



NEGATIVE POPULATION GROWTH

THE NPG FORUM

CLINTON ON POPULATION, PART 1.

Sobering News from the Real World

by Lindsey Grant

The Clinton administration is at mid-term, and the political landscape has been changed by the Republican landslide last November. This may be a good time to see what the Government has done or not done about population growth and to look ahead at what may be expected.

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As the story goes, the optimist said “this is the best of all possible worlds” and the pessimist agreed. What they meant depends on what they expected.

The Clinton administration’s performance on population issues would probably satisfy the pessimist and disappoint the optimist. On international population assistance, and measured against the preceding two administrations, it has done well. Measured against third world needs, it has not done nearly so well. As to U.S. population growth and despite the presence in the administration of people like the Vice President and Under Secretary of State Tim Wirth — it has done almost nothing and may not recognize there is a problem.

The possibilities for the rest of the term must now be judged against the Republican victories last November and the adjustments the Democrats will make as they attempt to regain lost ground.

To put the policies in the context of the problem, let us look first at what is happening to population and to the country.

The Problem

The nation more than trebled from 76 million in 1900 to 262 million now, and about 43 percent of that growth consisted of post-1900 immigrants and their descendants. A conservative projection with some decline in immigrants’ fertility leads to a population of 397 million in 2050 and 492 million in 2100. About 91 percent of that growth would be post-2000 immigrants and their descendants. If fertility and immigration stay where they are, the figure goes up to 440 million by 2050 and passes a half billion long before the end of the century. Growth will be even faster if fertility rises to reflect the higher average fertility of immigrants, compared to the native born.

That begins to put us in a league with China and India, and we would be far more destructive because of our style of living. We are already suffering the environmental pressures generated by population growth; our cities are disintegrating and a generation of youth being wasted. And there is more to come. We are assaulted by urban problems and unemployment, the energy transition, nuclear

waste and sewage sludge. More city dwellers will be drinking water from sewage plants. We are threatened by the loss of biodiversity, even as we watch the rising resistance of agricultural pests and human pathogens to pesticides and medicines. Acid rain, climate change, water resource depletion, topsoil loss and stagnating agricultural yields, more pressure on our forests, wetlands and fishery (which is already in a state of collapse.)¹

The purpose of this paper is not to repeat the evidence but rather to make a point that should be self-evident: U.S. population growth and its driving engine, immigration, should be central issues in governmental policy making.

Population is not even treated as a peripheral issue.

Population Assistance: the Good First Act

This section, regrettably, will be brief.

One of President Clinton’s first actions was to reverse the Reagan/Bush position that population growth is irrelevant to third world economic success.

Following up on that change, the Clinton budgets have more than doubled U.S. population assistance abroad, to nearly \$600 million, in the face of a declining overall foreign aid program. Population assistance is still only about 5 percent of total U.S. foreign aid, and it is much less than the U.S. Government itself recognizes would be necessary to play our part in meeting unmet contraception needs in the third world. There is nevertheless real progress, in the face of political realities such as the domestic unpopularity of foreign aid and the Israeli-Egyptian stranglehold on about half of that aid. A decade earlier, President Reagan proposed to zero out all U.S. population assistance. The U.S. Government has come a long way back toward its traditional leadership in population aid.

The New Tower of Babel

Something ominous has taken place as the participants in the political dialogue have multiplied in recent years. Attention to the

dangers of population growth has been submerged by dozens of different voices pressing parochial agendas. The agendas in themselves are sometimes worthy, but we head for disaster as the support for a population policy fragments and the role of population growth in the human future is forgotten.

Representatives of American Indian groups assert that non-indigenous populations are the source of their problem and that "overpopulation is not an issue for indigenous peoples"² even though American Indian fertility is the highest in the nation.

U.S. Women of Color (USWOC) takes the position that poverty should be attacked "by tackling social and economic imbalances, not just by pushing contraceptives. We don't want to wait until the 'unmet need' for contraceptives has been satisfied before realizing that we have utterly neglected to boost social and economic progress and failed to alleviate poverty."³ Those people have yet to consider that a population policy might help achieve their aims, and consequently they bitterly oppose the idea.

The *Earth Island Journal* carries a "declaration" that population and immigration are the "least" of causes of environmental damage, that illegal immigration is the fault of the industrialized countries, that immigrants help rather than harm the economy, etc. etc.⁴ Faced with this sort of advocacy, and concerned to retain their own constituency, the main line environmental groups address population only in anodyne generalities and avoid positions on immigration.⁵

Even more significant is the role of militant feminist groups. The Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights demands that the Population Council stop research on antifertility or contraceptive vaccines. The president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) told a press conference that "there can be no advancement in the world if the status of women is not improved".⁶

The new stridency and the polarization of our politics have rendered the traditional politics of compromise inoperable. It does no good to say to the true believer: "I agree that your cause is reasonable, and I will support it, but give me the same support for population control. It will help you." The answer is likely to be: "My cause is the *only* cause!"

Cairo: the Commandeered Conference.

