

ANNOTATIONS

WEALTH, WELL-BEING AND POPULATION¹

AMONG the recent studies that view with some misgiving the slowing growth and imminent decline of Western populations, two works by a leading French demographer must take an important place. In *RICHESSSE ET POPULATION* and *BIEN-ETRE ET POPULATION* Dr. Alfred Sauvy attempts to integrate once more the fields of economics and demography and to derive from their combination a group of principles and policies that will assist in the adjustment to or prevention of declining numbers. The author is Director of the new French National Institute of Demographic Studies, which is a section of the Ministry of Public Health in the French Government. The author's position indicates that concern over numbers is now a matter of official policy. The studies under review indicate why the author believes the concern to be appropriate, if somewhat tardy.

In *WELL-BEING AND POPULATION*, the shorter and more informal of the two books, Dr. Sauvy begins by posing the two dangers inherent in the relations of population to productive capacity: underpopulation and overpopulation. As might be expected from that definition of the problem, he subscribes to the view that for given circumstances there is an appropriate or optimum population. This optimum number should be the goal of official policy, both direct and implicit. The author is at pains to point out that policy decisions on a wide variety of matters are made on the assumption of facts about population growth that may be illusory. He shows the extent to which an essentially Malthusian view continues to prevail in countries like France which, in the author's view, are faced with the opposite danger.

¹ Sauvy, Alfred: *Richesse et Population*. 2^e ed. Paris, Payot, Bibliotheque Economique, 1944, 324 pages; Sauvy, Alfred: *Bien-Etre et Population*. 2^e ed. Paris Edition Sociale Francaise, 1945, 229 pages.

Successive chapters of *WELL-BEING AND POPULATION* provide a sort of primer of population movements and their relation to economic development. The author reviews the "vital revolution" in Europe, with perhaps a slight overestimation of the completeness of the shift to low birth rates in Eastern Europe and especially in Russia. A hasty review of the growing populations of the remainder of the world, and especially of the Orient, completes the perspective in which Dr. Sauvy wishes to place the situation of France. There especially he finds a network of deliberate and unintentional barriers to population growth, representing accumulated economic and political policies that discourage large families while individual choice and knowledge of contraceptive techniques translate the policies into realities.

In *WEALTH AND POPULATION* the author approaches the definition of population optima in more formal fashion. Here he seeks to relate size and growth of population to level of living and the state of the useful arts. Dr. Sauvy discusses in some detail the relation of the optimum to various states of population growth and age distribution, and to such economic conditions as resources, production, trade, elasticity of demand, and the like. The text is supplemented by numerous graphical and mathematical representations of the alleged relationships. In this discussion Dr. Sauvy seems to have contributed some greater precision to the definition of significant variables without, however, arriving at a truly operational definition of the optimum number for particular combinations of the variables. The reader misses throughout this discussion any reference to English or American literature on the subject.

Differing only in the amount of detail, both books indicate various respects in which a fallacious Malthusianism pervades official and popular opinion on demographic questions. The author indicates how unemployment, housing shortages, concern for population quality, and the "economics of abundance" and its counterpart in economic restrictionism (which the author calls "economic Malthusianism") have been used as conscious or implicit arguments against population growth. With each of these obstacles to growth the author attempts to show either that the argument has no merit or, in some cases, that population growth would actually aid solution of the problems.

Dr. Sauvy's case for increased population is made on exclusively economic grounds; he carefully avoids reference to population as an

element in military power. It may be doubted that the French government's official sponsorship of demographic studies rests so exclusively upon considerations of domestic economic welfare, although that welfare is certainly of some concern in postwar France. The author's position is that in an advanced society with modern technology and with ample resources either under domestic control or obtainable through trade, an expanding population aids rather than hinders the expansion of production and consumption, the adoption of new techniques, and even the improvement of genetic quality. The author is quick to recognize, however, that what is good for the economy as a whole viewed abstractly may be very disadvantageous for most family units viewed concretely. The practical policies with which both books culminate are designed to make the interests of individual families run in the same direction as the interests of the collectivity. Specifically, the author proposes a pronatalist policy encompassing benefit payments and an entire series of graded reductions in the expense of rearing children. This policy he would implement by such economic and fiscal policies as appeared necessary, including reduced restrictions on occupational mobility and on economic production, confiscation of funds used neither for production of goods or for production of children, loans for the newly married with payments acceptable in children, and the like. Some of these policies are now being put into effect in France. It is still too early to estimate their effect and, indeed, unless the fundamental problems of production and trade are solved more satisfactorily than now appears evident, it would be unfair to Dr. Sauvy's program to judge it by the results of incomplete and possibly superficial adherence to it in official policy.

In both books Dr. Sauvy is somewhat more concerned with exposition leading to practical conclusions than with economic demography as such. The author's use of demographic statistics is casual and largely undocumented, reflecting perhaps somewhat different scholarly usages than those customary in the Anglo-American literature. In neither work does the author appear to be concerned with precision of measurement of population movements. The books should rather be read for the able and very literate way in which the author discusses sweeping questions of demographic policy and for the way he answers those questions in regard to the interesting case of France.

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