

Europe's Population Implosion

A Diagnosis

by David A. Hartman

Over the course of the last millennium, the populations of Europe (including Russia) and its Western offshoots (including the United States) grew explosively. Fueled by the agricultural and industrial revolutions that they pioneered and the raw materials of the New World that they settled, combined European-derived populations grew from less than one sixth to one third of the world's people. And their combined economies grew even more explosively, from less than one sixth to *two thirds* of the world's production of wealth as measured by Gross Domestic Product.

Since their peak before World War I, European populations have declined to one fifth of the world's total. The redistribution of population growth has been nearly equally spread among Latin America, Asia, and Africa since World War I, although the *rate* of population growth in Asia has now slowed to below the world's current average of 1.67 percent per year.

Over the course of the past quarter-century, the combined European nations grew at slightly below one percent per year, but this figure is deceiving. If we were to subtract increases in growth resulting from immigration from the Third World and an increase in life expectancy, Europe's combined population actually would have declined during this period.

This is the result of a decline in fertility to well below that which is required for zero population growth. This decline has affected all of the major European nations and their offshoots except the United States, which reversed her decline in the early 1980's and returned to zero-population-growth fertility. The European Union's fertility rate is only 70 percent of that required for the natural maintenance of a population.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conducted a comprehensive inquiry into the causes of this fertility deficit, which is a common symptom of the developed world, including Japan. They discovered a three-year increase in the age at which women first gave birth in virtually all of the OECD countries. The OECD study then attempted to relate fertility rates to employment rates and the educational attainment of women through cross-sectional analyses of OECD countries as of 1980, and again as of 1999, and found no statistically meaningful correlations. The same analysis was applied to divorce rates and to the share of births out of wedlock; again, no statistically defensible correlations were found. The study did discover that, based on 1999 data, rising fertility rates are related to higher youth employment rates and that fertility rates decrease as the age of singles living at home rises. Perhaps in deference to political correctness, they turned a blind eye to the fact that, between 1980 and 1999, female employment rates, educational rates, and divorce rates, as well

as out-of-wedlock births, had increased, while fertility rates had plummeted.

What the OECD failed to investigate were the effects on fertility of the worldwide growth of welfare states over the past three decades—including the increased burden of taxation on families and the perverse effects of the welfare expenditures that those taxes funded. From 1970 to 2000, government spending for OECD countries increased by an amount equal to one tenth of GDP, while fertility rates plummeted by one third. Government spending on welfare grew by one ninth of GDP in E.U. countries, accompanied by a two-fifths decline in fertility. And the increase in working women with a preference for fewer children—or none at all—is clearly related.

The combined effect of reliable contraception and legalized abortion has probably contributed most to the decline in fertility in the “developed nations.” The socialist states have created a demand for these means of “fertility abatement” by crafting societies where the denigration of marriage, family, religion, and private property has largely destroyed not only the traditional motivations for bearing children but the means for traditional families to afford them.

Government spending accounts for nearly half of GDP among the countries of the European Union—almost 60 pence out of every euro when compared to personal income, two thirds of which goes for welfare expenditures. Government confiscations on this scale largely eliminate the ability of the middle class to save, undercutting their economic independence. But what the money is spent on has an even more malignant effect.

The fertility rates of Greece, Spain, and Italy are even lower than the E.U. average, despite similar marriage rates, far lower divorce rates, and a religious and cultural bias toward families. One reason is that unwed motherhood is frowned upon more in these three countries than in the rest of the European Union. Three out of every ten children are born out of wedlock in the European Union *versus* one out of ten in these countries. They also have higher old-age pensions relative to incomes, which promotes the separation of the aged from younger generations. And, since working mothers in virtually all countries prefer childcare provided by family members, the detachment of grandparents from the family is a deterrent to childbearing.

It is an axiom of economics that you get more of what you subsidize and less of what you tax. The European welfare state leads to fewer economically efficient marriages, the preferred basis for childrearing, and more unwed mothers, as well as more self-centered retirees, dissociated from the extended family and childrearing.

Around the globe, increases in government expenditures, particularly on social welfare—and the resulting increases in taxes—foster lower rates of marriage, higher divorce rates,

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more unwed mothers, and lower fertility rates. Where welfare states have been scaled back, as in Finland, Norway, and Sweden, fertility rates have significantly increased to above the E.U. and OECD averages, though they remain 15 percent below zero-population-growth fertility. No-fault divorce (particularly with children involved), the prevailing consensus of postmodern feminism, and increasing tax burdens work against any attempts to restore the primacy of the natural family.

