

stood — share of the responsibility for the world population situation, the governments of the industrialized countries, especially the most powerful ones, were undoubtedly even more responsible for making the Bucharest Conference a dialogue of the deaf. This judgment may seem too severe, though it does not deny the positive aspects of the conference, which Wendy Dobson discusses in the other article on this topic. It is, for example, indicative that, in spite of the fact that delegates constantly reaffirmed the need for integrating population policies with development planning, not the slightest effort was made to work together to find concrete ways of bringing about this integration.

Indeed, the conditions necessary for a true dialogue were absent. The following example will serve as an illustration: a number of delegates from Western countries expressed great regret that the World Plan proposed at the beginning of the conference was subsequently watered down; in particular, they deplored the suppression of the quantified objectives relating to reduction of fertility. Moreover, they accepted the principle that a population policy must be an integral part of a development policy, to which wealthy countries must contribute. They refused, however, to commit their countries to quantified criteria for development aid. Under these circumstances, how could the Third World delegates at Bucharest take them seriously? The United States in particular does little for its credibility when it begins crusading for the reduction of fertility for the sake of the welfare of families living in poverty in Third World countries.

If the spokesmen for one or more industrialized countries, speaking in plenary session or in the Working Group on the Plan, had solemnly recognized the logical (but not necessarily chronological) priority of development, with its practical political implications for economic structures and international aid, a breakthrough could have been made and an unproductive deadlock overcome. The Third World governments would then no longer have been able to sit in their seats so comfortably, since their share of responsibility for the under-development of their peoples is not inconsiderable; they could also have concentrated a little more attention on the specifically demographic aspect of the present situation and the future of their countries, in accordance with the purpose of the Bucharest Conference.

Unfortunately, this was not the case. While the conference created a certain awareness of the population problem as a constituent element in the problem of

under-development and development, this awareness did not come close to reaching the level required to deal with the urgency of the present situation, considering the impossibility of making rapid changes in the rate of population growth. Without going as far as the French agronomist René Dumont, who speculates about what future generations will think of a population conference that was held at the dawn of the greatest famine in history and refused to recognize it, one may agree that it is certain and regrettable that the delegations from the Third World governments, with the exception of the one from Bangladesh, showed no sense of urgency with regard to a situation that, apparently, does not arouse in them any impulse toward self-criticism. The governments of the industrialized countries do not admit that they have greatly contributed to this insensitivity by being insensitive themselves to the urgent need for a radical change of strategy with regard to the Third World. It is paradoxical that, in an advanced capitalist society, where long-term planning is thought to be natural, it is generally forgotten that wealthy countries carry on more trade than poorer ones, and that it would therefore be wise to allow the have-not countries to develop more freely according to their own plans if we wish to increase the number of good trading partners for the twenty-first century. It is too optimistic, even naive, to expect political and business leaders to plan ahead 20 years or more.

*Lack of urgency  
in face of  
greatest famine  
in history*



*'...and there's still opposition to the Pill'*