

ANNOTATIONS

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF SWEDISH POPULATION MOVEMENTS, 1750-1933

DR. THOMAS' recent analysis of the social and economic aspects of Swedish population trends since 1750¹ is unique in character. The study could not be duplicated for any other country because the data do not exist.

In Sweden the continuous population register system began in the seventeenth century, for in 1686 responsibility for the registration of births, deaths, and marriages was vested in the local clergy. Today the local Swedish political unit usually coincides with the corresponding unit of the state church, the parish, and the parish registers form the basis of Swedish population and vital statistics. The records kept in each parish include the book of births and baptisms, book of deaths and burials, book of confirmations, book of banns and marriages, book of in-migrants, book of out-migrants, and book of "non-existent" (residence unknown). When a person moves from one community to another he takes with him a migration certificate which includes an abstract of his record from the previous parish. The records afford the basic materials for the periodic Swedish reports not only for birth rates, death rates, and marriage rates but also for size, distribution, and composition of the population. The keeping of a continuous "tab" on people dispenses with the necessity of our form of the decennial house-to-house census.

Fortunate for Dr. Thomas' purposes was the existence of long series of demographic data based upon the above-described records. Several decades ago Gustav Sundbärg provided from records back to 1750 a year-to-year tabulation of Sweden's population by age, sex, and marital status and computed annual rates of birth, fertility, marriage, and mor-

¹ Thomas, Dorothy S.: *SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF SWEDISH POPULATION MOVEMENTS, 1750-1933*. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1941, 487 pp. \$6.00.

tality. These series are kept up to date in official reports. Dr. Thomas and her colleagues supplemented these series with some annual tabulations of internal migration and related factors for different types of communities for the period 1895-1933. Thanks to the work of Swedish economists and administrators, there were also available long series of data on such conditions as harvests, occupations, cost of living, wages, national income, etc.

Dr. Thomas' book is divided into two parts. The first part is devoted to the general analysis and covers the period 1750-1933. It contains, first, a factual description of population trends over the period considered, next a chapter on agricultural developments and adjustments of the agricultural population, and, finally, a chapter on industrialization in relation to population questions. The second part is focused on questions of internal migration. The detailed data on "in-migration" and "out-migration" are studied for various types of communities during the period 1895-1933.

The broad historical trends resemble those in other countries of Western civilization. The story is one of increasing urbanization and industrialization, of declining birth rates, and of the imminence of a stationary population. The unusual features of the data, however, are the possibilities for inductive study of various sorts of interrelations. The "push" and "pull" forces in population redistribution are studied by relating indices of agricultural and business prosperity to volume and direction of migration.

There are also interesting analyses of the impact of agricultural and business conditions on vital rates. During the early years of the period 1753-1913 the annual marriage rates, crude birth rates, and marital fertility rates varied directly and in a strikingly close manner with the harvest index for the preceding year. On the other hand, death rates rose after bad harvests and declined after good yields. These associations decreased in strength with the passing of time, however, and since the beginning of the present century there apparently has been only negligible impact of the harvests on vital indices.

The relation of various vital rates to business cycles was studied for the period 1865-1913. The variations in the marriage rate followed very closely those of the business cycle and this relationship persisted strongly throughout the whole period. From 1865 to 1892 there was also a high positive association between business cycles and birth and fertility rates but this was not true for the later period, 1893-1913. During neither of

these periods was the death rate found to be substantially associated with the business cycle.

Dr. Thomas discusses the declining influence of economic conditions on vital indices in the more recent periods. With respect to harvests, the development of scientific methods in agriculture has possibly reduced the magnitude of variations in crop yields. In so far as death rates are concerned, the developments in medicine and public health have probably helped to mitigate effects of vicissitudes of economic conditions. Also, increasing industrialization has meant that a declining proportion of the population is directly affected by harvests. The diminishing association between birth and fertility rates and the business cycle is a more puzzling and more complex situation. The author suggests that it "can scarcely be unconnected with the rapid downward trends in these rates, or with the differential spread of the pattern of family limitation." The situation might have been clarified somewhat if the harvest data had been related exclusively to the vital indices for the rural or agricultural population, and if the business cycle data had been related exclusively to the vital rates for the urban or non-agricultural population.

Dr. Thomas' book is replete with tables and charts, including much original data which enterprising students can doubtless use. It is fitting that the analysis of these unusual data was entrusted to one so well fitted for the job.

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