Faced with this sort of militancy, the administration decided to join them rather than fighting them. Department of State Undersecretary Tim Wirth remarked of the U.S. role at the UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) that "women's groups pretty much drove this."⁷

The Programme produced in Cairo at the ICPD last September contains hundreds of recommendations about women's rights and other issues, but almost literally none about population. The assumption is that, given unimpeded freedom of choice, the women of the world will choose the socially desirable fertility level. Therefore, money spent on women's advancement is the most effective way to pursue population goals.

These assumptions are simply speculation. There is no justification for the assumption that free choice will, unguided, lead to the socially desirable level of fertility, and U.S. experience suggests otherwise. It is myth masquerading as truth.

Nowhere does the Programme say that population growth should stop. Nowhere are growing countries urged to give a high priority to stopping (or even slowing) population growth. Governments are urged to "support the principle of voluntary choice in family planning." (section 7 15) The Programme is negative

about any stronger action, including "schemes involving incentives and disincentives." (section 7.22)⁸

The Programme has gotten it backwards. At one point, it says "Eradication of poverty will contribute to slowing population growth and to achieving early population stabilization." (section 3.15) The problem is that you can't get there from here. With the third world working age population growing some 60 million per year, and the ILO reporting that one-third of those in the labor force do not earn a minimal subsistence wage, this "solution" simply ducks the issue. A better bet would be to turn it around: a successful population policy would help reduce poverty.

The Programme calls for universal health care, universal primary education, jobs and leadership roles for women, in an era when unemployment is rising, national budgets are caught in the increasing costs of dealing with pollution and unemployment and their consequences, living standards are declining, and many governments are impotent in the face of overwhelming immediate problems. You cannot spend enough to achieve those goals when you don't have enough even now. You must identify those things that will do most to match the reality with the dream.

As William Catton has remarked, "to exalt goals that unalterable circumstances make unattainable is to play with dynamite."

Longtime Sierra Club population activist Judith Kunovsky has given perhaps the most telling response to the argument that population will take care of itself if we take care of women's needs and social inequity. At a Sierra Club round table, it was proposed that in order to deal with population growth "We need to relearn how we treat each other, how whites treat blacks, how men treat women, how rich treat poor, how educated treat uneducated... The patterns of dominating the oppressed..." Judy responded: "The problems you are describing have been around for thousands of years, and we don't even have a hundred in which to make this stupendous change... Resource shortages and population-driven problems are already causing violence throughout the world as people retreat into their own ethnic / religious / national groups for some measure of security. The earth's ecological system, on which we depend for survival, is already threatened... We really have very little time to make very dramatic transitions."⁹

Most modern Americans endorse the principle of women's equality, and population advocates have an interest in bettering women's status. Apart from its intrinsic merit, it would probably eventually contribute to a reduction in fertility. The problem is that the third world is not within sight of achieving all the good things that Cairo advocates, and the resources of the richer countries cannot do it for them. If as I believe stopping population growth is a condition precedent for the eventual achievement of those goals, and if funds are not unlimited, the issue for a population conference should be "what uses of limited funds would achieve the biggest bang for a buck in lowering fertility." At Cairo, they undertook instead to subvert existing population programs and to divert resources and attention from population programs to women's issues.

The Cairo conference explicitly disavowed the "narrow" population programs, including those developed by the U.S. Agency for International Development, that have had some success in lowering third world fertility. Heretofore, the focus has been on assuring the availability of contraceptives and knowledge about them, promoting awareness of the threat that population growth poses for the pursuit of national goals, and rallying indigenous leaders to promote the population movement. (The connection between women's fertility and their status has been recognized, but it is true that because of

bureaucratic resistances and inertia, not enough has been done to make use of that connection.)

At the practical level, there is not enough money for direct population programs, and the Cairo Programme would divert some of it into other causes. The administrative costs for “reproductive health” and AIDS prevention two-thirds of their cost are taken from “family planning.” (sec.13.15)

If the administration shifts to the Cairo Programme for its policy guidance, U.S. policy on third world population growth will consist of rhetoric more than practical advice, and the hard-won funds for family planning assistance will now be fair game for anything that can be construed as “women’s and reproductive health” or even for the more general Cairo objectives such as helping minorities, children, the aged, or indigenous peoples, or “eliminating poverty”

Unfortunately the U.S. Government played an active role in creating the Programme, now endorses it, and has modified its statements accordingly. Tim Wirth probably understands the dangers of population growth as well as any U.S. political leader, but he sometimes shifts his rhetoric to accommodate his new constituency. In a March 30, 1994, speech on the Cairo Conference, he said that “the empowerment, employment and involvement of women must be the overriding catalyst for common purpose in... Cairo.... At the end of this century, the extent to which we fostered the transition to sustainable development will be measured in part by our success in refocusing scarce resources and redirecting national priorities on behalf of women...” He listed seven objectives, all of which were directed toward women’s issues; none touched on population growth and only one of them included a reference to “voluntary family planning.” A good speech on women’s rights but not on population.

The Programme says very little about migration, perhaps the most politically explosive demographic issue in the world today other than to call for the good treatment of migrants. After a brief skirmish, a third world proposal to make family reunification across borders into a “right” was somewhat fudged to call upon receiving countries to “recognize the vital importance of family reunification” and adjust their laws accordingly (sec.10.12) The point is far from minor, and the U.S. Government accepted the language, even though Tim Wirth in April 1994 had called for more attention to migration at Cairo. U.S. immigration policy particularly since 1965 has centered on family reunification. This has been a primary reason for the growth of immigration. Any effort to control immigration must address family “chain migration” and the Government’s acquiescence in this formula suggests its lack of interest in the subject.

