

## Agriculture by Susan B. Cohen

### Zero growth for California water?

*The environmentalists and Interior Department are trying to play off sectional interests.*

Expecting victory on Proposition 8 on the November ballot, which effectively bans water projects on 800 miles of northern California rivers, Governor Jerry Brown and his environmentalist followers think they are so close to putting a zero-growth cap on water supplies in the state, that they have opened a new campaign to cap the population as well.

In a recent column in the *Sacramento Bee*, Brown's state resources secretary, Huey D. Johnson, wrote, "It makes little sense to attempt to deal with the supply side—resources—without dealing with the demand side—population. . . . We need action now to better understand the population aspect of the equation." Johnson continues that we can find democratic solutions to population problems through "dialogue" without resorting to policies like China's recent state directive forbidding families from having more than one child.

Johnson pointedly reprints segments from the Malthusian "Global 2000 Report to the President" listing, for example, the report's projected Mexican population growth from the present 60 million to 131 million in 20 years. Some California minority organizations made a short-lived protest to Johnson's proposed "dialogue." Yet farmers, ranchers, manufacturers, and mineral producers who are the

state's major water users have failed to perceive that the Governor and his followers are so convinced that they have sewed up a zero-growth water policy that they are now proceeding to their next objective.

This is especially ironic because, unlike most Western states, California has plenty of water. The water is not evenly distributed and must be brought to the rich agricultural valleys and population centers by large-scale projects, several of which are near completion.

Forty percent of California's rainfall, for example, falls on the north coast, and very little of that is used effectively. None is pumped back into the state's great Central Valley, which is the world's most productive agricultural area. It is the purpose of Proposition 8 to deny this water to Central Valley while simultaneously constructing environmentalist roadblocks to completion of the State Water Plan.

Most of the remainder of California's water falls on its eastern mountains, where rivers flow off into Central Valley. Here are located two great water projects, the federally financed Central Valley Project, including the magnificent Shasta Dam, which serves the Sacramento Valley in the north, and the State Water Plan, which serves the San Joaquin Valley in the south.

With this water, California produces 42 percent of the nation's

fresh fruits and vegetables and 25 percent of all food consumed in the U.S., in addition to considerable exports.

Beginning in 1977, the attack on agriculture explicitly took the form of blocking new water development. The governor's Water Rights Commission that year recommended no water expansion, better "management," and withdrawal of land from production. If followed, the commission's proposals could have taken 700,000 acres out of cultivation, destroying \$700,000,000 worth of cash crops yearly.

The Brown-RAND Corporation-environmentalist strategy has been to knock out projects and keep the north coast watershed out of production by playing sectional interests against one another, overlaying this with environmentalism and think-tank cost-benefit studies. The State Water Plan, adopted in 1960, was first hit by Bay Area fishing interests and environmentalists.

The federal Central Valley Project can be seriously truncated by a squabble between northern and southern water users over who will supply additional fresh water to maintain the flow into San Francisco Bay. The issue may split the California congressional delegation, a split the Interior Department threatens to use as an excuse for further "reconsideration."

Another Brown time bomb is a proposed "flexible water rights plan" that would take away previously assigned water rights, mostly to agriculture, and assign them to "new uses." This is coupled with the RAND Corporation "marginal cost pricing" theory that would assign water to the highest bidder, thus cutting out agriculture in the "free market."