At the same time that Reimert Ravenholt [see PRI Review January/February 2003] was setting up his “powerful population program,” the nations of Western Europe, along with Japan, were being encouraged by the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson to make family planning a priority of their own aid programs. International organizations, primarily the UN and its affiliated agencies, were also being leveraged on board. Together, they helped to create and maintain the illusion that the international community was solidly behind population control programs. (It wasn’t, and isn’t, as we shall see.) But it was the World Bank and its billions that was the real prize for the anti-natalists. And they captured it when one of their own, Robert McNamara, was appointed as President in 1968.1

McNamara Moves In

McNamara came to the World Bank from the post of Secretary of Defense, where he had unsuccessfully prosecuted the Vietnam War by focusing on “kill ratios” and the “pacification of the natives” instead of victory. A former automobile executive, he was prone to cost-cutting measures which sometimes proved to be false economies, as when he decreed that a new class of ship — the fleet frigate — should have only one screw instead of the customary two. This saved the expense of a second turbine and drive train, but the frigate — known to the Navy as McNamara’s Folly — lacked speed, was hard to berth, and had to be retired early.2 The population policies he was to advocate suffered from similar defects.

When the Boards of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund convened on October 1 of that year, President Johnson made a surprise appearance.3 Technology in the underdeveloped nations, he said, had “bought time for family planning policies to become effective. But the fate of development hinges on how vigorously that time is used.”
No More People

The stage was now set for McNamara to get up and attack the “population explosion,” saying that it was “one of the greatest barriers to the economic growth and social well-being of our member states.” The World Bank would no longer stand idly by in the face of this threat, McNamara said, but would:

Let the developing nations know the extent to which rapid population growth slows down their potential development, and that, in consequence, the optimum employment of the world’s scarce development funds requires attention to this problem. Seek opportunities to finance facilities required by our member countries to carry out family planning programs. Join with others in programs of research to determine the most effective methods of family planning and of national administration of population control programs.4

It quickly became evident that “the optimum employment of the world’s scarce development funds” meant in practice that the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and its network of regional development banks would act as loan sharks for the anti-natalists, pressuring sovereign nations into accepting family planning programs on pain of forfeiting vital short-term, long-term, and soft loans.5 This practice is well known in the developing world, as when a Dhaka daily, The New Nation, headline read, “WB [World Bank] Conditions Aid to Population Control.”6

McNamara also began providing loans for population and family planning projects, including those which involved abortion (both surgical and through abortifacient chemicals). By 1976 the National Security Council (NSC) was able to praise the World Bank for being “the principal international financial institution providing population programs.”7 Details are hard to come by, however. The World Bank is one of the most secretive organizations in the world, besides being effectively accountable to no one. It is known that there is a carefully segregated population division, which reportedly employs approximately 500...
people. But those who work on conventional development projects are not privy to what goes on in this division, which is off-limits to all but those who work there.  

**Fewer People, More Money**

A rare inside look at the organizations activities in this area is provided by a recent World Bank report, entitled *Improving Reproductive Health: The Role of the World Bank*. Written in a distinctly self-congratulatory tone, the document reveals that the Bank has spent over $2.5 billion over the last twenty-five years to support 130 reproductive health projects in over 70 countries. Indonesia and Lesotho, for example, have been the site of “‘information, education and communication’ campaigns about sex and reproductive health.” India has been the beneficiary of several different programs, which the report claims have “helped bring India two-thirds of the way towards her goal of replacement level fertility.” No mention is made of the fact that the Indian campaigns have been notorious for their coercive tactics. Or that McNamara visited India at the height of the compulsory sterilization campaign in 1976 to congratulate the government for its “political will and determination” in the campaign and, one would suspect, to offer new loans.

The World Bank also promotes abortion. *Improving Reproductive Health* openly admits that, since the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development, the first of the World Bank’s goals in the area of reproductive health has been “providing access and *choice* in family planning.” [italics added] Except for its candor, this promotion of abortion should come as no surprise. In Burkina Faso, for example, we are told that World Bank projects have included “mobilizing public awareness and political support” [that is, lobbying] for abortion and other reproductive health services.

The Bank has long been accused of pressuring nations, such as Nigeria, into legalizing abortion. In 1988, for example, abortion was virtually unthinkable as an official family planning practice in Nigeria. As recently as 1990, the Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria was forced to defend itself against allegations that it promoted the sale and use of “contraceptives” that were abortifacient in character. A year later — and two months after approval of a $78 million World Bank population loan — the government announced proposals for allowing abortion under certain circumstances.