U.S. Population Growth: the Missing Issue.

As often happens, the most important thing about the U.S. position at Cairo was what wasn’t there. The Cairo Programme was meant to apply to all nations — including the United States. Clearly, the government was thinking about the third world. Indeed, Tim Wirth’s March 30th speech would sound ludicrous if it were read as applying to the U.S., where most of the women’s rights he advocated already exist.

Wirth apparently believes that population growth is just a third world problem.

The Vice President makes that explicit. In his impassioned and moving book *Earth in the Balance* (1992), he said that “No goal is more crucial to healing the global environment than stabilizing human population.” But he was thinking of the third world. As to the United States, he simply listed it among the countries “with relatively stable populations.”

Pretty clearly, neither Wirth nor Gore considered recent projec-

tions of U.S. population growth. Nor have they made the connection between immigration and population growth. Underlying their statements is the assumption perhaps unconscious that third world population growth will simply stay in the third world. In fact, immigration has become the major demographic driving force here and in western Europe. If the administration’s two best thinkers on population issues are still at that stage, one may be pretty sure that U.S. population is a non-issue for the rest.

The Ambivalent Advocate.

President Clinton’s June 29, 1994 population speech to the National Academy of Sciences summarizes the state of his thinking. The President emphasized the need to invest in women. He added that “reducing population growth without providing economic opportunities won’t work” and that the population problem would be pursued “as part of the larger issue of sustainable development” He said that “Our population policy is rooted in the idea that the family should be at the center of all our objectives” but he did not elaborate how that relates to population growth. In short, to be unkind: bromides à la Cairo.

Perhaps more fundamental, the President suffers from an internal dichotomy. The speech reflected a mindset that has not yet absorbed the lessons of a finite Earth under environmental onslaught. He would solve every problem by growth. “We’re going to talk about what we can do within the G-7 to promote not just growth, but more jobs because a lot of the wealthy countries are finding they can’t create jobs even when they grow their economy.”

On world population, he said variously that “you must reduce the rate of population growth” or (ambiguously) “stabilize population growth.”

Few people in the population movement would consider that a sufficient goal. If the **rate** were halved, third world population would still double every three generations. The Earth could not sustain it. The President himself, in a different context (Earth Day 1993) observed that there may be nine billion people on the planet in the future, and that “its capacity to support and sustain our lives will be very much diminished.” Unfortunately he also spoke of “keep(ing) faith with those who left the Earth to us.” The first step toward ecological wisdom is that the Earth does not belong to us.

Even the Vice President, for all his eloquence, has dared go no farther than to decry “rapid (world) population growth” and call for its “slowing” (address to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, 1993). It is very difficult for a politician to come right out and state a difficult and perhaps unpopular truth, even if he knows it is true.

The President or his apologists might argue that “of course growth cannot go on forever, but we badly need it right now, to create jobs and eliminate injustice, and to permit the third world to achieve the living standards that the first world enjoys.”

The answer to that is that the immediate grows into the long term. Whatever happened to the idea of “sustainability” so honored in the abstract, so ignored in practice? It is wise to focus on jobs. Indeed, technological change has led to the situation the President described; economic growth in industrial countries does not necessarily translate into more jobs. However, the dream of social justice and prosperity for all cannot be achieved for an expanding population, and the effort would fundamentally alter the Earth’s ecosystem. It can only be achieved if we attack the twin evils of population growth and destructive consumption. Starting now.

The dream of perpetual growth is past. We cannot grow our way out of our problems.

The Silent Center.

Perhaps the President should not be blamed. He is a politician, and there is very little political pressure on him to take a more forthright position on population growth.

At a personal level, I encounter everywhere — among friends, at lectures, on radio talk shows — the recognition that the twin problems of population growth and wasteful consumption are, along perhaps with social disintegration, the principal threats to America's future. If others believe that, they are silent. When did the reader last see an editorial, or hear a politician or TV pundit, call upon the President to address population growth?

They say we get the politicians we deserve. If this is the best we can do now, when will we do better? Meanwhile, one hears the ticking of the population clocks.

PCSD: The Tiny White Knight

In Washington, if you have a problem but don't want to address it, create a committee.

On June 14, 1993, the President created the Presidential Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD). He charged it with helping to "set policies to grow the economy and preserve the environment..." Five times, in uncharacteristically brief remarks, he returned to that theme, saying "That is what we mean by sustainable development." He said that energy-efficient and less polluting light bulbs, computers, refrigerators and automobiles would sell around the world and make America prosperous. In effect, he equated sustainability with environmentally benign technologies. He did not mention population growth. He said nothing about depletion of renewable resources or destructive levels of consumption.

