

physical and mental pollution of an overabundance that threatens to exhaust the world's vital resources and promotes, not the development but actually the underdevelopment, of the Third World. This endemic under-development is accompanied by the second great wave of population growth in countries that are sinking further into poverty; in such countries, the underprivileged classes will soon no longer have anything to lose in a general revolution.

It was in this wider context that the World Population Conference in Bucharest was prepared and staged. In the socio-economic deliberations that took place there, the population factor once again assumed the importance that it had had among the classical economists of the last century and that it should never have lost. Even though separate international conferences have dealt, and will deal, with the environment, resources, population, food and housing, the record of these conferences to date clearly shows how closely the various factors are interrelated. It is for this reason that the conferences are linked together like successive rounds in a great contest between the countries with high and low standards of living. The confrontation is focused on the way in which the casual relation between the above-mentioned factors is to be viewed. It took a very political turn in discussions between government delegations at the Bucharest Conference, because of the enormous interests at stake.

Industrialized West worried

The conference owes its origins to the anxiety caused by the sudden acceleration in population growth after 1950. Malthus had been disturbed by a much smaller growth-rate, which had increased from 0.5 per cent at the beginning of the eighteenth century to 1 per cent at its end. Approximately the same pace was maintained during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth; since then, it has increased steadily, reaching 2 per cent a year in the present decade. Unlike the English pastor, today we can immediately appreciate what the increase in the population, combined with the actual or possible rise in its standard of living, represents in terms of the increased world-wide demand for goods and services. This increase is all the more disturbing to observers because they are at the same time acutely aware of the excessive consumption of natural resources by the wealthy countries.

In what way do these excesses relate to the Third World? We need not be concerned with preventing the unfortunate

consequences of excessive consumption from occurring there; this would be truly premature. The relation is twofold. On the one hand, there is the almost automatic neo-Malthusian response, which sees population growth as a very important factor — or even the main one, the scapegoat — in the problems faced by our wealthy societies. By a spontaneous extrapolation, population growth is considered as an evil in itself for the Third World, to which must be preached the virtues of zero population growth — especially since this state will take a great deal of time to reach, owing to what may be called demographic inertia. While some observers would like to see zero population growth in the industrialized countries combine with zero economic growth in order to put a stop to the squandering of scarce and non-renewable resources, they tend to see a population growth-rate of or approaching zero as a necessary prerequisite for Third World countries that wish to move out of their condition of under-development.

The second aspect of the relation is less often expressed, more subtle but undoubtedly more fundamental. The Third World countries loom on the horizon as a growing menace to countries with high standards of living. There are a number of aspects to this menace, although not all of them are necessarily taken into consideration by those — ordinary citizens, intellectuals and politicians — who feel menaced. Some worry that, in their desire to develop themselves along Western lines, the havenot countries will actively contribute to ecological deterioration and compromise recent efforts to restore the physical environment of our planet. Others are afraid that this same desire for development will accelerate the rate at which non-renewable and difficult-to-replace resources are exhausted. These two fears are in the Malthusian tradition of pessimism, which sees the future only in terms of decreasing yields, or at least refuses to count technical progress as a guaranteed resource of the future.

Another fear is much more political in nature, and concerns the evolution of power relations between the industrial nations, especially the Western ones, and the Third World. Up to now, the high standard of living in the wealthy countries has been made possible partly by the fact that raw materials have been available at ridiculously low prices, thus encouraging waste. The continued existence of the social and economic systems in these countries seems to depend on a guaranteed cheap supply of raw materials, so that any challenge to this arrangement by the under-developed

*Menace of
Third World
seldom expressed*