

ANNOTATIONS

PROBLEMS OF DECLINING FERTILITY IN EUROPE

IN 1935 Mr. D. V. Glass,¹ as Research Secretary of the British Population Investigation Committee, began a series of inquiries in the four European countries—Belgium, France, Germany, and Italy—in which measures had been adopted by the respective governments to check declining fertility. His object was to study and describe the nature of the measures and to consider the available evidence of their influence on reproductive trends. The results of his research were published in 1936 in his book, *THE STRUGGLE FOR POPULATION*, which at once became the authoritative work on the subject. The measures described have since been considerably extended, Sweden has adopted a population policy, and in Denmark and Norway the question of taking similar action had before the war become one of national importance. In the present volume Mr. Glass brings his account of European population policies up to the outbreak of the war, introducing much additional matter, and includes a chapter on population movements in England and Wales, another devoted to a general discussion of the nature and consequences of population trends, and a statistical appendix in which are described with remarkable lucidity the most useful methods of measuring population growth. The result is an important contribution to the scientific study of population.

The measures adopted in Belgium, France, Germany, and Italy to promote marriage and parenthood fall broadly into three classes: (1) the use of propaganda to create a public opinion in favor of large families, (2) repressive measures aimed at discouraging individual control over reproduction, (3) the offer of material rewards for marriage and child-bearing. The first class includes the issue of medals to parents of large families, newspaper publicity, and other marks of public approval. The second includes the prohibition of birth control propaganda and the sale

¹ Glass, D. V.: *POPULATION POLICIES AND MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1940, 490 pp. \$6.00.

of contraceptives, and the drastic penalizing of abortion induced on other than medical grounds; the imposition of special taxation and other disabilities upon unmarried persons may also be classed under this head. In the third class are such measures as family allowances, marriage loans, and the granting of taxation reliefs and other forms of material assistance to the parents of large families. Mr. Glass finds that though in all four countries birth control propaganda and the sale of contraceptives are illegal, the law, except in Germany, is not strictly enforced. The tendency is to rely less on repression and more on positive measures.

The most generally adopted of such measures is the granting of family allowances, the term family allowance being defined by Mr. Glass as "a cash grant, quite separate from and in addition to a man's wage or salary, given to help cover the costs of raising a family." The allowance usually varies in amount with the number of children and is given only in respect of dependent children. The family allowance system has been most fully developed in France and Belgium. In France the payment of family allowances began on a voluntary basis about the middle of the last century and was made compulsory in 1932; in Belgium the movement began later but developed more rapidly, and compulsion was applied in 1930. Because the payment of family allowances has been widely advocated as a means of checking the decline in the birth rate, it might be inferred that satisfactory evidence of their efficacy for this purpose is available. This, however, is not so. Figures have indeed been put forward. It has been shown that the birth rate among the employees of the French firms giving allowances is considerably higher than among the general population in the same locality or in France as a whole, but Mr. Glass shows that such comparisons, even with the adjustments that have been made in the attempt to eliminate differences in age composition, are invalid. He shows also that in France and Belgium the gross reproduction rate has since 1930 gone down more rapidly than in England, where there is no family allowance system. He admits that the French and Belgian population measures may have prevented an even more rapid fall, though he can find nothing to prove this, but he concludes that "they have not been influential enough to cause a rise in fertility, or even to stabilize fertility at its already low level of five or ten years ago." The Italian measures for checking the decline in fertility are more comprehensive, but they have not prevented a practically unbroken fall in the gross reproduction rate during the period from 1921-2 up to and in-

cluding 1936. Germany is the only country that has achieved any success in its attempts by governmental activity to bring more babies into the world. In 1939 the number of births reached replacement level.

Mr. Glass examines the various explanations put forward to account for the upward trend of the German marriage rate and birth rate since 1933, which he rightly regards as one of the most striking phenomena of recent years. Some writers attribute it to the material inducements given by the new régime to marriage and parenthood, others to the more drastic enforcement of the law against abortion and the suppression of birth control propaganda. In Germany it is attributed chiefly to what has been called the "spiritual rebirth" of the nation under the influence of the National Socialists. Mr. Glass subjects these various claims to critical analysis, and concludes "that the material measures have been more important than the 'psychic changes,' and that, in particular, the suppression of illegal abortion has been a major factor." This appraisal may usefully be considered together with the very different views expressed by Dr. Burgdörfer in *VÖLKER AM ABGRUND*, and in more recent writings.

The Swedish population policy differs from those so far considered in that it contains no measures of repression, such measures being regarded as inconsistent with democratic ideas; it is not desired to raise fertility by increasing the number of unwanted babies. But the development of the policy was checked at an early stage by the outbreak of the war, before the various measures had time to influence fertility.

Mr. Glass concludes that the European countries that have set out to raise fertility have little to show for the energy and money expended:

But it is clear that the cash-and-kind grants have not, so far, been large enough to cover the additional costs of family life. Even in Sweden, where much time and intelligence has been spent in investigating and analysing—in seventeen reports—the many aspects of the population question, the economic assistance given to families is still very small. At the same time, pro-natalist propaganda has attacked the selfishness of childless married couples and of the parents of one- and two-child families, and has shown that such persons have a substantially higher standard of life, comparing similar income levels, than large families. It is therefore not surprising that the propaganda has largely failed, and that the repressive measures—which, with the apparent exception of Germany, are not in any case wholeheartedly enforced—should not be more conspicuously successful. The record of govern-

mental attempts to stimulate fertility shows one significant and constant fact. However urgently governments may have declared their desire to increase the supply of births they have nevertheless persistently tried to buy babies at bargain prices.

Mr. Glass thinks, however, that something effective might be done to check declining fertility by "the provision of monetary grants which are large enough, when taken in bulk, to allow parents sufficiently to alter the present pattern of social life through the mechanism of effective demand."

The concluding chapter is devoted to a discussion of three questions:

First, what is going to happen to the populations of the different countries? Secondly, will future trends have "good" or "bad" effects upon the economic and social life of the various countries? Thirdly, if the results are mainly bad, can we do anything now or in the future either to alter the trends or to minimize the disadvantages that they would otherwise bring in their train?

The outcome of the discussion is that in the present state of knowledge definite answers cannot be given to any of these questions, but the more important factors that have to be considered are indicated. Various estimates of future population trends are discussed, and the author includes three new estimates of his own, merely as "rough indications of possibilities," of the future population of England and Wales up to the year 2000, all of which show a considerable decline in the size of the population. These estimates, however, take no account of changes that may be brought about by the war. The difficulties that may be expected to arise in consequence of population decline are briefly considered, and the view taken is that they may be mitigated by economic and social planning, or even entirely avoided by increased freedom of immigration, and that a considerable period will elapse before the actual decline of numbers is likely to be serious. But the problem of raising the average number of children in the family to the level required for replacement is regarded as one of formidable difficulty; for "the population problem is not a single problem, but an aspect of all the social and economic problems by which the individual and the family are affected." It is an aspect on which new light is thrown by this book, which, well written and unflinchingly interesting, embodies much painstaking research and critical acumen, and marks a real advance in the study of an important question.

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