The Council consists of a mix of cabinet members, industrialists, environmental organization leaders, and one labor union officer, with a judicious mix by gender and ethnicity. The co-chairs are an industrialist and an environmentalist. It does not include academicians or scientists, but there are some on the various working groups created to help carry out the mandate. It initially had seven Task Forces, covering some appropriate areas such as Energy and Transportation, Natural Resources, and Sustainable Agriculture. Others such as "Sustainable Communities" are almost certain to get mired in debate among proponents of different visions of Utopia. Inexplicably, the Population and Consumption Task Force was created only belatedly and over some opposition, after Tim Wirth made a very strong pitch that "the United States must adopt a process to address the impact of overpopulation/consumption."

The Council in April 1994 adopted a fifteen-point "Vision Statement" It was the sort of thing that one might expect such a group of well-intentioned people to adopt. Nevertheless, when put out for public comment, it was criticized from both sides: for being too "pro-growth" and for being both "anti-growth" and incompatible with "basic American values." So much for national consensus.

On population, the Vision called for stabilization "at a level consistent with the capacity of the earth to support its inhabitants." It was very general and did not address the U.S. specifically. It failed to address the question: "... at what consumption level, and with what margin of safety? Bangladesh? the United States?" I wish that it had gone beyond "sustainability" to the search for "optimum" Nevertheless, it did say "stabilize" rather than hiding behind vague language about "rapid population growth."

The Council's report is presently scheduled for next October, after which it will presumably dissolve, though its mandate can be extended to 1997. It would be premature to guess in detail as to

what will emerge. By current indications, it will probably be a good general primer on modern social and economic issues, and it may have some good ideas for resolving conflicts between environmental and industrial policy. However, if experience is a guide, it faces the following limitations:

- Irrelevancy. There has been a succession of such reports for nearly fifty years. None of them has had a perceptible effect on policy.¹⁰ To affect policy as it is made, any group trying to address the broad issue of "sustainability" must be in the action line, as the National Security Council is. It must be able to bring its concerns to bear as any new policy or development is discussed — welfare, health, the Haitian/Cuban boat people or whatever — **before** the policies are decided. Perhaps the best that can be said of the Council process is that some Cabinet members may read the things that are being written in their names, and that this may affect their own thinking — about the time they leave. One Secretary of Agriculture has already left.

- Lack of specific recommendations. If a press conference by the co-chairmen last October 21st is any indication, the Council will place a very high premium on unanimity or consensus, and this forces it to generalize. Only very specific recommendations — e.g. "There should be a federal carbon tax, rising to \$xx by 2000." — are likely to receive much attention or create specific issues on which the administration will feel it must take a position. However, such recommendations would stir up opposition everywhere. (Look what happened to the President's modest proposal for a fuel tax increase.) The new Republican Congress would react to an encroachment on their turf, and the President's advisers would be pressing the Council to cool it for political reasons.

- Impermanence. When the Council dissolves, there is no indication that there will be any continuing mechanism to incorporate its recommendations into policy.

- Bureaucracy. The Council will report to the President through the Director of the White House Office of Environmental Policy, which is now being folded into the Council on Environmental Quality. CEQ has been around for a generation and has never been able to carve out much of a place for itself in the decision process.

It pays to be cynical. One is not disappointed. The best bet is that the report will reach the President's desk, he will say "thank you" and that will be that.

The time would have been better spent within the system, hammering out specific proposals to deal with the real issues raised by "sustainability." On population policy, the Council activity permits the administration to say it is doing something. If it really wanted to do something, it should be seeking a "process" as Wirth said, to bring population issues into the policy process. (I will come back to this in the next NPG FORUM.)

The Republican Challenge.

Prospects for continued support for U.S. assistance to international population programs have dimmed with the November elections.

Senator Jesse Helms (R/NC), long-time scourge of "liberals" and opponent of foreign aid, is to take over the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Senator Mitch McConnell (R/KY) will become chair of the Senate Appropriations Foreign Operations Subcommittee. He has already said he wants to zero out all population assistance and all aid to Africa.¹¹ A tight budget will reinforce these negative signals about population assistance. The brief period of a rejuvenated U.S. role in international population aid is in for heavy going.

The effects of the elections on U.S. population growth are much less predictable.

The now famous "Contract with America" originated in the House Republican Conference and was endorsed by more than 300 Republican candidates for the House and by candidates for state and local positions. Three of the proposals in the Contract relate to population, undoubtedly by accident.

1 In reforming welfare, the Contract would prohibit welfare to minor mothers, limit AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) to five years, and deny increases for children born to mothers while on welfare. If carried out, these measures would make raising children much more unattractive for young unwed mothers. (The counter argument that AFDC does not encourage pregnancy is less than convincing.) It would also raise some horrendous questions about the well-being of the children who are born, anyway.

2. The Contract promised "a \$500 per child tax credit" One can only speculate how much a credit of this size would influence child-bearing. If anything, however, it is certainly pro-natalist.

3. The Contract would limit welfare benefits to citizens. That provision might discourage some people from bringing elderly "dependents" to the U.S., but the impact on population growth would be negligible. Perhaps more important, the anti-immigrant message might dissuade some would-be immigrants.

