
Interview: Maurice King

'Malthus's ideas have been merely postponed'

Dr. Maurice King, Professor of Public Health at Leeds University in England, was interviewed by Christine Bierre at the Dec. 7-8 conference in Paris on population growth organized by the association "Equilibrium and Population." A malthusian, King became notorious after authoring an article in the British medical journal The Lancet, which called for an end to vaccination of children in the Third World. In this interview, first published in the French bi-weekly Nouvelle Solidarité, King outlines his concept of "entrapment," which defines a nation having arrived through overpopulation at a point of no return. He once again underlines positively the role epidemics might have in "disentrapping" nations. But for King, AIDS will not be enough to end "entrapment"—the latest insanity coming from demographers is that since only 1 out of 3 or 4 babies born to HIV-positive women actually becomes infected with the virus (not 1 out of 2 as had been expected), the effect of this deadly disease will be "too little" to reduce population growth to zero, i.e., 2.1 children per couple.

EIR: You developed this morning the concept of "entrapment," which seems to worry you a lot. What exactly do you mean?

King: It is a population outgrowing its so-called carrying capacity. This is the ability of the land on which it lives to produce the food it requires. So if it outgrows the ability of its land, its ecosystem, to produce food, and at the same time has nothing to exchange for the food from other parts of the world, it's either going to starve or have to be given long-term food aid. So this very unhappy concept, "demographic entrapment," is very anxiety-inducing indeed, so much so that the aid agencies and sadly also, academia, don't really want to discuss it. We don't really want to look at which communities are in this situation, i.e., so many people that their land can't support them and, at the same time, don't really make anything that anyone else wants.

EIR: Which are these communities?

King: A hell of a lot have been suggested. It looks quite possibly that India, which has now come to the end of the bounty of its Green Revolution, in that its agricultural production is not rising in the way it did several years ago and yet has another billion people coming to it, may be in

this situation. The optimists say, "Oh, there will be breakthroughs in rain-fed agriculture"—not in irrigated agriculture, the Green Revolution, but in ordinary monsoon-fed agriculture—"and agricultural productivity will rise." The pessimists say, "This will be extremely difficult because it requires lots of technical advances which have got to be promoted all over India, taken up by the villagers, and there are all sorts of snags. It may happen, but it may not happen as well." So there is no certainty that India is going to get a second Green Revolution from its rain-fed agriculture. The optimists would also say, "Oh, there is no problem with the exports." But anybody, including ourselves, who is trying to export in competition with China is going to face considerable difficulty.

Kenya, a grain importer, is in a similar situation. Fertility has only just started to decline and it's going to have considerable difficulty in feeding its coming population, and chances to have much to export, including tourism, don't look too good. And, in fact, the situation in much of sub-Saharan Africa could be said to be similar. There is always an optimistic and a pessimistic way of looking at all these problems. Some of the optimists will say, "Oh, science will fix it and we can't have any problems, we shall either have major breakthroughs in agricultural technology, or perhaps we might even have an abundant source of new energy, cold fusion. A really abundant, cheap energy would make a lot of difference." . . .

EIR: But you are rather among the pessimists?

King: All of us would like to think we are realists. And what I consider my job in this unhappy activity is to remove the taboo from discussing "demographic entrapment." . . .

EIR: What do you propose to do vis-à-vis those countries which are entrapped?

King: I listed a whole lot of things which ought to be done. The first thing is . . . [to] put a great deal of push behind ordinary family planning. We don't really recognize it, however, and I'm concerned with particular communities, not with overall trends which may be made to look rather rosy. I'm concerned with what is going to happen to country A and to country B, what is going to happen to its population, what is going to happen to its agriculture, what is going to happen to its soil erosion, what are the possibilities or lack of them of irrigated agriculture, where can its population move?

Nepal is in a bad state. The top of the suitable land for agriculture is really finished or it's all used, the population is sort of climbing up the mountains, cutting down the trees and cultivating on steep slopes, which is highly unsuitable. It's stuck there with a population of about 20 million and, in fact, its people are pouring down into India. It's a pretty miserable opportunity to go down into India which is already overpopulated. So, there is a great reluctance to look at

particular countries and get down to business. We've only barely started in Nepal.

