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# An Economic Appraisal of Food and Population

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To sell one's body for a mere living is considered shameful; how should we condemn those who prostitute their minds, merely to gain worldly honours? If only I were gifted with the tongue and the courage of an Emile Zola so that I could say to the economist of today "I accuse"! Alas for human frailty! The science of economics, which should enunciate principles for political governance and formulate policies for economic progress, has been debased into an instrument of politics, and the economist, who should be the mentor of the statesman, has become a mere tool in the hands of the politician.

In the *possivistic* — scientific intellectual climate of the 19th century, there was born the notion that economics and ethics do not mix. No wonder Carlyle dismissed economics as a dismal science. The retreat from reality into a purely abstract and mathematical analysis reflected the loss of faith in Providence and the new belief in rationalism. Today, the economist, pandering to the foibles and follies of the politician, divorces himself from moral principles and invites the condemnation of a Ruskin who called economics the gospel of mammon.

In the intellectual vacuum in

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which the politician operates, there is ample opportunity for sowing the seed of suspicion, for confusing the issue, and ultimately for sabotaging principle, for the sake of expediency. "Hungry, are you?" Homeless? And poor too? Then — here is an easy and simple remedy. The prior question as to why you are hungry, landless and poor is dismissed as irrelevant; a solution is found for the symptom, not the disease!

You, doctors, will appreciate the point. Let us look at the symptoms and hunt for the disease. Are the world's inhabitants landless? Only one-third of the world's cultivable land is used today, fully and effectively, for the growth of food — only a third! In Africa and in South America — both of which are dubbed over-populated countries — there are immense areas of good cultivable land. Nearer home, large parts of Burma and Thailand, two-thirds of Ceylon, nine-tenths of Malaya, and the whole of Indonesia, outside Java, lie uncultivated.

Are the world's inhabitants overcrowding the earth, so that we, the advanced people, should book early a plot on the moon? Here is a shock, which should give you immediate relief. The density of population in the so-called over-populated countries of Africa and Asia, is less than the average density in the whole world. Strangely, the highest density of population is shown

by the most advanced region in the world, namely Central Europe. Again, contrary to general belief, the annual growth of population in countries, shamefully labelled as backward, is 2.3% in Asia and 2.4% in Africa against the world's average of 2.1%, and Central America's 2.9%. The latest trend in population statistics shows that India's growth had stabilized around 2.1% that is, no bigger than the world's figure.

Is the citizen of the world faced with famine? Some of you will recall those dreary days of the Thirties, when even cattle refused to eat wheat which had to be dumped into the sea, when Brazil's coffee crop was so plentiful that it had to be burnt, when the Indian farmer could not make a living out of his profession. That was long ago, but the position today, surprisingly enough, is not very different. Only last week, the same issue of *The Economic Times* carried two interesting head-lines; one highlighted the surplus production of farm products in Europe with the sensational announcement: "International Egg Market Crisis"; the other referred to enormous wheat crops this season in the words: "Canadian Grain Shippers fear international wheat-price war in 1965." In the United States of America, after the boost given to agriculture during the 2nd World War, Government has been compelled to enact legislation that guarantees both a fair price to the farmer as well as the purchase of unsold stocks of wheat. And the whole structure of the European

Common Market is in jeopardy because of General de Gaulle's insistence on a minimum price for the agricultural products of France. Nearer home, this land of ours which is supposed to be facing starvation, there is a report in Tuesday's newspaper that the Madras Govt. has had to guarantee a minimum price for paddy. And "support prices" have been promised for rice by the Maharashtra Govt. This is nothing new. During the past decade there has been a steady diversion in agricultural activity from food crops to cash crops, proof again that there is a shortage of food! Today, the surplus states, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and the Punjab, refuse to release their excess stocks, because the prices offered by the deficit-states are unremunerative! In the face of such evidence, how can any citizen in his senses raise the bogey of famine? If anything, the world suffers not from want but from plenty! There is no scarcity, only a scare!

To complete the picture, India annually produces 80 million tons of food grains; and when the harvests are poor, imports account for another 3 to 4 million. Hence the justification for the Government's argument that the food shortage is only temporary and marginal. In other words, if there be a crisis, it is entirely man-made! It is not a case of under-production; it is a case of uneven distribution.

On the larger canvas of the world, the picture is even rosier. The land surface measures 131 million square kilometres, of which 77 million is

good temperate farm land, even ignoring the Swedish and Finnish experiments which have shown that another 14 million square kilometres in Alaska, Canada and Soviet Russia, hitherto regarded as unsuitable for agricultural cultivation, can be made to yield good satisfactory harvests. The significance of this figure, according to a noted authority, is that it can support, at the level of the Dutch who are probably the healthiest and best-fed among peoples, a world population of 28 billion, nearly nine times the size of today's numbers! And the noted economist goes on to say that if we care to contemplate a predominantly cereal diet, and we calculate on Japanese standards of production and consumption, the agricultural resources of the world can support a population of 92 billion. Today we are only 3 billion!

These are unchallengeable facts, not political speculations, not economic fantasies, not statistical absurdities. Figures never lie, though it has been well said that liars can figure. There is an unfortunate tendency, in most discussions of the economics of food-production and population-growth, to ignore a very important fact, demonstrated at every stage of our history on earth, that the increase in education, the hope of a brighter future, and the impact of better living, have always tended to reduce the birth-rate. Greece and Rome and Egypt in ancient days, Germany, England and France in the late 19th century, and Japan and the United States in this century, are all examples of nature's wonderful working.