Population control loans skyrocketed after the Cairo conference. The Bank reported that, in the two years that followed, it had “lent almost $1 billion in support of population and reproductive health objectives.”  And the numbers have been climbing since then. But
even this is just the tip of the iceberg. As Jacqueline Kasun notes, “Given the conditions which the bank imposes on its lending, the entire $20 billion of its annual disbursements is properly regarded as part of the world population control effort.”

No More Reform

Despite his predilection for population control, McNamara never abandoned more conventional aid modalities, roads, dams, power plants, and the like. Not so James Wolfensohn, who became the head of the Bank in 1995. Asked at the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome how the World Bank understood its mission towards the developing world, Wolfensohn replied that there was a “new paradigm” at the Bank. “From now on,” Wolfensohn said, “the business of the World Bank will not be primarily economic reform, or governmental reform. The business of the World Bank will primarily be social reform.” The Bank has learned, he added, that attempting to reform a nation’s economics or government without first reforming the society “usually means failure.”

The benefits to nations who are willing to fall into line in the “civil society” will be immediate and intensely attractive. “The World Bank will be willing to look favorably on any reasonable plan for debt reduction — and even debt forgiveness,” Wolfensohn told the assembled reporters, “provided that the nation in question is willing to follow a sensible social policy.” Wolfensohn went on to tell reporters that population control activities are a *sine qua non* for any social policy to be considered “sensible.”

The World Bank is also, according to Wolfensohn, prepared to begin “directly funding — not through loans” certain NGOs in the countries involved, to further ensure that governments adopt “sensible social policies.” Thus fueled with money from the World Bank, the heat these favored NGOs will be able to generate on their governments to adopt, say, population control programs, including legalized abortion, will be considerable. Of course, other international organizations, not to mention USAID and European aid agencies, have been using this tactic for many years with great effect. Recalcitrant governments (who may innocently believe that they do not have a population “problem”) are thus sandwiched between the demands of international lenders and aid givers on the one hand, and the demands of “local” NGOs — loud, persistent and extremely well-funded — on the other.
Rapid Spread of Programs

With the U.S., international organizations, and an increasing number of developed countries now working in tandem to strong-arm developing countries into compliance, anti-natalist programs spread with startling rapidity. Bernard Berelson, the head of the Population Council, happily reported in 1970 that:

In 1960 only three countries had anti-natalist population policies (all on paper), only one government was offering assistance [that is, funding population control programs overseas], no international organizations was working on family planning. In 1970 nearly 25 countries on all three developing continents, with 67 percent of the total population, have policies and programs; and another 15 or so, with 12 percent of the population, provide support in the absence of an explicitly formulated policy ... five to ten governments now offer external support (though only two in any magnitude); and the international assistance system is formally on board (the U.N. Population Division, the UNDP, WHO, UNESCO, FAO, ILO, OECD, the World Bank).15

The recklessness with which Ravenholt, McNamara and others forced crude anti-natal programs upon the developing world dismayed many even within the movement. Ronald Freedman, a leading sociologist/demographer, complained in 1975 that, “If reducing the birth rate is that important and urgent, then the results of the expanded research during the 1960s are still pathetically inadequate. There are serious proposals for social programs on a vast scale to change reproductive institutions and values that have been central to human society for millennia.”16 [italics added] This was social engineering with a vengeance, Freedman was saying, and we don’t know what we are doing.

With even committed controllers saying “Slow down!” one might think that the anti-natalists would hesitate. But their army had already been assembled and its generals had sounded the advance; it could not be halted now. Even Freedman, rhetorically throwing up his hands,
conceded that “many people ... are eager for knowledge that can be used in action programs aimed at accelerating fertility decline,” and that the programs would have to proceed by “a process of trial and error.” The trials of course would be funded by the developed world; while the errors, murderous and costly, would be borne by poor women and families in the developed world.

What justification was offered for this massive investment of U.S. prestige and capital in these programs? Stripped of its later accretions — protecting the environment, promoting economic development, advancing the rights of women — at the outset it was mostly blatant self-interest. McNamara, who headed an organization ostensibly devoted to the welfare of the developing countries, had told the World Bank’s Board of Governors in 1968 that “population growth slows down their potential development.” But he told the Christian Science Monitor some years later that continued population growth would lead to “poverty, hunger, stress, crowding, and frustration,” which would threaten social, economic and military stability. This would not be “a world that anyone wants,” he declared. It was certainly not the world that many in the security establishment wanted, as secret National Security Council deliberations would soon make starkly clear.

