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513 NORTH PARK  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA 47405

POPULATION, ETHNICITY AND PUBLIC GOODS:  
THE LOGIC OF INTEREST GROUP STRATEGY

John A. Baden  
Department of Political Science  
and Department of Forest Science  
Utah State University  
• Logan, Utah 84322

Population control is essentially a problem of choice. Societies face the necessity of choosing their level of population; we note that not to choose is in itself a choice.

There has been controversy, particularly between Paul Ehrlich and Barry Commoner, centered around the methods to be employed in any attempt at population control. There are those who balk at any suggestions that lead to institutionalized coercion methods as a threatening form of political repression. Barry Commoner, in his book The Closing Circle (Knopf, 1971), has advanced the argument that if a substantial majority of the members of a society were to voluntarily accept a program for birth control, then coercion would be rendered unnecessary. However, there seems to be a flaw in this position. The error became apparent when Garret Hardin<sup>1</sup> demonstrated that leaders of subgroups within a society have a vested interest to admonish their followers to outbreed other subgroups. Admonitions of this nature possess the potentiality for undermining voluntary cooperation in birth control, if loyalties to the subgroup can be so directed. This brings us to the application of theories of population dynamics to issues of human population policy.

#### I. Competitive Exclusion

The competitive exclusion principle, also known as Gause's principle states that complete competitors cannot coexist. Garret Hardin, a biologist who has done us the service of straying into the area of political economy, explicates that meaning of that scientific hypothesis in an article appearing in Science<sup>2</sup> and in a later article, carries it into the

<sup>1</sup>G. Hardin, "Population Skeletons in the Environmental Closet" Science and Public Affairs, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 28:37-41, 1972.

<sup>2</sup>G. Hardin, Science, 131 (29, April, 1960) pp. 1292-1297.

area of population policy. It appears that the principle has application in the policy as well as the natural environment. Further, it seems that the hypothesized relationships are intuitively understood by the layman.

In the biological setting it is held that if two non-interbreeding populations occupy the same ecological niche, if they are sympatric, and if one population multiplies at a faster rate than the other, ultimately the faster growing population will completely displace the other. The logic remains consistent with multiple populations, but the complexity of relationships obviously increases.

Clearly the situation with human populations is not perfectly analogous with that found in animal communities. Human populations do, as a matter of fact, interbreed and differentiation of mixed or contiguous populations into subgroups is never perfect over even the medium run. For example, Japanese in South Africa have been reclassified as White. Even in that rigid system the boundaries of subpopulations are in flux. Yet the consistency between nonhuman animal and human populations may be sufficiently close to merit examination. The mathematical truth of the proposition has been demonstrated by calculus and set theory. The focus here is not on biology, but rather on the policy implications which arise from the potential application of the principle.

## II. The Impossibility of Perpetual Growth

I assume that all moderately intelligent people not willing to rely on divine intervention will agree that the rate of human population

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<sup>3</sup> A. J. Lotka, Jr., Washington Academy of Science, 22, 469 (1932).

<sup>4</sup> G. E. Hutchinson, Cold Spring Harbor Symposia in Quantitative Biology, 22, 415, (1957).

growth must ultimately reach zero. With any positive rate of growth, whether it is only 1% per year or even .1% per year, a population approaches infinity in a relatively short period of time. Clearly this condition is impossible and intolerable over any but the short run. Given that the doubling time for a population is determined by dividing the percent rate of growth into the  $\log_e \left( \frac{.6931}{r} \right)$  or, roughly, a percent rate of growth into 70, we can see that even a one percent growth rate will double a population in a mere human lifespan. It is generally accepted that growth of this sort cannot occur except in the short run in either biological or economic systems. There is substantial evidence that this realization is gaining general acceptance in the area of human affairs.

