

UNDERDEVELOPED AREAS IN SOCIAL EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

SIR RAPHAEL CILENTO¹

I HAVE listened with very great interest to the discussions that developed this morning and this afternoon. There are a great many points that I desired to raise that have already been dealt with effectively. Reference has, however, been made from time to time to underdeveloped territories, and it is in that direction perhaps that my observations may have some value because it has been my privilege to live in several underdeveloped territories. This has enabled me to see at first hand the problems that you are discussing here from the viewpoint of people dwelling in a long and well-established economy.

May I hark back in the first instance to first principles. The problem of civilization is definitely the problem of population. The problem of population is the question of the accessibility or availability of subsistence. To people in a well-ordered civilization this is not readily apparent, but in underdeveloped territories it is constantly obvious.

The course of history is a long series of records of nations or groups of nations that, after a great overgrowth based on new facilities for production and consequential massive increases of population, have struggled to reach an equilibrium where there is a balance between population and subsistence, and their collapse through a failure to defend this state of balance against attacks from within and attacks from without. The attacks from without came from other groups caught up in the upthrust of productive development at a later stage and unbalanced in one or other direction. At such a critical period the degree of development of the country concerned determines its reaction.

Take, for example, Australia, New Guinea, Oceania, and Japan, with all of which I am familiar. The Australian ab-

¹ Director, Division of Social Activities, Department of Social Affairs, United Nations.

originals were a food-gathering group of independent and isolated tribes which had established an uneasy equilibrium between population and subsistence and had maintained it for a very long period—Nature being their main antagonist. They maintained the balance by reducing their numbers partly by primitive methods of contraception and partly by killing anyone who intruded upon their food-producing area or hunting ground. After many centuries of isolation their country was invaded by a Western European civilization: they were unable to meet its impact and today, with the exception of some tens of thousands segregated in settlements and a few still living in remote and unsettled areas, they are extinct. The Tasmanian, of course, is completely extinct.

In New Guinea, mixed native populations had established a civilization which had reached equilibrium with its environment and where numbers were kept at balance to a large extent by the ravages of endemic and epidemic diseases, particularly malaria. Of every ten children born, two lived to reach puberty. They, too, met the impact of the Western European civilization, but only to the limited degree involved in the establishment of missionary, trader, and government official. Nevertheless, the change involved in the restriction of their hunting grounds, the limitation of pig-raising, the loss of the social values of war—because war had some social values at that level of civilization—have combined to throw out of balance the equilibrium they had established, and these primitive people have as yet been unable to establish themselves at the new level.

The story of these very primitive people is, however, a late phase of the whole story of Oceania with its great Polynesian population where, from 1835 to 1925, the population declined 75 per cent after what appears to have been a long period of equilibrium. It was an equilibrium established and maintained, among certain of the Polynesian peoples at least, by a deliberate process of sacrifice of children. This was not a religious sacrifice, but the Solon who invented this process attached it to a secret society on the basis of social prestige—the Areioi. The social

standing of the Polynesian within his own community rose in accordance with the number of children who had been born and abandoned to death.

The reduction of 75 per cent in 90 years, due to the introduction of tuberculosis, pneumonia, alcohol, fire-arms, and the system of the recruitment of labour by what was in effect slavery by capture, was terminated by increasing controls established by law as law became effective throughout these thousands of islands. In the third generation, the Polynesians have begun to revive as a race, particularly in Samoa and New Zealand, but they are not the same people socially and their economic environment is not the same economic environment. It is one with a completely different outlook and deliberately multiplied needs. They have been caught up in the industrial stream even in these remote areas.