Cold War Against Population

As the populations of developing world countries began to grow after World War Two, the U.S. national security establishment — the Pentagon, the Central intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the National Security Council — became concerned. Population was an important element of national power, and countries with growing populations would almost inevitably increase in geo-political weight. This was obviously a concern in the case of countries opposed to U.S. interests, such as the Soviet Union and China. But even allies might prove less pliable as their populations and economies grew. Most worrisome of all was the possibility that the rapidly multiplying peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America would turn to communism in their search for independence and economic advancement unless their birth rate was reduced. Thus did population control become a weapon in the Cold War.

The Japanese Program

Perhaps the first “successful” population control program was carried out in postwar Japan.
Prostrated by the war, Japanese leaders humbly acceded to MacArthur’s suggestion that abortion be legalized. While it was publicly maintained that the devastated Japanese economy could not support more people, the general’s interest was apparently in fighting the next war — in utero, as it were. He must have been pleased as the birthrate fell by half over the next few years.

MacArthur anticipated, in both style and substance, a secret directive from the National Security Council. “Our officials must know about the facts of population growth and be fully persuaded of the importance of this issue,” the NSC wrote in May 1976. “They must then find suitable occasion and discreet means to bring the message most persuasively to the attention of LDC [less-developed country] leaders whose influence is decisive in shaping national policies and programs.”

What the NSC then went on to describe sounded a lot like a covert operation. Washington should not be forward or assertive about its anti-natalist agenda, it said, but “selective and low-key,” relying instead upon outside agencies and the LDC’s themselves to promote its agenda. “It is important that the LDC’s take more of a lead on population issues at international conferences and at home ... We must help ensure that international organizations like IBRD [the World Bank group], WHO, UNDP, UNICEF, and UNFPA, as well as private voluntary organizations, play an active, positive role in support of population programs.” An appearance of international unity and consensus was to be carefully created. The war on people was not the U.S. versus everyone else, at least, they were not to think so.

**China Approved**

The NSC singled out for special praise “encouraging” trends in three countries now well known for abuse — China, India, and Indonesia. Indeed, the agency seems to have had China in mind when it noted approvingly that “population programs have been particularly successful where leaders have made their positions clear, unequivocal and public, while maintaining discipline down the line from national to village levels, marshalling governmental workers (including police and military), doctors and motivators to see that population policies are well administered and executed. Such direction is the sine qua non of an effective program.”

While privately commending coercion (how else can the reference to “maintaining discipline” and “marshalling ... police and military” be understood?) U.S. officials were cautioned against publicly praising such programs: “We recommend that U.S. officials
refrain from public comment on forced-pace measures such as those under active consideration in India ... [because that] might have an unfavorable impact on existing voluntary programs.”

Most importantly, the true — that is, anti-natal — purpose of the programs was not to be mentioned at all costs: “[W]e should avoid the language of ‘birth control’ in favor of ‘family planning’ or ‘responsible parenthood,’ with the emphasis being placed on child spacing in the interests of the health of child and mother and the well-being of the family and community.”

In other words, our Cold War against people was to be carefully disguised as an innocent program to improve infant and maternal health. “We have only the best interests of your mothers and children at heart,” foreign aid recipients are told in sugared tones. “We’re not sterilizing your women to prevent them from having children, only to protect them from the danger of dying in childbirth.” It was a clever ruse that would take in many, both in targeted countries and here at home. And, as we will see, it is still in use today. Those who are out to reduce the numbers of mothers and children like to pose as their protectors.

Earth First (People Last): Environmental Movement Signs On

Every sorcerer deserves an apprentice. Hugh Moore, grand wizard of the population explosion, got his in the person of a young Stanford University entomologist by the name of Paul Ehrlich. In the very first sentence of his very first book Ehrlich proved beyond all doubt that he had already mastered Moore’s panic-driven style. “The battle to feed all of humanity is over,” he wrote. “In the 1970s the world will undergo famines — hundreds of million of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now.”19

In fact, he had gone Moore one better, as overzealous acolytes are prone to do. His book should have been named The Population Explosion, instead of The Population Bomb, for according to Ehrlich the “bomb” had already gone off and there was nothing to do now but wait for the inevitable human die-back. “Too many people” were chasing “too little food.”20 The most optimistic of Ehrlich’s “scenarios” involved the immediate imposition of a harsh regimen of population control and resource conservation around the world, with the goal of reducing the number of people to 1.5 billion (about a fourth of its current level) over the next century or two. Even so, about a fifth of the world’s population would still starve to
death in the immediate future.