This is not to suggest that those of us in the U.S. are nearing exhaustion of any "essential" resources such as water, fuel, or food, or that we are about to gag on pollution. We are in no imminent danger. Claims that we are are fundamentally silly and indicate a simple failure to appreciate the workings of resource allocating mechanisms. There are and will be adjustments. These adjustments may be locally painful and they could indeed lead to serious problems of social organizations. The organizational problems, however, are of second or higher order consequences and do not necessarily flow from a scarcity of resources.

In the immediate future we will confront increased congestion,, diseconomies of scale in the operation of government units, and a diminution of natural amenities. This set of factors plus real, fancied, or contrived scarcities are likely to increase sensitivity to the issue of population growth. As an aside, we are likely to experience migration

to relatively undeveloped regions that offer a substantial supply of natural amenities.

In addition to these considerations, we can expect a generalized recognition that diminutions in personal latitude and freedom necessarily accompany the coercive coordination required by high degrees of interdependencies associated with high population densities in the context of a highly modernized society. In brief, the personal costs of crowding are likely to become increasingly apparent. Should this occur there will be increasing receptivity to the ideal of a stable population size.

### III. Tribalism and Population Policy

I have argued that population growth cannot ultimately be greater than zero, that within a finite system the subset that maintains the highest rate of growth will ultimately displace the others, and that the costs of growth will become increasingly apparent. We can expect, then, that some people out of a sense of responsibility and personal preference will breed at (or less than) replacement rates. If one assumes that partially successful enculturation of values flow from parents to children, this leads to the self elimination of conscience.<sup>5</sup> Should those exercising conscience in this direction be randomly distributed, the above possibility would be of no concern. The fundamental assumption of social science research, however, is that human behavior is patterned rather than random. And there is reason to believe that this behavior, like most other behavior is decidedly nonrandom.

In B. L. Crowe's response to Hardin's "Tragedy of the Commons,"

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<sup>5</sup> See G. Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," Science, 162 (13, Dec, 1968), pp. 1243-1248, for the classic discussion of this point.

"Tragedy of the Commons Revisited"<sup>6</sup> the issue of "tribalism" is introduced. Although this term is uncertain even in the anthropological literature, and while the concept may generate confusion, it does label a pattern of thought and behavior that is central to our concerns. Consistent with Crowe's usage we define a "tribe" as a group of people having the biological requisites of a society and who perceive of themselves and are perceived as constituting a distinct, endogamous group. From this perspective a "tribe" may be a race, a religious sect, or some other distinct subculture with an identity. Hardin notes that: "The essential characteristic of a tribe is that it should follow a double standard of morality—one kind of behavior for in-group relations, another for out-group."<sup>7</sup>

In a "tribally" heterogeneous society where political power is some positive function of group size we can anticipate that tribal members, or at least some of their leaders will be tempted to foster some form of "breeding war." Thus, the pillow and the pill will be perceived as political weapons.

Fundamentally, we assume that policy is important to people because it shifts costs and benefits, and hence relative advantages, among individuals. Thus, in our context, in a situation where ethnic, racial, or religious group membership and identification is important and the welfare of the members of one's "tribe" is more important than the welfare of an anonymous outsider, we can expect:

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<sup>6</sup> B. L. Crowe, "Tragedy of the Commons Revisited," Science, 166 (1969) p. 1103.

<sup>7</sup> Journal of Urban Law, 48: 563-578, 1971 reprinted in Hardin, Stalking the Wild Taboo, William Kaufmann, 1973, pp. 188-216, quote from p. 215,

(1) Group leaders to advocate political action that tends toward the socialization of costs and the localization of benefits with the group taken as the focus.

(2) A realization that political power is partially determined by group size.

(3) Admonitions to fellow tribal members to increase group size as an act of loyalty.

(4) A tendency for group leaders to discourage factors that would tend to produce a declining, or even a stable, population of their group.

(5) Neutrality toward or support for population limitation measures whose focus or projected application is upon people who are not members of their tribe.

There appears to be a substantial body of casual data supporting these hypotheses. Perhaps most obvious are some of the advocates of Black Power who have argued that those proposing to establish family planning clinics in Black ghettos are precursors of genocide and they advocated and admonished their followers to engage in a breeding war.