The tax credit idea is not new. The \$500 credit was in the Republicans' March 1994 budget proposal. In 1992, most of the presidential candidates — even Al Gore — offered some sort of proposal for exemptions or tax credits for children. The principal effect of the Contract proposal — aside from its fiscal irresponsibility — was to encourage President Clinton to make a counter-offer only slightly less "generous." He would give the credit for children below age 13. Both parties are thus inadvertently in favor of a pro-natalist proposal. Other recent laws and proposals will affect fertility and thus population growth. The Democrats' Family Leave Act is probably pro-natalist; on the other hand, they raised tax benefits in the Earned Income Credit but limited the benefits to two children, and thus could be seen as promoting the two child family. Both parties are calling for efforts to limit teenage pregnancies, which would depress fertility.

These demographic effects are accidental and conjectural. Immigration is the real current population issue.

A columnist remarked that there is a battle going on for the soul of the Republican Party. The center has shifted on immigration policy from advocacy of liberal immigration to opposition. Messrs. Kemp and Bennett opposed California's Proposition 187 (which calls for an end to most educational and welfare assistance to illegal aliens) and argued for a permissive view on immigration. They were roundly excoriated within the party.

The battle is far from over. The business interests that like more immigration because it provides cheap labor are hardly defeated, yet. In fact, Congressman Gingrich has already backed away from his "Contract" on the question of welfare payments to non-citizens. The Social Security Administration reported that the proposal would cause over 400,000 of them to lose Social Security SSI (Supplemental Security Income) benefits. Shortly thereafter, he told the National Restaurant Association that the Republicans would "revisit" that proposal. He went on to say: "I am very pro legal immigration. I think legal immigration has given America many of its most dynamic and creative citizens, and I think that we would be a very, very self-destructive country if we sent negative signals on legal immigration."¹²

On the other hand, the November elections brought advocates of more restrictive immigration policies into new and powerful roles. Two restrictionist Texans move into powerful House committee assignments: Archer into the Chairmanship of the Ways and Means Committee, Lamar Smith to chair the Immigration Subcommittee. A critical shift occurs in the Senate, where Senator Kennedy, arch foe of immigration control, is replaced by Senator Simpson, who advocates lower legal immigration, a better system of personal identification to control illegal immigration, and repeal of the 1966 Cuban Refugee Adjustment Act (which practically assures Cubans of legal residency if they can get to the United States). Simpson is seen as a moderate conservative on immigration; he differed with the House Republicans' "Contract" on the treatment of legal aliens and their children, and California's Proposition 187 on illegal aliens. He will probably carry considerable weight on both sides of the aisle.

Some sorting of priorities needs to be undertaken. Simpson would like to move on legal immigration levels; Smith counters that the first priority is illegal immigration. Rep. Elton Gallegly (R/CA) has been charged with putting together a special task force on immigration reform. The chances look pretty good that a proposal on immigration will emerge in Congress.

President Clinton is trying to govern a lion's den. In this era of polarized politics, he is unlikely to get very far with his international population policy but political strategy may force him to address immigration. If so, it hasn't happened yet.

Immigration: Policy by Accident

Representative Tony Beilenson says that "population is *the* big issue." Those of us who agree with him can draw little comfort from his assessment. The depressing fact is that the powers in Washington are not thinking about population.

Population policy is being made quite incidentally as a byproduct of immigration policy. Immigration is a very hot issue indeed, right now — because of the budgetary costs and the competition for jobs, not because of its impact on population growth. And the issue has reached Washington, not because of those effects, but because of the struggle for political advantage. (Perhaps the politicians are beginning to hear what public opinion polls have been reporting for years.)

Nevertheless, to a large degree immigration policy **is** population policy, even if it is accidental. If immigration is reduced, the country's growth rate will slow. If it is sharply reduced, the country will stop growing, barring a rise in fertility. If, by accident or design, immigration policy drives population, how does the administration stack up by that pragmatic test?

Very badly. To be charitable, it is rudderless. Each of us has our own version of "politically correct" and Democrats find it very hard to seem to be "against immigration." The Governors of California and Florida, and the belated Republican embrace of better control, have dragged the Democratic administration into addressing illegal immigration, but it has not gone willingly.

The Jordan Commission. The President after considerable delay appointed ex-Congresswoman Barbara Jordan to head the Commission on Immigration Reform, a temporary body created under the Immigration Act of 1990 to examine U.S. immigration policy. Jordan briefed Congress last August and the Commission submitted its first report in September.

The report came out in favor of restricting illegal aliens' access to all but emergency public health and welfare services. It also proposed the phased introduction of a system of identification that would permit the government to know who is and who is not legally in the U.S. A better system of identification would help to control crime

and drugs and to assure that the tax burden is equitably shared. It is essential for the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), is to work. IRCA makes it illegal to hire illegal aliens, thus in theory diminishing the appeal of the United States to prospective immigrants. Official study groups for years have underlined the need for better identity documents, but that provision was gutted as the price of passage for the 1986 act. Since then, the principal effect of the act has been to generate a huge business in false documentation.

Barbara Jordan was the ideal person to reintroduce the issue of identity. A Black woman with excellent liberal credentials and considerable personal stature, she could make the proposal without providing a target for those who see the ability to remain anonymous as a natural right.

