

# Letter to the Editor

Editor:

In the Spring issue of *The Social Contract*, Dan Walters of the *Sacramento Bee* and Judy Kunofsky of the Sierra Club comment on California's high population growth and how to deal with this threatening problem. I admire both of these people but I find their suggestions negative and unduly cautious. Walters takes a most draconian view as if he were deliberately trying to frighten people from even discussing the subject. Judy explains the political hangups with her customary astuteness but fails to make a specific proposal.

It is inconsistent, if not major hypocrisy, when our "leading environmentalists" in the Legislature, the California delegation, and the numerous environmental organizations simply go on about their business (which seems principally to be raising money) with no official concern whatever for the continuing high population growth and the increasing and irrevocable damage to California. I am particularly appalled at the senior Democratic members who present themselves as environmentalists. They have completely ignored the country's population problem and have voted for large increases in immigration in recent years. I fear they will be remembered as the leaders who presided over the destruction of California.

The polls indicate that a majority of Californians oppose a continuation of population growth. Why are we not engaged in an official discussion of this most critical issue? Surely economists can give us some idea of the consequences of slower or zero population growth. There are examples: Germany and most of the northern European countries have stopped growing. In any case there is no alternative but to act promptly against a continuation of population growth. Otherwise, what will we be leaving for our children?

An official discussion would also bring up the important question of a 'national population policy' which we badly need. California has been treated unfairly. We get most of the immigrants, and the government, after increasing immigration, gives us very little help in proportion to the problem. Most of the elements of a population policy were thoroughly studied by the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future in 1972. [See Editor's note below.] The recommendations produced by the Commission anticipated the problems of families and children which we now experience.

Of critical importance in discussions of population policy is a realistic position on immigration. We must drastically reduce immigration into the US and greatly increase our effort and that of all the industrialized countries to help the Third World

with its population problem. Birth control must be the new priority in foreign aid.

The Population Commission also recommended that the government provide incentives for business to expand employment opportunities in the smaller communities of the Midwestern and Mountain states which have the resources and the economic need for additional population. California has neither.

It is dangerous folly to insist that high population growth is necessary to drive California's economy. This is not a very constructive policy when it is destroying the very basis of our social and economic health, namely, land, water, and clean air.

Population growth is the most critical of all of our environmental and social problems. The environmental movement is irresponsible in ignoring this glaring danger which will obviously nullify all of its good efforts.

The Sierra Club must lead an effort to make 'overpopulation' the paramount environmental issue. It should urge all other environmental organizations to join in a coalition to fight for a national population policy.

I think the environmental movement is stalled. Unless it confronts the population problem then what possible future can we have?

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[Editor's note: *The winter issue of our journal will feature articles analyzing and updating the report of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future on its twentieth anniversary.*]