Such a prediction took pluck, for when the book appeared in 1968 there was no hint of massive famine on the horizon. The days of Indian food shortages were past. (We wouldn’t learn about China’s man-made calamity until a decade later.) The Green Revolution was starting to pay off in increased crop yields. And experts like Dr. Karl Brandt, the Director of the Stanford Food Research Institute, rebuked Ehrlich, saying that “Many nations need more people, not less, to cultivate food products and build a sound agricultural economy... every country that makes the effort can produce all the food it needs.”

But it wasn’t his forecast of a massive human die-off that catapulted Ehrlich into the front rank of environmental prophets. (In a motif that has since become familiar, the book left readers with the impression that this might not be such a bad thing.) Rather it was his startling claim that our reckless breeding had jeopardized earth’s ability to support life. All life, not just human life. Our planet was literally dying. Not only were the Children of Earth killing ourselves, we were going to take Mother with us as well.

The Population Bomb

Heavily promoted by the Sierra Club, The Population Bomb sold over a million copies. Ehrlich became an instant celebrity, becoming as much of a fixture on the “Tonight Show” as Johnny Carson’s sidekick Ed McMahon. He commanded hefty lecture fees wherever he went (and he went everywhere), and always drew a crowd. People found it entertaining to hear about the end of the world. Likening the earth to an overloaded spaceship or sinking lifeboat, issuing apocalyptic warnings about the imminent “standing room only” problem, he captured the popular imagination. His prescriptions were always the same: “Join the environmental movement, stop having children, and save the planet.”

While Ehrlich fiddled his apocalyptic tunes, Moore burned to commit the growing environmental movement firmly to a policy of population control. His ad campaign, still ongoing, began suggesting that the best kind of environmental protection was population control. “Whatever Your Cause, It’s a Lost Cause Unless We Control Population,” one ad read. “Warning: The Water You are Drinking May be Polluted,” read another, whose text went on to equate more people with more pollution. A third, addressed to “Dear President Nixon,” claimed that “We can’t lick the environment problem without considering this little fellow.” It featured a picture of a newborn baby.
Birth of Earth Day

Moore went all out for the first Earth Day in 1970, printing a third of a million leaflets, folders, and pamphlets for campus distribution. College newspapers received free cartoons highlighting the population crisis and college radio stations a free taped show (featuring Paul Ehrlich). With his genius for marketing, Moore even announced a contest with cash awards for the best slogans relating environmental problems to what he called “popullution” [population pollution]. Students on over 200 campuses participated. The winner, not surprisingly, was “People Pollute.”

By 1971 most of the leading environmental groups had signed on to the anti-natal agenda, having been convinced that reducing the human birth rate would greatly benefit the environment. Perhaps it was their interest in “managing” populations of other species — salmon, condors, whales, etc. — that predisposed them to impose technical solutions on their own species. In any event, many of them were population hawks, who believed that simply making abortion, sterilization and contraception widely available was not enough. “Voluntarism is a farce,” wrote Richard Bowers of Zero Population Growth as early as 1969. “The private sector effort has failed... [even the expenditure] of billions of dollars will not limit growth.” Coercive measures were required. He proposed enacting “criminal laws to limit population, if the earth is to survive.”

Those who held such views were not content to merely stop people from multiplying, they demanded radical reductions in human numbers. The group Negative Population Growth wanted to cut the-then U.S. population of 200 million by more than half, to 90 million. Celebrated oceanographer Jacques Cousteau told the UNESCO Courier in 1991, “In order to stabilize world populations, we must eliminate 350,000 people per day.” Garrett Hardin of “The Tragedy of the Commons” fame opined that the “carrying capacity” of the planet was 100 million and that our numbers should be reduced accordingly. (Do we pick the lucky 100 million by lottery?) To carry out these decimations, Malthusian solutions are proposed, as when novelist William T. Vollman stated that, “there are too many people in the world and maybe something like AIDS or something like war may be a good thing on that level.” And lest we have compunctions about resorting to such measures, we should bear in mind, as Earth First! Founder Dave Foreman wrote, “We humans have become a disease, the Humanpox.”
The Feminist Dilemma