Within the Black community a group with the acronym EROS (Efforts to Increase Our Size) developed the theme that babies grow into soldiers. Hence, there was open opposition to birth control clinics. Nathan Wright noted that "Opposition to birth control has been one of the manifestations of Black pride and Black efforts for survival and self-protection."<sup>8</sup> The same theme was advocated on the educational TV program dealing with "The Report of Population and the American Future" by

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<sup>8</sup> "Black Power vs. Black Genocide," The Black Scholar, Vol. 1 (2) pp. 47-52.

Jesse Jackson who argued that the safety of Blacks in America is dependent on the size of their population. During the fall of 1972, Dick Gregory noted with pride that he had nine children, planned to have more, and

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stated that birth control was not appropriate for his race. Stokely Carmichael is well remembered for his Statement<sup>10</sup> that the proper position of women in the Black Power Movement is supine.

My research among the Hutterian Communes of the Northern Great Plains, a group whose doubling time due to natural increase is approximately 18 years, strongly suggests that many of the Hutterian elders are highly conscious of the political power associated with their very rapidly increasing members. This growth is occurring in an extremely rural context where many countries have experienced net out migration. Although doctrinal support of political participation in the larger system is uncertain, massive registrations of colony members occurred in the late 1960s in <sup>11</sup> response to proposed policy change that would disadvantage the colonies.

The working out of this logic is also reported from French Canada and Ceylon<sup>12</sup> while Hardin notes the same dynamics in Northern Ireland and Belgium.

The main thrust here is simple: in a "tribalized" society voluntary

<sup>9</sup> "Heat, Light and Values," a conference held at Utah State University, October 17, 1972.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of these views see Maxine Williams, "Why Women's Liberation is Important to Black Women," in Feminism and Socialism; Pathfinder Press, N.Y., 1972, pp. 40-47.

<sup>11</sup> For a brief discussion on this group see John Baden and Richard Stroup, "Choice, Faith, and Politics: The Political Economy of Hutterian Communes," Public Choice, Spring, 1972, pp. 1-11.

<sup>12</sup> G. Hardin, "Population Skeletons in the Environmental Closet," Science and Public Affairs, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 28: 37-41, 1972.

birth control measures are inconsistent with the attainment of population stability at the "optimum" level. Thus, members of the several "tribes" find themselves locked into a game that is decidedly negative sum. Essentially, according to this logic, we are in a great commons and are bound for a classic "tragedy of the commons" if compulsory birth control is not introduced.

The beginnings of this situation are clearly illustrated in the case of Ceylon. During the 1960s the government of Ceylon fostered family planning in the hopes that population stability would result. Governmental support was withdrawn at the end of the decade. The rationale for this policy change is consistent with the above logic. The Sinhalese who make up 70% of the population and were the dominant group became convinced that the Tamil minority was not cooperating with the voluntary birth control program. Thus, if the Tamils reproduced more rapidly, they would some day become a majority and might seize political power. As a result of this logic, Hardin concludes that "a purely voluntary system of population control can fail even if it is only a minority group that fails to cooperate. Simple mathematical analysis shows that it does not matter how small this minority is, so long as it exists."<sup>13</sup>

#### IV. The Logic of Groups

I have indicated that there are strong pressures for a "Tragedy of the Commons" outcome in culturally nonhomogenous, "tribalized" societies. Nearly all will agree that the implications of the possibility are serious

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<sup>13</sup> From Hardin, ibid., reprinted in Stalking the Wild Taboo. Thus, in the absence of compulsory birth control, the prognosis is disaster, p. 214.

in both domestic and international affairs.<sup>14</sup>

Further, it appears that the logic is sound and the problem ever more pressing. Yet I hope to show that the predicted outcome is, if not wrong, seriously overstated. This demonstration is based on the logic of groups as developed by Mancur Olson.<sup>15</sup>

I will assume that members of a group ("tribe") do benefit from the increased power associated with the relative increase in group size. Second, I assume that the net benefits associated with this increase remain positive after the family costs accompanying increased family size are subtracted. Third, I assume that decisions such as whether to produce the Nth child are a function of information and incentives. (Obviously, there is also an error term.)

