



FOOTNOTES

We're Already Bailing Out Mexico

by B. Meredith Burke, Ph.D.

Like the NAFTA debate, that on the proposed \$40 billion financial bailout of Mexico is silent on the demographic gulf separating the two countries. Yet the situation of a major industrialized country whose native-born population has replacement fertility or below sharing a long border with a higher-fertility country just emerging from third-world status is unique.

Demographically unschooled Americans are unaccustomed to factoring concerns about fertility and population growth rates into our international policy considerations. Even Doris Meissner, commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, persists in confusing a symptom — illegal immigrants seeking jobs — with its root cause: high population growth rates in the sending nations.

The sharp post-1980 surge in Mexican migration roughly coincided with the labor force entrance of the first few Mexican birth cohorts benefiting from the decreasing mortality rates beginning in the late 1950's. The just-released 1992 Mexican Demographic Survey recorded 3.9 million Mexicans age 40-44; 5.8 million age 20-24; and 10.7 million age 10-14.

The United Nations estimated Mexico's 1989 population at 86.7 million with two million additions annually. The 1992 Mexican survey found 85.6 million residents; a shortfall of seven million persons. It also found up to ten percent more women than men in the young adult age groups 20-39. Where have these people, particularly the men, vanished?

Certainly some have slipped across the border. IRCA, the Immigration and Reform Act of 1986, legalized the status of three million illegal aliens who had entered the country before 1983; about 80 percent were Mexicans. Since

IRCA the INS estimates four million new illegals, 1.5 million of whom are Mexicans, have arrived (other estimates go up to 5.1 million). This compares with 100,000 or fewer legal Mexican admissions annually.

But a substantial part of the shortfall is represented by births current and projected which Mexico has de facto exported. In 1992 Mexican born-women in the U.S. bore 275,000 or 6.8 percent of 4.05 million U.S. births. This compares to about two million births in Mexico. Mexico has effectively exported about 12 percent of births to its nationals while securing them an education far above the less-than-grade-school education it gave their parents. Mexico has thus obtained a terrific capital transfer.

California has provided most of this capital. In 1992 Mexican-born women bore 161,000 (double the 1985 number) or 26.8 percent of the state's 601,000 births. MediCal data indicate at least 70 percent of these mothers had entered the U.S. illegally. Using prior years' birth data to estimate school enrollment I calculated that in 1993 980,000 of California's K-12 enrollment were citizen children of Mexican-born mothers; I will round this to one million. Of course, there are also Mexican-born students legally here plus, according to the GAO, 336,000 illegal entrant children — presumably a majority Mexican-born — enrolled in K-12 in California in 1994-95.

At \$5,000 per student California spends about \$5 billion annually per million students. But English as a Second Language (ESL) students from poor families with a grade-school-educated family head and requiring various forms of compensatory education cost nearer \$8,000 per student. On education alone California is financing an \$8 billion aid program to Mexican nationals. (The vast majority are in house-

holds with below \$20,000 income who pay on average \$81 in taxes to the state General Fund which finances education.) If immigration and immigrant fertility continue apace and we do not enact the Beilenson-Gallegly bill restricting citizenship at birth to only those infants whose parents are legally here, by 2005 California will be educating 1.5 million citizen children of Mexican nationals. Proposition 187 adherents had it wrong: it is the services to citizen children of illegal entrants, all of whom are entitled at the very least to K-12 years of schooling and AFDC, which will bankrupt the state.

Small wonder that Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) told both the Treasury Secretary and the Secretary of State that she knew "no one in (her) constituency who is for it (the bail-out)."

Mexican fertility has declined since the Mexican government belatedly approved a national family planning program in late 1973. Rural women age 15-49 have a projected lifetime fertility of 4.9 (down from 6.8 for women age 45-49); urban women, 3 children (down from 4.7); and all women 3.5 children (1.75 times the long-term replacement number of two).

But because of past high fertility, women age 15-19 are nearly three times more numerous than women age 45-49. If they bear 3.5 children on average, their descendants will be 3 X 1.75 or over 5 times more numerous than the grandparent population. If fertility declined 40 percent overnight to replacement level, these young women would still bear 3 X 1.00 or three times more descendants than the grandparent generation.

This continued growth after replacement fertility is reached (population growth momentum) is an artifact of an age structure skewed towards the young. Stabilizing population today requires that these three daughters bear a total of one granddaughter, or only 1/3 of a daughter (or 2/3s of a child counting sons) per woman. Present fertility is over five times that level.

No country can generate sufficient modern-sector jobs at that rate. Options include state-financed labor-intensive jobs, soaring unemployment rates, and where possible high levels of out-migration. Vanderbilt University professor Vir-

ginia Abernethy has compiled data suggesting that where physical resources are demonstrably limited and out-migration infeasible, sharp fertility declines ensue. China is one example; islands such as Taiwan, Singapore, and later Mauritius set records for the sharpness of their fertility declines. Jamaica, which has exported 10 percent of its nationals, and Haiti have displayed slower declines or none at all.

In Mexico, the large number of emigrants and their high remittances, especially to rural areas, have mitigated demographic distress and muted the fertility response. Meanwhile, the fertility of recent Mexican immigrants to the U.S. reflecting their largely rural origins and far-brighter prospects for their U.S. citizen children than their home villages could offer, is over four children per woman. (The hispanic fertility rate in California has risen from 2.75 children in 1980 to 3.5 in 1992; the contribution of Mexican-born women has risen from 54.9 percent to 60.9 percent.)

The U.S., which just twenty years ago was projecting a stable population of 200 million, now confronts forecasts of 400, 500, and even 600 million by the year 2050; all due to post-1970 immigrants and their offspring, disproportionately from Mexico. California's population has increased at least 60 percent since 1970, while the U.S.'s has grown 30 percent.

The taxes, social investments, and physical infrastructure required to support such a population are less daunting than the spectre of environmental collapse which ecologists are foretelling.

Viable futures for both the United States AND Mexico require a speedy end to ALL population growth in both countries. All bilateral agreements must be crafted to that end. If Mexico dissents, we must try the tough love solution of ending our current subsidization of a fertility level its own resources cannot support. A further bailout permitting demographic business to continue as usual will doom us both.

Dr. Burke, a demographer/economist who has consulted in Africa and the Caribbean, presented a detailed analysis of California fertility changes 1970-1990 at the April 1995 meeting of the Population Association of America.

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