The most radical of the feminists had a different definition of disease. Why should women be “subject to the species gnawing at their vitals,” as Simone de Beauvoir so memorably wrote in her feminist classic *The Second Sex*? Why endure pregnancy at all, if contraception, sterilization and, especially, abortion, could be made widely available? With the legalization of abortion in the U.S. in 1973, feminists increasingly looked overseas, eager to extend their newfound rights to “women of color” elsewhere in the world. They had read their Ehrlich as well as their Beauvior, and knew that the world had too many people, or soon would. But family planning, especially abortion, provided a way out. “Let us bestow upon all the women of the world the blessing that we women in the privileged West have received — freedom from fear of pregnancy,” the feminists said to themselves. “We will, at the same time and by the same means, solve the problem of too many babies. For surely impoverished Third World women do not actually want all those children they are bearing. Patriarchy has made them into breeding machines, but we will set them free.”

Abortion “Needs” Appear

At the time, the population control movement remained ambivalent over the question of abortion. Hugh Moore had long wanted it as a population control measure, but Frank Notestein was still arguing in the early 1970s that the Population Council should “consistently and firmly take the anti-abortion stance and use every occasion to point out that the need for abortions is the proof of program failure in the field of family planning and public health education.”

But the women’s movement would not be put off with the promise of a perfect contraceptive. They knew, better than anyone (and often from painful personal experience) that contraception, because of the inevitable failures, *always* led to abortion. As Sharon Camp of the Population Crisis Committee wrote “both abortion and contraception are presently on the rise in most developing countries.”

Abortion was, in the end, accepted by most controllers because it came to be seen as a necessary part of the anti-natal arsenal. The Rockefeller Commission, established by President Nixon, wrote that “We are impressed that induced abortion has a demographic effect wherever legalized” and on these grounds went on to call for “abortion on demand.” The Population Council followed the Commission in endorsing abortion as a
means of population control by 1975.

In the end, feminist advocacy of abortion had proven decisive. The feminists had given the population control movement an additional weapon, abortion, to use in its drive to reduce human fecundity, and encouraged its aggressive use.

Third World Women

At the same time, it was soon apparent to many feminists that birth control was not an unmixed blessing for Third World women, who continued to be targets of ever-more aggressive programs in places like Indonesia, India, and Bangladesh. They began to demand further changes in the way programs were carried out, starting with male contraceptives and more vasectomies, Frank Notestein wrote of the feminists that, “As second-generation suffragists they were not at all disposed to allow the brutish male to be in charge of contraception. Women must have their own methods!” But more recent feminists “complain violently that the men are trying to saddle the women with all the contraceptive work. You can’t please them if you do, and can’t please them if you don’t.”

Although expressed somewhat crudely, Notestein’s comment pointed out the dilemma faced by feminists. On the one hand, they sought to impose a radically pro-abortion agenda on population control programs, whose general purpose — fertility reduction — they applauded. On the other they tried to protect women from the abuses that invariably accompanied such programs. But with the exception of the condom, other methods of contraception all put the burden on women. Vasectomies could easily be performed on men, but it was usually the woman who went under the knife to have her tubes tied. And abortions could only be performed on women. So, as a practical matter, the burden of fertility reduction was placed disproportionately on women. And when programs took a turn towards the coercive, as they were invariably prone to do in the Third World, it was overwhelmingly women who paid the price.

Feminist complaints did lead to some changes, but these were mostly cosmetic. Population controllers did learn, over time, to speak a different language or, rather, several different languages, to disguise the true, anti-natal purpose of their efforts. When Western feminists need to be convinced of the importance of supporting the programs, reproductive rights rhetoric is the order of the day. Thus we hear Nafis Sadik telling Western reporters on the eve of the 1994 U.N. Conference on Population and Development that the heart of the discussion “is the recognition that the low status of women is a root cause of inadequate
reproductive health care.” Such language would ring strange in the ears of Third World women, who are instead the object of soothing lectures about “child-spacing” and “maternal health.” Population control programs were originally unpopular in many Middle Eastern countries and sub-Saharan countries until they were redesigned, with feminist input, as programs to “help” women. As Peter Donaldson, the head of the Population Reference Bureau, writes, “The idea of limiting the number of births was so culturally unacceptable [in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa] that family planning programs were introduced as a means for promoting better maternal and child health by helping women space their births.”