The experience of the United States is instructive. By 1993, the U.S. government was spending \$20,000 per individual 65 or older, regardless of his means, and \$20,000 on every child in poverty (primarily the progeny of unwed mothers). Between 1970 and 1993, the real after-tax income in constant dollars of the median married family failed to grow at all, despite a 38-percent increase in productivity per hour worked and a 50-percent increase in hours worked by wives. The entire increase in the U.S. economy went to government and its beneficiaries. Not surprisingly, unwed motherhood soared, marriage and childrearing within marriages declined, and divorces rose. The bumper stickers on the motor homes of affluent retirees that read "We're spending our kids' inheritance" should have continued "and spending our unborn grandchildren's share as well."

The United States currently makes up less than five percent of the world's population, yet she consumes one fifth of the world's goods. How long can this continue, if our productive and reproductive values are persistently undermined by welfarism, paid for by overseas borrowing that has transformed the United States from the world's largest creditor to the largest debtor in just two decades?

Since 1993, U.S. demographics have shown positive signs. The income of the median married family, in real dollars, has increased steadily as of 2000, and the federal tax burden has declined. Consequently, over the last few years, the divorce rate has declined, and marriage rates and marital-fertility rates have leveled out, but that has not made up for the lost ground. The total fertility rate has risen back to 2.1, the zero-population-growth level, but, unfortunately, the entirety of the improvement can be attributed to out-of-wedlock births, which have now stabilized at one third of total births. It remains to be seen if an increase of median-married-family incomes will further improve these vital statistics.

The latest official projections for the population of Europe published by Eurostat predict negative "natural" growth of native Europeans by 2005, with "natural" population decreasing at an *increasing* rate thereafter. Negative growth including net immigration is not expected until 2020. An updated "low" forecast was not provided, but last year's low forecast showed a possible decline of 20 percent by the year 2050, *despite* immigration. Extrapolating the lowered "official" forecast, we can project a nine-percent lower "natural" population by 2050.

A demographic study of Europe's population prospects presented in the March 2003 issue of *Science* suggests that the Eurostat "official" forecast is too optimistic. If Europe maintains its current fertility rate of 1.5 children per fertile woman, its population will decline approximately 25 percent by 2080. Even if fertility rose *immediately* to the level required for zero population growth, population would still decline until 2060 because of the "negative momentum" from the substantial decline in Europe's proportion of fertile women compared to total population.

This population implosion means that the ratio of workers to

retirees is declining at an alarming rate. It also poses problems for competitiveness, since a stagnant or declining economy makes it difficult to incorporate technological improvements when new capacity for productive output is not required.

Since this voluntary depopulation of a prosperous collection of countries is historically unprecedented, it is difficult to conclude that it is inevitable. What can be done to turn the tide?

Government spending accounts for almost 60 percent out of every euro when compared to personal income.

Any recipe for societal regeneration must restore primacy to marriage and family and disavow the notion that government is the true parent of the child and the preferred husband of the woman; restore Christianity to the education of children and to the promotion of the family and morality and allow it a respected role in society; and encourage women to prefer childrearing to employment and men to welcome the challenge of being the primary provider for the family. On the economic front, we must relentlessly reduce the role and cost of government to taxpayers, particularly to families, in order to allow them their rightful means to conduct their own lives without government interference; convert old-age pension and healthcare schemes to savings accounts under the direction and ownership of each family; terminate welfare schemes that subsidize unwed motherhood and the improvidence of the older generation at the expense of young families; and end trade and fiscal deficits that mortgage our future. And, in both social and tax law, we must cease to deny marriages the rights of any other partnership and the obligations of any other contract.

This list is just a start, but it provides an agenda that is far closer to God's will, human nature, and the natural order of a healthy society. A new and revitalized Europe—and United States—would be the consequence of such an agenda.

The socialist ideology has achieved its current hegemony because of the gullibility of individuals who were told that government confiscation and redistribution of income will achieve social justice. Given that power, the massive growth of government became irresistible, and the loss of income and of property rights was joined by the loss of rights for the family and religion and the loss of our heritage as freemen, as the growth of the power of nation-states led to unprecedented corruption. Demographic implosions, disintegration of families, the demise of religion, and the impending economic hegemony of Asia are the bitter fruits of the Europeans' folly.

The same can be said of us Americans. The footprints of Karl Marx are stamped on every page of our recent history. The only antidote is the severe curtailment of the excessive confiscations of government, thereby returning to families the means and the time necessary to care for themselves and to enjoy the fruits of their labor and freedom, along with the revitalization of a culture that encourages motherhood, fatherhood, and lifelong families. 