The White House reaction has all the earmarks of an internal struggle. Leon Panetta said that the Justice Department would make recommendations in the fall (it didn't), and that the Jordan proposal would be "one of the ideas we need to look at", but he warned about violating "individual rights." An unidentified spokesman dismissed the Jordan proposal. These things sat until January.

The President himself has admitted that his health reform proposal would not work without means of identifying who is entitled. This is another of those "politically correct" hot buttons. On the eve of an election the administration did not dare touch the proposal, whatever its merits and despite the fact that the United States is probably alone among modern nations in having no reliable way of ascertaining who a person is. Somebody in the White House is hung up over symbols and myths and is thereby resisting an opportunity to do something real about illegal immigration.

"Accepting the Immigration Challenge" The administration in November 1994 published a triennial report, as required by the immigration act of 1986. (This is separate from the "Jordan commission" report.) It has good news, bad news, and most ominously no news at all for those concerned by mass immigration's propulsion of already high U.S. population growth.

The good news is that the report professes a commitment of the Clinton Administration to curb illegal immigration and to halt the abuses of political asylum that have swelled the backlog of applications to more than 400,000 in 1994, and increasing by some 150,000 a year. The administration has begun to build up the numbers, equipment and technology of the U.S. Border Patrol, concentrating on major points of illegal entry, such as San Diego and El Paso. The early numbers from the border give reason for hope.

As a deterrent to fraudulent claims of asylum, the administration has begun to deny work authorization permits to pending claimants for six months and is working to speed up both the decisions on claims and the deportation of those rejected. Washington hopes that shortening the waiting period for a ruling on claims from 24 months to 6 months will end a key disincentive to frivolous claims.

Other promised measures to combat illegal immigration and the accompanying abuse of asylum involve a crackdown on alien smugglers, more diplomatic pressure on sending countries, such as Taiwan and China, more cooperation with major air carriers, and better identification and swifter expulsion of criminal aliens. (The promise of "better identification" be it noted, is in conflict with what the White House was saying about the Jordan commission proposal.)

INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) expenditures have been rising about 10 percent per year since 1990. They are scheduled for a 20 percent rise in FY1995. Personnel strength, not counting short-term hires for the 1987-90 amnesty program, has remained essentially flat since 1985. Positions are projected to increase 7 percent this fiscal year.

For these efforts, however, the Clinton administration deserves limited credit at best. The Administration has professed its determination to manage the border and the asylum process while sending contrary signals by rhetoric and actions that promote illegal entry and asylum claims. As we will see later, the government has been lamentably indecisive in handling Haitian, Cuban, Chinese and Salvadoran asylum seekers and illegal residents.

In its rhetoric, the administration continues to hold out the United States as the willing recipient of all the world's oppressed, with no limits. The language of the report commits the country to an asylum policy that is breathtaking in its expansiveness and ultimately unrealizable:

"Under these reforms, anyone, from any place, at any time, despite entry or immigration status, may still apply for asylum in the United States, and not be returned to any place where he or she fears persecution due to race, religion, membership in particular social group, or political opinion."

The really bad news in the President's report is the news that is missing. The report fails to even acknowledge or discuss problems with legal immigration, now at nearly one million a year, and its consequences for the country's population and environmental future. Despite the role in immigration policy of environmentalist Al Gore, this report says not a word about the long-term soundness of the nation's population-resource balance. The report is short on analysis and long on frothy verbiage. Gore himself is prominently quoted as saying, "our approach to immigration must not be on closing borders, but on opening our hearts."

Rhetorical references to the country's immigration "traditions" and its need to maintain "generous" policies suggest an Administration committed basically to more of the same for legal immigration. Indeed, the report affirms that Washington feels compelled to deal with illegal immigration and asylum abuse largely because public anger could threaten our "generous" legal immigration.

Equally troubling is the President's quickness to affirm as national doctrine presumed benefits of legal immigration which are still in dispute in academia and within his own bureaucracy, such as job creation, "needed workers" for employers, and establishment of businesses. Whatever the outcome of the Jordan commission studies of immigration's costs and benefits, it sounds as if the President's mind is already made up.

Major immigration reform advocacies are demanding a moratorium on immigration so that the nation can decide how many immigrants should come and from where, and how should we enforce the rules. A moratorium is indeed needed, first of all a moratorium on the use of Ellis Island rhetoric in weighing the troubling demographic, environmental and resource implications of continuing mass immigration.¹³

Controlling the Border. Politics may have helped to drive the steps that have been taken. IRS personnel were transferred to San Ysidro just before the election, in an unsuccessful effort to placate California voters. At El Paso, the INS achieved some success in slowing the cross-border movement by transferring all available personnel to the border itself. Apparently, this was a local idea, and the first reaction from INS Washington was to worry about the political fallout.

INS has announced that work permits will henceforth be issued at the regional level rather than by local offices, to control the supply and restrict their illegal issuance (they are said to be worth about \$500 each.)¹⁴

Haiti and Cuba. The tragi-comedy of the "boat people" from Haiti and Cuba is a dramatic example of the troubles that result from

a vacillating policy

Part of the problem is the Cuban Refugee Adjustment Act of 1966, previously mentioned. It was passed in the enthusiasm of the Cold War, to score propaganda points, and it has assured Cubans of almost automatic permanent residence if they can get to the United States. Over the years, Haitians (whose economic situation is far more desperate) have, like the Cubans, been making their way to Florida, and they have learned that the charge of racism embarrasses the United States Government when it gives them less favorable treatment. They watch U.S. policy very closely for any signs of softness.