James Grant of the U.N. Children’s Fund (UNICEF), in an address to the World Bank, was even more blunt: “Children and women are to be the Trojan Horse for dramatically slowing population growth.”

Corrupted Feminist Movement

The feminists did not imagine, when they signed onto the population control movement, that they would merely be marketing consultants. It is telling that many Third World feminists have refused to endorse population control programs at all, arguing instead that these programs violate the rights of women while ignoring their real needs. It must be painful for Western feminists to contemplate, but their own movement has been used or, to use Betsy Hartmann’s term, “coopted,” by another movement for whom humanity as a whole, and women in particular, remain a faceless mass of numbers to be contracepted, sterilized, and aborted. For, despite the feminist rhetoric, the basic character of the programs hasn’t changed. They are a numbers-driven, technical solution to the “problem of overpopulation” — which is, in truth, a problem of poverty — and they overwhelmingly target women.

This is, in many respects, an inevitable outcome. To accept the premise that the world is overpopulated and then seek to make the resulting birth control programs “women-friendly,” as many feminists have, is a fateful compromise. For it means that concern for the real needs of women is neither the starting point of these programs, nor their ultimate goal, but merely a consideration along the way. Typical of the views of feminists actively involved in the population movement are those of Sharon Camp, who writes, “There is still time to avoid another population doubling, but only if the world community acts very quickly to make family planning universally available and to invest in other social programs, like education for girls, which can help accelerate fertility declines.”

Here we see the population crisis mentality in an uneasy alliance with programs for women which, however, are justified chiefly because they “help accelerate fertility declines.”
The alliance between the feminists and population controllers has been an awkward affair. But the third of the three most anti-natalist movements in history gave the population controllers new resources, new constituencies, new political allies, a new rhetoric, and remains a staunch supporter even today.

Population Firm Funding

Over the past decade the Population Firm has become more powerful than ever. Like a highly organized cartel, working through an alphabet soup of United Nations agencies and “non-governmental organizations.” its tentacles reach into nearly every developing country. It receives sustenance from feeding tubes attached to the legislatures of most developed countries, and further support through the government-financed population research industry, with its hundreds of professors and thousands of students. But unlike any other firm in human history, its purpose is not to produce anything, but rather to destroy — to destroy fertility, to prevent babies from being conceived and born. It diminishes, one might say, the oversupply of people. It does this for the highest of motives — to protect all of us from “popullution.” Those who do not subscribe to its ideology it bribes and browbeats, bringing the combined weight of the world’s industrial powers to bear on those in countries which are poor.

In 1991, the U.N. estimated that a yearly sum of $4.5 to $5 billion was being directed to population programs in developing countries. This figure, which has grown tremendously in the last 10 years, includes contributions from bilateral donors such as the U.S., the European nations and Japan, from international agencies like those associated with the UN, and from multilateral lending institutions, including the World Bank and the various regional development banks. It includes grants from foundations, like Ted Turner’s U.N. Foundation, and wealthy individuals like Warren Buffet.

Moreover, a vast amount of money not explicitly designated as “population” finance is used to further the family planning effort. As Elizabeth Liagin notes, “During the 1980s, the diversion of funds from government non-population budgets to fertility-reduction measures soared, especially in the U.S., where literally hundreds of millions from the Economic Support Funds program, regional development accounts, and other non-population budgets were redirected to ‘strengthen’ population planning abroad.”34
More Money Spent

An almost unlimited variety of other “development” efforts — health, education, energy, commodity imports, infrastructure, and debt relief, for example — are also used by governments and other international agencies such as the World Bank, to promote population control policies, either through requiring recipient nations to incorporate family planning into another program or by holding funds or loans hostage to the development of a national commitment to tackle the “over-population” problem.