EIR: What is your aim in these countries?

King: It has got to be the absolute maximum use of ordinary family planning. It has to be, where possible, one-child families. Now because measures are so difficult, there is a great reluctance to look at them. China has had quite a measure of success, but it is usually said that other countries find [such measures] quite impractical. I sometimes wonder whether they are quite so impractical; and the reality of the situation has to be brought home to people, and it presently isn't being brought home.

EIR: Are you favorable to the Brazilian experience where there were massive numbers of sterilizations?

King: No, I'm not at all. Sterilization must certainly have its place when you have finished your family—have your tubes tied. What went wrong in Brazil was that the balance of the methods applied wasn't as suitable as was possible. All communities should in fact have a choice of whatever is suitable at different stages in the reproductive period, and different methods may be suitable. Tubal ligation certainly has a place.

EIR: It is obvious that population keeps growing massively in the South, as opposed to in the North. Aren't you afraid of being accused of being against the colored people of the South?

King: If entrapment has convinced me of anything, it is that I'm absolutely horrified by our northern lifestyles: the way we use our energy, the unnecessary use of our cars, the way we throw everything away, the way we feed so much of our grain to animals and then eat the cream and the butter which they produce. This is a very inefficient way of feeding people; we ought to become much more vegetarian. The diet wants a new term, and I mentioned a light-efficient, photon-efficient, a diet which feeds the most people from the least land. Here are we in the North, burning vast quantities of fossil fuel, increasing the world's carbon dioxide much more than the developing world, and we are contributing to the warming of the whole earth and to the change in the climate. So, this is absolutely urgent. And here we are, even centrally heating our buildings—we expect them to be centrally heated so we can wear our summer clothes in the winter.

EIR: So, you favor reducing the living standards in the North. You do realize, however, that we are in a crisis. In Europe, many people have lost their jobs; living standards have already dropped considerably.

King: I think we ought to rearrange very drastically the way in which our community and our economy functions. There is less employment anyway in conventional terms,

and there is a lot of unemployment. It seems to me that in a family, there need only be one bread-winner at one time—at one time it might be the wife, at another time the husband. And when we consider that so many children don't get enough care from either parent, it's such a pity that both should be working. We ought to go toward the norm of one parent working, and the way we would do this is by suitable tax incentives.

EIR: In 1974, Henry Kissinger ordered a study from the National Security Council on population trends (NSSM-200) which treats the growing population of the South as a security threat to the United States. What do you say to those who would accuse you of serving the interests of those policies?

King: I'm very well aware that the discussion of "entrapment" creates great tensions. We already mentioned this morning the migration issue in this fortress Europe, and I think we ought to improve conditions in the South by all possible means so as to reduce the pressure for emigration. I can't see the South being much of military threat. It can be threats in other ways.

EIR: Perhaps in terms of raw materials.

King: The interesting thing is that apart from such raw materials, there seems to be plenty of everything else, with the exception of food and water.

EIR: You come from the country of Thomas Malthus. Don't you think you're the living heritage of Malthus?

King: It is very unpopular to be a neo-malthusian. . . .

EIR: It is because his theories have been proven wrong.

King: In fact, they have been merely postponed. There are all sorts of things that he did not foresee. He didn't foresee huge increases in agricultural production. Well, they can't go on forever. He didn't foresee the demographic transition whereby people are really very wealthy—they prefer to have foreign holidays rather than children. He didn't foresee all sorts of other things. But, he also didn't foresee ecological destruction, nor did he really foresee lack of water, which is a great problem. His vision, needless to say, was only partial, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it's not going to come down to what he expected.

EIR: We are now moving toward an era of epidemics, with AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis. Would you say this might have a positive effect in curbing population?

King: Any substantial epidemic may happen at any time. A droplet infection with a high mortality, such as a high-mortality variety of influenza, might "disentrap us" at any time. . . . What the effect of AIDS is going to be . . . is somewhat arguable. It seems . . . to be likely to slow population growth but not totally negatively. It's possible that in various places it might do this. . . .