President Bush in May 1992 ordered the repatriation of Haitian boat people intercepted at sea, to forestall their landing and claiming asylum. Presidential candidate Clinton denounced the policy. When elected, however, he did not change it. Then, in April 1994, facing criticism from human rights groups, he allowed several hundred Haitians ashore in the United States for interviewing. Other Haitians got the word and started moving. On May 8, the White House announced that thenceforth they would not be allowed ashore, but would be interviewed aboard ships or at "safe havens" elsewhere.

For both Cubans and Haitians, the prospect of getting picked up for an interview, usually just off their own coast, seemed like a great idea, and they came in waves. The White House tried in July to reverse the May 8 announcement, but too late. We stuffed boat people into our Guantanamo base and negotiated with governments around the Caribbean to let us store them there.

In early January, having put Haiti's elected president back in office, we forcibly returned the Haitians from Guantanamo to Haiti.

The Cubans have given us more trouble. The 24,000 or so in Guantanamo are hanging tough. To stop further movement, we negotiated a deal with Castro. He stopped the boat people, and we promised to take at least 20,000 legal immigrants a year from Cuba — an unparalleled deal, and an end run around U.S. immigration laws, using the Attorney General's "parole" power. We insisted that those at Guantanamo would be processed under that agreement, and that we would not allow the Cubans to come from Guantanamo to the United States. Then, in November we took some old and ailing Cubans to the U.S. In December, the INS announced that we would move one-third of the others — children and their parents — to the United States. Cubans in Florida have a lot of political clout. Cubans we had stored in Panama rioted because they weren't getting the same treatment.

The Haitians and their allies, of course, screamed "racism" Parole was given to only 23 Haitians, all relatives of strongman Cedra, apparently as part of the deal to persuade him to leave.

The whole mess presented the country with an example — perhaps unique in our history — of immigration issues driving foreign policy. Our intervention in Haiti resulted, not from some sudden urge to "restore democracy" in that beleaguered country, but from the visceral recognition, at the last minute, that Florida and the United States cannot accommodate the flood of boat people.

Perhaps there is progress, of a sort. The last time there was one of these surges (the "Mariel" boatlift of 1980), President Carter initially welcomed them "with open arms and open hearts." As we have seen, the Vice President still goes in for "open hearts" but not when faced with an immediate test of the rhetoric.

The administration's visceral response was right, if belated, but only partly relevant to the problem. The boat people were not fleeing dictatorship; they have never had a functioning democracy. They were escaping a land that has been devastated by its population

growth. Population has almost doubled since 1960; the forested area has declined to less than 2 percent of the land area, and the remnant forests are still being cut. The soil has washed away, and the people are desperate. The surge of boat people occurred because the Haitians saw opportunity in a vacillating U.S. policy and hoped that they might be treated like Cubans.

Assisting Haiti's first elected president to return to his country was well enough, once we had gotten mired in Haitian politics, but Haitians are not going to stay obediently in Haiti even if democracy establishes a tentative foothold there. They will try to get to the United States and the possibility of a better life, and they will stop trying only if they are convinced that they will not be allowed to stay.

There are other potential "Haitis" around the world. If we are to avoid driving United States population toward the desperate conditions that prevail now in Haiti, we will need to reform our immigration policies and procedures so as to avoid drawing the desperate from elsewhere. We must convince Haitians and others that they will not be allowed to stay illegally in the United States.

Beyond that, if we are to help Haiti or anybody, we must recognize that there is little hope of success unless population growth is stopped and reversed. We should help them in that epochal task, but a military occupation itself doesn't tackle the job. By restoring some degree of order, it may in fact accelerate Haitian population growth.

Byzantium on the Potomac. The floundering was not limited to Cubans and Haitians. The government has been unable to develop a clear and consistent idea of what constitutes a refugee or asylee.

Since the Bush administration, the government and the courts have been wavering as to whether opposition to the Chinese government birth control program was grounds for granting Chinese asylum. In 1993 the Board of Immigration Appeals ruled it out. In 1994, when Chinese began wading ashore on both coasts, the INS started out firm. It put them in detention while their asylum applications were heard.

That lasted until August. Then the White House decided that if they really faced persecution for resisting Chinese birth control policies, Chinese should be allowed to stay in the U.S. Granting them refugee status was a bit embarrassing, however, so a new category was created (without benefit of law): "humanitarian relief." Now, they can stay, but in an indefinite legal limbo.

Another ambiguous message was the Clinton Administration's announcement in December 1994 that it would no longer extend the "temporary" protected status granted to Salvadoran migrants in 1990, because El Salvador is now peaceful. But at the same time an administration spokesman acknowledged that the nearly 200,000 Salvadorans affected would not necessarily have to go home. They can apply for political asylum (guaranteeing months or years of judicial process), or seek permanent residence status if they have an American spouse or have been in the U.S. for seven years. Those with work permits were promised nine months' stay of deportation.