In its insatiable effort to locate additional funds for its insatiable population control programs, USAID has even attempted to redirect “blocked assets” — profits generated by international corporations operating in developing nations that prohibit the transfer of money outside the country — into population control efforts. In September 1992, USAID signed a $36.4 million contract and “statement of work” with the accounting firm Deloitte and Touche to act as a mediator with global corporations and to negotiate deals that would help turn the estimated $200 billion in blocked assets into “private” contributions for family planning in host countries. The corporations would in return get to claim a deduction on their U.S. tax return for this “charitable contribution.” The Profit initiative, as it is fittingly called, is not limited to applying its funds directly to family planning “services,” but is also encouraged to “work for the removal” of “trade barriers for contraceptive commodities” and “assist in the development of a regulatory framework that permits the expansion of private sector family planning services.” This reads like a bureaucratic mandate to lobby for the elimination of local laws which in any way interfere with efforts to drive down the birth rate, such as laws restricting abortion or sterilization.35

U.S.’s Real Foreign Aid Policy

Throughout the nineties, the idea of the population controllers that people in their numbers were somehow the enemy of all that is good reigned supreme. J. Brian Atwood, who administered the U.S. Agency for International Development in the early days of the Clinton administration, put it this way: “If we aren’t able to find and promote ways of curbing population growth, we are going to fail in all of our foreign policy initiatives.” [italics added] (Atwood also went on to announce that the U.S. “also plans to resume funding in January [1994] to the UN. Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA).”)36 Secretary of State Warren Christopher offered a similar but even more detailed defense of population programs the
following year. “Population and sustainable development are back where they belong in the mainstream of American foreign policy and diplomacy.” He went on to say, in a line that comes rights out of U.S. National Security Study Memo 200, that population pressure “ultimately jeopardizes America’s security interests.” But that’s just the beginning. Repeating the now-familiar litany, he claimed of population growth that, “It strains resources. It stunts economic growth. It generates disease. It spawns huge refugee flows, and ultimately it threatens our stability.... We want to continue working with the other donors to meet the rather ambitious funding goals that were set up in Cairo.”

The movement was never more powerful than it was in 2000 in terms of money, other resources, and political clout.

**Losing Momentum**

Like a wave which crests only seconds before it crashes upon the shore, this appearance of strength may be deceiving. There are signs that the anti-natal movement has peaked, and may before long collapse of its own overreaching. U.S. spending on coercive population control and abortion overseas have long been banned. In 1998 the U.S. Congress, in response to a flood of reports about human rights abuses, for the first time set limits on what can be done to people in the name of “voluntary family planning.”

Developing countries are regularly denouncing what they see as foreign interference into their domestic affairs, as the Peruvian Congress did in 2002. Despite strenuous efforts to coopt them, the opposition of feminists to population control programs (which target women) seems to be growing. Many other groups — libertarians, Catholics, Christians of other denominations, the majority of economists, and those who define themselves as pro-life — have long been opposed.

As population control falls into increasing disrepute worldwide, the controllers are attempting to reinvent themselves, much the same way that the Communists in the old Soviet Union reemerged as “social democrats” following its collapse. Organizations working in this area have found it wise to disguise their agenda by adopting less revealing names. Thus Zero Population Growth in June 2002 became Population Connection, and the Association for Voluntary Surgical Contraception the year before changed its name to Engender Health. Similarly, the U.N., in documents prepared for public consumption, has recently found it expedient to cloak its plans in language about the “empowerment of women,” “sustainable development,” “safe motherhood,” and “reproductive health.” Yet the
old anti-natal zeal continues to come through in internal discussions, as when Thoraya Obaid affirmed to her new bosses on the U.N. Commission on Population and Development her commitment to “slow and eventually stabilize population growth.” “And today I want to make one thing very clear,” she went on to say. “The slowdown in population growth does not mean we can slow down efforts for population and reproductive health — quite the contrary. If we want real progress and if we want the projections to come true, we must step up efforts .... while population growth is slowing, it is still growing by 77 million people every year.”

Such efforts to wear a more pleasing face for public consumption will in the end avail them nothing. For, as we will see, their central idea — the Malthusian notion that you can eliminate poverty, hunger, disease, and pollution by eliminating the poor — is increasingly bankrupt.

Reducing the numbers of babies born has not and will not solve political, societal, and economic problems. It is like trying to kill a gnat with a sledgehammer, missing the gnat entirely, and ruining your furniture beyond repair. It is like trying to protect yourself from a hurricane with a bus ticket. Such programs come with massive costs, largely hidden from the view of well-meaning Westerners who have been propagandized into supporting them. And their “benefits” have proven ephemeral or worse. These programs, as in China, have done actual harm to real people in the areas of human rights, health care, democracy, and so forth. And, with falling birth rates everywhere, they are demographic nonsense. Where population control programs are concerned, these costs have been largely ignored (as the cost of doing business) while the benefits to people, the environment, and to the economy, have been greatly exaggerated, as we will see. Women in the developing world are the principal victims.