In the above situation we find that for a group member the production of "more" children than are preferred by the decision-makers (the prospective parents) as a contribution to the power position of the group vis-a-vis other groups follows the same logic as does the private production of other public goods. The situation is isomorphic with the logic of labor union membership or participation in a revolution. We would probably expect nearly all economists (as well as those political scientists who have thought about the matter) to be highly skeptical if told that large numbers of people will sacrifice personal benefits to provide public goods. For example, in the absence of individual inducements we expect very low rates of active and "expensive" participation in

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As one of many examples see Harold and Margaret Sprout, Toward a Politics of the Planet Earth, D. Van Nostrand, 1971, pp. 298-327.

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Mancur Olson, Jr., The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups, Harvard University Press, 1965.

revolutions. The problem faced by the organizers of revolutions is largely that of the "free rider." In brief, while the vast majority may expect to benefit from the revolution, the benefits from success would remain constant whether or not one invested his personal resources in it. Lenin understood this problem as have other successful organizers of revolution.<sup>16</sup> Olson's statement on this organizational problem would be hard to improve, "so in any large, latent group, each individual in the class will find it to his advantage if all of the costs of sacrifice necessary to achieve the common goal are born by others."<sup>17</sup> This tendency, of course, is the bane of radical organizers who condemn American workers as essentially selfish and materialistic. An engaging collection of these compliants is offered in Arnold Beichman's Nine Lies About America.<sup>18</sup>

The same logic can be applied to the organization of labor. It can sometimes be demonstrated that at least over the short run the employees of a firm will be financially better off if they are organized into a union (or somehow receive union benefits). In the absence of compulsion (or selective benefits), however, each individual worker has an incentive to avoid paying the various time and money costs associated with membership. "Labor associations can do nothing to raise wages but by force; it may be force applied passively, or force applied actively, or force held in reserve, but it must be force; . . . they must coerce those among their members disposed to straggle; they must do their best

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V. I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done*, N.Y.: International Publishers, 1929.

17 Olson, op. cit., p. 106.

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Arnold Beichman, ~~*Nine Lies About America*~~, Pocket Book, 1971 (revised and expanded edition), Chapter 4, "The American Worker is a Honky," pp. 81-98,

to get into their hands the whole field of labor they seek to occupy and to force other working men either to join them or starve. Those who tell you of trades unions bent on raising wages by moral suasion alone are like those who would tell you of tigers who live on oranges."<sup>19</sup>

Increased political power for a group has the attributes of a public good for members of that group. And thus we are led to recall a fundamental law of political economy; public goods if supplied privately are undersupplied. While leaders of the various "tribes" may admonish their followers to breed beyond the level of individual preference, the admonition runs counter to the incentives faced by the decision-makers.

This issue has caused serious division among the sexes in the Black Power Movement. Essentially, many Black women appear to resent being viewed and employed as baby factories. To the individual female, charges that she is hindering growth of the revolution are not always sufficient to motivate change in breeding patterns. An account of this conflict is offered below:

"Finally, one tall, lean dude went into deep knee-bends as he castigated the sisters to throw away the pill and hop

to the mattresses and breed revolutionaries and mess up the (white) man's genocidal

program. A slightly drunk lady from the back row kept interrupting with, for

the most part, incoherent and undecipherable remarks, But she was encouraged finally

just to step into the aisle and speak her speech, which she did, shouting

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Henry George, The Condition of Labor: An Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII, N.Y.: U.S. Book Co., 1891, p. 86. Quote from Olson, op. cit., p. 71.

the brother down in gusts and sweeps of  
historical, hysterical documentation of

mistrust and mess-up, waxing lyric  
over the hardships, the oatmeal, the

food stamps, the diapers, the suffering,  
the bloody abortions, the bangled births.

