

# Birth Control Viewed Phony Issue In Third World

Ottawa (CUP)--- The exploitation of natural and social resources by the few that are economically powerful, not over population and a lack of birth control, is the main problem facing developing nations according to a paper adopted by OXFAM Canada.

Catherine Harvey, OXFAM's Ontario Regional Director, in commenting on the paper said OXFAM's "Board of Directors believes that population has never started to decrease until the large majority of people are living a reasonably affluent and healthy life with some sort of responsibility for their own future."

The paper, Population Growth and Social Development, was drawn up for the 1974 World Population Year by two professors at the Free University of West Berlin and signed by an international group of development economists and political scientists.

OXFAM Canada adopted the paper earlier this year as its position on the population question for the United Nations population conference in Rumania this year.

The paper takes the position that population growth is a dependent variable within the social economic, political cultural development context.

It questions the "neo-Malthusian" position that overpopulation interpreted either as dense population or as a rapid population increase, is the single major problem facing Third World countries.

It also questions the theory that overpopulation is responsible for such evils as unemployment, poverty, high mortality rates, malnutrition, starvation and illiteracy.

Many people have argued that a reduced birth rate is the answer to these problems and this must be accomplished by direct measures such as birth control propaganda, more family planning clinics distribution of contraceptives, legislation of abortion and sterilization, etc.

OXFAM Canada has rejected this "Malthusian" approach saying:

"We consider this approach to be wrong. Population growth must not be blamed for diseases of society. It is a deception to make people believe that it is possible to solve problems

of society through birth control measures.

In the past two decades there has hardly been any considerable progress in most of the developing countries measured in the rise of levels of living of the broad masses; wealth and land have remained concentrated in the hands of small elites, in a number of countries the disparity between rich and poor is increasing.

Even in those Third World countries where economic growth has been fairly rapid in recent years, it has taken forms which do not benefit, and even worsen the condition of life of the poorer strata which make up the vast majority of the population in these countries.

For example, industrial technology, and to an increasing extent new agricultural technology, is seldom designed to meet local conditions; it is generally capital intensive rather than appropriately labour intensive and tends to increase the already heavy burden of unemployment and poverty.

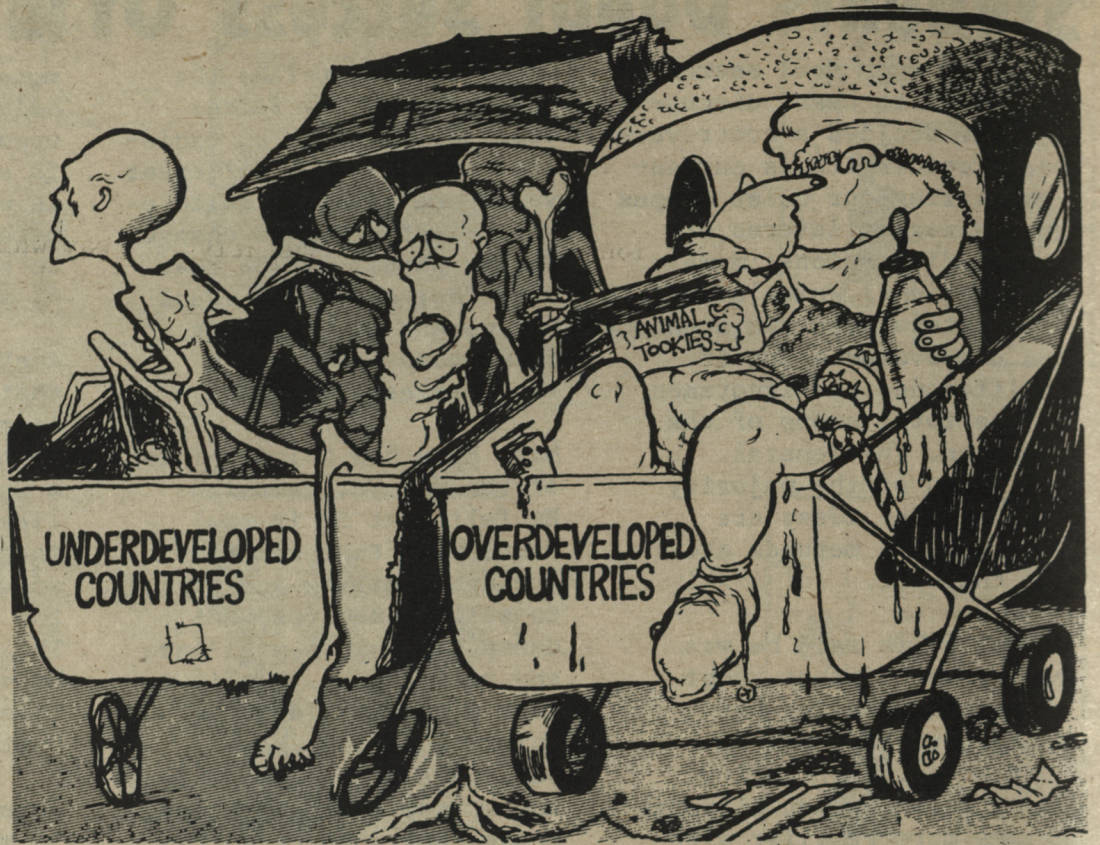
The political, economic and cultural elites in many developing countries are being supported by Western capital which keeps them subordinated to the interests of the Western industrialized countries.

These national and international power structures play an essential role in the perpetuation of poverty unemployment illiteracy and lack of social and political participation among the masses in the developing countries.

From the perspective of these power structures, the real issue is not that population growth exerts pressure on the means of subsistence, as the neo-Malthusians assert, but rather that population growth tends to threaten institutional framework, safeguarding the unequal distribution of economic and political power.

Insisting on population increase as a major cause of underdevelopment can therefore serve, on the level of theory, to furnish any ideological legitimatation of the existing order of things; on the level of politics it serves to distract attention from the real political-economic issues facing the Third World".

OXFAM's paper did not



*Overpopulation is everybody's baby*

oppose family planning, but on the contrary called access to efficient contraceptives and other means of birth control methods human rights that should be available to all.

They also felt that stabilization of population was "an urgent task," but that this kind of work could only be done "within the framework of an all-round economic and social development plan."

The paper stated that history had shown that before a decline in fertility was possible in a country, social development on a comprehensive scale was necessary. Peasants and "the new urban sub-proletariat," in underdeveloped countries, it argued, want many children to protect them in old age.

"As long as the material conditions under which the majority of people in the Third World have to live are not drastically improved reproductive behaviour is likely to remain unchanged and birth control programmes are bound to remain inefficient.

Therefore, the existence of plans and planning authorities cannot solve the population problem unless basic structural changes take place; unless institutions permitting large scale political participation of the masses replace the existing repressive systems which prevail in most of the developing countries; unless inequalities in the

distribution of wealth and opportunities are removed and strategies of social and economic development are implemented that benefit all strata of society; unless the countries of the Third World free themselves from economic exploitation and political domination by foreign interests.

In Western industrialised countries an increasing number of politicians and scholars maintain that population growth is a major cause of the depletion of resources, of environmental destruction and the decay of urban centres. We consider this argument both wrong and dangerous. The deterioration of the natural and social environment is not primarily a function of population size or growth, but it is essentially an emanation of an economic system based on the principle of the maximization of profits which implies the rude exploitation of natural and social resources by the few that are economically powerful.

A solution of the ecological problems facing many economically developed countries can only be found if present economic structures are democratised. In particular, the multinational corporations wielding inordinate economic and political power in many Western industrialised countries as well as in parts of the Third World must be subjected to effective democratic control," the paper stated.