

VILLAGE VIEW

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NEWS BULLETIN: March 15, 1983: In the last month over 80,000 illegal immigrants crossed the border from Mexico into the United States, according to the U.S. Immigration Service.

What do we do about it? Those who are caught are sent back to Mexico and asked not to return. But the hills south of San Diego, California, are overrun with people camping there, waiting their chance to slip across under cover of darkness or when the border guards' attentions are diverted.

Once here, they become eligible for all the benefits of citizens. Their children are entitled to attend public schools; they are entitled to welfare and unemployment benefits as though they were citizens; about all they cannot do, that you and I can, is vote. The only real way to stop them would be to shoot them.

In 1798, Thomas Robert Malthus, an English political economist, became a curate of the Church of England at the age of 32. During that same year, he published "An Essay on the Principle of Population as it affects the Future Improvement of Society, with Remarks on the Speculation of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and other Writers." His work is world-renowned as the Malthusian doctrine.

To understand fully his purpose, we can review the works of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and others. William Godwin (1757-1836), an English novelist and political theorist, was Malthus' senior by ten years. A leading radical of the time, he believed it impossible for man to be rationally persuaded and not act accordingly. Therefore, he posited, man could live in harmony without laws and institutions.

He held that man could achieve perfection. Influenced by Rousseau and the French Encyclopedists, and especially by English Romantics (poets of the 18th century, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelly, and Byron, among them), Godwin envisioned humanity as a species of life, which, eventually, would disavow greed, violence, sin and corruption.

Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat, the Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794), a French philosopher and mathematician, also advocated the theory of the "infinite perfectibility of man." He wrote a historic tableau tracing human development through nine epochs, and predicted man would become perfect in the tenth. As an adherent of the Gironde, a middle-class political party during the French Revolution, Condorcet advocated overthrowing the monarchy and an aggressive foreign policy; he was also anticlerical. Girondists were overthrown in 1793; Condorcet died the following year, in prison.

Unlike Godwin and Condorcet, Malthus allowed himself no illusions about mankind's achievement of perfection. His pragmatism is clear in his classic essay on population.

In essence, his doctrine views world population as a fluctuating statistic with predictable influences on mankind's behavior. Living-space crises rise and recede like tides as the human race repeatedly over-populates and subsequently reduces its numbers in predictable ways.

With his observance that population increases in a geometric ratio while the means of subsistence increases in an arithmetic ratio, and that four, and only four, constraints operate in nature, he recognized that crime, disease and starvation, war, and vice are necessary checks.

Although Malthus did not foresee the possibility of birth controls being available to reduce burgeoning populations, he did, in 1803, revise his work to include moral restraint as a possible fifth check on population growth.

The Malthusian doctrine is worth study when we face our present-day world economy and the social upheavals populations pressures are causing, for over-population is at the root of many economic and social problems that threaten peace in the world.

Groups such as the Moral Majority (which is neither moral nor a majority) preach Right to Life, abhor abortion-on-demand, and resist efforts to enable women to limit, through birth-control practices, the number of babies they bear.

Consider the alternatives. And, at the same time, examine the Mexican border problem. Crime, without question, is increasing at a frightening pace. Disease, while held in check in Western countries with advanced medical techniques, runs rife in Third World nations where poverty grows ever more acute. Ultimate mass starvation, as in recent years in Bangladesh, is the inevitable lot of millions of the world's people unless their populations are controlled. Neither vice nor moral restraint show themselves as decisive checks on population growth in modern societies.

Of all the checks Malthus foresaw as effective, war is the most efficient. While he had no inkling that mankind would refine military capacity to the nuclear potential achieved in the first half of the 20th century, few today can ignore that in a few short hours of nuclear confrontation, the world's present population crisis could be solved for the next several thousand years.

Is our choice, then, to be either war or disease and starvation? And given the choice, are we opting for war? Reaching any other conclusion seems an avoidance of the obvious.

Africa is smoldering. The Middle East still smokes from its most recent confrontations. Latin America is a tinder box, and South America is not far behind. The Far East is ready to explode at any moment. Europeans march in protest, fearful that their lands will become the proving grounds for nuclear conflict that both Russia and the United States discuss as a distinct possibility.

If, as many sociologists have concluded, mankind responds to over-population with military action and thus maintains a balance between living space and food supplies, and people, and, given the fact that populations increase at a geometric rate, we must see our behavior as self-limiting and self-defeating.

We are now in a position where we can command another control, a positive alternative to misery: the Malthusian doctrine offers as the only available checks on population growth. We can control the birth-rate.

Mexicans are not pouring across the border into the United States in a spirit of adventure. They want to come here because the economic climate at home leaves them little choice unless they are ready to die of disease and starvation. Were we they, in similar straits, migration would be in the opposite direction.

And what, ask yourself, becomes of our much-vaunted concern for human rights if we shoot illegal immigrants as they swarm northward from Mexico? Where does the Moral Majority stand on a question like that?