Equally inexplicable is the ostrich-like attitude of the prophets of doom who forget the lesson of history that every pressure of population has acted as a spur to economic progress. Wisely have the ancients coined the phrase; *With each mouth to feed, God provides two hands.*

This is seemingly an old wives' tale with no basis in truth; but it is amply supported by the well-known phenomenon of a tremendous upsurge of productivity, which according to a noted economist, is increasing at a rate sufficient to double our output in 30 years. "At this rate," he says, "our descendants only three centuries hence — if we have not been obliterated by some nuclear catastrophe — will be a thousand times as productive as we are." And Colin Clark, Director of the Agricultural Research Institute at Oxford concludes with these memorable words: "It is clear, from all this, that our duty towards our descendants both immediate and remote, is NOT to devise means of effectively preventing their existence. . . ."

Self-preservation is indeed a primary instinct and procreation is its natural corollary. Both these wages lead inevitably to healthy preoccupation with availability of food and pressure of population. It is true that fear of famine is an ancient and recurring phenomenon; even today, it is not unusual for one country to suffer from an embarrassment of unwanted food, while another is in the grip of a shortage, akin to famine. In our own country, there are surplus states and deficit states. But famine, as a

world-phenomenon, is only existent in the minds of family planners, sterilisation advocates and abortionists! Even though the theory has long been exploded that an increase in human race jumps in a geometric progression while food increase proceeds only in arithmetical progression; even though the Malthusian prediction of the 18th century continues to be falsified by developments in agricultural and industrial techniques; even though, all along in the history of the human race, pressure of population, which compelled the earlier generations to become nomadic in their search for food and pasture, has led to the tremendous and unbelievable miracle of human ingenuity, yet the bogey of famine and overpopulation is being raised to the degradation of the highest values of life and to the eternal shame of man as Nature's supreme masterpiece, moulded in the image of God, now a little Fallen Angel!

IF—and it is a big IF—the world is overpopulated, if there is surplus labour, if each new baby spells a threat to the stability of the worker, how is it that all the world over, even in this so-called poor, famine-stricken over-populated land of ours, so much urgency is attached to mechanisation in the industrial and agricultural field? IF there is a superabundance of workers, present and potential, how is it that wages everywhere continue to show an upward curve? IF there is excess of population, why is so much ingenuity devoted to labour-saving devices in trade and industry, why so much energy used in

devising and producing computers and calculators and electronic controls, why a worship of the whole scheme of automation as a science? This is not jugglery in economics, it is just sheer common sense!

If the earth is being populated by people jostling for each other's food and jostling for each other's job, why is a production on production in Europe, Japan and the United States of America, forced on the money-grabbing capitalists by a chronic shortage of labour? Permit me, to read the recent report, not about the greedy capitalists' desire to eliminate labour but about the Trade Union demand for Automation:—

Labour in West Germany is pressing for automation of industry. Unwilling to work longer hours and realizing that imported labour, now 4.5% of the total work force and one million strong, cannot be continually increased, German workmen see in greater automation the only means for industry to fulfil its mounting orders and keep prosperity at its high level.

Although France has, for the time being, more foreign workers even than Germany, this state of affairs is temporary there, whereas in West Germany there appears to be no hope of obtaining enough workers in this generation. These facts put West German labour in the unique position of urging employers to make their production methods increasingly automatic.

Pause and ponder, my dear friends, on another fallacy perpetrated by family planners and birth-controllers. Enlightened as we claim to be in this year of grace, proud as we are of the spirit of tolerance, shout as we do of our faith in the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God, there is almost everywhere a conflict between the

native and the foreigner, and a whole complex of social and moral and economic problems, grows around a mixed colony. Yet despite the colour-problem, Central Europe and Great Britain are painfully dependant on coloured labour. Witness the peculiar two-way traffic in technical and economic aid: India borrows millions of marks, pounds and dollars and imports hundreds of highly qualified and technical personnel, and yet—poor, starved, illiterate as we are supposed to be—we export semi-skilled labour in thousands to Great Britain and Canada, and in hundreds to France, Italy and Germany. Why this two-way traffic? Surely if planned parenthood, (not responsible parenthood, as we understand it) is such a panacea for all our ills, why has Europe been reduced to this state of poverty? Today, the hewer of wood and the drawer of water, today the coolie who carries the white man's burden, is supplied by India and Africa; tomorrow, where will there be surplus labour? Doubtless, it will come from the Moon!

Some of you may recall Marshal Petain's pathetic plea on France's shameful capitulation to Germany. With tears in his voice, he cried "Too few sons, too few arms." That was in 1940. In 1954, at the World Population Conference, Prof. Sauvy, the leader of the French delegation, made a quite unanswerable statement when he said that if population-restriction were the key to economic progress, France by now, after a century and half of it, should have become one of the richest countries in the world! It is one of the poorest in Europe!

To students of economics, there is a very simple truth which is sought to be put into cold storage by population-planners. The text-books teach us that labour, with land and capital, is a factor of production, a source of wealth, an invaluable asset. Today, it is being perverted into a liability, a pool of poverty, a morass of misery. Long long ago, Plato wisely remarked: *We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy is when men are afraid of the light.* And he added: *Science will and can show the light, provided men can face up to it.*

In September this year, Dr. Shushila Nayar, Union Minister for Health stated in Parliament: There is a correlation of birth-rate with the level of education, in India. She quoted the findings of the National Sample Survey to show that the number of children born to a woman is 2.6, if she has studied up to the intermediate and above; 4.2 if a matriculate; 4.5 if up to middle school, and over 6 among illiterates. Yet, we allocate annually to education a miserable 3 crores of rupees while the Defence Budget gets 870 crores out of a total expenditure of 2100 crores!

At the flowering of Hellenic culture, Socrates was condemned to death and forced to drink the hemlock because he was held guilty of corrupting youth. Today, high honours are bestowed on people who preach that morality does not enter into business and politics, that the end justifies the means, that the greatest good is the sabotage of the womb!