

**THE
POPULATION
BOMB**
(Revised)

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PROLOGUE

The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now. At this late date nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate, although many lives could be saved through dramatic programs to "stretch" the carrying capacity of the earth by increasing food production and providing for more equitable distribution of whatever food is available. But these programs will only provide a stay of execution unless they are accompanied by determined and successful efforts at population control. Population control is the conscious regulation of the numbers of human beings to meet the needs not just of individual families, but of society as a whole.

Nothing could be more misleading to our children than our present affluent society. They will inherit a totally different world, a world in which the standards, politics, and economics of the past decade are dead. As the most influential nation in the world today, and its largest consumer, the United States cannot stand isolated. We are today involved in the events leading to famine and ecocatastrophe; tomorrow we may be destroyed by them.

Our position requires that we take immediate action at home and promote effective action worldwide. We

must have population control at home, hopefully through changes in our value system, but by compulsion if voluntary methods fail. Americans must also change their way of living so as to minimize their impact on the world's resources and environment. Programs which combine ecologically sound agricultural development and population control must be established and supported in underdeveloped countries. While this is being done, we must take action to reverse the deterioration of our environment before our planet is permanently ruined. It cannot be overemphasized, however, that no changes in behavior or technology can save us unless we can achieve control over the size of the human population. The birth rate must be brought into balance with the death rate or mankind will breed itself into oblivion. We can no longer afford merely to treat the symptoms of the cancer of population growth; the cancer itself must be cut out.

FOREWORD

Man can undo himself with no other force than his own brutality. It is a new brutality, coming swiftly at a time when, as Loren Eiseley says, "the need is for a gentler race. But the hand that hefted the axe against the ice, the tiger, and the bear now fondles the machine gun as lovingly."

The roots of the new brutality, it will become clear from *The Population Bomb*, are in the lack of population control. There is, we must hope and predict, a chance to exert control in time. We would like to predict that organizations which, like the Sierra Club, have been much too calm about the ultimate threat to mankind, will awaken themselves and others, and awaken them with an urgency that will be necessary to fulfillment of the prediction that mankind will survive.

It was only twelve years ago that we even suggested, in any Sierra Club publication, that uncontrolled population was a menace. We went far enough to write: "People are recognizing that we cannot forever continue to multiply and subdue the earth without losing our standard of life and the natural beauty that must be part of it. . . . These are the years of decision—the decision of men to stay the flood of man."

In the next two years we worried about the battle of man versus his own numbers and were concerned that growth itself was growing and were not joyful about

the imminence of California's outstripping New York.

It was Professor Raymond Cowles who shook us loose with a provocative address before a Sierra Club conference, "The Meaning of Wilderness to Science."

What in the late fifties had seemed heretical soon was not so. For the complaints that I had received about mentioning population problems in early speeches, there were more vociferous complaints if I forgot to mention the big problem. In just two or three years it became possible to question growth, to suggest that DNA was greater than GNP, to predict that man had enough genius to require that science and technology be put to good purpose. He could limit his numbers. He could limit his heretofore unslackened appetite for destroying wilderness. He could go back over the nine-tenths or so of the earth that had already felt his touch, sometimes a gentle touch but too often brutal, and do better where he had been. He could start with Manhattan, or Los Angeles.

Whatever resources the wilderness still held would not sustain him in his old habits of growing and reaching without limits. Wilderness could, however, provide answers for questions he had not yet learned how to ask. He could predict that the day of creation was not over, that there would be wiser men, and they would thank him for leaving the source of those answers. Wilderness would remain part of his geography of hope, as Wallace Stegner put it, and could, merely because wilderness endured on the planet, prevent man's world from becoming a cage.

The good predictions could be entertained—the notion of predicting a more and more desirable future, not just a more and more crowded one.

—DAVID BROWER

Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

I have understood the population explosion intellectually for a long time. I came to understand it emotionally one stinking hot night in Delhi a few years ago. My wife and daughter and I were returning to our hotel in an ancient taxi. The seats were hopping with fleas. The only functional gear was third. As we crawled through the city, we entered a crowded slum area. The temperature was well over 100, and the air was a haze of dust and smoke. The streets seemed alive with people. People eating, people washing, people sleeping. People visiting, arguing, and screaming. People thrusting their hands through the taxi window, begging. People defecating and urinating. People clinging to buses. People herding animals. People, people, people, people. As we moved slowly through the mob, hand horn squawking, the dust, noise, heat, and cooking fires gave the scene a hellish aspect. Would we ever get to our hotel? All three of us were, frankly, frightened. It seemed that anything could happen—but, of course, nothing did. Old India hands will laugh at our reaction. We were just some overprivileged tourists, unaccustomed to the sights and sounds of India. Perhaps, but the problems of Delhi and Calcutta are our problems too. Ameri-