

ANNOTATIONS

THE DETERMINANTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF POPULATION TRENDS

IN April of 1949 the Population Commission of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations recommended that "... the Secretary-General should survey the existing scientific studies concerning the relationships between population trends and economic and social factors and prepare a summary of the findings of such studies with special reference to problems of economic development." The conception of the Population Commission was admirable; research that was relevant to the achievement of the purposes of the Economic and Social Council could best be planned against a background of knowledge of what we knew and did not know about the relations of population trends to economic development and social advance. The implementation of its directive appeared simple to the Commission; a survey of scientific studies and a summary of verified knowledge was merely bibliographic documentation for an appropriate delineation of the field to be covered. Five years later, in the spring of 1954, a rather massive report appeared bearing the title: **THE DETERMINANTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF POPULATION TRENDS.**¹

The summarization of world literature on the interrelations of economic and social factors with demographic variables proved a difficult and a complex task. Demography as science has advanced through meticulous study of limited variables in controlled situations, the development of more refined tools of

¹ United Nations. Department of Social Affairs. Population Division. **THE DETERMINANTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF POPULATION TRENDS. A SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS OF STUDIES ON THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POPULATION CHANGES AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS.** ST/SOA/Ser.A/17. United Nations Publication Sales No.: 1953. XIII. 3. New York, 1953. xii, 404 pp.

measurement, and the elimination of or standardization for inconvenient if not contaminating social and economic factors. This splendid isolation has begun to break as research problems in population dynamics are defined in cross-disciplinary terms, but objective and empirical analysis of interrelations remains limited. The vacuum of science has been filled by a great literature of assumptions and generalizations, of conclusions derived from concealed premises taken as axiomatic. Theory has been unfashionable during decades when exciting developments in sampling and improved mathematical tools permitted high dividends from field surveys and developments in methodology. A resume of scientific studies oriented toward economic development faced still another difficulty. The greatest problems of human welfare are in one type of area, the most advanced demography in another. It is only against these limitations of research that the study of the Population Division can be evaluated. It is also these limitations to research and knowledge that justify a survey of what is known as a basis for planning the future work of the Population Division.

Part One, Introduction and Historical Background, presents an outline of world population growth. Here there is also a chapter on the history of population theories, including much on history but something less than a page on "Population 'types' and 'stages' of demographic evolution." It becomes obvious as one reads this section that there is a virtual absence of contemporary theoretical formulations that are consistent with known facts of population growth and interrelations.

Part Two, Factors Affecting Population Trends, devotes Chapters IV-VI to economic and social factors affecting mortality, fertility, and migration respectively. Data for analysis and analytical studies are most adequate for mortality. Here it was possible to present a survey of factors contributing to the high mortality of European peoples in former times, factors which contributed to the reductions of mortality, and the possible future. For today's so-called underdeveloped areas there is a great ignorance concerning differentials and interrelations. Studies of the presence or absence of social and economic relations in areas of sharply reduced mortality are notably lacking. Cautious conclusions of theoretical probabilities based on his-

torical trends and differentials in Western cultures are all that is possible.

Levels, differentials, and trends or their absence represent greater areas of ignorance in fertility than in mortality. Studies of fertility trends and differentials in countries of low fertility receive twenty pages; comparable studies in countries of high fertility receive less than five pages. Yet it is this latter subject, the fertility of the peoples of the underdeveloped areas, that is the hard core of the world's population problem, the potential negation of all that economic development and modern public health can achieve. Migration, especially internal movements to industrial employment and urban areas, may be related intimately to trends in fertility and hence to rates of growth. However, in Chapter VI, "Economic and Social Factors Affecting Migration," three-fourths of the space is devoted to international migration stated as being largely irrelevant to the future population of Asian countries; one-fourth of the space is devoted to internal migration, primarily in industrial countries of European culture.

Chapters on "Dynamics of Population Growth and Age Structure," "Future Population Trends," and "Factors Affecting Population Distribution" conclude *Part Two* on the factors affecting population trends. The interrelations of fertility, mortality, migration, and population growth combined with the complex dynamics of age structures preclude segregation of the influence of external factors on specific components of growth. A resume of trends in these demographic interrelations precedes a survey of future populations for the now traditional three "types" of areas—low fertility and mortality, incipient decline of fertility, and high fertility. Consideration of studies of factors affecting distribution rather dangles at the end of *Part Two*.

Part Three, Economic and Social Effects of Population Changes, is introduced by a chapter on "World Population and World Resources." Here problems of trade, migration, and international economic relations are considered as well as natural resources and capital. Ch. XI, "Population and Labour Supply," surveys the literature on factors affecting the size of the economically active population, the composition of that popu-

lation, and the relation between the active population and the labour supply. Knowledge pertains primarily to Western countries with advanced economies, and even here there are notable lacks in the analysis of relations with economic and social factors. For the under-developed countries the field is one of deep ignorance. Ch. XII, "Population and Consumption," and Ch. XIII, "Effects of Population Growth on *Per Capita* Income," reveal notable deficiencies even in those types of analytical studies permitted by available data. Chs. XIV and XV consider the implications of population trends in highly industrialized and in under-developed countries respectively. In the latter chapter there is one courageous page on "the need to check population growth." The final chapter, XVI, concerns "Effects of Major Migratory Movements in Modern Times." And there the study of the *Determinants and Consequences of Population Trends* ends without a conclusion. Moreover, it ends without what should have been Part Four on the interrelations of population growth and economic and social change.

The comments that have been made on the deficiencies and imbalances of coverage are not faults primarily of the people who surveyed and summarized scientific studies, although there is evidence of marked inequalities in types of literature available and in language facilities. The Population Division had a mandate to survey a defined research field with a view to distinguishing the well-tilled areas from the unknown jungles and the arid waste lands. They succeeded rather admirably in this task, so much so that those of us who are sociologists or economists as well as demographers see the filling of the gaps in research as a task that might occupy many social scientists in addition to demographers. It is obvious that sharply conceptualized and adequately executed demographic, economic, and social research is the primary need. It is obvious also that we do now know what we know on many subjects for many areas, that much integrative analysis of available data and materials might accompany or even precede the new studies that involve the collection of additional data. A related problem posed by the *Determinants and Consequences of Population Trends* is the inadequacy of research personnel and facilities for the task at hand, with the correlated dangers of a diffusion of effort

among many little projects rather than a careful selection of the most critical problems.

Many detailed comments could be made to prove that in a tiny segment of world knowledge the reviewer was more erudite than the authors. One who has struggled with world literature for two decades can only bow humbly to those who achieved monumental coverage with minimal errors and integrated the massive citations and notes into a significant report. No scholar concerned with the planning or guidance of research can long maintain self-respect without a well-thumbed copy.

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