

On facing pages in its issue of June 3, 1994 the San Francisco Examiner ran these two commentaries about immigration. They are reprinted by permission.

Environment, Population and Government Responsibility

An Immigrant on Immigration Limits

by Yeh Ling-Ling

[Yeh Ling-Ling, an immigrant from China, is now a U.S. citizen and the California Representative of Population-Environment Balance, a Washington, D.C.-based group.]

California needs elected leaders capable of bringing real solutions to the serious problems facing the state: 9.6 percent unemployment, soaring budget deficits, overcrowded schools, persistent homelessness, growing congestion, urban sprawl and chronic water shortages.

Has any candidate running this year for state or federal office recognized that exponential population growth, fueled in part by excessive levels of immigration, is a major contributing factor to many of California's problems?

I am an immigrant and a former immigration paralegal. My experience here, watching rising poverty, homelessness and environmental degradation, has convinced me of our need to stop population growth — including reducing immigration. The latter contributes half of the U.S. population growth when immigration-related fertility is considered.

"It is urgent that Congress adopt a sensible immigration policy that would ... [take] into consideration economic needs and limited resources."

When the Statue of Liberty was erected, this country had 60 million people. Natural resources and job opportunities were plentiful. The economy was labor intensive. The social safety net, unlike today, was almost nonexistent.

But the United States now has 260 million residents. Poverty and homelessness are on the rise. Our schools and freeways are full. We have an oversupply of labor: more than 8 million workers are unemployed, and almost 5 million are underemployed.

Growth in California has been particularly pronounced. In just 30 years, the population has

doubled to nearly 32 million. The consequences have been devastating.

Even if we could achieve a miraculous *growth management plan* to limit the environmental impact of continuous population growth, overpopulation will continue to put tremendous pressure on our labor markets, infrastructure and budgets. Water shortage in California, a common occurrence in the past, will only be worse in the future.

Donald Huddle, of Rice University in Houston, estimates that immigration as a whole since 1970 cost California taxpayers a net \$18.1 billion in services and assistance programs, with nearly three-quarters of the total attributable to legal immigration.

The United States now has a national debt exceeding \$4.5 trillion. We have 37 million poor who do not live the American dream.

We should not continue an immigration policy that allows, every year, nearly 200,000 legal immigrant children to enter our overcrowded and under-funded public schools, hundreds of thousands of low-skilled legal immigrant workers to join our labor markets and compete with our own low-skilled workers, and tens of thousands of elderly legal immigrants who depend on welfare.

Because our economy needs highly skilled workers to compete in a global economy, this nation's priority should be to educate our children and train or retrain our own poor, homeless and unemployed.

It is urgent that Congress adopt a sensible immigration policy that would allow the United States to maintain its tradition as an immigrant-receiving nation while taking into consideration economic needs and limited resources.

An all-inclusive, replacement-level immigration ceiling of 200,000 people a year is proposed by Population-Environment Balance. This level is still higher than the average legal immigrant admissions from 1930 to 1960.

Population-Environment Balance supports the Immigration Stabilization Act of 1993, which would substantially reduce legal immigration and offer measures to curb illegal immigration and asylum fraud.

Balance also supports the Immigration Moratorium Act of 1994, which calls for a moratorium on many categories of immigration. We need a moratorium to fully assess the various impacts of our

current immigration policy.

The majority of Americans, including 78 percent of Latin Americans, supports cuts in legal and illegal immigration. A majority of black Americans also believes that current levels of immigration are too high.

It is high time that politicians understand that immigration is not a racial issue, but an environmental, social and economic one. ■

Seal the Border for Mexico's Good

by Elias Castillo

[Elias Castillo, a former San Jose Mercury News reporter, teaches journalism and writes from Redwood City, CA.]

For decades, America has helped take care of Mexico's wretched poor who are fleeing the hopeless squalor and corruption of their country.

Millions of Mexicans have fled nightmarish slums and illegally crossed into the United States in search of a better life. A few have succeeded economically. Most have not. Despite living in poverty in the United States, they are still a step up from the misery of being poor in Mexico.

Mexico's rulers have coldly counted on the United States to absorb the downtrodden, whose migration acts as a safety valve, easing pressures for reform in the nation to our south. Yet if those millions of poverty-stricken Mexicans were forced to remain in Mexico, it is likely they would demand massive reforms against the dishonesty and inefficiency that has made a misery of their lives.

Reforms in Mexico must be made because the United States cannot continue caring for the citizens of another country while it tries to ease poverty among its own people.

"All nations have a responsibility to improve life for their citizens, and Mexico has tragically failed to fulfill that basic mandate."

Already, Florida and California, in lawsuits filed against the federal government, say they cannot continue spending billions on health care, education and incarceration of illegal migrants. They demand that the federal government compensate them for those costs.

Meanwhile, Senator Barbara Boxer, D-California, and Governor Wilson have called on the U.S. government to seal the border with Mexico.

Their idea makes sense. While adding border guards will probably evoke protests from Mexico, it could also force its government to begin caring for its own citizens, rather than shoveling them across the

border like so much offal.

All nations have a responsibility to improve life for their citizens, and Mexico has tragically failed to fulfill that basic mandate.

The Mexican government, time and again, when confronted with its seeming lack of concern for its citizens, has pleaded that it is a poor nation, overpopulated and with scarce resources to properly care for them.

However, this is difficult to believe since the Mexican economy in recent years has spawned 12 billionaires, dozens of millionaires and hundreds of other wealthy citizens.

The demand for reform reached a peak on New Year's Day when Indians in Mexico's state of Chiapas rebelled and demanded social, educational and political change in their poverty-wracked state. The revolt embarrassed the Mexican government, which quickly acceded to many of the Indians' demands.

The Indian protest prompted millions of others to demand similar reforms nationwide. That protest was also voiced May 12, in Mexico's first debate between the three leading candidates in August's presidential elections.

Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas, the top candidate of the leftist Revolutionary Democratic Party, and Diego Fernandez de Cevallos, of the conservative National Action Party, launched a blistering attack on the Institutional Revolutionary Party, known by the Spanish acronym PRI, that has ruled Mexico for 65 years and has been described by its opponents as a brutal, repressive and corrupt institution.

This may be the ideal time for the United States to seal the border while offering Mexico new economic aid to help provide a better life for its people. PRI opponents who have sought support from the United States would gain millions of reform votes from those forced to stay in Mexico. These new voters would go a long way toward helping the country establish a healthy two-party system, paving the way for true democracy.

Unless the border is sealed, the United States will continue focusing its attention and anger on the unfortunate undocumented workers from Mexico instead of on the real culprit: the Mexican government.

This country cannot continue being the dumping ground for the poor of a neighbor whose government has allowed its rich to get richer while its humblest citizens are handed a road sign pointing north. ■