



Bulletin

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SCIENCE AND THE POPULATION EXPLOSION

The following excerpts are from the 1970-71 annual report of the Chairman of the Science Council of Canada, Dr. O.M. Solandt:

...To me, science is man's accumulated and organized knowledge about himself and the world in which he lives, and as such is to be sought after. Technology is what lets man use this knowledge, and can bring good or ill depending upon the wisdom which controls it. Between them, science and technology have allowed mankind to multiply, have brought part of mankind to the highest standard of health, longevity and material prosperity the world has known and have made possible our highly sophisticated human society; they have also provided the power to trigger off some trends which, if unchecked, could spell disaster - the threats of overpopulation, of resource-depletion or even of nuclear war are real threats.

As man has slowly come to realize how narrow his vision of "progress" has been, and to understand that "growth" is not necessarily good in itself, his realization has created its own backlash against science and technology. Prophets of gloom and doom have become numerous and among them they support visions of a wide range of apocalyptic futures -

titles ranging from *The Biological Time Bomb* to *Future Shock* are becoming common in the ranks of "non-fiction" books. These often oversimplified reactions to our problems tend in a way to obscure the reality of the threat posed by the exponential growth of human population and resource-use - a threat which we ignore at our peril. In recent years, increasing scientific knowledge has made it starkly apparent to a relatively small group of concerned people that it is just not possible for human society to continue to evolve along present lines indefinitely. Thoughtful students of the future disagree as to when and how the population explosion will occur, but few who have looked at the problem disagree with the idea that disaster is inevitable unless we begin at once to reduce the growth of world population.

SHORT-TERM VIEW OUTMODED

In planning to deal with the world population crisis it is important to recognize that we are setting out to achieve a level of understanding of the future and to initiate actions of a kind that have never before been attempted. Decisions made today are almost invariably made in the light of foreseeable consequences which will occur within the lifetime of a government, or at most, within the working lifetime of a man. This foreshortened view of the future must now be abandoned. In dealing with the problems of population-control and resource-management on a global scale man must think in terms of many generations and, what is much more important, one generation must be prepared to make decisions that may well reduce its own comfort and standard of living in order to try to provide a better life for future generations. It is perfectly clear now that some radical change must be achieved in the thinking of mankind about his survival as a species. At this stage the chances of success appear to be remote, but without effort now failure at some time in the future is certain. The first step that can and should be taken immediately is to mobilize the resources needed to put a significant number of our best brains to work on the problem.

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