

Security Is Happiest Cure For Overbreeding of Poor

RACISM SO PERMEATES the historical legacy of contemporary America that none of our policies and institutions is immune to a t t a c k from some quarter for being "racist." The epithet may be applied with even greater venom to policies that are designed to promote racial equality but differ from the critic's personal ideology of social progress.

"Institutional racism," furthermore, has nothing to do with the racial prejudices of any citizen but must be judged entirely by the de facto impact of a policy on the welfare of a minority group. The battle then rages over the values by which to measure that welfare.

Should blacks prefer a sharpening of their racial identity or a merger with the values and economic comforts of the middle class? Should we concentrate on the needs of the present generation for jobs and housing, or of the next one for education? Or should all of these be subservient to building an instrument of political and paramilitary power to provide the means for a forceful extraction of economic and social advantages from a reluctant and apathetic majority?

"IS POPULATION control merely another device of institutional racism?" Rational discussion of this hotly debated question is possible only with great care for the definition of the underlying values by which any policy in this area will be judged.

The most valid concern of minority groups is that movements like Zero Population Growth may divert attention from social reforms like guaranteed work and income, urban renewal and educational opportunity. Beyond this, we must also seek how to minimize potential conflicts between community and personal values, unless our aim is to rend the nation.

The community's interest in population control is by now well documented. We simply cannot double and redouble the world population without exhausting our resources and overflowing our sewers. Many people believe that the earth already has more people than it can carry at the level of affluence we currently prize. If this estimate is possibly wrong by a factor of two or four, the margin is still not a comfortable one.

Rapid growth of our population will multiply the stresses on our future. At stake are our environment, our capital investment for domestic needs and our economic and political relationships with other countries which furnish us a disproportionate share of dwindling mineral resources. On a scale of some decades, these problems may become crushing to the point that the community may have to press strongly on atavistic personal preferences for large families.

To the extent that we can reshape the life style of middle America by persuasive education today, we may be able to defer the use of sharper compulsion tomorrow. For example, Sen. Robert Packwood's (R-Ore.) bill to eliminate tax exemptions for more than two children would be a valuable symbolic step to dramatize a national commitment to restraint in population growth.

SUCH STEPS are, however, almost irrelevant to the very different problems of the poor. Efforts to encourage family planning among poor blacks might well, in the light of history, be labeled racist if they were motivated by some national interest that was in conflict with the interests of the poor themselves.

The poor do breed more rapidly than the rich—but this disparity would disappear the most happily with a justified belief in economic security of the poor. They are, after all, too few to make a strong contribution to the overall statistics of national growth.

The most urgent problem that is generated by the overbreeding of the poor family is not the depletion of natural resources but the perpetuation of the family's own poverty. The abolition of poverty is also one of the nation's most urgent, achievable goals. Where the interest of the poor family coincides with that of the nation, only mischief comes from the extremists on either side who would subvert individual freedom for the benefit of "larger" issues like racial separatism or a premature exercise in social control.

In reviewing a biography of Margaret Sanger, Sen. Joseph D. Tydings (D-Md.) pointed to Planned Parenthood statistics showing that poor women now bear 400,000 unwanted children a year merely for lack of family planning services (and access to facilities for safe abortion). We could do with less ideological rhetoric in favor of some hard cash for a major step toward solving one of our most important problems.

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