On the very outskirts of the Oceanic and Polynesian area, however, are two interesting groups, the Malays and the Japanese, and their histories are sufficiently different to justify comment. With the absorption of the South and West Pacific, the Malays and the Japanese, among other people, had the alternatives of absorption and colonial status or semi-independent or fully-independent economic cooperation. The Malays, broken into many weak groups, accepted colonial status, but they did not cooperate in what was in effect the introduction of a new economic system. As the easiest alternative, Malaya was overloaded with foreign labour, so that at the present time the Malays constitute only one quarter of the population of Malaya; half the population is Japanese, who to a large degree control the mercantile, the business needs, and the mining activities of the community; while the other quarter are Indian Tamils who a generation ago monopolized the railway services and various other needs.

The Japanese, on the other hand, accepted the economic challenge of Western civilization and ultimately modified their whole economy to base it on transit trade—an experiment involving the gravest consequences to their primary producers.

Five-sixths of the area of Japan is uncultivated because of the mountains and the cold. Forty-three per cent of the population tills the remaining one-sixth of the land on tiny holdings only sufficient for subsistence purposes in a primitive community. As the transit trade of Japan became more and more important, their standard of living inevitably declined, for that type of trade demands that your exporting capacity must be kept up by imports at the expense of your primary agrarian industries. The ideological reaction in these varying groups is interesting. The Australian aborigines and the primitive natives of New Guinea showed a resignation to the inevitable, a psychological "turning towards death," if one can accept that phrase. At the other end of the scale, Japan wrecked herself to equal the pace of the Western intruder. During the course of her long civilization, Japan had kept the population/subsistence ratio even by a deliberate policy of contraception. Under the Meiji restoration, this Tokugawa concept was replaced by a tremendous propaganda in the interests of the Shinto conception of the divinity of the children of the Sun-Goddess whose destiny was to lead the nations of the world under the four corners of Heaven each to its appointed place in the hierarchy of mankind. Contraception became sacrilege, but the ratio between population and subsistence utterly failed.

I mention these few facts in passing, thus inadequately, only to emphasize the statement that history as we know it is the story of a succession of balanced economies upset from time to time by a new factor making for a massive increase in productive power. The latest of these—that by which we are presently influenced—was the introduction of the railway in 1824. Every new productive force is followed by an immense expansion of population that outruns opportunity before it outruns population increase. Reference was made by another speaker just now to the development of the United States, but that development must be considered merely an item in a similar process of development and colonization throughout the whole world at that particular period. It is true that in 1846 the first

railroad was put right across the United States from sea to sea, but it is significant that the whole of the available colonial or undeveloped world was divided up between those colonizing powers that were first in the field between 1830 and 1850. The late-comers—Germany, who entered the field in 1870; Japan, who entered the field at the same time; Italy, who followed twenty years later—came too late, and to that fact we may ascribe the internal difficulties and the two world wars.

I should like to emphasize the fact—and I think you will all agree with it—that the two world wars have solved nothing in this regard. Whatever methods, whatever procedures are introduced at this stage to limit populations or to rationalize the population/subsistence ratio, cannot prevent the growth of population within the next fifty years to a critical and explosive degree. The limitation of political boundaries is in this regard an absurdity.

Take again the instance of Japan. In 1858, when her population was first estimated, it was set at 28 million. In 1938, shortly before the war, it had reached 68 million. Taking into consideration her war losses and every other catastrophe that can be imagined at the present time, nothing can prevent the population of Japan proper (that is, the main islands of Japan) reaching a figure of 113 million in 1968. Let us take a realistic point of view of this situation and consider what relation it bears to the solemn stupidities of treaty obligations. I suggest that we turn our attention also to the areas of South-east Asia and of Latin America. In the former, including Pakistan, Hindustan, Burma, the Malay States, Indonesia, the Philippines, Siam, Indo-China, and China itself, you find in this tropical and semi-tropical area half the population of the whole world. You find, moreover, a group of States including within it a great number which have just acquired independence—a group infused with a new stimulus, a new inspiration towards individualism, and an aim at all costs to protect these new-found freedoms. In August last I was interested enough to test in those areas the reactions of the people themselves by con-

versation with rickshaw-pullers, wharf-men, and plantation coolies—individuals among the mass of people who, in fifty years' time in population at least, will be the greatest single problem of civilization as we know it. Perhaps that gives too much importance to the problem, but I think not much too much.

