caldwell, 1986: 102–104). Most of the funds came to flow through the Office of Population at USAID, which due to the convictions of Dr. Reimert Ravenholt, its director, were spent on family planning programs to maximize their immediate impact on fertility (Warwick, 1982: 45–51). The involvement of the US government politicized the population control movement, especially since the US simultaneously was ramping up its unpopular involvement in the Vietnam conflict. In much of the Third World the US came to be seen as having its own agenda for the newly independent nations that might not correspond with their own desires. There was also significant international involvement in developing world family planning happening at the same time (Caldwell, 2002: 3–4). In 1965 the World Health Organization entered the field, and family planning advisory commissions were sent to India by both the World Bank and the United Nations. That same year the IUSSP and UN Population Division organized a World Population Conference in Belgrade. In 1967, at the instigation of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the UN Trust Fund for Population Activities was established to fund family planning programs; its name changed to the UN Fund for Population Activities in 1969. In 1950 the UN Population Division had projected that the world's population would reach 3.3 billion by 1980, but by 1968 their projection for that year had increased to a much more accurate 4.5 billion. Rapid population growth had become a significant global concern.

5.2.3 Fears of Famine, Failure and a Population Bombs

In the 1950 and 1960s India and China, densely settled and with rapidly increasing populations, both experienced significant challenges to their development efforts. Questions arose about food shortages and mass starvation. From 1958 to 1962 China attempted a “Great Leap Forward,” an accelerated industrialization effort. Mao Zedong launched this campaign to quickly move China from an agrarian economy to a communist industrial one through the formation of people's communes that would dramatically increase grain yields and simultaneously bring industry to the country-side. It failed miserably. Grain production dropped significantly leading to tens of millions of starvation deaths, which were systematically hidden from view. And the small backyard steel furnaces produced very little useable steel.

India's major challenge in 1965 was growing enough food to feed its 500 million people, increasing at more than 2% a year. Since independence India had experienced a number of famines and between 1954 and 1965 the US had granted it \$30 billion worth of agricultural assistance (Ahlberg, 2007: 673). In 1965 the US shipped 20% of its entire wheat harvest to India to make up its growing grain deficit. With the US grain surplus shrinking, mass starvation seemed imminent. In 1966, as India was experiencing a drought that threatened famine for 77 million people, President Johnson told Indian officials that the US would withhold its wheat shipments unless India “modernized” its agriculture and enhanced its family planning efforts (Ahlberg, 2007: 695). Under this US pressure India did fit more women with new IUDs, some causing significant infections (Connelly, 2008: 220–223). And throughout its prime wheat growing areas it planted the dwarf variety of wheat that Norman Borlaug, with Rockefeller Foundation funding, had perfected just four years earlier. The dwarf variety required the extensive use of irrigation, fertilizers, pesticides, and mechanization. This “Green Revolution” produced a record 1968 wheat crop that simultaneously put India on the road to food self-sufficiency and began a process that made redundant a significant portion of India's agriculture workforce.

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Paul Ehrlich published his widely read Malthusian tract, *The Population Bomb* (Ehrlich, 1968), that identified overpopulation as the fundamental cause of not only famine in the developing world but of global environmental deterioration. By 1970 over 88% of Americans believed that the world was experiencing a population problem, and over 70% thought that the United States was also (Westoff & McCarthy, 1979). In 1972 the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, appointed by President Nixon and headed by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, issued a fundamentally neo-Malthusian report (Commission on Population Growth, 1972) recommending “that the nation welcome and plan for a stabilized population.

Although the apocalyptic views of the Paddocks, Ehrlich and others were not universally accepted there was wide agreement that rapid population growth was a serious problem that deserved to be high on the international policy agenda. Family planning programs were considered an important intervention that should be fully supported by governments everywhere. China’s and India’s coercive programs inevitably produced strong national and international criticism that affected all discussions of population policy for the next several decades. The large majority of developing countries, however, considered coercion unacceptable and implemented voluntary family planning programs.

5.3 Controversies During the Rapid Decline Phase, 1970–2000

« The 1984 UN Conference on Population in Mexico City marked a turning point in movement development. The Reagan appointed US delegation asserted that “population is a neutral phenomenon” in the development process, and that excessive state control of the economy was more responsible for economic stagnation than rapid population growth. Adopting this anti-Malthusian position undercut the economic development rationale for fertility control programs, and allowed the Reagan administration to oppose the use of any pressure in family planning programs and all induced abortion.”