Endnotes

1 The World Bank is to a large degree under the control of the United States, which provides the largest amount of funding. This is why the head of the World Bank is always an American. The activities of the Bank are monitored by the National Advisory Council on International Monetary and Financial Policies — called the NAC for short, of the Treasury Department. The 1988 annual report of the NAC states that “the council [NAC] seeks to ensure that ... the ... operations [of the World Bank and other international financial institutions] are conducted in a manner consistent with U.S. policies and objectives ...”

2 I served on board a ship of this class, the USS Lockwood, from 1974–76. As the Main Propulsion Assistant — the officer in charge of the engine room — I can personally attest that this fleet frigate, as it was called, was anything but fleet. On picket duty, it could not keep up with the big flattops that it was intended to protect from submarine attacks.

3 The 1968 meeting was 23rd joint annual meeting of the Boards of Governors of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The two organizations always hold their annual meetings in tandem, underscoring their collaboration on all matters of importance.

4 McNamara moderated his anti-natal rhetoric on this formal occasion. More often, he sounded like Hugh Moore, as when he wrote: “the greatest single obstacle to the economic and social advancement of the majority of the peoples in the underdeveloped world is rampant population growth .... The threat of unmanageable population pressures is very much like the threat of nuclear war .... Both threats can and will have catastrophic consequences unless they are dealt with rapidly.” One Hundred Countries, Two Billion People (London: Pall Mall Press, 1973), pp. 45-46. Quoted in Michael Cromartie, ed., The 9 Lives of Population Control, (Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1995), p. 62. McNamara never expressed any public doubts about the importance of population control, although he did once confide in Bernard Berelson that “many of our friends see family planning as being ‘too simple, too narrow, and too coercive.’” As indeed it was — and is. Quote is from Donald Crichtlow, Intended Consequences: Birth Control, Abortion, and the Federal Government in Modern America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). p. 178.


Personal Communication with the author from a retired World Bank executive who worries that, if his identity is revealed, his pension may be in jeopardy.


Kasun, p. 277.


Ibid.


Freedman, p. 4.

Christian Science Monitor. 5 July 1977. He went on to say that, if present methods of population control “fail, and population pressures become too great, nations will be driven to more coercive methods.”


20 The first three sections of Ehrlich’s book were called, “Too many people,” “Too little Food,” “A Dying Planet.”


22 Ehrlich has continued on the present day, writing one book after another, each one chock full of predictions of imminent disasters that fail to materialize. People wonder why Ehrlich doesn’t learn from his experiences? The answer, I think, is that he has learned very well. He has learned that writing about “overpopulation and environmental disaster” sells books, lots of books. He has learned that there is no price to pay for being wrong, as long as he doesn’t admit his mistakes in print and glibly moves on to the next disaster. In one sense, he has far outdone Hugh Moore in this regard. For unlike Moore, who had to spend his own money to publish the original The Population Bomb, Ehrlich was able to hype the population scare and make money by doing so. He is thus the archetype of a figure familiar to those who follow the anti-natal movement: the population hustler.

23 Lawrence Lader, Breeding Ourselves to Death, pp. 79-81.

24 Richard M. Bowers to ZPG members, 30 September 1969, Population Council (unprocessed), RZ. Quoted in Critchlow, p. 156.

25 In later years, as U.S. population continued to grow. NPG has gradually increased its estimate of a “sustainable” U.S. population to 150 million. See Donald Mann, “A No-Growth Steady-State Economy Must Be Our Goal,” NPG Position Paper, June 2002.


27 Frank Notestein to Bernard Berelson, 8 February 1971, Rockefeller Brother Fund Papers, Box 210, RA. Quoted in Critchlow, p. 177. These concerns, while real enough to Notestein, apparently did not cause him to reflect on the fact that he was a major player in a movement that “detracted from the value of human life” by suggesting that there was simply too much of that life, and working for its selective elimination.

29 Critchlow, p. 165.

30 Frank Notestein to Bernard Berelson, April 27, 1971, Notestein Papers, Box 8, Princeton University.


35 Ibid., p. 11.


38 The Tiahrt Amendment.

39 See Betsy Hartmann, Reproductive Rights and Wrongs (Boston: South End Press, 1995).