

Birth control said false issue in Third World

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The exploitation of natural and social resources by a few who are economically powerful - not overpopulation or a lack of birth control - is the main problem for developing nations, according to a paper adopted by OXFAM Canada.

Catherine Harvey, OXFAM's Ontario Regional Director said OXFAM's board of directors "believes that population has never started to decrease until the large majority of people are living a reasonably affluent and healthy life with some sort of responsibility for their own future."

The paper, Population Growth and Social Development, was drawn up for the 1974 World Population Year by two professors at the Free University of West Berlin and signed by an international group of development economists and political scientists.

OXFAM Canada adopted the paper earlier this year as its position on the population question for the United Nations population conference in Rumania this year.

The paper took the position population growth is a dependent variable within "the social, economic, political and cultural development context."

It questioned the "neo-Malthusian" position that overpopulation, interpreted either as dense population or as a rapid population increase, was the single major problem facing Third World Countries.

Many people argued a reduced birth rate was the answer to these problems and this would be accomplished by direct measures such as birth control propaganda, more family planning clinics, distribution of contraceptives, legislation of abortion and sterilization.

OXFAM Canada rejected this "Malthusian" approach:

"We consider this approach to be wrong. Population growth must not be blamed for diseases of society. It is a deception to make people believe that it is possible to solve problems of society through birth control measures."

"In the past two decades there has hardly been any considerable progress in most of the developing countries measured in the rise of levels of living of the broad masses; wealth and land have remained concentrated in the hands of small elites, in a number of countries the disparity between rich and poor is increasing."

"Even in those Third World

countries where economic growth has been fairly rapid in recent years, it has taken forms which do not benefit, and even worsen the conditions of life of the poorer strata which make up the vast majority of the population in these countries.

"For example, industrial technology, and to an increasing extent new agricultural technology, is seldom designed to meet local conditions; it is generally capital intensive rather than appropriately labour intensive and tends to increase the

pation among the masses in the developing countries.

"From the perspective of these power structures, the real issue is not that population growth exerts pressure on the means of subsistence, as the neo-Malthusians assert, but rather that population growth tends to threaten institutional framework, safeguarding the unequal distribution of economic and political power.

"Insisting on population increase as a major cause of underdevelopment can therefore

but that this kind of work could only be done "within the framework of an all-round economic and social development plan."

The paper stated history had shown that before a decline in fertility was possible in a country, social development on a comprehensive scale was necessary. Peasants and "The new urban sub-proletariat," in underdeveloped countries, it argued, want many children to protect them in old age.

"As long as the material conditions under which the majority of people in the Third World have to live are not drastically improved, reproductive behaviour is likely to remain unchanged and birth control programmes are bound to remain inefficient.

"Therefore, the existence of plans and planning authorities cannot solve the population problem unless basic structural changes take place; unless institutions permitting large scale political participation of the masses replace the existing repressive systems which prevail in most of the developing countries; unless inequalities in the distribution of wealth and opportunities are removed and strategies of social and economic development are implemented that benefit all strata of society; unless the countries of the Third World free themselves from economic exploitation and political domination by foreign interests.

"In Western industrialised countries an increasing number of politicians and scholars maintain that population growth is a major cause of the depletion of resources, of environmental destruction and the decay of urban centres. We consider this argument both wrong and dangerous. The deterioration of the natural and social environment is not primarily a function of population size or growth, but it is essentially an emanation of an economic system based on the principle of the maximization of profits which implies the rude exploitation of natural and social resources by the few that are economically powerful.

"A solution to the ecological problems facing many economically developed countries can only be found if present economic structures are democratized. In particular, the multi-national corporations wielding inordinate economic and political power in many Western industrialised countries as well as in large parts of the Third World must be subjected to effective democratic control," the paper stated.



The above graphic indicates the philosophy of developed nations who attempt to portray all third world problems as based on overpopulation.

-CPS GRAPHIC

already heavy burden of unemployment and poverty.

"The political, economic and cultural elites in many developing countries are being supported by Western capital which keeps them subordinated to the interests of the Western industrialized countries.

"These national and international power structures play an essential role in the perpetuation of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and lack of social and political partici-

serve, on the level of theory, to furnish any ideological legitimation of the existing order of things; on the level of politics it serves to distract attention from the real political-economic issues facing the Third World."

OXFAM's paper did not oppose family planning but called access to efficient contraceptives and other means of birth control methods human rights that should be available to all.

They felt stabilization of population was "an urgent task,"