Their reaction to the Greater East-Asia Prosperity Zone propagandized by Japan was interesting indeed. The majority with whom I talked believed that the success of the Japanese was natural enough and directed towards a right objective, but that it failed because the Japanese were undisciplined and went far beyond their moral obligations and their physical possibilities; and they conceived that it was only these ideological failures that had caused the Japanese retreat.

This is a very grave and significant fact. They did not relate the retreat of the Japanese to the intervention of the Allied Forces, and when the occupation of Japan by the Allies was pointed out to them, these people—who are not only not Japanese, but suffered greatly at their hands—regarded the occupation of Japan as a punishment not for the war but for the perfection of the people by discipline through hardship. This is a Japanese concept, but I found it universal.

The possibilities of their own new freedom and the development of their own new countries are also matters of intense interest to them, but their conclusions were even more so. The majority summed up the situation by saying that the Greater East-Asia Prosperity Zone must be protected within some international framework: if the United Nations should prove to be strong enough, within the framework of the United Nations; and if it were not strong enough, then within some other international framework. Is the United Nations strong enough? Is it likely to get the support that will permit it to implement its Charter which imposes upon it a social obligation to improve the standard of living in underdeveloped and underprivileged territories in association with the Specialized Agencies? The field is rigidly restricted by budgetary limitations and by a

minimal priority program. The priority program is in effect a huge one. It is the obligation to direct the activities, the intentions and the ideas of the peoples of these huge underdeveloped groups in such a way that when they become a dominant factor in the scheme of things, as they will, their reactions will be along lines that experience has proved to be most progressive socially.

How can that be done? Up to the present our program in underdeveloped territories has been a matter of social education and the correction of disease, the latter through the intervention of the World Health Organization. The United Nations has held two seminars this year in Latin America. In 1948 it aims to hold seminars in the Far East, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and again in Latin America. A tremendous interest in the development of social science has been demonstrated by the people concerned. There is a very ready desire to implement this interest by the establishment of schools of social science. I am going down tomorrow to inquire into the possibilities in that regard in a neighboring Latin American State. Moreover, a very strong desire was evidenced in these Latin American and Asiatic countries to send Fellowship holders to acquire the best information available from the best sources throughout the world in order that they might take it back and apply as much of it as was applicable in their own countries. We have sent Advisory Social Welfare Experts to them, but they have shrewdly observed that these experts can only bring the systems of their own countries which may not be applicable in less developed lands, while the Fellowship holders travelling from their own countries can readily assess what is applicable and can spend the rest of their lives applying it. In United Nations I am convinced that their line of approach has much to commend it and is definitely a practical line.

The question before our children and our grandchildren, however, is whether nations can govern their population/subsistence ratio and nevertheless maintain their geographical and cultural frontiers. The population graph, however, drawn from

1810 to 1940, shows in the most graphic form not only the rise and fall of populations, but the history of every nation indicated, and the pre-factors of every major war. If every nation developed at the same rate at the same time; if the nations, in following the up and down curves of the graph—almost identical for all of them—kept pace or apprehended the significance of this progression of figures, we might be able to rely upon a regulated development in full enlightenment. But, alas! Early starters reach their peaks much earlier than late starters, and those late starters, forced forward by the pressure of population, necessarily become a threat to every specialized frontier of culture and civilization.

I believe that the work—the project—the job—for social workers all over the world is to carry us through this transition period until all nations can reach another stage of equilibrium in the history of civilization—an equilibrium upon which civilization can rest for a considerable period; a stage upon which it can rest until some new productive force, some new capacity for development, can revive again that psychological impulse that pushes mankind forward towards new achievement, that puts civilization again at hazard, and that demands again a new solution.