Communist rule has ended, but we are accepting about five times more "refugees" from the erstwhile Soviet Union than we did in 1989. Twenty years after the end of the Vietnam war, we still taking in Vietnamese war refugees, despite any evidence of continuing persecution, and even as we move toward formal recognition of Vietnam.

We send a message of weakness with the vague and sometimes bizarre rules as to what constitutes grounds for asylum. A judge in 1990 allowed a Mexican gay's claim that his sexual preference would lead to harassment in Mexico. The Attorney General promoted the decision to a general principle in 1994. (Last August, the original Mexican asylee died in California of AIDS.) Another appli-

cant has successfully resisted deportation on the grounds that her daughters would be exposed to female circumcision if they went home to Nigeria. We have stretched the definitions beyond rational limits, and a good share of the world's population, if it could get here, could find a basis to claim asylum.

In a forthcoming NPG FORUM paper, we shall outline what the government might do to control illegal immigration, if it wished. The problem is that the government really doesn't really know what it wants to do about illegal immigration. As a result, it veers with every criticism and multiplies its problems. As to rising legal immigration, the administration quite clearly would rather just avoid the issue.

The 1995 State of the Union address. The President said very little about immigration. Buried deep in the speech was the statement that "All Americans... are rightly disturbed by the large numbers of illegal aliens entering our country. The jobs they hold might otherwise be held by citizens or legal immigrants; the public services they use impose burdens on our taxpayers." This was followed by a (much overstated) description of what the administration has done, a promise to speed the deportation of illegal aliens arrested for crimes, and a final almost throw-away promise to do more to "identify illegals in the workplace as recommended by the commission headed by... Barbara Jordan." After every evidence of a pitched struggle in the White House, he thus seems to have come down, albeit unenthusiastically, on the side of better identification. We shall wait to see if anything happens.

Sometimes, Presidents have to recognize where the buck stops, politically painful though it may be. Vacillation is not always good for a President, and the time has come for the Democratic Party to re-examine its traditional pro-immigration mindset. It could turn out to be good politics as well as good policy.

The Prospect

After two years in office, an administration that seemed to offer the prospect of a real U.S. population policy has shown that the hope was false. Population policy has become an accidental offshoot of immigration policy. Both parties are offering rhetorical praise of legal immigration, and both are equivocal about handling illegal immigration. And both parties are divided on both issues.

Nonetheless, the Republicans seem to be moving around the Democrats' flank. Governor Pete Wilson of California is a born-again hero in the immigration wars. While Senator, he fought in 1986 for the "agricultural labor" loophole and in 1990 for increased legal immigration. Now, reversing course, he seems to have legitimized immigration control as a Republican issue.

The Republicans may be getting tougher on immigration, but they are likely to oppose spending money to help third world nations

to deal with the problem at the source. The Democrats are somewhat better on that question, but abysmal on U.S. population issues.

It isn't clearcut. In Congress, Democrats (e.g. Sen Reid and Rep. Bilbray of Nevada) have sponsored or cosponsored bills to limit immigration. At the state level, Democratic Governor Graham in Florida based his successful reelection effort on the demand for a more responsible Federal role in immigration policy. In this and other areas such as welfare and health policy, political lines seem to be shifting: the states and their governors vs. the center, instead of Democrat vs. Republican. And the states are on the offensive. This probably means continuing pressure for better control of immigration, since the pain occurs at the state and local level.

What we are seeing is complex: the possibility of practical action on part of the population problem in the absence of any general national resolve to address it. What does this mean for those of us who believe that population growth must stop? I will offer some thoughts on that conundrum in the following NPG FORUM.

* * * * *

NOTES

- 1 The projections, and the environmental consequences, are available in Leon Bouvier & Lindsey Grant *How Many Americans?* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994) Recent Census Bureau projections are roughly comparable and also make the point that immigration will become the principal source of growth in the next century. The "constant fertility" projection was done for this paper.
- 2 National Audubon Society *Population Newsletter* Summer '94 p.5.
- 3 UNFPA *Populi*, May 1994, p.10.
- 4 *Earth Island Journal*, Spring (Northern Hemisphere), Fall (Southern Hemisphere) (sic), 1994.
- 5 See NPG FORUM paper *The Timid Crusade*, January 1994.
- 6 ICPD Newsletter No. 14, April 1994, p.7.
- 7 Susan Chira, "Women Campaign for New Plan to Curb the World's Population" *New York Times*, 4-13-94, pp A1, A12.
- 8 For a detailed discussion of the Cairo Conference, see NPG FORUM paper *The Cairo Conference: Feminists vs. the Pope*, July 1994. That paper analyzed the draft Programme, but the final version is substantially unchanged except for the use of compromise language on abortion.
- 9 *Sierra* September/October 1994, p.52.
- 10 For a history of "foresight" efforts such as this, and a summary of proposals that have been made for their improvement, see Lindsey Grant *Foresight and National Decisions: the Horseman and the Bureaucrat* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988; still in print but available more inexpensively from The World Future Society, Bethesda MD. 301-656-8274.)
- 11 AP 12-29-94.
- 12 AP Washington, January 9, 1995.
- 13 I am largely indebted to David Simcox for this section.
- 14 AP 1-1-95.



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