She was mad as hell and getting more  
and more sober. She was righteous and

beautiful and accusatory, and when she  
pointed a stiff finger at the brother and

shouted "And when's the last time you  
fed one of them brats you've been

breeding all over the city, you jive-ass  
so-and-so?" she tore the place up.<sup>20</sup>

#### V. Strategies for Tribal Leaders

If leaders of the various groups are to successfully foster larger than average population increases (or smaller than average decreases) there are several strategies available. Most basic would be a program to socialize the costs of having children, if not over the entire society then among the tribe.

The purest example of this is found, whatever the motivation, among the Hutterites of North America. The Hutterites are organized into nuclear families and are assigned apartments in what is usually a quadplex. The housing and furnishings are supplied by the colony corporations. Medical care, food, clothing, education, and nursery schools are all supplied by the colony. Among the Hutterites the psychic benefits of children and the votes of males in future colony elections are captured

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<sup>20</sup> Toni Cade, "The Pill: Genocide or Liberation," The Black Woman, An Anthology, Signet Classics, N.Y., 1970, pp. 162-169.

by the family but the costs are born by the corporation. Thus, while the Hutterites and the Amish, another traditional Anabaptist sect, have similar theological views toward birth control, the birth rate of the noncommunal Amish is only about 72% as high as that of the Hutterites.<sup>21</sup>

Although this case is clearly an aberration due to its completely communal organization, it is merely the application of the principle carried to its logical extreme. If a "tribe" were geographically centralized it could subsidize the costs of childrearing with low maternity rates in hospitals, day care centers, school lunch programs, and various welfare programs. These efforts would be especially attractive if their costs were spread over the entire society while the benefits were localized.

This program would be aided substantially if birth control technology was relatively inaccessible to members of the tribe. The common justification for this is likely to be moral or religious rather than political, but the impact remains similar regardless of the rationale. Although I do not care to advertize an elaborate plan for "tribal" leaders, further development of these strategies would appear to be a fairly easy task.

#### VI. Conclusion: Policy Recommendations

A true conservative is one who has a preference for preserving valued features of an identified social system. This obviously includes the environmental system on which we are dependent. And an ever increasing human population is clearly inconsistent with the maintenance

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<sup>21</sup>Population Reference Bureau, Population Bulletin, XXIV, No. 2, November, 1968, p. 25.

or Improvement of the natural environment. While increased economic production could foster the ability to manage the environmental system in an optimum manner, increments in population carry no similar advantage. Thus, conservatives have a strong incentive to bring population growth down to zero.

The population implications of tribalism constitute a threat to the attainment of this goal if tribal leaders are successful in commanding strong loyalties from their group, and if the costs of having children are spread throughout society. Attempts to nullify this threat to population control may adopt a policy of overt coercion. However, strategies can be designed that would lead prospective parents into making decisions consistent with the goals of voluntary birth control. This would involve either increasing the costs of having children, decreasing the benefits, or both.

Two policy recommendations flow from the above considerations. The first is elemental; privatize the costs of having children. Demand curves for children, like everything else, slope downward and to the right. In the relative absence of government subsidies for childrearing these curves are likely to exhibit sharper profiles. Prospective parents can be expected to take the relative prices of children into account when determining their optimum family size. Significantly increased costs, resulting from each additional child, would act as a strong deterrent to large families. Associated with and necessary to this, is the requirement that birth control technology be made available to all prospective parents.

The second recommendation is a bit more difficult to explicate and enforce; reduce discrimination applied to "tribal" members by the encompassing society. When the larger society is nonthreatening, identification

with some subgroup is of less practical importance. Sharp distinctions of group identity, perceived both by the society and the members of the group themselves, would tend to dissolve. Hence, the advantage associated with high degrees of ingroup loyalty and participation would decrease substantially. Fewer group members would view increased tribal strength as a significant benefit resulting from an additional child. This suggestion, unlike the previous one, is consistent with the movement of American society and is likely to be unquestioned except by those tribal leaders whose position and power would be eroded by a hospitable social environment.